



Myanmar has to be one of my favourite destinations in Asia. There are amazing things to see in Myanmar. It is also one of the more controversial destinations to visit. Below, I discuss whether you should have a Myanmar holiday at all and all the practical information about this country including visas, how to get around, what to pack, etc.

Should you go to Myanmar?

Beyond the questions about whether you would enjoy Myanmar, what there is to do, how much it costs etc, is the question about whether it is responsible to travel to Myanmar or if you are hurting this country's people.

In very simple terms, Myanmar was ruled for years by a repressive military dictatorship. Free speech and political opposition was suppressed. There was ethnic civil war. Economic sanctions were put in place and the country's pro-democracy leaders asked for an international travel boycott. Many people heeded their advice (myself included) and the number of tourists that visited Myanmar were low.

The political direction of Myanmar has improved. In 2010, elections were held and a civilian president is now in power. Sanctions have been lifted. Calls for tourists to avoid visiting have quietened. However, the elections were far from fair and violence between different ethnic groups still continues.



Shwedagon Pagoda

Whether to visit or not is a personal choice. If you do decide to go, travelling responsibly is recommended. Your holiday in Myanmar should involve as much local travel as possible to try and avoid putting money into the Government's hands. Stay at local guesthouses, eat at local restaurants and shop at local markets.

It is an amazing country and the upside of all of this is the lack of tourists. Even though people talk as though Myanmar is full of tourists now that was not my reality at all. At most tourist attractions, I saw other foreign tourists, but I spent most days without seeing barely any just by walking around the cities and towns that I visited. I only saw two other foreigners in the couple of hours that I spent at Shwedagon Pagoda. I did see bus loads at the more tourist focused destinations in Mandalay though, but it was hardly overrun.

My Itinerary

I went to Myanmar alone, leaving J and the kids in Malaysia. For this reason, I wanted to be as fast as possible while still ensuring that I saw a reasonable slice of the country to make the trip worthwhile. I feel that I achieved this, and I saw my list of top things to do in Myanmar. This was my itinerary:

Day 1

I flew into Mandalay from Bangkok. I caught the free Air Asia shuttle into town and checked into the M3 Hotel (you can see the latest prices for this hotel [here](#)). I then explored Mandalay Palace and Mandalay Hill.



U-Bein Bridge

Day 2

I took a boat to Mingun and explored this area. On my return to Mandalay, I hired a taxi to take me to Sagaing Hill, Inwa and U-Bein bridge.

[Read more about Mandalay in my guide.](#)

Day 3

I was up early and flew to Bagan. I was in Bagan before 8am and headed straight to Ananda Pahto. I then walked around Old Bagan and some of the surrounds before having a late lunch at [Be Kind To Animals](#) [The Moon](#). I then headed back to the airport and did some work while waiting for my early evening flight to Yangon.

[Read my guide to Bagan here.](#)

In Yangon, I caught a taxi to my hotel ([more details here](#)) and went for a walk to get a feel for Yangon. It was well and truly dark at this point but the streets were alive and I felt perfectly safe. I had dinner at a street stall.



Exploring Yangon

Day 4

I was up early to explore Yangon in the nice, cool air. I started with a walking tour that was in **Lonely Planet** and took me around some temples and colonial architecture in Yangon. It was still early so I caught a taxi to Shwedagon Pagoda. I spent a couple of hours here before having lunch and taking a break from sightseeing.

I then visited the Bogyoke Aung San Market and walked around some more before an early dinner.

Read the full guide to Yangon here.

Day 5

I headed back early to the airport ready to return to my family in Malaysia.

Myanmar with Kids

I decided not to travel to Myanmar with kids primarily because of the ground transportation. Every option seemed long and arduous and just not something worth trying with a 2 and a 4 year old. Flying around would have been ok, but too expensive for four of us.

I feel like this was a good decision. With older kids that are happy to deal with long travel days, then I am sure it would be fine.

My other concern was the tourist attractions in Myanmar. There are kid friendly attractions, but the fact is that basically everything I did in Mandalay would not have been suitable for young kids. I am not sure it

would have been worth all the effort to get there, just to play in a playground and go to the zoo. I would have hated to go and miss out on what I saw as Myanmar's top attractions. Yangon is different and I think we would have lots of fun there.

The locals are very welcoming of children, and I do not think you would have any problems visiting Myanmar with kids – as long as you have the money to fly or kids who can deal with long journeys.

When to Visit

I can only talk about hot season as that is what it was when I was there. I worried beforehand as I have been to Thailand and Cambodia in hot season before and did not enjoy it very much. I did not find it bad in Myanmar.

It was a dry heat so I found it much more pleasant than Malaysia and it only bothered me in the middle of the day if I stood in direct sunlight. In the morning and evening, the weather was cooler than I am used to.

