

# Around Mandalay

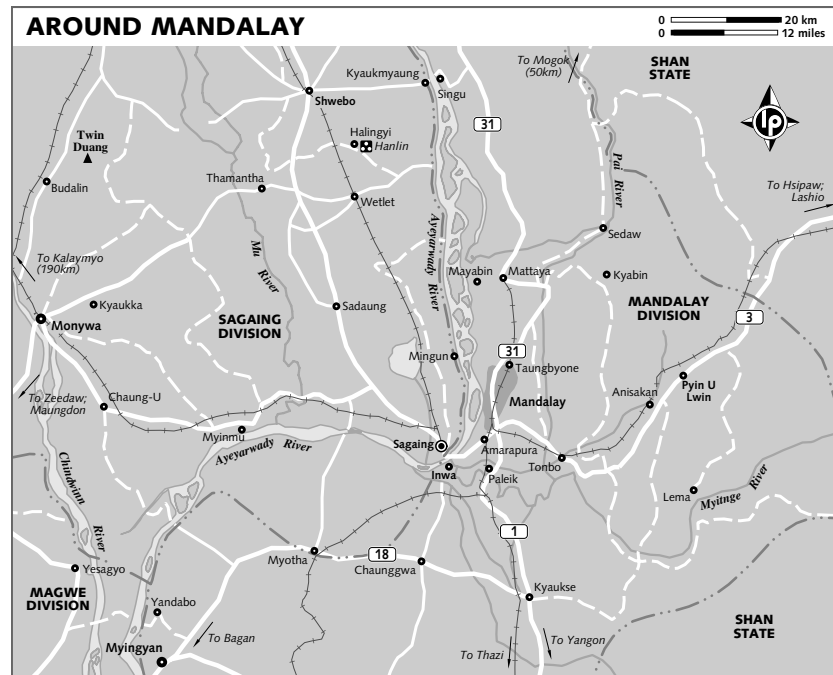


Mandalay's good, but it gets better just outside its doors. In centuries past, four capitals set up shop at (or near) various points along the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River, and they comprise some of the more compelling images of Myanmar. In Amarapura, for-hire rowboats drift by a 1.2km-long teak-pole bridge used by hundreds of monks and fishers carrying their day's catch home. At the canal-made island capital of Inwa (Ava), a flatbed ferry and then an ox-cart lead visitors to a handful of ancient sites surrounded by village life. In Mingun – a boat ride up the Ayeyarwady from Mandalay – steps lead up a battered stupa more massive than any other...and yet it's only a third finished. At one of Myanmar's most religious destinations, Sagaing's temple-studded hills offer room to explore, space to meditate and views of the Ayeyarwady that extend kilometres.

Further out of town, northwest of Mandalay in Sagaing District, are a couple of towns – real ones, the kind where wide-eyed locals sometimes slip into approving laughter at your mere presence – that usually require overnight stays. Monywa is near a carnivalesque pagoda and hundreds of cave temples carved from a Buddha-shaped mountain; just east, Shwebo is the stupa-filled town where Myanmar's last dynasty kicked off. Further north, near the Indian border, Kalaymyo is the only place in Myanmar where you can chat with Chin people without an expensive permit from the government.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- In Amarapura, **U Bein's Bridge** (p248) is the world's longest teak bridge, creaking under the footfalls of commuting monks and fishers
- Inwa's **Bagaya Kyaung** (p251) is an evocative 19th-century teak monastery
- The view from **Sagaing Hill** (p253) catches 500 temple tops peering over the Ayeyarwady River
- Upriver from Mandalay, the **Mingun Paya** (p255) is an unfinished, but still king-sized, stupa base you can climb
- Across the Chindwin River from Mandalay, the **Hpo Win Daung Caves** (p259) feature 500 temples dotting the innards of a mountain shaped like a reclining Buddha



## HISTORY

From the fall of Bagan (Pagan) to the end of the third and last Anglo-Burmese War in 1885 (a war that was disastrous for the Burmese), the capitals of Myanmar played musical chairs in the area close to, or in, Mandalay. At first, new kings sought to build their legacy by breaking new ground (and often the bricks and wood from old palace buildings) to build a new capital. By the late-18th century, kings turned to astrological forces to pick a site worthy of a king's royal headquarters. Generally, when a new reign began, the royal entourage of the new king took much of the might of the old capital and left the area to farming villagers, with neglected stupas picturesquely dotting their fields.

