



Yangon & Around

01 / POPULATION C4,447,000

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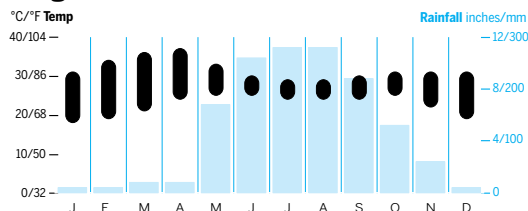
Why Go?

'A city of blood, dreams and gold' is how Pablo Neruda described Yangon. Nearly a century after the Chilean poet lived in what was then known as Rangoon, the former capital is emerging from bloody and neglectful military rule into an era of glittering possibilities. Exiles are returning and foreign investors and adventurers flooding in, triggering a blossoming of new restaurants, bars, shops, building sites and traffic jams.

Yangon's awe-inspiring Buddhist monument Shwedagon Paya is the one sight in Myanmar you cannot miss. Vibrant streets lined with food vendors, colourful open-air markets, evocative colonial architecture – some of the most impressive you'll find in Southeast Asia – are reasons for lingering. It's also easy to make day trips or go further afield to the charming city of Pathein (Bassein) or the relaxed beach resorts of Chaung Tha and Ngwe Saung.

When to Go

Yangon



Nov–Feb Best time to visit; the heat of the day is tolerable and the evenings are often cool.

Mar–May Hot-test time of year. April's Water Festival (Thingyan) can cause disruption to travel.

Jun–Oct Wet season, but showers are often short and shouldn't inconvenience your visit.

YANGON

ELEVATION 46FT

Even though it is no longer the nation's official capital, Yangon remains Myanmar's largest and most commercially important city. Its downtown skyline is dominated by the 'winking wonder' of Shwedagon Paya, a dazzling Buddhist temple that attracts pilgrims from all over the world.

Since the 2010 elections, Yangon's fortunes have skyrocketed along with its land prices, as both local and foreign investors scrambled to grab a foothold here. At the same time, decades of economic stagnation are only too apparent in the city's slums, shanty housing and creaking, frequently overwhelmed infrastructure – something you'll quickly realise as you crawl into town in a taxi from the airport.

In December 2013 a masterplan for Yangon was unveiled. Funded by the Japanese government's aid and development agency JICA, it proposed 103 priority projects costing over \$5 billion – around 100 times the current budget of the Yangon City Development Committee.

History

In 1755 King Alaungpaya conquered central Myanmar and built a new city at Dagon, a village that had existed for centuries around the Shwedagon Paya. He renamed the place Yangon, meaning 'end of strife',

and, a year later, following the destruction of Thanlyin (Syriam) across the river, built it up into an important seaport.

In 1841 the city was virtually destroyed by fire; the rebuilt town again suffered extensive damage during the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. The British, the new masters, renamed the city Rangoon (a corruption of Yangon) and mapped out a grand building plan for what would become the capital of their imperial colony.

It's easy to get a sense of how prosperous colonial Rangoon was from the monumental architecture that still graces the city's downtown. By the 1920s Rangoon was a key stopover point for steamships in the region; notable international visitors included Rudyard Kipling, W Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley and HG Wells. In 1937 Amelia Earhart dropped in during the second of her attempts to fly around the world.

Early-20th-century Rangoon was also the spawning ground for Burmese independence. When that independence came in 1948, Rangoon continued as the nation's capital. However, the city's fortunes took a turn for the worse when military rule was imposed in 1962. The Burmese road to socialism as promulgated by General Ne Win and his cohorts drove Rangoon, like the rest of the country, to the brink of ruin.

In 1989 the junta decreed the city would once again be known as Yangon. After decades of neglect, streets were cleaned and

YANGON & AROUND IN...

Two Days

Follow our **walking tour** of downtown Yangon. Drop by the gorgeous **Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue**, then browse the traditional market **Theingyi Zei** and the more tourist-oriented **Bogyoke Aung San Market**. Stroll through **People's Park** before ascending to **Shwedagon Paya** in time for sunset.

Start day two at the riverside **Botataung Paya**. Take a taxi to the **National Museum** to view the magnificent Lion Throne and other treasures. Spend the afternoon admiring the giant reclining Buddha at the **Chaukhtatgyi Paya** and the gorgeous sitting Buddha at nearby **Ngahtatgyi Paya**. An amble around **Kandawgyi Lake** can be followed by sunset drinks at **Vista Bar**.

Four Days

Hop on the ferry to **Dalah** to view the city from the Yangon River. Once in Dalah negotiate with a taxi or motorbike taxi for a tour to **Twante** to view pottery makers, Shwesandaw Paya and the snake-infested Mwe Paya. Back in Yangon, visit the incense-clouded temple **Kheng Hock Keong** and head to **19th St** for a grilled-food feast.

On day four board the **Yangon Circle Line** and get off at Tadakalay station to visit kitsch, fun **Melamu Paya**. Eat at **Taing Yin Thar** or **Minn Lane Rakhaing Monte & Fresh Seafood**, both at the north end of Inya Lake. Live it up back downtown at the **Strand Bar** or the **Union Bar & Grill**.