Getting to Myanmar

Going to Myanmar is going to include a flight to a neighbouring country and then flying on. I flew Air Asia between Myanmar and Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. It was cheap and easy. My 2.5 hour flight from Yangon to Kuala Lumpur was only US\$50!

Check the latest visa restrictions before you book your flight. Just after booking my flights, they started issuing visas on arrival at Yangon airport. This was very annoying since I had booked to fly into Mandalay (but would have done it differently otherwise). It is now fine at both airports, but these things can change.



Visas

Just about all foreigners need a visa. This process is much more straightforward now that you can apply for an eVisa – check out full information [here](#).

Money

There are many ATMS sprinkled around the places I visited. Be warned that many do not work. I walked around for hours the one morning I wanted to use one as they kept being out of service. There is a 5,000 kyat fee on all withdrawals (about US\$5).

I recommend bringing US dollars to avoid these fees and hassles. They are easy to change. The higher the dollar value on the bill, the better exchange rate you will get. I read a lot of blogs before my visit saying that you need notes in pristine condition, but this isn't true anymore. I was able to change folded notes, but I would ensure they are all relatively good.

Power point plugs and sockets

I found three variations in Myanmar – British, Europe and Australia style! Be prepared. There were two different styles in each of my hotel rooms.

Travelling in Myanmar

Getting around Myanmar can be hard work. There are boats, buses and trains that will get you to most parts of this country. Journey times can be long, uncomfortable and things go wrong. [This article](#) about train travel in Myanmar ensured I never took one! Locals told me to keep away from the trains as well.



My flight to Bagan

I was on such a tight timeframe that flying was the best option. On some routes it is actually quite affordable and not much different to the more comfortable land options.

I flew Air Bagan from Mandalay to Bagan. I actually booked the ticket with Golden Myanmar online, but this flight was cancelled and I was automatically transferred to an Air Bagan flight at the same time.

It was only a 30 minute flight, but it was great. It seemed like a new plane. It was mostly empty and they have me coke and lollies. I was happy!

I flew Air KBZ from Bagan to Yangon which I also booked online. This flight was also very smooth and easy. I received a small meal and a snack and the flight took about 1.25 hours.

What to pack

It is very unusual to see anyone in short shorts/dresses/skirts or singlet tops even foreigners. People (both locals and foreigners) wore clothes that kept shoulders and knees covered. These areas are required to be covered at temples. This includes men as well. If your shorts come to your knees (but don't cover them), you will need a sorong or the local longyi to wear at these times.



Sign you will see at all the temples

I recommend taking 3/4 length pants or the good old fisherman pants.

I also recommend taking everything you need with you into the country. I did not see much variety in goods and although things like toiletries are everywhere, they are not necessarily what you will find at home. Definitely take your own sunscreen.

Final thoughts

I absolutely loved Myanmar. It was like stepping back in time to how I imagine SE Asia used to be. I hate clichés like that but I don't know how else to describe it. To use another cliché, it is somewhere you should definitely visit now – don't wait! I am sure things will change quickly as more people visit.



Temples in Bagan

For me, it was a perfect level of tourism at the moment. Enough tourists that enough people spoke some English and there were enough signs that getting around and dealing with the practicalities of travelling in a country were easy, but there are not so many tourists that I couldn't escape them or that the people have started overly trying to take advantage of tourists and their money like in a lot of other SE Asian countries.

The people are friendly and welcoming. Many are trying to learn English and ask to practise with you. Initially, I thought maybe they were trying to rip me off in some way, but that is just not the case in Myanmar.

It is also very interesting and there are plenty of places to visit in Myanmar. I would have also liked to go to Inle Lake and the coast. However, I did have a fabulous introduction with visiting Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan. My best things to do in Myanmar all centre around these places. All of them are quite different with quite different Myanmar tourist attractions. I recommend them all when you plan your own Myanmar holiday – which I hope you are doing! It's an amazing place – Go now!

The Quick Guide to Things to Do in Yangon

I remember when I first heard about Burma back in primary school. We were learning all the capitals and geographic locations of all the countries in the world. I thought it was quite funny that there was a city called Rangoon as I associated it with the word “racon” and imagined it was a city full of racoons.

Many years later I have made it to this city, now called Yangon. It is certainly not full of racoons. Instead, it is a massive, alive city, full of buzz and energy which I surprised myself by enjoying very much! If you ever plan to make it to Myanmar, you will no doubt end up in this city. Hopefully, the following guide of what to do in Yangon, where to stay and eat, how to get around, etc, helps you to enjoy it as much as me.

Top Things to do in Yangon

There are a surprising amount of things to see in Yangon. The following are the top tourist attractions in Yangon which you should try not to miss.

Shwedagon Pagoda



Shwedagon Pagoda

I was totally blow away by Shwedagon Pagoda. It is amazing.

I had been told that it was the one must visit attraction in Myanmar. From what I have seen, I have to agree. It would be one of the top temples I have ever seen. In fact, the only one that beats it on my list is the [Golden Temple in India](#).

