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iD presents its second Myanmar feature

MYANMAR

Auspicious Beginnings for Burgeoning Tourism Sector

What are you waiting for?

One of 2013's hottest destinations, the country formerly known as Burma has opened its doors to visitors and investors. Discover more about Myanmar in the following digital version of the 4-page tourism special as published in The Daily Telegraph's Business Section on 18 February 2013



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MYANMAR

Auspicious Beginnings for Burgeoning Tourism Sector



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Restoring Confidence, Restoring the Soul

Cloaked in a magical morning mist of pinky-yellow hues, it's easy to see why breathtaking destinations like colonially elegant Yangon, pagoda-punctuated Bagan, famed royal outpost Mandalay and spectacular Inle Lake are so superlatively appealing. Not forgetting nearly 3,000km of pristine and largely undeveloped coastline. Widely cited to be THE place to visit this year, you could be asking yourself why you haven't already booked your trip to marvel at the wonder that is Myanmar. Deservedly it's just won first place in the Wanderlust Readers' Travel Awards 2013 but as one TripAdvisor reviewer remarks, "Do not wait too long to visit this amazing country with genuine and friendly people."

BY SORCHA HELLYER & GABRIELE VILLA ► Mingalabar is the Myanmar way to greet people and it is done with an open heart. In actual fact it roughly translates as "May auspiciousness be upon you" and is indicative of the goodness of this immensely welcoming populace. The beauty of the tourism industry is that every inhabitant has the opportunity to be an ambassador for his or her nation. Young or old, rich or poor - no career in diplomacy needed - just the willingness to want to represent the very best of your country. Myanmar may have its shortcomings but a lack of innate citizen ambassadors is definitely not one of them. Overwhelmingly gracious, to find a friendlier nation would be a challenge. The gentle and pure nature of the people is a quality which is more precious than all the country's resource-rich mines. If it remains unaffected by modernisation, it is what will likely define the country and enable it to carve out a unique niche for itself.

Myanmar's inhabitants are a huge asset to a country which is only now beginning to garner the kind of recognition it has hankered after for many years. Long in the shadows of wildly successful campaigns to corner market share by Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and lately even Vietnam and Cambodia, Myanmar is emerging as a strong future contender and one that can actually benefit from its underdog status. Indeed, at a time when already established tourism sectors are facing the need to reconfigure in order to embrace responsible tourism practices, Myanmar is using its back-foot status to launch itself from this starting point. The World Travel Market 2012 in London - one of the most important global travel events annually - was the perfect time for Myanmar to announce its commitment to developing its flourishing tourism industry in a sustainable manner.

Doing things the right way is undeniably the imperative of the new Myanmar. They may be somewhat lacking in international exposure or global practices but in their sincere, understated way they have fully understood the fundamentals of the hospitality industry. Arrive at Yangon International Airport and you will be amazed at how clean, efficient and welcoming it is. A ready smile at the immigration desk (and throughout the land) is not the result of the surreptitiously placed and charmingly naïve looking signs, which encourage the whole population to "Warmly Welcome & Take Care of Tourists". Rather this generosity emanates almost by rote from Myanmar's inhabitants and it is a quality so endearing and so affecting that it makes it easy to forgive virtually all other travel disadvantages; from the poor or non-existent English of taxi drivers to bumpy roads and sketchy amenities like internet and cell

The gentle and pure nature of the people is a quality which is more precious than all the country's resource-rich mines



phone services or occasional power cuts. This is, after all, a country emerging from half a decade of seclusion, which is probably one of the reasons why it is such an impressively genuine experience. Most people don't go to Myanmar to wallow in perfection, although that is not to say that luxury does not exist. Visit The Governor's Residence or take the Orient Express Road to Mandalay and you will know that it does. No. Most go to Myanmar to experience. WHAT you experience is entirely up to you. If your heart is as open as the citizens of Myanmar then it will be a marvellous journey of enlightenment about another way of life. For all that you may think you know about the Myanmar of the past, it is a nation of surprises. As one of the most colourful countries in the world, it is imbued with a spiritual and physical exoticism which floods the senses and yet also stills and restores the soul. In the hubbub of the life we live today it is a sacred gift and one that will stay with you forever.

Besides a wealth of heart-warming human capital, Myanmar is also rich in opportunity. Yes it's a hackneyed phrase - in a world that wants everyone to invest in their national "treasures" - but the Golden Land isn't a fable, it's a reality. Many areas of the country are seriously underdeveloped and even those that have seen significant past investment by local and foreign investors now desperately need expansion in order to address the surge in tourism numbers both in the short and long term. The Minister of Hotels & Tourism, Htay Aung explains succinctly, "As Myanmar is back on the right track with the reform process, the people of the world want to visit."

