



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR MYANMAR

**These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.**

**ENTERING MYANMAR:** All citizens will need a valid passport, which must be valid for at least 6 months after the date the tour ends, and UK citizens also need a Tourist Visa. The Embassy of the Union of Myanmar is located at 19a Charles Street, London W1J 5DX. (Tel: 0203-397-4463 Ext.1). Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Myanmar Embassy for entry requirements. A Yellow Fever certificate is required only if arriving from an infected area.

At the time of writing, it may take 5 to 10 working days to process a tourist visa application once the embassy in London has received the completed form, etc. The issued Visa will be valid for 3 months from the date of issue. The visa must be applied for individually either by post, via a representative, or in person. You need to download a visa form from the embassy website <http://www.myanmarembassy london.com/tourist visa.25.html#Tourist%20Visa> to complete. If applying individually the visa fee has to be paid by postal order only, made payable to Myanmar Embassy.

It is now possible to apply for a Myanmar visa online & this can be done by visiting <https://evisa.moip.gov.mm/NoticetoTourists.aspx> and paying the fee (currently February 2018 \$50US). An email, with a document which you must print out and show the immigration officer when you arrive at Yangon airport, is usually sent to your email address within two or three working days. This is the quickest and easiest way of getting a tourist visa to visit Myanmar.

*We will send you further details on how to apply for a visa when we issue your final payment invoice.*

There are visa service agencies that can provide you with an information pack on how to obtain a visa. They will also process your application for you however they will charge a handling and processing fee. One such company is Trailfinders Visa Service <http://visas.trailfinders.com> (tel: 0207 368 1504).

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously, you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

**TIME DIFFERENCE:** Myanmar is 6½ hours ahead of GMT.

**CURRENCY:** The currency is the Kyat. We recommend taking **new** bank notes and importantly these **MUST** be US dollars, Euros or Singaporean dollars (UK Sterling notes are not accepted), to change into local currency. Traveler's cheques and sterling bank notes will **NOT** be accepted and new bank notes are also required. US dollars cash, providing that the notes are in very good condition, as well as Burmese kyat can also be used in payment for laundry etc. at several of the hotels that we will visit on this tour. US dollars, Euros and Singaporean cash can be changed in to Burmese kyat at the international airport when we arrive and at the domestic airports there and at Bagan and Heho. Our hotels in Bagan, Inle and Kalaw will also change US dollars and Euros cash into kyat but the rate given by the hotels is slightly less than you will receive at the airport. Credit cards are still rarely used in Myanmar and even then they only accept Visa and MasterCard. Our hotel in Yangon does accept credit cards. As yet American Express cards cannot be used in Myanmar. Please also note that there are very few ATM machines in the entire country.

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**LANGUAGE:** The official language is Burmese. Our local guide will speak moderate English while this language is also spoken by a few staff in most of the hotels in the main tourist areas.

**CLIMATE:** It will be hot (perhaps up to 30 or 31°C in and around Yangon while elsewhere in lowland Myanmar, particularly around Bagan we can expect very hot temperatures (ranging from 27° to perhaps 33 or 34°C) and our activity here will be largely confined to the early morning and later afternoons to avoid the midday heat. It is less humid there than in the capital Yangon. In Kalaw and more especially on Mt Victoria we can expect pleasant, almost temperate, weather due to the altitude.

The early mornings on Mt Victoria can be cool (with temperatures perhaps dropping as low as 3°C) and a warmer hat and gloves can prove useful for the first hour or so after sunrise. Our rooms at Mount Victoria are not heated and can be cold (perhaps even down to just 9 or 10°C!). Similarly, our rooms in our otherwise very comfortable hotel in Kalaw can also feel cool, even though these have poor quality room heaters. Extra blankets and/or duvets are provided in our rooms at both of these sites but participants who are particularly sensitive to feeling the cold bring may wish to bring warmer night clothes to sleep in and even a hot water bottle! Elsewhere on the tour room air conditioning units will be more useful than room heaters and our hotels in Yangon, Bagan and Inle have these.

There is a small chance of rain, but it cannot be totally discounted, and a small folding umbrella may also be useful. Umbrellas are provided on the boats that we will use twice on Inle lake – these can be used to guard against spraying water when we occasionally travel fast and as a parasol to shade against the sun.

**ALTITUDE:** Most of the tour is at low elevation with Yangon being at about 50 metres above sea level, Bagan at 160, Inle lake at about 880 and Kalaw at 1350 metres. However, we will venture significantly higher than this during our time on Mt. Victoria. Our hotel is at about 1950 metres and we will explore other areas on the mountain at least as high as 2750 metres (just over 8700 feet). While this is not high enough for us to experience any serious altitudinal problems, it is certainly high enough for us to feel the difference and we will walk slowly and not over exert ourselves. We do not anticipate any altitude related problems here.

**PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** The tour is not particularly strenuous but some physical fitness is required. Most of the walks are easily paced and mostly downhill. For example, on Mt Victoria we take 4x4 vehicles to the higher sections and walk down.

