

Burmese Days in Mandalay and along the Irrawaddy to Pagan and Beyond

January 8 to 18, 2020 (exclusive of travel from and to USA)



The temples at Pagan in the early morning mist, above; and sketch of Ubein teak bridge at Amarapura (these and all other illustrations by Stephen Harby)

Introduction

Despite its political situation during the past several decades, or perhaps as a result, Burma (or Myanmar as its leaders would have us call it) remains a world apart. It is one of the few places on the planet that has not been overwhelmed by the tides of globalized homogenization. Rangoon (Yangon) is one of the few Asian capitals to retain its colonial urban fabric intact—albeit faded and crumbling. It reminds us what Singapore, Bangkok and Penang must have once been like. Its people are welcoming and travel services are efficient.

Loosening restrictions and the advent of a political thaw moving towards democracy with the rehabilitation of popular leader (and daughter of slain hero of independence) Aung San Suu Kyi, has been much in the news this past decade as have the terrible reports regarding the treatment of the Muslim minority. A visit now is both timely and urgent, as the country is clearly poised for more radical change, which, while we hope for the better for its people, will undoubtedly lead to the drastic transformation of the built environment that has occurred everywhere else in Southeast Asia.

The rich tapestry of architecture and urbanism that we will discover spans over a millennium and ranges from grand stone Buddhist temples and high Victorian British piles to teak wood monasteries and ram-



shackle fishing and farming villages built on stilts. We will see four royal capitals as well as the British Colonial one, and our modes of transport will range from horse cart, river steamer, hot air balloon to the more familiar motor coach (aka bus) and airliner.

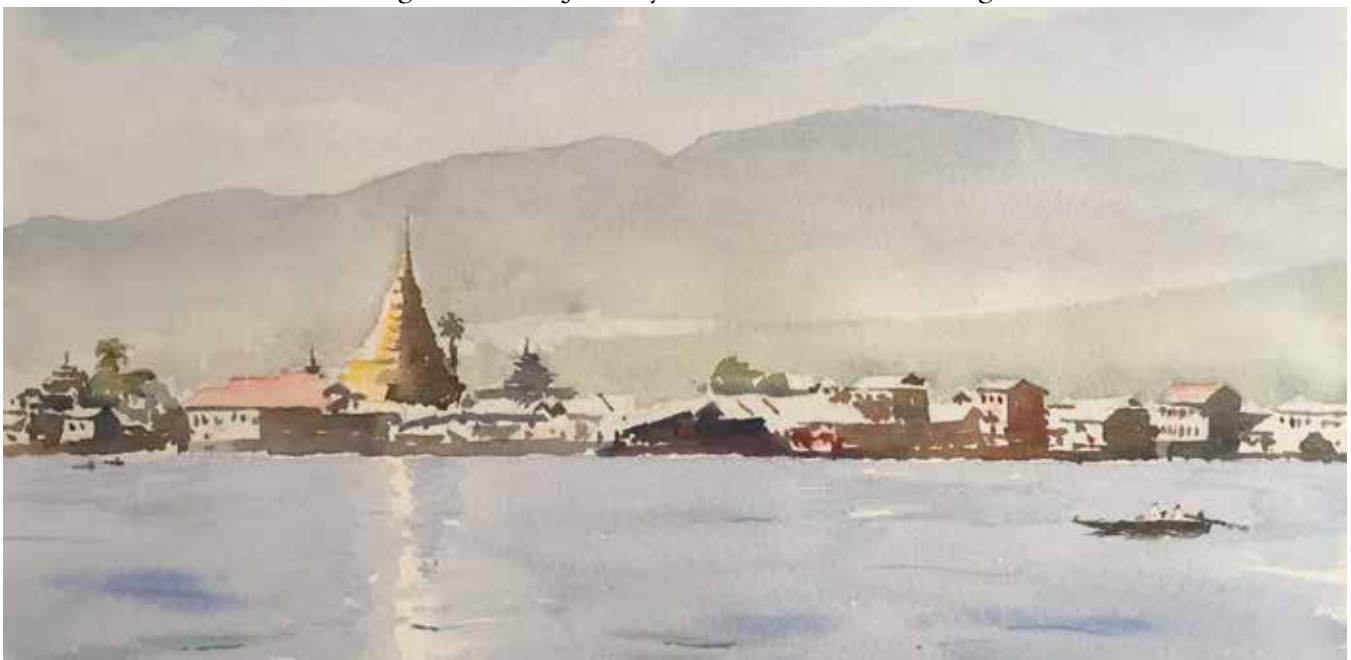
Our ten-night itinerary begins and ends in Bangkok, where we will gather to check in for our short flight to Mandalay, and to which we will return at the end from Rangoon. You will fly independently round trip to Bangkok, where you may choose to arrive a day or so early and make your own arrangements for accommodation.

