

WILD FRONTIERS



Burma River (Wild Expedition) In The Footsteps of Elephant Bill Myanmar (Burma)

An enigmatic land of golden pagodas and mist-shrouded jungle, Myanmar was once described by Rudyard Kipling as a place 'quite unlike any...you know about'. It was into this timeless landscape that a young man by the name of James Howard Williams arrived in 1920, to take up a post with the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation. Over the next 25 years this remarkable individual lived a life straight from the pages of a 'Boy's Own' adventure story, going on to earn himself the moniker of 'Elephant Bill' and eventually leading a dramatic exodus of elephants and refugees across the Burmese highlands into India. Following in his adventurous footsteps we journey by river into the jungles of the Upper Chindwin Valley, travelling into some of Myanmar's most remote landscapes. We'll take in the cultural highlights of Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan and sail into the very heart of Burma's ancient teak forests; journeying to the northern reaches of colonial Burma, where J.H. Williams began his remarkable story.

"I have travelled a lot with several different tour companies and would not hesitate recommending Wild Frontiers to those who want a very special adventure." *Jayne Hanlin*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Follow in the footsteps of 'Elephant Bill'
- Explore the colonial heritage of Yangon and Mandalay.
- 9-day river journey along the Chindwin River to the old elephant camp at Mawlaik.
- Explore the remote riverside communities in the wild Upper Chindwin Valley.
- Gaze across the temples and pagodas that litter the famed Plains of Bagan.

Duration: 15 Days

Average group size: 6 - 12

Start: Sun 18 Nov 12

Finish: Sun 2 Dec 12



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Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

The Traveller's Ethos: WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

Personal Service: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

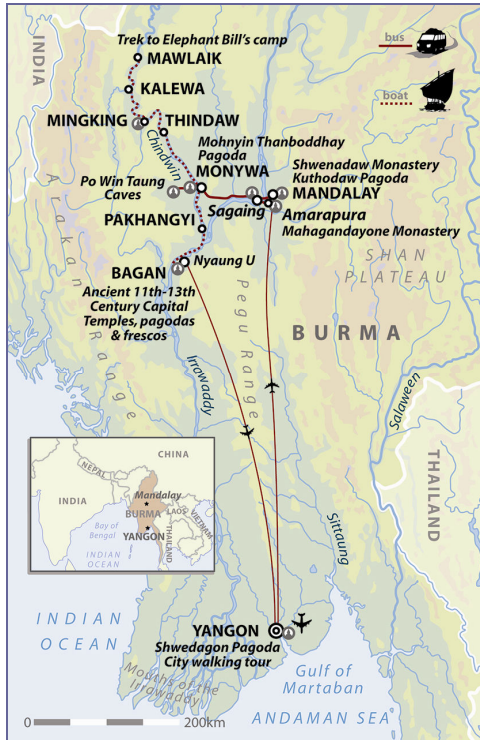
Small Group Size: We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

Cost of Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Added Value: We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

Our clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



Day 1: Tour starts in Yangon: Founded by the Mon in the 6th century, Yangon (or Rangoon as it was then known) lay at the political heart of British colonial Burma. A focal point for the fledgling Burmese independence movement, the city went on to become the capital of an independent Burma in 1948. After lunch at a local restaurant we head for Nanthida Jetty, from where we begin a walking tour of the city. Following the course of the Yangon River, we head first for the city's bustling harbour area. Yangon is blessed with the highest concentration of colonial architecture in Southeast Asia and, as we stroll down Pansodan Street, we pass the former High Court and General Telegraph Office en route to the Independence Monument and St Mary's Cathedral. From here we pay a visit to the Shwedagon Pagoda, whose famous golden stupa dominates the city's skyline. The most sacred Buddhist pagoda in Myanmar, Shwedagon's central stupa is surrounded by a wealth of intricately decorated buildings and statues, making it a wonderful spot from which to enjoy the setting of the late afternoon sun.
Hotel (L,D)

