Tour Notes

Myanmar - A Journey through the Golden Land

Tour Duration – 16 Days

Tour Rating
Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●● | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●○ | Wildlife ●○○○

Tour Pace
Moderate

Tour Highlights

✓ Travel on a special overland journey across 2 overland borders between Myanmar and Thailand
✓ Intriguing tribal culture and villages in Mon and Kayin states
✓ See the new capital of Nay Pyi Daw
✓ Off the beaten track cycling in the surrounds of Bagan
✓ Incredible 4WD journey in the footsteps of the Top Gear crew through Eastern Shan State
✓ Spectacular rice terraces and sweeping mountain vistas
✓ Spend time exploring hill tribe villages around Keng-Tung
✓ The remarkable pilgrimage site of Golden Rock
Tour Essentials

Accommodation: Mix of small hotels and guesthouses. Some guesthouses in Eastern Shan state do not have private bathrooms.

Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.

Group Size: Maximum of 12

Start Point: Bangkok

End Point: Bangkok

Transport: 4WD, local buses, train, bicycle, scheduled flights

Countries Visited: Myanmar and Thailand
Myanmar - A Journey through the Golden Land

For the first time in centuries it is possible to cross the border between Myanmar and Thailand overland, something many people have dreamt of but until very recently has not been possible. Be one of the first to travel this unique route crossing the Htee Khee border to Dawei which connects the more remote areas of Mon State and Kayin State. These are very much more undiscovered areas of Myanmar offering spectacular scenery and intriguing tribal culture dating back for centuries. The Mon are believed to be one of the first civilisations in this part of the world. The rich culture can still be seen in the daily lives of local people with their specific sarongs, traditional food, language and musical instruments. The Kayin are one of the indigenous tribes of the jungle known for their traditional boxing skills. The area offers beautiful natural scenery with traditional villages and waterways surrounded by spectacular limestone mountains. The Kayin has its own separate language and traditions, whose origins are still very much uncertain to experts. We continue to Bagan via the new capital Nay Pyi Daw, before being treated to the fertile lands of the Shan mountains. The final highlight of the trip is to discover an off the beaten track and only recently accessible part of Eastern Shan state where we can interact with local tribes such as the An (Anu) people, Akha people, Lahu people and Palaung (silver) people. You will learn about their cultures and religion (Buddhist, Christian and Animist). As well as the rich culture you will enjoy scenery from emerald rice paddies to sweeping mountain vistas. We will also enjoy some walking amongst these little visited villages. In Keng Tung you will explore the picturesque town and its surroundings and discover the British influence in the area. After Keng Tung, you will journey to Tachileik and cross the border into Thailand (Mae Sai). This is an unforgettable overland journey through an exciting and mostly unexplored part of Myanmar.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. On this tour you will have a different guide for Myanmar and Thailand. Often it is also necessary to have a different guide when travelling through Eastern Shan State. For group sizes of 1-4 people, there will be no accompanying tour leader but only local, station guides.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Bangkok

Arrive in Bangkok and transfer to your hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight at Galleria 10 hotel or similar.

Day 2: Bangkok – Kanchanaburi – Dawei

An early morning start to drive to the Thai/Myanmar border at Baan Phu Nam Ron. After immigration meet your local Myanmar guide at the border town of Htee Khee where we commence the journey to Dawei. The journey should take about 3-4 hours through the southern plateau passing through jungle and mountainous terrain on a winding and sometimes quite bumpy road. On arrival in Dawei transfer to your hotel.
If time permits, visit Shwe Taung Sar Pagoda and the museum to see collections of bronze coins, vases, portraits and large, wooden Buddha statues that are displayed. This evening enjoy Dawei cuisine at a local restaurant. Overnight at Shwe Maung Than Hotel or similar (BD)

Day 3: Dawei and San Lan fishing village
After breakfast we explore Dawei and its surroundings. Learn about the history of the town and its old buildings, many with intricate facades and balconies. Later we journey to a picturesque gulf overlooking the fishing village of San Lan Village, characterized by its bamboo huts on the beach. We walk through green forest area with a hilly route for approx. 1.5hrs and stop for some green tea en-route, before continuing to San Lan village. Stroll through the village to observe the local fishermen going about their daily rituals. We should also be able to visit some local people in their homes. A simple, local lunch will be served. After our visit to San Lan we head back to Dawei where we enjoy dinner with local hosts. Overnight at Shwe Maung Than Hotel or similar (BLD)

Dawei
Dawei, known as Tavoy in colonial times is the capital of Thanitaryi division. The town was one of the first cities settled by the British after the first Anglo-Burmese war; as a result the towns have a long history and very interesting architecture typical of the colonial era.