Arriving first in Mandalay for a two-night stay, we will see that ancient royal capital's rich collection of sites and will make an excursion one day to Amarapura and Inwa, two ancient royal capitals. The world's longest teak bridge and a 17th century teak monastery are among the treasures that await us there.

The next morning we will embark on a three-night cruise down the Irrawaddy River to Pagan aboard a traditional river steamer, much like those in regular service during colonial times, when the river fleet was the largest civilian fleet in the world. Along the way we will be able to continue to unwind as we glide slowly along, past one stunning tableau of river life after another: villages of thatched houses, rafts of logs lashed together reminiscent of Huckleberry Finn, and local boats packed with passengers. We'll make several stops along the way, including another royal site, the great unfinished stupa at Mingun, and a village where pottery is made for local export. At night we will tie up at the river's edge, where one night we will be treated to a barbecue among the dunes!

We will arrive in Pagan, in the morning and will spend the day ashore, while our vessel remains our home for one more night. It is the oldest of the capitals we will see, dating from a millennium ago and presents a vast dry plain with hundreds of pagodas, stupas and temples whose ethereal and varied profiles rise up out of the mist and the cover of trees. The next two days will be devoted to the exploration of the major temples. The highlight of our visit may well be a dawn ascent in a hot air balloon!

Leaving Pagan by air, we will reach Inle Lake, a center of Burmese rural life and crafts, with villages and temples dotting the shores and even built upon the waters of the 13 mile lake on rickety stilts. We will stay there at a lakeside resort for three nights and then return to Rangoon for one night in the downtown colonial Strand Hotel as a fitting end to this journey before we return to Bangkok and home.



Panorama of Inle Lake

Detailed Itinerary

No later than January 6, 2020, Depart home cities Aloft

Flying east or west, your destination is Bangkok, where you will meet the group at check-in for our short one hour flight to Mandalay. Depending on your flight and routing, it is suggested you arrive at least 12 hours prior to the time for our flight, or on the evening of January 7th in order to rest and to provide a cushion in the event of any delays. There are a variety of hotel options both within and nearby Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International airport.

Day 1 Wednesday, January 8, 2020
Mandalay

START OF SERVICE

Group check in Bangkok Airways flight PG 709 departing 12:15pm destined for Mandalay. Arrive Mandalay Thada'Oo International Airport at 13:40.

We will be met by our guide after passing through immigration, collecting our bags, and passing the custom desk.

Note: participants will be responsible for securing an e-visa online for the cost of \$50.

Transfer an hour by road to Mandalay, the second largest city of Myanmar.

Check in at Hilton Mandalay Hotel, in the center of town overlooking moat and walls surrounding the vast royal palace complex. This will be our base for a two nights stay. We will visit the



Above: map of our itinerary; below: Mandalay, King Mindon's Place, destroyed in WWII and reconstructed



Kuthodaw Pagoda (1868), known as "The World's Biggest Book" for the fact that 729 individual stupas protect stone tablets inscribed with Buddhist texts. Returning to the hotel, you will be free to walk along the palace moat and wall. Dinner and overnight at Hilton Mandalay.

Day 2 Thursday, January 9 Mandalay

A full day visit of Mandalay: Mandalay Hill, Golden Palace Monastery (Shwe Nan Daw, 1867--originally it was part of King Mindon's royal palace, and was dismantled by his son, reassembled and donated to the chef monk of Mandalay in 1880 at the current site.)

The Mandalay Palace was destroyed in WWII and rebuilt out of concrete and metal by the former government. This teak building is the only survival from the Palace. Next we will visit the traditional structure housing the Sein Myiunt Art Museum where you can see the royal paintings and collections such as antique furniture in wood, stone, lacquer, bronze, etc. Lunch and dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at Hilton Mandalay

Day 3 Friday, January 10 Mandalay / Irrawaddy River Cruise

Today we will embark on our three-night cruise from Mandalay to Bagan aboard a modern shallow draft river steamer, modeled after the traditional boats that plied this river a century ago. Check out the hotel and drive to Amrapura, see pagodas near to Taungthaman Lake and U Bein bridge. then visit the Mahamuni Pagoda and the Shwe In Bin monastery (1895), a beautifully carved teak monastery. Drive for half an hour to Sagaing Jetty where our vessel awaits us. After enjoying lunch aboard, we sail to Mingun, one of the country's former capitals, visiting the huge unfinished pagoda (1790), as well as the Hsinbyume Pagoda and Mingun bell. Overnight on our vessel, which will be moored near Saguin Hill,



The serene landscape of the Irrawaddy River captured from the steamer's deck.

