

Yangon

ရန်ကင်း



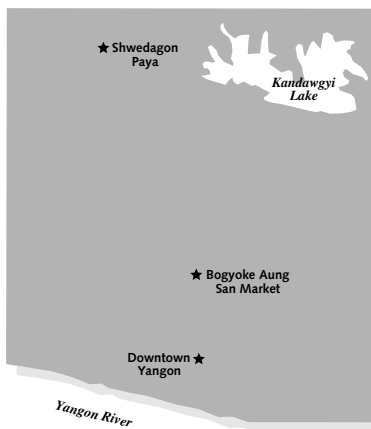
Yangon (formerly Rangoon) gives the impression of picturesque dishevelment, a half-finished work in progress, and is the most multiethnic, cosmopolitan, and interesting city in Myanmar. Located in the fertile delta region of central Myanmar on the wide Yangon River, this city more than anywhere else in the country exudes an entrepreneurial energy, at least as much as the government allows; commuters shuttle between work, home and school on recycled Chinese ferries, and Western-style shopping centres teem with a new generation of mall rats.

Crumbling decrepit buildings such as the impressive colonnaded ministries that line Strand Rd, the tall glass Chinese-style office towers and the glittering gold-topped stupas make up an untidy, irregular jumble teeming with life. From above, rooftop orchards of satellite dishes look like they are being swallowed by a sea of telephone wires, creeping through the patchwork quilt of disparate architecture. Packs of kids in spotless green school uniforms, teenagers in jeans and T-shirts, saffron-robed monks and *longyi*-clad men and women navigate the thronging, crumbling sidewalks of the city centre, dodging the miniature furniture of the ubiquitous teahouses and street vendors peddling everything imaginable, from knock-off sunglasses and second-hand clothes, to glossy posters of Burmese models and movie stars.

Parts of the city look like they're recovering from a strong quake, parts are rich in greenery, and parts are like mushrooming industrial appendages seen the world over. In Yangon, despite the contradictions of modern urban life, flip-flops are the footwear of choice, and the vibe is more easygoing than frenetic. It's one of the most exotic and striking cities in Southeast Asia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The one stupa not to be missed, golden **Shwedagon Paya** (p90) lives up to the hype
- **Bogyoke Aung San Market** (p121) is a bargain-shoppers paradise
- Everything and everyone is waiting for you at Yangon's downtown **street life** (p121)
- Wander around the architectural hodgepodge of **downtown** (p105) where glittering, ancient payas (Buddhist monuments) share the streets with colonial old Rangoon
- From corner teashops to night-time grill shops to international *haute cuisine*, **dining out** (p112) in Yangon is a treat; and cuisines come together in filling harmony



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 01

■ POPULATION: 5 MILLION

■ ELEVATION: 14M

HISTORY

As Myanmar's capital city, Yangon is comparatively young – it only became the capital in 1885 when the British completed the conquest of northern Myanmar and Mandalay's brief period as the centre of the last Burmese kingdom ended.

Despite its short history as the seat of national government, Yangon has been in existence for a long time – although very much as a small town, in comparison to places such as Bago (Pegu), Pyay or Thaton. In 1755 King Alaungpaya conquered central Myanmar and built a new city on the site of Yangon, which at that time was known as Dagon. Yangon means 'end of strife': the king rather vainly hoped that with the conquest of central Myanmar, his struggles would be over.

In 1756, with the destruction of Thanlyin (Syriam) across the river, Yangon also became an important seaport. In 1841 the city was virtually destroyed by fire; the rebuilt town again suffered extensive damage during the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. The British, the new masters, rebuilt the capital to its present plan and corrupted the city's name to Rangoon.

Yangon's early history as Dagon is tied very closely to its grand Buddhist stupa, the Shwedagon Paya. It doesn't stand in the city centre, rather about 3km to the north – yet it totally dominates the Yangon skyline.

In 1988 around 15% of Yangon's city centre population – all squatters – were moved to seven *myo thit* (new towns) northeast of the city centre. Many of the old colonial buildings once occupied by the squatters have now been refurbished for use as offices, businesses and apartments. The government rationalised the imposed relocations as being an effort to distribute the city population more evenly, to impose order on development and to insure space for industrial parks planned for the city's edge.

The city has changed dramatically following the 1989 banishment of socialism. Starting in the early 1990s, the government began sprucing up the city's appearance by cleaning the streets and painting many public buildings. Since 1992, when the relatively moderate, procapitalist General Than Shwe took power, new cars and trucks have taken to city roads, mobile phones are com-

monly seen in the city centre and satellite dishes dot the horizon. To try and keep blood-red spittle off the streets, the selling of betel nut was banned in 1995. As with many such decrees, the results have been negligible.

ORIENTATION

The city is bounded to the south and west by the Yangon River (also known as the Hlaing River) and to the east by Pazundaung Chaung (Pazundaung Canal), which flows into the Yangon River. The city is divided into townships, and street addresses are often suffixed with these names (eg 126 52nd St, Botataung Township – or Botataung t/s). North of the centre, the city opens up like the top of a funnel and spreads along a network of long, curving avenues.

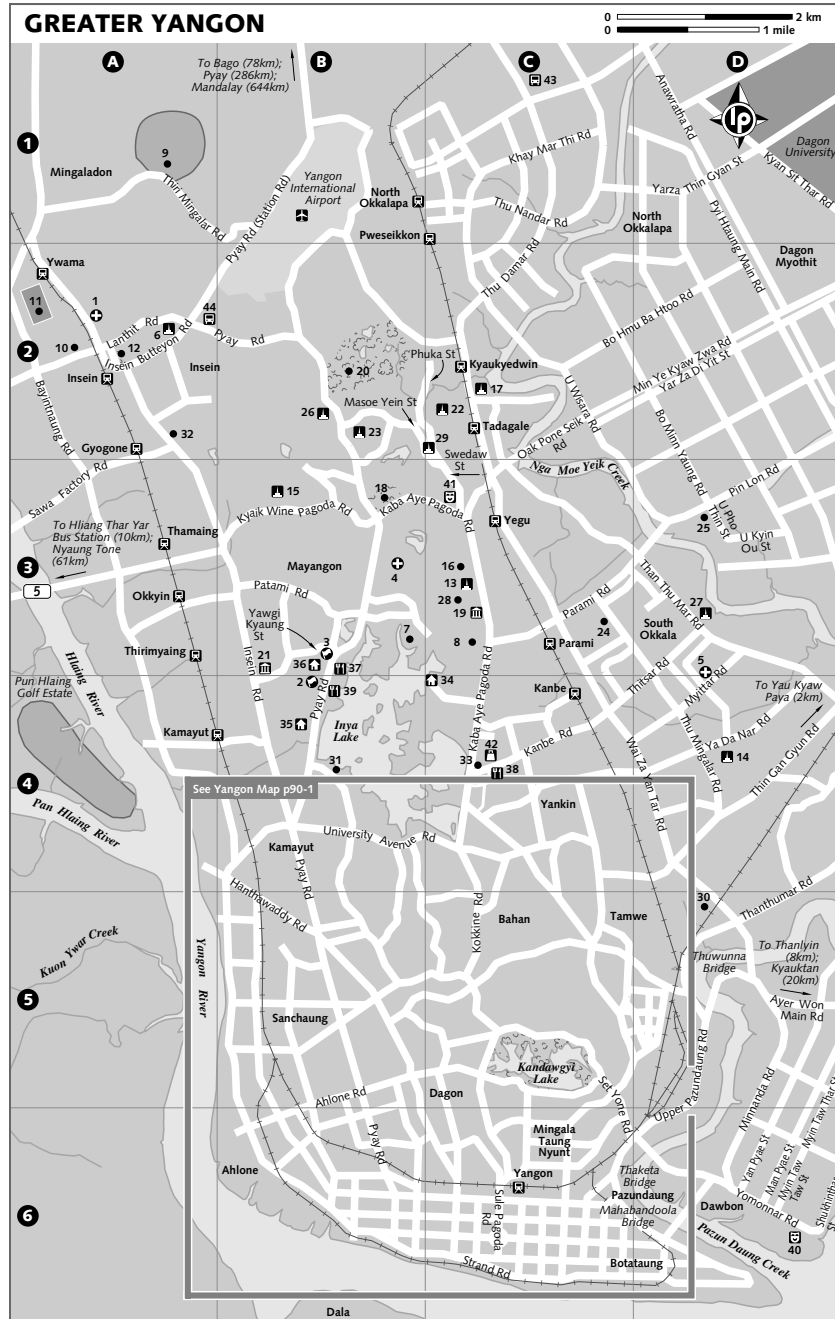
At the northern end, most businesses and hotels are found along Pyay Rd, Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd or Insein Rd – long thoroughfares running south from the airport area to the city centre. Addresses in this northern area often quote the number of miles from Sule Paya – the landmark paya (stupa or pagoda) in the city's centre. For example, 'Pyay Rd, Mile 8' means the place is 8 miles (13km) north of Sule Paya on Pyay Rd.

Two of the most important townships outside the central area are Dagon – where you'll find Shwedagon Paya, People's Park and several embassies – and Bahan, site of

YANGON STREET NAMES

The English terms of street and road are often used interchangeably in Yangon for the single Burmese word *lan*. Hence, some local maps may read Shwe Gone Daing St, while others will say Shwe Gone Daing Rd; in Burmese, it's simply Shwe Gone Daing Lan. This chapter uses the most common English version that travellers encounter.

Just to make matters a little more confusing, different maps present the actual names of streets differently, for example Shwe Gone Daing Rd is Shwegondaing Rd on some local maps. Similarly, U Wi Za Ra Rd may appear as U Wizara Rd, Dhamma Zedi Rd as Dhammazedi Rd, and Sule Paya Rd as Sule Pagoda Rd, and there are many other differences.



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Diethelm Travel.....	(see 34)
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many of the city's midrange and top-end hotels and inns. Kandawgyi lake interrupts the flow of traffic from north to south, roads extend from it like spokes in a wheel, and it is a convenient landmark from which to orient yourself.

Central Yangon is a relatively simple area to find your way around, and pleasant enough to explore on foot. The main central streets are laid out in a grid pattern, with the minor north-south streets numbered in the North American fashion. Many of the major roads were renamed after independence.

INFORMATION Bookshops

It's worth checking out the many bookstalls around Bogyoke Aung San Market (see p121; formerly known as Scott Market) or along 37th St. Several stalls have small selections of novels and nonfiction books in English, French and German.

Bagan Bookshop (Map p102; ☎ 377 227; 100 37th St;

☎ 9am-5.30pm, closed Mon) It has the most complete selection of English-language books on Myanmar and Southeast Asia. The front gate pulled across the entrance doesn't necessarily mean the place is closed unless the door inside the gate is closed too. The Bagan even has a photocopier so you can copy rare, out-of-print books on Myanmar.

Inwa Bookshop (Map p102; Sule Paya Rd) This bookshop next to the Nay Pyi Daw Cinema sells old issues of foreign magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Der Spiegel* as well English-language airport paperbacks and romance novels.

Cultural Centres & Libraries

At Shwedagon Paya, you can visit the Library & Archives of Buddhism, located in

the western arch. There is no public library system in the country.

Alliance Francaise (Map p98; ☎ 282 122; Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Rd; ☎ Tue & Fri) Attached to the French embassy; try here for French-language material.

American Center (Map p98; ☎ 223 140; 14 Taw Win St; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Behind the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also has a collection of books and magazines, which can be perused.

British Council Library (Map p102; ☎ 295 300; Strand Rd; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4.30pm Sat) A very modern and plush facility connected to the British embassy. It has a small library of English-language magazines, books and videos and one of the most complete collections of English-language history books on Myanmar.

Emergency

Your home embassy (see p339) may be able to assist with advice during emergencies or serious problems. It's a good idea to register with your embassy upon arrival or, if possible, online before you arrive, so that the embassy staff will know where to reach you in case of an emergency at home.

There isn't always an English-speaking operator on the following numbers; you may have to enlist the aid of a Burmese speaker to make these calls.

Ambulance (☎ 192)

Fire department (☎ 191)

Police (☎ 199)

Red Cross (☎ 295 133)

Internet Resources

Most top-end hotels and many midrange ones offer Internet access, as do a steadily growing number of small businesses and cafés. Several of the larger shopping centres in the city have Internet cafés as well.

YANGON IN...

Two Days

Start the morning with a traditional Myanmar breakfast of fish soup and tea. No matter how early you begin the city will already be up and buzzing. Before the sun gets too high in the sky and the heat becomes oppressive take a walk around **Chinatown** (p117), the bustling **markets** (p121) in the surrounding blocks and **Sule Paya** (p97), the geographic heart of the city. Lunch in one of the Indian eateries nearby before doing some cruising around some temples north of the city centre, including the **Chaukhtatgyi Paya** (p99) and nearby **Ngahtatgyi Paya** (p100). Then take a stroll around **Kandawgyi** (p102), and maybe stop in for a drink at one of the lakeside restaurants or hotels. Now, move on to the main event: the **Shwedagon Pagoda** (p90), the highlight of any tour in Yangon, deserves time, attention and the perfect light of a Yangon sunset. Dine at one of the excellent restaurants – Bamar, Thai, Korean, Japanese, French or Italian – in the immediate vicinity.

The second day can begin much like the first at a street side teashop. Morning is the best time for a **ferry back and forth to Dalah** (p125) on the other side of the Yangon river to provide a little taste of delta life. Back on dry ground, the **Botataung Paya** (p97) near the jetty is the next logical stop. Take a walk along Strand Rd for the British colonial-era architecture or head directly to lunch at one of the restaurants around **Bogyoke Aung San Market** (p121). Then there's the market itself, a bargain-shoppers Shangri-la, a maze of deals just waiting to be had. If your bags are too heavy, you might want to return to your hotel, otherwise the **street stalls** (p117) in Chinatown are a good way to meet locals while dining in the city centre. If you still have some get-up-and go, head to a teashop or one of the roof-top clubs nearby to squeeze as much as you can out of the Myanmar capital.

Rates are by the hour – usually pro rata if under an hour – and you can send and receive however many messages you want and access whatever websites you like, assuming they haven't been banned by the government. A few hotels still charge per page to send or receive messages to their private email account. Server speeds tend to be frustratingly slow.

Bee Internet Café (Map p98; 23A Na Wa Day St; per hr K750; ☎ 8am-11pm)

Cyber World I (Map p98; 4th fl, La Pyat Wun Plaza, 37 Ah Lan Paya Pagoda Rd; per hr K800; ☎ 9am-9pm) Faster than most.

Cyber World II (Map p102; ground fl, Nay Pyi Daw Cinema, 246-248 Sule Paya Rd; per hr K1000; ☎ 9am-9pm) Busy and frequented by foreigners because of its central location.

Internet Café (Map p102; 3rd fl, Myanmar Shopping Mall, 143-149 Sule Paya Rd; per hr K1000; ☎ 10am-9pm) Modern and plush with café attached.

Planet Internet Café (Map p98; 5th fl, 220-222 Bo Ta Taung Pagoda Rd; per hr K1000; ☎ 8.30am-9pm) Close to several midrange hotels.

Laundry

Almost all of Yangon's budget and mid-range guesthouses and hotels offer inexpensive laundry services including ironing

(load about K1000). Rates at the top-end hotels are not cheap. Another option is **Ava Laundry** (Map p98; ☎ 245 575; 305 Mahabandoola Rd, btwn 41st & 42nd Sts; ☎ 8am-8pm) though it's no quicker than the guesthouses and is expensive.

Medical Services

There are several private and public hospitals in Yangon, but the fees, service and quality may vary. There are also some useful pharmacies in town.

AA Pharmacy (Map p102; ☎ 253 231; 142-146 Sule Paya Rd; ☎ 24hr) Just north of Sule Paya.

City Mart Supermarket (Map p98; cnr Anawrahta Rd & 47th St) Well-stocked place (tampons available) that includes a pharmacy.

Global Network Co (Map p102; 155-161 Sule Paya Rd; ☎ 24hr) Pharmacy just north of Sule Paya and opposite AA Pharmacy.

International SOS Clinic (Map p86; 24hr alarm centre ☎ 667 879; 37 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd; ☎ 24hr) On the ground floor of the Renaissance Inya Lake Hotel, this is your best bet in Yangon if you want medical attention.

May Pharmacy (Map p102; 542 Mahabandoola Rd; ☎ 24hr) Near the SOS, on the northwest corner of Pansodan St.

Pacific Medical Centre & Dental Surgery (Map p90; ☎ 548 022; 81 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd) Recommended.

Money

Because you can pay for your taxi from the airport to the city in US dollars there's no reason to change money in the terminal. Most hotels and guesthouse sell kyat for rates slightly lower than the usual street rate. One hotel in particular known to offer competitive rates is the **Central Hotel** (Map p102; 335-357 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) near Bogyoke Aung San Market. The market itself has a fair number of moneychangers who generally offer the highest rates; odds are you'll be approached by one of them if you wander down the centre aisle. Ask around before you go to establish the going rate. You should not pay any commission or tip for their services.

A few of the top-end hotels including the **Sedona Hotel** (Map p90; 1 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd) and **Grand Plaza Park Royal Hotel** (Map p98; 33 Ah Lan Paya Pagoda Rd) accept credit cards; Visa and MasterCard more likely than others. And a few will give guests cash advances on their cards. Any transaction with plastic involves commissions from 3% to 12%.

Traveller's cheques are even less likely to be recognised as legal tender. Again, only a few hotels accept them, and they charge a hefty commission.

Post

DHL (Map p102; Traders Hotel, 1st fl, 223, Sule Paya Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri)

Main post office (Map p102; Strand Rd; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) A short stroll east of the Strand Hotel. Stamps are for sale on the ground floor but go to the 2nd floor to send mail.

Tourist Information

Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT; Map p102; ☎ 275 328, tourist information ☎ 282 075; 77-91 Sule Paya Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is a government-run travel agency on the corner of Mahabandoola Rd and across the street from Sule Paya, which seems modern compared to the MTT's offices. The staff is as enthusiastic as Soviet bureaucrats though they will provide basics such as schedules for Myanmar Airways (MA) and the Yangon-Mandalay railway. It's not uncommon to be steered towards a private travel agency if your questioning becomes too demanding and involves venturing away from the main tourist quadrangle. Free decent city and country maps are available; information from here,

like most other places, should be double-checked.

Travel Agencies

Most visitors to Myanmar only use private domestic travel agencies to book a tour, hire a car or book a domestic flight (air ticket prices are usually cheaper through a private travel agency). However, of the more than 100 enterprises in Yangon calling themselves travel agencies, only a handful can be considered full-service, experienced tour agencies.

Among the more reliable agencies are the following:

Columbus Travels & Tours (Map p98; ☎ 229 245; www.travelmyanmar.com; 586 Strand Rd) It's on the corner of Strand Rd and 7th St. There's also a branch office on the 3rd floor of the Sakura Tower across from the Traders Hotel.

Diethelm Travel (Map p86; ☎ 527 110; leisure@diethelm.com.mm; 37 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd)

Exotissimo Travel (Map p102; ☎ 255 266; www.exotissimo.com; 3rd fl, Sakura Tower, 339 Bogyoke Aung San Rd)

Free Bird Tours (Map p102; ☎ 245 489; www.freebirdtours.com; 357 Bo Aung Gyaw St)

Good News Travel (Map p102; ☎ 09-511 6256; good-news@mptmail.net.mm; 4th fl, FMI Centre, 380 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) The owner, William Myatwunna, is extremely personable and knowledgeable. Recommended.