Undoubtedly the staggering transformation brought to bear on the country by President Thein Sein is having a profoundly positive impact on all sectors, especially tourism. Many first-time visitors who were patiently

waiting for a change in the political climate have hurriedly moved Myanmar up to the top of their wish list - eager to see the country before too much development takes place. Then there are those who have been on waiting lists for 2 or 3 years, so limited were the chances to travel to the country formerly known as Burma. On the other hand some travellers had their curiosity piqued only recently by Obama's surprise visit straight after his re-election.

As the reforms are widely thought to be irreversible, international confidence in this verdant, mesmeric and enticing land is also being restored. This represents an exciting new chapter in Myanmar's story and tourism is at the forefront of the changing image of the country. Whatever the motivation to make Myanmar your destination of choice one certainty remains; it is among the fastest growing in the world and one not to be missed. In fact 2012 saw international visitor numbers make an impressive leap to break through the supremely symbolic 1m mark. Topping the list were regional neighbours Thailand, China, Japan, Korea and Malaysia while European visitors made a strong showing with France in 6th

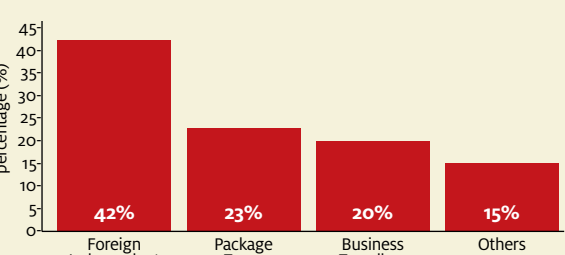
Official Name: The Republic of the Union of Myanmar (as adopted in 1989)
Status: Independent from the UK (since 1948)
Area: 676,577sq km (2.77 times the size of the UK)
Capital: Nay Pyi Taw (since its move from Yangon in 2005)
Population: Estimated 60 million (similar to the UK but with a density per sq km of 85 people versus the UK's 260)
Language: Myanmar, several dialects and English
Location: In Southeast Asia bordering the following 5 countries: Bangladesh (W), India (NW), China (NE), Laos (E) & Thailand (SE). It also has about 3,000km of coastline on the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea
Races: There are over 100 ethnic groups the major ones being Bamar, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. The people are called Myanmar
Climate: Myanmar is a year-round destination. Hilly regions in the north and northeast enjoy cool temperate weather. Rainfall is also very low in central regions during the monsoon season
UK Visitors: Ranking 8th in the league table, numbers have more than doubled in the past year from 11,056 UK tourists in 2011 to 24,296 in 2012
Flag: Adopted on 21 October 2010, the new flag is said to symbolise solidarity, peace, tranquillity, courage and decisiveness



Tourist Arrivals

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Yangon Entry Point	187,766	234,417	297,246	364,743	559,610
Mandalay					
& Bagan Gateways	5,553	8,861	13,442	20,912	3,2521
Nay Pyi Taw Gateway				5,521	1,250
Border Tourism	537,911	519,269	480,817	425,193	465,614
Total	731,230	762,547	791,505	816,369	1,058,995

Types of Tourist in 2012



Tourist Numbers by Country in 2012

Ranking	Country	Number of Visitors	% of Total Visitors
1	Thailand	94,342	15.90
2	China	70,805	11.93
3	Japan	47,690	8.04
4	Korea	34,805	5.87
5	Malaysia	30,499	5.14
6	France	30,064	5.07
7	Singapore	26,296	4.43
8	UK	24,296	4.09

Source: Ministry of Hotels & Tourism

place and the UK in 8th place behind Singapore. Highly indicative of the changing state of Myanmar's tourism market is the fact that, for the first time, arrivals through airports overtook those overland through border checkpoints.

Predictions are that 2013 will see an expected 1.4m visitors arriving in Myanmar. Leading the way are foreign independent travellers while business tourists are increasingly making their mark thanks to the recently opened economy and the host of conferences and events which are mushrooming as a result. The government is readying the country for this explosion of interest, "Facilitating the smooth entry of visitors as well as systematising transport is a priority. So too is the enhancement of good quality tourist accommodation coupled with improved service. We are actively involved in the expansion and sustainability of our tourist destinations," elucidates Htay Aung. It is indeed a delicate balancing act that requires careful and yet robust handling if the country is to grow in a viable manner without losing its most charming qualities. Embracing the world at large, the nation finds itself at a critical juncture in creating its future history. Let's hope that the world will continue to return the embrace with the same fervour while also respecting the fragility of Myanmar's chosen path and its environment.



