

Burma at the Crossroads

12 Days | Oct 28 –Nov 8, 2013

10-11 participants | \$3890 per person

12-13 participants | \$3690 per person

15-16 participants | \$3490 per person

Emerging from decades of global sanctions and 50 years of military rule, Burma's recent political and policy reforms are reintroducing this once isolated country to the world. Burma at the Crossroads will explore the country's vibrant culture; understand its tumultuous history; engage in dialogue with locals to understand contemporary life in Burma; and meet social, educational, political and humanitarian groups shaping the future of the country.

Since Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in November 2010, the military junta ceding power to a civilian government in 2011 and the National League for Democracy's (NLD)'s victories in the 2012 by-elections, the mood on the streets in Burma is one of palpable optimism. All of this makes now a fascinating time to visit and witness the rapid changes in this once inaccessible country.

In addition to visiting many of the country's cultural and historic sites (Shwedagon Pagoda, the pagodas of Bagan, the ancient cities around Mandalay, U Bein Bridge, etc.), Burma at the Crossroads will meet with human rights advocates, members of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy, Shan minority representatives, and local craftspeople and artists to gain a first hand understanding of the country directly from its people. Our journey includes visiting the breathtaking Inle Lake and meeting with the Ministry of Tourism in Bagan to learn about tourism impacts and opportunities for the local economy.

While the changes in the past year and a half have been extraordinary, Burma still remains one of the least developed and poorest countries in the world; and continues to be one of the most repressive governments in the world. Global Exchange Reality Tours and Ethical Traveler champion responsible and ethical travel and have designed this and all our tours to maximize support for the local communities and people we visit.

Note: Burma has been experiencing a tourism boom the past year and the rise in international visitors has outpaced the development of its tourism infrastructure. Due to the high demand for limited hotel rooms and other tourism facilities, prices continue to increase haphazardly. Because of this, we encourage all interested participants to book early so travel arrangements can be promptly finalized.

This is a tentative Itinerary. Global Exchange Reality Tours and Ethical Traveler are not responsible for any changes to itinerary due to weather and other circumstances beyond our control.

ITINERARY

Day 1 | Oct 28, 2013 – Fri | Arrive in Yangon

On arrival at Yangon International Airport, you'll be met by your local guide who will accompany the group for the entire tour, and transferred to your hotel. Welcome drinks at hotel. At 5 PM, meet at the hotel lobby for a lecture on "History of Burma from Bagan to British" by a retired professor from Rangoon University, followed by a group dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: D

Day 2 | Oct 29, 2013 – Sat | In Yangon

After breakfast, meet at the hotel lobby at 9 AM for our program orientation and the do's and don'ts in Burma, presented by your local guide and our local tour operator, Zarmani Tours' managing director. Please feel free to ask questions. After the orientation, we'll visit the National League For Democracy's head office, a political party led by Aung San Suu Kyi, advocating for democracy in Burma, and meet with a few of its party members. Following the meeting, we'll visit the country's revered and enormous reclining Buddha Chaukhtatgyi that's about 6-story tall. We learn more about Burma's history, with a visit to the Martyrs' Mausoleum, commemorating General Aung San (Aung San Suu Kyi's father), the father of modern Burma and one of the main architects of its independence from the British.

On the way to lunch, we'll drive slowly pass Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's residence located on Inya Lake, then visit The 88 Generation Students Group, who were instrumental in organizing rallies and protests against rising fuel and commodity prices during The Saffron Revolution in 2007. We'll meet with a few ex-political prisoners and the 1988 student uprising leaders who are also leaders of All Burma Federation of Student Unions.

Late afternoon visit to the 2500-year old Shwedagon Pagoda, Burma's most sacred and impressive pagoda that's a center for religious and community activities. We'll stay here for sunset before returning to our hotel then dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 3 | Oct 30, 2013 – Sun | In Yangon

After breakfast, we take a morning stroll from Sule Pagoda (at the city center) on Mahabandoola Road to Lanmadaw Street to explore the cultural and ethnic diversity of Yangon. Along the way, we'll pass a mosque, a church, a Chinese temple, a Hindu temple and Buddhist monastery, all representing the myriad of cultures and religions in Burma. We'll stop at a local teashop near Scott Market (Bogyoke Market) to sample some of the local teas before continuing to the historic neighborhood along Pansoedan Street that's dotted with colonial architecture. After lunch we visit the Free Funeral Service Society, an organization providing free funeral services for the poor around Yangon; the Sukha Charity Clinic, which provides free medical care to locals; and the Happy Haven Humanitarian Project (HHHP), an orphanage for HIV affected children – all located in the same area – and meet with social activists to discuss health, women and children issues and services in Burma. We end our day with dinner before returning to the hotel.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 4 | Oct 31, 2013 – Mon | Yangon to Mandalay