In the chaos after the fall of Bagan, it was Sagaing that first rose to prominence (in the early 14th century), but in 1364 Inwa succeeded it. Alaungpaya appointed himself a royal in 1752, and the capital was briefly stationed in his home town of Shwebo (then called Mokesebo). In 1760 the capital shifted back across the river to Sagaing,

where it remained for just four years. Inwa only regained its pre-eminent position from 1764 to 1783, after which time Amarapura became the capital. In 1823 Inwa was again the capital but, following the terrible

## THE LAST KINGS

Myanmar's last dynasty (the Konbaung dynasty) based itself in the area around Mandalay. It began with Alaungpaya (p38) in 1752 and ended 133 years later, when King Thibaw was deposed by the British and exiled to India. Here's a cheat sheet to the 10 kings:

Alaungpaya	1752-60
Naungdawgyi	1760-63
Hsinbyushin	1763-76
Singu Min	1776-82
Bodawpaya	1782-1819
Bagyidaw	1819-37
Tharawaddy Min	1837-46
Pagan Min	1846-53
Mindon Min	1853-78
Thibaw Min	1878-85

earthquake of 1838, which caused considerable damage to all these cities, the capital was moved back to Amarapura in 1841. Amarapura was capital again for only a short period, and in 1860 the seat of power was transferred to Mandalay, where it remained until the end of the British conquest of Myanmar 25 years later. This dizzying move of capitals around Mandalay gives the area its second nickname: Deserted Cities.

## CLIMATE

As in Mandalay, it's hot here, and April and May bake. Dust cakes the trees (and the back of your throat) any time it's not raining.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

All of these destinations are best reached via Mandalay. Three of the ancient cities (Amarapura, Inwa and Sagaing) outside Mandalay's door are reached by pick-ups, but most visitors go on day trips by taxi. Monywa and Shwebo are a few hours west and north of Mandalay by bus; Monywa also has air and slow-train connections with Mandalay and a useful bus connection with Pakokku (p281) en route to Bagan. The road north from Monywa to Kalaymyo is closed to foreigners; an air service connects Kalaymyo with Monywa and Mandalay.

## ANCIENT CITIES

Popular day trips south and southwest of Mandalay take in these ancient cities: Amarapura (below), Inwa (p251) and Sagaing (p252), as well as the Snake Pagoda at Paleik (p252); upriver to the north is Mingun (p254). Technically, you will need to purchase the so-called 'Mandalay Archaeological Zone' combo ticket (p229) for US\$10 to visit Amarapura, Inwa or Paleik. A separate US\$3 ticket allows entry to Sagaing and Mingun.

## AMARAPURA

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Myanmar's penultimate royal capital, the now modern town of **Amarapura** (admission US\$10 combo ticket), 11km south of Mandalay, is more well known by the many day-trippers for its 1849 pedestrian bridge built of over 1000 teak posts. The setting on the wide Taungthaman Lake is gorgeous too, and there's much more to see, though most sites

are scattered (and sometimes not easy to find). Allow time and energy for walking if you don't have a driver.

Amarapura means 'City of Immortality', though its period as capital was brief – just over 50 years. It was founded by Bodawpaya as his new capital in 1783. In 1857 Mindon Min decided to make Mandalay the capital, and the changeover was completed in 1860.

Today little remains of the old Amarapura palace area. The city walls were torn down to make quarry material, while most of the wooden palace buildings were dismantled and taken to adorn the palace in Mandalay.

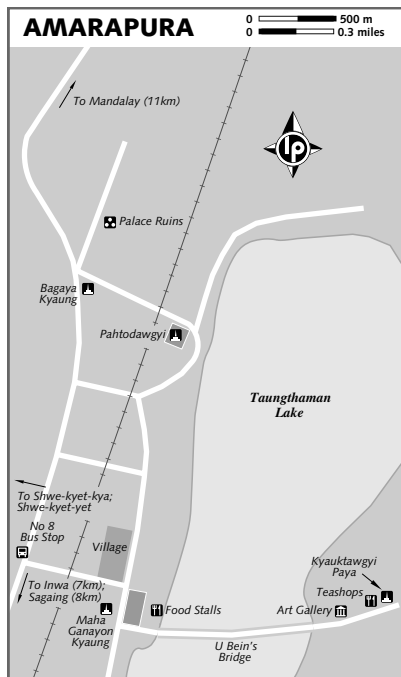
All visitors are supposed to have the US\$10 combo ticket bought in Mandalay to visit Amarapura, but it's not always asked for. There is no licensed accommodation in Amarapura.

