



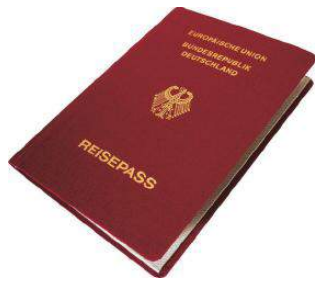
**Azure Sky Tours**  
**Our Brief Travel Guide**

## **Useful travel tips**

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# Useful travel tips

**VISA** Foreign visitors require a Myanmar visa and the passport should be valid for at least six (6) months upon entry into the country. The tourist visa costs 50 Euro/US \$ and is valid for 28 days after entry. Business visas cost 70 Euro/US \$. Overstay fees (\$ 3 per day) will be levied. The total stay with a tourist visa may not exceed 90 days, otherwise immediate deportation! The easiest way to get a visa is via the internet. Under [www.evisa.moip.gov.mm](http://www.evisa.moip.gov.mm) you will find all necessary information. It is recommended to enter the country by plane via Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyitaw. For overland entry (and, of course, regular visa application) visa can be applied for at the Myanmar embassy in your home country. German and Austrian citizens may contact the embassy in Berlin ([www.botschaft-myanmar.de](http://www.botschaft-myanmar.de)), Swiss citizens the consulate in Geneva. Please take into consideration that the processing of the application can take longer at peak times. In difficult cases, we are happy to help you with the visa. At the time being, overland entry is only allowed from Thailand. The borders of all other neighbouring countries are closed to foreigners. The most important border



crossings are Mae Sai/Tachileik, Mae Sot/Myawady and Ranong/Kawthaung, where you may enter with e-visas, too. In line with the promotion of tourism, other border crossings at the Thai-Burmese border are currently being opened. More details on request.

**Customs:** If you carry cash exceeding the value of USD 10,000 you must declare it to the custom authorities when entering the country. The same is true for valuable jewelry and expensive technical items. Burmese money may neither be brought into the country nor may it be taken out. There are restrictions on the import of cigarettes and alcohol. However, the prices for cigarettes in Myanmar are unbeatable and you can meet your requirements in the Duty Free Shop (at least in Yangon) after passing the customs check.

## **MONEY MATTERS**

The motto in Myanmar is: Cash is king! Even transactions in the six-digit range (dollars!) are settled in cash! In the big cities you often see people with big gunny bags full of money! And no one cares about them! Bank robbery is unknown in Myanmar, since the transport problems after a successful robbery are insolvable. And if someone – against all

odds – manages to get the bags into the escape car, he'll surely be stuck in the next traffic jam... Myanmar money (Kyat, pronounced as 'tcha') is circulating in various denominations of one to ten thousand kyat. The highest face value is about US \$ 7 – which says a lot about Myanmar's economy. You can buy the national currency on arrival in Yangon at the airport. The rates there are very good. Please do not believe that you get more on the black market. Rather, a little less. Or even much less, if you fall for one of the numerous fraudsters! But rest assured: there are also honest money changers! In many places you can find trustworthy 'Official Money Changers' where you can change without hesitation. However, if you are approached at a street corner and someone offers you a very tempting rate, be cautious! Banks and money changers accept Euro, Dollar, Singapore Dollar and also Thai Baht. On the other hand, it is a good idea to carry some US \$ in addition to the national currency. They are accepted almost everywhere. Please make sure to bring along very well-preserved banknotes: you cannot dispose



of dirty or kinked bank notes in Myanmar – not to mention dollar notes that are scribbled! Likewise dollar notes with the serial number CB – only the Buddha knows why ... On the other hand, watch out when you accept dollar notes from Burmese. They don't hold off from trying to get rid of exactly that kind of money ...

Credit cards since the introduction of ATM machines, many tourists are using those to withdraw cash with their credit card. You may withdraw up to 300,000 kyat (about 250 US \$) up to three times a



day. That should be enough! Please note that sometimes high fees are charged for the withdrawal of money. Credit cards issued by the large organizations Visa and Mastercard are accepted. Otherwise, paying with credit cards in Myanmar is rather rare and where they are accepted, up to 8 % commission will be charged. And do not rely solely on your credit card. Always carry cash in your pocket! Traveller's checks are not accepted in Myanmar!

