

Myanmar (Burma)



Myanmar Magic Bike Tour

13 days Inle Lake to Yangon

The new Myanmar Magic! We took this great ride, changed it, improved it, made it easier to ride and we now believe it is an irresistible trip for anyone who has wondered what in fact lies between the well known cultures of India, China and Thailand. The answer for most is something completely unexpected.

Cycle from the enchanting Shan Hills into the Irrawaddy basin and onto the Bagan plain, home to around 4000 Pagodas. Finish with a visit to the commercial center of the country, Yangon.

As soon as you step off the plane you will know that Burma is unlike any place you have ever been. While at times you might find similarities to India or Thailand, Burma is a completely unique culture with a strong Theravada Buddhist heritage.

Behind the drama of the international sanctions, military dictatorship and controversy of this secretive nation is a country full of friendly people who have a strong tradition of hospitality and a country with amazingly diverse landscapes.

To ride through Burma is to get up close to the country, its people, their food and their traditions. Roads with minimal traffic, mountains, great rivers and ever changing scenery. It's the ride of a lifetime.



Itinerary

Day 1 | Yangon to Inle Lake

Today we meet at the Yangon Airport for our flight to the Shan State. People can fly in this morning or stay a night in Yangon before the tour. We then take a late morning flight to Heho which is located 30km from Inle Lake. We will be staying on the dry land next to the lake rather than on it. This gives you freedom to explore the area by bike in the afternoon. Tonight we have our first meal together. (L,D)

Day 2 | Inle Lake (Nyang Shwe) | 20km

In the morning we take a ride around the area to learn a little about the local culture and the farming habits of the people here. We then cycle along the western bank of the lake, before taking a boat trip on the lake itself. Here we will see Leg Rowing Fishermen, silk weaving, Silversmiths and whole communities that exist in stilt houses on the lake. Everything from schools, shops, even basket ball courts can be found out here, all within a short boat ride of each other. (B,L)

Day 3 | Inle Lake to Kalaw | 70km

We leave early this morning and after a flat ride to start, we climb out of the valley and up into the Western Shan Hills. This is a challenging ride, but is on mostly good surface. We reach the town of Kalaw in the mid afternoon. Kalaw was a British Hill Station in colonial times and is well populated by British designed buildings. The climate here is cool and was much more agreeable to the British than the humid flat-lands. Kalaw is populated by a diverse range of peoples, with Muslims (mainly originating from Bangladesh), Pa Ou and Pao Luang hill tribes and even descendants of Nepalese Gurkas, who settled here. We will enjoy a Nepalese meal tonight in recognition of this diversity. (B,L,D)

Day 4 | Kalaw to Pindaya | 45km

A more relaxing ride today, we retrace our tracks a little and then branch off towards Pindaya through a valley of seemingly endless rolling hills, covered in a patchwork fields and you may momentarily think you are in a North American farming belt instead of an Asian one. The houses of this area are particularly attractive, built from compressed earth. Pa Ou people can be seen in black costumes with orange head-dress today, farming everything from Potatoes to Cabbage. They will find you quite amusing in your colored cycling costumes.

In the afternoon we will visit the famous Golden Cave where thousands of golden Buddha images have been placed. (B,L,D)

Day 5 | Pindaya to Mandalay | 100km

We start with an off-road ride through a seldom visited area where small communities of Pa Ou will watch curiously as you pedal by. We leave the hills today, and as we drop into the Irrawaddy basin, we get some fantastic views from the hills as we fly down them. There are few towns today due to the steep landscape, but there are lots of villages, who's inhabitants will be truly surprised to see you. This is a less travelled route where it is un-common to see many people on bikes. we will drive the last part of today's ride to reach Mandalay, where we reward ourselves with a comfortable hotel and a great Burmese meal. (B,L,D)

Please note: today's journey will involve a drive at the end of the day to reach our destination due to the distances involved.

