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ACCOMMODATION

This guidebook lists many of Myanmar's 600 or so licensed, privately run hotels and guesthouses. Many are simple family-run guesthouses or minihotels, sometimes just with bubbly vinyl flooring laid over concrete, a mosquito net, a fan that turns off at midnight (when the generator does) and a cold shower down the hall. In particularly popular destinations (eg Yangon, Bagan, Inle Lake, Mandalay, Ngapali Beach), you'll find high-end affairs akin to luxury resorts in Thailand, with bungalow-style rooms, swimming pools, tennis courts and restaurants with European chefs. In between (but closer to budget in quality) are many, many modern, hit-or-miss

Chinese-style hotels that follow familiar templates: tiled rooms with air-con, a private bath with hot water and a refrigerator in a corner.

Essentially all accommodation choices provide free breakfast (usually eggs and toast, but sometimes quite sprawling breakfasts that include local dishes like *mohinga*, a spicy fish noodle soup). Staff at most can also change money, arrange for laundry service (starting at K1000 per load at budget guesthouses), rent bikes, arrange taxis, sell transport tickets, and find you local English-speaking guides.

Restrictions

Foreigners are only allowed to stay at 'licensed' hotels and guesthouses, which supposedly must keep at least five rooms and reach a certain standard. In the past some owners bent the rules in less-visited towns, but that seems to be waning. Staff will often say 'we have no rooms' instead of owning up that they lack the licence.

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

Types of Hotels

This guidebook tries to include only hotels run by private owners. When considering where to stay, consider this (informal) breakdown of the choices.

FAMILY-RUN GUESTHOUSES

Often with just five or so rooms and a TV lounge to share with three or four generations of a family living in-house, these budget-level guesthouses can be a highlight of a trip, of-

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PRACTICALITIES

- **Electricity** When it's working: 230V, 50Hz AC electricity. Most power outlets have two-pronged round or flat sockets. Many hotels have generators (some run at night only) – local power sources in many towns are scheduled for just two to three hours daily.
- **Emergencies** Outside Yangon, no-one in Myanmar calls an ambulance in an emergency; they go to the hospital. You could call top-end hotels in a crisis and ask about English-language doctors.
- **Newspapers** Yangon publishes two English-language newspapers: *Myanmar Times*, which offers some useful travel and entertainment information, and the government mouthpiece *New Light of Myanmar*.
- **Radio & TV** All national radio and TV broadcasts are state-controlled. Many locals listen to short-wave radios for BBC and VOA broadcasts. Satellite TV has brought some dramatic changes in recent years, with CNN, MTV Asia, BBC World Service and – *sacré bleu!* – Fashion TV all piping in.
- **Video** The standard video system in Myanmar is NTSC, but many people also own PAL models, which are compatible with Thailand, Australia and most of Europe.
- **Weights & Measures** 1 Burmese *viss* or 100 *ticals* = 3.5lb; 1 *gaig* = 36in; petrol is sold by the gallon; distances are in miles, not kilometres.

fering quick connections with local life and cheap deals (often \$10 to \$15 for a double). Most come with fan or some sort of air-con unit, though electricity frequently cuts out after midnight. Some are better than others, however, and, like budget hotels, you'll find some with squashed mosquitoes left on the walls.

BUDGET HOTELS

In many towns your only options will be a couple of four-floor, modern, 'Chinese-style' hotels. In some there are dark cell-like rooms with shared bathroom on the ground floor (usually for locals only), and two types of nicer rooms on upper floors. Some have lifts; some have doorstaff; some keep their generators on 24 hours, others just for a few hours at night and in the morning. Most run \$15 to \$30 for a double. Have a look before taking the higher-priced 'deluxe' rooms; often it's an extra \$10 for a refrigerator and writing desk you may not use. Others get more space, nicer flooring and maybe a satellite TV.

GOVERNMENT HOTELS

We advise against using any hotels run by the government's Ministry of Hotels & Tourism (MHT). All money is directly put into the government's hands *and* they're generally dated, empty and poorly cared for. These hotels are generally easy to identify: they are often named

for the town they're located in (eg Sittwe Hotel in Sittwe), fly a lone Myanmar flag out front – and the staff are often quite upfront about it if you ask! 'Government hotels' have been dwindling in number in recent years; some being leased out to 'private' owners. Throughout this book we point out government hotels so you can avoid them if you choose.

JOINT-VENTURE HOTELS

A number of foreign hotel groups operate hotels – technically maintaining their hotel grounds via a 30-year lease with the government. These are all top-end, electricity-all-day hotels, sometimes costing \$450 per night, and are often the nicest options.

Though these work on the whole as private hotels, it's unclear how much beyond an approximate 10% or 12% tax, and whatever 'licence' fee is settled on, goes to the government. Because of this murkiness, some travellers opt to skip joint ventures. On the other hand, they are known to pool some of their profits into community projects, such as building clinics, and are known for paying a slightly higher salary than average.

OTHER PRIVATE HOTELS

It's hardest to peg where the money goes for receipts from this category – upper mid-range and top-end hotels that are owned and run by various local entrepreneurs. Some