

# myanmar

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### Travelling in Myanmar

The lifting of the tourism sanctions in Myanmar has resulted in the country experiencing a heavy influx of travellers, curious to experience for themselves the intrigue that has long been associated with the country.

As a result of the significant number of visitor numbers in 2012 and 2013 thus far, tourism infrastructure is well behind the demand. While services are slowly adjusting to the expectations of western tourists, currently they do struggle to cope with the demand especially during peak travelling periods.

Below is a summary of what challenges travellers may experience when travelling to this region;

1. Shortage of accommodation options in the major tourist cities of Yangon, Bagan and Inle Lake region (Nyaung Shwe).
2. International flight availability.
3. Meal variety (especially with western food options)
4. Limited understanding by guides of western preferences and cultural differences.
5. Fluctuating and high 'tourist' prices, especially in regards to accommodation and flights.

We have found that almost everything will be different to what you are used to. We have found that those passengers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and do go wrong, are those that find their experiences the most rewarding.

This Fact Sheet provides you with practical advice and cultural information to aid you whilst travelling. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with this information and refer to the contents throughout your travels.

### Accommodation

Wendy Wu Tours always endeavours to utilise properties within the 'medium' range, however this can vary greatly between one area to the next. In remote areas we utilise properties that are the best available, and who can accommodate the size of our groups. We are also at the mercy of hotel availability and as such we will ensure that the best selection of properties is used where available. Please keep in mind that all levels of hotels can sometimes suffer from minor problems and technical difficulties (see Electricity). At each hotel your National Escort will try to organise the rooming arrangements to suit everyone's requirements. If you are travelling as a couple please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of double beds.

Yangon and Mandalay offer a good choice of accommodation; however in Bagan and the Inle Lake region, travellers should not expect the same standard, but instead a selection of more traditional style accommodation, which is simple and basic in décor and design.

### Transport

**Road** - We provide air conditioned cars and coaches where available for all tours. Travel through Myanmar requires patience as schedule changes are common and the road conditions are poor in some rural areas. Wendy Wu Tours sources the best available vehicles; however these may vary from city to city.

**Seatbelts** - Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law and therefore the locals largely choose not to wear them. For this reason local operators may or may not have seatbelts hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times whilst the vehicle is moving.

**Air** - Myanmar Airways is the country's official domestic airline. The air service has improved significantly in recent times and privately operated carriers are now flying to the most popular tourist destinations throughout Myanmar. Our clients travel by the reliable airlines that use ATR-72 or ATR-42 aircraft wherever possible.

### Meals

On our fully inclusive group tours, all meals are included on your tour; breakfast will be a buffet with a combination of local and western style food. Lunches and dinners are traditional banquet meals. Beverages are an additional cost and are readily available. We strongly recommend that you do not drink the tap water nor take ice with your drinks. Bottled drinking water is readily available to purchase. Please note that long driving distances or flight times may delay/alter your mealtime. Ensure that you carefully wash any fruit and/or food from local markets/street vendors with bottled water.

### Special Dietary Requirements

If you are on a restricted diet, it is a good idea to reiterate this with your National Escort/guide upon arrival.

**Vegetarians** - In order to ensure that you are properly catered for, please advise us if you are vegetarian so that arrangements can be monitored for you. It is also a good idea to reiterate your requirements to your guide upon arrival.

**Food Allergies** - If you have food allergies please also make them known to your National Escort/guide who will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met in advance. Unfortunately we can give no firm guarantee that special requirements can always be met. We recommend you either bring snacks or purchase them locally, to ensure you will always have something on hand if your allergy cannot be catered for.

People on restricted diets should expect complications in Myanmar. Patience, understanding and personal involvement will go a long way.

### Luggage and Incidental Items

Passengers are limited to one suitcase weighing no more than 20kg. You may also carry a cabin bag of approximately 5kg. Please ensure your luggage is properly locked at all times.