Day 2: Fly to Mandalay; visit Amarapura and Sagaing: After an early breakfast we fly on to Mandalay, the last royal capital

of Burma and, for many, the country's cultural heart. On arrival we will pay a visit to Amarapura to visit the famous monastery of Mahagandayone, renowned as one of the largest Buddhist teaching centres in the city. We will also visit the 140 year old U Bein Bridge and cross Lake Thaungthaman to explore the monastic refuges of Sagaing, probably the country's most important religious centre. The hillsides that lead up from the river are crowded with numerous monasteries and pagodas, including the U Min Thoneze Pagoda (Thirty Caves), the central pagoda of Soon U Pon Nya Shin and Kaungmudaw, making this area a rich treasure trove of Buddhist culture and tradition. Returning to the city we then take a drive up to the summit of Mandalay Hill to enjoy the sunset.
Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 3: Mandalay - Monywa: A morning visit to the gilded majesty of the Kuthodaw Pagoda offers us an opportunity to view the 'world's largest book', before we take in the intricate teak carvings of the Shwenandaw Monastery and the holy Buddha statue at the Maha Myatmuni Pagoda. Leaving Mandalay behind we then drive to Monywa in the Chindwin Valley, a three hour journey that brings us to the eastern bank of the Chindwin River. The city is home to the immense grandeur of the Mohnyin Thanboddhay Pagoda, where more than 500,000 images of Buddha decorate every wall and archway in the temple's vast complex. We will visit the temple on arrival, as well as the Boditahtaung Pagoda, before crossing the river to travel out to the extraordinary caves at Po Win Taung. Here we will find some 947 sandstone caves, which archaeologists believe contain the richest collection of mural paintings and Buddhist statues anywhere in South East Asia.
Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 4: Cruise to Thindaw Village: This morning we will transfer to our intimate river boat, to continue our journey into the heart of the Chindwin Valley by river. The major tributary of the Irrawaddy River, the Chindwin snakes its way through a landscape of thick jungles and misty mountains, passing remote riverside communities and protected wildlife preserves as it makes its way down from the Hukawng Valley. This region marked

the front line between the Allied forces and the Japanese during the Second World War, the mountains to the west forming a formidable barrier between India and Burma. Our first day's cruising takes us from Monywa to the small village of Thindaw, where we will have an opportunity to stretch our legs and explore the village and its environs before returning to the boat for dinner.
Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 5: Sail to Kalewa: Rising early again this morning, we follow the Chindwin upstream, towards the district township of Kalewa, at the confluence of the Chindwin and the Myitha Rivers. An important staging post for trade crossing between India and Myanmar, Kalewa was a vital part of the retreat from Burma during WWII. From here the road to Assam progressed up the Kabaw Valley to Tamu, crossing over the mountains into Manipur and onto the Imphal Plain. The Kabaw Valley earned itself the chilling nickname of the 'Valley of Death', with disease, starvation and exhaustion claiming hundreds of lives as the refugees attempted to reach safety beyond the Burmese highlands. We will overnight in Kalewa.
Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 6: Explore Kalewa, then sail to Mawlaik: This morning we will explore a little something of this lively river port, taking in the market and climbing up to the Shwe Moat Htaung stupa to enjoy the lovely views across the surrounding countryside. Returning to the boat for lunch we then set sail again, continuing upstream towards the town of Mawlaik. An old colonial outpost that was once the centre of the British administration in the area, Mawlaik occupies a lovely spot overlooking the river. A major trading post for the old Bombay Burma Trading Corporation the town still retains something of its charming colonial heritage and many of the old colonial offices and 'Dak' bungalows are still in use today. An interesting footnote to its colonial past is the local belief that the timber elephants here still only respond to commands in English. If time allows this evening, we will take dinner at a local restaurant.
Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 7: Trek to the old elephant camp: James Howard Williams arrived in Burma in 1920, initially as a Forest Assistant with the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation. His job initially was to oversee an area of about 400 square miles of the Indaung Forest reserve, looking after 70 elephants and their oozies (mahouts) in 10 camps situated some 6-7 miles apart. With the outbreak of war though, teak became as important a commodity as steel and Williams found himself attached to the British 14th Army, as an elephant advisor to the Royal Indian Engineers. This morning we will have a chance to explore one of the camps where 'Elephant Bill' spent his early years in Burma, exploring something of the town and taking lunch at one of the local houses before returning to the boat.
Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 8: Free day at the camp: Williams' 25 years in the jungles of Burma saw him develop an incredible rapport with the elephants under his care. He would treat them for anthrax and tiger wounds, syringe out their sinuses and, on one occasion, even have one stop in for an impromptu tea-break. With the outbreak of war and the Japanese invasion of South East Asia, the remote jungles of Burma were dragged inextricably into the bloody conflict. As the Imperial Japanese Army swept everything in its path, the decision was taken to evacuate the elephants into neighbouring India. Following in the footsteps of Hannibal, 'Elephant Bill' led a rag tag group of 45 elephants and a small army of refugees across over 100 miles of jungles and mountains to the safety of India. It was an incredible journey, constituting the largest single elephant rescue in history and led to Lt Colonel J.H. Williams being awarded the OBE at the end of the war.
Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 9: Sail from Mawlaik to Mingking: Setting sail again, we leave Mawlaik behind this morning and head downstream towards the charming village of Mingking. Wonderfully reminiscent of Luang Prabang in neighbouring Laos, the village is home to a number of Konbuang style monasteries, relics of the last dynasty to rule over Burma. Founded in 1752, the Konbuang dynasty ruled over the second largest empire in the

