

BIG FIVE®

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Destination Information Guide

Myanmar



Big Five Tours & Expeditions, USA
1551 SE Palm Court, Stuart, FL 34994
Tel: 772-287-7995 / Fax: 772-287-5990
800 BIG FIVE (800-244-3483)
www.bigfive.com & www.galapagos.com
Email: info@bigfive.com

Big Five Tours & Expeditions Ltd. Canada
80 Corporate Drive Unit 311
Scarborough, Ontario M1H 3G5 Canada
Tel: +416-640-7802 / Fax: 1-647-463-8181
Toll Free: 888- 244-3483
www.bigfivetours.ca
Email: info@bigfivetours.ca

Welcome to the World of Big Five!

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



Yangon, Myanmar

Elevation: 95 feet Latitude: 16 54N Longitude: 096 11E

Average Temperature

Years on Record: 18

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	82	77	81	85	88	85	82	81	81	82	83	81	78

Average High Temperature

Years on Record: 18

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	90	89	94	97	99	92	86	85	85	86	88	89	88

Average Low Temperature

Years on Record: 18

	YEAR	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
°F	73	65	67	71	76	78	77	76	76	76	77	73	67

WEATHER

Myanmar has a tropical monsoon climate with three main seasons. The hottest period is between February and May, with little or no rain. Rainy season exists from May to October and dry, cooler weather from November to February.

TIME ZONE

GMT + 6.5.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least 3 blank pages are necessary.

Visas: *Recently, the issue concerning obtaining visas on arrival in Myanmar has come into question.* To avoid problems, please get your visa prior to leaving home. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Trivisa to process required visas for our passengers. You can find the necessary forms from Trivisa's website at: www.trivisa.com. Please use account code JP1551, and follow the directions.

Important: Please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: *Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.*

Note: Remember to carry with you in a safe place photocopies of all important documents in the event your passport or other documents are lost or stolen. Also, it's a good idea to have a passport photo with you. As a tourist, you will need to produce your passport when booking in at hotels, changing money or travelers' checks and prove your identity whenever requested by a policeman.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Upon arrival, proceed through immigration and baggage claims and customs. Big Five personnel or their representatives will assist you with your baggage, escort you to your hotel, and assist with check-in. **Departure Tax:** US\$10. Passengers in direct transit are exempt.

CUSTOMS INTO MYANMAR

The following goods may be taken into Myanmar by persons over 17 years of age without incurring customs duty: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g tobacco; 1l of alcohol; 0.5l of perfume or eau de cologne.

Jewelry, electrical goods and cameras must be declared; failure to do so may result in visitors being refused permission to leave with these items. Video cameras will be held in safe custody at the airport and will be returned on departure.

NOTE: You must purchase gems, jewelry and silverware from authorized shops in order to take them out of the country.

Prohibited items: Playing cards, gambling equipment, antiques, archaeological items and pornography are prohibited.

US CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. Regulations frequently change. For a list of exempt items and more information contact your nearest Customs office or write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Anyone traveling internationally should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Also, discuss your general fitness level for participating in the activities related to your specific tour (i.e. snorkeling, hiking, nature walks, etc.).

Yellow Fever: Yellow fever inoculation is required if one of the following applies:

- If you are coming from any area other than the United States, Europe, or Canada.
- If you plan on visiting more than one African country.

Other Risks: Vaccinations against Japanese B encephalitis, tuberculosis and hepatitis B are sometimes recommended.

Japanese encephalitis: if you plan to visit rural farming areas and under special circumstances, such as a known outbreak of Japanese encephalitis.

Please note: If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

Lightweight cottons and linens throughout most of the year are required. A light raincoat or umbrella is needed during the rainy season. Warmer clothes are advised for coolest period and some evenings.

LUGGAGE

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations. Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions may apply for charter flights. This will vary with destination and type of planes used. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final itinerary.

MONEY

Currency: Kyat (MMK) = 100 pyas. Notes are in denominations of MMK 5,000, 1,000, 500, 200, 100, 50, 20 and 10. Coins are in denominations of MMK1, and 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 pyas.