The centrepiece of Shwedagon is a 325 foot zedi, adorned with gold, diamonds and other gems and is believed to enshrine hairs of the Gautama Buddha (you can see it in the photo at the top of the page). It

looks spectacular, but I was expecting that especially as I had a sneak peak of this on the way to my hotel the night before. What I wasn't expecting was how big the entire site is with many other pagodas and images of Buddha. It seems to go on and on and it all has a peaceful, relaxed and incredibly special vibe.



For luck you can pour water over the Buddha that corresponds with your day of birth

It is impossible to describe or photograph in a way to do it justice. Just know that you need to get yourself here!

K8,000 entrance fee for foreigners. A taxi from central Yangon is K2,000 (may have to bargain for that). Early morning or sunset are the best times to visit.

Colonial and Religious Walking Tour



Sule Paya

The downtown area of Yangon has some beautiful colonial structures around Mahabandoola Gardens, as well as a mix of temples. Exploring this area on foot was a fun and interesting way to explore Yangon.

I started with 2200 year old Sule Paya, then walked along Mahabandoola Road. To the West, I found beautiful mosques. To the East is the big City Hall, colonial Government Buildings, the High Court with its bell towers and a big church. Mahabandoola Gardens is right here as well and is a great place to take a moment to relax (or for the kids to play if you have them).



Mahabandoola Gardens and High Court

I then explored along the riverfront where there is more colonial architecture. I finished with the book stalls near the corner Pansodan and Merchant Street which is known as the open air library in Yangon.

National Museum of Myanmar

The National Museum is the main museum for art, history and culture in Myanmar. This is a good way to learn more about the different cultural groups in Myanmar. Read more [here](#).

Botataung Paya

This riverfront paya is a great way to finish a walking tour of the downtown area. It is not as spectacular as Shwedagon but it is beautiful and in a great location by the river. It also has the bonus of far less people than Shwedagon.

K3,000 entry and K1,000 for a camera

Bogyoke Aung San Market



Bogyoke Aung San Market

This large sprawling market in downtown Yangon has over 2000 stalls with reputedly the largest selection of Myanmar souvenirs and handicrafts. It is a pleasant place to walk around. I did not find a very large range of items, however. If you want jewellery, paintings, shoulder bags or longyi then you are in luck! Or regular local clothing. I wondered around for quite awhile, but was unable to find something for the kids, so I left disappointed.

There is a range of fruit and vegetables for sale outside and a Parkson department store along with a supermarket next door.

Inya Lake

Another Yangon thing to do is to visit this lake. It is a beautiful spot to relax and enjoy some downtime in Yangon. It is also a great place for a jog or work out with many locals using the jogging tracks both times I passed by here. It is also the location of Aung San Suu Kyi's house where she spent her years of house arrest. In the evening, this area comes alive with many stalls and food options.

Yangon Circle Train

A popular way to see more of Yangon and its locals is to take the 32 mile Yangon circle line which is the local train. It makes a huge loop through Yangon for the bargain price of K1,000 and takes about three hours – meaning you are better off taking it until you are sick of it then catching a taxi back. Trains do not run very often.

It is meant to be a great way to view off the beaten track parts of the city and interact with locals. There are many reviews [here](#) that describes more about it. I decided not to do it as I also heard that it was just an uncomfortable journey to see lots of poverty and I was short of time. Anyway, the choice is yours!

Best Hotels in Yangon

Yangon is a big and as such there are a wide range of areas and hotels in Yangon. I recommend staying in the downtown area. It is easy to get to all the main attractions from here and I felt quite safe walking around even at night. Here are my top picks, all are family friendly.

- Hninn Si Budget Inn – This is where I stayed. It is nice and cheap, clean and in the downtown area. It also has triple and quadruple rooms so great for families. [Check out the latest prices here.](#)
- Hotel Grand United 21st Downtown – For a step up in just about everything, this mid range hotel offers excellent value. [Check out the latest prices and reviews here.](#)
- Governor’s Residence – if money isn’t a problem, this is my top pick in Yangon. In a previous life, it was a guesthouse for important nationals. It is now a beautifully restored luxury option with a beautiful pool. You can’t go wrong staying here. [Read more about it here.](#)

Where to eat in Yangon

You will certainly not go hungry in Yangon. There is food everywhere. There are stalls on many corners as well as many restaurants. You can also find a supermarket next to the market.

The best restaurants in Yangon are often those you just find on your street corner! However, here are some choices I enjoyed:

- 999 Shan Noodle House – Delicious Shan style noodles that not only taste good but are very cheap. They are also currently ranked as the best restaurant in Yangon according to TripAdvisor. More information [here](#).
- Cafe Sule – Excellent buffets with a variety of food, but not cheap. More information [here](#).

