

Myanmar

September 2013

A The country



Over the past decade a number of developments have had major effects on Myanmar and in turn shaped the humanitarian and development landscape. These include: Cyclone Nargis, which devastated large areas of the Ayeyarwady Delta in 2008 and killed 138,000 people; the political reform process begun in early 2011; ethnic conflicts including that in Kachin State; and the inter-communal violence that flared up in Rakhine State in June 2012. With Myanmar being large, resource-rich and strategically located as well as having a population that is poor and heavily exposed to climate change, the former isolation has given way to an influx of development actors and businesses alike. While efforts to reduce poverty and strengthen resilience are needed, working in a rapidly changing environment is not without challenges - understanding the country's background, issues, actors and practical aspects is vital.

Bordering China, India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Laos, Myanmar is the largest country in mainland South-East Asia. Estimates of Myanmar's population range from 47 to 60

million (no census has been conducted for the past 30 years; a new census is planned for 2014). Myanmar's society is diverse and consists of some 135 ethnic groups. Despite its natural resources and strategic location, Myanmar is also the poorest country in the region, with around one quarter of its population estimated to be living in poverty (below USD1.25 per day). The government's investment in both education and health is one of the lowest in the world. For much of its contemporary history, Myanmar has been ruled by a military regime and was internationally isolated.

Since the inauguration of a quasi-civilian government in March 2011, significant steps have been taken towards political reform, including the release of hundreds of political prisoners, peace agreements with the eleven major ethnic armed groups, and new laws that provide for greater freedom of expression and assembly, labour rights and political participation.

In April 2012, Myanmar conducted parliamentary by-elections in which Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for



Fast facts

Official name	Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Capital	Nay Pyi Daw
Population	47-60 Mio (census due in 2014)
Currency	Kyat (MMK)
Per capita GDP:	USD 1,405 (PPP) / USD 854 (nominal)
HDI score:	0.498 (2012, rank: 149th)
Natural hazards:	Cyclones, earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides
Infant mortality rate	46.31/1,000 (2013 estimate)
Live expectancy at birth	65.6 years (2013 estimate)

For more key data on Myanmar, see UN Data [here](#) and the Asian Development Bank's Myanmar fact sheet [here](#).

About our inprofile series

As part of our free service to the subscribers of our newsletter, we publish concise profiles about the countries we work in. If you would like to subscribe, go to www.banyaneer.com/sign-up. All country profiles are updated annually. While all efforts are made to ensure that information provided is correct at the time of publishing, Banyaneer assumes no liability for the use of this information.

Political profile

Executive:

President Thein Sein, two Vice-Presidents, cabinet

Legislative:

Two legislative chambers, the 440-seat Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly, the lower house) and the 224-seat Amyotha Hluttaw (Nationalities Assembly, the lower house). In both houses, 25% of seats are reserved for military appointees.

Main political parties:

- Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP, military-aligned)
- National League for Democracy (NLD, lead by Aung San Suu Kyi)
- National Democratic Force (NDF)
- National Unity Party (NUP)

Economic profile

Composition: GDP (labour force)

- Agriculture: 38.8% (70%)
- Industry: 19.3% (7%)
- Services: 41.8% (23%)

GDP growth

6.2% (2011-12 estimate)

Agricultural products:

Rice, pulses, beans, sesame, groundnuts, sugarcane; fish and fish products; hardwood

Industries:

Agricultural processing; wood and wood products; copper, tin, tungsten, iron; cement, construction materials; pharmaceuticals; fertilizer; oil and natural gas; garments, jade and gems

Ethnic profile

The government identifies eight national ethnicities which comprise 135 "distinct" ethnic groups. These are the Bamar (68%), Shan (9%), Kayin (7%), Rakhine (4%), Mon (2%), Kachin (2%), Kayah (1%) as well as many small ethnic groups. Unrecognised ethnic groups include Myanmar Indians and Myanmar Chinese who form 2% and 3% of the population respectively, and the Rohingya.

Over 80% of the population are Theravada Buddhist, with the remainder being Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Animist.