MMK100,000 is known as a lakh, and MMK10 million as a crore. Kyat is pronounced like the English word 'chat'. *To combat the black market and limit the financial power of dissident groups, currency denominations are occasionally declared invalid without prior notice.* Limited refunds are usually allowed for certain sectors of the population.

Currency Policy: Only New US dollar bank notes accepted. As of this writing, travelers need to be aware that the only bills acceptable in Myanmar are bills that are in **very good condition**. Bills that are old, folded, worn, stained or otherwise damaged will not be accepted at government offices including immigration department, most hotels and restaurants in Myanmar. New currency is preferred. Bring small denominations.

Currency Exchange: FECs, which are printed in China, are Myanmar's second legal currency and are issued by the Bank of Myanmar specifically for visiting tourists. They come in denominations equivalent to US\$20, 10, 5 and 1. Payment for FECs is only accepted in US Dollars. FECs can be exchanged into Kyats at officially authorized banks, bureaux de change, hotels and Myanmar Travel and Tour offices and can be spent anywhere in the country. Cash payments can also be made in US Dollars, but only at establishments (eg hotels, railway stations, airlines) that have an official license allowing them to accept dollars. Wherever possible, it is advisable to change US Dollars into Kyats rather than FECs, as FECs usually have a poorer exchange rate than Kyats. It is also recommended to carry small change as large notes may be difficult to change. Euros are now also accepted in all banks and currency exchange bureaux. **Note:** The import and export of local currency is prohibited.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs: Not usually accepted at this point in time. It is unlikely that credit or debit cards will be accepted. And if they are, only Visa and Master Card is allowed. **It is always best to check with your card company prior to travel.** There are NO ATMs available.

Some hotels have made arrangements to accept credit cards or travelers' cheques in emergencies; however high surcharges may apply, and these practices are not authorized by the Myanmar authorities, so therefore cannot be guaranteed.

NOTE: Traveler's Checks: Travelers checks are generally NOT accepted in Myanmar.

LANGUAGE

The official language is Myanmar (Burmese). There are over 100 dialects spoken in Myanmar. English is spoken in business circles.

Telephone: Country code: 95. Only larger cities can be dialed direct from within Myanmar; smaller towns still use manual switchboards and callers need to ask the operator to connect them to a specific town operator. International calls are difficult to place outside hotels.

Mobile Telephone: There is no international roaming in Myanmar. Note: Mobile phones may be collected by customs on arrival and released to you upon departure.

Internet: There are several Internet cafes in larger cities, but access to many free international e-mail services is blocked. All Internet use is monitored by the government and is usually expensive in hotels.

ELECTRICITY

220 volts AC, 50Hz.

FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Bottled water and drinks are easy to get. Use bottled water for drinking, brushing teeth, cleaning contacts, or making ice. Otherwise, all water should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Stick to bottled water. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled. The regional food is hot and spicy. Fish, rice, noodles and vegetables spiced with onions, ginger, garlic and chilies are the common local ingredients. Chinese and Indian cuisine is offered in many hotels and restaurants.

National specialties: Mohinga (fish soup with rice noodles); Oh-no khauk swe (noodles, chicken and coconut milk soup)

Note: If you have food allergies or special / restricted dietary requests, please notify your travel agent or our office in advance, so that we may try to comply with your needs. Also, please advise your travel agent or our office if you have any mobility restrictions, so that we may inform our representatives accordingly. They will always strive to accommodate you to the best of their ability.

TIPPING

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to: www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide

SHOPPING

Souvenirs include handicrafts and jewelry. In Yangon, a good place to shop is Bogyoke Aung San Market, which sells luxury items, handicrafts, food stuffs, clothing, jewelry and consumer goods. Mandalay is a good place for traditional handicrafts that can be purchased at Zegyo Market. Phatahe Bazaar sells Buddhist articles of worship.

Always insure that your purchases will be allowed back into the U.S. Information is available at the U.S. Customs & Immigration website: www.customs.ustreas.gov.

