Wendy Wu Tours

Myanmar Explorer Tour Dossier

Classic Tour | 11 Days | Moderate

Yangon – Bagan – Mandalay – Inle Lake

Myanmar emanates the exotic glamour of a relatively undiscovered destination. This unique country is dripping with cultural riches, which make for an immensely rewarding adventure.

Tour Highlights:

Yangon - The former capital of Myanmar with parks, colonial buildings and the golden Shwedagon Pagoda

Bagan - The home to over 3,000 temples and Myanmar's greatest architectural site

Mandalay - Considered to be the cultural centre of Myanmar and home to the world's longest teak bridge

Inle Lake - Famous for the people who live on and around it, known as the 'Intha'

Visit wendywutours.com.au

Call 1300 727 998 to speak to a Reservations Consultant

Myanmar Explorer tour inclusions

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers)
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders

Personal expenditures e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary are at your own expense.

Classic Tours

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Indochina on an excellent value group tour travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully-inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

Moderate

Myanmar Explorer is a **moderate** tour. This means that the itinerary requires a good level of fitness.

- On several days there will be sightseeing on foot for extended periods of time.
- At some of the sights visited there are a large number of steps to climb
- You will be required to get on and off varying sizes of boats often without assistance.

Of course, our National Escort and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

Country Profile: Myanmar

Myanmar is a spiritual country, largely unexplored by tourists until recently. It is known as the 'Golden Land' because of the countless number of pagodas and temples that dominate the landscape. In Myanmar, 89% of the population is devoutly Buddhist, which is reflected in their gentle and welcoming nature.

Itinerary Changes

1. It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.
2. The domestic airlines in this region have frequent schedule changes. For this reason, we have indicated morning, afternoon or evening flights only in the following section. Your Local Guide or National Escort will inform you of any schedule changes as they are informed of them.
3. Enhancements to the itinerary have been made for 2017 departures.
   - Due to flight schedules with Singapore Airlines, an overnight stay in Singapore has been removed.
   - The overnight in Kalaw has also been removed from the 2017 itinerary to improve passengers experience on this tour.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 11 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the starting point. Join the tour on Day 1 in Yangon and end the tour on Day 8 in Yangon. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Important Information Regarding Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our Myanmar office on **+95 (0) 9 977 11 5310 (24 hours)** to urgently advise your arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in Myanmar. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and ensure someone is at the airport to meet you on arrival.

If we are not advised of late changes and missed connections, Wendy Wu Tours cannot guarantee someone will be able to meet you upon arrival in Myanmar as our local office will have no way of knowing which flight you will be arriving on. Wendy Wu Tours will not be responsible for providing reimbursement of transportation costs from the airport to your hotel in the event that our local office was not advised of changes to arrival time.

Myanmar Explorer Itinerary

DAY 1: AUSTRALIA TO YANGON

Fly with Singapore Airlines to Yangon for a two-night stay. Your National Escort/Local Guide from Wendy Wu Tours will meet you at the Yangon International Airport in the Arrivals Hall tonight. Together with other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer to your hotel and check-in. In the event of flight delays or changes to arrival times, please see the details above as to what to do in this circumstance.
Brisbane passengers may depart one day earlier.

Destination Information

Yangon - With a population of over 5 million, Myanmar's former capital possesses a peaceful atmosphere with colonial boulevards and tranquil lakes. This charming city thrives by night with bustling streets filled with stalls selling everything from locally made handicrafts to fruit and cigars.

DAY 2: DISCOVER YANGON

After breakfast, you will start your walking tour of Yangon at the Central Post Office, and then stroll down Strand Road and observe the locals going about their daily lives. Continue walking up Pansodan Street famous for some of Yangon's most impressive colonial architecture, before arriving at Mahaboandoola Park where you can view the Sule Pagoda. Next visit City Hall and the High court. Later explore Mahabandoola Garden and the Bogyoke Markets. Visit the National Museum, home to priceless ancient artefacts and Karaweik Hall before watching the sunset at the magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda located on top of

Singuttara Hill, where many locals and Buddhists come to worship.