country's history, fighting campaigns against Manipur, Assam and the Siamese kings of Ayutthaya. We will have a chance to step ashore and explore the village and its historic architecture before returning to the boat for dinner.

Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 10: Sail from Mingking to Monywa: A long day's sail brings us full circle today, returning us to Monywa where we began our journey. Arriving back in the city late this afternoon we will take dinner at a local restaurant, spending this evening moored up close to the city.

Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 11: Sail from Monya to Pakhangyi Village: As our river journey takes us ever closer to the fabulous archaeological ruins of Bagan, we near the lower reaches of the Chindwin River, close to where it enters the Irrawaddy. Today's gentle cruise takes us past a collection of riverside communities, where we may get a chance to watch some traditional paper fan making and see how jaggery is made (cane sugar). Our destination for this evening is the village of Pakhangyi, where we will take dinner locally before retiring for our final evening onboard the boat.

Riverboat (B,L,D)

Day 12: Sail to Bagan; disembark boat: Our final day on the river sees us rising with the sun and sailing past more rural villages as we head for the stunning climax of our river journey. Sunset on the Irrawaddy sees us finally approaching the ruins of Bagan, one of Asia's most spectacular sacred sites. Covering some 41 square kilometres, the ruins are considered by many to be on a par with the magnificent Angkor temples of Cambodia. Once the capital of the First Burmese Empire, Bagan's golden period spanned the years between the 11th and 13th centuries, when its vast plains lay scattered with over 13 thousand temples, pagodas and religious structures. On arrival we will disembark the boat and transfer to the hotel where we will spend the next three nights.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 13: Bagan sightseeing: Time, earthquakes, Mongol armies and the inundation of the River Irrawaddy have ravaged much of the original city, but there are still over 2200 structures

remaining, presenting us with one of the most unforgettable views anywhere in Southeast Asia. We will take a tour of the city after breakfast, visiting the famed golden stupa of Shwezigon Pagoda and the 12th century frescoes that adorn the cave temple of King Kyansittha. Before lunch we also plan to visit the temples of Htilominio and Ananda, the latter of which is considered a masterpiece of Mon design. Our afternoon then sees us enjoying a horse cart ride through the Tharaba Gateway and on to the Shwegugyi Temple, located in front of the old Royal Palace. After visiting the 12th century Thatbyinnyu Temple (at 61metres the tallest in the city) we finish our tour watching a golden sunset from the open terraces of the Bagan temples.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 14: In Bagan: A morning visit to the Nyaung U Market affords a chance for some great photo opportunities, as well as the prospect of bartering for some local wares before continuing on to the Mingalazedi Pagoda. Built during the reign of King Narathihapate in 1284, this represents for many the pinnacle of Bamar pagoda architecture. After exploring the lovely stucco-work of the Gubyaukgyi Temple in Myinkaba village, we then pay a visit to the Mon style Hindu temple of Nanpaya, said to have been built by the captive Mon king, Manuha. The last of our morning's visits then sees us taking in the four Buddha images in the Manuha Pagoda and the Myazedi stupa, Myanmar's very own 'Rosetta Stone'. Following lunch we will make our way to Minanthu village (famed for its mural painting) and visit a lacquer-ware factory, before ending our day with some free time to enjoy the temples at sunset.

Hotel (B, L, D)

Day 15: At leisure, then fly to Yangon: After a morning at leisure in Bagan we will transfer to the airport for the flight back to Yangon where the tour ends.

(B,L)

Wild Extensions:

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to

relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

A sample of what you could do...

Myanmar (Burma): You might like to add Lake Inle or Mrauk U.