Getting to and from Yangon

Yangon is the best connected city in Myanmar. It is not hard to get flights, buses or trains here. It is also the easiest city to fly into internationally with many airlines flying here including some budget airlines. I was able to pick up a flight from here to Kuala Lumpur for the bargain price of \$50 including taxes. It is also a good choice of city to start your Myanmar journey as there are now visas on arrival for many nationalities at Yangon International Airport.

Getting Around

Taxis are cheap and easy and I had no problems with them understanding English. Short trips are only K1,000-2,000. The one hour drive to the airport K8,000. There is also the circle train mentioned above, but it does not go to many destinations that would appeal to tourists.

What to pack

Similar to Bagan and Mandalay, it is normal to keep shoulders and knees covered up here. There is a much wider range of clothing worn by inhabitants here compared to the other places but many people are still in traditional longyi.

Yangon with Kids

The kids were not with me, but as normal I kept an eye out for what to see and do in Yangon with kids. The above Yangon attractions would all work with kids as well. If you are looking for baby items, such as nappies and formula, the supermarket next to the market sells them.

Best Things to do in Yangon with Kids

Mahabandoola Garden



Playground at Mahabandoola Garden

These beautiful gardens are centrally located and surrounded by some interesting colonial architecture as well as the 2200 year old Sule Paya. There is plenty of room for the kids to run around here, as well as a playground.

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People's Park



Photo Credit: [Jason Eppink](#) via [cc](#)

Next door to the Shwedagon Pagoda, the People's Park has plenty of things to do with kids including gardens, fountains, tree-top observation posts connected by swinging bridges, an old Myanmar Airways jet, fighter jet and steam train that the kids can play on. There is also the Natural World Amusement Park and the kids' amusement park, Happy Zone.

There is a K5,000 admission charge to the park. It costs extra for rides at the amusement parks.

Kandawgyi Lake

This is another Yangon tourist attraction that is great with kids not far from Shwedagon Pagoda.

Here, there is an artificial lake with a boardwalk and gardens. On the eastern side, there is a park with a small playground and paintball for older kids.

There is a K2,000 admission charge to the lake area.

Yangon Zoological Gardens

This small zoo is next to the lake and is home to many species of mammals and birds. As with the zoo in Mandalay, some of the cage conditions and the chaining up of animals is a problem.

Pools

There are several local pools as well as the option to pay to access one at one of the hotels if you are not staying at a place with your own pool. Kandawgyi Swimming Club has a paddling pool for toddlers. Parkroyal, Savoy and Chatrium offer access to their pools.

If you have travelled to Yangon with kids, I would love to hear your thoughts in the comments below!

Budget

My two nights in Yangon cost me about US\$80 including accommodation, taxis, attractions and food.

My verdict

I was surprised by how much I liked Yangon as I usually find large developing country cities hard to stomach. However, Yangon has a very pleasant and exciting vibe. I loved just walking around the busy streets. I felt perfectly safe walking around at night alone too. Everywhere I went, the streets were packed.



Outside the Bogyoke Aung San Market

It has the cosmopolitan feel of a big city and the cultural mix of Myanmar was much more noticeable here – in the faces of the people, the food and the temples. People were always friendly and helpful and the average person seemed to speak at least a few words of English. People often said hello as I passed and would try out some English on me in shops and restaurants.

Shwegadon Pagoda blew me away. It is by far my highlight of the attractions I visited in Myanmar.

I came to Yangon seeing the destination as a necessary stop to fly back to Malaysia, but I left feeling like it is was actually my favourite place in Myanmar. Don't ignore it in your own itineraries!

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The Quick Guide to How to Survive & Things to Do in Mandalay

Mandalay.

That word has always sounded so exotic and mysterious to me. Even before I knew anything about it, I knew I wanted to go.

At initial glance, this city does not live up to the mysteriousness that its name implies. It's hot, dusty and busy. However, it's charms soon grew on me. From it's lovely walkway along the moat to the countless pagodas and monasteries, to the beautiful surrounding areas and horse and carts. I felt like I had gone back in time to how Asia used to be before tourism took over. It's a fabulous place to be.

Things to do in Mandalay

Mandalay Hill



On top of Mandalay Hill

Walking up this hill is a must do Mandalay attraction. Mandalay is flat so there are good views from this 760 foot hill – if the whole city isn't in a haze like it was when I was there. However, even without the views, I found this walk fantastic.

The walk takes about 40 minutes up a covered stairway on the southern slope of the hill. There are plenty of places to stop with bench seats lining most of the walkway, so it is very easy (and more pleasant) to take your time. It must be walked barefoot.



Stairs up Mandalay Hill

There are many stalls and praying opportunities on the way as well as a large standing Buddha and various other statues. At the top of Mandalay Hill is a great temple area. There are also far more people as you can also drive up and take a lift to the top.

For me, the top was nice, but nothing that spectacular. The walk, however, was priceless especially as I was mostly alone. Walk it if at all possible. This is also a popular place to watch the sunset.