After breakfast, we take an early morning flight to Mandalay, the center of Burmese culture and arts and crafts. On arrival in Mandalay, we'll visit a silk weaving, marble carving, bronze casting, woodcarving, embroidery, and gold leaf making workshop. Before checking-in at our hotel, we'll visit the highly venerated Mahamuni Buddha Image that's covered in 2-centimeter thick gold leaf. After lunch, we'll visit the Mandalay Fine Arts School where we'll meet some of its students and teachers. In the early evening we'll see a marionette (traditional puppet) show before dinner. Marionettes were once used to inform and educate people of current events, history, literature religion, etc.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 5 | Nov 1, 2013 – Tue | In Mandalay

After breakfast, drive to Sagain to visit the famous temples of Sagaing Hill and take in the wonderful views of Mandalay and the surrounding area from the top. We'll visit a nunnery to learn about the nuns' daily life and a charity school run by a monastery. After lunch, we continue to Inwa, the ancient Burmese imperial capital, by pony-cart to visit Bagaya Monastery, Menu Okkyaung, and Nan Myint Tower in this historic site. We proceed to Amarapura, to walk across the famous U Bein Bridge that's made entirely of teak, or take a canoe trip at Taungthaman Lake for sunset and meet locals at teashops around the tree-lined lakeshore. Return to hotel before dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 6 | Nov 2, 2013 – Wed | Mandalay

After breakfast, we leave for the Irrawaddy River, Burma's longest river and most important commercial waterway, to embark on a chartered local long tail boat and sail upstream (1 hour) to Mingun, home of the ruined Mingun Pagoda that was built in the 1700s. Upon arrival, we explore Mingun on foot (about 2 hours) to visit Mingun Pagoda; Mingun Bell, the world's biggest ringing bell; Myatheindan Pagoda, built in memory of King Bagyidaw's first wife; and the Home for The Aged, the first nursery home in the country. Following our visit, we return to the riverbank and sail downstream (~45 minutes) back to Mandalay. On arrival at the jetty in Mandalay, our coach will take us to lunch before returning to our hotel to freshen up and meet with an ex-regime politician and also a descendant of the country's last royal family to discuss "peace and reconciliation" in Burma. In the late afternoon, we go to Mandalay Hill for sunset and visit Kuthodaw Pagoda which contains the world's largest book; and Golden Palace Monastery. We return to our hotel after sunset before going to dinner at the bustling Mandalay Night Market for dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 7 | Nov 3, 2013 – Thu | Mandalay to Bagan

After breakfast, we transfer to the Mandalay jetty for our chartered Nawarat River Boat from Mandalay to Bagan. Along the way, we can observe and stop to visit local villages on the riverbank. Lunch on board. We will have a traditional fortuneteller on board for you learn about Burmese traditional astrology and a traditional medical expert on board to discuss traditional Burmese medicine and treatment. Arrive in Bagan in the late afternoon and transfer to our hotel where we'll also have dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 8 | Nov 4, 2013 – Fri | Bagan

Our day begins early with a presentation of "the architectural evolution of the Bagan temples" by your guide in the hotel. Home to thousands of temples constructed between the 11th and 13th centuries, Bagan was the capital of the Kingdom of Pagan that birthed modern Burma. Following the presentation, we head out to Shwezigon Pagoda, built in 1102 AD and the most important shrine for prayer in Bagan. From there, we transfer to Myingaba Village to explore Gubyaukgyi Temple, the best example of an early Bagan style temple. We'll explore Myingaba Village on foot and meet some villagers making lacquerware. Following lunch, we'll visit the Ministry of Tourism Department of Bagan Zone and meet some prominent members of the Bagan Zone Hotels Association to discuss the tourism impacts and opportunities for the local economy. In the late afternoon, we'll transfer by coach to Guni Temple to view the sunset over the Bagan plains. We'll take a horse cart back to the hotel after sunset before going to dinner.

Optional: Evening visit to the Ananda Temple Pagoda Festival or Bagan night market.

Note: Optional balloon ride over Bagan for sunrise is highly recommended.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 9 | Nov 5, 2013 – Sat | Bagan

We begin our day with a visit to Ananda Temple, one of the surviving masterpieces of Mon architecture and the finest and best preserved of the Bagan temples. We'll also visit Htilominlo Temple, the best example of the later period of the Bagan temples before meeting with the Bagan Archaeological Department to learn about excavation and protection of the archaeological sites in Burma. After lunch we'll meet with a local NGO working on youth and education issues, followed by a visit to Minanthu Village to see the Bagan dynasty's last temples and viewing the sunset at Tayokepyay Temple. We return to our hotel before going to dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 10 | Nov 6, 2013 – Sun | Bagan to Inle Lake