Day 4: Dawei - Mawlamyine
For those that wish to rise early we can pay a visit to the bustling central food market by the river. After breakfast you have some time at leisure to further explore the town. Later we transfer to the bus station to take an air-conditioned bus on the journey north to Mawlamyine through the southern plateau. The air-conditioned bus will leave from Dawei around 2pm and the journey takes around 8 hours. On arrival in Mawlamyine transfer to the hotel. Overnight Shwe Myint Moh Tun Hotel or similar (B)

Day 5: Mawlamyine
After breakfast we visit the Seindon Mibaya Monastery with its magnificent wood carvings. Continue to Ni Paya for fine views over the city and we take a walk to examine some of the buildings of the city and the architecture from the colonial days. Renowned writers such as Orwell and Kipling lived in the city. We also visit the first Baptist church. We will visit the Mon Museum which has some interesting displays demonstrating the rich Mon culture. Lunch will be taken in a local home with Mon specialities. The afternoon will be at leisure. Overnight at Shwe Myint Moh Tun Hotel or similar (BL)

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 called Moulmein in that period and became a Buddhist nun till her death (her tomb is in the compound in one of the nunneries). She built the Seindon Mibaya Monastery in Mawlamyine which is very fine example of architecture in the original Mandalay palace and has magnificent woodcarvings and other decorations. It's a monastery so beautiful that one could actually call it a museum.

Day 6: Mawlamyine – Golden Rock (Kyaikhtiyo)
This morning we transfer to Kyaikhtiyo and visit the important pilgrimage site of the remarkable Golden Rock. The visit involves around a 1.5 hour walk and there will be plenty of time to explore the pagoda and its surroundings. Overnight at Golden Sunrise Hotel or similar (B)

Golden Rock
The Golden Rock is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Myanmar Buddhists and maybe one of the strangest sights for visitors to Myanmar. Balanced on the edge of a mountain, over many years the rock has been totally covered with gold leaf by pilgrims.
Day 7: Golden Rock (Kyaikhtiyo) – Nay Pyi Daw
Today we transfer to Nay Pyi Daw a journey of around 5 hours. On arrival transfer to your accommodation and later we can explore the town including the market, the Safari Garden and the Water Fountain. Alternatively, you can have this afternoon at leisure. Overnight Thingaha Hotel or similar (B)

Nay Pyi Daw
Nay Pyi Daw is a new capital city of Myanmar established in the early 21st century to serve as the country’s new administrative centre.

Day 8: Nay Pyi Daw – Bagan
Today we transfer to Bagan. The journey should take around 5 hours. On arrival we transfer to the hotel before taking some time to visit some of the wonderful temples in Bagan. Overnight Zfreeti Hotel or similar (B)

Bagan
No words can do Bagan justice. A vast plain dotted with innumerable stupas and temples, Bagan’s heyday was between the 11th and 13th centuries, when King Anawahrata embarked upon a massive programme of building that now fills approximately 40 sq. km. on the banks of the Ayeyarwaddy. Highlights include the temples of Thatbyinnyu, Ananda Pahto, Shwesandaw and the mighty Dhammayangyi, situated in the middle of the plain. Many temples contain images of the Buddha while others are decorated with ancient frescoes. While some see relatively high numbers of tourists, others remain tantalisingly unexplored and it is quite easy to find yourself the only person there, marvelling over the wonders of an ancient civilisation. Exploring these temples, finding your way through winding and darkened corridors to emerge onto a terrace with spectacular views over the whole area, is one of the highlights of travel within the whole continent of Asia. Watching the sun set and cast a dim yellow glow over hundreds of stupas glittering throughout the plain, is a breath-taking experience not easily forgotten.

Day 9: Bagan
Today we will enjoy some cycling in the surrounds of Bagan. Our first stop is the Z-Craft Jetty in Old Bagan. We will visit a busy market where locals bring their merchandise from across the river. We take a short boat ride across to SeLan village on the other side of the Ayeyarwaddy River. We spend some time cycling through the vegetable plantations and rural scenery observing local life. Arrive at Myitchay village where we can visit some local industry such as cane/bamboo. After lunch we cycle south around 10km’s to Kyaung Chaung Jetty where our boat will be waiting for us to bring us back to Old Bagan. The rest of the day will be at leisure to explore some of the many incredible temples. Please note you should wear clothing suitable for this activity. Closed shoes are recommended. Overnight Zfreeti Hotel or similar (B)

Please note that alternative arrangements can be made for those not wishing to cycle.

