



## Smiling Albino's Myanmar Grand Slam

Magnificent temples, remote villages, historic journeys, Colonial hill stations, glittering gold stupas, thousands of Pagodas, leg rowers and smiling faces...



## Background



Myanmar, or Burma as it was formerly known, holds great mystery, beauty and legend. From Himalayan Mountains in the north, to stunning ancient temples, enchanting lakes and soulful people, we'll enjoy an experience in one of the world's last unexplored corners in style. In some ways, little has changed since the British colonial times where modern amenities in major centers are light years beyond the simple, inspiring countryside life. The contrast is staggering and residents' perseverance simply amazing. A journey through this nation takes you places you never thought you'd see, and leaves you awestruck at the resolve of the human spirit. We'll take you on an intimate exploration of the remote countryside, through to the thousands of pagodas of Bagan and finally the photographic haven of Inle lake. We'll engage and learn from the Burmese people from floating villages to hill stations, and from markets to monuments. Rudyard Kipling once described Myanmar as "quite unlike any place you know about", and we invite you to come and discover the spirit and hidden corners of this nation on the move.

**Day 1:**  
**Yangon – Arrival (Am  
flight) – Mawlamyine**



Drive: 4 Hours  
Meals: L  
Mawlamyine Strand Hotel,  
Deluxe Room\_

Kipling opens his famous poem with these lines, and it's only befitting our Burmese voyage begins there as well. Upon arrival in Yangon your host will be waiting for you with a big smile and warm welcome to whisk you off to Moulmein—now known as Mawlamyine.

Our focus in Myanmar is on exploration, and we'll start doing just that! We'll escape Yangon, the largest city and former capital, by beginning our journey straight away to picturesque Mawlamyine with its stupa-capped hills in Kayan state. As we depart the city we're immediately amidst scenic landscapes and rich local life.

*By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea, There's a Burma girl a-settin',  
and I know she thinks o' me;*

Rudyard Kipling, Mandalay

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Mawlamyine was once a bustling sea port in colonial times. As we drive through the Mon State towards our destination we pass an area which is known to have been the seat of the last capital of the Mon kingdom: the city called Suvannabhumi. Burmese archaeologists have recently started the search again for the exact location of this ancient city. Enroute we will also pass the ancient city Thaton, which is famous for its durian and betel nut (as is the whole of Mon state.)



### **Mon State and Kayin State**

are still considered quite undiscovered areas of Myanmar. They offer spectacular nature and intriguing tribal culture that date back many centuries in the history of South East Asia. The Mon are believed to be one of the first civilizations in this part of the world. Although their kingdom was lost to the Bagan king in the 11th century, their rich culture can be seen here today through their sarongs, traditional food, language and music instruments. The Kayin (also known as Karen) are one of the indigenous hill tribes of the mountainous forests, they are best known for their traditional boxing skills. The Kayin state offers beautiful nature, traditional villages, and rural waterways, all in a limestone mountain setting. The Kayin have a unique language and series of traditions, and their origins are still very much debated by anthropologists to this day.

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On arrival we'll start with a visit to a local house where a home cooked lunch of Mon specialties marks the beginning of our journey. Next we'll go on foot to explore the impressive buildings from colonial times where writers like George Orwell were living in the city. We'll see some of the classic sites like the first Baptist church, and other curious corners along the way.

Finally, if we still have some energy we'll continue to visit the nearby village of Hpa Ouk which is famous for its weaving of the traditional Mon sarongs for men and women. This will be our first look at how each ethnic group has their own individual style. Cotton is sourced in country and local herbal plants are used to dye the fabrics in the colours of the Mon national dress.



### About Mawlamyine Strand Hotel

The Mawlamyine Strand is one of the most modern hotels in Mawlamyine, however it's named after the street it's found on and has no association with the famous Yangon landmark hotel. Chosen for its comfort, this hotel enjoys a great waterfront location on the Thanlwin River. This is a great base for exploring the city and is a short walk into town. Well-appointed rooms are spacious with wifi in the lobby.

## Day 2: Boating to Hpa An



**Meals:** L  
Overnight at Hotel Zweekabin,  
Deluxe Room\_

We'll start the day visiting the must-see wood carvings at the Seindon Mibaya Monastery.