Ensuring Safety, Reliability & Comfort in the Skies of Myanmar



Air Mandalay

Safety, Reliability & Comfort

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Myitkyina, Bhamo, Mandalay, Kyaing Tong, Heho, Tachileik, Sittway, NAYPYITAW, Thandwe, Yangon, Dawei, Myeik, Kawthaung, Phuket

— Current Route
— Future Route

FDI

Boom Times Require International Investment

Seduced as you may well be by the heady mix of cultural heritage, areas of outstanding natural beauty, ethnic traditions and dulcet lifestyle of a bygone age - to name just few of the innumerable charms of the nation - Myanmar's government is keen for investors to look beyond the aesthetic appeal and recognise the real potential that the economy represents.

Despite the lifting of EU and US sanctions last year, a large proportion of foreign investors were reticent about doing business in Myanmar until very recently and had been waiting for the optimum moment to explore the opportunities. They are ripe for the picking and international hoteliers have Myanmar in their sights. Unsurprisingly there has been a veritable flood of initial interest shown by top hotel brands seeking to gain a foothold in what they perceive as a lucrative market. "Currently Singapore is the most significant investor in the hospitality sector in terms of the number of projects and amount of investment," says Htay Aung, Minister of Hotels & Tourism, "The total accumulated investment is nearly \$600m across 12 projects."

The anticipated rewards and the commitment of the government to its ongoing reform process have seen a spike in deals being agreed but weighing up the risks and challenges associated with Myanmar's transitioning economy is not easy. In order to address the dearth of information in the investor market - and to position the country as a strongly emerging player in the ASEAN area - the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism coupled with the Myanmar Tourism Federation have joined forces with the Singapore-based company, Sphere Conferences to mount the inaugural Myanmar Hospitality & Tourism Conference in Yangon from 26-28 February.

The central premise of the conference is to act as a forum, a conduit for an exchange of concrete detail about the opportunities that abound in Myanmar and how to approach investing in this newly opened country. Moreover, it aims to shake off the misperception that the nation's future, although once a neglected backwater, is for it to be consigned to perpetual backwardness. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. "It has been predicted that tourism arrivals could hit 1.4m this year," explains Htay Aung, "Yet the number of hotels in the country stands at only 787 providing an inventory of just 28,291 rooms, which is insufficient to meet the tourist numbers. As Myanmar opens the door to both corporate and leisure travellers, it offers a myriad of opportunities for foreign investors to seek partnerships and collaborations to meet the immediate needs of the industry."

Clearly in the midst of a tourism boom, Myanmar's tourist income rose phenomenally in 2012 to \$534m as compared to 2011's revenues of \$319m. If the changes afoot continue to advance apace then there is a chance that many global hospitality players will be kicking themselves in the years to come for not having entered the market at the right time. However, there are those that are well ahead of the curve - all kudos to them and to the Ministry



Alluring Mandalay

of Hotels & Tourism which has been spurred on by the signing of record-breaking agreements on a number of hotels and mixed-use constructions - including a \$300m BOT development in Yangon led by the Vietnam-based Hoang Anh Gia Lai Group.

France's Accor is also re-entering the market with its Novotel brand to manage hotels in Yangon and Mandalay (Myanmar's second largest city) which is suffering a critical shortage of tourist accommodation. These are just a few of the many deals being struck. The government has also allocated large tracts of land for foreign investors to build 100 hotels in the new Tada-U Hotel Zone just 24km from the cultural centre. This volume of capacity expansion signifies vital job creation. Moreover tourism is a tremendous way to mobilise the working population as well as bring it into closer contact with global practices. The hope is that besides boosting the economy, inward investment in the hospitality industry will actually benefit the people of this long-suffering nation. "The government is facilitating investment but besides the influx of capital and employment opportunities, it is the improved level of training and the transfer of knowledge brought by foreign investment, that will bring the country up to the standards of the international community," explains Soe Thane, Minister of the President's Office.