Destination Information

Strand Road and Pansodan Street – Many fine examples of British colonial architecture dating from the mid 1800's are located downtown. Pansodan Street intersects Strand Road, which runs parallel to Rangoon River and where Pansodan Jetty is located. This is a great opportunity to witness a hive of activity along the riverfront.

Sule Pagoda – Situated in the centre of Yangon, octagonal in shape and standing 44m tall. According to legend, remnants of the pagoda are over 2,500 years old, having been built during the time of the Buddha.

Bogyoke Markets – A vast covered marketplace selling an array of handicrafts, food, jewellery and clothing.

National Museum – Housing works of art and historic memorabilia. Here you will learn the history and tradition of Burma.

Shwedagon Pagoda - Located on top of Singuttara Hill, where many locals and Buddhists come to worship. Shwedagon Pagoda is thought to have been built between the 6th and 10th centuries; however, it has been rebuilt

many times. It is here that eight strands of Buddha's hair are said to be kept. The pagoda is covered in gold and contains diamonds, rubies and emeralds.

DAY 3: FLY TO BAGAN

This morning fly 1 hour and 10 minutes to Bagan where upon arrival you will start your sightseeing tour with a visit to the colourful Nyaung U Markets before exploring the pagodas of Htilominlo and Shwezigon and the Ananda Temple. Visit a Lacquer ware craftsmen's workshop and travel through the town of Phwar Saw Village to climb the 400 steps of Aureum Watchtower for a view of the setting sun.

Destination Information

Bagan - It is believed as many as 13,000 temples and stupas once stood in the area around Bagan; however, invasions, war and natural disasters have reduced most of these to rubble. Despite this, Bagan is home to more than 2,200 standing ancient temples and is Burma's greatest architectural site.

Shwezigon Pagoda - This beautiful pagoda was built by King Anawrahta in the 11th century to enshrine one of the four replicas of the Buddha's tooth found in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Today it is considered Bagan's main religious site rising from the earth in three separate terraces.

Htilominlo Pagoda –This pagoda built in 1218, marks the spot where King Nantaungmya was chosen to be the crown prince. Today it still has some of the original plaster and carved reliefs on display.

DAY 4: MT POPA

Today drive 2 hours to Mt Popa and climb more than 750 steps to the nearby temple of Taung Kalat, set atop an extinct volcano and said to contain 37 spirits, also known as 'nats'

Destination Information

Mt Popa - Formed by a volcano almost 250,000 years ago and a revered spiritual residence of the 37 'nats,' worshipped in Burma in unison with Buddhism. There are a number of statues and shrines that represent these spirits located along the mountain. Once you reach the top, the temple of Taung Kalat affords sweeping views of Myingyan Plain below.

DAY 5: MINGUN AND AVA

Leave Bagan and fly 30 minutes to Mandalay this morning. Considered the epicentre of Burma culture, Mandalay's sites reflect this. Visit the Mahamuni Pagoda, Shwenandaw Monastery and Kuthodaw Pagoda. Transfer to the jetty after lunch for a boat ride across the Irrawaddy to Mingun on board a local boat. Return to the mainland and visit a traditional handloom silk workshop and Kalaga tapestries craftsmen's shop. Finish the day with a drive up Mandalay Hill in an open top vehicle for magnificent views from the 230m-high summit.

Destination Information

Mandalay - Is the second largest city and the last royal capital of the Burmese Kingdom. Located along the Irrawaddy River and centred around the Royal Palace, Mandalay is within easy distance to former colonial hill stations and ancient cities.

Mahamuni Pagoda - Enshrining the Mahamuni Buddha - a highly revered image in Burma. It is covered in thick layers of gold leaf applied by male worshipers. As a result, this has started to distort its shape.

