



Myanmar

Official name of Myanmar is the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Capital : Naypyidaw

History/Background

The history of Burma (Myanmar) covers the period from the time of first-known human settlements 13,000 years ago to the present day. The earliest inhabitants of recorded history were the Pyu who entered the Irrawaddy valley from Yunnan c. 2nd century BCE. By the 4th century CE, the Pyu had founded several city states as far south as Prome (Pyay), and adopted Buddhism. Farther south, the Mon, who had entered from Haribhunjaya and Dvaravati kingdoms in the east, had established city states of their own along the Lower Burmese coastline by the early 9th century.

Another group, the Mranma (Burmans or Bamar) of the Nanzhao Kingdom, entered the upper Irrawaddy valley in the early 9th century. They went on to establish the Pagan Empire (1044–1287), the first ever unification of Irrawaddy valley and its periphery. The Burmese language and culture slowly came to replace Pyu and Mon norms during this period. After Pagan's fall in 1287, several small kingdoms, of which Ava, Hanthawaddy, Arakan and Shan states were principal powers, came to dominate the landscape, replete with ever shifting alliances and constant wars.

In the second half of the 16th century, the Toungoo Dynasty (1510–1752) reunified the country, and founded the largest empire in the history of Southeast Asia for a brief period. Later Toungoo kings instituted several key administrative and economic reforms that gave rise to a smaller, more peaceful and prosperous kingdom in the 17th and early 18th centuries. In the second half of the 18th century, the Konbaung Dynasty (1752–1885) restored the kingdom, and continued the Toungoo reforms that increased central rule in peripheral regions and produced one of the most literate states in Asia. The dynasty also went to war with all its neighbors. The kingdom fell to the British over a six-decade span (1824–85).

The British rule brought several enduring social, economic, cultural and administrative changes that completely transformed the once-agrarian society. Most importantly, the British rule highlighted out-group differences among the country's myriad ethnic groups. Since independence in 1948, the country has been in one of the longest running civil wars that remain unresolved. The country was under military rule under various guises from 1962 to 2010, and in the process has become one of the least developed nations in the world.

Population

All population figures of Myanmar/Burma are just rough estimates as the last partial census was conducted in 1983, and no trustworthy nationwide census has occurred since 1931. It's believed there are at least 300,000 refugees from Burma located along the Thai-Burma border, with many camps established in the 1980's. Illegal groups are not recognized as citizens in the country, and they have been relentlessly persecuted. This led to the expulsion of close to 300,000 Burmese Indians.

The country is very ethnically diverse with 135 ethnic groups recognized by the government. There are at least 108 ethnolinguistic groups in Myanmar. The Bamar account for around 68% of the population, followed by the Shan (10%), Kayin (7%), Rakhine (4%) and overseas Chinese (3%). Ethnic minorities in the country prefer to be called ethnic nationalities to fight against the proliferation of the dominant Bamar people. Other ethnic groups include the Mon (2%), Overseas Indians (2%) and the Kachin, Chin, Anglo-Indians, Nepali and Anglo-Burmese.

Myanmar is currently experiencing steady if somewhat low population growth. It's hard to say what the population will be in the future, but one thing is sure: Myanmar is facing an aging population and this problem must be addressed.

Religion

Myanmar (Burma) is a multi-religious country. There is no official state religion, but the government shows preference for Theravada Buddhism, the majority religion. According to both the statistics published by the Burmese government and the CIA, it is practiced by 89% of the population,[3][4][5] especially among the Bamar, Rakhine, Shan, Mon, and Chinese. The new constitution provides for the freedom of religion; however, it also grants broad exceptions that allow the regime to restrict these rights at will.

Although Burma's Jews once numbered in the thousands, there are currently only approximately 20 Jews in Yangon (Rangoon), where the country's only synagogue is located. Most of the Jews left Myanmar at the commencement of the Second World War, and also after General Ne Win took over in 1962. Hinduism is practiced mainly by Burmese Indians.

Language

The Burmese language is the official language of Burma. Burmese is the native language of the Bamar and related sub-ethnic groups of the Bamar, as well as that of some ethnic minorities in Burma like the Mon.

Burmese is spoken by 32 million as a first language and as a second language by 10 million, particularly ethnic minorities in Burma and those in neighboring countries. (Although the Constitution of Burma officially recognizes the English name of the

language as the Myanmar language, most English speakers continue to refer to the language as Burmese.)