Gulliver Tours & Travel (Map p90; ☎ 526 100; gulliver@mptmail.net.mm; 51B Inya Maing Rd)

Insight Myanmar Tourism (Map p98; ☎ 297 798; insight@mptmail.net.mm; 85-87 Thein Byu Rd, Botataung Township)

Myanmar Himalaya Trekking (Map p90; ☎ 227 978; www.myanmar-explore.com; Rm 226, Summit Parkview Hotel)

New Horizons Travels & Tours (Map p90; ☎ 542 949; tun@mptmail.net.mm; 64 B2R Shwe Gon Plaza)

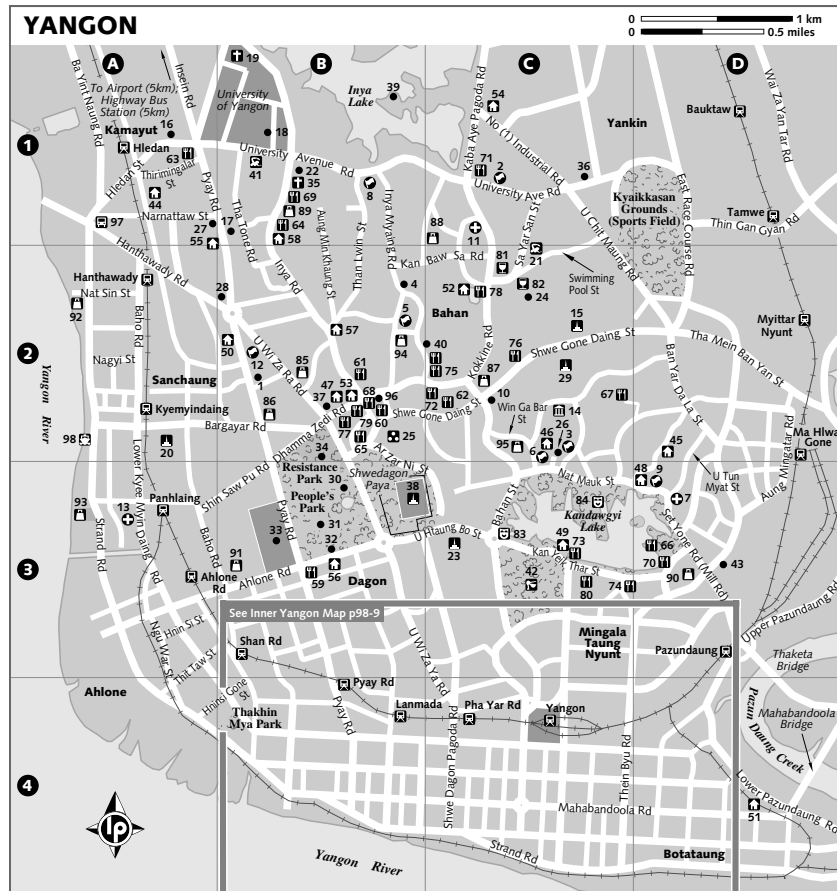
Santa Maria Travel & Tours (Map p102; ☎ 254 625; www.myanmartravels.net; 195-B 32nd St)

Tour Mandalay (Map p98; ☎ 294 729; www.tourmandalay.com; 2nd fl, 194-196 Mahabandoola Rd)

Woodland Travels (Map p98; ☎ 202 071; www.woodlandtravels.com; 422-426 Strand Rd, 7 FV Commercial Centre)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Many travellers report being overcharged double or triple the correct amount when buying bus tickets from the kiosks around Aug San Stadium in Yangon. No doubt it's not uncommon elsewhere, but it seems



particularly egregious here where fares are not posted and ticket sellers routinely claim there are only a few seats left for any particular route. The truth is, as mentioned in the Getting There & Away section (see p123) there are almost always several bus companies leaving at about the same time for any destination. If the ticket sellers refuse to sell you the ticket at or close to the correct price you can always simply show up at the bus station before the scheduled departure.

SIGHTS
Shwedagon Paya

ရွှေတိဂုံဘုရား
Much like the Statue of Liberty in New York City or the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the

Shwedagon Paya (Map p90; admission US\$5; ☎ 5am-10pm) has achieved iconic status for Yangon and, along with Bagan, for the country as a whole. However, unlike the monuments of those Western cities, the majority of the pilgrims visiting Shwedagon are local, its meaning deeply religious and rather than being a beacon of the modern, it proudly stands for the ancient and timeless. To a foreigner maybe the most exotic element of this huge gold bell-shaped temple is how casually it stands amid the modern and familiar, or how Burmese who live literally in its shadow go about their everyday lives without seeming to register amazement or awe in its existence. If Bagan is special in part because of its isolation, Shwedagon

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Cambodian Embassy.....	2 C1
German Embassy.....	3 C2
Gullivers Tours & Travel.....	4 B2
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seems all the more exotic because of the way it has been domesticated and intertwined in the physical and mental geography of the city.

In the heat of the day, the stupa glitters bright gold. When the sun sets it casts its last rays on the soft orange dome, and a swarm of sparrows migrates from the Shwedagon grounds until their return the following morning. It can be quiet and contemplative, or colourful and raucous. Kipling called it 'a golden mystery... a beautiful winking wonder'. For Myanmar Buddhists, it is the most sacred of all Buddhist sites in the country, one which all Burmese hope to visit at least once in their lifetime.

The great golden dome rises 98m above its base. According to legends, this stupa – of the solid *zedi* (stupa; bell-shaped monument) type – is 2500 years old, but archaeologists suggest the original stupa was built by the Mon, sometime between the 6th and 10th centuries. In common with many other ancient *zedi* in earthquake-prone Myanmar, it has been rebuilt many times and its current form dates back only to 1769.

Visible from almost anywhere in the city, Shwedagon is located to the north of central Yangon, between People's Park and Kandawgyi.

The admission fee includes an elevator ride to the raised platform of the stupa. Of course, like most Burmese, you may walk up one of the long graceful entrances. There's also a US\$5 camera fee, not always enforced. The north gate is especially photogenic at night.

HISTORY

During the Bagan period of Myanmar's history (10th to 14th century), the story of the stupa emerges from mists of legend (p92) to become hard fact. Near the top of the eastern stairway you can see an inscription recording the history of the stupa to 1485.

In the 15th century, the tradition of gilding the stupa also began – Queen Shinsawbu, who was responsible for many improvements to the stupa, provided her own weight (40kg) in gold, which was beaten into gold-leaf and used to gild the structure. Her son-in-law, Dhhammadzedi, went several

THE LEGEND OF SHWEDAGON PAYA

The legend of Shwedagon Paya tells of two merchant brothers meeting the Buddha, who gave them eight of his hairs to take back to be enshrined in Myanmar. With the help of a number of *nat* (spirits), the brothers and the king of this region of Myanmar discovered the hill where relics of previous Buddhas had been enshrined. When the chamber that would house the hairs was built and the hairs were taken from their golden casket, some quite amazing events took place:

...there was a tumult among men and spirits...rays emitted by the Hairs penetrated up to the heavens above and down to hell...the blind beheld objects...the deaf heard sounds...the dumb spoke distinctly...the earth quaked...the winds of the ocean blew...Mount Meru shook...lightning flashed...gems rained down until they were knee deep...all trees of the Himalaya, though not in season, bore blossoms and fruit.

Fortunately, hairs of the Buddha are not unveiled every day.

Once the relics were safely enshrined, a golden slab was laid on their chamber and a golden stupa built on it. Over this, a silver stupa was built, then a tin stupa, a copper stupa, a lead stupa, a marble stupa and finally, an iron-brick stupa. Or so the legend goes. Later, the legend continues, the stupa at Dagon fell into disuse and it is said the great Indian Buddhist emperor Asoka came to Myanmar, finding the site only with great difficulty, and subsequently had the encroaching jungle cleared and the stupa repaired.

better, by offering four times his own weight and that of his wife's in gold. He also provided the 1485 historical inscription on the eastern stairway.

The *zedi* suffered from a series of earthquakes that caused great damage during this time. In 1612 Portuguese renegade adventurer Philip De Brito raided the stupa from his base in Thanlyin and carried away Dhammazedi's great bell, with the intention of melting it down for cannons. As the British were to do later, with another bell, he dropped it into the river. During the 17th century, the monument suffered earthquake damage on eight occasions. Worse was to follow in 1768, when a quake brought down the whole top of the *zedi*. King Hsinbyushin had it rebuilt to virtually its present height, and its current configuration dates from that renovation.

British troops occupied the compound for two years immediately after the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. In 1852, during the Second Anglo-Burmese War, the British again took the paya, the soldiers pillaged it once more and it remained under military control for 77 years, until 1929. In 1871 a new *hti* (the umbrella-like decorative top of a paya), provided by King Mindon Min from Mandalay, caused considerable head-scratching for the British, who were not at all keen for such an association to

be made with the still-independent part of Myanmar.

During the 20th century, the Shwedagon Paya was the scene for much political activity during the Myanmar independence movement. The huge earthquake of 1930, which totally destroyed the Shwemawdaw in Bago, only caused minor damage to Shwedagon. Less luck was had the following year when the paya suffered from a serious fire. After another minor earthquake in 1970, the *zedi* was clad in bamboo scaffolding beyond King Mindon's 100-year-old *hti*, and was refurbished.

DESIGN

There are four covered walkways up Singutara Hill to the platform on which Shwedagon stands. The southern entrance, from Shwedagon Paya Rd, is the one which can most properly be called the main entrance. Here, and at the northern entrance, there are lifts available, should you not feel fit enough for the stroll up the stairs. The western entrance features a series of escalators in place of stairs, and is the only entrance without vendors. The eastern stairway has the most traditional ambience, passing adjacent *kyaung* (monasteries) and vendors selling monastic requisites.

Two 9m-high *chinthe* (legendary half-lion, half-dragon guardian figures) loom

over the southern entrance. You must remove your shoes and socks as soon as you mount the first step. Like the other entrances, the southern steps are lined with a series of shops, where devotees buy flowers – both real and beautifully made paper ones – for offerings. Buddha images, ceremonial paper umbrellas, books, golden thrones, incense sticks, ivory combs and antiques are also on sale. However hot it may be outside, you'll find the walkway cool, shady and calm. It's this quiet, subdued atmosphere on the entrance steps that makes the impact so great as you arrive at the platform.

You emerge from semi-gloom into a visual cacophony of technicoloured glitter – for Shwedagon is not just one huge, glowing *zedi*. Around the mighty stupa cluster an incredible assortment of smaller *zedi*, statues, temples, shrines, images and *tazaung* (small pavilions). Somehow, the bright gold of the main stupa makes everything else seem brighter and larger than life.

Stupas, indeed all Buddhist structures, should be walked around clockwise, so turn left at the top of the steps and, like the crowds of locals, start strolling. During the heat of the day, you'll probably have to confine yourself to the mat pathway laid around the platform – unless your bare feet can take the heat of the uncovered marble paving.

The hill on which the stupa stands is 58m above sea level and the platform covers over five hectares. Prior to the British takeover of southern Myanmar, there had been Burmese defensive earthworks around the paya, but these were considerably extended by the British, and the emplacements for their cannons can still be seen outside the outer wall.

The main stupa, which is completely solid, rises from its platform in a fairly standard pattern. First there is the plinth, which stands 6.4m above the clutter of the main platform and immediately sets Shwedagon above the lesser structures. Smaller stupas sit on this raised platform level – four large ones mark the four cardinal directions, four medium-sized ones mark the four corners of the basically square platform and 60 small ones run around the perimeter.

From this base, the *zedi* rises first in three terraces, then in the 'octagonal' terraces and then in five circular bands – together these elements add another 30m to the stupa's height. A standard architectural problem

associated with stupas is how to change from the square base to the circular upper elements? Here, as in many other *zedi* in Myanmar, that transition is achieved with the help of the octagonal sections, which make a transition from the horizontal design of these lower elements to the smooth vertical flow of the bell.

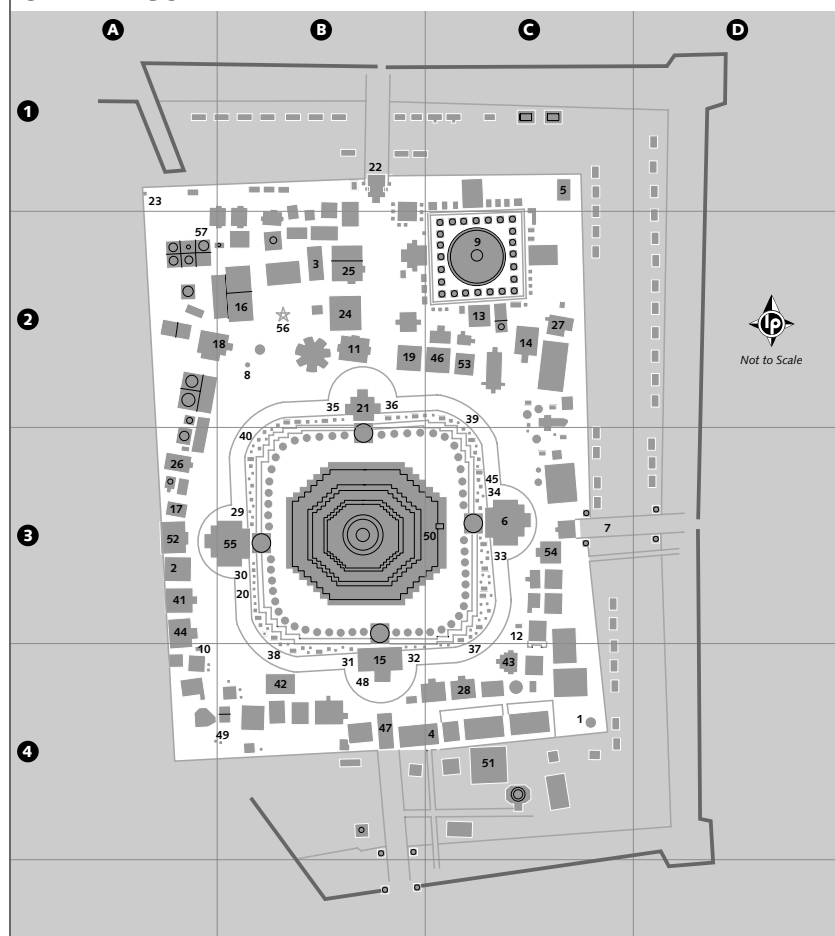
The shoulder of the bell is decorated with 16 'flowers'. The bell is topped by the 'inverted bowl', another traditional element of stupa architecture, and above this stand the mouldings and then the 'lotus petals'. These consist of a band of down-turned petals, followed by a band of up-turned petals.

The banana bud is the final element of the *zedi* before the *hti* tops it. Like the lotus petals below, the banana bud is actually covered with no less than 13,153 plates of gold, measuring 30 sq cm each – unlike the lower elements, which are merely covered with gold-leaf. The seven-tiered *hti* is made of iron and again plated with gold. Even without the various hanging bells, it weighs well over a tonne. The *hti* tiers descend in size from bottom to top, and from the uppermost tier projects the shaft which is hung with gold bells, silver bells and various items of jewellery. The topmost vane, with its flag, turns with the wind. It is gold- and silver-plated and studded with 1100 diamonds totalling 278 carats – not to mention 1383 other stones. Finally, at the very top of the vane rests the diamond orb – a hollow golden sphere studded with no less than 4351 diamonds, weighing 1800 carats in total. The very top of the orb is tipped with a single 76-carat diamond.

AROUND THE STUPA

The mighty central *zedi*, regilded every year, is only one of many structures on the hilltop platform. Reaching the platform from the southern stairway (47), you encounter the first shrine (15), which is to Konagamana, the second Buddha. Almost beside the shrine stand the planetary posts for Mercury (31 and 32). If you were born on a Wednesday morning (as was the Buddha), then this is your post, and the tasked elephant in your animal sign. Continuing around the plinth, you pass a double-bodied lion with a man's face, a laughing necromancer with his hands on his head, and an earth goddess. At the southwestern corner

SHWEDAGON PAYA PLAN



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
1	C4	Banyan Tree.....	1
2	A3	Chinese Merchants' Tazaung.....	2
3	B2	Chinese Prayer Hall.....	3
4	C4	Curio Museum.....	4
5	C1	Dhammazedi Inscription.....	5
6	C3	Eastern Shrine Hall.....	6
7	C3	Eastern Stairway Landing.....	7
8	B2	Eight Day Stupa.....	8
9	C2	Golden Elder Stupa.....	9
10	A4	Guardian Nat.....	10
11	B2	Hair Relics Well.....	11
12	C3	Hintha Prayer Post.....	12
13	C2	Izza-Gawna Pavilion.....	13
14	C2	King Tharawaddy Min's Bell.....	14
15	B4	Konagamana Shrine.....	15
16	B2	Large Pavilion.....	16
17	A3	Low Pavilion.....	17
18	A2	Maha Ganda Bell.....	18
19	B2	Mahabodhi-Style Temple.....	19
20	B3	Mai Lamu & King of the Nats.....	20
21	B2	Northern Adoration Hall.....	21
22	B1	Northern Stairway Landing.....	22
23	A1	Northwestern Corner.....	23
24	B2	Pavilion (where hti was placed).....	24
25	B2	Pavilion (with Indian figures).....	25
26	A3	Pavilion (with tall columns).....	26
27	C2	Pavilion (with woodcarvings).....	27
28	C4	Pavilion (with woodcarvings).....	28
29	B3	Planetary Posts for Jupiter.....	29
30	B3	Planetary Posts for Jupiter.....	30
31	B4	Planetary Posts for Mercury.....	31
32	B4	Planetary Posts for Mercury.....	32
33	C3	Planetary Posts for the Moon.....	33
34	C3	Planetary Posts for the Moon.....	34
35	B2	Planetary Posts for Venus.....	35
36	B2	Planetary Posts for Venus.....	36
37	C4	Planetary Post for Mars.....	37
38	B4	Planetary Post for Saturn.....	38
39	C2	Planetary Post for the Sun.....	39
40	B3	Planetary Post for Yahu.....	40
41	A3	Prayer Hall (with reclining Buddha).....	41
42	B4	Prayer Pavilion.....	42
43	C4	Prayer Post Bell.....	43
44	A3	Rakhaing Tazaung.....	44
45	C3	Shan Umbrellas.....	45
46	C2	Small Gilded Zedi.....	46
47	B4	Southern Stairway Landing.....	47
48	B4	Stairs to Zedi Plinth.....	48
49	B4	Student Monument.....	49
50	C3	Tawa-gu Image.....	50
51	C4	Trustees' Office.....	51
52	A3	Two-Pice Tazaung.....	52
53	C2	Two-Pice Tazaung.....	53
54	C3	U Nyo Pavilion.....	54
55	B3	Western Adoration Hall.....	55
56	B2	Wish-Fulfilling Place.....	56
57	A2	Wonder-Working Image.....	57

of the plinth, you reach the planetary post for Saturn (38). Come here if you were born on a Saturday; your animal sign is the *naga* (serpent being). The pavilion (42) directly opposite has 28 images to represent the 28 previous Buddhas.

Back towards the southwest corner of the platform is a monument (49) with inscriptions in four languages, recounting a 1920 student revolt against British rule. Continuing around the platform, you come to a glass case with two figures of *nat* (10) – one is of the guardian *nat* (spirits) of Shwedagon Paya. Close to these figures is a prayer hall (44), quite bare inside, but with fine woodcarving on the terraced roof. It is known as the Rakhaing Tazaung, as it was donated by brokers from the Rakhaing (Arakan) coast bordering Bangladesh. An 8m-long reclining Buddha can be seen in the next prayer hall (41). Next to this is the Chinese Merchants' Tazaung (2), with a variety of Buddha figures in different poses.

On the plinth opposite this prayer hall are figures of Mai Lamu and the king of the *nat* (20), the parents of King Ukkalapa who, according to the legend, originally enshrined the Buddha hairs here. The figures stand on top of each other. The western adoration hall (55) was built in 1841, but was destroyed in the fire that swept the *zedi* platform in 1931. The planetary posts for the Thursday-born (29 and 30) stand to the right and left of this pavilion: your planet is Jupiter and your animal sign is the rat. A figure of King Ukkalapa can be seen further to the left, on the *zedi* plinth.

Directly opposite the west adoration hall is the Two Pice Tazaung (52) located at the head of the western stairway. The low pavilion (17) next to the entrance was built by manufacturers of monastery requirements – in contrast to the rather Chinese-looking roof. Next along is a pavilion (26), with tall columns and the *pyatthat* (wooden, multi-roofed pavilion) rising from the upper roof. Almost opposite this *tazaung*, at the northwestern corner of the main *zedi*, is the planetary post (40) for those born on Wednesday afternoon, whose animal symbol is the tuskless elephant, and whose planet is Yahu (Rahu, a mythical planet in Hindu astrology that allegedly causes eclipses).

A small stupa with a golden spire (8) has eight niches around its base, each with

a Buddha image. Between the niches are figures of animals and birds – they represent the eight directions of the compass and the associated sign, planet and day of the week. To get over the small complication of having an Eight Day Stupa and a seven day week, Wednesday is divided into Wednesday morning and Wednesday afternoon. The eight days, which can also be found with their corresponding planetary posts around the main stupa are (from the southern entrance):

Direction	Day	Planet	Sign
south	Wed am	Mercury	tusked elephant
southwest	Sat	Saturn	<i>naga</i> (dragon serpent)
west	Thu	Jupiter	rat
northwest	Wed pm	Yahu	tuskless elephant
north	Fri	Venus	guinea pig or mole
northeast	Sun	Sun	garuda
east	Mon	Moon	tiger
southeast	Tue	Mars	lion

Close to this small Eight Day Stupa stands the bell pavilion (18) housing the 23-tonne Maha Ganda Bell. Cast between 1775 and 1779, it was carted off by the British after the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1825. The British dropped it into the Yangon River while trying to get it to the port for shipping to England; after repeatedly trying to raise it from the river bottom, they gave up and told the Burmese they could have the bell back if they could get it out of the river. The Burmese placed logs and bamboo beneath the bell until it eventually floated to the surface.