1. See: Myanmar: The Politics of Economic Reform, ICG Asia Report No. 231, 27 July 2012.



Democracy (NLD) was elected to Parliament. She acknowledged the role of President Thein Sein in leading Myanmar towards democratic reform. In signs of continuing reform, the Myanmar parliament has agreed to review the Constitution. The next parliamentary elections are due in November 2015.

As the International Crisis Group (ICG) points out, Myanmar's political transition and economic reconstruction are intimately entwined: "Achieving either depends on achieving both. [...] It is hard to imagine a successful political transition unless the government can secure macro-economic stability and sustained improvement to the lives of ordinary people, just as it is hard to imagine successful economic reform without political stability and a continued shift away from the authoritarian past."¹

The 2012 riots in Rakhine State that saw more than 176,000 people affected and more than 100 killed, as well as unrest in other areas, served as a reminder that the reform process may not be without hurdles.

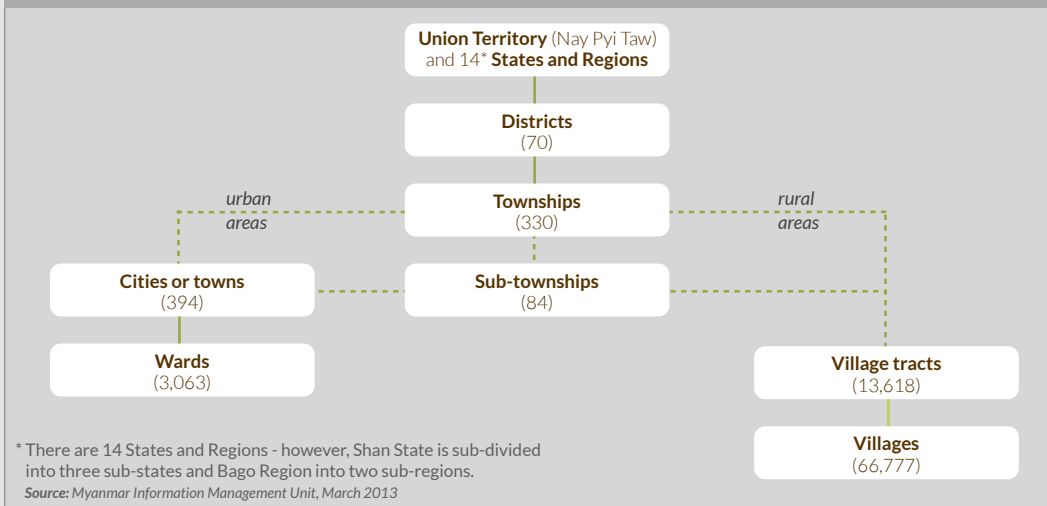
The role of external actors

With international sanctions and the former regime's reluctance to grant access to many development and humanitarian actors (which was heavily criticised in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis), few external actors were able to pursue operations prior to 2011. The number of businesses, NGOs and other external actors has risen tremendously since (as the exploding cost of living in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, testifies).

External actors - both from the profit and non-profit sectors - can contribute to improving the lives and livelihoods of people across Myanmar, both through direct action as well as through support and advocacy to the government. With Myanmar standing at rank 149 out of 186 countries assessed for the Human Development Index (2012), and the country lagging behind all of its ASEAN neighbours in indicators for poverty, health and education, much is to be done to advance the lives of its people - especially as climate change brings additional burdens.

Effective coordination between agencies, adherence to the "Do No Harm" principle, and a focus of needs-based interventions will be key to a successful support role of external actors.

Chart | Myanmar administrative structure



MIMU

Created in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) provides a broad range of information and facilitates coordination. It maintains lists of maps, baseline data, publications, a contact list and features a library.

Website:
<http://themimu.info>

Address:
No. 5 Kanbazwa Street
(opposite Pearl Condo)
Bahan Township
Phone: 01-230 5663

B The issues

Myanmar's reform process offers a major opportunity to improve the lives of its people through interventions in a range of fields. We present some of the key issues related to resilience below.