The government has allocated large tracts of land for foreign investors to build 100 hotels in the new Tada-U Hotel Zone near Mandalay which is suffering a critical shortage of tourist accommodation

companies are currently working on major projects to expand transit infrastructure and increase the number of hotels and guest houses. Meanwhile, preparing the future generations is proving a must. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism launched a Bachelor of Arts degree in Tourism just last year with a view to creating a strong basis for future sectorial growth and to underline the importance of the industry to the country's emerging economy. Aid for education is critical and is a sound investment in the future of the country; thus the UK has teamed up with Australia to be the first western donors to open a joint office in the nation's capital Nay Pyi Taw. The UK Department for International Development and AusAID have pledged an initial \$21m to their education program destined for non-government organisations in remote, poor and ethnic areas. To all extents and purposes, engagement with the global community whether through aid, trade or investment is vital for the socio-economic development of the people of Myanmar. That said continued political stability, with a resolve to establish and maintain lasting peace with disparate ethnic minority groups in the country, will be what determines the fate of the nation and the burgeoning tourism sector.

When around 200 prospective investors flock to the Myanmar Hospitality & Tourism Conference at the end of February - to better evaluate the opportunities for their expansion into the last bastion of Southeast Asia - they will no doubt take time to savour the former capital's delicious atmosphere and colonial charm. It is a metropolis of juxtapositions, from perfectly manicured roundabouts and landscaped lakes to the higgledy-piggledy street commerce with which the city hums and thrives. Of course, no trip to Myanmar is complete without a visit to Yangon's shimmering golden shrine, Shwedagon Pagoda. Its origins purportedly date back some 2,600 years, making it the oldest Buddhist temple in the world. It is the perfect chance to mingle with thronging locals or to reflect and contemplate along with the saffron-robed Buddhist monks. Undoubtedly whether you travel to Myanmar for business or pleasure your trip will be punctuated by immensely rewarding encounters and many phenomenal sights. These will leave you pondering the meaning of life and wondering what you can do to help the nation move forward.



Shwedagon Pagoda

Whether you travel to Myanmar for business or pleasure your trip will be punctuated by immensely rewarding encounters and many phenomenal sights

The Sky is No Limit

With a landmass of 676,577sq km, Myanmar is one of Southeast Asia's largest countries - second only to Indonesia. Limited road and rail networks mean

that air transportation is fundamental to both tourism and business. In fact it has become an increasingly critical contributor to the nation's economic growth as it continues to develop at a striking speed. With its head office in Yangon, Air Mandalay is one of a handful of local airlines operating in Myanmar. It has routes connecting travellers with main tourist destinations and commercial hubs. Having established a good reputation as a carrier of high standards, Air Mandalay is often the airline of choice for visiting dignitaries and business delegations, with its planes being chartered by top international officials.

"After an absence of 16 years, UK Trade & Investment Myanmar (UKTI) officially opened on 11 July 2012, coinciding with the arrival of the first British trade mission led by Lord Marland," says Khaing Tun, Senior Trade & Investment Manager at UKTI,

"It was necessary for us to charter a return flight between Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw as we were working on a rather challenging schedule. We selected Air Mandalay for a number of reasons but most importantly because their safety record was in accordance with UN guidelines." As Adam Htoon, Group CEO responsible for ensuring the airline's success explains, "Our mission is, and has always been, to ensure that we provide quality service and safety which meet international standards."

Testament to this is the fact that Air Mandalay's pilots are trained at ATR facilities and undergo recurrency training every 6 months. In addition the aircraft engineers at the facility in Yangon (which has European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) part 145 approval) are trained at both ATR and Pratt & Whitney facilities to ensure the ATR aircraft operated by Air Mandalay are always well maintained to the European JAR 145 Standard. All this might sound perfectly routine to UK ears but it bucks the trend

in a country that has had a critical lack of exposure to international business practices. Therefore the delivery of such high standards is no small feat and one that Air Mandalay has been achieving for 18 years - since they were incorporated as Myanmar's first privately owned airline with a remit to support the country's tourism industry.

At every level, a commitment to exemplary service is an innate part of the company's corporate culture. Khaing Tun continues, "In our experience everyone at Air Mandalay was very professional, both their ground and on-board services were exceptional. Moreover they were flexible in order to meet the clients' needs, while at the same time offering a very reasonable price. It is for these reasons that we would not hesitate to recommend Air Mandalay to any businesses or companies looking to expand their operations in Myanmar."

Retaining a strong position will be vital going forward, since the industry is likely to become increasingly competitive and complex as the tourism sector heats up. Htoon's mood is buoyant, "Myanmar's business landscape is now opening up to new investments and business ventures. The market has in no way reached full capacity and the country is abundant with natural and human resources. We also enjoy a strategic geographical location. Of course infrastructure such as transportation, electricity and telecommunications are still largely underdeveloped in the country but all this is about to change very soon. Things are happening at a fast pace and I am optimistic about how they are developing. However, we must also keep the environment in mind. At Air Mandalay we believe in limiting our impact wherever possible by implementing policies that can reduce our carbon footprint and by taking a responsible attitude to waste management."