Venturing back into the open area of the platform, you come to the star-shaped 'wish-fulfilling place' (56), where there will often be devotees, kneeling down and looking towards the great stupa, praying that their wishes come true.

The large pavilion (16) across from the bell pavilion houses a 9m-high Buddha image and is often used for public meetings. Behind this pavilion stands a small shrine (57) with a highly revered 'wonder-working' Buddha image covered in gold leaf. From the northwestern corner of the platform (23), you can look out over some of the British fortifications and the country to the north of the hill. There are also two banyan trees growing here, one of them

grown from a cutting from the actual tree at Bodhgaya in India, under which the Buddha sat and was enlightened.

Among the cluster of buildings on this side of the platform is the Chinese prayer hall (3), with good woodcarvings and Chinese dragon figures on the sides of the *zedi* in front of it. The adjacent pavilion (25) has life-size figures of Indians guarding the side and front entrance doors. No-one quite understands their relevance or that of the very British lions that guard the next pavilion.

In 1824 a force of Burmese 'Invulnerables' fought their way up the northern stairs to the entrance (22) of the platform before being repulsed by the better-armed British forces occupying the paya. The crocodile-like stair bannister dates from 1460. The Martyrs' Mausoleum of Bogyoke Aung San and his compatriots stands on the western side of the hill reached from this stairway.

Walking back towards the stupa, you pass the pavilion (24) built on the site where the great *zedi's hti*, provided by King Mindon Min, was placed before being raised to the *zedi* summit. The Hair Relics Well (11) was located at the position of the Sandawdwin Tazaung (28) and is said to reach right down to the level of the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River and to be fed from it; the Buddha hairs were washed in this well before being enshrined in the *zedi*. In the northern adoration hall (21), the main image is of Gautama, the historical Buddha. On either side of the hall stand planetary posts for Friday (35 and 36), domain of the planet Venus, and the guinea pig or mole.

Modelled after the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya, India, the temple (19) a few steps away is distinctly different from the general style of buildings on the platform. A small gilded *zedi* (46) stands next to this temple, and next again is another 'two-pice' *tazaung* (53) enshrining a 200-year-old Buddha image. An opening behind this image is, according to legend, the entrance to a passage that leads to the chamber housing the Buddha hair relics. Although seen from the 'two-pice' *tazaung*, the Buddha image is actually in the adjacent stupa.

Izza-Gawna (which means 'goat-bullock') was a legendary monk whose powers enabled him to replace his lost eyes with one from a goat and one from a bullock. In his

pavilion (13), the figure off to the left of the main Buddha image has eyes of unequal size as a reminder of this unique feat. The golden Elder Stupa (9) is built on the spot where the hair relics were first placed before being enshrined in the great *zedi*. A straight line drawn from the centre of this stupa to the centre of Shwedagon would pass through the small stupa reputed to be the entrance to the passage that leads to the relic chamber. Women are not allowed to ascend to the platform around the Elder Stupa, which is also known as the Naungdawgyi Stupa.

Back in the corner of the platform is the Dhammazedi inscription (5), which dates from 1485 and was originally installed on the eastern stairway. It tells in three languages – Pali, Mon and Burmese – the story of Shwedagon.

Cast in 1841, King Tharawaddy Min's bell is housed in an elegant pavilion (14). The Maha Tiitthadaganda (three-toned bell) weighs 42 tonnes. Note the ceiling made of lacquer inlaid with glass. If you look closely, you can also discern red-billed green parrots nearly hidden in the scrolling among the *devas* (celestial beings). The adjacent small pavilion (27) has some good panels of woodcarvings. Back on the main platform the planetary post (39) for those born on Sunday (the sun) stands at the northeastern corner of the stupa platform. The bird-like creature beneath the post is the garuda of Hindu-Buddhist mythology, called *galoun* by the Burmese. Further around you will see golden Shan umbrellas (45) among the plinth shrines; there is also one over the Friday planetary post near the northern pavilion.

Facing the eastern stairway, the eastern shrine hall (6) is said to be the most beautiful on the platform. It was renovated in 1869, but destroyed by the 1931 fire and subsequently rebuilt. The main image is that of Kakusandha, the first Buddha. The eastern stairway (7) is the longest and is lined with shops selling everyday articles as well as religious goods and antiques. On either side, the people who were born on Monday worship at the planetary posts (33 and 34) ruled over by the moon and the tiger.

The graceful U Nyo pavilion (54), beside the eastern entrance, has a series of interesting woodcarved panels illustrating events

in the life of Gautama Buddha. The prayer post (12) close to the southeastern corner of the *zedi* is topped by a mythological *hintha* bird. An interesting bell (43) hangs near this prayer post. Opposite these on the *zedi* plinth is the planetary post for Tuesday (37), presided over by the lion and the planet Mars.

In the corner of the platform stands another sacred banyan tree (1), also said to be grown from a branch of the original tree under which Gautama Buddha gained enlightenment in India. There is a good view from this corner of the platform over Yangon and across the Yangon River towards Thanlyin. On a clear day, you can see the Kyaik-khauk Paya, just beyond Thanlyin. The paya trustees have their office (51) on this side of the platform, and there's also a small curio museum (4). In front of the museum is a pavilion (28) with very fine woodcarvings. There is also a revolving *hti* and a telescope, possibly for looking at the real *hti* on top of the *zedi*.

Beside the southern shrine (15), the first stop on this circular tour, stairs (48) lead up onto the *zedi* plinth. With permission from the paya trustees, men only are allowed to climb up to the plinth terrace. Men come up here to meditate; the terrace is about 6m wide – a circular walkway between the great *zedi* and its 68 surrounding *zedi*. Behind the eastern shrine is a Buddha image (50) known as the Tawa-gu, which is reputed to work miracles.

Sule Paya

ဆူးလေဘုရား

It's not every city whose primary traffic circle is occupied by a 2000-year-old golden temple. Surrounded by government buildings and commercial shops, the tall *zedi* at **Sule Paya** (Map p102; cnr Sule Paya & Mahabandoola Rds; admission free) is another example of the strange incongruity of the Yangon cityscape. It's not everywhere you check the Internet and visit a shrine said to contain a hair of the Buddha in the space of a few blocks. The central stupa's name, Kyaik Athok, translates in the Mon language as 'the stupa where a Sacred Hair Relic is enshrined'. As with many other ancient Myanmar shrines, it has been rebuilt and repaired many times over the centuries, so no-one really knows exactly when it was built.

The golden *zedi* is unusual in that its octagonal shape continues right up to the bell and inverted bowl. It stands 46m high and is surrounded by small shops and all the familiar nonreligious activities that seem to be a part of every *zedi* in Myanmar. Besides its significance as a landmark and meeting place, maybe its most mundane function is as a milestone from which all addresses to the north are measured.

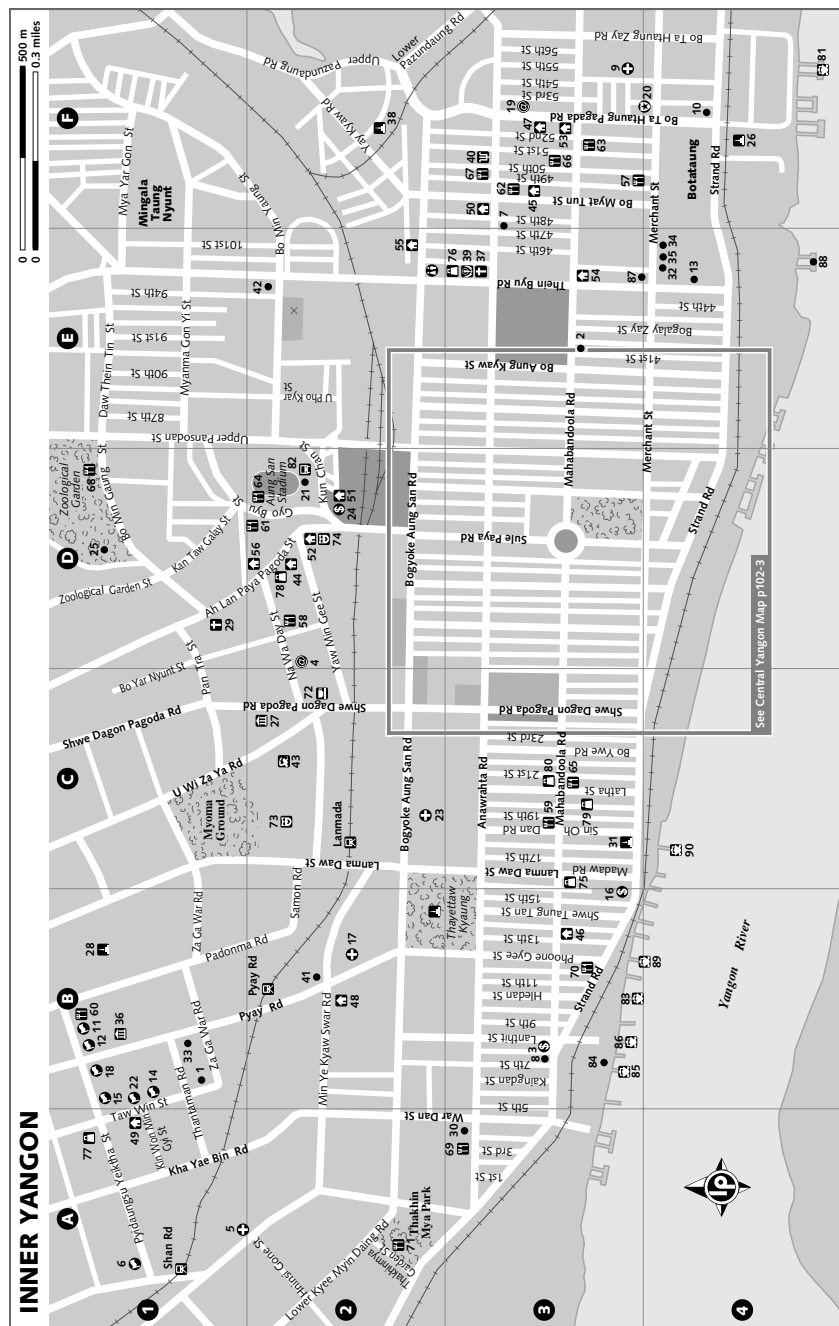
Botataung Paya

ပိုလ်တေထောင်ဘုရား

One of Yangon's 'big three' payas, and said to contain hair relics of the Buddha, the **Botataung Paya** (Map p98; Strand Rd; admission US\$2) was named after the 1000 military leaders who escorted relics of the Buddha to Myanmar from India over 2000 years ago (*Bo* means leader, usually in a military sense and *tataung* means 1000). For one six-month period this paya is said to have harboured all eight strands of the Buddha's hair before they were distributed elsewhere. Of course it's not breathtaking like Shwedagon or striking for being so out-of-place like Sule Paya, however Botataung's spacious river-front location and elements of kitsch make it worth visiting.

It's proximity to fresh air and the Yangon wharves were less fortuitous when a bomb from an Allied air raid in November 1943 scored a direct hit on the unfortunate paya. After the war, the Botataung was rebuilt in a very similar style to its predecessor, but with one important and unusual difference: unlike most *zedi*, which are solid, the Botataung is hollow, and you can walk through it. There's a sort of mirrored maze inside the stupa, with glass showcases containing many of the ancient relics and artefacts, including small silver-and-gold Buddha images, which were sealed inside the earlier stupa. Reconstruction also revealed a small gold cylinder holding two small body relics and a strand of hair, said to be that of the Buddha's, which is reputedly to still be in the stupa. Above this interesting interior, the golden stupa spire rises to 40m.

To the western side of the stupa is a hall containing a large gilded bronze Buddha, cast during the reign of King Mindon Min. At the time of the British annexation, it was kept in King Thibaw Min's glass palace, but after King Thibaw was exiled to India, the



INFORMATION

Alliance Francaise.....(see 11)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs.....33 B1	Lucky Seven Teashop.....67 F3
American Center.....1 B1	Ministry of Railway	Maharaja Indian Restaurant.....68 D1
Ava Laundry.....2 E3	Transportation.....34 E4	Maw Shwe Li Restaurant.....69 A3
AWB Bank.....3 B3	Ministry of Transport.....35 E4	Night Market.....(see 75)
Bee Internet Café.....4 D2	National Museum.....36 B1	Singapore's Kitchen.....70 B3
Central Women's Hospital.....5 A1	Salvation Army Church.....37 E3	Western Park Restaurant.....71 A2
Chinese Embassy.....6 A1	Shwe Pon Pwint Paya.....38 F2	
City Mart Supermarket.....7 F3	Sikh Temple.....39 E3	DRINKING ☑
Columbus Travel & Tours.....8 B3	Sri Devi.....40 F3	J's Bistro & Bar.....(see 77)
Cyber World I.....(see 78)	Than Zei (Market).....41 B2	Ritz Café.....72 C2
East Yangon General Hospital.....9 F3	Theinbyu Zei (Market).....42 E2	
FJV Commercial Centre.....10 F4	Yangon Swimming Pool.....43 C2	ENTERTAINMENT ☑
French Embassy.....11 B1		National Theatre.....73 C2
Indonesian Embassy.....12 B1	SLEEPING ☑	Pioneer Club.....(see 56)
Insight Myanmar Tourism.....13 E4	Grand Plaza Park Royal Hotel.....44 D2	Thamada Cinema.....74 D2
Laos Embassy.....14 B1	Haven Inn.....45 F3	
Malaysian Embassy.....15 B1	Lai Lai Hotel.....46 B3	SHOPPING ☑
Myanmar Agricultural Bank.....16 B3	Ocean Pearl Inn.....47 F3	Iron Bazaar.....75 C3
New Yangon General Hospital.....17 B2	Panda Hotel.....48 B2	Ivy Gallery.....76 E3
Pakistani Embassy.....18 B1	Prmsea Yangon.....49 A1	J's Irwaddy Dream.....77 A1
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Police Station.....20 F4	Sakhantha Hotel.....51 D2	Lucky 7.....79 C3
Rubyland Tourism.....21 D2	Thamada Hotel.....52 D2	Twenty One.....80 C3
Sri Lankan Embassy.....22 B1	Three Seasons Hotel.....53 F3	
Tour Mandalay.....(see 66)	YMCA.....54 E3	TRANSPORT
Woodland Travels.....(see 10)	Yoma Hotel.....55 E2	Botataung Jetty.....81 F4
Yangon General Hospital.....23 C2	Yuzana Garden Hotel.....56 D2	City Bus Ticket Offices
Yoma Bank.....24 D2		(Long Distance Buses).....82 D2
		Hledan St Jetty.....83 B3
		Inland Water Transport
		Office.....84 B3
		Chinese Street Stalls.....85 B3
		Feel Myanmar Food.....80 B1
		Ginza Pan Food Centre.....61 D2
		Golden Dragon Teashop.....62 F3
		Home Sweet Home Restaurant.....63 F3
		Golden Express Ltd.....30 A3
		Ichiban-Kan.....64 D2
		Kheng Hock Keong.....31 C3
		Indian Street Stalls.....65 C3
		Lashio Lay Shan Restaurant.....66 F3
		Cargo Jetty.....86 B3
		Myanma Five Star Line.....87 E3
		Myanma Five Star Line (MFSL)
		Pongyi St Jetty.....89 B4
		Sin Oh Dan St Jetty
		(Vehide Ferry to Dalah).....90 C4

British shipped the image to London. In 1951 the image was returned to Myanmar and placed in the Botataung Paya. Also on the grounds is a *nat* (spirit) pavilion containing images of Thurathadi (the Hindu deity Saraswati, goddess of learning and music) and Thagyamin (Indra, king of the *nat*) flanking the thoroughly Burmese *nat* Bobogyi.

A short walk from Botataung Paya at Botataung jetty, you can watch ferryboats and oared water taxis cross the Yangon River.

Chaukhtatgyi Paya

မြောက်ထပ်ကြီးဘုရား

Good thing he's resting because when magnified to this size the placid features of the Buddha in repose can start to seem somewhat eerie, especially if you begin to imagine what he would look like standing above you. Monstrous fantasies of the Buddha aside, the reclining Buddha at Chaukhtatgyi (Map p90; Shwe Gon Daing Rd; admission free), almost as large as the enormous figure in Bago, is impressive. Housed in a large metal-roofed shed, only a short distance northeast beyond the Shwedagon Paya, this huge figure is surprisingly little known and hardly

publicised at all – if you can't get to Bago to see the Shwethalyaung, then don't miss this colossal image. Fortune-tellers on the surrounding platform offer astrological and palm readings.

Kaba Aye Paya

ကျောင်းအေးဘုရား

The 'world peace' *zedi* was built for the 1954–56 Sixth Buddhist Synod. The 34m-high stupa (Map p86) also measures 34m around its base. It stands about 11km north of the city centre, a little beyond the Renaissance Inya Lake Hotel. This attempt to construct a modern paya was not terribly successful – it does not have the same visual appeal of Myanmar's older, more graceful stupas. The interior of the monument, however, is hollow and contains some nice Buddhist sculptures, including a *lei-myet-hna* (four-sided Buddha sculpture).

Maha Pasana Guha

မဟာပါသနလိုက်ဂူ

The 'great cave' (Map p86) is a totally artificial one, built close to the Kaba Aye Paya. It was here that the Sixth Buddhist Synod was held in 1954–56 to coincide with the 2500th

anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment. The cavern measures 139m by 113m. This enormous cave, which can accommodate up to 10,000 people, took only 14 months to build; it helps if you have 63,000 labourers. The cave is still used to hold grand religious ceremonies.

Maha Wizaya (Vijaya) Paya

မဟာဝိဇယ

Linked by a pedestrian bridge to the Shwedagon complex southern gate, the **Maha Wizaya** (Map p90; admission K200) is unavoidably dull in comparison. It's a rather plain but well-proportioned *zedi* built in 1980 to commemorate the unification of Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar. The king of Nepal contributed sacred relics for the *zedi's* relic chamber and Burmese military strongman Ne Win had it topped with an 11-level *hti* – two more levels than the *hti* at Shwedagon.

Foreign media and some locals often refer to the monument as 'Ne Win's paya', due to Ne Win's involvement in the project (a common practice among top military figures). However, many Myanmar citizens resent this phrase, pointing out that as the *zedi* was built by donations from the people, it should rightfully be called the 'people's paya'.

Other Paya, Temples & Shrines

South of the Chauktatgyi Paya, there's a huge seated Buddha image at the **Ngahatgyi Paya** (Map p90). It's appropriately known as the five-storey Buddha and is located in the Ashay Tawya monastery. In Kyemyindaing (also called Kyimyindine and Kemmedine), in the west of the city, there's another huge seated Buddha over in the **Kohatgyi Paya** (Map p90; Bargaryar St); it stands (or sits) 20m high. There are many monasteries in the vicinity. Kyemyindaing also has a busy night market.

Near the airport, the **Me La Mu Paya** (Map p86) has a series of images of the Buddha in his previous incarnations, and a reclining Buddha image. The paya is named after the mother of King Ukkalapa, the founder of the city of Dagon. In Insein, west of the airport, you'll find the five-storey **Ah Lain Nga Sint Paya** (Map p86).

Near the International Buddhist University, between Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd and Thudhamar St, is wedding-cake shaped **Swe Taw Myat Paya** (Buddha Tooth Relic Pagoda; Map p86;

Swedag St). Not that you'd ever know it nor should it affect your appreciation of the paya architecturally but it contains not just another tooth relic from the Buddha, but a replica of a relic brought from China in 1997 by pilgrims.

The **Yau Kyaw Paya** is a 30-minute drive northeast of the city centre, past the Kyaikasan Paya. It's an interesting complex of buildings with tableaux depicting Buddhist legends, pet monkeys, deer and peacocks and an interesting museum crammed full of Burmese antiques. The paya is beside the Pazundaung Chaung in a rural setting.

At the time of writing, construction was underway on a **replica of the Thatbyinnyu Paya**, in the North Okkalapa section of Yangon; the Thatbyinnyu is the tallest structure in Bagan.

Kheng Hock Keong (Map p98; Strand Rd) is the largest Chinese temple in Yangon. Supported by a Hokkien association, the 100-year-old temple is most lively from around 6am to 9am when it's thronged with worshippers offering candles, flowers and incense to the Buddhist and Taoist altars within. Old men play Chinese checkers in the temple compound throughout the day.

