



Eastern Myanmar

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Why Go?

The shaggy hills of Shan State are ground zero for some of the country's most fabled outdoor pursuits. Activities such as buzzing along Inle Lake in a motorised canoe and trekking among the Pa-O and Danu villages outside Kalaw are classic Myanmar (Burma) experiences, and should not be missed. Throw in even more opportunities for trekking, boating and caving in lesser-known areas such as Pindaya and Kakku, and we reckon even the most hopeless outdoor junkie will be sated.

Once you've caught your breath, eastern Myanmar is also the best region for a unique cultural experience. Because of the logistical difficulties of getting to Kengtung (Kyaingtong) and Kayah State, the border regions see far fewer visitors, but it's worth making the effort to reach these intriguing enclaves of ethnic Tai and hill-tribe culture.

When to Go

Eastern Myanmar is the place to head in winter (November to January); even though night-time temperatures dip perilously close to freezing, the daytime temperatures at the higher elevations are a comfortable 68°F to 79°F (20°C to 26°C). The hottest time of year is from March to May, when daytime temperatures climb close to 104°F (40°C), but the evenings and mornings remain cool. The rainy season is from June to October and it would be best to avoid this time, especially if you plan to do any trekking.

THAZI TO INLE LAKE

The rolling hills between Mandalay and Inle Lake have attracted travellers ever since Myanmar first opened up to international visitors in the early '90s. From the junction town of Thazi, a pitted highway cuts east across a series of mountainous ridges, divided by broad valleys covered in a multicoloured patchwork of fields, villages and hedges. After Yangon and Bagan, this is probably the most visited part of Myanmar – not least because of the enduring appeal of Inle Lake.

Thazi

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☎0647 POP C10,000

Thazi crops up on travellers' itineraries for one reason only – the town marks the intersection of the Mandalay–Yangon rail line and the highway towards Inle Lake and the Thai border.

Sleeping & Eating

Moon-Light Rest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎69056; Thazi-Taunggyi Hwy; r \$3-10; ☎) On the main route to Taunggyi and located across the street from the road that leads to the train station, this simple guesthouse is run by the delightful Htun family. The basic rooms are clean, the atmosphere is wholesome, the welcome is genuine and the attached restaurant serves good food. Staff can help out with travel arrangements.

Information

Internet (Thazi-Taunggyi Hwy; per hr K500; ☎9am-10pm) is available across the street from Moon-Light Rest House, in the post office compound.

Getting There & Away

Most people arrive in Thazi by train – the station is about 300yd north of the main road. Buses drop off and pick up passengers along the highway near Moon-Light Rest House.

Bus

To reach Thazi from Mandalay, take a bus to Meiktila (K3000, three hours) from the highway bus station, then hop on a pick-up truck from Meiktila to Thazi (K500, one hour).

Heading east from Thazi, several buses leave between 7am and 11am daily bound for Kalaw (K2500, four hours), Shwenyaung (K3000, six hours) and Taunggyi (K4000, seven hours).

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Most places between Thazi and Taunggyi are open to foreigners, but the only way to reach Kengtung from inside Myanmar is by air. Even then, you are generally not allowed to exit the country at Tachileik, and must fly back the way you came (or to somewhere else within Myanmar).

Confusing things even more, tourists entering Myanmar from Thailand via Tachileik are only permitted to travel as far as Kengtung – it's not possible to cross to China nor will you be allowed to fly anywhere else in the country. For details on this border, go to p197.

Parts of Kayah State are open to foreign tourists, but only to those who have received advance permission and who have booked a government-sanctioned package tour. For details on arranging this go to p198.

Fares are typically doubled for foreigners. To get a seat on one of the more comfortable express buses between Mandalay and Taunggyi, you'll need to make an advance reservation – the staff at the Moon-Light can help.

Pick-Up Truck & Taxi

There are frequent pick-ups for Kalaw, Shwenyaung and Taunggyi, charging the same as buses but taking longer and not quite as comfortable.

A few long-distance taxis loiter around the station in Thazi charging \$70 to Kalaw and \$90 to Nyaungshwe (Yaungshwe) near Inle Lake. You'll need to bargain hard for a fair price.

Train

Thazi is an important stop on the rail route between Yangon and Mandalay, and also one end of the scenic mountain line to Shwenyaung. For information on getting here from Yangon see p71, and from Mandalay see p222.

A horse cart from the station to the bus stand will cost around K1000.

YANGON Ordinary \$9 to \$12, upper \$24 to \$28; 11 to 12 hours; departures 7.45am, 8.17am, 9am, 12.25am.

MANDALAY Ordinary \$3, upper \$8; three hours; departures 3.52am, 4.19am, 7.22am, 5.41am, 8.44am, 6.04pm.

SHWENYAUNG Fare \$5; nine hours; departure 5am.

KALAW Fare \$3; six hours; departure 5am.