

# welcome to Myanmar (Burma)



## Surreal & Traditional

To travel here is to encounter men wearing skirt-like *longyi*, women smothered in *thanakha* (traditional make-up) and betel-chewing grannies with mouths full of blood-red juice – and that’s just at the airport! One of the most fascinating aspects of travel in Myanmar is the opportunity to experience a corner of Asia that, in many ways, has changed little since British colonial times. Myanmar, for instance, has yet to be completely overwhelmed by Western clothing. It’s also a country of many incredible and sometimes surreal sites. Contemplate the 4000 sacred stupas scattered across the plains of Bagan. Stare in disbelief at the Golden Rock teetering impossibly on

the edge of a chasm. Ride a horse cart past colonial-era mansions. Meet multitalented monks who have taught their cats to jump, or feisty elderly Chin women, their faces tattooed with intricate designs.

## Simple Pleasures

Turn back the clock with a trip to this time-warped country where there’s no such thing as a 7-Eleven or an ATM, and people still use horse and cart to get around. Liberate yourself from your mobile phone (it won’t work here) and the internet (you can get online, but connections are *slooooooow*) and discover a culture where holy men are more revered than rock stars. Drift down the Ayeyarwady in an old river steamer,



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*'This is Burma', wrote Rudyard Kipling. 'It is quite unlike any place you know about.' How right he was: more than a century later Myanmar remains a world apart.*

(left) Umin Thounzeh (p229), Sagaing Hill  
(below) Fresh produce at a Nyaung U market



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stake out a slice of beach on the blissful Bay of Bengal, or trek through pine forests to minority villages scattered across the Shan Hills. Dig into the myriad dishes of the local cuisine, from a hearty bowl of *mohinga* noodles for breakfast to the fermented tea-leaf mixture that's a popular finish to a Burmese meal. Swap cocktails and canapés for snacks and tea sweetened with condensed milk at teahouses where you can shoot the breeze with locals.

## The Ethical Dimension

You no doubt know that Myanmar is a troubled land. In 2011, following the previous year's election, a quasi-civilian government was sworn in and Aung San Suu Kyi,

at the time of research, had been released from house arrest. The tourism boycott that persuaded many to steer clear of the country for over a decade has been lifted. It's still up to you to decide whether it's time to visit (see p21). Keep in mind that the long-suffering people are everything the regime is not. Gentle, humorous, engaging, considerate, inquisitive and passionate, they want to play a part in the world, and to know what you make of their world. Yes, this is Burma – come with your mind open and you'll leave with your heart full.