There are a couple of long walks – with the ones on Mt. Victoria being included in these. On probably three of our four full days on the mountain we will explore forests above our hotel. We will drive up the mountain in the early morning and walk back down during the rest of the day with the vehicles catching us up at one or two hourly intervals. We do not expect to ever detour far off the dirt road here and those wishing to take a break will be easily able to do so. We expect to use a fleet of four-wheel drive vehicles on Mt Victoria and should be able to offer the option of people joining us later or returning to the hotel earlier. On our fourth day on Mt Victoria we expect to walk on a narrow forest trail where the vehicles will not be able to follow us. This walk will probably be between five and six kilometres in length and will probably last all morning.

The longest walk of the tour will be at Kalaw. This walk will last all day and will also include some modest uphill sections. We will spend all day on this walk and expect to cover about six or seven miles (about 10 kilometres). Here as on Mt. Victoria anyone with an average degree of fitness would be able to cope.

Some days we will start early – perhaps even around 05.00, and in places where the midday temperature gets quite high, we'll take breaks during the heat of the day.

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**HEALTH:** It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the region you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

Malaria preventatives and up-to-date inoculations against typhoid, polio and Hepatitis A are recommended. It might also be worth checking that you are adequately protected against tetanus. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Tap water is not safe to drink, but bottled water, soft drinks and beer are widely available. Because of the high humidity on some parts of the island it is important to drink plenty of water. Upset stomachs are possible in Myanmar. We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium or Arret just in case. Packets of Dioralyte are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea.

Finally, be sure to bring adequate supplies of all personal medication, as it is now impossible to buy most drugs from pharmacies without a doctor's prescription.

The abundance of biting insects varies from year to year and place to place. Generally biting insects are not numerous although mosquitoes and ticks occur locally. A can of spray repellent should provide adequate protection. We recommend bringing an antihistamine if you are sensitive to insect bites.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** Generally, the accommodation is of a good standard and all the places we stay will have en suite facilities. In the main tourist areas, such as Yangon, Bagan, Inle and Kalaw the accommodation is of a good 3 or 4-star standard. On Mt. Victoria we will stay in a slightly more basic hotel. Even here all the rooms, although simple, are very clean and have en suite facilities with a western toilet, wash basin and a shower.

Power cuts are not uncommon in Myanmar and participants are advised to keep a torch or flashlight handy in their room. All of our hotels have their own generators, but it might take the staff several minutes before they are able to start these running. Our hotel at Mt Victoria is not (yet) on the mains electricity supply and all their power comes from their own generator. The typically turn this on just before dusk and off during the night (usually at about 22h00) and on again about one hour before we are planning to have breakfast. We have occasionally been able to persuade them to keep in running so that we can charge our camera batteries etc.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Laundry services will be available at a couple of the hotels where we stay – the ones in Bagan and in Kalaw. We will spend three and two nights respectively at these two places. In the past, it has been possible to persuade some of the staff at our hotel on Mt Victoria to do some laundry for us – but this is not a regular service and might be unavailable.

**ELECTRICITY:** 220 volts AC, 50 Hz. Myanmar uses either a 2-round pin or a three flat-pin plug. The latter is the same as those used in the UK. An international travel adaptor is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. As mentioned above power cuts away from the main towns are possible. Please see the following website for more information <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

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**FOOD:** In the main tourist areas the food will have a distinct western feel to it. Elsewhere we will be served local food which is, unlike Thai food, not particularly spicy. Spicy accompaniments, such as chilly vinegar, are available on request.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

**DRINKS:** Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** All of the hotels except the one on Mt Victoria have free wireless internet access in the lobby and most also in the rooms. More specifically there is free WI-FI/internet in the rooms in our hotel at Yangon; in the hotel lobby and reception area as well as in some of the rooms at Bagan; in the rooms and public areas of the hotel at Inle lake and in the hotel lobby and dining room at Kalaw. There is also WI-FI in the airports at Yangon, Bagan and Heho. The hotel that we will stay in for five nights on Mount Victoria does not have internet nor is there internet access anywhere nearby. Participants should also be aware that internet speeds are invariably much slower than most of us are used to in the west and even downloading emails can be a laborious and time-consuming task. None of these hotels have business centres so you will have to use your own device.

An increasing number of foreign mobile telephones will work in Myanmar. However, the coverage or reception of the domestic mobile phone networks, is although expanding and improving, rather poor. Local mobile phone sim cards can be bought, or rented, at Yangon international airport – and these are increasingly cheap. The Sunbird leader will have a mobile telephone that probably works in Myanmar and our local guide will definitely have one that works locally. The hotels in Yangon and Bagan have facilities for making international phone calls but again this is expensive.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress is informal throughout the tour. However, if visiting a temple or shrine please try to dress with respect – no shorts or bare shoulders for instance. Shorts and t-shirts can be worn in towns and villages but are often not practical for birding in the forest where long trousers and long-sleeved shirts should be worn as a barrier against any biting insects and thorny vegetation. We will spend two days birdwatching around Bagan. The habitat here is dry thorny scrub with numerous acacia bushes and other thorny scrub. Sturdy shoes and not sandals are the preferred foot wear here. Similarly, there are many seed bearing sticky or spiny plants that are adept at attaching themselves to clothing, particularly socks. It can take hours to fully remove these seed from your clothing and the leader intends to wear some cheap socks and dispose of them when we leave Bagan. The generally hot and humid conditions dictate lightweight and loose clothing. In the field and especially when birding in forests, subdued colours are also recommended. A lightweight rainproof jacket might prove useful, as might a small folding umbrella. A sun hat, sun glasses and high factor sunscreen are all essential.