Day 10: Bagan - Heho – Inle Lake
This morning we transfer to the airport for an internal flight to Heho. On arrival we transfer to Nyaung Shwe on the periphery of Inle Lake. We visit the Buddha museum which is housed in the former “Haw” (palace) of the last Shan prince of Nyaung Shwe. After lunch at a local restaurant we take a stroll around the local market and visit the ancient teak wooden Shwe Yan Pyay monastery with its photogenic oval windows. Later we take to the water exploring small canals and the floating gardens to get a feel for local Inthar life. Today ends with a visit to one of Myanmar’s only vineyards where you can taste some wine and relax with a great view. Dinner will be at a local restaurant. Overnight at Blue Vander Hotel or similar (BD)

Please note that alternatively you can choose to do a boat trip on Inle Lake itself. Please advise at the time of booking.
Inle Lake
Enormous Inle Lake is one of Myanmar’s key attractions. With a shoreline littered with stilt villages, it is famous for its fishermen, who row their boats using their legs – an amazingly photogenic sight. A boat trip around the lake reveals small villages with water buffalo wading into the water, and wooden monasteries that have been here for centuries. The surrounding area is mountainous and home to the Pa-O people, among other ethnic groups, who can be found wearing their traditional headgear.

Day 11: Nyaung Shwe – Kunhing 4WD
Today we start a real adventure through Eastern Shan state by 4 wheel drive through an area only recently opened up to tourism in 2014, where infrastructure is very basic and where local people have had very little contact with Westerners. On the way we pass some of the most beautiful scenery in Myanmar, through forested areas that have remained largely untouched. The road follows the infamous route for opium couriers using mules to pass goods through the famous Golden Triangle. By late afternoon or early evening, we arrive at Kunhing and a simple dinner will be served at a village house. Overnight in the village at the house of a village elder or a local guesthouse (Basic facilities and shared bathroom) (BLD)

Eastern Shan State
Following in the trails of the BBC Top Gear team, Eastern Shan state has been closed to tourists until as recently as 2014. It is only now that the area can be visited with special permits. The region is stunning with high mountains and sweeping vistas around every turn. The area is home to fascinating hill tribes, who have had very little contact with Westerners. Certainly it would be not exaggerating to say that this is a truly pioneering journey on a route that will certainly yield many fascinating travel stories at the dining table when you’re back home.

The facilities during the trip through Eastern Shan state are very basic. Expect shared bathroom facilities and basic Shan food consisting of rice and noodles. Shan state is rich in produce so lots of fresh fruit and vegetables are available.

Day 12: Kunhing - Phan Lan - Mong Ping
For those that rise early we can visit the local market and then after a simple breakfast we continue on our adventure weaving through the mountains. En route we will make stops to take in the magnificent views and also stop at some Shan villages where we will have an opportunity to meet local hill tribe people. This afternoon we arrive at Mong Ping, a pleasant town situated on the road to Keng Tung. A simple dinner will be served at the local restaurant. Overnight at ISein Yadanar Htaik Guesthouse with shared bathroom (BLD)

The facilities are basic in local houses. Mosquito nets and blankets are provided, and bathroom facilities are either at a communal village well or in the river. Food will be rice, noodles and locally prepared by your guide.

Day 13: Mong Ping - Keng Tung
After a simple breakfast we will visit Mong Ping market and then continue the drive through outstanding scenery comprising of forests, deep valleys, and emerald rice paddies all the ways to the capital of Eastern Shan State - Keng Tung. On arrival in Keng Tung we will explore the town including the standing Buddha and one tree hill where a magnificent 250-year-old tree stands in isolation. We can enjoy the sunset and this evening have dinner by the picturesque lakeside. Overnight Keng Tung Princess Hotel or similar (BL)

Day 14: Hill tribe villages around Keng Tung
This morning we transfer to Pin Tauk, in beautiful countryside where we will enjoy walking in the countryside to visit local villages of the Pan Lac (Ann), Won Lar (Akha) and Nam Lin Mai (Ann) tribes giving you a chance to meet and learn about the different minority people in the area. A simple picnic lunch will be served during the walk. The villages in this area have little contact with western tourists in this isolated part of Myanmar.
Later this afternoon we return to Keng Tung. This evening you are free to dine at your leisure in the town. Overnight at Keng Tung Princess Hotel or similar (BL)

**Day 15: Keng Tung - Tachileik - Mae Sai**

Early this morning we visit the local market in Keng Tung and try a local Shan breakfast. Later we transfer to Tachileik (around 5 hours) and cross the border back into Thailand (Mae Sai), and continue to Chiang Rai airport for your late afternoon flight back to Bangkok. Overnight Airport Hotel, mid-range (B)

**Day 16: Departure from Bangkok**

Transfer back to Bangkok airport by shuttle bus for your departure flight (B)

*For those that wish to end their trip in Northern Thailand please let us know. Extension arrangements can also be made in Northern Thailand*

**Tour inclusions/exclusions**

**Inclusions:**
- Arrival and departure transfers in Bangkok
- Domestic flight in Thailand
- All accommodation
- Ground transportation with services of a driver
- Services of English speaking guide / tour leader
- Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
- Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