Agriculture, livelihood and food security

Lack of access to credit and inputs have had a negative impact on food security, livelihoods and the rural economy. According to a UNDP survey in 2011², 26% of Myanmar's population lives below the poverty line, with the proportions being much higher in some areas, such as Chin State (73%), Rakhine State (44%), Tanintharyi Region (33%), Shan State (33%) and Ayeyarwaddy Region (32%). The nationwide prevalence of moderately underweight children is 32%. The proportion of total household budgets spent on food is 68%. Access to land is a significant issue, with 24% of people being landless. The Thematic Group on Food Security and Agriculture (TGFSA), the Delta Livelihoods Working Group (DLWG)³, and the Food

Security Information Network (FSIN)⁴ are mechanisms for coordination and information-sharing amongst stakeholders in this sector.

Disaster risk management

Myanmar ranks first on OCHA's 2012 list of most at-risk countries in the Asia Pacific region. The country is vulnerable to floods, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides and tsunamis. Between 2002 and 2013, 2.6 million people were affected by cyclones and 500,000 by floods. OCHA has produced a fact sheet that is available [here](#). The combined effects of climate change add to this risk: a 2011 study ranks Myanmar second out of 233 countries/territories in terms of the threat posed by both agricultural productivity losses and sea-level rise, and fifth in terms of the threat from weather extremes.⁵ The experience from Cyclone Nargis has shown that while community members are excellent at helping each other in times of hardship, most communities in remote areas lack the support structures (e.g. early warning) needed to anticipate or cope with hazards.

2. See UNDP 2011: Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA) II; available at: <http://www.mm.undp.org/IHLCA/index.html>
3. For more information on the TGFSA and DLWG, see http://themimu.info/Agriculture_Livelihoods_Food_Security/index.php
4. See <http://www.fsinmyanmar.net/>
5. See Wheeler, D. (2011): Quantifying Vulnerability to Climate Change: Implications for Adaption Assistance. Washington DC: Center for Global Development - http://international.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1424759_file_Wheeler_Quantifying_Vulnerability_FINAL.pdf and a discussion here: <http://www.dvb.no/news/climate-change-threatens-burma/20748>

Health and nutrition

Myanmar has high rates of infant, under-five and maternal mortality, as well as high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Government expenditure on health is only 0.5% of GDP, and access to health care facilities is extremely limited outside major cities and towns. Improving maternal and child health services (including nutrition and immunisation) across Myanmar's rural areas is vital.

Water and sanitation

Common practices of open defecation, use of unprotected water sources, and generally poor sanitation standards are underlying causes for the high prevalence of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea, Hepatitis A and typhoid fever across Myanmar. These are amplified during and after floods.

Education

The government spends only 1.3% of GDP on education. Some 50% of students finish primary school, a small percentage of these students complete middle and high school, and fewer still go on to university. Universities across Myanmar have faced many restrictions and cuts since the 1988 student uprising.

Protection and Human Rights

Myanmar has had a dubious record in the past in regards to labour issues, including forced labour and the recruitment of minors into the military. The Myanmar Parliament passed new labour laws in September 2011 that aim to bring Myanmar back into line with international norms and ILO standards. In June 2012 the government and the armed forces signed a Joint Action Plan to stop the abuse of children in armed conflict, including the recruitment of child soldiers. By September 2013, the military had discharged a total of 176 child soldiers from service. In July 2013, 73 political prisoners were released, and the government pledged to release all remaining political prisoners by the end of 2013.

Conflicts and communal violence

While progress has been made recently towards resolving longstanding ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, many challenges remain. The government has reached tentative peace agreements with all eleven of the main armed ethnic groups, following the signing of a preliminary agreement with the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) on 30 May 2013 and a preliminary ceasefire with the Karen National Union on 12 January 2012, which ended one of the world's longest-running civil conflicts.

2012 saw the outbreak of extreme communal violence in Rakhine State between Buddhist and Muslim groups that resulted in many displaced people across that region. One year on, the UN estimates that 176,000 remain affected by the crisis. Furthermore, sporadic religious violence has broken out in different locations across the country - in Miektila in March 2013, in Lashio in May 2013, and in Sagaing Region in August 2013.