The last king of Myanmar, at the palace in Mandalay, came to power by killing many of the rival heirs to the throne at the end of the 19th century. Queen Seindon escaped and moved to what was then called Moulmein and became a Buddhist nun (her tomb is in the compound in one of the nunneries).

She built the Seindon Mibaya Monastery which is a fine example of architecture found in the original Mandalay palace, and has magnificent woodcarvings and other decorations.

From here we'll continue to the Ni Paya (where Orwell lived and Kipling found inspiration for his poem Mandalay) and after admiring a panoramic view over the city we'll begin our upriver journey to Hpa An. Our cruise is on the Thanlwin (Salween) River – one of the longest in Myanmar. This river route has been chosen to provide fabulous glimpses and interaction to life along the river. We'll stop in a small village with remarkable carvings and decorations, its highlight is an ordination hall donated to the village by Myanmar's famous Mr Na Auk.

Mr Na Auk was a Mon trader who lived in this area during the British reign. He was famous for his intelligence and success in trading with large British companies. He is a national symbol for his patriotism, savvy business sense and his kindness to his fellow countrymen.

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**Meals: L**  
Overnight at Hotel Zweekabin,  
Deluxe Room\_

From here we'll continue along the Thanlwin and enjoy lunch on-board with inspiring views of Zweekabin and other limestone mountains rising from the rice fields. We'll make stops along the way in villages such as Pa Lin, for a walk around unique local communities with Kayin, Shan, Mon, Bamar and PaO peoples.

Arriving late afternoon into Hpa An, we'll settle into our hotel that is nestled into the bottom of a limestone mountain near Mt Zweekabin. This evening more Burmese dishes are on the menu, let's try a typical Kayin "Talabaw" soup for dinner which is made of bamboo shoots, rice and jackfruit in a nearby local restaurant.



### About Hotel Zweekabin

Hotel Zweekabin is set in a garden environment with stunning views of Mt Zweekabin. You can enjoy sunrise over the mountain top from your spacious room. Located just outside of Hpa An at the foot of limestone karsts, this hotel is surrounded by beautiful scenery, best enjoyed from your terrace or balcony.

## Day 3: Kayin Kayaking



Kayaking: Approx 2 hours, calm waters  
Driving: 4-5 Hours  
Meals: B, L  
Kandawgyi Palace, Deluxe Room

After a hearty breakfast we'll head further afield, and enjoy more country scenery by kayak. A local Kayin will help us navigate the waters from charming Lakkana through to Muku village. With rice fields and limestone mountains as our backdrop we'll explore traditional Kayin villages. This is a ground-breaking journey through rural Myanmar, recently developed to delve even deeper into Burmese culture. On route we'll see lots of locals and stop for some fresh fruit with some of our new friends inside a traditional wooden Kayin house.

Note: The creeks in this part of Kayin State are quite shallow, we use small kayaks to help, but you could get wet – sandals, shorts and a t-shirt are recommended.

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As Kayin state borders Thailand, there is some very tasty Thai food available in the local restaurants. For lunch let's try some! Afterwards we'll return to the hotel for a shower and to freshen up before continuing on to Yangon. We'll break up the drive with a visit to Kawgun cave on the way. The artwork of clay Buddha statues dates back from the 7th century, the period of the Mon kingdom.

This evening we'll arrive into Yangon and enjoy our lakeside hotel with views of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda.



### About Kandawgyi Palace

The Kandawgyi Palace Hotel is situated on the shores of the tranquil Kandawgyi Lake (Royal Lake). It was originally opened in 1934 as the Rangoon Rowing Club. The hotel's styling retains traditional Myanmar architecture by using local golden teak blended with brick. Deluxe rooms enjoy views of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda.

**Day 4:  
Spiritual Yangon**



Meals: B, L  
Kandawgyi Palace, Deluxe Room

After a Burmese breakfast (why not try some Mohingar?), we'll head off to explore the most important religious pilgrimage site in the country: Shwedagon Pagoda. Visible from almost anywhere in the Yangon, it was built more than 2,500 years ago when the city was a small riverside village. Today we'll explore what's behind the golden façade of the Golden Pagoda while learning the history of the pagoda itself. We'll also search into the deeper insight of the Buddhist religion and how local spiritual belief is mixed with the belief in nats – the Myanmar spirits.