Besides heading up a private joint venture company in one of the country's hottest industries, Htoon is also actively involved in the ICT sector and was one of the pioneers in bringing the internet to this once secluded nation. He is therefore in an excellent position to take the pulse of the economy, "With the influx of tourists and business travellers, the tourism industry is the first to see the transformation and feel the impact. I hope that existing service providers will improve and expand to meet the increasing demands." He emphasises this saying, "Equally, I'd like to see new players in the travel and tourism industry. The market has not been fully saturated and having competition helps companies upgrade their services and standards." He may not have to wait too long for this to become a reality but remains confident of Air Mandalay's standing and that even broader horizons are ahead. "Our long-term plan is to become a boutique regional airline," indicates Htoon. For now though his focus is on the Golden Land and on making other countries aware of what it has to offer, "Whether you have only heard about Myanmar or have been here before, please come and see the new Myanmar. The changes should be experienced in person as written words can only say so much. Seeing is believing."



“With the influx of tourists and business travellers, the tourism industry is the first to see the transformation in the economy and feel the impact”

ADAM HTOON
Group CEO of Air Mandalay



Happy and hopeful



Charmingly Authentic

The hope is that besides boosting the economy, inward investment in the hospitality industry will actually benefit the people

Tourism Income				
	2009 (US\$)	2010 (US\$)	2011 (US\$)	2012 (US\$)
Total Earnings	196m	254m	319m	534m
Average Expenditure Per Person Per Day	95	102	120	135
Average Length of Stay	8.5	8.0	8.0	7.0

Foreign Investment in Hotels and Commercial Complexes by Country				
Ranking	Country	Hotels / Apartments	Investment US\$ (m)	Remarks
1	Singapore	12	597.75	
2	Thailand	10	235.75	
3	Japan	6	183.01	
4	Hong Kong	4	77.00	
5	Malaysia	2	20.00	
6	UK	1	3.40	
7	Vietnam	1	300.00	BOT Contract
Total		36	1416.91	

Top Destinations (according to room inventory)			
Ranking	Destination	Number of Rooms	Number of Hotels
1	Yangon	8,915	204
2	Mandalay	3,374	79
3	Bagan	2,196	75
4	Nay Pyi Taw	2,111	33
5	Nyaung Shwe (Inle Lake)	1,134	42
6	Ngwe Saung	1,026	21
7	Tachileik	832	19
8	Pyin Oo Lwin	706	35
9	Ngapali	619	17
10	Taunggyi	528	17

Source: Ministry of Hotels & Tourism

Believing in a Better Future



“Myanmar has been identified as one of the rising stars in Asia and the government is facilitating investment”
SOE THANE
Minister of the President's Office



“The international community is paying fresh attention to Myanmar's potential as an emerging tourism destination”
HTAY AUNG
Minister of Hotels & Tourism



“My wish is for all the ethnic groups to be at peace, for the prosperity and good of the country”
AYE MYINT KYU
Minister of Culture



“Our legacy is to promote international relations and to expose the country to the global community”
TINT HSAN
Minister of Sport



“Government's remit is to protect and preserve the colonial heritage of Yangon for future generations”
MYINT SWE
Chief Minister of Yangon Region



“Promoting the arts is important to nurturing our cultural heritage and encouraging new talent”
AUNG KYI
Minister of Information

CONSERVATION

Sustaining National Treasures

If getting away from it all and connecting with nature is your bag then Inle Lake - lush, fabulously peaceful and delightfully authentic - is a must-do when visiting Myanmar. Besides being able to drink in the spectacular location, there is the immeasurable pleasure of experiencing the local people and their fascinating livelihoods. From their foot-paddling fishermen to their floating gardens they demonstrate an ability to adapt to, and thrive in, their environs; holding lessons for many of us in more sophisticated nations. Described by some as a living, historical hydroponics system, the area is particularly famous for its tomato harvests.



