



## The Edvectus Educator: An Introduction to Myanmar A Guide to Successful Integration



### The Facts and Figures

**Official Name:** The Republic of the Union of Myanmar (formerly Burma)

**Location:** South East Asia

**Border:** Myanmar borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand

**Area:** 676,578 square kms

**Topography:** Mountainous borders with central lowlands.

**Capital:** Naypyidaw though Yangon is the largest city

**Population:** About 51 million

**Main Language:** Burmese

**Currency:** Burmese Kyat (MMK)

**Dialling Code:** +95

**Time Zone:** UTC+06:30

**Government:** Unitary Presidential Republic

**Main Airport:** Yangon International Airport

**Main Carrier:** Myanmar National Airlines

**Drives on the:** Right

**Religion:** Buddhism

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## Unique Selling Points

Myanmar (formerly Burma) is a beautiful, unspoiled country, steeped in tradition and culture and, following a long period of self-isolation, visiting Myanmar is said to be a little like stepping back in time to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Back to 'old' Asia where locals still wear traditional dress (the men wear the Longyi which is a skirt-like piece of cloth), walk with bare feet and travel in trishaws and in the open country, by horse and cart. Where the pace of life is leisurely, the local food virtually unknown outside of Myanmar and the locals inquisitive, friendly and kind. Myanmar has so much to offer its newly invited tourists.

An ethnically diverse nation there are around 135 officially recognised ethnic groups within Myanmar grouped into 8 major national ethnic races (primarily grouped by region). With a population that is about 90% Buddhist, there are hundreds and hundreds of Buddhist temples and Pagodas to visit. There is also beautiful landscape and colonial architecture – a legacy from the period of British rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In fact, Myanmar has more colonial buildings than any other country in Asia. Following the departure from British rule when Burma became independent in 1948, there was a period of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world. Since the first general election in 20 years was allowed in 2010 which marked the beginning of a shift from military rule towards democratic civilian rule, there has been a surge in tourism that looks set to continue.

Whilst it is not a country famous for its beaches, Myanmar has some stunning, untouched beaches perfect for a weekend away (and I daresay ripe for development by the tourist industry). Ngapali Beach and Chaung Tha Beach (which is close to Yangon), Ngwe Saung Beach (about 5 hours from Yangon) and the Myeik Islands – also known as the Mergui Archipelago (which were off limits to foreigners until 1997) - in the south, are notable places to check out. With little to do and few tourists it's the perfect spot to relax and do nothing!

Myanmar's climate is hot and humid with the rainy season running from June to October and a cooler, drier period between November and February. March, April and May are hot and dry.

Beautiful Ngwe Saung



The Myeik Islands



Ngapali Beach



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**Find out more:**

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma>

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Myanmar>

<http://www.travelandleisure.com/articles/myanmars-moment>

<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/04/05/travel/myanmar-11-things/>

<http://www.mergui.org/index.php/en/>

<http://www.myanmartravel.cc/travel-information/myanmar-travel-destinations>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gEE379VTcU> Top Ten Places to Visit in Myanmar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iTtpYFyAWA> Myanmar Travel Documentary Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hIeuQzLkgs> Myanmar Vacation Travel Video Guide

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8s8DBXQOUU> Mergui Archipelago Myanmar Travel

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pnBb86\\_874](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pnBb86_874) Myanmar Burma / A Journey thru the Mergui Archipelago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6zmxmuA8GA> Ngapali Beaches 2015



## Yangon

Despite no longer being Myanmar's capital city, Yangon (formerly Rangoon) is the country's largest and most important city economically since it serves as the country's main entrance and seaport. With a population exceeding 5 million, it is a cosmopolitan city with

British, Burmese, Chinese and Indian influences.

The history of Yangon stretches back as far as the 11<sup>th</sup> century and once under British rule, Yangon is home to a number of Colonial period buildings situated in attractive leafy avenues (giving Yangon the nickname of the 'Garden City of the East') though many buildings have been neglected following the move of the capital to the city of Naypyidaw in 2006.

The British influence extends to the hospitals, architecture, cathedrals and colleges to the city's grid pattern and roads and railroads, parks and museums.

Now is indeed the time to visit Yangon as despite the introduction of a few high rise buildings – albeit no more than about 10 storeys high - that have been introduced since the '90s following

**Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon**



**Old British Office Building in Yangon**



the government's move to allow private investment, the city of Yangon – for now - remains relatively untouched and traditional.

There are many historical and religious sights to see in Yangon but the Shwedagon Pagoda or Paya is perhaps the most famous. It is said to have been built at the time of Buddha and has a golden dome and hti encrusted with diamonds, rubies, topaz and sapphire as well as a massive emerald to dazzle the thousands of tourists and pilgrims it attracts each year.

Also in Yangon are the Zoological Gardens, Mahabandoola Garden - known for its rose gardens - and the Independence Monument, built to signify Myanmar's independence from the British. There is also People's Park, known for its large concrete water fountain and the museum within it, Inya Lake and Kandawgyi Lake and Nature Park. Other attractions include the National Museum, Martyrs' Mausoleum, Food Market Tours and Cooking Demonstrations, Sapel Burmese Traditional Foot Spa, Karaweik Palace for traditional Burmese entertainment, and Chinatown. There are many restaurants offering various international cuisine as well as local hawker street food stalls for a more authentic experience. There are of course sporting events in Yangon (and watching European football on the TV in bars is also popular!) and for children (and adults young-at-heart), several amusement parks.

