

# Myanmar (Burma)

## PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, has been isolated from the rest of the world for decades, therefore offering great historical value, rich cultural heritage, and insight to a unique daily life style. It also possesses a vast eco-diversity such as pollution free air, virgin landscapes, natural river systems and unspoiled beaches. But what makes Burma stand out is the people who have often been described as the most friendly and openhearted people in Asia. The country lies between two of the world's greatest and ancient civilizations – China and India and has incorporated the finer arts and blended it to the tastes of native traits and characteristics.

# GETTING READY FOR YOUR TRIP

## Passports

- ❖ Passports are required of U.S. Citizens to enter
- ❖ Must be valid for at least 6 months after your trip – if not, apply or renew immediately
- ❖ Keep a copy of the picture page of your passport in a separate place while traveling
- ❖ Carry an extra passport photo in case you need to apply for a quick replacement

## Visas

- ❖ Visas are required for entry into Burma
- ❖ Applications are accepted in person at the Embassy/Consulate, by expedited mail service or through a visa service
- ❖ You must apply no sooner than 3 months ahead of your departure date
- ❖ Travelers are required to show their passports with a valid visa at all airports, train stations, and hotels.
- ❖ The Burmese government rarely issues visas to persons with occupations it deems “sensitive,” including journalists.
- ❖ Nationalities of other countries please inquire regarding visas
- ❖ Information about entry requirements as well as other information may be obtained from the Embassy of the Union of Myanmar, 2300 S Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, telephone 202-332-4350, website: <http://www.mewashingtondc.com>

## Health, Immunizations

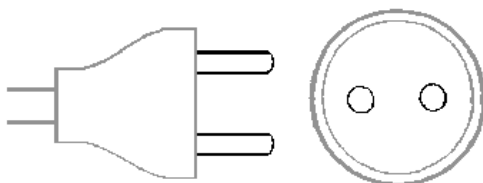
- ❖ Some immunizations are highly recommended, but none are required for entry
- ❖ Recommended immunizations include: polio, tetanus, typhoid, MMR, hepatitis A & B
- ❖ Malaria prevention is also recommended
- ❖ A vaccination certificate for yellow fever is required for entry if arriving from other infected countries
- ❖ SEEK INDEPENDENT MEDICAL ADVICE from your physician or local travelers health service
- ❖ For the latest recommendations for immunizations or malaria prevention contact the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia: 800-311-3435, or visit their website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>
- ❖ Many universities have immunization clinics that can assist you

## Time Difference

- ❖ Myanmar's time zone is six and a half hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +6 1/2)
- ❖ It is 14 1/2 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, and 11 1/2 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time
- ❖ When it is 11:30 PM in Yangon, it is 12 Noon in New York and 9 AM in L.A., on the same day

## Electricity

- ❖ 230 volts, 50 Hz
- ❖ Brownouts and blackouts are common outside Yangon, though some hotels have their own generators
- ❖ Most standard adapter/converter kits will have the necessary plug configuration to fit the standard electric outlets, which may vary around Myanmar.
- ❖ Typical plugs are the round pin attachment plug, shown here.
- ❖ Rectangular blade plugs may also be found, primarily in better hotels, also pictured.
- ❖ Also, many major hotel chains are said to have multipurpose outlets, which will take Australian 3-pin plugs and perhaps other types.



# ARRIVAL

## Entry

- ❖ You will be met upon arrival by your tour leader or representative and transferred to your hotel
- ❖ Contact information is sent with your Last Minute Reminders from JOURNEYS
- ❖ If you are asked for an address where you will be staying in Burma, please use the address for JOURNEYS Myanmar given on your service voucher

## Customs

- ❖ Before arrival in Myanmar, you will receive a Passenger Declaration Form, which must be completed and submitted to Customs officials
- ❖ Fire-arms, pornography and narcotics are strictly prohibited
- ❖ Bringing in or taking out Myanmar currency is not allowed
- ❖ Cameras, video cameras, radios and cassette players can be brought into the country but must be declared on arrival and taken out upon departure
- ❖ Mobile phones may be confiscated and held by customs and returned upon your departure
- ❖ Important note: Laptop computers may make custom officials suspicious that you are a journalist and the laptop may be confiscated
- ❖ Antiques are not allowed to be taken out of the country

# GETTING ALONG AS A VISITOR

## Food & Restaurants

- ❖ Drink only bottled drinks, and avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes
- ❖ Eat only foods that are thoroughly cooked, and raw fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself
- ❖ Avoid fresh salads unless the vegetables are washed with purified water, and avoid dairy products that are unpasteurized or may not have been refrigerated properly
- ❖ Look for a restaurant where lots of locals are eating - chances are the food will be delicious and reasonable
- ❖ Don't buy food from street vendors or stalls