Burmese is a tonal, pitch-register, and syllable-timed language, largely monosyllabic and analytic language, with a subject-object-verb word order. It is a member of the Lolo-Burmese grouping of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The language uses a Brahmic script called the Burmese script.

Political System

Burma (also known as Myanmar) is a **unitary presidential constitutional republic** under its 2008 constitution.

Historically, Burma was a monarchy ruled by various dynasties prior to the 19th century. The British colonized Burma in the late 19th century and it was under the jurisdiction of the British Raj until 1937.

Burma was ruled as a British colony from 1885 until 1948. While the Bamar heartland was directly administered (first as a part of India and then, from 1937, as British Burma), ethnic regions outside the heartland were allowed some measure of self-rule along the lines of the Princely States of India. This led to split loyalties among the various ethnic groups to outside powers (either to the British or Japanese) as well between the indigenous people in Burma. The dominant ethnic groups in Burma are the Bamar, who make up approximately sixty-eight percent of the population. During World War II, many members of the Bamar ethnic group volunteered to fight alongside the Japanese in hopes of overthrowing the occupying British forces.

Meanwhile, many other ethnic groups supported the Allied forces in combating the Japanese and Burman forces. This conflict would come to be very significant in the aftermath of World War Two when Burma was granted its independence from Great Britain in 1948. By granting independence to Burma, the British government gave the new ruler, Aung San, control over areas that were not traditionally controlled by the Bamar. This conglomeration of formerly British-owned land created a state that is home to over twenty distinct minority ethnic groups.

From the time of the signing of the Burmese Constitution in 1948, ethnic minorities have been denied Constitutional rights, access to lands that were traditionally controlled by their peoples and participation in the government. The various minority ethnic groups have been consistently oppressed by the dominant Burman majority, but have also suffered at the hands of warlords and regional ethnic alliances. Religion also plays a role in the ethnic conflicts that have taken place. Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists all live in Burma. These religious differences have led to several incidents that have affected hundreds of thousands of citizens in Burma.

The SPDC had been responsible for the displacement of several hundred thousand citizens, both inside and outside of Burma. The Karen, Karenni, and Mon ethnic groups have been forced to seek asylum in neighboring Thailand, where they are also abused by an unfriendly and unsympathetic government. These groups are perhaps more fortunate than the Wa and Shan ethnic groups who have become Internally Displaced Peoples in

their own state since being removed from lands by the military junta in 2000. There are reportedly 600,000 of these Internally Displaced Peoples living in Burma today. Many are trying to escape forced labour in the military or for one of the many state-sponsored drug cartels.[citation needed] This displacement of peoples has led to both human rights violations as well as the exploitation of minority ethnic groups at the hands of the dominant Burman group. The primary actors in these ethnic struggles include but are not limited to the Government of Burma (junta), the Karen National Union and the Mong Tai Army.

Cultural Do's and Don'ts

If you happen to be one of the visitors to the land of Golden Pagodas, there are some things you should know about the customs and beliefs of the Myanmar people that will go a long way toward making your stay more pleasant. A key concept for Myanmar people is "Cetana". Although the word has no exact translation in English, it is generally employed in the sense of goodwill, good intention or benevolence. Cetana is manifested in a thousand ways. In the life of a Myanmar, it is applied everywhere and all the time. It is practiced in both his religious duties and daily dealings with others. Any act performed out of true Cetana is greatly appreciated in Myanmar society, you also should never hesitate to ask for help whenever you feel the need for it. Anybody would be happy to help you, without harboring any selfish desire for material gains. Belief that merits, i.e. doing good deeds for others, especially strangers, will accrue is widespread. It even makes us feel enraptured. Thus, gift of money or things should, if at all, be given courteously to a Myanmar who helps you. You should be aware that the help is Cetana, regardless of whether it actually involves expenses. Most Myanmar feels that Cetana can be repaid with gratitude rather than money. Tipping as a system thus confined to such service people as taxi drivers, porters, bellboys and waiters, since they expect a small extra payment if they are indeed, of service to you.

Feeling of Respect

In Myanmar, feelings of respect are spontaneous in almost any situation. Deeply rooted in hearts. People pay respect to whomever honor is due. Yadanar Thone Par- literally meaning the Three kinds of Gem, refers to the venerable trinity of Buddha, Dhamma [his Teachings] and Sangha [members of the Buddhist Order]. Among the Three Gems, Buddha is the most exalted. So much so that each Buddha image must be treated as reverently as a living Buddha himself. Also to be revered are shrines housing the images, and precincts where in shrines, stupas, temples, monasteries and any other religious edifices stand. Which is why footwear is strictly prohibited on sacred religious grounds.