Our intriguing morning starts from the bottom of the hill and winding our way, passing through workshops, markets and monasteries. With a deeper understanding of this special country, we'll be well prepared for the rest of our journey!

Next let's calm our hunger spirits with a local lunch, then the afternoon is free to explore downtown on foot with its extensive presence of colonial architecture and heritage buildings.

**Day 5:**  
**North-Eastern Shan**  
**State: Hsipaw**



Trekking: 3 hours  
Flight: flight to Lashio. (YH 729  
11:00 – 12:45)  
Meals: B, L (light lunch on flight)  
Mr. Charles Hotel, Deluxe Room

This morning we'll shuttle to the airport for our flight to the northern Shan State. After settling into our comfortable guesthouse we'll go walkabout in the town of Hsipaw and the fascinating Shan and Palaung villages. With its surrounding villages, natural beauty, historic stupas and cottage-industry factories, this region is a rare unspoiled gem.

Today is a genuine discovery of simple village life, we'll learn in detail about the Shan culture as well as the history of Hsipaw. This afternoon we'll walk through panoramic scenes of paddy fields, small creeks and smiling families. Along the way pass a unique wooden monastery as well as some small home industries like cheroot (cigar) rolling, bamboo weaving "factories", among others.

This evening is free to enjoy the town, with several good options for local Shan and Chinese dishes.



### **About Mr. Charles Hotel**

This is the place to rest your head in tiny Hsipaw, located on the north end of town a short stroll to the main village street. A tastefully furnished hotel offering simple comforts and conveniences, it covers all the basics in such a rural setting in Myanmar. A great base for exploration.

**Day 6:**  
**The Train to Pyin Oo Lwin**



Train: 4.5 hours  
Driving: 2 hours  
Meals: B, L  
Royal Park View Hotel, Deluxe Room

After breakfast we'll head to the Hsipaw railway station. Today's journey is a duality of spectacular mountain scenery and an exploration of local life. As the train moves slowly along the historic track we'll mingle with local travellers passing small villages and towns. Adding even more local colour, along the way we'll meet merchants as they board the train to peddle drinks, snacks and other wares. Today's highlight begins when we start to snake our way down a densely forested gorge that cuts deeply through the otherwise gentle landscape suddenly the train slows down to start across the Gokteik Bridge.

The famous Goteik viaduct, located in Nawnghkio, is one of Myanmar's most stunning engineering marvels. Built by the British at the beginning of the 20th century to expand their Empire. When it was completed, in 1901, it was the largest railway trestle in the world. It was fabricated and designed by the Pennsylvania Steel Company of the United States. This spectacular railway bridge is considered a masterpiece of steel and engineering.

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Having unlocked a life achievement with just completing one of the “must do” train journeys in the world, we’ll arrive at Naung Cho station where we’ll continue to Pyin Oo Lwin by car.

This evening we’ll settle into this very colonial town, formerly known as Maymyo or “May Town” by the British. It was the principal hill station (don’t let the name fool you, it’s relatively flat here) and summer retreat during the British rule. The town is once again becoming a popular getaway so we’ll have the opportunity to experience the old charm before modern expansion brings changes.

You’ll have an option to explore on a horse drawn cart giving you a period vehicle to admire the colonial style brick and timber houses. This calls for a beer! Pyin Oo Lwin is also the place to beat the Mandalay heat – bring a fleece as it gets chilly here at night!



### About Royal Park View Hotel

Located in the garden area of town, this charming boutique property is set amongst colonial houses. A family run hotel with full service restaurant on site. Each room varies in design, yet all are attractively styled with teak wood and indigenous fabrics. It is well placed for strolling the neighbourhood and visiting the botanical gardens.

