



Understand Myanmar (Burma)

MYANMAR (BURMA) TODAY290

A new government, Aung San Suu Kyi free, continued ethnic tensions – but does it amount to meaningful change?

HISTORY293

Kings, generals and prodemocracy fighters: how competing kingdoms became colonial Burma, then military-ruled Myanmar.

PEOPLE OF MYANMAR (BURMA)307

Meet some of the 135 ethnic groups that make up Myanmar's multicultural mix.

POLITICS, ECONOMICS & SANCTIONS 315

Understand why Myanmar's poor record of government and human rights has made it an international pariah.

ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE.322

The mountains, plains, jungles and beaches of Myanmar are home to a Noah's ark of flora and fauna.

EATING IN MYANMAR (BURMA)328

The diversity of Myanmar's food and drink is well worth discovering – this chapter will help you dig in.

RELIGION & BELIEF.....338

Buddhism may be the dominant religion, but Myanmar is home to many other faiths too.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE.....344

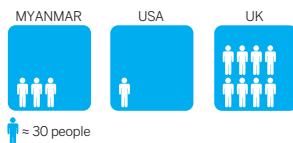
Explore the beauty of Myanmar's architecture, arts and crafts, as well as the ways locals like to relax.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI.....352

Daughter of a national hero, mother, widow, international political icon: the life and times of the people's champion.



population per sq km



Myanmar (Burma) Today

Roadmap to Democracy?

In October 2010 Myanmar went to the polls for its first national election in 20 years, part of the generals' plan for a 'discipline flourishing democracy'. Following the victory of the military-backed Union Solidarity & Development Party (USDP), National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released from her latest stint of house arrest – and instantly jumped into the fray, and rounds of interviews with the international media, reminding people of the 2100 other political prisoners still in detention.

To everyone's surprise, a new national flag was unveiled at the end of the year, while in February 2011 a quasi-civilian parliament convened for its initial sessions, replacing the military regime's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). A new president, former general and old prime minister Thein Sein, was 'chosen' by the elected reps to take over from Senior General Than Shwe, Myanmar's supreme ruler for the past two decades.

When the new parliament was sworn in at the end of March and a new head of the military, Min Aung Hlaing, was announced, a tick appeared against the seventh, and final, step on the junta's 'roadmap to democracy'. In response, neither the US nor the EU fully dropped their sanctions against Myanmar, but both softened their stance – the former appointing Derek Mitchell as a special envoy, the latter easing travel restrictions on key members of the new government.

A 'Deeply Flawed' Election

Has much changed in Myanmar? Over 30 different political parties did manage to jump through a considerable number of hoops to contest the election, including the National Democratic Force (NDF), a breakaway group from the NLD that, unlike its parent party, decided to participate in the poll. However, few were surprised by the results, which saw the

- » GDP per capita: \$435
- » Cost of a mobile phone SIM card: \$1000
- » Internet users: 0.1% of the population
- » Political Prisoners: 1994 (June 2011; source www.aapbb.org)

Travel Literature

The Trouser People Journalist Andrew Marshall retraces the steps of Sir George Scott, who traversed unmapped corners of British Burma in the late 1800s.

Golden Earth Norman Lewis's account of his trip through Burma in the turbulent 1950s.

Finding George Orwell in Burma Sarah Larkin's evocative and perceptive travelogue recounts Orwell's days here as a colonial policeman, as well as the modern-day plight of Myanmar.

Documentaries

Burma VJ About the monks' uprising in 2007.

Burma Soldier The journey of a Burmese soldier from junta supporter to democracy activist.

This Prison Where I Live Covers the plight of political prisoner Zargana.