



## Insurance

Medical facilities with western standards are very limited in Myanmar and practically only exist in Yangon. Many doctors have been educated in Europe (especially in the UK) but have limited access to modern medicines and limited updated knowledge on medicine.

It is **STRONGLY** recommended that you have a comprehensive travel insurance policy that includes medical evacuation so in case of emergency we can assist and make sure you will receive the necessary medical attention in Myanmar or in Bangkok, where the best medical facilities are available.

## Passports & Visas

All travelers to Myanmar require a valid passport with minimum 6 months remaining and a Myanmar visa. To apply for e-visa you can apply [here](#). For the Tourist visa it cost 55 \$ per person and the available port of entries are Yangon International Airport, Mandalay International Airport and Nay Pyi Taw International Airport as well at the land border checkpoints in Tachileik, Myawaddy and Kawthaung.

It is also possible to apply for a tourist visa at any Myanmar Embassy or Consulate. Tourist visas are issued for duration of 28 days at all Myanmar Embassies or Consulates and can be extended in Myanmar up to a maximum stay of 90 days. Any tourist whether traveling on a package tour or individually will receive the same type of tourist visa.

## Currency

The **kyat** (pronounced 'chat') is the official currency of Myanmar, abbreviated as 'K' or 'MMK' and usually placed before the numerical value (i.e. **K500**). Kyat comes in notes (no coins) of value **K50, K100, K200, K500, K1000, K5000** and **K10, 000**.

Hotels and many service industries are priced and payable in USD\$. Many restaurants are priced in kyat although high end establishments still price in USD\$. It is always best to pay in the currency displayed to save losing out on exchange rate.

USD\$ and Euros can be exchanged at most banks. Other currencies ie GBP£, AUD\$, THB can also be exchanged but fewer banks accept them. Branches of Farmers Bank exchange AUD\$.

Sometimes if you pay shopkeepers/taxis in USD\$ you will be given change in small grubby kyat which you will want to pass on quickly. Never change money in the street, always use a bank or official money changer.

You can change any unused kyat into USD\$ at the airport upon departure. The difference between the buying and selling rate is minimal (approx. 5 kyat).

## Arrival Procedures

After clearing the immigration desk, you will proceed directly to the baggage area. After collecting your luggage and clearing customs, head to the arrivals area where you will be met by your tour guide and/or driver.

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## Customs Procedures

As a basic rule-of-thumb, all valuable items brought into the country such as jewellery, cameras, mobile phones, electrical equipment, etc. must be declared upon arrival and subsequently brought out of the country upon departure. Foreigners must declare amounts exceeding USD 10,000. - or equivalent.

*\*You should only take ONE camera per person and any large or professional looking cameras or video equipment may come under scrutiny as outside journalism is severely checked.*

## ATM

There are now thousands of ATMS that accept international bank and credit cards located around the country – although bear in mind that most are concentrated in **Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Bagan** and **Inle Lake**. Cardholders can also withdraw local currency from ATMs and use their cards at a growing number of major outlets such as hotels, restaurants, and retailers.

Currently only **Visa, Mastercard** (Maestro/Cirrus), **China's Union Pay** and **Japan's JCB** can be used; the biggest providers of compatible ATMs are CB (Co-operative) Bank and KBZ (Kanbawza) Bank. Others include AGD Bank, AYA Bank and United Amara Bank.

For ATM cash withdrawals, there is typically a K5000 transaction fee, and a withdrawal limit of K300,000 per transaction. Depending on the conditions set by your own bank at home, you may be allowed multiple withdrawals per day. The use of ATMs in Myanmar is sometimes restricted by internet failure.

We do however recommend you take new US Dollars with you to exchange into Kyat. Blemishes of any kind – creases, marks, folds and so on – may result in getting a far worse rate of exchange or the money may not be accepted at all. Also, pre-2006 dollar bills or ones with the letters AB and CB at the start of the serial number (at the top left corner of note) may not be accepted. It is therefore advisable to carry US dollars in a safe, flat folder – not in a wallet. Ask your hotel or your guide about the current exchange rate on arrival and also where to exchange. There are more bank exchange counters opening all over the country, including on arrival at the airport and those counters usually give the best exchange rate.

## Safety

Myanmar is a very safe country for traveling. Bag grabbing, assaults, etc. are very rare. Foreign visitors are considered guests and are welcomed by the entire population with respect and curiosity. As a precaution it is of course always better not to leave money or valuable goods laying around in your hotel room or elsewhere but to carry your money with you or to store it in the safe in your hotel. Besides the normal precautions just don't get involved in any political activities in the country.

## Weather

### November – February (winter)

The most popular season for tourists to travel because of the lower temperatures (evenings in the mountains can be cold – 10 degrees Celsius). Daytime temperature is around 30 degrees Celsius. A good time to visit any place in the country but it can be busy at the major tourist locations.

### March – May (summer)

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The whole country can be hot (especially in the afternoon – around 35 degrees Celsius). Landscapes are a bit dry – excellent time to visit the beaches and to visit higher parts of Myanmar (Shan state for example).

