



Mandalay & Around

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Best Religious Structures

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- » Mingun Paya (p230)
- » Pahtodawgyi (p225)
- » Sagaing Hill monasteries (p228)
- » Shwe In Bin (p209)

Best Views

- » River scenes from View Point cafe (p216) or the rooftop of Ayarwaddy River View Hotel (p214)
- » Chanthaya Paya and foot-bridge seen across the lake from the west (p211)
- » U Bein's Bridge from the lake (p224)

Why Go?

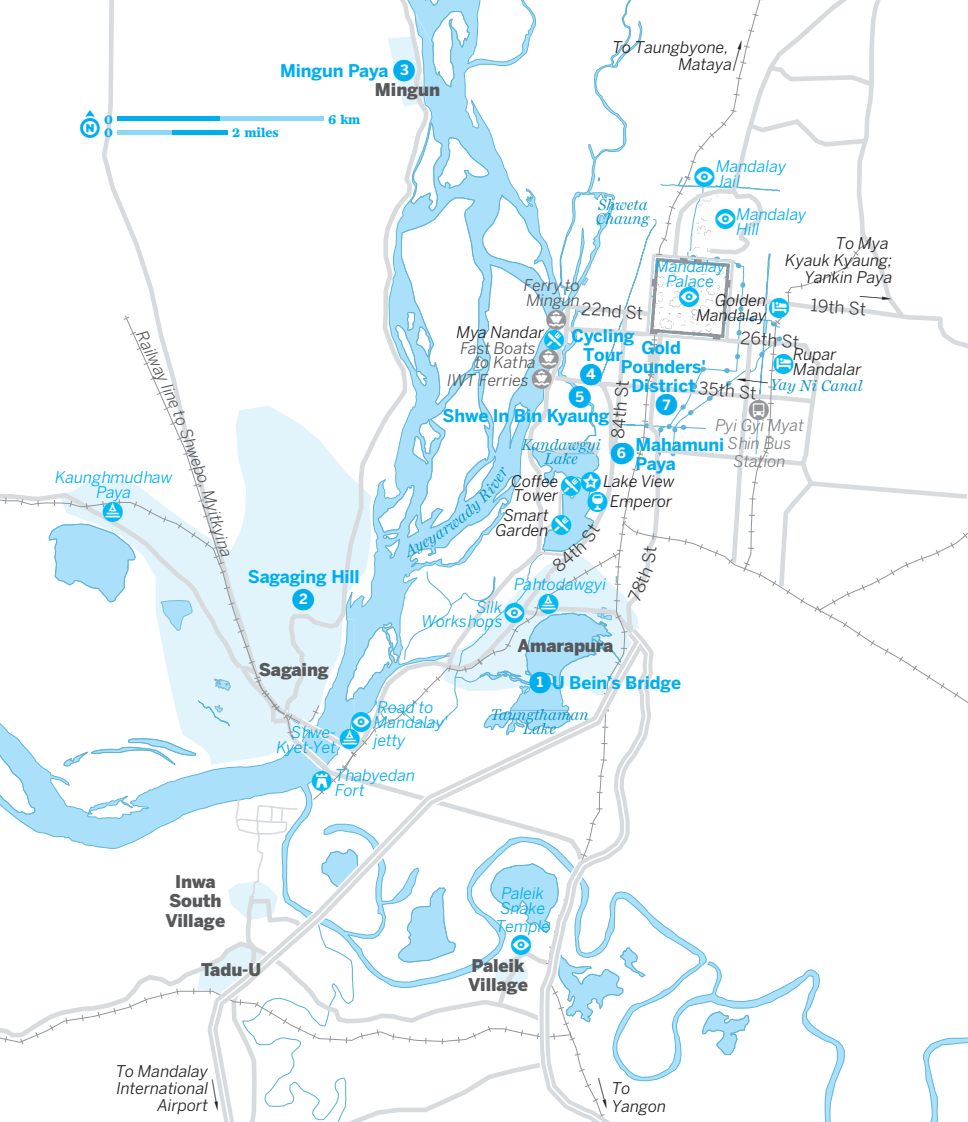
For those who haven't been there – and that list included *The Road to Mandalay* author Rudyard Kipling – the mention of 'Mandalay' typically conjures up images of Asia at its most traditional and timeless. The initial reality can be a major anticlimax – a traffic-choked grid of interminable straight roads full of anonymous concrete buildings. But don't despair. Though it's a relatively 'young', dynamic city, Mandalay (မန္တလေး) is Myanmar's cultural capital. It's easy to escape the fumes and architectural banalities of the main streets in quarters full of craftworkers and tree-shaded monasteries. Temple-topped Mandalay Hill offers a welcomed exception to the city's pan-flat topography and several mini-theatres showcase traditional performing arts. Meanwhile, Mandalay is the ideal transport hub for northern Myanmar and offers a panoply of easy day-trip destinations, including three former royal capitals and the site of what would have been the world's biggest stupa, had it ever been finished.

When to Go

In the winter tourist season, days are still hot but evenings are mild and you might need a light jacket if you're riding a motorbike after sunset. By March you may find it hard to sleep without air-conditioning, while April and May really bake with temperatures sometimes reaching 104°F (40°C) by day and dust caking the trees (and the back of your throat). At such times, cool down by nipping up to nearby Pyin Oo Lwin (p250).

If you're not interested in participating in the water-throwing fun of Thingyan (see p16), it's generally best to avoid April, especially 12 to 21 April, when almost all public transport stops and shops are closed. Restaurants mostly close too, and those hotel eateries that still serve might double their prices.

In August, Mandalay regional transport can be overloaded for several weeks due to huge crowds heading to and from the vast *nat* festival at nearby Taungbyone, which culminates over the five days before the August (Wagaung) full moon.



Mandalay & Around Highlights

- 1 Join the dawn monk parade crossing the world's longest teak bridge, Amarapura's iconic **U Bein's Bridge** (p224)
- 2 Look over pagodas and the Ayeyarwady River from atop **Sagaing Hill** (p228), an important religious site
- 3 Climb **Mingun Paya** (p230), a king-sized

- unfinished stupa reached by a boat ride from Mandalay
- 4 Escape Mandalay's big-city bustle with our **cycling tour** (p211)
- 5 Potter around Mandalay's less-known monasteries, including the beautiful teak masterpiece, **Shwe In Bin Kyaung** (p209)

- 6 Arrive by 4am at **Mahamuni Paya** (p208) as attendants brush the teeth of the country's most famous buddha image
- 7 Discover the wealth of crafts being made, including edible sheets of gold-leaf, in the **Gold Pounders' District** (p209) around 36th St