



Myanmar
(Featuring Tuang Gyi Hot-air Balloon & Fireworks Festival)
November 12 to 20, 2013



***"This is Burma, and it will be quite unlike any land you know about."* Rudyard Kipling**

Long isolated from the outside world, Myanmar has preserved its rich cultural and religious traditions to a greater extent than many of its neighbors. Most visitors are enchanted by Myanmar's exotic temples, pagodas and monasteries, but they are likewise enthralled by the Burmese people, who are quick to smile and largely uninfluenced by western ways. You'll observe hundreds of Buddhist monks, clad in orange robes, lining up and walking quietly, with rice bowls in hand, to collect one of their two daily meals from devotees. You'll encounter men wearing sarong-style longyis, and women adorning their faces with Thanaka paste to repel the sun and attract young men. You'll see women performing centuries-old candle and umbrella dances, and expert puppeteers recounting Buddhist legends during colorful marionette shows. And you'll see farmers and fisherman delivering their wares on bullock carts to remote village markets.

Yangon, Myanmar
November 12

Yangon is a charming city with wide, tree-lined boulevards, shimmering Buddhist stupas and British colonial architecture. Founded in 1755 by King Alaungpaya, Yangon became the capital after the British conquered Upper Myanmar in 1885. Formerly known as Rangoon, Yangon was renowned as the "Queen of the East." Yangon is now considered to be the most delightful city in all of Southeast Asia, bustling without urgency, traffic jams, high rise buildings and department stores.



After lunch we visit Myanmar's most famous site, the **Shwedagon Golden Pagoda** which was originally built on this site 2500 years ago to house eight sacred hairs of the Buddha. The structure has changed beyond all recognition as it is constantly enlarged and restored. The central bell-shaped tower is covered with 60 tons of gold leaf and topped with a weather vane crowned with a 76 carat diamond and encrusted with an additional 3,154 gold bells and 79,569 diamonds and other precious stones. It stands over 300 feet high and is

surrounded by numerous other places of worship and resting places for the more than 5000 pilgrims who visit the pagoda each day.

Yangon – Inle Lake November 13

From Heho airport drive overland to Nyaung Shwe by car (1 hr drive). Nyaung Shwe is a small town at the northern end of Inle Lake. Located in the Shan State at 2950 ft above sea level and ringed with mountains, Inle is a beautiful lake with calm, crystalline water. The lake supports 64 villages on stilts, mostly inhabited by the Intha people. We will try and hike them all! At one of the jetties of Nyaung Shwe village, we can take one of the long out board motor boats of Inle area with comfortable armed chairs all the way to our hotel. But I'm sure we would rather walk.



We will then sail with the motorboat to **Nga Phe Chaung Kyaung**, a wooden monastery built on stilt over the lake in late 19th century. It is known as “jumping cat monastery” because the monks there have trained a few cats to leap through wooden hoops. Inside the monastery is a modest collection of Buddha images in Shan and Mandalay styles. Just as impressive as the Buddhas are the tall, highly ornate, wood and mosaic pedestals and cases built for these images. After all that, we boat through the unique “Floating Gardens” on the lake in the nearby village of tomato farmers on the way back to hotel. WHEW what a day. And then we have our opening ceremony.

Inle Lake November 14

This morning the focus of your visit will be a boat trip on the lake to enjoy views of the lake, and to experience the unusual rowing style of the local boatmen using one leg while balanced on their sampans before our major hike of the day. Visit



Phaung Daw Oo 5-day market with ethnic minorities selling local agricultural produce and handicrafts. Then visit the nearby **Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda**, the most sacred temple of the lake which houses 5 small gold balls of Buddha images deformed from the gold leaves donated by the devotees from all over Myanmar. Proceed by boat to get to **Indein temple ruins** located at the western shore of the lake. The boat sails through scenic Indein creek

which empties its water into Inle Lake. A walking distance from the jetty of Indein village locates magnificent scenery of ruined temple structures dating to the 15th century.

Lunch is special at Intha Heritage House near Inn-paw-kohn village run by the same owner of Inle Princess Hotel. The breezy balcony of the house's upstairs provides such a panoramic view of the lake, the nearby plantations and the hazy Shan mountains ringing around. In addition we can hear the purring of the lovely chocolate-brown color



Burmese cats in cat house downstairs. After lunch we sail to the nearby silk weaving village of **Inn-paw-kohn** and learn the way they weave the tie-dye silk. They even have the filaments cut of the lotus stalks to weave nice shawls similar to comb cotton material. We can also stop by at a cheroot (Myanmar cigar) rolling factory and a teak canoe making place. Watch the sunset over the Shan Plateau and the lake from the balcony of your chalet before dinner at our beautiful hotel.