### **June – mid October (green season)**

The temperatures drop (till about 25 - 30 degrees Celsius) and the scenery is green. Sightseeing is not too hot and not too dusty. A perfect period to visit Bagan, Mandalay and Shan states (Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Pyin Oo Lwin, Kalaw, Inle Lake) where it isn't raining a lot (mostly a short shower at the end of the day). Avoid the beaches in this period (it's raining more at the coast and most hotels are closed in this period). Yangon can get quite some rain as well so it is better to spend just 1 or 2 nights here. Sightseeing is great as there aren't many other tourists around yet – it's Myanmar at its best! There are in this period on average less than 10 rainy days a month upcountry.

### **Food**

The staples of Burmese cuisine are rice, noodles and curries. The main ingredient of the meal is usually rice and the curries are not as spicy as those from India. A clear soup called 'hingyo' accompanies most meals and a fermented fish sauce or paste called 'ngapiye' is usually served as a side dish to add flavour.

### **Water**

You will need to drink bottled mineral water whilst in Myanmar. There are many brands of bottled mineral water and all are safe for consumption just ensure that the seal on the bottle is not broken! Showering and brushing teeth with tap water does not pose a problem in the big cities. Avoid ice cubes, undercooked food and unpasteurised dairy products.

### **Toilets & Facilities**

Public toilets, when they can be found, can be squat-holes in the floor with footrests on either side. All public toilets come with a small obligatory fee for using them irrespective of the standard of hygiene. You will need to supply your own toilet paper. You will find some western toilet facilities near tourism sites, though again hygiene can be lacking. Your best bet is to use hotel and restaurant restrooms before leaving.

### **Tipping & Taxes**

Tipping in Myanmar is not customary. Amounts are often rounded up due to lack of small denominations notes or you are given a candy, a tissue or even a cigarette as "change". In a relatively poor country like Myanmar, tipping is however highly appreciated. In more upscale restaurants a tip of between 5 and 10% is recommended. In other places leaving the small change or 1 USD is enough. Taxi and trishaw drivers usually don't expect any tip at all.

Guides and drivers of rented vehicles do expect to be tipped. For guides a tip between 2 and 5 USD per person per day is customary, for drivers between 1 and 2 USD per day. Of course tipping is always related to the quality of services rendered.

The departure tax at Yangon International Airport is already included in most international flight tickets while the domestic airport tax is already included in tickets if booked through Conical Travel.

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## Shopping

As with most countries in Asia you will be expected to bargain. Things to look out for in Myanmar include lacquer ware, woodcarvings, stone carvings, bronze work, paper umbrellas, silver, gem stones, silk items and hand woven textiles.

*NOTE: Do not be tempted to buy antiques. Not only do we believe these articles should be left in the country of origin, but your purchase is likely to be confiscated at the airport. Gemstones should only be bought from government controlled outlets where authentic certificates are issued.*

## Clothing

Lightweight clothing in natural fabrics such as cotton is most suitable. The dress code is very casual but it is advisable to take a lightweight raincoat and some warm clothing during their wintertime (our summer). Pack lightly, all your hotels will offer laundry services. Suggestive or revealing clothing is not appreciated in this conservative and largely Buddhist culture. When visiting religious shrines and temples, modest dress is required and easily removable footwear is recommended as such sacred grounds must only be visited in bare feet (no socks either).

## Communication

Visiting Myanmar really is a "get -away" – consider yourself incommunicado, as your mobile phone will probably not be working. Myanmar has only a few roaming agreements. Buying a local simcard is getting easier and a temporary telephone number would cost about 2 Usd (MPT, Telenor and Oredoo) and can be bought easily in shops all around the country.

Internet cafes can be found in the bigger cities and most of the hotels around the country offer Wifi. The internet connection is often a bit slower than at home and there might be days that you can't get a connection fast enough to chat online.

## Photography

Please exercise caution and respect when taking photographs of monks in prayer, though taking photos of the morning procession of collecting alms is not a problem (please keep your distance, and don't use flash). It's best if taking close up shots to ask permission first.

## Cultural Differences

Every culture has its unique set of unwritten rules, as does Myanmar. When you visit Myanmar, try to adapt to the culture. Here are some examples of rules visitors should try to obey:

- ✚ In Myanmar, **feet** convey messages. Do not point with your feet. Pointing with your feet means disrespect.
- ✚ Also, don't stretch out your **legs** when you're sitting. Tuck your feet away. Your feet should certainly never face the Buddha.
- ✚ Calling with your **finger** means calling for a challenge. Calling with your fingers down is considered to be polite.
- ✚ Never pat a **monk** on the back. You should never touch the robe of a monk. Monks are very revered in Myanmar and they observe many rules, study the Dhamma, practice meditation and they are highly respected in Myanmar society.

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- ✚ Giving money to **children** is not advisable. Giving money or other things creates children's dependency on tourism. Visitors should consider the saying "Don't give a helpless person a fish, teach them how to catch a fish and they will learn for a lifetime".
- ✚ When in Myanmar, don't touch anyone on the **head**. The head is considered to be the most esteemed part of the body. To be touched on the head is considered aggressive.

For more good cultural tips about how to behave in Myanmar when traveling and to understand some cultural differences, have a look at: <http://www.dosanddentsfortourists.com/>


## Language


The national language is Burmese of which there are over 80 dialects spoken. The written language is an amazing looking script based on ancient Indian characters. In the cities English is becoming more widely spoken

Some basic phrases:

Hello [ pronounced min ga la ba ] : Mingala ba  
Thank you [pronounced ce-zu tin-ba-deh] : Ceizu tinbade

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