There is a K1,000 camera fee at the top. People ask for K300 to keep your shoes at the bottom. I'd recommend tucking them in your bag and taking them with you as that way you have the flexibility to walk down a different side on your descent or to take a taxi down. Knees and shoulders must be covered at the summit.

Mandalay Palace



The other big Mandalay attraction is Mandalay Palace, located in the centre of the fortress area. It is a 1990s reconstruction of the original and makes for an impressive site with more than 40 timber buildings. There is a watchtower to climb and a minor museum and information displays.

I enjoyed having a walk around, but if you need to skip something on this list, this is what I would skip.

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Admission is via a 10,000 Mandalay combo ticket which will also give you entry to many other attractions around Mandalay. Tourists are only allowed to enter via the East Gate and are not allowed to wander off the main road heading to the palace.

Moat and Walls



Walking next to the moat

Surrounding the area where the palace is located is a 230 foot wide moat with over 4 miles of 26 foot tall walls. These form a square in the centre of Mandalay around the site of the former fortress. Next to the moat, is a wide, shaded footpath which makes for a pleasant walk. I enjoyed walking along here. Just don't be like me and try to walk the whole lot!

U-Bein Bridge



U-Bein Bridge

Another Myanmar must see is the U-Bein Bridge – the longest teak footbridge in the world. It is 1300 yards long across Taungthaman Lake. The experience varies a lot depending on which season you visit – there was no water under most of the bridge when I was here. After the summer rains, apparently the water comes up to just under the bridge planks.

It's a fun place to walk along and many locals were playing, relaxing and going about their business when I visited. Sunset is the best time to go when many villagers are commuting across the bridge.

U-Bein Bridge is about a 15 minute taxi ride south of central Myanmar.

Sagaing



The top of Sagaing Hill

Sagaing is a beautiful place to spend some time just a short drive from Mandalay. The low rising green hills seem covered in gold and white stupas and the effect is just gorgeous. My driver told me this is where people come to meditate. It looks like a great option to me. Many of the 1600 monasteries that surround Mandalay are located here.

The highlight of Sagaing is climbing one of the many covered stairways up the hills past monasteries, nunneries and temples to viewpoints of the river and the surrounding hills.

I climbed up Sagaing Hill. It is also possible to drive up but, similarly to Mandalay Hill, I think you lose the best part of the experience of visiting here if you skip the climb. It was relatively easy and the undercover stairway was lined with bench seats. There is also a shrine to visit on the way up.

The temple at the top was a highlight of my time in Mandalay. There were many local people and some stunning outfits that eclipsed the great views.

Take a taxi or motorbike to Sagaing. It is about a 30 minute drive from Mandalay. It is close to Inwa and U-Bein Bridge so can be combined with a visit there.

Inwa



Inwa. Photo Credit: [Inwa Temples](#) via cc

Inwa, an area south of Mandalay near Sagaing, has been the royal capital 4 times since 1364 before it was finally abandoned in 1841. Today it is a rural area with ruins, monasteries and stupas. The easiest way to visit this attraction is a boat ride over the Myitnge River (this is where taxis will drop you off) and then riding around by horse and cart. There are no taxis here.

The Mandalay Combo ticket described above is required for Inwa. The riverboat crossing is K800 return and a horse and cart starts at K6000 for an hour. There is a boat here from Mandalay or you can take a taxi or motorcycle taxi. It makes sense to combine a trip here with Sagaing and U-Bein Bridge.

Mingun



Mingun Pahtodawgyi

Mingun is a village up the river from Mandalay. The main attractions here are some beautiful temples especially the Mingun Pahtodawgyi. It is an incomplete stupa and is absolutely huge. It was never completed. If it had of been, it would be the largest in the world at 150 metres. It makes for quite a site – I thought it was a hill when I first saw it! It's a steep, but relatively quick climb to the top with great views over the surrounding temples. This was one of my highlights in Mandalay.

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Standing on top of Mingun Pahtodawgyi

There is also the Mingun Bell which is the heaviest functioning bell, and many other temples that are worth a visit. The streets are lined with stalls so this is also a good shopping opportunity – although be careful as the quality is not great if my purchases are anything to go by.

I visited here on a boat, but it is also possible to visit via taxi which will have to travel via Sagaing to get here from Mandalay. The boat ride is part of the appeal. It takes about 50 minutes and is a nice introduction to Myanmar. I was able to see Mingun and its temples from quite a distance away.

The return boat ride is K5,000 and leaves Mandalay at 9am. Entry to Mingun Bell and Mingun Pahtodawgyi costs K3,000. It is easy to walk around Mingun on foot but there are ox and carts and tricycles if you want transport.

Best Hotels in Mandalay



My room at the M3 Hotel

There are a wide range of hotels in Mandalay. Here are my top picks, all are family friendly.