**Day 7:  
The Road to Mandalay  
and onwards to Bagan**



**Driving:** 2 hours  
**Flights:** Mandalay – Bagan (6T 502  
- 17:50 – 18:20)  
**Meals:** B  
**[Bagan Lodge](#),** Deluxe Room

This morning we can explore the Pyin’s remarkable botanical gardens before a picturesque drive to Mandalay. On the outskirts of the city we’ll visit the famous U Bein Bridge in Amarapura: the longest teak bridge in the world. While heavily visited, this is an iconic photo stop worth indulging in.

If time permits we’ll visit the most revered Buddha image in Mandalay, the 13-foot Golden Buddha decorated in precious jewels known as Mahamuni Paya.

After ticking off the must-sees we’ll escape the city with an afternoon flight to the ancient city of Bagan, the beloved historic site of Myanmar. Here we’ll settle in, take the evening to relax and prepare ourselves for tomorrow’s exploration of this archaeological wonderland.



### **About Bagan Lodge**

Bagan Lodge is gateway to some of the world's most magnificent pagodas in the Nyaung U section of town. Rooms and suites evoke the romance of a storied expedition, in posh, air-conditioned comfort. Relish in the comfort of a property with a restaurant, bar, swimming pool and spa.

**Day 8:  
Biking Bagan**



Meals: B, L  
Bagan Lodge, Deluxe Room

Today we'll have a well-paced day of temple exploration by mountain bike. As we're in the plains now, to avoid the mid-day heat we'll get an early start (08:30). The terrain is generally flat and through small (unpaved) countryside lanes, we'll visit some lesser seen temples on the way. The focus this morning will be to see some of the spectacular scenery of ancient temples. Flexible traveling means you can travel at your own pace stopping for photos and breaks at every whim.

Around noon we'll arrive at a temple in the Minnanthu area of the Bagan plain, we'll enjoy a quiet picnic lunch before continuing back through the thousands of stupas.

## Day 9: Bagan Temples and Sunsets



Meals: B, L  
Bagan Lodge, Deluxe Room

This morning we'll visit the best-known temples of Bagan. Starting with a short pagoda climb to get an impressive panoramic view over the whole Bagan plain, we aim to impress with amazing places like the Ananda, Dhammayangyi and Sulamani. Halfway through we'll switch to horse carts before returning to the hotel. This afternoon is some free time to enjoy the pool or discover more of the Bagan temples on your own.

Tonight's main event is a boat ride on the grand Ayeyarwaddy River. We'll relax on a sandbank (tides permitting) and enjoy some sundowners. With the peaceful river scenery and the sun setting we can reflect, relax and enjoy drinks and light snacks.

### **Option – Balloons over Bagan +US\$ 285 per person**

One of the many highlights when visiting Myanmar. Early morning before sunrise you will be picked up at your hotel and taken to the launch site for a spectacular hot air balloon ride over the temple zone in Bagan. The mostly British balloon pilots are operating each balloon under highest UK safety standards and the views you will get are simply breathtakingly spectacular. After floating in the air and following the wind you will land safely and be welcomed back on the ground by a smiling crew serving cold champagne before bringing you to your hotel. From December to March the winds are just perfect.

**Day 10:  
To Heho and cycle into  
Inle Lake**



Meals: B, L  
Flights: Bagan – Heho (6T 351  
09:05 – 09:45)  
[View Point Eco Lodge,](#)  
Cottage Suite

A short flight takes us to Heho, and we'll journey into Inle Lake the best way possible: by mountain bike! As you arrive your two wheels are waiting and we'll start a leisurely 4-hour biking trip down to Indein. After we get through a few uphill portions in the beginning, we'll ride mostly off-road, and the majority of the roads are flat or downhill. Today's highlight is passing through numerous Pa O villages in an area where few visitors go - a great experience for our intrepid selves!

We have time to stop on the way to enjoy the fantastic views over the lake and the Shan countryside. Lunch will be in a local village and we'll end the cycling portion and explore the ancient ruins of Indein. From here, we continue by boat to the lodge, where your luggage is waiting in your room.



### **About View Point Lodge**

View Point Lodge sits on the edge of the canal leading to the magnificent Inle Lake and reflects the beauty of its name. The scenic surroundings include the canal entering the lake on one side and rice paddies on the other, all overlooking the highest mountains in the region. The Lodge is walking distance to the village of Nyaung Shwe.