The **Moseah Yeshua Synagogue** (Map p102; 85 26th St), near Mahabandoola Rd, was founded over 100 years ago by Sephardic Jews. In the classic Sephardic style, it contains a *bimah* (platform holding the reading table) in the centre of the main sanctuary and a women's balcony upstairs. The wooden ceiling features the original blue-and-white Star of David motif. Myanmar had around 2500 Jews – a combination of B'nai Israel, Cochins (Indian) and Iraqi heritages – until nationalisation in the 1960s and 1970s, when many began leaving the country. Today there are no more than 50 or so Burmese Jews left in Myanmar, but surviving trustees maintain the synagogue for the occasional special service given by visiting rabbis from India or Israel. Caretaker Moses Samuels is happy to talk with visitors and show them the nearby Jewish cemetery, with over 700 graves dating back to 1856. Look for the Jewish star above the shops on Mahabandoola Rd. The entrance, sandwiched between small shops, is around the corner on 26th St.

Several colourful Hindu temples can be found in the centre of the city, including

Sri Sri Siva Krishna (Map p102; 141 Pansodan St), **Sri Kali** (Map p102; Anawrahta Rd), between 26th and 27th Sts, and **Sri Devi** (Map p98; cnr Anawrahta Rd & 51st St). These are the centres for the city's annual Murugu Festival, famous for colourful street processions featuring acts of ritual self-mutilation.

National Museum

အမျိုးသားပြတိုက်

About 1km north of Bogyoke Aung San Rd, and just south of the Indonesian embassy is the **National Museum** (Map p98; ☎ 282 563; Pyay Rd; adult/child/student US\$5/10/10; ☎ 10am-4pm), an unspectacular, cavernous and quite sparsely labelled collection.

Nevertheless, you can find a number of interesting exhibits, especially the 8m-high Sihassana (Lion Throne), which belonged to King Thibaw Min, the last Burmese king. There is also a fair range of royal regalia, much of which was plundered by the British but later returned (in fact you'll find a more impressive Burmese collection in London's Victoria and Albert Museum). Also worth a look are some extraordinarily intricate examples of 19th-century Burmese woodcarving.

Upstairs you'll find Burmese archaeological finds as well as traditional musical instruments. The 4th floor features about 40 mannequins dressed in the traditional dress of various ethnic groups in the country. There are also some excellent old maps and modern Burmese paintings.

Bogyoke Aung San Museum

ဗိုလ်ချုပ်အောင်ဆန်းပြတိုက်

Located in Bahan Township, the quiet and secluded **Bogyoke Aung San Museum** (Map p90; ☎ 541 359; Bogyoke Aung San Museum St; admission US\$3; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sun) is the former home of General Aung San and his wife Daw Kin Kyi, and contains remnants of another era. The house itself dates from the 1920s and the rooms, stairway, railings and furniture are fairly intact. There are several old family photos, which of course include daughter Suu Kyi as a little girl. A glass-encased English-language library reveals the general's broad interests; titles range from *Cavalry Training*, *Armoured Cars*, *a History of the US*, *Left-wing Democracy in the English Civil War* and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

TIP

Ride the lift to the top of the Sakura Tower (map p102), an office building across from Traders Hotel, for the best 360 degree views of the city.

Martyrs' Mausoleum

အာဇာနည်မိမိ

Close to Shwedagon, on a hill offering a good view over the city, stands this **memorial** (Map p90; Ar Za Nir St; admission US\$3; ☎ 9am-4pm) to Bogyoke Aung San and his fellow cabinet officers who were assassinated with him. It was also here that a bomb set off by North Koreans killed a number of South Korea's top government officials in late 1983. The mausoleum itself is only open one day a year – 19 July.

Mahabandoola Garden

မဟာဗန္ဓုလဝန်းခြံ

Just southeast of the Sule Paya, this square urban **park** (Map p102; admission K50) offers pleasant strolling in the city centre's heart, especially in the early morning when the Chinese come to practise tai chi, and the air hasn't yet filled with traffic fumes. Occupying the centre of the northern half of the park is the **Independence Monument**, an obelisk surrounded by two concentric circles of *chinthe*.

For a year or two following the 1988–90 prodemocracy uprisings, the park was occupied by Burmese soldiers; many of the more violent events of the time took place nearby.

Yangon Zoological Gardens

ရန်ကုန်တိရစ္ဆာန်ဥယျာဉ်

The monkey pen looks like a concrete cyclodrome and the elephants are tethered in place by heavy chains, nevertheless the **zoo** (Map p90; ☎ 72 2134; admission incl gardens K1500; ☎ 6am-4pm) and connecting 0.7-hectare **gardens** (Map p90; ☎ 274 244; Kan Yeik Thar St) make a popular outing for Myanmar families. The entrance is opposite the Dolphin Seafood Restaurant on Kandawgyi. Originally developed in 1906 by the British, the sparsely landscaped grounds include a couple of artificial lakes, a playground and a miniature train circuit for kids, and English and Latin labels (even on many of the trees).



Tigers and lions and a fair selection of both common and scarce Asian animals (including sambar, leopard, serow, Eld's deer, Malayan sun bear, goral, Indian muntjac, great hornbill, python, cobra and the huge marsh crocodile) are on display. Unchained elephants carry passengers on three-minute rides for K500. A row of large pens in the back house a massive Himalayan gibbon, and a few great hornbills among other large birds.

Kandawgyi

ကန်တော်ကြီး
Occupying prime Yangon real estate, this natural lake (Map p90) close to the city centre is a good place for a stroll. Don't expect

untamed nature or meditative quiet here as the sidewalk surrounding the circumference of Kandawgyi also runs alongside a busy road. Also known by its literal translation, Royal (Dawgyi) Lake (Kan), the lake seems at its most attractive at sunset, when the glittering Shwedagon is reflected in its calm waters; you'll find the best sunset view from the lake's eastern edge.

Several of the city's embassies, clinics and smaller hotels are in the lake's vicinity, the majority north of the lake. Just east of the Kandawgyi Palace Hotel, on the southern side of the lake, floats a **Shin Upagot shrine**. Upagot is a Bodhisattva or Buddhist saint who is said to protect human beings in moments of mortal danger.

INFORMATION		Sri Siva Temple.....39 A2	DRINKING ☑ ☑
AA Pharmacy.....1 C2	Super One Department Store.....40 B1	ABC Country Pub.....80 C2	Café Aroma.....81 C1
Australian Embassy.....2 D4	Bagan Bookshop.....3 D3	Da Best 69 Entertainment.....82 A2	Diamond White Bar.....(see 41)
Bookstalls.....4 B1	Bookstalls.....5 D3	Emperor Entertainment.....83 A2	Golden Triangle Bakery.....84 B3
British Council Library.....(see 6)	British Embassy.....6 D4	Mr Brown Café.....85 C2	Silver Oak Café.....86 D3
Camera/Film Shops.....7 C2	Central Bank of Myanmar.....8 C3	Strand Bar.....(see 52)	Theingyi Shwe Yee Tea House.....87 D1
Central Telephone & Telegraph Office.....9 C2	Cyber World II.....10 C1	Zawgyi's Café.....88 B1	Zero Zone Rock Restaurant.....89 A2
DHL.....(see 55)	Exotissimo Travel.....(see 37)		
Fire Station.....11 C2	Free Bird Tours.....12 D1		
Global Network Co.....13 C2	Good New Travel.....(see 95)		
Indian Embassy.....14 C3	Internet Café.....(see 98)		
Inwa Bookshop.....15 C1	Main Post Office.....16 D4		
May Pharmacy.....17 C2	Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank.....18 C3		
Myanmar Oriental Bank.....19 B2	Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT).....20 B3		
New Zealand Embassy.....(see 2)	Santa Maria Travel & Tours.....21 B1		
US Embassy.....22 C3			
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
Cholia Jama Mosque.....23 B2	City Hall.....24 C2		
Customs.....25 C4	High Court Building.....26 C3		
Holy Trinity Cathedral.....27 A1	Immanuel Baptist Church.....28 C2		
Immigration Office.....29 C2	Independence Monument.....30 C3		
Law Court.....31 C4	Methodist Telugu Church.....32 D2		
Moseah Yeshua Synagogue.....33 A2	Mosque.....34 B2		
Narsapur (Moja) Mosque.....35 B2	Sj Mary's Cathedral.....36 D1		
Sakura Tower.....37 C1	Sri Kali.....38 A2		
SLEEPING ☑			
Central Hotel.....41 B1	City Star Hotel.....42 C2		
Daddy's Home.....43 A3	Garden Guest House.....44 C3		
Golden Smiles Inn.....45 B3	Mahabandoola Guest House.....46 B2		
May Fair Inn.....47 D3	Mayshan Guest House.....48 C2		
New Aye Yaw Hotel.....49 D3	Okinawa Guest House.....50 B3		
Panorama Hotel.....51 D1	Strand Hotel.....52 D4		
Sunflower Hotel.....53 B2	Tokyo Guest House.....54 D3		
Traders Hotel.....55 C1	White House Hotel.....56 A3		
EATING ☑			
999 Shan Noodle Shop.....57 C2	Adoms Kitchen.....58 B1		
APK Kitchen Thai Food.....59 B1	Bharat Restaurant.....60 D2		
Golden City Chetty Restaurant.....61 C1	Golden Duck Restaurant.....62 B3		
Grand Mee Ya Hta.....(see 58)	J Donuts.....63 C2		
J Donuts.....(see 59)	MacBurger.....64 D2		
Mandarin Restaurant.....65 C3	Nan Yu.....66 C3		
New Delhi Restaurant.....67 B2	Nila Biryani Shop.....68 B2		
Nilar Win's Cold Drink Shop.....69 D2	Okinawa Restaurant.....70 B3		
Palei Kywe Restaurant.....71 D4	Pizza Corner.....72 B1		
Shme Htoo Restaurant.....73 C2	Tokyo Fried Chicken.....75 B1		
Tokyo Fried Chicken.....76 C2	Var Lunch Home.....77 B2		
Yakiniku Japanese Barbeque.....78 B1	Yatha Teashop.....79 D3		
SHOPPING ☑			
Ava Tailoring.....93 C2	Bogyoke Aung San Market.....94 B1		
FMI Centre.....95 B1	Global Tailoring.....96 B1		
Morning Market.....97 D1	Myanmar Shopping Mall.....98 C2		
Theingyi Zei (Market).....99 A2			
TRANSPORT			
Air France.....100 C1	Air Nippon Airways.....(see 100)		
Birman Bangladesh.....101 D3	Indian Airlines.....102 C2		
Japan Airlines.....(see 95)	KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines.....103 D4		
Malaysia Airlines.....104 B1	Myanma Airways.....(see 103)		
Myanma Five Star Line (MFSL) Passenger Jetty.....105 C4	Myanma Port Authority.....106 D4		
Myanmar Airways International.....(see 102)	Pansodan St Jetty.....107 C4		
Pick-ups to Thanlyin.....108 C2	Silk Air.....(see 100)		
Thai Airways.....(see 100)	Train Ticket Office.....109 C1		
Yangon Airways Office.....110 C4			

The eastern side of the lake is dominated by a very expensive government-financed project including a small park and playground for children as well as the fanciful or monstrous – depending on your taste – **Karaweik**, a reinforced concrete reproduction of a royal barge. Apart from being something of a local attraction in its own right, the Karaweik (Sanskrit for garuda) – the legendary bird-mount of the Hindu god Vishnu – is also the name of a government-owned restaurant nearby. Traditional dance performances are held here in the evenings.

Inya Lake

အင်းယားတန်
Inya Lake itself is hidden from street level view – a shame as a walk or drive around the perimeter reveals only that something is probably on the other side of the earthen berms. The lake (Map p86) is roughly five times larger than Kandawgyi but to see actual water you must explore on foot and

brave the powerful sun. There aren't many opportunities for shade, really only scattered umbrellas, popular with young couples sneaking a little alone time.

Inya is north of the city, stretching between Pyay Rd to the west and Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd to the east; certain areas along the lakeshore – occupied by state guesthouses and ministerial mansions – are off-limits to the general public.

Before reclusive dictator Ne Win died in December 2002, he resided on University Ave at one end of the lake while Aung San Suu Kyi, who at the time of research was still under house arrest at No 54, was at the other end. For years these two important figures in contemporary Myanmar history had resided like powerful *nat* locked in a battle of wills.

Myanmar Gems Museum & Gems Market

မြန်မာ့ကျောက်မျက်ဖြူတိုက်နှင့် အရောင်းပြခန်း
Just north of Parami Rd, this museum (Map p86; ☎ 665 365; 66 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd; admission US\$3;

(9am–5pm Tue–Sun) is meant to impress – starting with the world’s largest sapphire that comes from Mogok to the northeast of Mandalay. The sapphire measures 17cm in height, and is nearly 12kg in weight; this somehow translates to 63,000 carats. The museum also boasts the world’s largest jade boulder, rough ruby, and star sapphire. Other not-so-impressive claims include the only mineral with ‘imperial’ in its name. The Gems Market is spread over three floors. In a currently poor country famous for valuable resources, the museum offers an unintended lesson in beauty, politics and money.

Na-Gar Glass Factory

နဂါးဝန်မြေမှန်မြေတော်ငုံ
The **glass factory** (Map p86; ☎ 526 053; 152 Yawgyi Kyaung St, Hlaing Township; admission free; ☎ 9.30–11am & 12.30–3.30pm) is an interesting place to explore, with lots of hand-blown glass on display, in a surprisingly pleasant indoor-outdoor setting. It was this place that provided the huge, mesmerising eyes of the reclining Buddha at Chaukhtatgyi Paya (see p99). Unusual wine glasses, small vases and the like are also for sale at very reasonable prices here. It’s well worth your while paying a visit. The friendly, giggly owner is usually on hand to give you a tour of the workshop.

The factory isn’t signposted, and is well hidden down a jungly driveway. Most taxi drivers in the downtown area aren’t familiar with the factory, and it definitely helps if you tell them it’s located in Hlaing (pronounced lie-eng) Township. A taxi from the downtown area should take about 15 minutes one way and cost around K3000 for a return trip.

Other Attractions

Opposite the Shwedagon Paya to the west, the **People’s Park** (Map p90; admission US\$3; ☎ 7am–7pm) is a huge expanse of grass and trees that is bisected by **People’s Square**, a wide, socialist-style pedestrian promenade. Near a set of fountains just to the south of People’s Square is a children’s playground area, and in the southeastern corner of the park there are a couple of armoured tanks on display. The entrance to the park is on the eastern side, by the Shwedagon Paya’s western gate.

ACTIVITIES

Swimming

Most of the top-end hotels have pools and many are open to the public for a few dollars. Admission to some includes access to the hotels’ gyms and saunas. The nicest of these are the Sedona (US\$5), the Kandawgyi Palace (US\$5) and the Nikko Royal Lake (US\$5). Three public pools in Yangon charge fees (usually US\$3) for daily use and are generally open from 6am to 8pm:

Kokine Swimming Club (Map p90; ☎ 550 034; 34 Sa Ya San St)

Yangon Swimming Club Pool (Map p98; ☎ 278 550; U Wi Za Ra Rd) Attached to the He & Me Food Centre & Music Pub, which offers snacks and drinks in an open-air setting.

Yangon University Swimming Pool (Map p90; ☎ 531 889; Inya Rd)

Running

An informal group does a 3km and 6km run between the Traders Hotel and the Zoological Garden/Kandawgyi area every Sunday. Inquire at the Traders Hotel (see p110).

Traditional Myanmar Massage

Most top-end hotels offer professional traditional Myanmar massage. Maybe the most decadent is the **Strand Hotel** (p109) where sessions (US\$75, 90 minutes) are preceded by a soak in a rose-petal-sprinkled tub. Silk pyjamas are provided. Also try:

La Source Beauty Spa (Map p90; ☎ 512 381; 1 Shwe Li Rd) Body scrubs, facials, hair salon, and special bridal packages.

Seri Beauty and Health (Map p90; ☎ 534 493; 103 Dhama Zedi Rd; upper body massage US\$3) Skilled and friendly. Every eighth massage is free.

Train Ride

More in the category of sightseeing rather than transportation, the **Yangon Circle Line** (Yangon train station: ☎ 274 027; US\$1) is a slow moving, not particularly comfortable three-hour trip around Yangon and the neighbouring countryside. However, for US\$1, it’s a great way to get a quick overview of the sprawling capital. There are actually two trains, one clockwise and one counter-clockwise, and it takes about three hours to complete the loop in either direction. You can always hop off at any station and take a taxi back to the city centre. The first train leaves around 6am from platform 6/7 at the

Central Train Station (Map p98; Bogyoke Aung San Rd) and the last trip of the day departs around 5pm. Trains depart approximately every 30 minutes though not all do the full circuit. The train is least crowded on weekends.

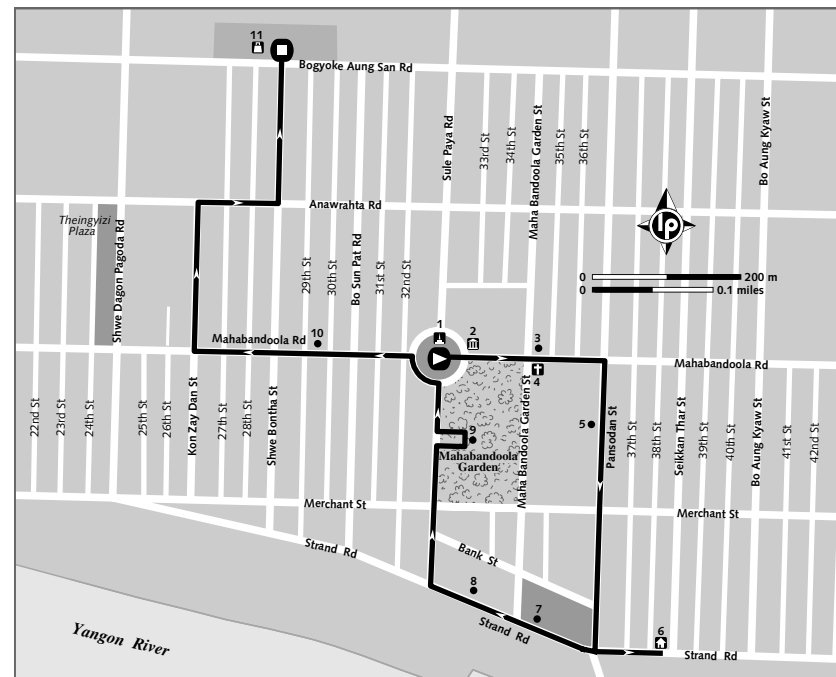
To buy tickets look for the ticket window next to an oval track map at the eastern end of the station.

WALKING TOUR – DOWNTOWN YANGON

Start your tour of downtown at the 2200-year-old **Sule Paya** (1; see p97) the geographic and commercial heart of the city, and where the British-designed grid street pattern was centred. After a complete rotation or two and visit inside, cross the busy traffic circle to the east and you’ll find the twice rebuilt **City Hall** (2). On the next corner further east on Mahabandoola Rd is the **Immigration Office** (3), once one of the largest department stores in all of Asia. Across the street is the **Immanuel Baptist Church** (4) originally built in 1885. Continuing east on Mahabandoola, take the next right onto Pansodan St where you’ll see the **High Court Building** (5) on your

right, in name at least, the highest legal authority in the land. Continue south on Pansodan St, past Merchant Rd to Strand Rd, the last east-west thoroughfare before the Yangon River.

On your left is the **Strand Hotel** (6; p109), whose restored façade evokes another era and whose air-conditioned lobby, café and bar make a good rest-stop along the way. Ready to brave the heat and uneven sidewalks again, walk west along Strand Rd for a block past Pansodan St where you’ll see the **Customs House** (7), built in 1915, on one corner and the **Law Court** (8), an impressive looking colonnaded building on the other – both institutions best admired (figuratively) from afar. Turn north up Mahabandoola Garden St or the less pedestrian friendly Sule Paya Rd. On the other side of Merchant St, you can’t miss the 50m obelisk, a monument to the country’s independence standing in the middle of popular **Mahabandoola Garden** (9; p101). This brings you back to the Sule Paya from where you can continue on west down Mahabandoola Rd through the chaotic **Indian and Chinese quarters** (10) of the



city. Every block along the way is crammed with shops and street vendors selling everything under the sun. Anywhere along the way you can turn right, or north, for several blocks until you hit Bogyoke Aung San Rd. It shouldn't be hard to determine where the **Bogyoke Aung San Market** (11; p121) is from here; a nice place to end your walk and begin a new sort of tour, a slightly more difficult one that involves walking and shopping at the same time.