Thailand: Why not extend your trip with a stopover in Thailand either on the way out or the way back? Depending on your available time we can offer a number of different ideas.

And then there is the rest of Southeast Asia, all easily accessible from Bangkok, where the options are practically limitless.

Contact the office for extension specifics.

TOUR DETAILS

Version: BRE/C

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

Single Supplements: These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. On this tour we are happy to offer an optional single supplement that will cover you for all the hotel nights of the tour except but not for the nights aboard the boat.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required
- All transport, as outlined in the itinerary
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips
- Beverages & any costs of a personal nature
- International Flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights (subject to change) are:

17NOV TG911 LHR-BKK 11:50/06:10 +1
18NOV TG303 BKK-RGN 07:55/08:50
02DEC TG306 RGN-BKK 19:45/21:40
02DEC TG910 BKK-LHR 01:10/07:15

Key:

LHR - London Heathrow

BKK - Bangkok

RGN - Yangon

TG - Thai Airways

NB If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

PRACTICALITIES

Accommodation will be in good quality, privately-owned hotels and bungalows and on board the boat. For more information please see additional information later in this document.

Any accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality.

Transport on this tour includes minibuses, boats, train and domestic flights.

Trip Grading:

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖

Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖

Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office.

Wild Expeditions: As many of you will be aware, Wild Frontiers is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers and the company ethos has always been to help adventurous souls get to incredible places that would otherwise remain inaccessible. With many members of the WF team cutting their teeth in real adventure travel - as travel writers, polar explorers and expedition leaders - we are keen to return to our roots, to get out there into the wilds of this incredible earth, and take some of you with us. So while we have always prided ourselves on running cutting edge, innovative trips, our Wild Expeditions truly take adventure travel to the next level. These often-groundbreaking tours, which investigate new destinations and rarely used routes, revert back to the golden age of explorative travel. These trips are unpredictable and conditions are often basic (although not so much on this particular expedition), so participants must be open-minded and prepared for all eventualities - and a sense of adventure (and humour!) is essential. Often more demanding than normal tours, they aren't for everyone and as such we strongly recommend you call the office to discuss the trip before booking.

Fitness...

Anyone in a reasonable state of health, with an open mind and a sense of adventure should be perfectly able to cope with this tour.

It may sound obvious but...

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website www.fsa.gov.uk.

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip.

Visas: Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) www.travcour.com for the latest advice.

For this tour, UK passport holders currently require a visa for Burma.

Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

Responsible Travel: Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of

each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

The Wild Frontiers Foundation: In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestations and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a full list of partner NGOs please visit our website. Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

The Environment: Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

Climate: The main season for visiting Burma is from November to March, when it rains least and isn't too hot. The southwest monsoon starts between mid-May and mid-June, and brings frequent rains until October. We expect daytime temperatures of around 30 degrees during this tour.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO): The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not

necessarily cancel a trip because of the FCO advice. It is recommended therefore that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

The Riverboat



This Little Boutique boat has 7 Twin Cabins in total and can accommodate a maximum 12 Clients. The boat has sunset deck with dining facilities, 2 common bathrooms with showers for both Ladies/Gent as well as 2 common toilets on board.



Further information:

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

MYANMAR (BURMA) - THE FACTS

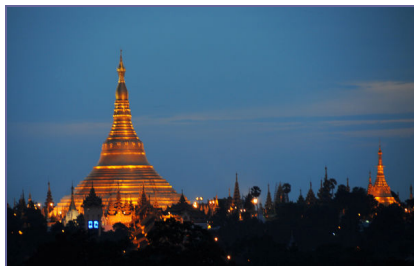


Like most of Southeast Asia's countries, Burma's people and history is a glorious mishmash of settlers and invaders from all fronts. The Mon and the Pyu are thought to have come from India, while the now dominant Bamar (Burmese) migrated through Tibet and by 849 had founded a powerful kingdom centred on Pagan. For the next millennium, the Burmese empire grew through conquests of Thailand (Ayutthaya) and India (Manipur), and shrank under attacks from China and internal rebellions.

Eventually, Britain conquered Burma over a period of 62 years (1824-1886) and incorporated it into its Indian Empire. Burma was administered as a province of India until 1937 when it became a separate, self-governing colony. During the Second World War, Burma was a major battleground as the Allies fought the Japanese for dominance over Asia. The Burma Road was built to get supplies to China. Large parts of Western Burma, particularly the hilly areas bordering India and the city of Mandalay, were severely damaged during the war. Independence from the Commonwealth under the name Union of Burma was attained in 1948.