### **Cottage Suites at View Point Lodge**

Cottage Suites are built on pilings using traditional Shan construction. The Lodge and Cottages are built with local limestone, mud and rice straw, and reinforced with wooden beams. Only paints made from laterite mud and natural wax decorate the Lodge. Using traditional materials does not mean compromising comforts as all suites have modern bathrooms, wi-fi and LCD TV. The Lodge blends the best of the Shan traditions and the needs of modern travelers.

**Day 11:  
A Day on the Lake!**



Meals: B, L  
[View Point Eco Lodge,](#)  
Cottage Suite

Inle Lake in is a vast natural lake surrounded by Shan villages. On the lake itself the Intha people have been living for many centuries in villages built entirely on stilts.

Recommendation: Rise early to watch the morning mist – A quintessential Inle Lake experience

After breakfast we begin in true Inle Lake fashion: by boat. We'll discover all the lake's natural beauty, visit the floating gardens, see some famous leg rowers, and have a cup of tea at a local house.

Today will be one long iconic photo moment after another. The lake is so large and the villages so spread out that Inle never feels too crowded. We'll have a little bit of fun with today's lunch, catered on a rice boat in the middle of the lake. The boat has been transformed into an ephemeral restaurant fully equipped.

On and around the lake, traditional markets are held in different villages according to a 5-day rotating schedule. After lunch we'll leave solitude behind and visit one of these colourful markets frequented by Shan and PaO people, here we'll see locals who have come to do their weekly shopping.

Afterwards depending on interest, we can also visit a local cheroot factory (where traditional Burmese cigars are made), floating tomato gardens, Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda, Intha Heritage house - where Burmese cats are bred - and a weaving factory.

Day 12:  
Inle Lake – Heho –  
Yangon



Meals: B,  
Flights: Heho – Yangon 6T402  
Depart Heho 09:35 Arrive Yangon  
10:45

Today we have an early flight to Yangon. For our farewell meal we'll have an excellent lunch at Sharky's restaurant – a local entrepreneur who is famous for growing organic vegetables and producing locally made French cheese, ham and other delicious popular food.

There is time for a foot massage or perhaps shopping for popular things like a longyi (local sarong), umbrella's, old books, gold leaves, or contemporary paintings. We can arrange a stroll through the Scott Market or just a place to relax and soak it all in.

We'll then transfer you to the airport for your flight out of Myanmar. It's been a pleasure hosting you, and we hope to see you again...

Thwa – Me - Naw (Goodbye!)

**PRICE:**

**Approx. \$3,630 USD per person  
(Minimum 4 persons)  
Single supplement: \$1,055 USD**

**INCLUDING:**

- 11 Night's hotel accommodation (based on twin sharing)
- All transfers and transport
- Friendly, knowledgeable English speaking station guides
- All meals as mentioned (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner).
- All entrance fees on tour
- Domestic air tickets within Myanmar

**EXCLUDING:**

- Flights to/from Myanmar, note the first day begins early. We can arrange a stopover in Bangkok or Yangon before your tour for you.
- The hot air balloon ride over Bagan is not included, we highly recommend it! At time of booking we can provide more info on arranging it however they do book up fast
- Insurance
- Personal expenses
- All drinks
- Other expenses that not mentioned on the itinerary
- Visa fees and/or visa authorization (we'll help you arrange these)



### **The Smiling Albino Service Difference**

We understand implicitly that a perfect adventure is much more than nice hotels, great meals and hassle-free logistics. For a travel experience to be perfect, all pieces must work together like a symphony. It is the fine details which our guests appreciate most, like cold face towels after a hike, electrolyte beverages for your day cycling, and wine uncorked when the moment is right. From local maps to bottled water and colorful anecdotes on the areas we visit, a Smiling Albino adventure is a thorough, intimately hosted experience. We will also provide you with a complimentary mobile phone for your use throughout your stay. You'll be treated with executive care during your Smiling Albino adventure.

We look forward to hosting you!

### **The Team at Smiling Albino**

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"See a different part of the world, differently."