COURSES

Meditation

Several monasteries in Yangon welcome foreigners to meditation courses. For more information see p335.

Thai Chi & Martial Arts

The art of **Tai Chi** is practised daily at dawn at Mahabandoola Garden, near the Sule Paya.

Burmese kickboxing instruction for beginners is offered on the ground floor of the **YMCA** (Map p98; ☎ 294 128, 296 435; Mahabandoola Rd, near Thein Byu Rd; ☞ beginners 7-9am Tue, Thu & Sat, experienced 3-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri). There's usually someone around who can translate the essentials, though you should mostly expect to learn by example. Techniques taught here incorporate some moves borrowed from Thai and international boxing.

Visitors are welcome to participate in boxing upon becoming members; if you're staying at the YMCA, you're welcome to use the facilities for a small donation. Inquire at the main office on the upper floor for more information.

Saya Pan Thu, founder of the **Institute of Myanmar Traditional Advanced Boxing** (Map p90; 15 Aung Chan Tha St, Hledan Rd, Kamayut Township) teaches a more traditional Burmese kickboxing style on most Saturdays at 4pm at the Yangon University campus. Pan Thu doesn't speak much English, nor apparently do any of his students.

TOURS

Yangon is a good place to organise tours to some difficult-to-reach places, including the following. The operators are listed in the referenced pages.

Chin State (p329) Includes hikes and bird-watching on Mt Victoria in the west of the country.

Kawthoung area (p167 for kayaking and boat trips and p333 for diving trips)

Putao area (see p225) For hiking in the far north of the country.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Crowds of pilgrims descend on the Shwedagon for a *paya pwe* (pagoda festival) from 29 February to 7 March, one of the more important Myanmar holidays.

Other major festivals in Yangon include the following:

Independence Day (4 January) Includes a seven-day fair at Kandawgyi; see p340.

Water Festival/Thingyan (April) The Myanmar New Year is celebrated by a wet pandemonium. See p340 for more details.

Buddha's birthday (April/May) See p340

Martyrs' Day (19 July) Commemorating the assassination of Bogyoke Aung San and his comrades. See p341

Murugu Festival Held at Yangon's Hindu temples (see p101), it involves colourful processions.

SLEEPING

Judging by the number of large top-end business-style hotels cropping up all over the city, the hospitality industry in Yangon is alive and well. Low occupancy rates, though, belie the wisdom of the hotel building boom and heavy rebates are to be had by the savvy traveller. Practically all of the budget options are located in the busy city centre area but room rates are high and the quality low when compared with budget accommodation in Mandalay. It's worth considering spending a few extra bucks and taking the jump to midrange accommodation if you're only in the capital for a night or two.

Many of the midrange and top-end hotels provide airport pick-ups and offer Internet access and full-service business centres. Only a few accept credit cards in person so it's worthwhile booking and paying for reservations online where rates are often heavily discounted anyway. Even if you do just show up unannounced you'll rarely have to pay the advertised price. Some of the top hotels add on an additional 10% service charge and 10% government tax. Almost all hotels, even the mostly lowly budget place, will store luggage while you're away up country.

Note: most of the top-end hotels are joint ventures with the government although the

exact percentage of ownership – whether the government is a majority or minority shareholder and exactly what this means – is difficult to ferret out (see p331).

The obvious appeal of the hotels just north of the city centre in the Kandawgyi area are the breathtaking views of the Shwedagon Pagoda, especially at night. The lake itself provides a peaceful backdrop for several clustered hotels around its shores. The city becomes more suburban and spread out the further north you go towards Inya Lake.

City Centre

The author's choice for this price range can be found on p108.

BUDGET

Prices quoted generally include a rudimentary eggs-and-toast breakfast. Payment is accepted in US dollars, and sometimes kyat. Street noise, especially in the early morning, is a nuisance at many of the options.

Motherland Inn 2 (Map p90-1; ☎ 291 343; www.mymarmotherlandinn.com; 433 Lower Pazundaung Rd; r US\$7-13; ☞ ☑ ☒) While the Motherland Inn 2 (the original Motherland has since closed) is a long walk or a short taxi ride from the centre itself, it's one of the best value options in this category and is deservedly popular with the backpacker set. This well-managed hotel's modern and green façade is easily noticeable on this quiet residential street. The rooms themselves are simple but exceptionally clean; several triples with fan or air-conditioning are also available. A complimentary airport shuttle runs twice a day and breakfast is outstanding for this category. The pricier rooms have private bathrooms.

Okinawa Guest House (Map p102; ☎ 374 318; 64 32nd St; dm US\$5, s/d with bathroom US\$10/15; ☞) The only downside to the Okinawa's six beautifully furnished all-wood rooms is the erratic power supply, which means no hot water and air-conditioning only at night. If neither are concerns, this distinctive guesthouse just a short walk from Sule Paya is an excellent option; even the attic-level dormitory room is attractive. Just look for the red roof and brick exterior on this otherwise nondescript street.

White House Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 240 780; whitehouse@mptmail.net.mm; 69-71 Kon Zay Dan St; r US\$5-

14; ☞) It's a good thing the White House rooftop has hammocks and swings and that the views are so spectacular because the steep climb to get here is an aerobic workout. Some of the rooms are weirdly shaped and the design scheme is somewhat funky – shards of glass and mirrors and tiles – but things are kept clean and the common areas at the top are crowded with potted plants. Breakfast is better than average and the front desk is a one stop shop for all your bus and tour information.

Golden Smiles Inn (Map p102; ☎ 373 589; myathiri@mptmail.net.mm; 644 Merchant St; r US\$5-12; ☞) Golden Smiles is centrally located, up a flight of stairs from a grubby street-level entrance. There's nothing outstanding about the eight basic rooms and lighting can be dim despite the sunny balcony hangout/breakfast area. All the rooms have air-con, the more expensive rooms have private bathroom and the staff is helpful and friendly.

May Fair Inn (Map p102; ☎ 384 183; mayfair.inn@mptmail.net.mm; 57 38th St; r US\$9; ☞) This inn between Merchant and Strand has several clean, carpeted rooms. The modern bathrooms make up for the slight inconvenience of night-time-only air-con and hot water. The May Fair isn't the place to meet other travellers and there is no welcoming common area or extra domestic touches despite the fact that it is family owned.

YMCA (Map p98; ☎ 294 128; 263 Mahabandoola Rd; r US\$8-19; ☞) At the time of writing a new nine-story wing was in the works, three floors dedicated to accommodation. Rooms in the original building are large, sparse and decorated only with concrete but they do have windows – a plus in the budget category. Free transport to/from the airport is available. Both men and women are welcome here, although double rooms are ostensibly for married couples.

Sunflower Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 240 014; sunflower.ygn@mptmail.net.mm; 259/263 Anawrahta Rd; r US\$8-15; ☞) Located in the heart of the busy Indian quarter on the corner of Shwe Bontha St and Anawrahta Rd, the Sunflower offers a variety of neat if airless and character-free rooms. The pricier rooms with air-con also have TV.

Tokyo Guest House (Map p102; ☎ 287 143; 200 Bo Aung Kyaw St; r US\$6; ☞) Though rooms in this 2nd floor guesthouse are barely large enough for a bed and are windowless, they

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Haven Inn (Map p98; ☎ 295 500; phyuaung@mptmail.net.mm; 216 Bo Myat Tun St; s/d US\$10/15; 🏠) There's no more homey and inviting place to retire to after a busy day of sightseeing in Yangon. The Haven Inn, announced only by a small neon sign, is located on a relatively quiet street east of the city centre. The five well-furnished rooms are often all booked in high season. Each has air-con, minibridge, large private bathroom and comfortable mattresses though all are window-free. Room 101 is surprisingly large and includes a desk and separate sitting area. The 1st-floor living room area and 2nd-floor breakfast space are all dark wood. Dr Htun, the friendly owner of this family-run retreat, is an excellent source of information.

are clean and well-kept and there is a sunny breakfast area filled with plants and books. Bathrooms are shared.

The following are bare-bones and only last resorts:

Daddy's Home (Map p102; ☎ 252 169; 107 Kon Zay Dan St; r per person US\$4-10) Only a few doors from the White House.

Garden Guest House (Map p102; ☎ 253 779; 441-445 Mahabandoola St; s/d from US\$4/6) Fronting Sule Paya.

Mahabandoola Guest House (Map p102; ☎ 248 104; 93 32nd St; s/d US\$3/5) Also fronting Sule Paya.

MIDRANGE

Yangon's accommodation options in this price category have expanded rapidly. Some hotels will accept credit cards. Almost all offer discounts in the low season and if you stay for an extended period of time. The two best value choices, as well as the author's choice (see above), are within a few blocks of one another.

Three Seasons Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 293 304; phyuaung@mptmail.net.mm; 83-85 52nd St; s/d US\$12/20; 🏠) Similar in style and appeal to the Haven Inn, the Three Seasons is owned by the same family. If one is full they'll escort you to the other. High ceilings and spotless wooden floors are complimented by modern bathrooms and tasteful furnishings. Friendly staff serves up an outstanding breakfast – part Western, part Burmese – in the sunny 2nd-floor sitting area. This

is an especially quiet block at night so you should be able to sleep undisturbed.

Ocean Pearl Inn (Map p98; ☎ 297 007; www.oceanpearlinn.com; 215 Bo Ta Taung Pagoda Rd; s/d US\$10/15; 🏠) In the same neighbourhood as the Haven and Three Seasons, the newly opened Ocean Pearl is another high-value option. While the rooms don't have as much charm as the other two, there is satellite TV and it's kept so clean you can see your reflection in the floor. Not only are the willing-to-please front desk staff able to book air, bus and train transport but there is 24-hour room service for those with late night cravings.

Maysan Guest House (Map p102; ☎ 252 986; mayshan@mptmail.net.mm; 115-117 Sule Paya Rd; s/d US\$15/22; 🏠) It's hard to top the Maysan's location, a half a block north of Sule Paya. The vibe is less family and intimate than others, nevertheless the small, tiled modern rooms are well-kept and have satellite TV, a good way for new arrivals to pass the early morning jet-lagged hours. There's a lift and a lobby and breakfast area, both good halfway points between the privacy of your room and the crunch of the outside streets. The Maysan is also one of the few places where you can access personal hotmail email accounts (30 minutes for US\$3).

New Aye Yar Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 256 938; newayar@mptmail.net.mm; 170-176 Bo Aung Kyaw St; s/d US\$18/20; 🏠) One of the best high-rise entries in this category, the New Aye Yar has a regal looking lobby fronted by two stone lion statues guarding the entrance. Unusual in this price range, you get spiffy uniformed porters and a selection of foreign newspapers for perusal. All of the large rooms have satellite TV, fridges and big, inviting bathrooms. Lower priced rooms have carpeting, while for a few dollars extra you can get one of the much nicer, newer all wood (floors and furniture) rooms; some have panoramic views of the city.

Thamada Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 243 639; thamadahotel@mptmail.net.mm; 5 Signal Pagoda Rd; s/d US\$25/30; 🏠) Rooms in this six-storey hotel just across from the train station and next to the cinema of the same name, are surprisingly luxurious. Everything in the bedrooms is done in teak with a few special touches such as local artwork and photography. But it's the spacious bathrooms that are the real standout. Some rooms have baths and those in the back are quieter.

Panorama Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 253 077; panorama@mptmail.net.mm; 294-300 Pansodan St; s/d US\$22/30; 🏠) Within walking distance of the train station and the Bogyoke market, the aptly named 10-storey Panorama's rooms offer good views of downtown Yangon. Its wide marble atrium lobby seems slightly dated and in some of the rooms the carpets are fraying and the paint is peeling. However, location and professional and attentive service offset these flaws.

Yoma Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 297 725; yoma.one@mptmail.net.mm; 146 Bogyoke Aung San Rd; s/d US\$15/18; 🏠) Not as nice as its Yoma 2 counterpart (p112), the Yoma gets by on its central location and the business-friendly professionalism of its staff. The quality of the rooms themselves varies; some with low ceilings have seen better days while there are nicer, newer ones too. There are five floors and no lift. Monthly rates are available on request.

Queen's Park Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 296 447; qphotel@mptmail.net.mm; 132 Anawrahta Rd; s/d US\$15/22; 🏠) The very small lower priced rooms in

this 11-storey hotel on the corner of Bo Myat Tun St are decidedly *not* good value. The larger, higher priced ones have the standard amenities in this category. There's a generator to cover frequent power outages and free airport transfer for groups of six or more.

Central Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 241 007; www.myanmars.net.central; 335-357 Bogyoke Aung San Rd; s/d US\$30/35; 🏠) Next to the Traders Hotel and just across the road from Bogyoke Aung San Market, the Central offers large and clean, if unremarkable, standard rooms and larger suites. All rooms have air-con with private bathroom, fridge and phone. The hotel has a good Chinese restaurant and a very popular bar/café, the Diamond White Bar (p118), adjacent to the large lobby. The Central is a good place to change dollars for kyat.

Sakhantha Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 249 518; Yangon Central Train Station; s/d US\$15/25; 🏠) Basically a wing of the train station, the Sakhantha's rooms are so big and the ceilings so high that a train carriage could probably fit inside. You don't really need all this space and there

THE STRAND HOTEL

Strand Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 243 377; www.ghmhotels.com; 92 Strand Rd; superior ste US\$425, Strand ste US\$900; 🏠) Royalty, both the Hollywood kind and the more traditional, make the Strand their home away from home in Yangon. Mick Jagger, Oliver Stone, the King of Tonga, George Orwell, Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham all slept here.

'When in Singapore stay at the Raffles', the saying used to go. (Actually it was 'feed at the Raffles' and stay somewhere else, but never mind.) Similarly, when you are in Yangon, the place to stay, if you can afford it, is this property located between 38th and Seikkan Thar Sts. The Strand was originally constructed by the Sarkies brothers, of Raffles fame, in 1896, and was one of those glorious outposts of the British empire early in the 20th century. During WWII it was forced to close, only to reopen in 1948, under the auspices of London's Steel Brothers Co.

Ne Win nationalised the property in 1963 and in its latter-day socialist role the Strand became a run-down shadow of its former self – certainly no competition for the well-kept likes of Raffles or The Oriental in Bangkok. Yet somehow, the old colonial era lived on at the Strand. All of this changed again in 1991, when Dutch-Indonesian resort impresario Adrian Zecha and his company began spending US\$36 million to renovate the grande dame. By the beginning of 1995, 32 rooms had been totally redone and opened to the public.

Though well beyond the budget of many visitors to Myanmar as a place to spend the night, the Strand is well worth a visit for a drink in the bar, high tea in the lobby lounge or a splurge lunch at the café. Unlike the Oriental or Raffles, the hotel isn't appended to touristy shopping malls and souvenir shops. The décor doesn't bowl you over with a surplus of ornamentation either, and the staff is more laid-back and less snobbish to nonguest visitors.

Each suite here is elegantly finished in the colonial style, with plenty of brass and teak and all the amenities expected at hotels of this calibre. The renovated guest rooms are divided into eight superior suites, 23 deluxe suites and one apartment-like Strand Suite. To all rates, add the mandatory 20% tax and service. Among the public facilities are a dinner-only restaurant, an opulently finished bar decorated with local art, a café and a small business centre. All guests are met at the airport.

isn't enough furniture to justify its size but this plus its colonial-era style makes it a unique choice.

Both the **City Star Hotel** (Map p102; ☎ 250 291; www.citystarhotel.com; 169/171 Mahabandoola Garden St; s US\$20-25, d US\$25-30; 🏠) and the **Lai Lai Hotel** (Map p98; ☎ 227 878; fax 227 342; 783 Mahabandoola Rd; s/d US\$15/25; 🏠) are modern Chinese-style high rises in the heart of Yangon. Higher priced rooms have windows with good views of the chaos below.

TOP END

Grand Plaza Park Royal Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 250 388; www.grandplaza.yangon.parkroyalhotels.com; 33 Ah Lan Paya Pagoda Rd; s/d US\$60/70; 🏠 📺 🚿) A swanky 350-room hotel just north of the city centre, it comes complete with wood and rattan furnishings, Japanese and Chinese restaurants, café, disco/pub, business centre, fitness centre and tennis court. Rooms here are exceptional value, especially if on one of the floors with a combo business centre, library and lounge. At the time of research the Grand Plaza Park Royal was accepting Visa cards, and was also allowing guests to withdraw cash with their cards for 8% commission; traveller's cheques are changed for only 3% commission.

Traders Hotel (Map p102; ☎ 242 828; fax 242 800; www.shangri-la.com; 223 Sule Paya Rd; r US\$70-75, ste US\$110; 🏠 📺 🚿) Because of its imposing 22 storeys and 500 rooms, and because it's anchoring one of the busiest street corners in the city, Traders has achieved landmark status. This hotel, part of the Shangri-La chain, enjoys a reputation for good service and is popular with conferences and business meetings. It has a very decent book/gift shop, business centre, fitness centre and excellent restaurant and bar facilities. All rates include breakfast, airport transfer, laundry and local phone calls. Traders also has a free laundry service and a generous check-out time of 6pm. Significant discounts can be found online.

Yuzana Garden Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 248 944; 44 Signal Pagoda Rd; s/d US\$36/48; 🏠 📺 🚿) From a distance the colonial façade looks grand and impressive but, like an ageing movie star, reveals its wrinkles and cracks upon closer inspection. The lobby was probably elegant in its day and the oversized rooms are attractive though some are a little mil-dewy and need a touch-up. More expensive

rooms have balconies facing the front. The Pioneer (p120), a popular nightclub is at the rear of the building.

Shwedagon & Kandawgyi Area

This area of the city is generally quieter than central Yangon. It's also convenient for walking to Shwedagon Paya, the zoo and Kandawgyi. It's not a place to seek out budget accommodation.

MIDRANGE

Winner Inn (Map p90; ☎ 535 205; www.winnerinnmyanmar.com; 42 Than Lwin Rd; r US\$20-25; 🏠 📺) The Winner is a low slung building that's attached to a four-storey wing between Inya Lake and Shwedagon Paya. Rooms are very good value, complete with private bathroom, fridge and satellite TV; there is a dining room overlooking the garden. Higher priced rooms are larger.

Guest Care Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 511 118; www.guestcarehotel.com; 107 Dhama Zedi Rd; s/d US\$24/32; 🏠 📺) All guests at the Guest Care have access to the top floor viewing area with spectacular unobstructed views of the nearby Shwedagon Pagoda. Rooms at this hotel are kept spick and span. Larger rooms have sitting areas and some touches of antique furniture; all have satellite TV and minifridges.

Mya Yeik Nyo Royal Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 548 310; www.myayeiknyo.com; 20 Pa-le Rd; r US\$35, r in old bldg US\$100; 🏠 📺 🚿) There are two very different Mya Yeik Nyos right next to one another. One is a modern, slightly kitschy looking four-storey building, the other is a stately, old mansion built by the British as an office for the legendary Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (IFC). The rooms in the former are large and comfortable though the furniture is mismatched and feels like a 70s-era suburban living room. Grand restoration plans for the latter include six massive incredibly unique rooms filled with local handicrafts and sculptures and lit by elegant chandeliers. The MYN Royal's landscaped grounds afford clear views of the Shwedagon Paya.

Bagan Inn (Map p90; ☎ 541 539; pinegrp@mptmail.net.mm; 2 Nat Mauk Ln - 29 Po Sein Rd; s/d US\$40/60; 🏠) This is a well-managed place sitting in its own large, landscaped compound on a quiet street, just north of Kandawgyi. Owned by Hong Kong Chinese, the inn's 25 rooms, in three separate two-storey

buildings, are large and nicely decorated. All rooms feature fridge, TV and phone; there are also more expensive suites. Rates include laundry service.

Summer Palace Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 527 211; fax 525 424; 437 Pyay Rd; s/d US\$20/25; 🏠 📺 🚿) The Summer Palace, set back from the road near the Myanmar TV and radio broadcast station, is a diminutive version of one of the larger top-end hotels in the city. It's only six-storeys and 56 rooms but has an efficient business centre, professional service and a small swimming pool and bar at the rear.

Panda Hotel (Map p98; ☎ 212 850; www.myanmars.net/pandahotel; 205 Wadan St; s US\$20-25, d US\$25-30; 🏠 📺) This 13-storey high-rise west of the city centre, is another high quality business-oriented midrange hotel in a residential area. Rooms have all the standard amenities, plus some have excellent views and there's a small gym. It offers free airport transfers.