### Pharmaceutical Goods

It is recommended that you take any pharmaceutical products that you may require on tour as they may not be readily available to purchase. This could include items such as sleeping pills, tablets to relieve stomach upsets, headaches, motion sickness and any other medication that you usually take. For any prescribed medication we strongly recommend that you have a letter from your doctor. It is a wise choice to use an insect repellent against mosquitoes and as the sun can be remarkably hot, anti-bacterial wipes or hand sanitizer, a hat and high-factor sun block is advisable.

### Safety and Security

You are recommended to maintain a high level of personal security, especially in crowded places. Although Myanmar is considered to be safe for travellers, ensure you keep belongings on you at all times and that your suitcase/daypack has a lock on it, especially in crowded areas like marketplaces and train stations.

Do not leave any valuables unattended in your hotel room. We advise you to lock away valuables in the safe (either in your room or at Reception). Not all hotels will have in-room safes so, if this is not possible, you must either carry your items with you, or put them in the hotel safe. Wearing a money belt under your clothing is strongly recommended. It is also recommended that you do not bring valuable jewellery, etc. with you to Myanmar, as this may attract unwanted attention.

*We suggest that each passenger takes photocopies of their passport and that the copies are kept in various sections of your luggage - i.e. not where the original documents are kept!*

Whilst travelling each day, do not leave any valuables unattended on the bus. It is your own responsibility to ensure that you carry your money and valuables on you at all times.

### Insurance and Health

Comprehensive Travel Insurance is highly recommended. If you have chosen to decline the insurance offered by your Travel Agent or Wendy Wu Tours, please ensure you have arranged the appropriate cover for your holiday, as overseas medical costs are expensive and Medicare and Australian private health insurance will not cover you outside of Australia. A health certificate is not required for travel to Myanmar, however we strongly advise you consult your doctor or contact the Travellers Medical and Vaccination Centre in your capital city for advice on appropriate inoculations. If you are taking out travel insurance with your credit card company, you need to investigate the policy's inclusions and conditions fully. You should receive a policy number, an international access phone number to contact them in an emergency and a copy of full conditions.

### tipping

For our passengers' convenience we ask for a specified amount to be paid at the beginning of our group tours to cover tipping for guides, drivers, restaurant staff etc. Approximate tipping amounts can be found in our brochure and/or website. Exact tipping amounts will be stated in your final documentation, approximately 3 weeks before departure. This amount will not be paid in Australia to your travel agent or Wendy Wu Tours. It is paid locally in USD to cover the tips for your main service providers; guides, drivers, attendants and wait staff. Please ensure: that only crisp new USD notes are given.

### Entrance Fees and Optional Extras

All of your entrance fees for attractions listed in the itinerary are included in the price of your tour. However, you may be offered extra sightseeing that is not included on the itinerary. Participation in this is at the discretion of the passenger and is not part of your tour; therefore any additional costs will need to be paid directly to the guide.

### What to Wear

Out of respect for local values we ask that you follow your National Escorts advice at all times. You cannot wear hats inside temples and monasteries nor can you wear a jacket around your waist.

**Clothing** - The tropical days are hot and humid and we recommend light, comfortable cotton clothing. Casual wear is acceptable for most occasions in the city as are shorts and T-shirts. Bring swimming gear to cool off from the tropical heat. Please remember, however, this is a highly conservative country and you must ensure that shoulders, knees and chest for ladies are covered, especially when entering religious sites/areas. Take care to respect local modesty and dress appropriately at all times. Light rain wear is a must as there may be encounters with rain. Don't forget sunscreen and sun hats (to protect against the tropical sun). These items can be locally obtained easily and cheaply.

**Footwear** - For days that require a great deal of walking, comfortable hiking or walking shoes are recommended. For shorter trips that do not require a great deal of walking, a good pair of sneakers will do. A pair of flip-flop, slippers or thongs should be included. Note that locally, there may be difficulty in getting footwear in large sizes.