## Money and Currency Exchange

- ❖ Myanmar currency is the Kyat (K or MMK); check the current exchange rates at: <http://www.xe.net/ucc/>
- ❖ You are on a prepaid tour so it is not necessary to exchange money immediately at the airport. We suggest waiting for your guide to advise you on where to exchange currency into kyat
- ❖ Be careful to exchange an amount very close to what you anticipate you will need. If you need to exchange it back to American dollars at the airport before departure, the rate goes up considerably
- ❖ It is a good idea to bring newer dated currency that has no rips, marks, folds, or holes
- ❖ Important: Credit cards and traveler's checks are NOT accepted throughout Burma. There are no international ATMs, either, so be sure to bring enough cash.
- ❖ For a week-long tour, expect to budget at least \$300 for tips, departure taxes, personal expenses such as drinks and shopping, but if you enjoy shopping you may want to bring more
- ❖ In countries where Visa and MasterCard are accepted, be aware that you may need to show your passport when using a credit card. Also, credit card companies are now charging a 3%+ surcharge on all foreign currency purchases (purchases of goods made outside of the US). Check with your credit card company before you travel as the charges change frequently without notice and vary with card and destination.
- ❖ Airport departure tax is approximately \$10, payable in US dollars

## Tipping

- ❖ It is common to tip drivers, guides, waiters at local restaurants and hotel porters
- ❖ The following suggestions on tipping are meant as a general guideline. Tipping should be done out of appreciation. For exceptional service you may wish to give more:
- ❖ Tip hotel porters 50¢-\$1 (in US\$ or equivalent kyat)
- ❖ 5% for meal service (in kyat)
- ❖ We suggest tipping your driver \$3-5 per person/per day for individuals or couples and about \$1-2 per person/per day for groups (in US\$ or kyat) - you may need to tip your driver on a daily basis as there could be different drivers each day.
- ❖ A fair tip for the tour guide would be from \$5-10 per person/per day for individuals or couples and about \$3-5 per person/per day for groups of 4 or more (in US\$ or kyat)
- ❖ At the International airport, guides are not allowed into the departure terminal, so a porter will escort you and your luggage through. He will expect a tip of around \$1, preferred in kyat
- ❖ When in doubt about appropriate tipping for porters, restaurants and drivers, ask your guide
- ❖ Anytime you especially appreciate someone particularly informative or helpful, an extra tip is always gratefully accepted.

## Emergency Services

- ❖ A 24-hour medical clinic with internationally trained medical staff is available in Yangon
- ❖ Emergency services and care for major medical illnesses may be limited outside of the city
- ❖ Prevention of injury is always the best policy.
- ❖ Your guide will advise you in the case of urgent medical need during your tour

# SPECIAL REMARKS

## People

- ❖ The people of Myanmar are generally hospitable, friendly, and fun loving
- ❖ Do not hesitate to ask for help whenever you feel the need for it
- ❖ Buddha is highly revered throughout Myanmar
- ❖ It is best to ask permission before entering houses, or before taking portrait photos. If in doubt, ask the guide

## Time

- ❖ Do not expect everything to happen on time; remember that in some places time is not as important as it is back home, and there is often little concern for punctuality
- ❖ Despite best efforts, departures and arrivals could be a little before or after the time given. This applies particularly to aircraft movements. Operating requirements, weather and terrain sometimes present problems, and on these occasions, to ensure your safety, flight times may vary

## Restroom Facilities

- ❖ It is a very good idea to carry your own small supply of toilet paper.
- ❖ Most bathrooms will neither look nor smell as sanitary as those you are used to.

## Safety

- ❖ Observe the same precautions taken at home
- ❖ Do not flaunt your wallet, always lock unattended vehicles, do not leave baggage unattended in public
- ❖ Make use of security facilities provided for valuables in your accommodation
- ❖ In towns, the best place to carry your passport and money is in a pouch worn around the neck inside of the shirt or in a money belt around the waist
- ❖ It is highly recommended that you buy travel insurance that covers your baggage before you leave
- ❖ Don't take anything you can't afford to lose or can't replace



## Shopping

- ❖ Popular souvenirs include: Lacquerware, Silver, Wood & stone carvings, Hand woven silk & cotton garments or fabrics, Gems & jewelry (purchases should be made through a government-authorized dealer who must issue an official receipt, which is required for taking them out of the country), “Kalaga” embroidered tapestries, Traditional puppets, and Tribal handicrafts
- ❖ Bartering is the norm at street markets. Ask your guide for tips on local bartering. But don't push too hard - remember that what is only a few dollars to you may mean a great deal to the average seller or artisan. Never barter unless you intend to buy.