TOP END

Pansea Yangon (Map p98; ☎ 229 860; www.pansea.com; 35 Taw Win St; s/d US\$150/170; 🏠 📺 🚿) To truly be pampered and live like a sovereign on holiday, this elegant teak mansion in the leafy embassy district is for you. The Pansea was once a guesthouse for important nationals of the Kayah ethnic group visiting the city, but now after a masterful restoration it's a foreigners ideal of colonial luxury. In the 2nd-floor open-air lounge area with bar and pool table, and most especially the rooms, everything is wood and handicrafts and paintings set off with soft plush cushions and bright colours. It's a feast for the senses and is worth a visit even if you're not an overnight guest. There's an excellent restaurant, Mandalay (p116), serving French and Asian cuisine in a pond-side setting.

Savoy Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 526 289; www.savoy-myanmar.com; 129 Dhama Zedi Rd; s/d US\$90/135; 🏠 📺 🚿) Everything inside the Savoy is done so perfectly that it's easy to forgive the fact that it's situated right on a busy street corner with heavy traffic. A cross between the Pansea and a smaller version of the Strand, the Savoy is excellent value in this category. Hallways, rooms and even the lavish bathrooms are stocked with photographs, antiques, handicrafts and sculptures, all of museum quality and it's a pleasure just

to walk from your room to the bar or one of the excellent restaurants on the 2nd floor (see p117). Most of the rooms have windows that open out onto the pool area.

Kandawgyi Palace Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 249 255; www.kandawgyipalace.com; Kan Yeik Tha Rd; s/d US\$80/90; 🏠 📺 🚿) Architecturally, the Kandawgyi Palace looks like an extension of the nearby Shwedagon Paya, blending seamlessly into the fairytale vistas from the lake shore. Rooms are mostly teak and wicker and if you stay in one of the paya-side suites the windows frame the scene like a picture postcard. The hotel has several fine restaurants with Burmese, Asian and also European fare (see p116), including a nightclub and 24-hour coffee shop. There is also a business centre and a beautiful outdoor swimming pool guarded by a giant stone dinosaur. For those with royal fantasies, there are several amazing bungalows with private Jacuzzi, pool and butler service.

Summit Parkview (Map p90; ☎ 211 888; www.summityangon.com; 40 Ahlone Rd; s/d US\$50/55, studio ste US\$220/230; 🏠 📺 🚿) A top choice among business travellers, it stands within walking distance of Shwedagon Paya. The voluminous marble lobby is designed to impress; the hotel's 252 rooms come with satellite TV, in-house movies and 24-hour room service; suites and studio suites cost more. In addition to a useful hotel clinic and dispensary, the Summit features a fitness centre, newsstand, hair salon, shopping arcade, several travel agents, a bakery/café and also a restaurant.

Hotel Nikko Royal Lake Yangon (Map p90; ☎ 544 500; www.nikkoyangon.net; 40 Nat Mauk Rd; superior s/d US\$90/100, deluxe US\$120/140; 🏠 📺 🚿) This large, imposing hotel overlooking Kandawgyi has none of the charm or character of other hotels in this price range. It does have all the amenities you'd expect: a business centre with secretarial service, a fitness centre and large pool (K1500 for nonguests), a grand ballroom, a very good Japanese restaurant and a brasserie serving excellent Bamar, Mediterranean and Thai cuisine.

North & Inya Lake Area

The remainder of the hotels are well north of the city centre; the majority are along or just off Insein Rd or Pyay Rd, which are both long avenues running north to south.

MIDRANGE

Aurora Inn (Map p90; ☎ 525 961; fax 525 400; 37A Thirimingalar St; s US\$10-15, d US\$20-30; 🍷) Hidden down a narrow street off Pyay Rd, this French-managed place encompasses two older buildings; the one at the back is decorated with antiques and contains a snack bar. Rooms are spacious, and the more expensive rooms have air-con. The attached restaurant serves good French cuisine.

Yoma Hotel 2 (Map p90; ☎ 531 065; 24A Inya Rd; s/d US\$21/28; 🍷 📺) A small, 17-room hotel that, like its Yoma 1 counterpart, it is very service-oriented and a popular spot in this price range with business travellers. Lower long-term rates are available.

Shwe Hinthar Inn (Map p86; ☎ 533 295; roswin_01@mptmail.net.mm; 51 Pyay Rd; s/d US\$30/40; 🍷 📺) It's a converted colonial building offering 18 well-appointed rooms on spacious grounds; rates include continental breakfast. There is a large garden and poolside bar on the grounds. It's near the northern end of Inya Lake, next to the Philippine embassy.

Royal White Elephant Hotel (Map p86; ☎ 503 986; rwec@mptmail.net.mm; 11/15 Kan St, 6 miles; s/d US\$20/24; 🍷) This place is near Inya Lake off Pyay Rd. It's a four-storey building with elevator and receives raves for its friendly service. However, the spacious, carpeted rooms are beginning to wear around the edges.

Liberty Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 525 974; fax 524 144; 343 Pyay Rd; s/d US\$24/28; 🍷) Near the Hanthawady roundabout in an elite residential neighbourhood is this two-storey colonial mansion converted to a hotel. The rooms are large and high-ceilinged, and there's also a much larger family room. There's a nice garden out back.

TOP END

Sedona Hotel (Map p90; ☎ 666 900; www.sedonamyanmar.com; 1 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd; r US\$75; 🍷 📺) Towering over Inya Lake, the Sedona is a big conventional hotel. There are no real special touches or acknowledgments that this is indeed Yangon, however the rooms are very comfortable and good value. Discounts are usually available for stays of three nights or more. The hotel boasts a popular fitness centre, large outdoor pool, sauna, tennis courts, business centre, good bookshop and several restaurants including the Orzo (see p116).

Dusit Inya Lake Resort (Map p86; ☎ 662 857; www.dusit.com; 37 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd; r US\$70; 🍷 📺)

🍷) The Renaissance is a 239-room complex, about 6km north of the city centre on 37 acres of landscaped grounds near Inya Lake. It's not much to look at from the outside but the facilities and rooms are fairly sumptuous and elegant. There's an excellent fitness centre, tennis courts, business centre and several restaurants and cafés. The Dusit Inya frequently hosts conferences and banquets. Room rates are excellent value for a top-end Yangon hotel.

EATING

Yangon is the culinary capital of the country. From street food, to cheap Bamar and Indian eateries, to high-end restaurants with creative chefs serving European, Thai, and Japanese cuisine, eating is an unexpected highlight of a visit to the city. Eat early – by 10pm all but a couple of 24-hour places, a few large hotel cafés and the Strand will be ready to close. There are also a few music clubs/cafés that serve food until 11pm.

Bamar

Eating options outside Yangon are limited to mostly Bamar cuisine so many travellers take advantage of the relative diversity and hold off on Bamar cooking until they leave the capital. While this is an understandable strategy to keep the taste buds guessing, it would be unfortunate as there are several Bamar restaurants more interesting than those upcountry.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Sandy's Myanmar Cuisine (Map p90; ☎ 525 195; 290 U Wi Za Ra Rd; vegetable entrees K1500, meat entrees K3000) There's no better place to try Bamar cooking than at Sandy's over-looking serene Kandawgyi. The colonnaded colonial building and outdoor patio seating heighten the surprisingly affordable dining experience. Try the *Be'Ou-Pazun-Ahsar-Thoor-Gyaw* – just pronouncing it is a mouthful – duck eggs filled with minced prawns (K3000), pumpkin soup (K1500) and meat-filled clay pot (K4500). The *mohinga* (rice noodles with chicken or fish) breakfast here, compared with the same meal served in the average teashop, is like the difference between *haute couture* and sweat pants.

The more humble-looking the restaurant appears, the more locals probably frequent it. Figure on spending no more than K1000 per person for a full spread, not including beverages:

Feel Myanmar Food (Map p98; ☎ 725 736; 124 Pyihtaungsu Yeiktha St; meals K2000) The Feel does heavy lunch-time business; a mixed crowd of locals and foreign embassy staff pack the all-wood dining room that resembles a private home in northern Myanmar. Choose from a great looking array of dishes laid out buffet style in the back. There are a few other Feel Myanmar outlets in the city; this is the nicest, though.

Aung Thuka (Map p90; 17A 1st St; venison curry K1000; 🍷 10am-7pm) On a small side street between Shwe Gon Daing and Dhama Zedi Rds near the Shwedagon Paya, Aung Thuka features a simple dining room decorated with Myanmar calendars and movie posters, and furnished with linoleum-top tables and wooden chairs. Along one side of the room are dozens of pots containing the day's curries and special dishes; you'll automatically receive soup, dhal, rice and side dishes.

Hla Myanma Htamin Zain (Beautiful Myanmar Rice Shop; Map p90; 27 5th St; curries K1000; 🍷 10am-7pm) Near the Aung Thuka restaurant, this place is sometimes called Shwe Ba because a famous Burmese actor of that name once had his house nearby. Like Aung Thuka it's a very simple, plain restaurant, where the food is served from rows of curry pots. There are also some Chinese and Indian dishes.

Green Elephant Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 535 231; www.elephant-house.com/restaurant; 519A Thirimingalar St; dishes K2500) Tour groups make this restaurant down a narrow side street off Pyay Rd part of their Yangon itinerary. If you don't mind rubbing elbows with other foreigners, the upmarket and slightly Westernised Bamar curries, salads, meat and seafood dishes are quite satisfying. Service is very good and the restaurant includes an upmarket craft shop.

Shan

Aung Mingalar Shan Noodle Restaurant (Map p98; Bo Yar Nyunt St; dishes K1000) Opening onto the busy corner of Nawady St, Aung Mingalar is an excellent place to simultaneously indulge in people watching and the sweet sound of noodle sipping. Waiters are uniformed in Aung Mingalar T-shirts and

it's probably the most modern of the Shan noodle shops.

999 Shan Noodle Shop (Map p102; 130B 34th St; most noodle dishes K400) Four or five tables are crammed into this tiny eatery behind City Hall a short walk from Sule Paya. The menu, printed in English and Burmese, includes filling *Shàn k'auq swèh* (thin rice noodles in a slightly spicy chicken broth), and *myi shay* (Mandalay-style noodle soup). Noodle dishes are served with fried tofu triangles and jars of pickled cabbage. The kitchen may sell out of some items by early evening.

Maw Shwe Li Restaurant (Map p98; ☎ 221 103; 316 Anawrahta Rd, Lanmadaw Township; curries K1000) This is another good Shan eatery west of the city centre. The small, friendly, out-of-the-way place is usually crowded with locals, and the curries are excellent and cheap; Shan specialities include *pei pot kyaw* (sour bean condiment) and *hmo chawk kyaw* (fried mushrooms).

Lashio Lay Shan Restaurant (Map p98; ☎ 259 015; 71 51st St; mains under K1000) A popular, simple little place near the corner of Mahabandoola and 51st Sts, it serves excellent Shan mains.

Thai

Yinn Dee Thai Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 526 526; 126 Dhama Zedi Rd; freshwater catfish salad K2200; 🍷) Thumbing through the small phonebook-sized menu is an exercise in gustatory masochism. Fortunately, the food comes quickly and when it comes it tastes as good as the photos look. Yinn Dee Thai's menu is more creative than its competitors and its dining room more elegant.

Sabai Sabai Thai Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 544 724; 232 Dhama Zedi Rd; dishes K000; 🍷) One of the more popular restaurants in Yangon, Sabai Sabai is in a new location but the extensive menu and homey, welcoming atmosphere remain the same. The menu isn't as interesting as that in the Yinn Dee Thai's but the portions are large. Prices are in US dollars and kyat.

Padonmar Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 536 485; 78 Inya Rd; dishes K1800; 🍷) The menu here is a mix of Thai- and Bamar-influenced Thai dishes (or is it Thai-influenced Bamar dishes)? Whatever it is, the ground nut and tomato curry (K800) is especially good. Open late, the curiously decorated garden dining area is a good place for a late, leisurely dinner;

French and Australian wines and mixed drinks are available.

Silom Village Restaurant (Map p86; ☎ 527 448; 647A Pyay Rd; K2000; 🍴) Just north of Inya Rd in Hlaing township, this large bustling open-air restaurant does very good Thai classics. The atmosphere is fun – although the service can be spotty when they're busy.

APK Kitchen Thai Food (Map p102; ☎ 250 437; 369 Shwe Bontha St; dishes K1200; 🍴) Attached to the grocery of the same name, you can watch shoppers through the window in the restaurant while you eat. The food is better than you'd expect from the fast-food style bench seats, and it's easy to pick out favourites from the big photo-filled menu.

Chinese

You can sample the whole range of Chinese cuisine in Yangon – from the familiar Cantonese to the less well known Shanghai, Sichuan, Beijing or Hokkien dishes.

Singapore's Kitchen (Map p98; ☎ 226 297; 524 Strand Rd; dishes K1500; 🍴 10am-1am; 🍴) This is one of the best Chinese restaurants in town. It offers excellent food and good service with a choice of upstairs or down, fresh fish on display, an open kitchen and tables that spill onto the footpath during fair weather. At night it's a bright and busy place, and even better is the late closing time. Besides seafood, it does a good job of crispy-fried duck, as well as lots of veggie and noodle dishes. A 10% service charge is added to the bill.

Golden Duck Restaurant (Map p102; ☎ 241 234; 222-224 Strand Rd; duck mains K1800; 🍴 10am-10pm) The Golden Duck is a busy, popular little place offering seafood and, of course, duck. It doesn't have the ambience of the nearby Singapore's Kitchen, but it serves excellent food and is good value.

Yin Fong Seafood Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 546 149; Kan Yeik Tha Rd; dishes K4500; 🍴) This restaurant directly across from the Kandawgyi Palace Hotel is deservedly popular. A few of the specialties are squid with garlic sauce (K4600), *wasabi* cuttlefish (K4800), shark congee (K4800), and also medicinal eel soup (K4200).

Western Park (Map p98; ☎ 225 143; Thakhin Mya Rd; dishes K1800) Near Thakhin Mya Park and the bus terminal at the corner of Strand Rd, the Western Park is a big banquet style hall. Its menu lists a wide variety of styles and dishes but the specialty is the juicy duck.

Palei Kywe Restaurant (Map p102; ☎ 296 094; 44 Bo Aung Gyaw St; dishes K800; 🍴 10am-9pm) This restaurant is in the city centre near the main post office, between Strand Rd and Merchant St. It serves excellent northern Chinese fare at reasonable prices. The roast duck is a speciality.

Mandarin Restaurant (Map p102; ☎ 272 960; 126 Mahabandoola Garden St; dishes K800) Near the corner of Mahabandoola Rd, just across from the park, this place is owned by the same family that runs the Mayshan Guest House. The Mandarin offers the usual assortment of northern Chinese dishes, vegetarian fare and fresh fish in a clean and fan-cooled setting.

Nan Yu (Map p102; ☎ 252 702; 81 Pansodan St; dishes K1200; 🍴) The Nan Yu has all the usual Cantonese specialities.

For noodles, fried rice and other quick Chinese meals, try the **night market** (Map p98; Madaw Rd) in Chinatown, around the corner from the Cantonese temple.

Indian

Along Anawrahta Rd, west of Sule Paya Rd towards the Sri Kali temple, are a number of shops serving Indian biryani (*kyettha dan bauk* in Burmese), and at night the *roti* and *dosa* (a thin crepe filled with potato; spelt *toeshay* on menus) makers set up along the pavement on the side streets. Indian food is probably the cheapest way of eating in Yangon, particularly at places that serve *thali* (all-you-can-eat meals of rice and vegetable curries piled on a fresh banana leaf or stainless-steel plate), which often cost only K200. Biryani costs a bit more, around K300.

New Delhi Restaurant (Map p102; Anawrahta Rd) It does a variety of North and South Indian dishes for as little as K200. The selection includes *puris* (puffy breads), *idli* (rice ball in broth), *dosa* and banana-leaf *thalis* and a variety of curries for lunch and dinner. Overhead fans keep the swarms of bugs attracted by the ceiling lights from dive bombing your food. No tea here, only coffee, South Indian style. The restaurant opens onto the street between 29th and Shwe Bontha Sts.

Shwe Htoo Restaurant (Map p102; cnr Anawrahta Rd & 30th St) This restaurant is open later than most and is good for a quick *palata* (fried flatbread) or biryani plate; it's between the New Delhi and Nila Biryani.

Nila Biryani Shop (Map p102; Anawrahta Rd) Although it's always crowded, and deservedly

so, the service is snappy, so the wait for delicious biryanis isn't long. It's between 31st and 32nd Sts in the city centre.

Shami Food Centre (Map p102; Anawrahta Rd) A block east on the same side of Anawrahta Rd, this place serves fare similar to the Nila Biryani and is owned by the same family. Both offer vegetarian biryani, as well as the usual chicken.

Bharat Restaurant (Map p102; ☎ 281 519; 356 Mahabandoola Rd; mains from K600) On the corner of Seikkam Thar St, this place is dependable and cheap; it's similar to the New Delhi with more of a focus on South Indian flavours. Bharat's marble-topped tables make a nice change from the long cafeteria-style tables at the Indian places on Anawrahta Rd.

Golden City Chetty Restaurant (Map p102; 170 Sule Paya Rd) Just north of the Sule Paya, on the eastern side of the street, this place follows the usual pattern for Yangon's Indian restaurants – white-tiled walls and bright fluorescent lights; it's one of the few city-centre Indian places open after 7pm.

Var Lunch Home (Map p102; Shwe Bontha St) Two doors south of Anawrahta Rd and the Sunflower Hotel, Var Lunch serves tasty dhal as well as chicken, mutton and veggie curries – all on banana leaves, South Indian style. Good, cheap and authentic – it costs about K800 for two people.

There are some very good upmarket Indian restaurants north of the city centre.

Ashoka Indian Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 555 539; 288 Pho Sein Rd; mains from US\$5; 🍴) Up the road from the Nikko Hotel in a nicely restored old home is the Ashoka serving up excellent, mostly North Indian cuisine. Portions are small but that justifies ordering several courses including piping hot breads and filling samosas. The dining room is large and service formal and attentive.

Royal Taj Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 542 899; 138C University Ave Rd; mains from US\$4) Another very good North Indian eatery just east of Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd and Inya Lake with excellent tandoori dishes and veggie curries. Prices are moderate.

Maharaja Indian Restaurant (Map p98; ☎ 720 126; Amusement Park, Zoological Garden Compound; mains US\$5) Another very good choice.

Japanese

Furusato Japanese Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 556 265; 137 West Shwegondine Rd) Furusato, a traditional

Japanese restaurant (no shoes, floor seating) enjoys a stellar reputation because of its high quality sushi and sashimi. The hot pot and barbecue dishes are also excellent.

Ichiban-Kan (Map p98; ☎ 245 027; 17-18 Aung San Stadium; noodle dishes US\$3-10; 🍴) This small old school-style Japanese restaurant is in the northwest corner of the stadium. The small menu focuses on soup and noodle dishes.

Yakiniku Japanese Barbeque (Map p102; ☎ 374 738; 357 Shwe Bontha St; bbq dishes K1000; 🍴 10am-10pm; 🍴) Yakiniku is just down the block from the Bogyoke Aung San Market. Tables here have small gas-fired grills built into them, and you're responsible for cooking your own raw meat and fish.

Okinawa Restaurant (Map p102; 32nd St; K1000) Owned by the same family as the Okinawa Guest House down the block, this casual restaurant does good Singapore-style fried rice.

Korean

Han Il Kwan (Map p86; ☎ 533 898; 46 Inya Rd; mains K4000-8000). For genuine Korean and the best *kimchi* (salted, pickled vegetables) to be found in Yangon, look for the large red Han Il Kwan sign on the left side of 6½ miles on Pyay Rd. Along with a main dish, you get a small vegetable salad and at least eight side dishes with various kinds of *kimchi*. Various noodle and Chinese and Japanese dishes fill out the menu. Wash it all down with Korean *soju* (K5000), a delicious rice liquor that packs a punch.

World Cup (Map p90; Dhama Zedi Rd; mains K3000-5000) Diagonally opposite the Savoy Hotel on Dhama Zedi Rd, World Cup is another Korean favourite. It serves *galbi tang* (a delicious rich beef soup) as well as marinated meat (usually pork rib) to eat with the *kimchi*. Pictures of World Cup footballers decorate the walls.

Vietnamese

Vietnam House Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 554 957; 287 Shwe Gon Daing Rd; dishes K800) Between Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd and Chaukhtatgyi Paya, this place has an excellent local reputation, and the prices are moderate.