Recent work on widening, but not hard surfacing, the unpaved road up Mount Victoria has made it quite dusty here and, while we expect that there will be rather few vehicles on this road, we will spend a lot of time walking along it and participants might want to consider taking a small face mask, light-weight scarf, or a snood for use when vehicles are passing us.

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Our hotels in Yangon and at Bagan has its own swimming pool and participants might wish to bring their swimming costumes.

### MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pencil	Face towel or large handkerchief
Small torch with spare batteries	Alarm clock
Small rucksack/daypack	Sunglasses & Sunscreen lotion
Small canteen / water bottle	Umbrella
Insect repellent	Personal medication
Pocket knife (with bottle opener) (put in your checked-in luggage)	
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper). The can also be useful on the boats at Inle.	

**Optional:** Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have one), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swim suit.

**Note:** The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following:

Telescope and tripod	Small first-aid kit
Field guides and reference books	Playback equipment
Laser pointer	

**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and cultural photos will be easy to obtain as will a number of open country birds. Taking good photographs of forest birds will be difficult. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. Digiscoping is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope will not be available for this.

If you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

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**TRANSPORT:** Land travel will be a combination of a variety of small coaches (during our time in & around Yangon, close to Bagan and in the Heho, Inle and Kalaw areas). We will take a boat trip on the Irrawaddy river at Bagan and will use a large motorized boat with a cabin and large roof when there. We will have one, probably two, more boat rides during the tour – spending the best part of an afternoon out on the lake at Inle. The boats here are long narrow boats similar to those used in Thailand and will take a maximum of five people plus the pilot. They have comfortable seats but no awning or cover. Umbrellas are available should it prove to be an unusually hot day. We expect this boat ride to last perhaps six hours and we will have a break for lunch, another to have a drink elsewhere and probably a third at a birdwatching tower. All three of these sites have toilets.

The road up Mt Victoria and between there and Bagan are rough and in order to use our time most productively we will take a fleet of four-wheel drives for our excursion here. In the past these have been comfortable Japanese or Korean vehicles such as Toyota Prados and Toyota Hilux.

The leader will arrange a seating rotation and participants should be able to ride in any seat in the tour vehicles.

**SMOKING:** Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

### Field Guides:

Robson, Craig. 2014. *Birds of South-East Asia*. Christopher Helm. Second edition. (ISBN 13: 9781472916693). It covers Peninsular Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Laos, Vietnam & Cambodia as well as Myanmar. Describes and illustrates over 1250 species in all plumage variations employing various eminent ID artists including Clive Byers, Ian Lewington & Jan Wilczur. 104 colour plates. **Recommended.**

Robson, Craig. 2005 reprinted in 2013. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Thailand*. Second edition. Princeton University Press. Uses illustrations mainly from the author's SE Asian guide (above) but has the advantage of possessing updated distribution maps for Myanmar based on those in Lekagul & Round (1991).

## MYANMAR: Tour Information...7

### Other references:

Simon Richmond, Austin Bush & David Eimer 2014. *Lonely Planet Myanmar (Burma)*. ISBN 978 1 74179 469 4. Another excellent guide book for the Lonely Planet stable.

Cox, M. J., P.P.V. Dijk, J. Nabhitachata, and K. Thirakhupt. 1998. *A photographic guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Thailand and South-east Asia*. Asia Books Co., Bangkok.

Francis, C.M. 2001. *A photographic guide to Mammals of Thailand and South-east Asia*. Asia Books Co., Bangkok.

Smythies, B.E. 1986. *The Birds of Burma*. 3rd edition (revised). Nimrod Press, Liss, England. This useful handbook contains a wealth of descriptive and anecdotal information.

**OBTAINING BOOKS:** Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd  
Tel: 01803 865913  
[www.nhbs.co.uk](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

Subbuteo Books  
Tel: 0870 010 9700  
[www.wildlifebooks.com](http://www.wildlifebooks.com)

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100  
[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

### MAPS:

Freytag & Berndt Myanmar (Burma). 1: 1,200,000. ISBN 978 3 7079 0652 – 3. An excellent folding travel map that covers the whole of Myanmar & not just the places that we'll be visiting on our tour.

Reise Know How. Myanmar- Burma 1:1.5 million. ISBN 978-3-8317-7078-6. An excellent trip and waterproof map.

Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop  
Tel: 01684 593146  
[www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)

Stanfords  
Tel: 020 7836 1321  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

**ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB:** Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at [www.orientalbirdclub.org](http://www.orientalbirdclub.org)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions, please contact us.