## Important Notes

- ❖ Do:
  - ❖ Use both hands when offering something to a monk or nun or elderly person
  - ❖ Show the utmost respect for monks, nuns, and elders
  - ❖ Bow or bring your palms together when introduced to a monk
  - ❖ Practice saying the word “mingalarbar”
- ❖ Don't:
  - ❖ Wear shoes and socks inside a pagoda or monastery
  - ❖ Walk on carpets, mats or other types of floor coverings, especially with your shoes on
  - ❖ Wear unsuitable or revealing clothing
  - ❖ Display affection in public
  - ❖ Sit with feet on table or sprawl yourself on the floor
  - ❖ Point your feet toward a Buddha image, monk or older person
  - ❖ Lose your temper

## Climate

- ❖ Burma's climate pattern can be compared to the climate of other parts of mainland Southeast Asia.
  - ❖ The monsoons begin between May and June with frequent rains continuing through October.
  - ❖ Best time to travel is between November and March
  - ❖ The mildest and driest season is from November to February, with temperatures ranging from 60-75°F.
  - ❖ In the highlands, temperatures can drop to near freezing at night during December and January.
  - ❖ It can get very cold in the Kalaw/Inle Lake region during winter months. Be sure to pack a warm jacket.
  - ❖ In March, April and May, temperatures can be unbearably hot often reaching 100°F.
- | Ave. (°F) | Jan | Mar | May | July | Sep | Nov |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| High      | 89  | 96  | 91  | 84   | 86  | 88  |
| Low       | 65  | 72  | 77  | 75   | 75  | 74  |

## Equipment & Packing

- ❖ A good goal is to fit everything into a single piece of checked luggage and a carry-on daypack
- ❖ We recommend a durable, water-resistant, soft duffel bag (for treks) or lightweight soft-sided suitcase as your checked luggage. Hard suitcases are not practical due to space limitations.
- ❖ A small backpack or hip-pack is ideal for carrying bottled water, camera, extra sunblock, etc, while on excursions where the terrain requires your hands to be free.
- ❖ Choose a distinctive, easily identified bag, and use a JOURNEYS luggage tag for bag identification by staff, and your name and address should be also indelibly affixed inside the luggage.
- ❖ Casual clothing is appropriate at all times
- ❖ Lightweight & light colored clothes will help keep you cooler. Also keep in mind that synthetic fabrics dry faster than natural fibers like cotton, especially in humid areas, so you can pack less if you are able to wash and dry your clothes easily.
- ❖ Some hotels may have laundry services, but you will probably need to wash out some clothes en route
- ❖ Be aware of weight limits on checked luggage (20kg/44lbs) and pack accordingly
- ❖ You may want to bring an extra smaller, collapsible (lockable) duffel, to leave items in a city hotel while you are on an excursion or to use on your return for souvenirs

# CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS CHECKLIST

## Pre-Departure Tasks

- Obtain or renew passport
- Buy travelers checks in low denominations
- Evaluate and obtain trip cancellation, baggage and medical insurance
- Consult with physician for immunizations and prescription medicine recommendations
- Break-in primary footwear
- Make final payment to JOURNEYS at least 60 days before trip departure

## Clothing

- Comfortable athletic or walking shoes
- Extra shoes or sandals
- Shorts
- Comfortable, lightweight pants
- Nicer pants or skirt
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt
- T-shirts, short sleeve shirts
- Sweater or sweatshirt
- Light weight jacket or windbreaker
- Warm Jacket, gloves & warm hat (for cold areas)
- Rain gear - poncho or jacket
- Sun hat or cap with wide brim
- Bandana
- Swim suits
- Socks
- Sleepwear
- Under clothes

## Personal Items

- Sunblock (waterproof, high SPF)
- Lipbalm with SPF
- Insect repellent with DEET content
- 2 spare passport photos (in case of lost passport)
- Wrist watch and/or travel clock
- Sunglasses (with strap, case)
- Extra eyeglasses/contacts
- Money belt or pouch for valuables
- Small flashlight with extra batteries
- Copies of all important documents
- Day pack (can also serve as an airline carry-on bag)
- Camera, memory cards, film, batteries, charger
- Underwater camera (disposable kind is very handy)
- Lead bag/containers to protect film in X-ray machines
- Lightweight binoculars
- Plug adapter (if needed)
- Soft duffel with shoulder strap or durable suitcase
- Luggage tags
- Ziploc-type bags for packing shampoo or other liquids
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags for organizing inside luggage (also useful for dirty laundry)
- Thread, needles, safety pins for minor repairs



- Small packable umbrella

### Personal First Aid Kit

- Aspirin or other pain killer
- Cold relief tablets, antihistamine, cough drops
- Band-aids, gauze pads
- Antibiotics
- Prescription medicines
- Aloe gel or lotion in case of sunburn
- Anti-diarrhea medicine
- Antibiotic cream/ointment
- Supply of feminine hygiene items
- Motion sickness tablets
- Earplugs

### Essential Items For Your Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Domestic and international air tickets
- Travelers checks, money and credit cards
- Insurance certificates
- Address and telephone number of emergency contact
- Prescription medicines
- Extra set of underclothes
- Toiletries in small leak-proof bottles
- Camera gear, film and other valuables

### Optional Items

- Binoculars
- Address book, writing paper, or journal, pen/pencil
- Small washcloth
- Wet wipes/moist towelettes and Kleenex
- Favorite snack foods (pre-packaged)
- Pictures of your house and family
- Mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit (if applicable)
- Map
- Silica bags for moisture (protect camera equipment)
- Video camera
- Phrase book