Shwenandaw Monastery - Once part of the royal complex of King Mindon, this building was dismantled and reassembled outside the palace walls in 1880. As luck would have this move ensured that it survived the WWII bombing campaign in Mandalay, where many other royal buildings perished.

Kuthodaw Pagoda - Famous for housing the world's largest book; Separated into 15 volumes each page is inscribed in marble and housed in its own stupa.

Mingun – A riverside village home to many unique pagodas and the world's largest ringing bell, weighing over 87 tonnes.

Mandalay Hill - The highest point in Mandalay and an optimal spot to enjoy the panoramic views of the river, Shan hills and the city sprawl below

Day 6: AMARAPURA AND MANDALAY

This morning, visit Amarapura with its working monastery dating back to 1783. Later travel to Sagaing, a former Shan capital in the 14th century with many impressive stupas scattered on its Hill and on to the charming island of Inwa with highlights such as the ' leaning tower of Ava' and the elegant teakwood monastery Bagaya Kyaung. Inwa is only accessible by a short ferry transfer and there are no cars on the island. At sunset take a boat ride at the U Bein Bridge, the longest teakwood bridge in the world.

Destination Information

Inwa Island - Founded in 1364, Inwa Island lasted nearly 400 years as a royal capital. The city was finally abandoned after it was destroyed by a series of major earthquakes in 1839.

U Bein Bridge - This teak wood bridge built 200 years ago spans 1.2km across the Taung Thaman Lake and is the longest teak bridge in the world.

DAY 7: INLE LAKE

This morning board your 30 minute flight to Heho, continue to Inle Lake where you will visit Shwe Yan Pyae Monastery. Begin your visit on the lake by long tail boat, seeing the floating gardens and Intha fisherman. Later visit Phaungdaw Oo Pagoda, one of Burma's most sacred shrines before admiring the collections of ancient Buddhas at Nga Phe Monastery. Finally visit the weaving village of Inpawkhon.

Destination Information

Inle Lake - Located 900m above sea level and approximately 22km long and 11km wide, this water paradise is inhabited by over 200 villages constructed on stilts. The lake is most famous for the extraordinary lives of the people who live on and around it, known as the 'Intha'.

Shwe Yan Pyae Monastery - Built in the 19th Century, this red painted teak monastery provides education and boarding for novice monks.

Phaungdaw Oo Pagoda – One of the most sacred shrines in Burma dating back to the 18th Century. Inside the tiered pagoda, devotees await an opportunity to place gold leaf on one of four ancient Buddha statues housed here.

Nga Phe Monastery - A beautiful collection of Buddha images depicted in the Shan, Tibetan, Bagan and Inwa styles are displayed inside the expansive wooden meditation hall.

DAY 8: EXPLORE INLE LAKE

Sightseeing today on the western shore of the lake at the Indein Pagoda complex. Take a leisurely walk along one of the many creeks, passing through rice fields to the village of Saema. Visit the village primary school.

Destination Information

Indein Pagoda Complex – One of the amazing historical sites in Inle Lake, where hundreds of small stupas decorated in sculptures of mythological animals and beings lay overgrown by moss and vegetation.

DAY 9: YANGON NIGHT MARKETS

This morning transfer to Heho airport for your flight to Yangon. Upon arrival visit the Kaba Aye Pagoda, then continue to Botataung Pagoda and Nanthida jetty to observe the daily life of the local people. In the evening, visit the busy area of Chinatown including a Chinese Temple and night market before a farewell dinner.

Destination Information

Kaba Aye Pagoda – Built in 1952 Kaba Aye (World Peace) Pagoda was home to the Sixth Buddhist Council which was held there from 1954 -1956.

Botataung Pagoda – Close to Yangon River, this restored Pagoda is unique as it is hollow inside allowing visitors the opportunity to walk through and admire different relics and artefacts on display.

Chinatown – Located in downtown Yangon since the 1850's, stroll through the myriad of street vendors and enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of this bustling market.