After breakfast, we transfer to the airport for our morning flight to Inle Lake. On arrival in Heho, coach transfer to Nyaung Shwe Museum (approximate an hour drive) to visit the former Shan Chief's residence that currently has the ethnic group's traditional dresses and cultural relics on display. Following our visit, we'll take a private open-air motorboat to Inle Lake. After lunch, we'll meet with prominent members of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization, an organization advocating for the freedom and liberation of the Pa-Oh people, an ethnic minority group in the Shan state. After the meeting, we'll visit Inle Lake's famous silk weaving workshop in Innpawkhone Village and meet the owner and her weavers (all are women). We'll also visit the cigar making workshop and black smith in Nampan Village and observe the villagers working on their floating gardens. We'll also visit a local micro-lending organization before returning to our hotel then dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 11 | Nov 7, 2013 – Mon | Inle Lake to Yangon

After breakfast, we'll transfer to Heho airport for our hour flight back to Yangon. The luggage will be transferred separately to the airport. On arrival at Yangon airport, transfer to Tharyargone Village, about an hour drive from Yangon airport where we'll visit our local tour operator's school projects and meet the villagers, children and the teachers. After lunch, we'll visit the International Relations Department of the University of Yangon, meet an ex-exiled journalist or meet a group of social advocates depending on the availability before checking into our hotel. In the afternoon, we'll meet at the hotel lobby for a talk with a Yangon City Development Council representative. We end our day's activities with a farewell dinner.

Overnight: 3-star hotel. Meals: B, L, D

Day 12 | Nov 8, 2013 – Tue | Depart Yangon

Tour concludes after breakfast then a transfer to the airport for your international flight home.

Price & Inclusions

Tour Prices:

10-11 participants | \$3890 per person
12-13 participants | \$3690 per person
15-16 participants | \$3490 per person
Single supplement: \$465 per person

If you are a single traveler, we will try to match you with another solo traveler of the same sex for twin share accommodations.

Due to the volatility of the Burmese Kyat's exchange rate and fuel, transportation and hotel rates in Burma; tour prices may be adjusted if prices suddenly rise.

Note: No credit cards, ATM cards, nor traveler's checks are accepted anywhere in Burma; even at hotels and up-market shops in Yangon. Tour members must bring enough cash (new and clean US dollars with no tears) for contingency expenses and personal expenses such as souvenir shopping.

Tour price is inclusive of the following:

- Accommodations at locally owned 3-star hotels
- Accommodations on a double occupancy basis
- All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) as specified, except for Day 1 (dinner only) and Day 12 (breakfast only)
- Local English speaking guide accompanying the group throughout the tour
- Program activities as specified in itinerary
- All entrance fees to sites as specified in itinerary
- Domestic flights and airport taxes as specified in itinerary
- Honoraria for speakers and donations to community groups and organizations in itinerary
- Vehicle transport as specified – air conditioned coaches, open-air boats, horse carts and chartered local Nawarat boat from Mandalay to Bagan
- Bottled water during meals and refresher towel when on local operator's vehicles and boats
- Baggage handling at airports and in hotels
- Gratuities
- \$50 tax-deductible membership fee to Global Exchange
- A year subscription to the Earth Island Journal, published by the Earth Island Institute (EII). Ethical Traveler is a project of the EII.

Tour price does NOT include of the following:

- Visa fee
- Alcoholic, soft drinks and imported mineral water
- International flights and airport tax
- Services not mentioned in the program.
- Meals not mentioned in the program
- Expenses of a purely personal nature.
- Room service charges.
- Transportation of luggage in excess of weight allowance.
- Conveyance fees used for private purposes.
- US airport taxes
- Travel Insurance (We strongly advise that each participant arrange for their own travel insurance).
- Optional activities specified in the itinerary, such as balloon ride over Bagan

For more information or to book the tour

Contact:
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Or book online at <http://www.globalexchange.org/reality-tours-online-application?trip=23030>. Along with your completed online application, a \$500 non-refundable deposit is required at the time of booking. Your remaining tour balance is due 90 days before the departure date.

About Global Exchange Reality Tours

Global Exchange is an international human rights organization dedicated to promoting social, economic and environmental justice around the world. Reality Tours, as a part of Global Exchange's public education programs, organizes citizen delegations to explore human rights issues abroad. For more information on Reality Tours, please visit www.realitytours.org.

About Ethical Traveler

Ethical Traveler (ET) is the first grass-roots alliance uniting adventurers, tourists, travel agencies, and outfitters — everyone who loves to travel, and sees travel as a positive force in the world. ET feels that all travelers are, in effect, freelance ambassadors. Ethical Traveler also believes that we have the ability to join our voices, and to use our economic power to strengthen human rights and protect the environment. For more information on Ethical Traveler, please visit www.ethicaltraveler.org.