## **INTERNET: Pros and Cons**

It's no secret anymore, that nowadays everybody can save a lot of money by booking directly on the internet – be it hotels, be it flights, or whatever. But it is no secret either, that the internet hides many traps: untrustworthy providers, incomprehensible small print etc. often make bookings on the internet a gamble. Not a few people were more than amazed, when they arrived in their room, which looked so beautiful on the picture: fish-eye and wide-angle lenses as well as photo shop are capable of producing true miracles! The matter is further complicated by the fact that Myanmar cannot be compared with other, more advanced countries in many ways. Be it the payment modalities, be it the internet connection, not to mention the electrical power supply... For example, you book a domestic flight to Myanmar in the internet. You may save ten percent (i.e. the commission of the local travel agency). The air traffic market in Myanmar is highly regulated: although we had more than ten domestic airlines, their prices hardly differ. Competition simply doesn't exist! 'Good relations' between the airlines' owners and authorities make sure no one breaks ranks. You will not find cheap flights (for example late evening flights) on the web, since they are usually offered at short notice and quickly sold out. And what, if the flight you've booked on the net is

delayed? Or cancelled? The travel agency surely learns about it. But what about the traveler, who is on a trekking tour and realizes only at the airport that his flight is already gone? Or has been canceled altogether? He'll be left out in the cold! The same can happen to hotel bookings, e.g. when you arrive at your hotel and they tell you that they just can't find your name, unfortunately! Or they gave your room away because they thought you wouldn't come anymore as it was so late. And the room, therefore, was 'passed on'. A complaint to tripadvisor after the trip doesn't give you a bed for that night. But it's a different story if you book with us: we take care of the booking, confirm it several times. And if all else fails, we'll take care that you find a place where you can rest your tired head. And the price differences usually aren't that big: after all, we have the same contracts and similar conditions with our partner hotels as the providers on the internet and we can keep up with those in the net. And inquiries with us are free of charge! To avoid misunderstandings: of course, 99 % of internet bookings go smoothly, even in Myanmar – but who would like to be among the 1% whose bookings went wrong?

## **HEALTH ISSUES**

A stay in Myanmar does not present a greater health risk than in Thailand or other countries in Southeast Asia. The

people here are dying of the same illnesses or diseases as the people of the Western world (cardiovascular diseases are in the first place) and not of snake bites or cholera! The dreaded malaria does not present a general health risk for the inhabitants of Myanmar. It hardly occurs in the areas visited by tourists. Dengue fever, transmitted by mosquitoes, exists in all countries of Southeast Asia, even in Singapore. Unfortunately, there is no vaccination against it yet. The best protection against mosquitos therefore is a mosquito net and clothing that covers the body. For more information please refer to the travel hints website of your country's embassy or guide books. Medical care in Myanmar unfortunately leaves much to be desired, although in Yangon the SOS clinic operated by foreign doctors is quite reliable. The Australian Embassy's clinic also offers a very good standard. There are some VIP hospitals with good facilities, too, in Yangon. And if it you should develop a serious condition, it is fortunately only a short trip to Bangkok, where there is a good medical infrastructure. However, a foreign travel health insurance is usually not very expensive but can save you a lot of trouble. It usually includes emergency



transport to your home country, should it come to the worst. Vaccinations are not compulsory when entering Myanmar, but it is not a bad idea to make sure before the trip that the usual immunizations (polio, wound arrest, hepatitis, etc.) are still effective.

The heat in Myanmar definitely can take its toll on visitors! Always wear a sunscreen (hat or umbrella) and don't forget to apply sun tan lotion with a high sun protection factor at the beach. At Inle Lake and elsewhere on larger water bodies keep in mind that the water reflects the sunrays. Quite a few travellers who thought that wearing a hat would be enough to protect them from the sun contracted painful sunburns. Make sure to ingest sufficient amounts of liquid because you are sweating permanently without even knowing it. It is a good idea to have a soup for lunch as it contains both liquid and salt. On the other hand it should not be forgotten that it is as easy to catch a cold as it is to get sunburnt in Myanmar. For longer bus rides a warm jacket or even a blanket can be rather useful.