Day 4 Saturday, January 11 Irrawaddy River Cruise

We have pulled up on the bank where a smaller tributary forms an island which is Inwa, also known as Ava, one of Myanmar's ancient imperial capitals (1365-1842). We will reach the ancient city on horse carts through the naturally preserved landscape and key landmarks, such as remains of the walls which enclosed the capital. Here we visit the Yadana Shemee (1430) and Wingaba, temples, the teak Bagaya Monastery (1770s), and the masonry Maha Aung Mye Bonzan Monastery (1822). We will return to the ship for lunch as it casts

off for a relaxing cruise downstream towards Bagan to enjoy the passing landscapes and villages along the river bank, with scenes reminiscent of the days of Rudyard Kipling and other intrepid explorers who have visited this pastoral landscape over the centuries. Tonight we will pull up against a sandbar where a torch lit barbecue dinner will be laid out for us amongst the dunes and the palms.

Day 5 Sunday, January 12 Arrive Bagan

After a leisurely breakfast on board during which we will complete the last segment of our river journey to Bagan,



Sketches: clockwise from above: Mandalay, Shwe Nan Daw, Monastery, 1867; Pagan, Dhammayangyi Temple, Inle Lake, manasteries and lakeside scenes.

we will begin our visit to some of the massive temples and pagodas for which Bagan is famous. These will include the Shwezigon Pagoda (1086, a prototypical Burmese stupa), Htilominlo Temple (1211-1231, one of the biggest temples in Bagan with stucco carving on the exterior wall), and Ananda (1105) as well as others. We will return to the ship (which remains our home for this night) for lunch and some time to relax or stroll ashore. In the afternoon at around 4:00, you will have the option to take a horse cart, to stroll, or to take an e-bike to tour some of the nearby temples before sunset. We will return to the ship for our farewell dinner aboard.

Day 6 Monday, January 13 Bagan

At the crack of dawn, or in fact well before it, we will rise for the memorable experience of an ascent in a hot air balloon to see the lay of the land and the temples from the air in the early morning light of the rising sun. Back on board our ship for the last time, we will have breakfast and bid farewell to the crew and disembark. Then in late morning see the best preserved mural painting of Bagan in Gubyaukgyi Temple (1113), then the Myazedi Stone Inscription, the Rosetta stone of Burma. We will then take a walk in Mingaba Village to see the bamboo mat weaving, and lacquerware making. Check in at



Schwedagon Pagoda, Rangoon.

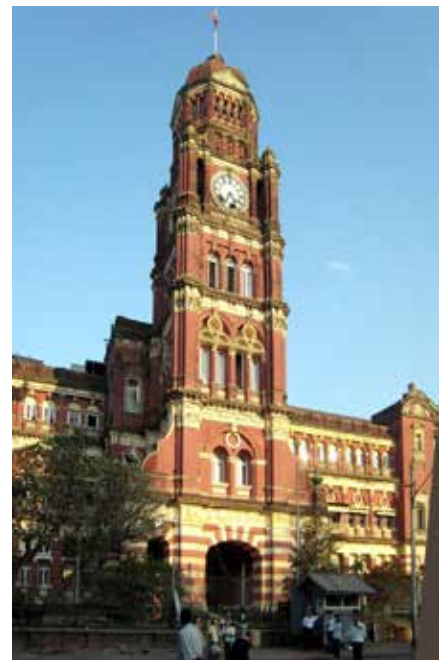


British colonial era buildings in Rangoon run the gamut from stately neo classical to high Victorian Gothic

hotel after lunch at a local restaurant and afternoon rest. Optional visit of more temples or walk among the temples during sunset. Dinner and overnight at Thiripyitsaya Sanctuary Resort.