Natural resource management

In Myanmar, where 70% of the people depend on natural resources for their livelihood, the sustainable use and protection of these resources matters not just in their own right, but also for livelihoods, food security and disaster risk reduction. Adapting to increasing saline intrusion along the Ayeyarwady Delta - the country's rice bowl - and ensuring that economic development does not come at the cost of natural resources are cases in point.



Woman in Bago Region fetching water. [Photo: S. Marr]

C The actors

Despite challenges and restrictions imposed by the past regime, many international actors have worked successfully to support communities within Myanmar. Many challenges remain and will take time to redress. Key operational challenges include the lack of mobility of expatriate staff, lengthy and fluctuating visa approvals, limited humanitarian space, lack of reliable data, lengthy government procedures and red tape, uncertain registration status and short term and/or limited funding.

Opportunities exist to increase aid effectiveness by accessing longer term funding, cooperating and working to build the capacity of public structures in health and education, to improve basic facilities and services, and to strengthen civil society.

Nearly all international NGOs operate in Myanmar under some sort of framework agreement with the government, commonly a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Letter of Agreement with the ministry that has purview over the sector in which they work. MOUs are granted for a specified time, usually one to three years. It is not uncommon for INGOs to operate under an expired or pending MOU for periods of time. INGOs operating in Myanmar work largely with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, or the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

Official development assistance

Official development assistance (ODA) to Myanmar has been low until the beginning of the political reform process (around USD 7 per capita in 2009). Since 2011, ODA has increased substantially, and donors to Myanmar have established an informal coordination group, the Partnership Group for Aid Effectiveness (PGAE). A paper from March 2012 provides a profile of bilateral donors and shows their

respective contributions and priorities.⁶ Other donors not included in the profile include the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank. Three main multi-donor funds have been established for Myanmar:

Multi-Donor Education Fund Phase II

Volume: approx. USD 65 m (2012-2016)

Supported by: Australia, Denmark, the European Commission, Norway, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the United Kingdom

MDEF II builds on its predecessor, the Multi-Donor Education Fund, to address the urgent need for sustainable improvements in access, equity, quality and management in Myanmar's basic education sector. It aims to accelerate progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 2, "ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, girls and boys alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling."

Three Millennium Development Goals Fund

<http://www.3mdg.org>

Volume: approx. USD 300m (2012-2016)

Supported by: Australia, Denmark, European Commission, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America

The Three Millennium Development Goal Fund (3MDG) supports the provision of health services in Myanmar and will contribute towards the country's efforts to achieve the three health-related Millennium Development Goals. These goals include reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. 3MDG places a special emphasis upon provision of maternal, newborn and child quality health services.

Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT)

<http://lift-fund.org>

Volume: approx. USD 170 m (2009-2016)

Supported by: Australia, Denmark, the European Union, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America

LIFT was established in 2009 to be an effective mechanism for channeling aid through partners, to achieve its goal of improved food and livelihood security of poor and vulnerable people in Myanmar. It focuses on the Ayeyarwady Delta, the central dry zone as well as Chan, Chin, Kachin and Rakhine States, and aims to reach at least 2 m people. Currently, 43 LIFT projects are being implemented.

Myanmar government

The Government of Myanmar, headed by the President, includes 31 Ministries. Key departments for humanitarian and development work are the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (Minister: U Myint Hlaing), the Ministry of Health (Minister: Pe Thet Khin), and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (Minister: Myat Myat Ohn Khin).