General Ne Win dominated the government from 1962 to 1988, first as military ruler, then as self-appointed president, and later as political kingpin.

Pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 were violently crushed, with general Saw Maung taking over in a coup and installing the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to rule the country, now renamed Myanmar. Multi-party legislative elections were held in 1990, with the main opposition party - the National League for Democracy (NLD) - winning a landslide victory (392 of 489 seats). But SLORC refused to hand over power, instead placing NLD leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, where she has remained on and off until her release in November 2010.



Yangon: Yangon, formerly Rangoon, was the capital of Myanmar until it was superseded by Naypyidaw in November 2005. The city is an amalgamation of British, Burmese, Chinese and Indian influences, and is known for its colonial architecture, which although decaying remains an almost unique example of a 19th-century British colonial capital. New high-rise buildings were constructed from the 1990s as the government began to allow private investment. However, Yangon continues to be a city of the past, as seen by its lyongi-wearing pedestrians, its street vendors and its pungent smells.

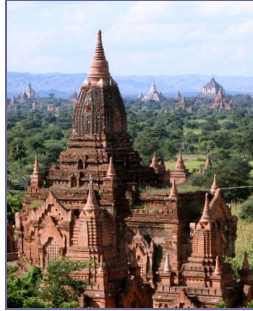
Yangon began as a small Mon village known as Dagon. It was captured by King Alaungpaya and was renamed Yangon, "end of strife". The town remained insignificant until it became the colonial capital of the British in the 1850s, after the capture of Lower Burma. The British knew it as "Rangoon", the Anglicised form of Yangon. The city grew rapidly during the colonial period, which left a legacy of solid 19th-century colonial architecture. Burma attained independence in 1948, but it's true 'modern' period began with the 1962 military coup and the institution of an isolationist Socialist regime in 1964, resulting in the steady decay of the city and its infrastructure. In 1988 Rangoon

was the site of peaceful pro-democracy protests in which thousands, including monks and students, were gunned down. In 1989 the city was renamed Yangon by the military junta. In 2005 the capital was moved to Naypyidaw, but Yangon continues to be an important commercial and cultural centre.



Bagan: Also spelled Pagan, Bagan lies on the banks of the Ayerwaddy River and is home to the largest area of Buddhist temples, pagodas, stupas and ruins in the world - many dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries. The shape and construction of each building is highly significant in Buddhism with each component part taking on spiritual meaning. King Anawratha unified Burma under Theravada Buddhism and Bagan became a central powerbase of the mid 9th century. It is estimated that at one time more than 13,000 temples and stupas stood on this 42 sq km plain in central Myanmar, and Marco Polo once described Bagan as a "gilded city alive with tinkling bells and the swishing sounds of monks' robes". Approximately 2,200 remain today, in various states of disrepair. Some are large and well maintained, such as the Ananda Pahto, others are small tumbledown relics in the middle of overgrown grass. All, however, are considered active sacred sites.

Bagan's golden age ended in 1287 when the Kingdom and its capital city was invaded and sacked by the Mongols. Its population was reduced to one village that remained amongst the ruin. In 1998 this village and its inhabitants were forcibly relocated a few kilometres to the south of Bagan, forming "New Bagan". Today the ancient city is abandoned, with the exception of a few hotels and religious centres.



Mandalay: Formerly its capital, Mandalay is Burma's second largest city (after Yangon) and remains the economic and religious hub of upper Myanmar. The city is centred around the Royal Palace with wide lanes filled with bicycles and motorcycles. Mandalay is known for its millionaires, its monks (half of the country's monks reside in Mandalay and surrounding areas) and its cultural diversity.



Founded in 1859, Mandalay was the last royal capital of the Burmese monarchy, before the British conquered Burma. King Mindon decided to build a capital centred on the Royal Palace in 1857 under a Buddhist prophecy. Several public works projects took place afterwards, including the completion of many pagodas. The Royal Palace was heavily bombarded during World War II and was used to store artillery and weapons by the British. Mandalay is ethnically diverse, with the Bamar (Burmese) forming a slight majority. In recent years there has been a major influx of Chinese who, together with colonial-era immigrants, form 30 to 40% of the population. Their influence is seen in the Chinese-style glass buildings throughout the city. Other prevalent ethnic groups include the Shan, who are ethnically and linguistically related to the Thais and Laotians, and the Karen (Kayin). There is also a sizable ethnic Indian population, including Nepalese and Sikhs.