Social Etiquette

Like other Buddhist Asian countries, Myanmar adheres to a set of acknowledged cultural rules that can cause problems for the uninitiated. Here's a guide to what you should not do on your trip to Myanmar :

Never wear shoes and socks inside a pagoda or monastery as they are not allowed, although some monasteries allow footwear in the grounds. When visiting someone's home, shoes should always be left at the door. You should also remember that carpets, mats and other kinds of floor covering are meant to be sat upon, so should avoid walking on them especially with your shoes on.

Myanmar dress is conservative; therefore visitors should avoid wearing anything unsuitable in public. In a pagoda, men and women should avoid wearing sleeveless or revealing clothing.

Women should not sit on the roof of buses or boats out of politeness to the men or elder sitting underneath. Nor should anyone sit in chairs on the same level as monks or nuns and certainly not higher.

Do not step over the body of anyone else. But if you must, always ask to be excused first.

When you offer something to a monk or nun or an elderly person, use both hands. With others, apart from casual transactions at shops or food stalls use your right hand or both hands in order to be polite in the case of giving or receiving gifts, etc.

Monks and nuns should not be touched. Women should be careful not to let any part of their body touch a monk's robes.

Men should not offer to shake hands with a Myanmar lady unless she offers first, and should not touch them even in friendliness. Also, couples should avoid displaying affection in public.

Do not sit with feet on tables or sprawl yourself on the floor. If you happen to be sitting and your feet should, however unwittingly, be pointing toward, say, a Buddha image or a monk or an older person, it would be considered offensive.

However aggravated you are, do not lose your temper in public as it will cause everyone involved to lose face. Furthermore, touching someone older than you on the head may also be interpreted as an act of aggression and should be avoided. It is also worth bearing in mind that, apart from the religious persons, age, rather than wealth or professional position, is the most important criterion of social standing. In short, respect for elders above all.

Introduction and Greetings

Mingalarbar, literally means an auspicious occasion! probably is the first word, which you will hear from a local when you visit Myanmar. Unlike any other language-greeting

phrase, Mingalarbar can be used at any part of the day. The originally western custom of shaking hands when introduced has become something of a vogue among urbanized Myanmar. But this applies only to men. If you were introduced to monks, you would bow or bring your palms together. If you, a man, are introduced to a Myanmar lady, you should not stretch out your hand to shake hers unless she does so first. As demure and shy as a Myanmar lady might appear at first to a foreigner, she is the upholder of centuries-old traditions that make up the fabric of Myanmar society. Thus a proper Myanmar woman will most certainly be reluctant to have any sort of social intercourse with a man who is not intimately related to her. In urban areas, once again, better-educated, well-exposed ladies are less likely to adhere rigidly to such a conservative code of behavior.

Food

Burmese cuisine includes dishes from various regions of the Southeast Asian country of Burma (now officially known as Myanmar). The diversity of Myanmar's cuisine has also been contributed to by the myriad of local ethnic minorities. The Barmars are the most dominant group, but other groups including the Chin people also have distinct cuisines.

Burmese cuisine is characterized by extensive use of fish products like fish sauce and ngapi (fermented seafood). Owing to the geographic location of Myanmar, Burmese cuisine has been influenced by Chinese cuisine, Indian cuisine and Thai cuisine.

Mohinga is the traditional breakfast dish and is considered by many to be Burma's national dish. Seafood is a common ingredient in coastal cities such as Sittwe, Kyaukpyu, Mawlamyaing (formerly Moulmein), Mergui (Myeik) and Dawei, while meat and poultry are more commonly used in landlocked cities like Mandalay. Freshwater fish and shrimp have been incorporated into inland cooking as a primary source of protein and are used in a variety of ways, fresh, salted whole or filleted, salted and dried, made into a salty paste, or fermented sour and pressed.

Burmese cuisine also includes a variety of salads (a thoke), centered on one major ingredient, ranging from starches like rice, wheat and rice noodles, glass noodles and vermicelli, to potato, ginger, tomato, kaffir lime, long bean, lahpet (pickled tea leaves), and ngapi (fish paste). These salads have always been popular as fast foods in Burmese cities.