Key international NGOs in Myanmar

- **ACTED**
<http://www.acted.org/en/myanmar>
- **Action Against Hunger**
<http://www.actionagainsthunger.org/countries/asia/myanmar>
- **Action Aid**
<http://www.actionaid.org/where-we-work/asia-australia/myanmar>
- **Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)**
<http://www.adramyanmar.org/>
- **Aide Medicale Internationale (AMI)**
<http://www.amifrance.org/-Myanmar-ex-Burma-.html>
- **Burnet Institute**
http://www.burnet.edu.au/countries/_2_myanmar_burma
- **CARE**
<http://www.care.org.au/myanmar-burma>
- **CESVI**
http://www.cesvi.eu/?pagina=pagina_generica.php&id=641
- **International Rescue Committee**
<http://www.rescue.org/overview/irc-myanmar>
- **Malteser International**
<http://www.malteser-international.org/home/wo-wir-helfen/archiv/asien/myanmar.html>
- **Marie Stopes International**
<http://www.mariestopes.org.au/how-we-help/where-we-work/myanmar>
- **Medicins du Monde (MDM)**
<http://www.medicinsdumonde.org/gb/International/Burma-Myanmar>
- **Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF)**
<http://www.msf.org/myanmar>
- **Merlin**
<http://www.merlin.org.uk/category/myanmar>
- **Mercy Corps**
<http://www.mercycorps.org/myanmar>
- **Norwegian Refugee Council**
<http://www.nrc.no/?aid=9355836>
- **Oxfam**
<http://www.oxfam.org/en/myanmar>
- **PACT**
<http://www.pactworld.org/myanmar>
- **Plan International**
<http://plan-international.org/where-we-work/asia/myanmar/>
- **PSI**
<http://www.psi.org/myanmar>
- **Relief International**
http://www.ri.org/where_we_work/country.php?ID=10
- **Save the Children**
<http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpl4E/b.6150543/>
- **Solidarites International**
<http://www.solidarites.org/fr/hos-missions/myanmar>
- **Terre des hommes**
<http://www.tdh.ch/en/countries/myanmar>
- **Welthungerhilfe**
<http://www.welthungerhilfe.de/home-en.html>
- **World Vision**
<http://www.wvi.org/myanmar>

6. The paper "Myanmar donor profiles" can be accessed here: http://www.mof.go.jp/about_mof/councils/customs_foreign_exchange/sub-foreign_exchange/proceedings/material/gai240625/03.pdf

Key government departments

- **Department of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement**
<http://www.dsw.gov.mm/en>
- **Ministry of Health**
<http://www.moh.gov.mm/>
- **Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation**
- **Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries**
- **Ministry of Labour**
<http://www.mol.gov.mm/en/>
- **Ministry of Communication and Information Technology**
<http://www.mcit.gov.mm/>
- **Ministry of Industry**
- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
<http://www.mofa.gov.mm/>

UN agencies

- **UNOCHA**
<http://www.unocha.org/roap/about-us/about-ocha-roap/myanmar>
- **UNDP**
<http://www.mm.undp.org/>
- **UNOPS**
<http://www.unops.org/english/whatwedo/Locations/Europe/Myanmar-Operations-Centre/Pages/MyanmarOperationsCentre.aspx>
- **UNICEF**
<http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/>
- **WFP**
<http://www.wfp.org/countries/myanmar>
- **WHO**
<http://www.who.int/countries/mmr/en/>
- **UNODC**
<http://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/myanmar/index.html>
- **UNHCR**
<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4877d6.html>
- **UNFPA**
<http://myanmar.unfpa.org/>
- **UNAIDS**
<http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/myanmar/>
- **ILO**
<http://www.ilo.org/yangon/country/lang-en/index.htm>
- **FAO**
<http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=MMR>

7. Available at: <http://lrcmyanmar.org/en/ngoprofiles/Local%20NGO>

Local partners

Despite decades of tight control of civil society groups, Myanmar has a wide array of national and local non-government organizations. The Local Resource Centre (LRC) provides profiles of 125 local NGOs.⁷ Some of the key local actors are:

- **Metta Development Foundation**
<http://www.metta-myanmar.org/>
- **Myanmar Red Cross Society**
<http://myanmarredcrosssociety.org>
- **Radanar Ayar Association**
<http://www.radanarayar.org>

Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement

The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) was established in 1939 and is the country's largest humanitarian organization. As a member of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, it is supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Six National Societies (from Australia, Denmark, France, Qatar, Turkey and Canada) currently have a local presence in Myanmar.