OVERVIEW

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, offers the best of Asia: virgin jungles, snow-capped mountains and pristine beaches that combine with a rich heritage spanning more than two thousand years. Traveling in Myanmar is a magical journey to the past, discovering the strong influences of the Indo-Chinese civilization. One of Southeast Asia's largest and most diverse countries, Myanmar stretches from Andaman Sea in the south to the Eastern Himalayan Mountains in the north. Yangon boasts the world's largest Buddhist pagoda, Shwedagon Pagoda. Myanmar has been unified, divided, conquered, and reunited many times through the centuries by various rulers. The first identifiable civilization is that of the *Mon*, who likely began migrating into the area in about 300 BC. The first kingdom of Suvarnabhumi was founded around the port of Thaton. The Pyu arrived in Myanmar in the 7th century, establishing city kingdoms at Binnaka, Mongamo, Sri Ksetra, and Halingyi. During this period, Myanmar was part of an

overland trade route between China and India. By 849, the Burmans had founded a powerful kingdom centered on the city of Bagan. The kingdom grew in relative isolation until the reign of Anawrahta (1044 to 1077), who successfully unified all of Myanmar by defeating the Mon in 1057. After the collapse of Bagan authority, Myanmar was divided once again. The Burmans had reestablished themselves at the city of Ava by 1364, where Bagan culture was revived and a great age of Burmese literature ensued. The kingdom lacked easily defensible borders, however, and was overrun by the Shan in 1527. Survivors of the destruction of Inwa eventually established a new kingdom centered on Taungoo in 1531 led by Tabinshwehti (reigned 1531-50), who once again unified most of Myanmar. A popular Burmese leader named Alaungpaya drove the Bago forces out of northern Myanmar by 1753, and by 1759, he had once again conquered Pegu and southern Myanmar while also regaining control of Manipur. He established his capital at Rangoon, now known as Yangon. Yangon is the main gateway to Myanmar. Lush tropical trees, shady parks and beautiful lakes, Yangon has been

called the "Garden City of the East." King Alaungpaya founded the city on the site of a small settlement called Dagon when he conquered Lower Myanmar in 1755. The name Yangon means "End of Strife," which the British anglicized to Rangoon. The name of this city has changed along with its history: first Dagon, then Yangon, and Okalapa Aung Myae Yan Hnin, then finally back to Yangon. Modern Yangon has a population of more than five million. Mandalay, the country's second largest city, is situated about 600 kilometers north of Yangon on the Ayeyarwaddy River. Mandalay is the major trading and communications center in northern and central Myanmar. The main tourist destination in Myanmar is Bagan, capital of the first Myanmar Empire; one of the richest archaeological sites in Southeast Asia. Situated on the eastern bank of the Ayeyawaddy River, Bagan has inspired visitors to Myanmar for nearly 1,000 years. Bagan covers an area of 42 square kilometers, and encompasses more than 5,000 pagodas and temples from the 11th through 13th centuries in its archaeological zone; and more than 2,000 of those are well-preserved.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com, and Longitude Books, www.longitudebooks.com, have collections of books, searchable by country.

The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma

by Thant Myint-U, Thant Myint-U

In *The River of Lost Footsteps*, Thant Myint-U tells the story of modern Burma, in part through a telling of his own family's history, in an interwoven narrative that is by turns lyrical, dramatic, and appalling. His maternal grandfather, U Thant, rose from being the schoolmaster of a small town in the Irrawaddy Delta to become the UN secretary-general in the 1960s. And on his father's side, the author is descended from a long line of courtiers who served at Burma's Court of Ava for nearly two centuries. Through their stories and others, he portrays Burma's rise and decline in the modern world, from the time of Portuguese pirates and renegade Mughal princes through the decades of British colonialism, the devastation of World War II, and a sixty-year civil war that continues today and is the longest-running war in the world.

Last Man Out: Surviving the Burma-Thailand Death Railway: A Memoir

by H. Robert Charles, James T. Hornfischer, James D. Hornfischer

From June 1942 to October 1943, more than 100,000 Allied POWs who had been forced into slave labor by the Japanese died building the infamous Burma-Thailand Death Railway, an undertaking immortalized in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. One of the few who survived was American H. Robert Charles, who describes the ordeal in vivid and harrowing detail in this book.

From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey

by Pascal Khoo Thwe

Pascal, a member of the Kayan Padaung tribe, was the first member of his community to study English at a university. Within months of his meeting with Dr. Casey, Pascal's world lay in ruins. Burma's military dictatorship forces him to sacrifice his studies, and the regime's brutal armed forces murder his lover. Fleeing to the jungle, he becomes a guerrilla fighter in the life-or-death struggle against the government. In desperation, he writes a letter to the Englishman he met in Mandalay. Miraculously reaching its destination, the letter leads to Pascal's rescue and his

enrollment in Cambridge University, where he is the first Burmese tribesman to attend.

