

# Temples of Bagan

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## Best Temple Murals

- » Upali Thein (p158)
- » Nandamannya Pahto (p164)
- » Payathonzu (p164)
- » Ananda Ok Kyaung (p158)
- » Abeyadana Pahto (p162)

## Best Sunset Spots

- » Shwesandaw Paya (p159)
- » Buledi (p158)
- » Pyathada Paya (p160)
- » Thabeik Hmauk (p160)
- » Tan Kyi Paya (p155)

## Why Go?

Marco Polo, who may or may not have visited on his travels, described Bagan as 'one of the finest sights in the world'. Despite centuries of neglect, looting, erosion, regular earthquakes (including a massive one in 1975), not to mention questionable restoration, this temple-studded plain remains a remarkably impressive and unforgettable vision.

In a 230-year building frenzy up until 1287 and the Mongol invasions, Bagan's kings commissioned over 4000 Buddhist temples. These brick and stucco religious structures are all that remain of their grand city, with the 11th to 13th century wooden buildings having long gone.

Many restoration projects have resulted in a compromised archaeological site that can barely be described as in ruins. Often the restorations bear little relation to the building styles and techniques used at the time of original construction. Still, Bagan remains a wonder. Working temples like Ananda Pahto, give a sense of what the place was like at its zenith, while others conceal colourful murals and hidden stairways that lead to exterior platforms and jaw-dropping views across the plain.

## When to Go

Bagan is in the midst of the 'dry zone', Bagan is hot. Avoid sizzling March to May and visit in 'cooler' November to February, the peak travel season. The rainy season (June to October) sees fewer visitors but is still pretty steamy. If you're interested in local religious rites, music and dance, time your visit to coincide with the festival lasting several weeks at Ananda Pahto in January.

Plan your daily temple viewing around a dawn/dusk itinerary, building in a leisurely lunch/siesta/poolside lounging session from around 12.30pm to 4pm. Temperatures at dusk and dawn will be more pleasant and the light is better for photographs.

## History

Per Pali inscriptions found here, Bagan kings apparently flirted with a couple of different city names during its heyday: Ari-maddanapura (City of the Enemy Crusher) and the less dramatic Tambadipa (Copper

Land). The name Bagan may in fact derive from Pyugan, a name first written down by the Annamese of present-day Vietnam in the mid-11th century as Pukam. The British in the 19th century called the site 'Pagan' while



## Temples of Bagan Highlights

**1** Marvel at the perfectly proportioned **Ananda Pahto** (p156), which houses four giant buddha statues carved from teak

**2** Speculate over what lies inside the bricked-up inner sanctum of mysterious **Dhammayangyi Pahto** (p159)

**3** Take in all the colours of the sunset from **Shwesandaw Paya** (p159)

or **Buledi** (p158), or enjoy the spectacle, minus the crowds, at **Thabeik Hmauk** (p160)

**4** Admire the intricate murals decorating **Upali Thein** (p158) and **Abeyadana Pahto** (p162)

**5** Get acquainted with the 37 Nats at the beautiful zedi **Schwezigon Paya** (p164) in Nyaung U

**6** Hire a private boat to cross the Ayeyarwady and make the trip to **Tan Kyi Paya** (p155), a gilded stupa providing sweeping views back towards Bagan

**7** Inspect the fine internal ornamental work of **Sulamani Pahto** (p160), a temple known as the Crowning Jewel