D Working in Myanmar

Visa

When travelling to Myanmar it is imperative to check current visa requirements with local consulates and Embassies well before entering the country. Since 2012, business visas on arrival have been available for some organizations/companies. All other business and tourist visas must be obtained prior to entry into Myanmar. Many visitors have been turned away at immigration without proper visas and

documentation. To apply for a business visa on arrival, your organization in Myanmar must arrange this with the relevant Ministry responsible for the company/organisation along with coordinating with airport authorities before your arrival. This takes time, so plan ahead. Tourist visas (valid for 28 days) are often obtained in nearby Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur. It is possible to overstay and pay a fee on departure, but this is not recommended. For



Community workshop in Shan State, with women's and men's group comparing exercise results. [Photo: S. Marr]

longer term work, long stay permits are required; approval can take considerable time, depending on your organization and your travel record to Myanmar.

Travel permits

When visiting places outside Yangon for work/humanitarian purposes, it is necessary to obtain a Travel Authority (TA) from the government. If travelling to Nay Pyi Taw, this process usually takes less than one week, for all other states and regions it can take three to four weeks. It is therefore necessary to plan ahead for all trips outside Yangon to allow for adequate time to process the TAs. Your host organisation will be able to provide more details.

Money

Until recently, Myanmar was disconnected from the international banking system - there were no automatic teller machines (ATMs), no bank transfer (like Western Union), and credit cards were not accepted. As of mid-2013, a limited number of ATMs are available (but unreliable) around Yangon; credit cards are accepted by few businesses.

The best way is to bring in cash - crisp and clean USD notes are widely accepted; larger denominations (\$100) will often get a higher exchange rate. Money changers and shop keepers are extremely fussy in what USD notes they accept. Notes that are marked, have stamps on them, torn, or folded in any way will get rejected entirely or given a very low exchange rate. Therefore it is worth taking the time to obtain pristine new, unmarked USD notes. USD can then be changed into Myanmar Kyat (MMK). There are 100, 200, 500, 1,000, 5,000 and 10,000 Kyat notes but most taxi drivers and small shop owners prefer not to handle or change larger notes. 1,000 Kyat notes are widely accepted in all situations. It is quite common to carry and pay with large wads of cash in shops and restaurants. If spending some time in Myanmar, you may even pick up the Myanmar talent of counting notes quickly.

Registration

Based on Law 6/88, all NGOs operating in Myanmar need to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs and sign a basic cooperation agreement. The government has issued 'Guidelines for UN agencies, International Organizations, NGO/INGOs' which are available at: <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/guidelines-English-official.pdf>.

Hiring staff

Hiring local staff is becoming increasingly difficult as more international businesses and NGOs set up operations in Myanmar. The best way to advertise for national staff is to place ads in journals like the Myanmar Times or on the following websites:

<http://www.themimu.info/jobs/>
<http://ngoinmyanmar.org/vacancies>

Cost of living

The cost of living for expatriates in Myanmar, particularly in Yangon and Mandalay, has recently sky-rocketed. Accommodation that is suitable for expatriates in terms of access to electricity and water in convenient locations is in high demand with new businesses, NGOs and Embassies. Mercer's Cost of Living Survey ranked Yangon as the world's 35th most expensive city in the world (2011: 70th; 2010: 159th). As of March 2012, Yangon was more expensive to live in than Milan, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Vienna, Berlin and Dubai.

Restrictions

There are some areas in Myanmar that are restricted for foreigners. All travel outside normal tourist spots need Travel Authorisation as mentioned above.

Communications

Internet service is unreliable and not readily available in many parts of Myanmar, particularly outside of Yangon. The telephone network is unreliable and limited to cities and large towns. It is difficult and costly to make international calls from Myanmar. International GSM roaming is not available and only Myanmar SIM cards will function in Myanmar.