Letters from Burma

by Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung San Kyi, Heinn Htet (Illustrator), Heinn Htet (Illustrator)

For the last decade of Burma's traumatic history, Aung San Suu Kyi - winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize - has been the inspirational leader of attempts to restore democracy to her country. In these fifty-two pieces, originally written for a Japanese newspaper and begun soon after her release from house arrest, she paints a vivid, poignant yet fundamentally optimistic picture of her native land.

The Burma Road: The Epic Story of the China-Burma-India Theater in World War II **by Donovan Webster**

As the Imperial Japanese Army swept across China and South Asia at World War II's outset, closing all of China's seaports, more than 200,000 Chinese laborers embarked on a seemingly impossible task: to cut a 700-mile overland route - the Burma Road -- from the southwest Chinese city of Kunming to Lashio, Burma. But when Burma fell in 1942, the Burma Road was severed. As the first step of the Allied offensive toward Japan, American general Joseph Stilwell reopened it, while, at the same time, keeping China supplied by air-lift from India and simultaneously driving the Japanese out of Burma.

Aung San and the Struggle for Burmese Independence

by Angelene Naw

Aung San, the "architect of Burma's freedom," was one of the most important political figures in the history of Burma's struggle for independence. Beginning as a student leader and activist in the 1930s, Aung San went on to assume prominent leadership positions in Burma's nationalist movement. At the beginning of World War II, he organized a clandestine trip to Japan in search of funds and military training in order to fight against British imperialism, but his close-knit group Thirty Comrades found it necessary to resist not only the British, but also the Japanese.

In the postwar years, Aung San became Burma's chief negotiator for independence from Britain, focusing much of his energy on promoting cooperation and unity among Burma's many ethnic groups. Aung San's tragic assassination in 1947 at the age of 32 denied him the privilege of seeing his country claim the freedom and unity to which he had dedicated his life.

Codebreaker in the Far East
by Alan Stripp, Christopher Andrew
(Introduction)

This is the first book to describe British wartime success in breaking Japanese codes of dazzling variety and great complexity which contributed to the victory in Burma three months before Hiroshima. Written for the general reader, this first-hand account describes the difficulty of decoding one of the most complex languages in the world in some of the most difficult conditions. The book was published in 1989 to avoid proposed legislation which would prohibit those in the security services from publishing secret information.

In the Forest with the Elephants
by Roland Smith, Michael J. Schmidt

Across Asia, elephants and the forests where they live are rapidly disappearing. But in the small country of Myanmar, the majestic Asian elephant continues to thrive. There, thousands of elephants work alongside humans harvesting teak and other valuable woods using environmentally sensitive foresting methods. This inspiring environmental success story reveals how elephants and humans are working to preserve the endangered Asian elephant and its habitat.

**A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia:
Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore,
Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia**
by Craig Robson

Famous for its vast diversity of birdlife, Southeast Asia is an increasingly popular destination for birders and ecotourists. Travelers, however, have long been without an up-to-date, comprehensive bird guide to this fascinating region. A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia fills this need, illustrating and describing all 1,250 species found in Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

**Beyond the Last Village: A Journey of
Discovery in Asia's Forbidden Wilderness**
by Alan Rabinowitz

Beyond the Last Village takes the reader on a journey ... in this remote corner of the planet at the southeast edge of the Himalayas where tropical rain forest and snow-covered mountains meet. As we travel through this "lost world"-a mysterious and forbidding region isolated by ancient geologic forces-we meet the Rawang, a former slave group, the Taron, a solitary enclave of the world's only pygmies of Asian ancestry, and Myanmar Tibetans living in the furthest reaches of the mountains. We enter the territories of strange, majestic-looking beasts that few people have ever heard of and fewer have ever seen-golden takin, red goral, blue sheep, black barking deer. The survival of these ancient species is now threatened, not by natural forces but by hunters with snares and crossbows, trading body parts for basic household necessities.