**Equipment** - A backpack and water bottle will come in handy. Bring along plastic bags to keep clothes and cameras dry in case of rain.

## Shopping

Popular items to purchase in Myanmar are lacquer wares, silver, wood and stone carvings, silk and cotton, gems, "Kalaga" or embroidered tapestries, traditional puppets and tribal handicrafts. Bartering is expected in markets. As a general rule, respond with an offer of 40% of what the seller asked for and negotiate from there. Please remember that this process is a bit of fun and should be undertaken with a generous dose of humour and patience, resulting in both parties reaching a mutually beneficial outcome.

## Electricity

Throughout the country the electricity is 220volts and the plugs are generally of the round, flat two-pin or rectangular 3 prong variety. Please note that 240 volts appliances will work on 220 volts supply.



European plug



Japanese plug



UK plug

Although Myanmar uses 220V, this can occasionally increase to 300V and then drop to 100V. The short power cut is not uncommon even in the capital Yangon. From March through to May, the electric power is supplied in a rotating system from quarter to quarter in and around Yangon. Most of the popular tourist destinations still have rationing. However, most major hotels have their own generator.

## Customs and Photography

All items of jewellery, cameras and foreign currency in excess of US\$2,000 must be declared upon arrival on the currency declaration forms. Travellers should have completed these forms during the flight to Yangon and must be submitted upon arrival. No Myanmar currency may be imported or exported.

A Wendy Wu Tours representative will join you upon arrival after immigration and customs control points have been passed. The representative will display a 'Wendy Wu Tours' sign for easy recognition. Export of Buddha images, gemstones and antiques without an official receipt is prohibited. Photography in airports, railway stations, administrative buildings such as banks or court houses, and near any military post is forbidden. Always ask permission first when taking photographs of people.

## Visa

Entry visas are required for all foreigners wishing to visit Myanmar and can be obtained through the Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department. Visas are valid from the date of entry, are valid for 60 days from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 30 days.

## Duty Free

200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g tobacco; 1 litre of alcohol; 0.5 litres of perfume or eau de cologne.

Prohibited and restricted items - Gambling equipment, antiques, archaeological items and pornography are prohibited. Jewellery, electrical goods and cameras must be declared; failure to do so may result in visitors being refused permission to export it on departure.

## Departure Tax

Your departure tax from Myanmar is included on your ticket so this does not need to be paid on departure. There is no departure tax for domestic flights. This is subject to change without notice.

## Religion and Etiquette

While the majority of Myanmar, around 87 per cent, practices Theravada Buddhism, there are also Christians, Muslims and Hindus. However, there is complete freedom in religion among Buddhists or non-Buddhists in Myanmar. In most cases your National Escort will brief you on etiquette and local customs; however there are a couple of good points worth noting;

- Visitors should dress neatly and conservatively in all religious shrines. It is acceptable to wear shoes when walking around the compound, but not inside the temple where the principal Buddha image is kept. This is done in your bare feet, so taking some antibacterial wipes to wipe down your feet afterwards is a good idea.
- Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman
- The body is viewed as being of two separate parts; the upper part of the body is considered sacred whilst the lower half is inferior. This is why it is rude to touch a person's hair head or cheek or to point your feet towards an image of Buddha, elder or sacred place.
- Public displays of affection are frowned upon as are revealing clothes for women.

## Climate

Since it is in the tropical region, it is generally hot and humid. But it is cooler in the mountain areas. The location and topography of the country generate the "dry and wet monsoon climate" pattern.

- **Summer months** - February through mid-May
- **Rainy period** - from mid-May through late October
- **Winter seasons** - November through January

Daily extremes of temperature are rare. The directions of winds and depression bring rain, and although it is always heavy in the coastal areas during monsoon season, it seldom creates hardships. The favorite months to travel are October through January when the days are not so hot.

## Money

The official Myanmar currency is Kyat (pronounced 'Chat'). The official exchange rate is 1271 Kyat for 1 USD as of November 2015. You will need to ensure you exchange all the required currency into US Dollars before departure.