Chindwin River: The Chindwin River originates in the broad Hukawng Valley of Kachin State of Burma, where the Tanai, the Tabye, the Tawan, and the Taron rivers meet. In 2004, the government established the world's largest tiger preserve in the Hukawng Valley, the Hukawng Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, with an area of approximately 2,500 square miles (6,500 km²); later, the Sanctuary was extended to 21,800 sq.km, making it the largest protected area in mainland Southeast Asia. Much of Chindwin's course lies within mountain ranges and forests. Due to the difficulty of access, much of it remains unspoilt. The mountain ranges to the west of the Chindwin are formidable, yet not totally impregnable to armies. The Kabaw valley saw many an invasion by the kingdom of Manipur to the west, most notably during the reign of King Garibaniwaj (1709-1748) when his army crossed over the Chindwin and the Mu, took Myedu, and reached as far as Sagaing opposite the capital Ava. During World War II, when the Japanese had cut off sea access, the British and other allied forces under General Joseph Stilwell retreated on foot to India across the same mountains, with disastrous results, mainly due to disease and hunger. The Ledo Road was built across the Hukawng valley to supply China and is one of the main arteries for timber in the country, as it was in Elephant Bill's day.

Elephant Bill: Here is a rough quotation from Lt. Colonel J.B. Williams' 1950 book, *Elephant Bill* (p. 232):

During the war elephants had many jobs to do with timber which they had never encountered in the routine of peacetime. One of these was the lifting and passing of logs to a height of nine or ten feet—that is to say, from ground level to the bridge level. These logs weighed on an

average a quarter of a ton each and were often too heavy for the trunk to grip or hold. If the log were balanced on the outside of the trunk on the tusks, there was always a danger that as the elephant raised its head to lift it the last foot or two of the log would roll back up its forehead and endanger the life of the oozie who was sitting on the elephant's neck at a lower level.



14 a) Elephant at work, Lampang, Thailand

On one occasion, I was watching, with one or two sapper officers, the last logs being handed up to a bridge under construction and we witnessed a remarkable display of intelligence. The elephant was a particularly clever animal and was beautifully handled by his oozie, but it was evening and they were both tired. Several logs had slipped during their efforts to balance them and it was quite obvious that the elephant was anxious about the safety of the oozie who was placed in a dangerous position just as the log was lifted to the highest point. There were still about three logs to be lifted. The largest of them was picked up by the elephant and held in an endways position between the trunk and tusk, the signals of this being given to the animal by the oozie with his foot. The elephant then let it gradually slide so that it lay across his trunk at the point of balance and the up-curving ends of his tusks acted as stops to prevent it rolling onto the ground. Then he slowly lifted his head.

"God's truth, how marvellous," said a major in a low voice.

"Hope to God it doesn't roll up his head," murmured the brigadier.

I held my breath and then said in a calm voice in Burmese: "Carefully now." The

animal at once dropped his head and let the log cash to the ground. The oozie looked disgusted, and then, acting entirely without instruction, the elephant used his brains to devise a safe method of handling the log—that is, he thought of something we four men ought to have thought of ourselves.

He moved on one side rapidly and picked up a stout piece of wood which had been shaped for use as a maul or club to drive pegs into the bridge. He rammed it in a vertical position, jammed between his tusk and his trunk. I immediately saw what he had in mind. The oozie also had immediately understood and put him hard at the log again. With almost vicious strength and certainly with determination, the elephant picked up the log endways, lowered it and balanced it as before, and then raised his head. But this time the club-shaped bit of wood was there to act as a vertical stop so that the log could not roll back over his forehead onto his rider.

An oath came from the major, a murmur of admiration from the brigadier. I could feel my heart beating as the animal moved towards the bridge platform, caring the balanced log, and then, putting his forefeet onto another log so as to gain a little extra height, lowered his head a little, at the same time curling the head of his trunk out of the way so that it should not get pinched. The log rolled onto the platform as gently as easily as if placed in position by an electric crane. It was one of the most intelligent actions I have seen an elephant perform. The remarks of the major and the brigadier as we returned to camp would have made that elephant purr with the complacent pleasure of a Persian kitten if he had heard them, and he deserved it all.

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