- M3 Hotel – this has to be my top pick as I loved staying here. My room was fantastic, the bed comfy and the service impeccable. It is a bargain for the price at \$40 a night. It also had the cheapest minibar I have ever seen and a great Sky Bar. I loved eating dinner and having a beer at sunset here. I stayed in a standard room which was fine, but there are also suites and large family rooms available. The internet is ok. [Check it out here.](#)

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- Mandalay City Hotel – this large hotel is right across the road from the M3 but a world away. The best part about this place is the outdoor pool, making this a great choice for families who want something to keep the kids happy or for couples or singles that also want to relax while in Mandalay. It is also possible to pay to visit this pool as a non resident. [Check out Mandalay City Hotel here.](#)
- For the budget conscious, Hotel A1 is a great, clean, excellent priced option for under \$30. [Check out the latest prices and reviews here.](#)

Where to eat in Mandalay



View from Sky Bar at M3 Hotel

There are restaurants and food stalls littered all around the place and everywhere I ate had great food. Here are some choices I enjoyed:

- PTS Restaurant – this restaurant looked like the nicest one in Mingun in a central location. It was also the one place I saw that had English menus. The staff were friendly, the food delicious and the price was even better. I paid 2,500 for a plate of noodles (which came with a bowl of soup), a can of Coke Zero and a big bottle of water to take with me.
- [M3 Hotel Sky Bar](#) – non residents can also visit this bar on the top floor of the M3 Hotel which also serves all the food available in the hotel restaurant. The prices are great and the food delicious. I particularly enjoyed the vegetarian spring rolls.
- Super 81 – this cheap Chinese restaurant is excellent. Downstairs is a normal looking beer station* with an air conditioned restaurant up top. There is also a barbecue. Portions are big, prices low. [See more here.](#)

**Beer stations are basically outdoor/undercover seating areas that serve cheap beer and barbeques.*

Getting to and from Mandalay

There is an international airport in Mandalay, a train station, buses and boats. I flew into Mandalay on a bargain airfare on Air Asia and flew out again on Air Bagan. The airport is about an hour from the city. Air Asia has a free bus between there and central Myanmar. A taxi cost me K12,000 in the early hours of the morning to return.

After flying, buses can be the best option to get to and from Mandalay. The trains can be very uncomfortable with long journey times. The boat is also long and only works if you are coming from certain destinations, like Bagan. It can also run into problems – another tourist was telling me his boat from Bagan got stuck on a sand bar and took 3 hours to get off turning this journey into a 15 hour one. I paid about the same price for my flight as that boat as well!

Getting Around



You can also take this for of transport in Inwa and Mingun

The main way to get around Mandalay is by taxi or motorbike taxi. Generally, motorbike taxis are about K1,000 – 2,000 within Mandalay with normal taxis about twice the price. They always have a spare helmet available. It can be a bit more difficult to find a normal taxi.

You can also hire a bicycle or moped. Mandalay is mostly very flat, but it is a hot and dusty place.

There are also pick ups which are the public transportation. These are confusing and very full. There are often no seats and everyone is just squished in.

Itinerary Ideas

I only spent 1.5 days in Mandalay and was able to do all of the above. I did not have anything else on my list things to see in Mandalay so I was very happy with my time frame. This is what I did:

Day 1: Arrived afternoon, set off to Mandalay Palace and then Mandalay Hill

Day 2: Return boat to Mingun. On arrival back to Mandalay, hopped straight in a taxi for Sagaing, Inwa, U-Bein Bridge. It was a busy day and in an ideal world, I would split this over two days. However, it is completely possible as well.

A smarter idea if you need to do all this in one day would be to hire a taxi in Mandalay before heading to Mingun to pick you up in Mingun. On the boat trip, we were there for 3 hours and I only really needed 1-2 hours.

If you do not have much time at all, Mingun and Sagaing were my highlights. You could easily do these two destinations in half a day with your own driver.

What to pack

It is very unusual to see anyone in short shorts/dresses/skirts or singlet tops even foreigners. In fact, I don't think I saw any. Temples will require shoulders and knees to be covered and people generally wear clothes that cover these areas at all times. This includes men. I recommend taking 3/4 length pants or the good old [fisherman pants](#).

Mandalay with Kids

I did not take my kids to Mandalay. However, I cannot help but keep an eye out for kid friendly attractions. Below are some things to do in Mandalay with kids. For the above attractions, they would all be suitable for older kids. If you have younger kids, like mine, many attractions would not work unfortunately. I would recommend driving to the tops of Mandalay and Sagaing Hills.

The U-Bein Bridge would terrify my little ones (and me) as there are big gaps between some of the planks and there are no railings along the sides. The boat to Mingun also did not have decent railings, so I would avoid that with young kids too. The horse and cart rides might be fun – for a few minutes, but they are also too squishy for a family and lying room only. I think kids would get uncomfortable and bored of it quickly.