DAY 10: DEPART YANGON

Any time before your flight is free at your leisure today. You will be transferred from the hotel to Yangon Airport for your onwards flight.

DAY 11: ARRIVE AUSTRALIA

Arrive home today.

MYANMAR EXPLORER TRAVEL INFORMATION

Visas

Visa Requirements - Entry visas are required by all visitors to Myanmar and Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork and submit the visa application on your behalf. Visas for Myanmar are valid for 90 days from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 28 Days. Please be advised that your passport must have at least 6-months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are **due in our office 90 days prior to departure**; if received after this, urgent visa processing fees will apply. Also, please note we do not accept passports and visa applications within 70 days prior to departure. Passports will be returned with your Final Documentation 2-3 weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a $15 courier fee will apply.

Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

Eating in Indochina

Indochina is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in most local dishes. Whilst Myanmar food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

Your itinerary has been carefully crafted to introduce you to a range of local dishes and we hope that you enjoy the culinary adventure ahead. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive group tours from dinner on the day of your groups' arrival until breakfast on your day of departure. When dining in Myanmar, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetizers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it's appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. In Thailand and some other countries in Indochina, forks and spoons are used for most dishes and chopsticks are typically provided to eat noodles. Usually chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Myanmar is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

Please refer to your travel guide for more information on Myanmar cuisine, including information for travellers with restricted diets.

Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the Australia and Indochina. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide.

Rest assure that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

Please note double bed requests can be made at time of booking but cannot be guaranteed.

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Roads in Southeast Asia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

Seatbelts: Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in Indochina and therefore the local people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason, some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

Development in Myanmar

Although Myanmar is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in the Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in the Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from you National Escort or Local Guides.

Myanmar Public Holidays

If you are travelling within the below Myanmar Public Holidays please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. Water Festival is celebrated between 13th – 21st April. Myanmar New Year Holiday is between 17th – 20th April 2017.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions, which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a national escort. There will usually be no more than 28 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised

departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

Tipping Policy

Tipping while on holiday is a firm and expected element in the tourism industry and Myanmar is no exception. To remove the uncertainty and stress of not knowing how much is appropriate to tip or to whom, Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy for our group tours where a nominated tipping amount is paid upon commencement of the programme by each tour member. This amount is stated in all group pricing, however it is not collected in your final payment received by Wendy Wu Tours.
This nominated tipping amount is to be given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour, who will than distribute it amongst your main service providers – guides, drivers and attendants – on your behalf during the tour. Any other tipping, such as tips for bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion based on satisfaction of services received, as are gratuities for additional requested special services.

The tipping amount is determined based on the total number of passengers travelling in the group. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort. The final tipping amount will be outlined in your final documentation, which is distributed 2 weeks prior to your tours departure.

Packing List and Climate

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on www.weather.com.

Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 7kgs. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

Exchanging Cash

The Central Bank of Myanmar has withdrawn all foreign currency exchange license for businesses including Hotels, Restaurants, Airlines and Souvenir Shops. Starting from 01 November 2015, institutions such as the ones named will not be allowed to accept payments in US dollars. Tourist can bring US-Dollars and change it into local Kyats or withdraw local currency at any ATM with their credit card.

US Dollars are the preferred currency in Myanmar. ATM's are limited in Myanmar, so we suggest that you bring enough US Dollars in cash to last the duration of your stay. It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling outside major cities in Myanmar. For your convenience, please ensure that US Dollars should be from the new series from the year 2003 onwards and in good condition to avoid any difficulties exchange money during your trip. Old series notes can be difficult to exchange.

We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of AU$250 per week should be sufficient; however for those that cannot resist a bargain, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

Climbing Steps

Some sightseeing involves climbing quite a number of steps. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside. People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

Cultural Differences

Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist; however, it is a nation with many cultures and histories. Please be considerate of the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration.

Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.travelvax.com.au.

Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.smartraveller.gov.au as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website

After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: 20 March 2017