

# Temples of Bagan

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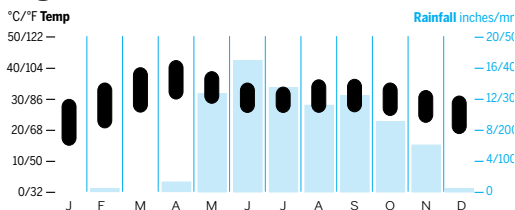
## Why Go?

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 and regular earthquakes, 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 more than 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 long gone. Many restoration projects have resulted in a compromised archaeological site. Often the restorations bear little resemblance to the original building styles. Still, Bagan remains a wonder. Working temples, such as Ananda Pahto, give a sense of what the place was like at its zenith, while others conceal colourful murals and exterior platforms with jaw-dropping views across the plain.

## When to Go

### Bagan



**Mar–May** Bagan is sizzling; avoid visiting now or you may melt.

**Jun–Oct** Rainy season; steamy but a good time to go, with cheaper rooms and fewer visitors.

**Nov–Feb** Best time weather-wise, but temples are crowded and it's hard to find accommodation.

## History

According to Pali inscriptions found here, Bagan kings flirted with a couple of different city names in its heyday, including Arimaddanapura (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 cen-

tury as Pukam. The British in the 19th century called the site Pagan while the military junta switched it back to Bagan in 1989.

## Glory Days

Bagan's 2½ centuries of temple building (from the 11th century to the 13th century) coincided with the region's transition from Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist beliefs to the Theravada Buddhist beliefs that have since



## Temples of Bagan Highlights

- 1 Ananda Pahto** (p187) Marvelling at the perfectly proportioned Ananda Pahto, which houses four giant buddhas carved from teak.
- 2 Dhammayangyi Pahto** (p190) Speculating on what lies inside the bricked-up inner sanctum of mysterious Dhammayangyi Pahto.
- 3 Shwesandaw Paya** (p190) Watching a dramatic sunrise over the surrounding expanse of ancient temples.
- 4 Abeyadana Pahto** (p192) Admiring the intricate murals adorning the dimly lit walls of Abeyadana Pahto.
- 5 Shwezigon Paya** (p195) Getting acquainted with the 37 *nats* at this beautiful *zedi* in Nyaung U.
- 6 Htilominlo Pahto** (p189) Taking in the soaring spires, fine carvings and artfully wrought reliefs of photogenic Htilominlo Pahto.