French

Le Planteur (Map p90; ☎ 549 389; 16 Sawmaha St; mains US\$15-25; 🍴) Widely considered the best restaurant in Yangon, the cost of a meal

at Le Planteur matches its exalted reputation. A list of just a few of the delicacies will whet the appetite of foodies: boneless frog leg appetizers, chowder of Japanese scallops with black truffles and Myanmar white beans, and locally caught filet of parrot fish. The all-you-can-eat barbecue – ribs, steak, chicken, seafood and vegetables – comes with free drinks for the first two hours of the barbecue – with drinks including wine, beer, Johnnie Walker and soft drinks – every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. It costs a reasonable K18,000. To find Le Planteur, follow the signboard on Nat Mauk St, next to Kandawgyi near the Hotel Nikko.

L'Molier (Map p86; ☎ 501 558; 49 Pyay Rd; mains US\$12; 🍷) Opened in 2004, L'Molier is picturesquely set right on Inya Lake. The chef specialises in fish and seafood, but meat dishes, especially the lamb cutlets with dauphinoise potato are also excellent. Fantastic chocolates round out the meal.

J's Bistro & Bar (Map p98; ☎ 220 284; 59 Taw Win Rd; soups K3500; 🍷) Connected to the boutique J's Irwaddy Dream in the same elegant teak building, J's is popular with foreign embassy staff on lunch breaks. Besides a few French dishes, plus several Thai and Bamar inspired ones, the menu includes good cheeses, desserts and bread.

Italian

L'Opera Restaurant (Map p86; ☎ 566 662; 20 Thukha Waddy Rd; pizzas US\$9; 🍷) One of the better and more elegant restaurants in Yangon, L'Opera boasts well-trained and smartly dressed wait staff but more importantly is the Italian owner and chef's meticulous preparation. L'Opera is east of Inya Lake, just south of Kanbe St, in a pretty little residential cul-de-sac. The outdoor garden seating is a bonus in good weather. Lunch is even more affordable, including delicious seafood pizza.

Café Dibar (Map p90; ☎ 006 143; 14/20 Than Lwin Rd; mains K3000; 🍷) Around the corner from the Savoy Hotel, in a strip mall of a few other restaurants, Café Dibar is an informal and less expensive Italian bistro. The seafood pizza and lasagne are excellent.

Other Western

Onyx (Map p90; sandwiches K2000; 🍷) Not entirely sure of what it wants to be yet, the Onyx

is hip and stylish inside, outside it's hidden behind a cement wall at the corner of Dhama Zedi and Inya. The décor is minimal but the pop music is loud. Service is slow but friendly, a few of the dishes are inventive while the burgers are only basic.

50th Street Bar & Grill (Map p98; ☎ 298 096; 9-13 50th St; pizzas US\$7; 🍷) No detail or cliché is missing, from the pool table to the newspapers to the overpriced Cokes (US\$2) to the mediocre pizzas, pastas and sandwiches. Everything it's assumed an expat misses. The 50th Street, near the corner of Merchant St is a popular hang-out with both expats and locals alike. Prices are in US dollars, though you may pay in kyat as well. Lunches are half-price Monday to Friday.

Hotel Restaurants

Most of the hotel restaurants stay open until 11pm.

Strand Grill (Map p102; ☎ 243 377; 92 Strand Rd; 🍷 6-11pm) The Grill is one of Yangon's most expensive restaurants, with changing continental dinners starting at about US\$25. Less formal (and less expensive) is the hotel's **Strand Café** (entrees from US\$9; 🍷 6.30am-11pm), which offers well-prepared soups, salads and sandwiches, as well as a number of Burmese and Asian-inspired dishes. There is also a proper and filling high tea, from 2pm to 5pm daily. The cost is US\$14 per person.

La Maison du Lac (Map p90; ☎ 249 255) The Swiss chef at this restaurant in the Kandawgyi Palace Hotel prepares special set French dinners (US\$15) every Friday and Saturday.

Shiki-Tei (Map p98; ☎ 250 388) This elegant and modern Japanese restaurant in the Grand Plaza Park Royal Hotel is one of the best in the city. The set lunch (US\$5) is a good deal.

Mandalay Restaurant (Map p98; ☎ 221 462; 35 Taw Win St; mains US\$10) At the ritzy Pansea Yangon, this is a serene restaurant serving outstanding French- and Burmese-style cuisine; it's a perfect place to splurge.

Adorns Kitchen (Map p102; ☎ 256 355; dishes K2500) Consistently rated as the top Chinese restaurant in Yangon, Adorn's can be found in the Grand Mee Ya Hta Executive Residences next to the FMI Centre.

Orzo (Map p86; mains K8000) Downstairs in the Sedona with a view of the pool, this Italian restaurant serves good pizza and pastas.

Traders Hotel Restaurant (Map p102; ☎ 242 828; 223 Sule Paya Rd; brunch US\$12, dinner US\$18) In the Traders Hotel, this restaurant serves international, Cantonese, Japanese and Burmese cuisine and elaborate buffet dinners. The Gallery Bar on the 2nd floor does a lavish brunch, which includes well-prepared Bamar curries, Chinese steam pot, roast duck, soufflés and desserts.

Parkview Café (Map p90; 350 Ahlone Rd; mains K6000, buffet K8500) At the Summit Parkview Hotel, it is another good place for Sunday brunch; this one with both veggie and non-veggie Indian cuisine. Buffet dinners from around the world are served Thursday to Sunday nights.

Kipling's Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 526 289; mains K9000-17,000, 4-course dinner K17,000) Kipling's has a German chef but mostly Italian fare; the Bierstube (beer, wine and German food) and the Captain's Bar (happy hour from 6pm to 8pm daily and Wednesday from 8pm to 11pm) are both in the Savoy Hotel on Dhama Zedi Rd.

Travellers keen to avoid government-owned places should bypass the Karaweik Palace Restaurant, which is a remarkable looking structure on Kandawgyi.

Teashops

Yangon's numerous teashops are not just places to have cups of milk tea or coffee or tiny pots of Chinese tea. They are great places for cheap Burmese, Chinese and Indian snacks. For breakfast, in fact, you're often better off spending a few kyat in a teashop, rather than eating the boring toast, egg and instant-coffee breakfasts provided by many hotels and guesthouses.

Sei Taing Kya Teashop (Map p90; 53 Za Ga War St; 🍷 7am-5pm) This is the most famous tea-tipping spot in Yangon. It has six branches and the most happening branch is near the Israeli embassy. It serves top-quality tea, samosa, palata, *mohinga* (rice noodles with chicken or fish and eggs) and *ei-kyakwe* (deep-fried pastries). A branch east of the city centre is at 103 Anawrahta Rd, on the corner of 51st St. There's another just south of the Theinbyu Playground and by Kandawgyi, on Thein Byu Rd.

Yatha Teashop (Map p102; ☎ 349 341; 353 Mahabandoola Rd; 🍷 7am-5pm) Mahabandoola Rd has a couple of more modest establishments that typify the general division between

Chinese-influenced and Indian-influenced teashops. This place, between Seikkan Thar and 39th Sts, represents the latter, providing fresh samosas and palata.

The Golden Dragon Teashop (Map p98) and Lucky Seven Teashop (Map p98) are lively teashops serving good snacks and are in the vicinity of several good midrange guesthouses east of the city centre.

Street Food

Lit up like Times Square, little makeshift grills and small plastic tables line 19th St between Mahabandoola and Anawrahta Rds in Chinatown. To order, point to what you want – a selection of meat and fish skewers (K150), artichokes and bean curd. It's a bit of a men's club, though there's no reason to think women aren't welcome. Another good Indian stall (selling good barbecued fish) is nearby on Latha St, just south of Mahabandoola Rd, next to Vilas Beauty Salon. Snack places for dessert are around the corner on Mahabandoola Rd.

The noodle stalls on 32nd St, near the Sule Paya, are very cheap and very good. Food stalls serving curries and rice – for experienced stomachs only – can be found along the eastern side of Bo Galay Zay St.

Fast Food

If you're seeking more of a café-style atmosphere, see p118.

Sharkey's (Map p90; 4B Golden Valley) A favourite with the expat community, it sells locally made cheese, yogurt, pizzas (part cooked – you need your own oven to finish it off), pesto, olives, sundried tomatoes, as well as home grown rocket and other vegetables and fresh herbs. The Burmese owner, who acquired his cheese-making skills in Europe, also cures his own hams and chorizo, and makes pâté to die for. Sharkey's is found in Bahan township close to the Australian embassy.

Pizza Corner (Map p102; ☎ 254 730; 397 Shwe Bon Thar St; pizza K2000-2800; 🍷) This Pizza Hut-style joint is a block from Bogyoke Aung San Market. The lights are bright and the décor is American fast-food to the hilt but the veggie and meat pizzas are tasty. Pasta and fried chicken are also on the menu.

Ginza Pan Food Center (Map p98; ☎ 379 234; 29 Gyo Phyu Rd; 🍷) The Ginza Pan, across from Aung San Stadium, suffers from an identity crisis.

Is it a café, a fast-food joint, a full-service restaurant, Myanmar or Thai, or a bakery? It's actually a combination of all of the above and doing all of them adequately.

Tokyo Fried Chicken (Map p102; 156 Mahabandoola Garden St; ☎ 8am-9pm; 🍷) There are several outlets of TFC, Yangon's very own version of KFC. One is just north of Mahabandoola Rd and the other is across the street from Bogyoke Aung San Market.

Nilar Win's Cold Drink Shop (Map p102; ☎ 278 364; 377 Mahabandoola Rd; ☎ 8am-11pm) This long established clean little café is four blocks east of Sule Paya (between 37th and 38th Sts). You can get yogurt, lassi (a delicious Indian yogurt drink, plain or blended with fruit) as well as fruit salad, toast and egg (just K80), French toast and other traveller delicacies.

J' Donuts (Map p102; Shwe Bontha St) is just south of Bogyoke Aung San Rd, while **MacBurger** (Map p102; Pansodan St) and another **J' Donuts** (Map p102; Pansodan St) are opposite each other between Mahabandoola and Anawrahta Rds. All are open 8am to 9pm daily.

DRINKING

Apart from the bars and cafés listed below, Yangon abounds in teashops, where cups of milk tea or coffee, followed by endless tiny pots of Chinese tea and cheap snacks, are available. As these places are a good choice for breakfast, we have included them on p117.

Bars

Most of the city goes dark around nine. Burmese night owls head to one of the clubs listed opposite. A lively expat scene rotates around the city during the week: Wednesday nights are for the Savoy, Thursday nights Traders, and Friday night the Strand.

Strand Bar (Map p102; ☎ 243 377; 92 Strand Rd; ☎ 11am-11pm) Though it's primarily an expat scene, this classic bar inside the Strand Hotel has any foreign liquors you may be craving behind its polished wooden bar. Occasionally there's someone around to play the baby grand. Friday afternoon and early evening is a two-for-one happy hour (there's a standard happy hour all other days from 5pm to 7pm). The bar is pleasantly relaxed and comfortable despite the price of the rooms above.

Mr Guitar Café (Map p90; ☎ 550 105; 22 Sayasan St;

☎ 6pm-midnight) Founded by famous Burmese vocalist Nay Myo Say, this dark café/bar features live folk music from about 7pm to midnight nightly. Well-known Burmese musicians drop by frequently to sit in with the regular house group. The clientele is a mix of locals and expats. Along with music and drinks, Asian and European food is available. Foreign beers such as Corona will set you back K4400.

Frenz Bar & Grill (Map p90; ☎ 547 324; Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd; ☎ noon-late) A sleek place, especially for Yangon, Frenz keeps the décor minimalist and, like trendy bars everywhere, risks style over substance. Live music, mostly covers, is on offer every night apart from Sunday. Burgers (K3800), pizza, pastas, Indian cuisine, steaks and seafood make up the culturally diverse menu (K2200 to K5000).

50th Street Bar & Grill (Map p98; ☎ 298 069; 9-13 50th St; ☎ 11am-10.30pm) Popular with local Burmese and expats on Friday and Saturday nights, this bar has a pool table and brick-oven pizza. There are half-price drinks from 5pm to 8pm Monday to Thursday, 4pm to 9pm Friday and all day Sunday.

Silver Oak Café (Map p102; 83/91 Bo Aung Kyaw St; ☎ 299 993; ☎ noon-late) This place, a few blocks from the Strand is one of the few centres of gay nightlife in the city. In front is a hair salon and behind is the club with live music most nights.

Captain's Bar (Map p90; ☎ 526 289; 129 Dhama Zedi Rd; ☎ until midnight) At the Savoy Hotel, this bar is popular with both local Burmese and expats, especially on Wednesday nights when there's live jazz.

Diamond White Bar (Map p102; ☎ 241 007; Bogyoke Aung San Rd; ☎ early morning-late) It's a popular drinking hole and café on the ground floor of the Central Hotel. There's a steady stream of satellite TV sport, and prices are good and low.

Cafés

Zawgyi's Café (Map p102; ☎ 256 355; 372 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) Zawgyi's is next to the FMI Centre, one of the best people watching spots in the city. In addition to ice cream, shakes and juices the café menu includes noodle and rice dishes and sandwiches as well. The shop inside sells high-priced handicrafts and textiles.

Ritz Café (Map p98; ☎ 243 934; 296 Shwedagon Pagoda Rd; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm; 🍷) A hip stylish

café near the Defence Services Museum with interesting glass tables, it has international newspapers and magazines free for perusal while downing a burger (K780) or cappuccino (K750). CDs are sold here as well.

Café Aroma (Map p102; Sule Paya Rd; ☎ 8am-11pm; 🍷) The Starbucks of Yangon, this café has several outlets around the city. The Sule Paya Rd branch, next to the cinema, is the most central, and offers fine, freshly brewed coffee and fruit smoothies (from about K500) in a stylish setting. Pasta and pizza dishes are also available for K800 to K1400. Other Café Aroma outlets are at the Yuzana Plaza, just east of Kandawgyi and at the La Pyat Wun Shopping Centre.

Golden Triangle Bakery (Map p102; ☎ 378 869; 641 Merchant St; ☎ 8am-5pm; 🍷) It has three locations throughout the city including one across the street from the Golden Smiles Inn and another in the British Library. The bakery does delicious cheese cake (K850), biscuits and special order cakes, not to mention cappuccinos (K500) and other hot and cold drinks.

Actor's Corner Café (Map p90; ☎ 504 932; 1st fl, Dagon Centre; ☎ 8am-7pm; 🍷) Far from Hollywood, this café is still advertised as the place where stars hang out, and while you may not be able to spot them, the modern roomy café is good enough for the hoi polloi.

Mr Brown Café (Map p102; Mahabandoola Garden St; 🍷) Another place to get a break from the heat and sip a cold drink even if the décor is more fast food than café.

ENTERTAINMENT

Nightlife and Yangon aren't usually used in the same sentence. The main form of local recreation is hanging out in teashops or 'cold drink' shops. While Bangkok makes an evening in Yangon seem quaint and provincial, entertainment can be found in far-flung places around this sprawling city, unfortunately much of it in large hotels catering to foreigners.

On festival days (some are listed on p106), local bands occasionally organise live outdoor concerts. During the water festival in April, sizable rock-music shows are set up along Inya Rd and University Ave Rd and feature local underground rockers.

National Theatre

The Yangon government revived the per-

formance of Burmese classical dance-drama at the **National Theatre** (Map p98; Myoma Kyaung Rd), a government-sponsored facility, northwest of Bogyoke Aung San Market.

Scenes from Ramayana – called Yama Thagyin in Burmese – are only occasionally held. Check at the theatre itself or try asking staff at the larger hotels.

Dinner Shows

There are a few large, banquet-style restaurants with floorshows in Yangon. Heavily used by the visiting business community, these dining spots are typically Chinese-owned and feature extensive Chinese menus plus a few Burmese dishes. Entertainment is provided by Burmese bands that perform a mixture of Burmese, Western, Chinese and Japanese pop songs. Some places also feature Burmese classical dance and/or mari-onette theatre.

LakeView Theatre Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 249 255; kphotel@mptmail.net.mm; Kan Yeik Tha Rd; dinner & show K7200) Attached to the Kandawgyi Palace Hotel, the entertaining show includes 10 traditional Burmese dances; one involves a woman balancing on one foot on a chair while juggling a cane ball. The buffet dinner of Thai and Burmese favourites starts at 6.30pm, before the show.

Lone Ma Lay Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 550 357; Nat Mauk St, Kandawgyi; dishes K1000) This is among the best of the bunch of restaurants at Kandawgyi that offer entertainment. Shows focus on Burmese classical and folk dance early in the evening, and pop later on.

Dolphin Seafood Restaurant (Map p90; ☎ 250 240; Kan Yeik Tha St) Near the aquarium, also on the lake, the Dolphin Seafood is less formal and known for employing the best Burmese pop singers in town. A recent addition to the restaurant is karaoke in English, Burmese and Chinese.

Clubs

Yagon's own interpretation of club culture involves competitive fashion shows and mostly listless groups of men sipping bottles of Myanmar beer. It's not clear whether an 11pm curfew is *de facto* or *de jure*, either way it's only periodically and unevenly administered, dependent on both power supply and politics. Most clubs have a nominal cover charge that includes the first drink.

A word of warning: prostitutes are a regu-

lar feature at many of Yangon's hot night spots. Though the government keeps them on the move, there is little concern for their health or safety, or that of their clients.

There are several rooftop clubs in Thein Gyi Zay Plaza, on Shwedagon Paya Rd in Chinatown. Access is provided by lifts open to the street. They tend to be open from early evening until late.

You might find yourself straining to hear the gentle lap of ocean waves at **Zero Zone Rock Restaurant** (Map p102; ☎ 373 384; 2nd fl, 2 Thain Gyi Zay) whose bamboo shelters seem more appropriate for a beach club than Yangon rooftop. It's the most appealing of the bunch offering up live music nightly, views of the city, cheap beer and Myanmar, Chinese and Indian food. **Da Best 69 Entertainment** (Map p102; City Centre Plaza, Shwedagon Pagoda Rd) and **Emperor Entertainment** (Map p102; ☎ 240 600; 5th fl, City Centre Plaza, Shwedagon Pagoda Rd) are on the same block. **Pioneer Club** (Map p98; ☎ 240 995; 44 Alanpya Pagoda Rd, Yuzana Garden Hotel), a disco popular with US Marines, and other primarily male expats and Burmese hosts a 'supermodel' show.

Cinemas

There's no better city for Myanmar cinephiles than Yangon. By a conservative estimate there are over 50 theatres, a half-dozen or so found along Bogyoke Aung San Rd, east of the Sule Paya. Tickets are K800 or less per seat. Critically acclaimed films are in short supply; rather there is a succession of syrupy Myanmar dramas, Bollywood musicals, kung-fu smash-ups, plus a few Hollywood blockbusters.

Nay Pyi Daw Cinema (Map p102; ☎ 276 555; Sule Paya St; 🎬) This cinema across from Traders Hotel and next to the Aroma Café has showings throughout the day. It's one of the busiest cinemas in the city.

Thamada Cinema (Map p98; ☎ 246 962; 5 Alaung Paya St; 🎬) Easily the best cinema for foreigners, it is comfortable and shows fairly recent American and international films.

American Center (Map p98; 14 Taw Win St) Behind the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this centre shows free American movies at noon every Monday.

SHOPPING

It's unfortunate that shipping goods from Myanmar is either prohibitively expensive for most or simply not possible because of

political reasons; travellers are therefore limited to whatever can fit in their carry-on baggage. Yangon isn't the shoppers' mecca that Bangkok is, it does however offer a more manageable alternative as there are fewer and smaller outlets and prices tend to be even cheaper all around.

Arts & Handicrafts

A small but thriving local gallery scene exists in Yangon, the majority spread around the relatively posh Golden Valley neighbourhood. Several painters have achieved recognition abroad and prices in general are not inexpensive.

Wingaba Art Gallery (Map p90; ☎ 549 376; eurasia@mptmail.net.mm; 29 Wingaba St) Contemporary paintings, lacquerware and tapestries are on display in this colonial residence.

Nandawun (Map p90; ☎ 221 271; cnr Baho & Ahlone Rds) It deals with rare books on Myanmar, ethnic minority costumes, lacquerware and gems.

Daw Mya Mya Sein (☎ 542 505; 11 Thiri Zeyar St) This is an antique lacquerware shop in the house of the proprietor, who is a former Shan princess.

Traditions Gallery (Map p90; ☎ 513 709; 24 Inya Myaing Rd) Quality reproductions of traditional Myanmar handicrafts are sold here. The director is Claudia Saw Lwin.

Ivy Gallery (Map p98; ☎ 297 654; 159 45th St) Between Bogyoke Aung San and Anawrahta Rds, Ivy is run by the director, Myat Min. It features a fine collection of modern Burmese art. Ivy also has a shop in Bogyoke Aung San Market at 438 West Row.