Inle Lake **November 15**

This morning after a major yoga stretch we are trekking to nearby villages through sugar cane plantations up to hill top **Mine Thauk Pagoda and monastery and beyond..** We lunch back at the hotel and to change outfits! In the afternoon, we are biking to the nearby **Red Mountain Estate Vineyard and Winery** and the town of Nyaung Shwe not too far away to view lives and culture of local people in the slow gear. After an early dinner, we drive to Taung Gyi (1.5 hr drive) to take part in the annual hot-air balloon and firework festival. **Taunggyi Hot Air Balloon Festival** is a spectacular festival held in Taunggyi every year in November that attracts locals from all over the country. The eight-day long festival is one of the largest religious festivals of Myanmar. The festival is well known for its hot air balloons, which are released day and night. At night, visitors can see competition of hot air balloons with fireworks and fire crackers, competing over how beautiful the fireworks are and the maximum altitude they reach. After the hot air balloons successfully flied during the competitions, the crowd plays traditional instruments and dances happily. It's absolutely spectacular. Return to hotel is after midnight. Late nite!



Inle Lake – Heho – Bagan **November 16**

Bagan, also written Pagan, was the capital for 230 years from the 11th to the 13th centuries during which the rulers of this first Burmese kingdom conquered their neighbors - the Mon and the Shan - and unified the whole of Burma. At its peak the city had a vast population and the city spread



across the plains inside a great bend in the Irrawaddy River. The Bagan Dynasty began as a Brahmanist and Mahayana Buddhist kingdom and then, under the great king Anawrahta, converted to Theravada Buddhism. For a Buddhist the

best way to gain merit is to build a temple or stupa – a solid dome or tower to enshrine sacred relics. At Bagan over 2,000 temple ruins are concentrated in an area of approximately 16 square miles creating one of the most awe inspiring religious monuments of Asia.

November 17



Begin your explorations (hike) today with a diverse selection of the most important pagodas and temples such as **Shwezigon Pagoda**, built by King Anawrahta in the early 11th century; **Htilominlo**, a temple with exquisite plaster works on its walls; and **Ananda Temple** with four huge standing-Buddha images and numerous seated Buddha figures depicting the scenes of the life of the Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha along its interior gallery. Board Road

to Mandalay and have lunch. After lunch visit the **Lacquer ware factory** to watch craftsmen skillfully making the area's most famous handicraft; 12th century temple called **Myin-ka-ba Gu-byauk-gyi** (under the protection of UNESCO) with the most well-preserved mural paintings on its inner walls depicting 547 Jataka stories of the Buddha's lives; end the day's sightseeing with the sunset viewing atop **Pythagyi Temple** to see the panoramic view of the valley of Bagan filled with 2217 temples and pagodas which would allow you to get back to 1000 years time through your imagination. Transfer to Road to Mandalay.

Sunrise Balloon trip, Excursion to Mt. Popa

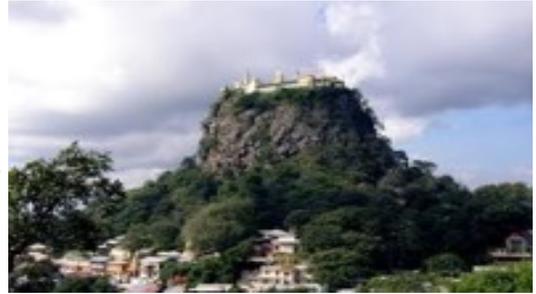
November 18



This morning you will have the most memorable moment of your life by seeing the valley of Bagan from the hot air balloon at sunrise. It gives you the vivid bird's eye view of the valley with 2217 temples. Many of these architectural wonders are visually stunning, mixing gold, red brick and white plaster in varying degrees. Many contain beautiful murals

depicting stories from the life of Buddha. Return to hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast at hotel, visit the colorful vegetable market of Nyaung U. Drive to Mt. Popa for an hour by passing along a beautiful country side with the peaceful villages. Make a stop on the way to see the way of life of a palm climber family for decocting palm syrup to get palm sugar. Mt. Popa is an extinct volcano and locals strongly believe that it is a home for the spirits. Walk up 777 steps of the little hill at the base of the mountain formed from lava spewing of the volcano which is now extinct and known as Mt. Popa. It is the home of the Nats (spirits) widely propitiated and amalgamated well with Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar. The most famous of all Nats in Myanmar are 37 in total and pilgrims from all over come to worship the 37-Nat shrine at the base of the Mt. Olympia of Myanmar. A memorable lunch at Popa Mountain Resort. After lunch. We will drive back to Bagan and explore more temple ruins of Bagan including the visit to **Sulamani and Shin-bin-tha-lyaung Temples.**



Bagan-Yangon November 19

A morning yoga wake up call followed by a culture hike, lunch and a drive along the streets of Yangon to introduce the historical downtown with its colonial past and the bustling jetties of Yangon River which is one of the estuaries of the great Irrawaddy River. We will even take a stroll through the sprawling **Bogyoke Aung San Market (Scott Market)** where everything such as gems, wood or jade carvings, lacquer ware, textiles, musical instruments and everything are sold under one roof. Walk through the streets of China town teeming with roadside vendors selling various kinds of food, snacks and fruits. *The Governor's Residence will host us for our celebratory last evening.*



Departure Yangon November 20

After breakfast transfer to Yangon airport for a regularly scheduled morning flight to Bangkok or Singapore with incredible memories and everlasting friendships of another STAT journey.

The Investment is \$6500, not including international airfare.



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