Day 6 | Mandalay | Rest day



Mandalay was the last Royal capital of Myanmar and was the city to be ransacked by the advancing British forces. The former Royal complex was destroyed in a fire during World War 2, but you can still see the impressive walls and moat.

The city of Mandalay is now a bustling commercial centre with fascinating local markets. You may opt to take a boat ride up to Mingun to see the Largest ringing bell in the world, weighing 90 tonnes. Alternatively, if you have the energy, explore the surrounding countryside by bike with your guide to see monk robe production and various other crafts. A visit to Mandalay Hill for sunset is another option and provides a great view over the city. (B)

Day 7 | Mandalay to Monywa | 100km

Today we cycle along the river and then past Sagaing, with its many golden topped stupas. We then cycle on a busier road out to Monywa. The ride today is flat and you will notice a marked difference in the landscape with less fertile, drier soil. Watermelon stalls line the road as we pass through on our way to the trading town of Monywa. Local agriculture produce includes palm sugar, oranges & beans. We will drive the last section today, to keep the distance manageable and give you enough time in the pool. (B,L,D)

Please note: today's journey will involve a drive at the end of the day to reach our destination due to the distances involved.

Day 8 | Monywa to Bagan | 80km

We follow a railway line today, across the peninsula formed by the two rivers. We then cross the Chidwin River and head for Pakkokou. This town is best known as a trading town, but has recently gained other notoriety after unrest spread from here. Here we will take a boat to Bagan. This is a great way to approach the Bagan Plain. The pagodas initially appear in scattered groups along the shore, then thicken until they can be seen all along the river.

Bagan is home to around 4000 pagodas and one could be content to enjoy the atmosphere and views for a long time. You will have time to explore the area more, but a little later in the tour. (B,L,D)

Please note: today's journey will involve a drive at the end of the day to reach the boat, due to the distances involved.

Day 9 | Bagan to Mount Popa | 55km

Today we find some hills again as we leave Bagan and climb up to the Volcanic Mount Popa, home of the 37 Nat. The ride is on good road as we start with a flat section, then meet some steep, but relatively short hills to get to our destination of the Mount Popa Resort with its pool and a view of the hill-top temple. (B,L,D)

Day 10 | Mount Popa to Bagan | 70km

A flying downhill starts us off into the valley and onto Kyaukpadaung. After a stop at the local tea house for snacks, we will look through the produce market before riding to Bagan by a different route.

Today's ride concludes the cycling part of our tour. The bikes will still be available for use around Bagan the following day. (B,L)

Day 11 | Bagan | Explore Bagan

Our Burmese guide will today take you for a ride around the temples. This is an excellent way to explore the pagodas and to get some historical context around them. The rest of the day is yours to explore further or just relax.



Optional Activity. Balloons Over Bagan is a professional ballooning operation based in Bagan. They run sunrise balloon flights that are considered some of the best ballooning in the world. We can arrange this for you. Prices are approximately \$270 per person. Please inquire when booking on the tour if this interests you. (B)

Day 12 | Yangon | Flight

We will take a late morning flight (subject to flight schedules). After landing in Yangon, we will take a walk through the Schwedagon Pagoda, the most important religious monument in Burma, before we check into the hotel. After lunch, we will take a walk in downtown Yangon to absorb the vibe of this city with its broken charm.

Tonight we enjoy our last dinner together and have a chance to celebrate the experience that was Magical Myanmar! (B,L,D)

Day 13 Yangon | Finish

Our tour concludes today. The hotel can assist with airport transfers.

If you fancy staying longer in Burma, we can assist with additional hotel bookings and any travel advice you require. (B)

Tour Details

Style

Fully supported cycling tour

Inclusions

Internal flights, zone and entrance fees, Tour Leader, English speaking local guide, bike mechanic, air-conditioned support vehicle, boat cruises, most meals, accommodation on a twin/share basis.

Group Size

Minimum 4, maximum 14.

Accommodation

11 nights Superior hotel, 2 nights guesthouse (all rooms have private bathroom & air-conditioning).

Our Myanmar Magic Tour has the highest overall accommodation level of all our cycling trips.