Things to do in Mandalay with Kids

Yadanapon Zoological Gardens

This 53 acre zoo is located at the base of Mandalay Hill near the fortress walls. It has some attractive gardens and over 300 animals, although the conditions of some of the cages can be upsetting.

K2,000 admission per person.

City Park



City Park

I walked past this park near the river in the early morning when it was shut, but it looked like lots of fun! Check out this review [here](#) for more details.

Mandalay City Hotel pool

If you are not staying at the Mandalay City Hotel, you can use its pool for K5,000 each.

If you have travelled to Mandalay with kids, I would love to hear your thoughts in the comments below!

<http://www.wheressharon.com/country/myanmar-travel-blog/>

Budget

My two nights in Mandalay cost me about US\$180 including accommodation, taxis, attractions and food. I also bought a pair of trousers (which broke straight away) and thongs/flip flops after mine broke. It would not have cost much more for someone else to be with me since the major costs were accommodation and taxis.

My verdict

I loved Mandalay. It wasn't what I expected, but that was not a bad thing. For some reason, I imagined a hilly, green, jungle location, but actually Mandalay is surrounded by dry scrub and is flat. I enjoyed walking around this city and taking it all in. It was rare I would see other foreigners apart from at the attractions.



Mandalay Palace

The sites above are all worth visiting. I particularly liked Mingun and the walks up Sagaing and Mandalay Hills. The one thing I didn't like was the dust. I felt dirty all of the time.

The people are friendly and there is enough English around that life is not difficult. I loved the simplicity of things – like the horse and carts. I really did feel like I had stepped back in time. It was lovely to be somewhere that is easy to navigate and explore but still not ruined by tourism.

The Quick Guide to Bagan

The former Burmese capital of Bagan is a must visit destination in Myanmar thanks to the amazing amount of temples in this area. Everywhere I looked was a temple, stupa or pagoda with many dating back to the 12th century. There are literally thousands.

What is known as Bagan is actually an area with three different “towns” – Nyuang U, Old Bagan and New Bagan and a spread out area of temples. Nyuang U is the bigger town and home to the train station, jetty and airport. New Bagan is a new village that was created in 1990 to house the people that formerly lived in Old Bagan who were forced to leave at that time. Old Bagan is home to many of the ruins and temples of this region and where you will find the best concentration.

I loved exploring this region, especially around Old Bagan which is where I focused the majority of my sightseeing. There were far less people around than I expected which only added to the experience.

Things to do in Bagan

Bagan is all about the temples and all activities and attractions are focused on this. Here are some suggestions...

Create your own Walking Tour of Old Bagan

The temples in Old Bagan are all quite close together and it is easy to do your own walking tour. I loved the flexibility that walking provided and it was never more than a few minutes between temples. Walking allowed me to stop wherever I fancied very easily. I could also walk between the temples using little paths instead of the roads in many sections and I was able to explore without all the crowds.



There really are temples EVERYWHERE!

I had a map but it was not necessary. I started my “tour” just outside the Old Bagan’s walls at Ananda Pahto and walked in from there. I did a nice round circuit over a few hours including some temples outside of Old Bagan – it is easy to leave accidentally as the walls are not fully enclosed.

I was worried about the heat before I set out, but despite being hot season and the fact that I was carrying all my luggage, I did not find it a problem. I loved being able to set my own path and feel like I was discovering the temples myself. My favourite temples from this tour are listed below.

Ananda Pahto



Ananda Pahto

This shimmering 51 metre high temple just outside of Old Bagan cannot be missed. It is described by Lonely Planet as “one of the finest, largest, best preserved and most revered of all Bagan Temples”. It is thought to be built between 1090 and 1105 and it is a beautiful sight. Inside, there are 4 x 9 metre standing Buddha statues.



Ananda Pahto

This was the busiest temple I visited, but even here I was basically by myself when I wandered around the outside.

Shwe Gu Gyi



Shwe Gu Gyi

This was the first temple I visited inside of Old Bagan's walls and one of my favourites. It's small, but I was able to walk up into upper level of the temple where there were great views, particularly of Thatbyinnyu.

<http://www.wheressharon.com/country/myanmar-travel-blog/>

Thatbyinnyu



Thatbyinnyu from Shwe Gu Gyi

This is Bagan's highest temple at 63 meters tall and built in 1144. Unfortunately, it is not possible to climb up the temple but it is definitely worth exploring this beauty.

Buphaya



Buphaya

This stupa is thought by some to date back to the 3rd century, although it is more likely to be the 9th. The original was destroyed in an earthquake in 1975, but it has been reconstructed. I liked this stupa as it is right by and above the river, so there are great views. There were also big local crowds here which gave it a party like atmosphere.

Archaeological Museum



Archaeological Museum

This museum is housed in a massive, out of place looking 19th century style temple. There are many artefacts from the Bagan region here including reclining Buddhas, inscribed stones and original images.