Day 7 Tuesday, January 14 Bagan / Inle Lake

Transfer to the airport for a morning flight to Heho in Southern Shan State. On arrival at Heho Airport, we will be met and taken to Nyaung Shwe, the gateway town to Inle Lake. Visit Shwey-panyay Monastery and temple en route (19th c.). From Nyaung Shwe, embark on a long tail open-air boat to our hotel on the eastern bank of the lake. Afternoon introduction to the lake's floating gardens, floating villages and fishermen at work. Inle Lake is a remarkable place, reminiscent of what Venice must have been like when its settlements consisted of wooden huts built by traders and fishermen on the mud banks of the lagoon. Here, villagers live in houses on stilts and tend their floating gardens nearby. It may not be like this much longer! Return to our hotel just before sunset. Lunch at a local restaurant. Dinner and Overnight at Villa Inle Resort and Spa.



Day 8 Wednesday, January 15 Inle Lake

Set out by boat to visit Taungtoe Village for market day in the southern part of the lake. Walk up the stairs to Taungtoe Pagoda and see the panoramic view of the lake. After lunch at a local restaurant, walk 3 miles from Tantaung Village to Myaynigone Village, see the villager's farm and sugar cane plant, meet the villagers and their monasteries. Return to hotel by boat just before sunset. Dinner and overnight at Villa Inle Resort and Spa.



Bagaya Kyaung (Monastery), Inwa, near Mandalay, Built entirely of teak in 1834.

Day 9 Thursday, January 16 Inle Lake

Morning cruising to the western part of the lake, you will see the fishermen at work, floating gardens and houses on stilts and floating village. Visit Innsein Village to see the ruins of Shan style stupas on the hill slope, Innpawkhone Village to see hand-spun silk weaving center, Nampan Village black smith workshop, and cigar making. Return to hotel just before sunset. Lunch at a local restaurant. Dinner and Overnight at Villa Inle Resort and Spa.

Day 10 Friday, January 17 Inle Lake / Yangon

Early morning transfer to Heho airport by road for a late morning flight to Yangon. On arrival Yangon International airport, we will be met and transferred to a local restaurant for lunch before check in at The Strand hotel. Afternoon visit to the recently restored Secretariat, one of the largest and grandest of the British era buildings, and Shwedagon Pagoda. Farewell dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at The Strand Hotel.

Day 11 Saturday, January 18 Yangon / Bangkok

Continue to explore Yangon: Walking tour of heritage colonial part of the town, Scott Market (Bogyoke Aung San Market), and Little India. After hotel check-out and lunch nearby, we

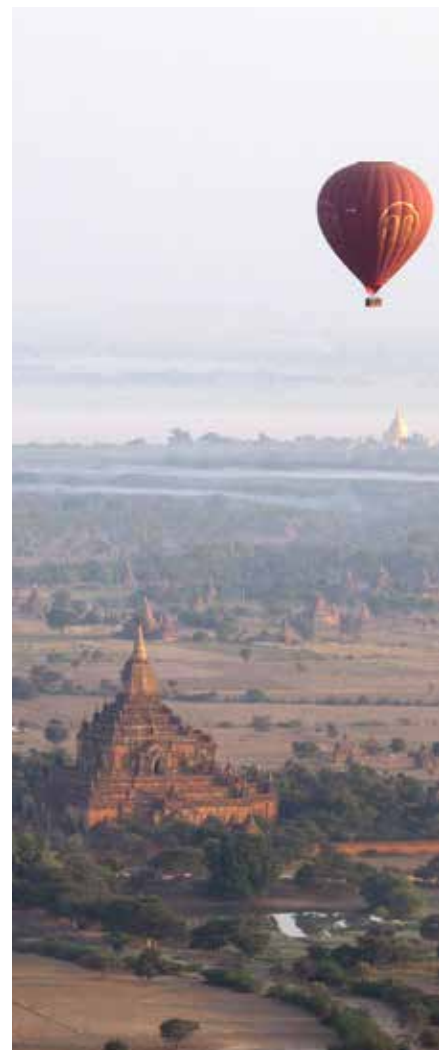


Above: The Ubein bridge is a teak structure linking several communities across the marshes and fields and teems with local color. Below, left: One of the many stupa/temples in Bagan; Below, center: The Strand, our hotel in Rangoon. Below, right: We will go aloft in a hot air balloon to survey the valley below.

will have some free time prior to our mid-afternoon transfer to airport for flight to Bangkok by PG704 at 18:30 with arrival at 20:35.

END OF SERVICE

We recommend you spend the night and book continuing flights for the next day, or allow at least 4 hours for connection and delays.



For Pricing and Registration Information

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