**Exchanging foreign currency** - The Central Bank of Myanmar has withdrawn all foreign currency exchange licenses for businesses such as Hotels, Restaurants, Airlines and Souvenir Shops. Therefore USD can no longer be used for payment of items/services, or exchanged at businesses other than the Bank. Please bring USD to exchange into local Kyats at the Bank. Please be careful when exchanging money from AUD to USD, as only crisp, new USD notes are accepted; any tears or folds in the note will be rejected. This applies for when you are exchanging money into Kyat and also when you are handing tipping money to your guide. Notes: Kyat 1000, Kyat 500, Kyat 200, Kyat 100, Kyat 50, Kyat 20, Kyat 15, Kyat 10, Kyat 5, Kyat 1. Your National Escort will advise where you can change your USD into Kyat. Please be sure to keep your receipts as these may be requested by Customs upon your departure.

**Credit cards** are still widely not accepted at most hotels or banks. A few deluxe hotels do accept them for expenses; however this cannot be relied upon. Instead we recommend you bring enough cash for all expected expenses. ATM's - ATM's are available in the bigger cities, yet their reliability cannot be guaranteed. We recommend you bring adequate funds in cash before your departure.

## Keeping in Touch

**Phone calls** - Calling Australia from Myanmar can be very expensive. To call Australia the international access code is 0011, followed by the country code, 61 then the local area code (omitting the first 0) then the number. For example to call Wendy Wu Tours you would dial 0011 61 2 92248888. The country code for international calls is (95) and these can be made from major hotels and the Central Telegraph Office in Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan. The service is improving however the connection is sometimes still poor and international calls are expensive.

**Mobile phones** - The telecommunication system in Myanmar barely meets the minimum requirements and it is still very poor in standards. Myanmar uses a GSM mobile phone network. If you choose to take your mobile with you, please be aware that international roaming will not function with your own number; although it is possible to purchase a prepaid SIM card in Yangon. You may need to ask your guide for assistance in purchasing this. The cost for a SIM card is roughly 25,000 Kyat. It will cost approximately 90 cents a minute for an international call.

**Postage** - The postal service in Myanmar is considered unreliable and letters sometimes take months to arrive at their destination.

**Internet & email** - E-mail access is available at most hotel business centres, as is Wi-Fi. Please be aware that internet access can sometimes be unreliable and slow. Be careful not to save your password or any sensitive information on public computer terminals.

## Time Difference

For your convenience please find below the time in all Australian Capital cities, Singapore and New Zealand when it is **12:00 midday in Myanmar**.

City	Daylight Saving	EST
Sydney	4:30pm	3:30pm
Brisbane	3:30pm	3:30pm
Melbourne	4:30pm	3:30pm
Adelaide	3:00pm	3:00pm
Canberra	4:30pm	3:30pm
Perth	1:30pm	1:30pm
Darwin	3:00pm	3:00pm
Hobart	4:30pm	3:30pm
Auckland	6:30pm	5:30pm
Singapore	1:30pm	1:30pm

**MYANMAR TIME IS 6:30 HOURS AHEAD OF GREENWICH MEAN TIME (GMT+6:30)**

## Our Ground Operator

If you have any concerns prior to your departure, please contact our office on 1300 727 998 or your local travel agent during office hours. If it is outside of normal business hours and your query is urgent please email:

**afterhrsassistance@wendywutours.com.au**

Wendy Wu Tours wish to ensure that your holiday runs as smoothly as possible and so if, during your trip you are dissatisfied with any element of your arrangements please immediately notify your National Escort or Local Guide who will endeavour to resolve the issue at the time. Should the outcome not be satisfactory, please contact our ground operator partner as per the contact details below;

**Buffalo Tours** - L10, Vietbank Building, 70-72 Ba Trieu, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi, Vietnam  
**Emergency 24hour number:** +95 (0) 92 5017 6435  
**Email:** operations.myanmar@buffalotours.com