Single Room

On Grasshopper Adventures tours single travellers do not have to pay any extra to join our trips - we will match you up with another same sex, single traveller. However, should you wish to choose to take a single room we are happy to book rooms for you for an extra charge. This single supplement is completely voluntary and only applies to hotel accommodation, on overnight train trips there are no single rooms available. We should point out that on occasion single rooms may not be available and in these instances you may need to share for a night or two - we will refund part of your single supplement in these cases.

Extra accommodation

We can book additional accommodation before or after the tour in Yangon at competitive rates. Please book extra nights when you book your tour.

Arrival Details

Meeting Point - this trip will begin at the Domestic Airport, which is located right next to the International terminal. The meeting time is 8.30am. More details will be provided at booking. Most early flights with Air Asia, Thai Airways and Malaysia Airlines arrive in time for the meet up.



Food

Included meals: 12 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 7 dinners, plus cold water, fruit and biscuits on cycling days. You should consider bring some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

Cycling Days & Distance

8 days - 530km

Difficulty

Moderate - this trip involves riding on sealed roads mostly, but some of these are in considerable disrepair. There are two days of 100km on this tour. Anyone with a reasonable level of fitness and some pre-trip training should consider this ride.

Cycling Conditions

85% sealed roads, 15% dirt roads.

Loose sand, potholes and rocky sections are frequent, but some stretches are on well made roads. Traffic is mostly minimal with the exception of one day where there are quite a few buses. Care must be taken with all those unexpected surprises like chickens, children and dogs running out in front of you. Stay alert.

Bikes

You can bring your own bike for this trip. The best bike for conditions in Myanmar would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tyres to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before travelling to ensure that it is in good working order. While we do provide mechanical assistance and carry some spare parts during the trip you will need to bring spare parts (including tubes) for your bike as different bikes use different parts and we cannot guarantee that we will have a part to suit your bike.

Bike Hire

If you don't have a bike or don't want to bring your own you can hire a bike from us for the entire trip. We provide well maintained Trek 4400 mountain bikes, Trek 7200 Hybrid bikes and some Trek 4500 mountain bikes in various sizes and will be responsible for any maintenance required during the trip for these bikes. All bikes are fitted with one bottle cage. Pannier racks are not supplied. For added comfort you may consider bringing your own seat and pedals which we can easily fit to your rental bike. Please note, renters will be liable for any damage caused to rental bike which is a result of riding accidents.

Helmets

For safe cycling helmets are compulsory. We can arrange for quality helmets compliant with US safety standards to be provided with advanced notice.

Transporting Your Bike

Most international airlines consider bicycles as part of your regular luggage weight allowance, so you will need to pack light. The best way to transport a bicycle is to package it in a bike box. Most bicycle stores are happy to give away boxes for free. You will need to remove the front wheel (and sometimes the rear wheel), handle bars, pedals and seat post. Tape any loose parts to the bike frame and pack a few extras in the box such as your helmet. You can keep your box until the end of the trip to pack it for the trip home.

Support Vehicles

We will have the backup support of a small bus that will carry our luggage, snacks, water, and anybody not cycling. You can use the support vehicle whenever you feel like no longer cycling.

Travel Details



Visas

One month single entry visas can be obtained in advance from your nearest Myanmar Embassy. Costs vary on location. Visa on arrival has recently been implemented through selected travel agents. Whilst we have no specific recommendations on this, we are not aware of any problems with the service.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

If you are looking for an insurer we can recommend World Nomads. [Click to see more details.](#)

Flights

International flights to the starting point and from the finish point are not included in the price of this tour. We can assist with the purchase of inter-Asia flights. All domestic flights as per itinerary are included.

Money

The official currency of Myanmar is the Kyat (pronounced Chat). The rate varies wildly from the booth at the airport to the hotel and to the market. We suggest that you bring new, large denomination USD notes and exchange either at the hotel or a market based money changer. Do not change money at the airport as the rate much lower than anywhere else. There are no ATMs or international banks in Burma, and credit cards are seldom accepted except in large hotels at significant surcharge rates. For this reason, bring more cash than you plan to spend as a backup. Travellers cheques are not accepted anywhere in Burma.