**Excluded:**
- International flights
- Travel Insurance
- Visa – at present an e-visa is not possible for overland travel – see visa information
- Drinks
- Items of a personal nature
- Tips (discretionary)

**Important Information**

**Foreign Travel Advice Warnings**

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings in place for our Journey through the Golden Land small group tour. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.
Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times
As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an ‘arrival day’. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating
On this tour you can expect to stay in simple but comfortable accommodation. Kindly note that the guesthouses in Eastern Shan State towards the end of the tour do not have private bathrooms. Most hotels will have a restaurant and/or bar. The smaller guesthouses may not have a bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink
The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements
If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour
You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food
The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £3 - £5 / Dinner £5 - £10

Drink
The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1 - £2 / Bottle of Mineral Water £0.5
Tipping – Guide and Drivers
Tipping is common practice in Asia. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. As a rough guide, drivers can be tipped between $2-4 per day and guides between $7-15 per day – these figures are per group, not per person.

Foreign Exchange
ATM Availability: There are now ATM machines in a growing number of places in Myanmar- we recommend that you check with your card issuer as to the locations. ATM machines are widely available in Thailand.
Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Although some of the larger hotels will accept Visa or Mastercard in Myanmar, officially these are not accepted due to international sanctions. Cards are widely accepted in Thailand.
Local Currency: Kyat
Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollars cash. You must ensure your notes are clean and crisp – many places will not accept notes with even small blemishes
Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information
Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad
Customers booked on the ‘Land Only’ arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance
It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information
Most nationals including UK, EU and US visitors require a visa for entry to Myanmar. Although visa regulations can change and you should always check the current requirements at the time of booking, at present the Myanmar Government offers an e-visa for many nationals. This includes UK, EU, US, Australian and New Zealand passport holders. For further details please visit – http://evisa.moip.gov.mm/

For clients travelling on our Journey through the Golden Land tour, a visa will still need to be obtained in advance via an Embassy as an e-visa cannot be obtained at this time when travelling overland from Thailand. Please state your entry point into Myanmar as Htee Khee (Land border).

For Thailand most nationals including UK, EU and US visitors do not require a visa for entry into Thailand for 30 days. Other nationalities should check with their nearest embassy.
Passports
It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country’s embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection
As with travel to most parts of Asia, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor’s surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations.

Yellow fever vaccination is required for travellers arriving from countries with risk of yellow fever transmission.

For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. Anti-malaria medication will also be required and the use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you’re travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on best practice when travelling with medicines. For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you’ll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you’re travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate
Myanmar has 3 different seasons: winter (mid Oct–Feb), summer (March–May) and green season (June mid Oct). These seasons are very similar to the seasons in Thailand. Every season has its own advantages and disadvantages to travel.

March–May (summer)
The whole country can be hot (especially in the afternoon around 35 degrees Celsius or more) so you’re advised to plan sightseeing more in the mornings and evenings. Landscapes are a bit dry - excellent time to visit the beaches and to visit higher parts of Myanmar.

November–February (winter)
The most popular season for tourists to travel because of the lower temperatures (evenings in the mountains can be cold sometimes as low as 10 degrees Celsius) while the chance of rain is less (although November 2013 saw more rainy days than July or August of that year). Daytime temperature is around 30 degrees Celsius. A good time to visit any place in the country but it can be busy at the major tourist locations.
June–mid October (Green season)
The temperatures drop (till about 25-30 degrees Celsius) and the scenery is green. Sightseeing is not too hot and not too dusty. A perfect period to visit Bagan, Mandalay and Shan states (Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Pyin Oo Lwin, Kalaw, Inle Lake) where it isn’t raining a lot (if it does, it is a short shower at the end of the day). Avoid the beaches in this period (it’s raining more at the coast and most hotels are closed in this period). Yangon can get quite some rain as well so it is better to spend just 1 or 2 nights here. Sightseeing is great as there aren’t many other tourists around yet – it’s Myanmar at its best!

Clothing
When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

Equipment
The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared and to be adequately immunized. A good insect repellent and bite cream is advisable. Suncream/sunblock is a must – please ensure you bring enough as it may not be available locally. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. Please bring a torch/head-torch for any unexpected electricity outages and also dimly lit areas.

Footwear
Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable and sturdy walking shoes/boots are recommended. When travelling comfortable footwear such as sandals will be suitable. Please note that when you enter religious sites in Myanmar you have to remove your shoes. Some people like to ensure they have socks to avoid problems on hot ground surfaces.

Luggage on tour
Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs
Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have a variety of pins, but mostly two pins.

Tour Itinerary Versions
Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated 8th July 2020.