## SECURITY FOR TRAVELERS

Myanmar may be considered as a very safe place! On the other hand, I recently read in a statistic that Myanmar had the highest murder rate of all of Eurasia. It could almost be compared with those of the 'leading' crime countries in Africa and South America. I was amazed that these peaceful people should be so murderous. After some investigation, the full truth emerged: It turned out that the victims of



domestic conflicts were simply included. Amazingly, this was not the case in Syria or Iraq ... Don't worry: Myanmar is one of the safest countries in the world and if you should notice that you have left your wallet somewhere, most probably someone will already be on the way to return it to you. However, there are areas in Myanmar (especially in Shan State, Karen State and Kachin State) where the Burmese army fights against various rebel groups. These areas are located in the outlying areas of the country and usually closed to tourists. If conflicts should occur in the area you're visiting, the authorities will make sure that you

leave immediately. For all areas of conflict a permit is usually required and it will only be granted if the location is safe. It is possible that areas that were open for tourists one day will be closed the next day. But these are exceptions. Please let us know where you want to go, and we will take care of the permit – success, however, can't be guaranteed!

Helpers in need: If you should really get in distress, you can contact the tourist office. If there is no such thing, ordinary police officers will help you, too. The officials are friendly and always eager to assist those seeking their help. In a medical emergency, you should contact the nearest doctor. Your hotel will be happy to help you find the right person. Larger hotels may even have an in-house doctor. In Yangon, the SOS clinic (phone: 01 657922) is reliable. Pls. don't forget to ask for a receipt, which you can submit later to your insurance company. Especially, if the treatment is expensive. The embassy of your home country can also help you. And, of course, we'll be there for you! Do not hesitate to call us at any time, even at night! This is part of our service! We also arrange contact with your relatives and friends in your home country.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Those bad old days, when you had to wait several hours at the Yangon

Telegraph Office until you were able to make a rather expensive overseas call – and then could hardly understand a



single word – are fortunately long gone. Myanmar has caught up with the age of modern communication! In addition to the state-owned MPT – which has greatly improved its service in the face of competition – the foreign owned companies Oredoo and Telenor are competing to win over the clients. Their services and prices are pretty much the same. One company may offer cheaper phone calls. While the other may be cheaper when it comes to internet access. After arrival in Yangon you can buy a rather reasonable priced SIM card (about one Euro) and immediately start making phone calls. The prices are higher than in the neighbouring countries but yet reasonable. If your credit is used up, you can top it up without any problems. Roaming with your own foreign phone card usually works, but will be considerably more expensive than a local SIM card. Tablet & Co. rang the death bell for most of the internet cafes that sprang up like mushrooms a few years

ago. They belong to the past, as network access has become so easy. Most of the hotels have well equipped business centers, should you require a desktop. In the cities and the main tourist destinations the network is usually o.k. but in the countryside you may find yourself offline more often than you like.

## **GRATUITIES**

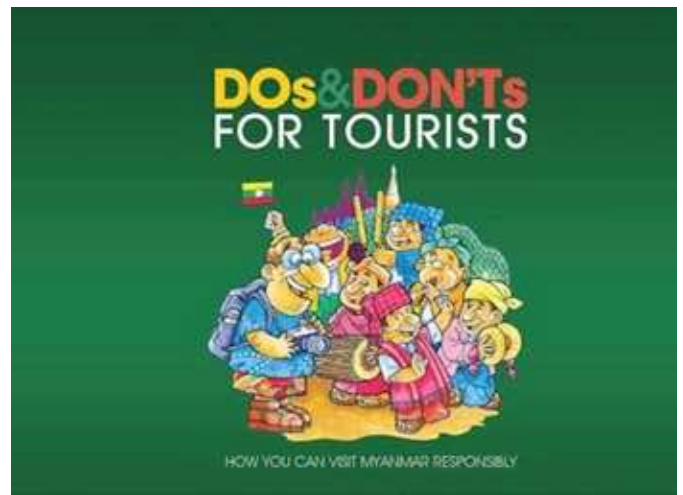
Myanmar is a service society where even lower class people have their maids. While in Europe even the clients of better hotels usually have to carry their suitcases to the room themselves, in Myanmar a simple guesthouse will



provide a baggage porter. There is a multitude of waiters, doormen, room boys etc. at the guest's disposal. Sometimes even more than you think you need. And they all expect a tip from you. All have in common that they are underpaid and therefore dependent on your tips in a way. But: how much is appropriate? Well, that depends on where you are! If you give the boy in a