Public holidays

04.01.	Independence Day
12.02.	Union Day
02.03.	Peasant's Day
27.03.	Armed Forces' Day
13.-16.04.	Thingyan Festival
17.04.	Myanmar New Year
01.05.	Workers' Day
19.07.	Martyr's Day
08.12.	National Day
25.12.	Christmas Day

In addition, the timing of the following holidays varies each year:

Public holiday	2013	2014
Full Moon of Tabaung	26.03.	16.04.
Full Moon of Kason	25.05.	06.05.
Full Moon of Waso	22.07.	12.07.
Full Moon of Thadingyut	21.10.	09.10.
Full Moon of Tazaungmone	18.11.	22.11.

Note that Buddhist festivals are declared based on local astronomical observations; it is not possible to forecast the dates exactly.

Source: www.worldtravelguide.net

Myanmar: six handy websites

- 1 MIMU**
<http://themimu.info>
 The Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) provides lists of maps, baseline data, publications, a contact list and features a library.
- 2 Local Resource Centre**
<http://lrcmyanmar.org/en>
 The Local Resource Centre (LRC) focuses on the development of local NGOs; its sites provides profiles of local and international NGOs as well as donors.
- 3 The Myanmar Times**
<http://www.mmtimes.com>
 Online version of Myanmar's English language daily newspaper.
- 4 International Crisis Group**
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar.aspx>
 In-depth country reports about political and security developments.
- 5 Yangon Life**
<http://www.yangonlife.com.mm>
 Yangon's new locally produced community website for expats living in Yangon will soon replace its predecessor:
<http://www.whatsonyangon.com>
- 6 Australian Smart Traveller Security Advice**
<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Myanmar>
 Regularly updated security incidents and advice, including on airline safety.

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<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/QR5V9TD>

Precautions

It is prudent to take care and take heed of all **visa and travel authority processes**. You must carry your passport during all domestic travel outside of Yangon. All guest houses and hotels take note of your visa details. It is not uncommon that these will alert local authorities if your visa has expired or if it appears that you are on a business trip while holding a tourist visa. Unmarked **land mines** are a danger in parts of Myanmar, particularly in border areas.

It is illegal to drive in Myanmar without a valid **Myanmar driver's licence** - foreign and/or international driving licenses are not accepted. Driving in Myanmar can be dangerous because of aggressive driving practices, poorly maintained vehicles and roads, livestock and pedestrians on the road and the lack of street lighting. A driver involved in an accident with a pedestrian is always regarded to be at fault and is likely to be detained. It is illegal to leave the scene of an accident. **Public transportation** within Myanmar, including air, river and rail travel, often does not meet international safety standards. Fatal accidents occur regularly, and search and rescue capacities are limited.

Air travel

The safety record of domestic airlines is not publicly available, nor is information on the Myanmar government's oversight of maintenance standards of domestic airlines. This lack of transparency raises concerns about airline safety in Myanmar. You should be aware that airlines operating in Myanmar sometimes use aircraft from outside their own fleet. Passengers are not advised in advance when this is the case. There have been a number of recent accidents involving Myanma Airways, Air Bagan and Air KBZ.

Cultural notes and tips

Myanmar is a fairly conservative and a predominantly Buddhist country. The following guidelines should be followed to pay respect to local people and culture and to avoid causing offence:

- **Wear** conservative clothing, best to cover the shoulders if you are a woman and wear skirts below the knees. If visiting a pagoda it is more appropriate to wear long pants for men or a longyi (traditional sarong) for women.
- **Do not kiss** in public, particularly around religious areas such as pagodas.
- **Use your right hand** when dealing with people. Avoid pointing strongly with only one hand. It is most polite to shake hands, pass something, pay for goods or point to people with your right hand while holding your right elbow with your left hand.
- **Do not sit** with your feet pointing towards people and in particular to a Buddha image, pagoda or monk. Tuck your feet behind you or sit cross-legged when on the floor.
- **Do not use** your feet to point to anything
- **Avoid** touching monks
- Always **ask permission** to take photographs. Some people really do not like it – in particular some monks. However there will be many willing participants, so it is always best to check first.
- **Learn** some Myanmar language – just a few words will bring big smiles and much appreciation by the locals.
- **Agree** on the taxi fare before you accept the ride.