Car/Motorbike/Bicycle/Horse and Cart Tour of Bagan Region

There is a wide range of transportation available to take you around the thousands of temples in this region. Pick which temples you want to go to most or find a knowledgeable driver to take you to their favourites. It is not hard to work something out. Prices start around \$35 a day for a car and driver. Less for other options.

Hot Air Ballooning

If there is one place in the world to do a hot air balloon trip, this would have to be it! Take off for a 45 minute journey to see Bagan's sprawl of temples from the air. It is not cheap, but it is amazing. Tickets can be booked out a month in advance, so book as soon as you know where you will go. Read more [here](#).

Boat Trips



The river from Buphaya

Once you have seen Bagan by air and land, another option is a sunset boat trip on the Ayeyarwady.

Best Hotels in Bagan

I recommend booking accommodation in advance unless you do not have much luggage as walking possibly long distances in the heat between guesthouses is difficult. None of these suggestions are run by the Government.

- Aye Yar River View Resort – if you are not on a tight budget then this is the best all round option for Old Bagan. The resort recently had a major makeover and features fabulous river views, a great pool area and spacious bungalows. It's great for families as well as singles and couples. It's easy to walk outside and explore the temples of Old Bagan from here. [Check the latest prices here.](#)
- Golden Myanmar Guest House – for a budget friendly option, try this guest house in Nyaung U. It's simple but in a handy location and nice and cheap – [see the price here.](#)

Where to eat in Bagan

You will not have a problem finding something to eat in Bagan. There are plenty of options. I highly recommend this great place...

Be Kind to Animals the Moon



Outside of Be Kind to Animals The Moon

This place may have a strange name but it is an oasis just outside of Tharabar Gate in Old Bagan. Despite being located in a dusty car park area with many other eateries, the garden set up makes this place stand out, as does the delicious vegetarian cuisine, English menus and staff. A great place to stop for lunch when exploring Old Bagan. [Read more here.](#)

Getting to and from Bagan

There are bus, trains and flights from Yangon and these options as well as a boat from [Mandalay](#). You can also hire taxis to wherever you like. The overland journeys can be arduous – everyone I talked to had tales about how the journey time was a lot longer than expected. Things go wrong. One guy was telling me how his boat hit a sand bank and it took three hours to get off it!

I flew which was nice and easy. From Mandalay, I flew on Air Bagan. I originally booked it online via Golden Myanmar Airlines for only US\$35, so it is worth looking into flights as that is a similar price to the fast boat (which takes 11+ hours). My flight was cancelled but I was automatically transferred to Air Bagan.

Getting Around

Taxis from the airport are K6,000 to Old Bagan, K5,000 to Nyuang U and K7,000 to New Bagan. Taxis and horse and carts are readily available to take you around. You can hire them between locations or for the day. It's about \$35 for a taxi and half that for a horse and cart.

There is also the popular option of hiring a bicycle, electric bicycle or motorbike. Keep in mind many of the roads are dirt or gravel and it is very hot on the roads.

What to Pack/Wear

This is definitely a place to wear long skirts, trousers and ¾ length shorts. All of Old Bagan is considered a sacred area and you need to cover your knees and shoulders. My guide book said to cover elbows too, but locals were not doing this so I don't think it is necessary.

Taking a sarong around to cover up does not really work here. I recommend lightweight, ¾ length pants.

A hat is also essential as is sunscreen. I recommend bringing everything you need from home. In my experience, it was hard to find anything of quality. I bought the long pants everyone is selling here just to have them break the first time I put them on!

Sandals/thongs/flip flops can be the best footwear since you need to take them on and off regularly. However, if you want to go exploring by foot, I recommend good walking shoes. It's more comfortable to walk across the scrub this way.

Bagan with Kids

The attractions in Bagan are not kid focused. However, I think it would be easy for kids to enjoy exploring temples and the open space. Younger kids will probably get bored quickly, so you may need to be creative to keep them entertained. I would definitely book the hotel mentioned above with a pool.

Budget

I spent K40,000 on a day in Bagan including two taxi rides, meals and the entry ticket to Bagan Archaeological Zone. This pass is required to visit this area and you buy it on arrival at the Airport and river jetty for US\$20.

My verdict

Bagan is a fabulous destination. I have never been anywhere like it. There are temples just everywhere. I sat in amazement on the taxi drive to Old Bagan from the airport as the temples became more and more concentrated until it seemed like they were everywhere.



More temples!

Thanks to it being such a spread out site with thousands of temples, I never felt like I was overrun by other tourists. I especially liked wandering around and exploring by myself. I went to many temples where I was the only one there.

I visited Angkor Wat nearly ten years ago to the day and I couldn't help but draw parallels. I personally much preferred Bagan. The temples were generally in better condition, and I found it easy to walk around and be by myself. This is definitely going up there with [Tikal](#) and [Rome](#) as some of my favourite archaeological sites in the world.

I do have one regret – my tight timeframe meant that I did not get to go on a hot air balloon ride – next time!