The conservation of the Intha way of life, along with that of the unspoiled, yet fragile environment in which the tribe exists, will be fundamental to its survival and to creating a sustainable tourism industry



Although tourism to Myanmar is welcomed, and assists in supporting the community, there is a desperate recognition that too much too soon could have a bewildering and damaging effect. Encouraging development with conservation in mind is imperative to safeguarding not only the environment but also cultural and human heritage. The government's upcoming Tourism Master Plan is the culmination of months of consultations with foreign experts and national entities. Such efforts aim to systematically address the country's inadequacies like lack of infrastructure as well as how to prepare the groundwork for greater inflows, expand tourism segments and foresee future trends. However, the crux of developing the sector is to do it in a way that will not impinge on - but will instead protect and venerate - Myanmar's distinct offerings. Among the least hammered out (but probably most abundant) of nations in Southeast Asia, Myanmar has a veritable golden opportunity to reap the benefits of economic growth - and tourism can be at the forefront of this.

However, recent reviews by global experts demonstrate a heightened risk to Inle Lake, located in the southern Shan State. These reports and the newly passed Environmental Law are expected to form the basis for part of the plan to protect these unique wetlands. In fact the extent to which Myanmar's government aims to expand its capacity will be laid down in the countrywide Tourism Master Plan that is being hammered out by a team of international and national consultants. The Norwegian government and local entities have been actively involved in both processes and this bodes well for the future. The conservation of the Intha way of life, along with that of the unspoiled, yet fragile environment in which the tribe exists, will be fundamental to its survival and to creating a sustainable tourism industry there. The same is true of many areas where Myanmar's diverse hill tribes live and continue to practice their age-old traditions. "Our ministry has been collaborating with the Ministry of Culture to preserve cultural heritage as well as the Ministry of Environmental Conservation & Forestry to protect the natural environment," illustrates Htay Aung, Minister of Hotels & Tourism. "We are striving hard for the development of responsible and sustainable tourism since we have learnt lessons from other countries. We want to welcome responsible travellers to our country."



ViewPoint was built with local limestone, mud and rice straw, and reinforced with wooden beams. No concrete was used and only paints made from laterite mud and natural wax decorate the Lodge

Whether gliding past Inle Lake's stilted wooden structures (that house all manner of cottage industries) or stopping to bargain with crafts people and indigenous marketeers, you can't help but admire the tenacity and ingenuity of this community. It doesn't just exist; it flourishes and exhibits a genuine energy for living in harmony with one's surroundings. Enriching in the extreme, engagement with these diverse ethnic groups gives you a whole new perspective on life. This is not lost on travel companies that seek to offer something special to their clientele. A number of them relish the unspeakable, cherished, intrinsic value of revering Myanmar's multi-ethnicity and rich human cultural heritage. Set aside for a moment the major attractions, the archaeological sites, the awe-inspiring natural beauty and fabulous heart-stopping experiences of destinations - and just think "people".

Engagement with ethnic groups offers a new perspective on life

This is the authenticity that Myanmar can offer the world and to connect with a nation of such diversity on such a fundamental level is something almost unheard of today. Take Rustic Pathways for example, an Australian-founded company which promises to take students and families on the journey of a lifetime which will foster "a deep understanding of this beautiful corner of the world". Or Exotissimo, an Indochina-focused travel specialist which has a vast array of itineraries ranging from adventure to luxury or family trips. There are also schedules that enable travellers to immerse themselves in everything including hill tribe life, cycling tours for charity or spending time with the disadvantaged in local communities. For the independent traveller - the fastest growing and most important segment in the country's tourism industry - there are many ways to go about organising your own trip. However you decide to get to Myanmar, it is sure to be a rewarding experience.

Venture beyond the buzzing metropolises of Yangon or Mandalay and you are still mercifully unexposed to the rampant commercialism to which the developed world is accustomed. Of course that is likely to change in the future as the nation opens up, the economy expands and the average income increases. Tourism has the capability to improve the lives of the population. However, it will also bring elevated consumption of basic utilities and amenities in a country which is struggling to overcome its own poverty issues and infrastructure deficiencies. There are, as is often commented, so many priorities that it is critical to identify the "priorities within the priorities" - and this is not only the role of government but also of stakeholders. These include local and foreign entities who have a keen interest in the future success of the nation.

Swiss national, Boris Granges who has lived in Myanmar for nearly 17 years, is one such person. After having founded Le Planteur (arguably Myanmar's most famous and most upmarket restaurant) in Yangon, he decided to branch out. He found himself going into a joint venture with local business partner, Ko Zaw, creating a corner of paradise on a canal leading to Inle Lake. Their hotel and restaurants receive rave reviews from satisfied guests and reputable guide books alike. ViewPoint Lodge is obviously a labour of love but Granges is confident of the investment of his time, energy and finances; "We are almost always full with a large number of our bookings coming through Agoda.com. I am pleased by our success even if I feel there is always room for improvement." He admits that it is a challenge to deliver first world products and services in Myanmar because of limited dealings with international standards and practices in the past.