tea shop a hundred Kyat, he'll be delighted. The baggage porter in a luxury hotel might be a little disappointed with that amount: one thousand Kyat would be more appropriate in this case. In a restaurant one should give 5 to 10%. But of course not, if you go out with a group of friends and the bill is rather high. In an exclusive restaurant – Yangon has quite a few of them – you might end up with a bill of 500.000 Kyat. Then, of course, a tip of ten percent would be more than inappropriate. A waiter in such a place earns about 200.000 Kyat and you wouldn't give a waiter in your home country one quarter of his monthly income as tip. Or would you...? Upscale restaurants will have a service charge on their bill. I usually bring up the bill to a round figure, e.g. from 8,500 Kyat to 9,000 Kyat. Quite often porter fees are fixed as on the airports where they charge 300 Kyat per piece of baggage. Of course, they have no objections if you give them 1.000 Kyat... When you disembark from a ship in Bagan they'll charge 500 Kyat per piece. If you hire a tour guide, a tip of 5 dollars per day seems to be a reasonable amount to me – total, that is, not per person! Due to the fact that the driver often has a more stressful job than the guide, I consider it appropriate to give the same amount to him. For a larger group, which means more work for the guide, you may feel obliged to give 10 dollars per day.



## **DO'S AND DON'TS – WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT**

The shoe question: ...has an outstanding significance in Myanmar and may even be regarded as the trigger for the independence struggle. If you visit a pagoda, you must take off shoes and socks. Even if you have an artificial leg, like one of my customers. He was really outraged when the pagoda people forced him to take off his socks. In this regard, there is ZERO tolerance in Myanmar! Sometimes, visitors – especially if they have some knowledge of Buddhism – can't help but feel that taking off shoes at the pagodas and putting gold leaf on Buddha statues seems to be the very essence of Buddhism in Myanmar. There is a strict dress code, too: an overzealous local guide donated posters at many pagodas, which tell the visitors exactly what dress is not allowed on the premises: short trousers are as undesirable as sleeveless blouses and tank tops etc. for women. But don't worry: you can borrow a longyi (the national dress) to cover your naked legs. The

booklet 'Do's and Don'ts in Myanmar', which is even available free of charge in some places, tells you how to avoid embarrassment. Even though the authors exaggerate a bit sometimes, if you ask me... Photographing: is relatively easy in Myanmar. Most people have no problem when a foreigner wants to take a photo of them. However, you should try to get



the approval of the person you want to take. This can be done by a corresponding gesture, you don't have to speak Burmese for that... Be cautious when taking photos of Muslims! And never take photos at railway stations, airports, bridges, not to mention military installations, where photography is strictly prohibited!

## SHOPPING IN MYANMAR

Myanmar is not exactly what you call a shopping paradise when it comes to luxury items from the Western world. But if you are looking for local products, you will find them everywhere. The markets offer a wide range of textiles and souvenirs such as wood carvings,

mother-of-pearl items, lacquer products, etc. Very popular with tourists are monks' umbrellas, rattan ware, musical instruments and the famous Thanaka paste, which makes the skin of Burmese ladies so smooth. Gold and precious stones should only be purchased from authorized dealers (with certificate) as you may encounter problems at customs. The same applies to antiques - here even more caution is suggested! Especially when it comes to Buddha statues and other religious items the Burmese are particularly sensitive ... We are happy to advise you! As a general rule, it is best to buy the souvenirs at the places where they are made: Bagan definitely has the best selection of lacquer ware while wood carving and other popular souvenirs are best in Mandalay. In Myanmar it is customary to bargain but don't expect the same discounts as in India.

Mail: The Burmese snail mail is rightly notorious! Some are still waiting today for the postcard they've sent to their mother in Germany twenty years ago. After all, a post office clerk doesn't earn very much, and with a little inventiveness the stamps can be re-used ... Better give your postcards to your hotel or give them to us. We'll take care that they are duly sent - i.e. with a small gift to the clerk! It is rather expensive to send overseas parcels from Myanmar. Maybe, it's a good

idea to wait until you are in Bangkok and to send them from there. If you want to send a letter or a parcel inside Myanmar we advise you to use one of the numerous courier services (Royal Mail etc.). Larger consignments are sent along as additional load by bus. Very reliable! You'll have to deliver it to the bus stand and pick it up at the bus stand at your destination. If you should want to send home bulky souvenirs you may confide in (generally reliable) cargo agents who work with the relevant shops. We will also assist you if necessary.