Both **Golden Valley Art Centre** (Map p90; ☎ 513 621; 54(D) Golden Valley), and **Inya Gallery of Art** (Map p90; ☎ 530 327; 50(B) Inya Rd) feature exhibits by contemporary Burmese painters.

Malls

There are a number of modern Western-style shopping malls with air-con, restaurants, cafés and a wide selection of stores selling everything from hipster T-shirts to flat screen TVs. The largest and most convenient are these:

Blazon (Map p90; 72 U Wi Za Ra Rd)

Dagon Centre (Map p90; 262-264 Pyay Rd)

Excel Treasure (Map p90; Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd)

FMI Centre (Map p102; 380 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) Just east of Bogyoke Aung San Market.

La Pyat Wun Plaza (Map p98; Ah Lan Paya Pagoda St) Not far north of the train station.

Markets

Shopping at the *zei* (markets, often spelt *zay*) in central Yangon can be fun, educational and a chance to interact with the locals.

The long southern stairway at Shwedagon Paya is lined with small shops catering to pilgrims and tourists alike. Popular items include sandalwood bracelets, small drums, papier mache animals etc. Bargaining is expected here.

Bogyoke Aung San Market (Map p102; Bogyoke Aung San Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun) A half-day could easily be spent wandering around this 70-year-old sprawling – with over 2000 shops – market (sometimes called by its old British name, Scott Market). Besides the fact that it has the largest selection of Burmese handicrafts you'll find under several roofs, the market is a fantastic opportunity to smile, laugh and haggle alongside Burmese shoppers. Along the maze-like aisles you'll find a whole variety of interesting Burmese souvenirs, from lacquerware and Shan shoulder bags to T-shirts and puppets. Pick-up some nice slippers here, convenient for all the on and off demanded by paya protocol. Gems and jewellery are also on hand. To store all this booty, several shops in the market, across the street along Bogyoke Aung San Rd and in the New Bogyoke Market, which caters more to the household needs of Burmese, sell an extensive variety of backpacks of all sizes and brands, some more authentic than others.

Some of the more interesting shops in Bogyoke Aung San Market include:

Depi Store (39 West Block) For cheroots and cigars.

Eastern Queen (1st fl, 18 Face Wing) Rattan furniture.

Jing Phaw Mai Lay (Myanma Silk & Cotton Wear; 93 Central Arcade) & **Mya Malar** (137 West Wing) At least 20 other places in the market also specialise in *longyi* (sarong-like lower garments).

Maung Maw & Brothers (115 Inner West Wing) Modern and traditional musical instruments.

Myanmar Lacquerware (1-2 East Wing) Lacquerware.

Myat Sanda (138 West Wing) *Lapheq* (pickle tea).

Super Star Antique & National Traditional Goods Shop (15 West Wing)

Theingyi Zei (Map p102; Shwedagon Paya Rd) The biggest market in Yangon, this is especially good for locals who find Bogyoke Aung San Market a little too pricey. Most of the merchandise is ordinary housewares and

textiles, but the market is renowned for its large selection of traditional Burmese herbs and medicines. A snake section features the fresh blood and organs of various snakes, some live ones are disembowelled on-the-spot for medicinal consumption. Traditional Burmese herbal shampoo, made by boiling the bark of the *tayaw* shrub with big black *kin pun* (acacia pods) is sold in small plastic bags; this is the secret of Myanmar women's smooth, glossy hair. A new mall-like section on Shwedagon Paya Rd, Theingyi Zei Plaza, contains less-interesting modern shops.

Thirimingala Zei (Map p90; Yangon River bank, Ahlone Township) Off the northern end of Strand Rd (about 1km west of People's Park), is a labyrinth of vendors selling fresh foodstuffs, vegetables, fruits and meat – it's worth a stroll for the amazing sights and smells, not all of them especially pleasant.

San Pya Fish Market (Map p90; Nat Sin St) Catch even more of an aroma further north along the riverfront.

Mingala Zei (Map p90) A little southeast of Kandawgyi, this market proffers textiles, clothes, electrical appliances, plastic ware, preserved and tinned foodstuffs, modern medicines, and even cosmetics from China, Thailand and Singapore.

Iron bazaar (Map p98; cnr Mahabandoola & Madaw Rds) Located in Yangon's Chinatown – you can find all the items that are used in Chinese cooking here.

Itinerant vendors set up along Anawrahta Rd east and west of Sule Paya Rd from about 6pm to 10pm nightly, selling everything from Chinese toothbrushes to fresh fruit and shish kebab. Chinatown (Map p98) itself extends east-west between Madaw and Shwedagon Paya Rds, and north-south between Mahabandoola and Strand Rds.

Speciality Shops

J's Irrawaddy Dream (Map p98; ☎ 221 695; 59 Taw Win St; ☎ 9am-8pm) A block north of the Pansea Hotel, this is a handsome shop featuring high-quality Burmese textiles, clothes, lacquer and other handicrafts. It's an especially good place to find stylish women's dresses.

Royal Rose (Map p86; ☎ 662 576; www.kyolone.com; Inya Yeiktha St) East of Inya Lake and north of L'Opera, Royal Rose sells handbags and beautifully crafted women's slippers, better than the kind sold in Bogyoke Aung San Market.

If your prescription spectacles should go missing, optometry stores (Map p102) line both sides of Shwe Bontha St between Bogyoke Aung San and Anawrahta Rds.

The **Morning market** (Map p102; cnr 38th St & Bogyoke Aung San Rd) has fresh flowers at cheap prices. Also try the back entrance to Bogyoke Aung San Market, or on early mornings/evenings at Hledan, Myaynigone or Kyimyindaing markets.

Yangon is a surprisingly good place to find DVDs of American, British, French and Hong Kong films. Be aware that a number of DVD shops deal in pirated copies. Here's a disclaimer for liability purposes: the ones in the following places look genuine.

As well as films, **Lucky 7** (Map p98; ☎ 371 410; 61 Latha St) sells an extensive variety of DVDs of popular American and British TV shows including the *Simpsons* and the *Office*; **Twenty One** (Map p98; ☎ 245 295; 168 Mahabandoola Rd, cnr 21st St), a much smaller shop nearby, sells the usual Hollywood blockbusters. Most of the malls listed on p120 have small shops selling DVDs. The ones on the 2nd floor of Excel Treasure and the 4th floor of La Pyat Wun Plaza are the best.

Tailors

Yangon isn't a place you would usually think of for tailor-made clothes, but prices for tailoring are among the lowest in Southeast Asia. The selection of fabrics at tailor shops, however, is mostly restricted to synthetics. Cotton lengths in prints, plaids, solids and batiks can easily be found in the larger markets, so you may do better to buy cloth at a market and bring it to a tailor shop for cutting and sewing.

J's Clothes (Map p98; ☎ 220 284; 59 Taw Win Rd) This part of J's Irrawaddy Dream works with high-quality Myanmar and imported fabrics.

Ava Tailoring (Map p102; ☎ 2481 56; 124 Pansodan St) If you want a traditional, Mandarin-collar Myanmar shirt (for men), try this place near the train station at the Anawrahta Rd intersection.

Globe Tailoring (Map p102; ☎ 273 416; 367 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) Well regarded by local expats for women's and men's tailoring.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

See p354 for information on international

air travel, and p358 for details on domestic air travel, to/from Yangon.

Boat

Along the Yangon River waterfront, which wraps around the south of Yangon, are a number of jetties with boats offering long-distance ferry services. The four main passenger jetties (Pongyi, Lan Thit, Kaingdan and Hledan) service long-distance ferries headed up the delta towards Patheingyi or north along the Ayeyarwady River to Pyay, Bagan and Mandalay. Named after the respective streets that extend north from each jetty, all four are clustered in an area just south of Lanmadaw township and southwest of Chinatown. When you come to purchasing a ticket for a particular ferry from the government's **Inland Water Transport** (IWT; Map p98; ☎ 284 055) deputy division manager's office, at the back of Lan Thit jetty, be sure to ask which jetty your boat will be departing from.

Myanma Five Star Line (MFSL; Map p98; ☎ 295 279) ships leave from the MSFL jetty (Map p102) – also known as Chanmayeiseikan jetty – next to Pansodan St jetty.

There are several privately owned companies that operate luxury cruises from Yangon to Bagan and Mandalay (see p362).

PATHEIN

IWT boats depart from the Lan Thit jetty in Yangon for Patheingyi at 5pm daily (arriving 10am the next day). The cost is US\$7 for deck class (an easy chair if you're early enough) or US\$42 per person for a cabin with private bathroom. From Patheingyi to Yangon, boats also leave at 5pm and arrive at 10am the next day.

A more luxurious option is the privately owned and operated **Delta Queen** (☎ 246 752; www.myanmar-rivercruises.com; 343 Bo Aung Kyaw St, Yangon; per person US\$170) See p134 for more details.

TWANTE

The alternative to getting to Twante by the Dalah ferry/bus combo is to take the two-hour scenic trip along the Yangon River and Twante Canal (see p129 for details).

DAWEI, MYEIK, & KAWTHOUNG

It's theoretically possible to travel in a large MFSL boat south to Dawei, Myeik or Kawthoung. In reality, it's unlikely that the requi-

site supernatural amounts of luck, patience, and commitment are all possessed by one single person at a single extended moment in time. If the stars should align in your favour remember there is no fixed schedule for departures or arrivals. Bon voyage.

Bus

There are two major bus terminals in Yangon: Aung Mingalar Bus Terminal and the Hlaing Thar Yar Bus Terminal, described below.

There is a third station, smaller and less important than the following two, known as Tha-khin Mya Pan-gyan Gate. It is near the Western Park Chinese Restaurant. Buses from here, which are generally older and without air-con, service Bago, Mawbi and Taikgyi. Companies based in Aung Mingalar also travel to Bago so the only real reason to leave from Tha-khin Mya Park is because the station is within walking distance of the city centre.

Most signs at the bus terminals are in Burmese; however, English-speaking touts anxious to steer you in the right direction are in abundance. To avoid the hassle and attention make sure your taxi driver (both of the major terminals are around 45 minutes from the city centre and it's unlikely you'll arrive to either via public bus) knows where you want to go and even better the name of the specific bus company. Showing the driver your ticket will do; if you don't have a ticket have a Burmese speaker write the information on a slip of paper.

You can buy tickets at the bus terminal or at several central locations, mostly opposite the central train station, alongside Aung San Stadium. Many hotels can book tickets for you.

AUNG MINGALAR BUS TERMINAL (HIGHWAY BUS STATION)

Located to the northeast of the airport, Aung Mingalar (Map p86) is the only official bus terminal for all 150 bus lines leaving for the northern part of Myanmar from Yangon, as well as for Kyaiktiyo (Golden Rock), Mawlamyine and destinations to the south. Prior to April 2003 when Aung Mingalar, was christened, another terminal near the airport called Saw Bwar Gyi Gone was known as the highway station. Many publications and maps still refer to Saw Bwar Gyi Gone incorrectly; it's now used

as a maintenance yard, warehouse space, and a transport hub for shipping goods. The majority of bus companies do still have offices there.

To the North

The nicer, air-conditioned buses of companies such as Leo Express and Sun Moon Express head off to destinations to the north daily, usually at around 5pm or 6pm. Bus companies operating up and down Highway 1 include the following (those with ticket kiosks at Aung San Stadium are indicated below):

AKM Express (☎ 636 441)

Eastern State Express (☎ 639 455)

Hnin Thu Wai (☎ 246 283)

Kyaw Express (☎ 242 473; 8-11 Aung San Stadium, South Wing)

Leo Express (☎ 252 001; fax 240 668; Aung San Stadium, Eastern Wing)

Mann Shwe Pyi Express (☎ 248 970)

Rainbow Express (☎ 272 250)

Saw Bwa Gyi Gon (☎ 665 545)

Sin-ma-lite (☎ 286 588)

Sun Moon Express (☎ 642 903; Aung San Stadium, Southern Wing)

Transnational Express (TNE; ☎ 249 671; 22-29 Aung San Stadium, Southern Wing)

Destinations served include the following. Journey times depend on road conditions and the health of your bus.

Bagan (K6500, 14 hours) Ye Thu Aung express buses leave at around 3pm. To go there via Pyay requires bus changes in Pyay and Magwe – this seems to be a route only used by those on package bus tours, or with a private car.

Kalaw (K7000, 15 to 17 hours) Buses depart in the late afternoon and go over the mountains.

Mandalay (K6000, 12 to 15 hours) Buses leave from around 4.30pm to 6pm.

Taunggyi for Inle Lake (K6000, 20 hours) Get off in Shwenyaung and then grab a pick-up or taxi to Nyaung-shwe on Inle Lake.

Thandwe for Ngapali Beach (K4500, 17 hours) Go via Pyay and Taunggyi for Aung Thit Sar Bus or Ye Aung Lan buses run via Gwa. Neither buses particularly comfortable and the former route is only meant for the hardiest of travellers.

To Bago, Kyaiktiyo, Hpa-An and Mawlamyine

The names of some of the bus lines that ply the specific routes are listed below in parentheses.

Bago (K500-K1000, two hours) Buses (Phyo and Kyan Tine

Aung) leave every 30 minutes from the early morning to early afternoon.

Kyaiktiyo (Golden Rock) and Kinpun (K2500, 4½ hours) Buses (Win and The Tan Kyaw) leave at 7.30am, 8.30am and 9.30am. Other bus companies leave between 7am and 1pm. There are also several companies with ticket booths along Pansodan St in Yangon with trips on similar large, air-con buses to Kinpun; however, these leave around 9pm and aren't very desirable unless you prefer to arrive in the middle of the night.

Hpa-An (K4000, eight hours) Buses (Ah Swe Taw, Mya Eai Drae, Shwe Hpar Si and Shwe Chin The) leave from 6.30pm to 8pm.

Mawlamyine (K4000, 10 hours) Buses (Yarzar Min, Yaung Ni Htun and Mihara) leave from 6pm to 8pm and go via Hpa-An. With a new bridge over the Thanlwin River, BTT buses plan on running nightly buses (K3000, six hours) directly between Yangon and Mawlamyine.

HLAING THAR YAR BUS TERMINAL

This is the bus terminal for travel to the delta region (called Ayeyarwady Division) to the west of Yangon, including destinations such as Pathein (K2500, 3½ hours), Chaungtha Beach (K5000, six to seven hours), and Ngwe Saung Beach (K5000, five hours).

Its official name is the Dagon Ayer Bus Terminal (Dagon is the old historic name of Yangon). It's 45 minutes to an hour away by taxi west of the city centre on the other side of the Yangon River on Highway 5 (Yangon–Pathein Rd). More than 20 bus lines operate out of here.

There are several daily buses to Pathein, Chaungtha Beach and Ngwe Saung Beach, leaving from the early morning until 1pm. The more comfortable buses tend to leave

early in the morning. You can usually buy tickets for the same day.

Car

Many people choose to forgo both public transport and package tours by hiring a guide and car and maybe an additional driver for doing DIY tours. For some this combines the best of both worlds – relative comfort and safety and flexibility and personalised itineraries. This can be arranged through a travel agent (p89) or hotel front desk.

Train

The most frequented train from Yangon is the 14-hour trip north to Mandalay. While Myanmar Railways operate most services, a private company, Dagon-Mann also has a service on this route – the 17 up – which departs Yangon at 3.15pm. Ask at guesthouses or private travel agents for details and bookings.

Theoretically foreigners are not allowed to buy tickets for any berths below 1st class. A 1st-class seat costs US\$30 (no air-con or video); an ordinary upper seat US\$42; a special upper seat (reclining) US\$45; an ordinary sleeper US\$48; and a superior sleeper (with private bathroom and fridge) US\$50. Tickets may be reserved up to a month in advance. It's possible to get off anywhere along the way, the most relevant stops, being Bago, Taungoo and Thazi. Another line heads north to Pyay and to Kyaiktiyo and Mottama to the south.

For general train enquiries, call **Yangon central train station** (Map p98; ☎ 274 027; 🕒 6am–4pm). See p367 for information on

rail travel within Myanmar using Myanmar Railways.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Taxi drivers will approach you before exiting the airport terminal. The standard fare for a ride from the airport to anywhere in the city is US\$3. It's best to have a few single bills so that you don't have to change money in the airport (see p89). From the city centre to the airport it can cost slightly less (K2000 to K3000).

Boat

Cross-river ferries to Dalah (US\$1), on the southern bank of the Yangon River, leave about every 20 minutes from Pansodan St jetty (for pedestrians), at the foot of Pansodan St from the early morning to the evening.

You can hire privately owned sampans (flat-bottomed skiffs) from the Pansodan or Botataung jetties for K500 per hour if you just want to have a look at the river life.

Bus

Over 40 city bus routes connect the townships within Yangon. Many buses date to the 1940s. Often, they're impossibly crowded; a Myanmar bus is not full until every available handhold for those hanging off the sides and back has been taken. Other routes use newer air-conditioned Japanese and Korean buses that aren't too bad; some routes also use pick-up trucks with benches in the back. If you can find a space on a bus you can go anywhere in central Yangon for K5. Longer routes cost K10 to K20. Prices often double at night – still cheap and still crowded.

Useful bus routes include these:

Bogyoke Aung San Market to Mingala Zei (south-east of Kandawgyi) Japanese pick-up No 1.

Sule Paya to Thamaing Junction (8 Mile Junction) Along Insein Rd; bus Nos 44, 45 and 53.

Sule Paya to the airport Via Hledan junction, Pyay Rd, University of Yangon, western side of Inya Lake and Yangon City Hotel. Blue bus Nos 51, 53 and air-con No 51.

Kaba Aye Paya to Mae La Mu Paya Bus No 43.

Sule Paya to Aung Mingalar Bus Station Bus Nos 43, 45, 51.

Sule Paya to Hlaing Thar Yar Bus Station Bus Nos 54, 59 and 96.

Insein to Thein Byu Rd Near the YMCA, Three Seasons Hotel and Cozy Guest House. Green pick-up No 48.

Shwedagon Paya Bus Nos 37, 43 and 46.

Chaukhtatgyi Paya Bus Nos 42, 47.

Taxi

All licensed taxis carry red licence plates, though there is often little else to distinguish a taxi from any other vehicle in Yangon. The most expensive licensed taxis are the, usually older, mid-sized Japanese cars; many missing their door handles and other 'extras'.

Fares are highly negotiable – most trips around the central area shouldn't cost more than K1000 one way, and K1000 to K1500 for longer trips. You can also hire a taxi for about K3000 an hour. For the entire day, you should pay from US\$15 to US\$30 depending on the quality of the vehicle and your negotiating skills. Be sure to work out all details before you agree to a price and itinerary. From downtown to the highway bus terminal drivers ask for K2500 to K3500 and the trip takes from 45 minutes to an hour. To the Hlaing Thar Yar Bus Terminal taxis charge around K3000.

For all types of taxis the asking fares usually leap by 30% or so after sunset and on weekends, when rationed petrol isn't available. Late-night taxis – after 11pm or so – often cost double the day rate, mainly because the supply of taxis on hand is considerably lower than in the day, so the drivers are able to charge more.

Many drivers speak enough English to understand directions to your destination but it's advisable to have someone write them out for you in Burmese as insurance.

Train

A circular train route loops out north from Yangon to Insein, Mingaladon and North Okkalapa townships and then back into the city. For more info see p104.

Trishaw

Every Asian country seems to have its own interpretation of the bicycle trishaw. In Myanmar, trishaw passengers ride with the driver, but back to back – one facing forward, one backward. These contraptions are called *saik-ka* (as in side-car) and to ride one costs roughly from K250 to K500.

Nowadays trishaws are not permitted on the main streets between midnight and 10am. They're most useful for side streets and areas of town where traffic is light.

TRAIN TRAVEL FROM YANGON

Destination	2nd	1st	Sleeper	Departure time	Duration
Bagan	US\$11	US\$34	US\$34	8.30am, 10am	19hrs
Kyaiktiyo*	US\$4	US\$9	-	7am, 10pm	8hrs
Mandalay*	US\$13	US\$30–38	US\$50	6am, 11.30am, 3.15pm, 5pm, 6.30pm, 7.30pm, 9pm	14hrs
Mottama	na	US\$17	-	(see Kyaiktiyo)	9hrs
Pyay	US\$17	-	-	7am	7hr
Shwenyaung	US\$13	US\$26	-	3.30pm	21hrs
Taungoo	US\$7	US\$19	-	(see Mandalay)	9hrs
Thazi	US\$10	US\$26	US\$34	(see Mandalay)	12hrs

* Also stops at Bago en route.

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