You can see why Granges came to settle in this part of the world - the stunning scenery is the perfect backdrop for his magic blend of hospitality. Committed to utilising seasonal and local produce in the kitchen, ViewPoint cooks up a creative storm for both in-house guests and those visiting from other hotels. Despite the intimacy of his establishment Granges is proud to run not one but two restaurants; exquisitely melding regional and continental cuisine complemented by delectable wines, a chic yet instantly homely ambiance and an impressive view which encapsulates the vibrancy of the locality. The philosophy behind ViewPoint Lodge is that the experience should be as holistic as possible so cooking classes are on offer and the Lodge also organises a myriad of eco-tourism activities including mountain biking, trekking, horse riding and cultural tours.

Located in the village of Nyaung Shwe, ViewPoint boasts 20 luxurious overwater cottage suites which combine the best of Shan traditions with the comfort and amenities that meet the needs of modern travellers. Wherever possible Granges

embraces his surroundings and skews his operations towards being environmentally friendly. He is deeply passionate about the need to preserve not only Myanmar's natural and cultural heritage but also the traditional customs passed down through the generations. So much so that ViewPoint was built with local limestone, mud and rice straw, and reinforced with wooden beams. No concrete was used and only paints made from laterite mud and natural wax decorate the Lodge. Yet all suites have modern bathrooms and are equipped with Wi-Fi, telephone, LCD TV, unlimited movies and music. Reviving native traditions and methods, while adding a contemporary twist, is artful but not always easy. Granges seems to have a flair for it and it goes

Voyage of Discovery

Currently on a gap year, Harvey Strachan, 19, chose to spend the time travelling in order to broaden his understanding of the world. However, this is no ordinary year out abroad. Instead it has turned into an odyssey of sorts and Myanmar was high up on the agenda for very personal reasons. Here, Harvey shares his first person account of what the experience has brought him.

Before going to university or starting a career, I decided that it would be beneficial to expand my horizons. My original plan was to make my way across to New Zealand and Australia to find work and meet up with friends who had similar ideas. But before doing so, I wanted to travel elsewhere - to a developing country - and volunteer in remote regions. It just so happened that my uncle had travelled to Myanmar (Burma, as it was known in those days) in his early twenties, working alongside an engineering firm associated with the family. After falling in love with the country, the people and its history, he has since made it his duty to resurrect the Irrawaddy Flotilla and recreate the magic of the golden days of Myanmar.

Additionally my uncle felt it necessary to give something back to the communities that had opened his eyes to the wonders of Myanmar; and so in the last decade, schools and clinics have been built in Bagan, under the cruise company's name, Pandaw. Because of all this, I had grown up hearing about this strange - almost mythical - country on the other side of the world and everything my uncle had accomplished. However, I never quite understood what was going on in the more remote regions of Myanmar, nor what Pandaw's charitable responsibilities were within these areas. Visiting Myanmar and working with the charity would both satisfy my curiosity and fulfil my ambition to help in villages that, until recently, have had very limited access to education and healthcare.

So on my way to New Zealand I found myself spending 3 months in Bagan - a centrally located town on the Irrawaddy River and quite possibly one of the most wondrous places in the world. The volunteer work I was doing had me visiting local schools and clinics, most of which were located across the river and only accessible by whatever boats were available at the time. When I wasn't volunteering I often made myself useful at Bagan House, Maw Maw's lacquerware workshop. Bagan has become the epicentre of this ancient handicraft and if you go there it's worth visiting to see how it's done. Maw Maw manages the schools



Working and travelling in Myanmar was a truly unique experience, meeting both its people and others like me wishing to gain a greater understanding of this amazing nation

and clinics in the area as well as her shop, which is thankfully now enjoying increased sales due to a rise in tourists visiting Myanmar. There I helped behind her desk and taught English to her employees - an important second language considering a high percentage of visitors to her shop were either British or American.

However, I am not one to stay in the same place for too long, so in the 3-month period, I decided to explore some of the country, by boat. I linked up with Pandaw and for a few weeks was living and working as a barman alongside the wholly Myanmar crew. Seeing the country from a completely different perspective was very rewarding. During this time it was agreed with the boat managers that I should work as an ambassador for the charitable side of the company. Being the only foreigner amongst the crew I was constantly approached by curious clientele. I played this to my advantage taking every opportunity to inform them about the charity and found that many of them were keen to hear how they could participate in bettering the lives of the gentle people of Myanmar. Working and travelling through Myanmar was a truly unique experience, meeting both its people and others like me wishing to gain a greater understanding of this amazing nation. I set out to learn about my family's involvement in the country and to secure a place working with a charity but discovered so much more. Along with me, those I met expressed a particularly keen interest in Myanmar's race to catch up with the rest of the world. I am pleased to have noticed the changes, even in the short time I spent in the country, and thoroughly recommend visiting this fascinating destination.