### **POWER SUPPLY**

As a rule, you will find alternating current (220-240 V) in Myanmar. However, it is a good idea to ask, when you check in. Current variations are quite common in Myanmar and you often come across 'voltage regulators' that are supposed to keep the voltage relatively constant. If the fluctuations are too strong, the device switches off automatically. So-called safeguards do not regulate the current flow, but simply switch off when the voltage exceeds certain limits. Pls. make sure that your sensitive devices such as laptops etc. are protected. Power cuts represent a further problem: even in Yangon they are a regular occurrence. A multitude of private generators outside shops bear witness to this. Therefore, charge your mobile phones and laptops if you have the

opportunity and don't wait until you are back at the hotel – there may be a power cut... Budget hotels often have no generator, but they provide the guest with a candle if necessary – which won't help you very much with your mobile phone... If you are lucky these places may have an 'inverter', i.e. battery supported



power. Bring a torch light! Even most of the budget hotels nowadays have air condition but that doesn't help you in the case of a power cut. Lack of air con can be particularly unpleasant in the hot season. Plug sockets may be another problem. Myanmar offers an incredible variety of those. When I moved into my house I found six different types! By replacing most of them I managed to reduce the number to three. And if you

trust that your 'universal plug' won't let you down, don't forget that Myanmar is a universe of its own in many aspects... Needless to say: electrical installations in Myanmar are not safe. Not at all! Burnt-out plug sockets etc. everywhere tell the story. Tourists just love to take photos of utility poles in the big cities – a maze of power supply lines and one wonders how in this world the electricity board keeps track of them. Generally, Myanmar people are very 'inventive' when it comes to electricity – beware!

## FOOD AND DRINK

In Myanmar as well as in other tropical countries the old rule applies: 'Cook it, peel it – or forget it!' Fortunately, the times when the infamous 'Burma Belly' caught almost every tourist are long gone. But still, you should be cautious with what you eat and drink! Don't believe that street food in Yangon is as safe as in Bangkok! So better avoid it! But you wouldn't eat street food in India either, would you? Bottled water is available everywhere and you better stick to it! Avoid ice cubes, unless you are in a four-star-hotel. As a rule, avoid experiments and stick to restaurants that have the reputation of being safe.

Burmese cuisine: It's not easy for the Burmese cuisine to hold its ground against her neighbours (India, China, Thailand) whose cuisine enjoys

worldwide reputation. Generally, Burmese cuisine is oriented more to the western neighbour: Curries dominate! Even though they are not as spicy and – contrary to India – pork is very popular. Many describe the cuisine of Myanmar as 'oily', and in fact the Burmese housewives are not mean, when it comes to oil. But maybe it's just that, which makes Burmese curries so delicious! Personally, I find it amazing that there is only one Burmese restaurant (in Cologne) in Germany and not a single one in Paris! On the other hand, in Europe there are lots of restaurants serving food from



regions that (rightly) are not so renowned for their food, such as Arab or African cuisine. Not to mention Anglo-American cuisine... But that's my personal opinion, of course! Maybe it is due to the fact that very few Myanmar people live in the West...

Staple food, as could be expected, is rice. Myanmar people hold the world record in rice consumption: if I believe a statistic I read recently, the Burmese eat no less

than 600 grams (uncooked!) of rice daily per head: including the elderly and children! There are rumours, however, that quite a lot of it is fed to the animals as the price of rice is heavily subsidized by the government. Many visitors believe that the typical Myanmar greeting is 'Mingalaba!' (Auspiciousness to you!). Wrong! Much more often you will hear: 'Htamin saa bibilaa?' And that means, 'Have you already eaten rice?' Since the preparation of the traditional Burmese cuisine is very time-consuming, the housewives of the country rather often switch to Chinese cuisine, which gives considerably less trouble. The same applies to Indian cuisine, especially in places where many Indians live. The different peoples of Myanmar of course have their own specialties: Shan noodles are not only popular with the Shan and

opportunity to attend a cooking course in Myanmar with subsequent tasting (e.g. at the Inle Lake) – an adventure of a special kind. In the bigger cities nowadays many Thai restaurants can be found, which



offer the tasty cuisine of the neighbouring country. There is a wide selection of Italian, Japanese, Korean and Indian cuisine near the major tourist attractions. In Yangon there is even a German (!) Restaurant. Mahlzeit offers authentic German food from Krautwickel (stuffed cabbage) to Sauerbraten and Schnitzel! In the supermarkets of the City-Mart chain, homesick travelers will find a wide selection of wellknown products such as Nutella and Ritter-Sport-Chocolate! Even half-decent bread is available in some hotels... But if you're looking for shoelaces you certainly will not succeed: so please bring replacement!



the fiery Rakhine cuisine often can be found outside Rakhine. In Yangon you can make a culinary journey through the country: whether Intha cuisine from Inle Lake or Karen cuisine – everything is available here. Do not miss the