Rates for the Kyat hover between 900 and 1300 kyat to the US dollar.

Important notice!

USD notes bearing the serial number CB are not being accepted by anyone in Burma. A recent rumor that these are counterfeit has caused this. Check all notes for serial numbers. Also, be aware that generally all traders and major companies closely inspect all notes and will not accept worn or torn notes at all. This especially applies to the Departure Tax window at the airport when leaving Yangon at the end of your travels. This is completely unnegotiable, so ensure you have \$10 in near perfect condition for this.

Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$20 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. It is customary to tip the guides and drivers in Asia. You should allow approximately US\$30 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction. If you think your tour leader has done a good job you may also tip him/her. Again this is completely up to you.

Health

There are no specific health requirements for travelling in Myanmar, however, we recommend that you visit a travel medicine doctor before travelling. You should carry a well stocked first aid kit with you when you travel. All Grasshopper Adventures Group Leaders are first aid trained, however, they are not permitted to distribute any medications.

Climate

Burma is a diverse climate given the variety of topography and weather patterns. Yangon is usually warm and humid (30-36degrees celsius). The Shan Hills can range between 15 degrees celcius at night up to 28 during the day. The coldest time is between November and Jan. Rain is usually limited to the monsoon season between late May and late October, but rain outside these times is not unheard of. During the wet season, the afternoon downpour will cool us off after a warm sunny day of riding and will help to turn the rice paddies to a bright green, fill the rivers and clear the air of any smoke and smog. A great time to visit Asia!



Electricity

Burma works on a 220 volt system and uses American/Asian 2 flat pin plugs. For more on plug types visit the [World Electric Guide](#). You can easily buy an adapter in Burma for much cheaper than in your home country.

Important Notice!

In many rural areas, electricity is more often off than on. While most hotels have generators, these are prone to failure at times and so the electricity supply is un-predictable. For this reason, we recommend bringing a good torch/flashlight. We also advise that if you are reliant on a sleep apnea machine, this may cause problems. Please discuss this matter with our staff at the time of booking the tour.

Packing

You should consider bringing the following items:

<p>Personal Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Backpack or small sized wheelee bag (some of the guesthouses we have do not have lifts so you may need to carry your luggage up some flights of stairs)• Long trousers• Shorts• Shirts• Hat• Sandles/light shoes• Swimming costume• Sunglasses• Light rain jacket• Toiletries• Small towel• Sunscreen• First Aid Kit• Mosquito repellent• Camera• Alarm Clock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages• Passport photo• Travel insurance details• Flight tickets• Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques• Phrase book <p>Cycling Gear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bicycle• <i>if renting</i> - your own seat & pedals (optional)• Something to carry your personal belongings in while cycling, eg. day pack, bum bag, handlebar bag• Helmet• Cycling gloves• Bicycle water bottle• Bike shorts with something to put on over the top while off the bike
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Positive Impact

An integral part of traveling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

Dress

Burma is still quite a conservative country. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not appropriate so if you wish to cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you on the bike to put on over the top such as long loose shorts or a skirt/sarong. A good solution to this is 'shy shorts' which combine cycling shorts with loose long shorts over the top. When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Sleeveless tops are not acceptable in temples.

Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people that you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak English but away from these areas it is great to learn a few words of



Burmese. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book.

Donations

Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving items away to local people can create an expectation that a visiting foreigner equals free give away's. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to Grasshopper Adventures which we will then pass on to development organisations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed by those working in the communities who understand better the local needs.

Poverty

There is an enormous amount of poverty in Burma which you will see, particularly in tourist areas. If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. Many beggars can earn more than those who work unskilled jobs. There are organisations in Cambodia who are working to alleviate this poverty issue and may be able to do more good with donations that you might like to make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

Important

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.