EVENTS

On Course to Impress

As Myanmar steps up to the challenge of staging global events like the World Economic Forum - East Asia in June and the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in December, it puts its capabilities in the spotlight for the first time in recent history. “Myanmar last hosted the SEA Games in 1969,” explains Tint Hsan, Minister of Sport, “The country welcomes the chance to not only compete in them in 2013 but also be responsible for hosting them. It is a chance for us to show the international community that we are capable of mounting such events. Organising the SEA Games successfully is critical for our regional image.”

In readiness to host proceedings in less than 10 months, fundamental preparations are in progress with new stadiums and hotels being built or renovated mainly in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay. These will cater for the region’s biggest sporting event and some constructions are even ahead of schedule. As the Chairman of ACE Group, Dr Phyo Ko Ko Tint San elucidates, “This is an excellent opportunity for our country. At ACE our objective is to make Myanmar known to the rest of the world; to share our way of thinking and our concepts in such a way that we will demonstrate very clearly our abilities. Our Group is a local company with a wide array of activities and with aspirations to expand while also helping Myanmar, as a nation, grow too.” Hotel ACE is actively involved in the tourism sector, with hotel developments underway in Yangon, Bagan and Ngwe Saung as well as operating hotels in Inle Lake and Chaung Tha on the coast near Yangon. The Chairman has a vested interest in improving the image of this least developed of all ASEAN nations. Besides hotels and restaurants, the construction arm of the company has been responsible for building high-

Ngwe Saung beach, still miraculously underdeveloped despite its relative proximity to Yangon, will be where the SEA Games yacht races are held



Vibrant Yangon



Pristine Ngwe Saung



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DR PHYO KO KO TINT SAN
Chairman of ACE Group



Pagoda on the beach



Chaung Tha locals

rise apartment blocks, government and community buildings, including sports facilities such as the Myanmar Archery Federation building and the Myanmar Archery Ground where the SEA Games event will be held.

Continuing the sporting theme, ACE is also the patron of Nay Pyi Taw FC and built Paung Loun Stadium - the home of the football club. Sport is definitely one of the ways that Myanmar is aiming to stimulate pride and participation from the younger generations. “We learned a lot from the London Olympic Games and we want to follow the example of the UK by inspiring the youth to be fit and healthy,” explains the Minister of Sport. It may not be on quite the same scale but the SEA Games are a big deal for Myanmar. He continues, “Our slogan for the games is ‘Clean, Green & Friendship’ and these words relate to the importance we attach to fair play, the environment and fostering good relations with the competing nations. The values of good sportsmanship are important to Myanmar.” This is the new paradigm in a nation

which is undergoing phenomenal change, one that is inclusive and seeks cooperation with the world at large. Symbolically, and in recognition of the country’s rich diversity, one hundred ethnic races will be represented through dances, traditional dress and music at the opening and closing ceremonies of the SEA Games.


Major events are spurring development but as 2013 is already shaping up to be a momentous year for Myanmar’s tourism industry, preparedness of sites as well as the strain on infrastructure to cope with the sheer volume of visitors expected, are subjects of concern. Thankfully private sector and government entities are working collaboratively to meet the challenges. ACE has been involved in the upgrading of Thuwana Stadium in Yangon which can now seat 50,000 spectators. Further afield Ngwe Saung beach, still miraculously underdeveloped despite its relative proximity to Yangon and its reputation as a weekend hang-out for rich Yangonites, will be where the yacht races are held. Hotel ACE is one of five existing hotels which have been closed for a number

of years on this impressive swathe of pristine coast. They will be renovating and reopening in order to accommodate increased visitor numbers during the Games. Evidently it is hoped that these establishments will benefit from Myanmar’s rapidly improving reputation as visitors swarm to enjoy Asia as it once was.








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This is the second in a series of features dedicated to Myanmar. If you missed Part 1 please email us at myanmar@imagediplomacy.com for a digital version



Nay Pyi Taw FC Stadium



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LOOKING FORWARD TO BEING YOUR PARTNER IN MYANMAR

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