Although Yangon does have the majority of bars out of all the cities in Myanmar, it is not on a par yet with other major Asian cities like Singapore, Hong Kong or Bangkok and the nightlife is relatively limited. This is because of the historical lack of wealth, the isolation from the rest of the world and also frequent blackouts at night thanks to an unreliable electricity network but, as with many things in Myanmar, this situation is changing with the influx of money and tourists to the country and exposure to the rest of the world. The beer stations (open air bars or restaurants that serve alcohol) close early (about 9pm) and they are more likely to be frequented by men than women – or at least, local women. Local men and women do not socialise together as they do in western society and drinking is not culturally acceptable for females in Burma (though there is an understanding and acceptance that different cultures allow this and women are still welcome in these establishments). Beer, rum and whiskey are the most popular drinks in Myanmar though wine can be bought in the more upmarket bars and restaurants. Most western-style bars and nightclubs are to be found in 5\* hotels (and at beach resorts outside of the city).

Myanmar is strictly policed and Yangon is one of the safest large cities in the world. With 5 years jail time for thieves and muggers (with a very hefty fine as an alternative) and plain-clothes policemen, street crime is rare.

The city is served by an international airport about half an hour north of the centre and there are direct flights to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Chiang Mai, Dhaka, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Gaya, Kolkata, Kunming, Guangzhou, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Taipei. There are also train lines

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connecting Yangon with the other major cities in Myanmar providing ample opportunity to travel both within and outside of the country on weekends and during holidays. Travel by boat was once the norm and you can still take a passenger ferry for a more leisurely journey. For example, the route between Yangon and Mandalay takes 5 days (with a stop to change ferries at Pyay).

Yangon has a tropical climate with a distinctive wet and dry season and year round warm temperatures.

**Find out more:**

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Yangon>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/yangon-rangoon>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwHyw9dQgAk> Myanmar Travel Part 1: 10 Things to Do in Yangon

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_Pwxlj9FEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_Pwxlj9FEA) Yangon - A 'must see' destination, one hour flight from Thailand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYDCHChx7YY> Yangon, the Commercial City of Myanmar



**Mandalay**

Mandalay is just over 700km north of Yangon situated on the banks of the Irrawaddy River and is the second largest city in Myanmar. Half of Burma's monks can be found living in and around the city and there are monasteries, pagodas (over 700 in total) and temples aplenty to visit in and around Mandalay. Ethnically diverse there are large Chinese and Indian populations in particular and the city is known as the cultural and religious centre of Myanmar despite it being a relatively modern city only founded in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Notable sights include Maha Myat Muni Paya, Shwenandaw Monastery, Atumashi Monastery, Buddha's Replica Tooth Relic Pagoda, Mahamuni Buddha Temple, Mandalay Palace and Mandalay Hill (where the world's largest book, the Buddhist Bible, is to be found in the Kuthodaw Pagoda). There is also the Yadanabon Zoological Gardens which lays claim to being the only zoo to house Burmese roofed turtles. Mandalay was also the last Royal City when the Burmese Kingdom still existed and the rebuilt Royal Palace (the original was destroyed by fire during the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war) is testament to this. There are night markets, cafes and restaurants to be enjoyed after a long day of sight-seeing.



The Royal Palace, Mandalay

Mandalay is served by an international airport and with rail and road links to the rest of Myanmar, weekend breaks and holidays further afield are easily accessible. Mandalay has a

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tropical wet and dry climate has temperatures averaging between 21 and 31 degrees (with the hottest months being April and May).

Temples of Bagon in Mandalay



Ruined Mingun Pagoda in Mandalay



Ubein Bridge, Mandalay



### **Find out more:**

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Mandalay>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/mandalay>

<http://travelhappy.info/myanmar-burma/things-to-see-and-do-in-mandalay/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow1ysPtzQG0> Manadalay, Myanmar in 4K

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b32Y5aLwWkY> Mandalay: The Royal Capital of Myanmar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HabG0k6Ycvw> Aerial View over Mandalay Myanmar



### **Ten Reasons to Consider Myanmar**

1. It's a beautiful, unspoiled country to explore - before the mass of tourists that will inevitably descend upon this stunning land arrive!
2. It's a country with a rich cultural and religious history with thousands of pagodas, monasteries and historical architecture to visit
3. There are stunning, uncrowded beaches
4. It's well-positioned for travel to neighbouring countries such as Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh, India and China
5. There is currently no income tax arrangement for expats so salaries are tax-free
6. Myanmar is a safe place to visit; most Burmese are Buddhists and gentle, friendly people. Crime against foreigners is rare.
7. It has a year-round warm climate
8. There is exceptional local food and cheap beer (about 60 cents a bottle) to be enjoyed
9. There is plenty of opportunity to partake in unique adventures from balloon rides over the Bagan temples to off-road jeep trails, hiking through the mountains to Himalayan villages and amazing scuba diving in the Mergui Archipelago in the deep South.
10. It offers an incredible spiritual experience. Since about 90% of the Burmese population are Buddhist, there is ample opportunity to learn about Buddhism and meditation.

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