A popular Burmese rhyme sums up the traditional favourites: "A thee ma, thayet; a thar ma, wet; a ywet ma, lahpet", translated as "Of all the fruit, the mango's the best; of all the meat, the pork's the best; and of all the leaves, lahpet's the best".

Eating Etiquette

Traditionally, Burmese eat their meals from dishes on a low table, while sitting on a bamboo mat. Dishes are served simultaneously. A typical meal includes steamed rice as

the main dish and accompanying dishes called hin, including a curried freshwater fish or dried/salted fish dish, a curried meat or poultry dish instead, a light soup called hin gyo, called chinyay hin if sour, and fresh or boiled vegetables to go with a salty dish, almost invariably a curried sauce of pickled fish (ngapi yayjo) in Lower Burma. Fritters such as gourd or onions in batter as well as fish or dried tofu crackers are extra.

Out of respect, the eldest diners are always served first before the rest join in; even when the elders are absent, the first morsel of rice from the pot is scooped and put aside as an act of respect to one's parents, a custom known as u cha.

The Burmese eat with their right hand, forming the rice into a small ball with only the fingertips and mixing this with various morsels before popping it into their mouths.[2] Chopsticks and Chinese-style spoons are used for noodle dishes, although noodle salads are more likely to be eaten with just a spoon. Knives and forks are used rarely in homes but will always be provided for guests and are available in restaurants and hotels. Drinks are not often served with the meal and, instead, the usual liquid accompaniment is in the form of a light broth or consomme served from a communal bowl. Outside of the meal, the Burmese beverage of choice is light green tea, yay nway gyan.

Chin cuisine is focused around rice, millet, and maize. A Christian ethnic group from western Burma's hills, the Chin were oppressed by the government in the 1960s, including a rice blockade, and many fled the country. Chin dishes are often boiled rather than fried in oil.

Food theories

In traditional Burmese medicine, foods are divided into two classes: heating or cooling, based on their effects on one's body system, similar to the Chinese classification of food.

Examples of heating and cooling foods include:

Heating foods:

- chicken
- bittermelon
- durian
- mango
- chocolate
- ice cream
- Cooling foods:

- pork
- eggplant
- dairy products
- cucumbers
- radish

The Burmese also hold several taboos and superstitions regarding consumption during various occasions in one's life, especially pregnancy. For instance, pregnant women are not supposed to eat chili (for the belief that it causes children to have sparse scalp hairs).

Money

The currency of Myanmar is **Burmese kyat**.

Visa Information

The Required Terms and Conditions for VISA ON ARRIVAL

The applicant shall -

- have a valid passport not expiring for at least 6 months from the date of entry into Myanmar.
- bring two recent (4cm x 6cm) color photos taken within the past six months.
- have the letter of invitation from the sponsoring company in the event of first trip of business study. (Stay cannot be extended.)
- be required to produce copies of company registration/business license/ evidence of permission to do business issued by the ministries concerned together with the application if he is working in Myanmar.
- fully mention the name of the factory, location, the sponsor and the position he holds if he is doing business with business visa.
- apply for extension of visa with the recommendation of the ministries concerned as well as in accordance with the existing procedures if he is doing business with business visa.
- produce letter of invitation by the ministries concerned if he is going to attend meetings, workshops, - not be allowed to engage in any sort of work with or without charges apart from the professions mentioned in the visa application form.
- produce air ticket to the destination if he is applying for transit visa.

- stay at the hotels, motels and guest houses holding legal licenses issued by Myanmar Government, and factories and workshops legally permitted as well as human dwellings; and exactly mention the address he will stay at.
- make a promise to strictly abide by the existing laws, rules, procedures, orders and directives issued by Myanmar Government.
- have under-seven-year-old children accompanying parents in the passport granted visa free of charge; be able to produce the evidence of parent-children relationship if the children are holding separate passport.
- not be allowed to travel to the restricted areas without seeking prior permission.
- report to the office of the township Immigration and National Registration Department concerned at which he stays within Myanmar mentioning the address of hotels, motels, guest houses, factories and workshops legally permitted as well as human dwellings.
- depart to the country which he has travelled from by the arrangement of the airline he is using if he is denied entry.
- abide by the decision of the On Arrival Visa Scrutiny and Issuing Team.
- apply for Visa On Arrival at Airport Immigration Section obtaining the application form either from the airlines in Myanmar or the following website www.myanmarvisa.com/downloadform.htm of the Ministry of Immigration and Population.

Country Information Websites

- <http://www.journeysmyanmar.com>