## Sights

### U BEIN'S BRIDGE

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Amarapura biggest draw – and easily one of Myanmar's most photographed sites – is this remarkable 1.2km-long teak **footbridge**



leading across the shallow **Taungthaman Lake** (which is named for an ogre who supposedly came looking for Buddha here). Still strong after 200 years, the world's longest teak span sees a lot of life: fishers casting a line into the water, locals walking their bicycles home to Taungthaman village across the lake and monks in saffron robes carrying alms bowls between the monasteries on both sides.

The best times to visit the bridge are just after sunrise or just before sunset, when hundreds of villagers commute back and forth across it. A popular sunset activity is hiring boats (about K1500) to get close-up looks of the 1060-post bridge from the water. In the dry season, however, the lake dwindles greatly in size; in June or July the water levels sometimes rise above the walkway.

The bridge's name is usually attributed to the 'mayor' of Amarapura when the capital moved here from Inwa in 1841, but some say it was named for a Muslim servant of the king who built the bridge. Most of the posts are original, though some have been replaced by concrete blocks. The bridge is curved to better withstand the wind.

There are five shaded rest areas on the bridge, including (at times) a couple of places to sample fresh palm toddy. During the dry season, a cement stairway halfway across leads down to a small island with a single teashop (there's no sign).

## AROUND THE BRIDGE

Near the start of the bridge are a few food stalls where you can take noodles, tea or beer and enjoy the view.

Just west from the start of the bridge is the **Maha Ganayon Kyaung**, home to several thousand young monks. If you visit at about 11am, you can watch the whole monastery eating silently. (Do try to refrain from thrusting cameras into monks' faces, as too many visitors do this.) It was founded in around 1914 and is renowned as a centre for monastic study and strict religious discipline. There's also a new and garish-looking temple with a gigantic seated Buddha.

## Kyauktawgyi Paya

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If you cross U Bein's Bridge (and you should, considering the views to be had of Pahtodawgyi and the lake), you'll come to **Taungthaman** village and **Kyauktawgyi Paya** (about 200m from the bridge). Constructed in 1847 by Pagan Min, this paya is said to have been modelled on the larger Ananda Pahto at Bagan (p300), but its five-tiered roof gives it more the look of a Tibetan or Nepali temple.

While the paya doesn't have the perfectly vaulted roofs or the finer decorations of the original, it does have an excellent seated Buddha image and well-preserved frescoes. Check the entry ceiling murals to see some suspiciously English-looking figures in bamboo hats, looking a little bossy despite the smiles.

The *paya pwe* (pagoda festival), known as the **Festival of Lights**, takes place here during Thadingyut (October).

The atmosphere around Kyauktawgyi is very peaceful and shady, and this is a good

## PLANNING DAY TRIPS

You can't visit all the ancient cities in one day. Mingun is a half-day trip by boat. With a taxi driver, it's possible to visit Amarapura, Inwa and Sagaing in one busy day (and many visitors do), but it's best to save Sagaing for another day. At research time, a taxi from Mandalay for the three sites cost about US\$23 to US\$30 (about US\$15 for a half-day), and a 'blue taxi' (a dinky Mazda pick-up) costs about US\$10 or US\$15.

Local packed pick-ups leaving from the corner of 29th and 84th Sts in Mandalay stop by Amarapura (30 minutes) and the Inwa junction (40 minutes), before reaching Sagaing (45 minutes). It's K100 during the day, K200 after dark. Considering how far apart many sights are, even many shoestringers spring for a full-day taxi, which is the only way to link them up with Paleik.

Note that the popular dining time for monks at the Maha Ganayon Kyaung (above) in Amarapura and the snake-feeding time at Paleik (see p252) is 11am daily.

Other transport details are listed at the end of each section.

alternative place to hang around at sunset. There are several smaller overgrown stupas to be seen in the vicinity, including a unique honeycomb-shaped stupa covered with Buddha niches. Lay people often come here to practise meditation.

There are a couple of traditional outdoor teashops, serving tea and snacks.

You can catch a boat back across the lake for about K1500.

### SHWE-KYET-KYA & SHWE-KYET-YET

On the bank of the Ayeyarwady, west of Amarapura, stand two 12th-century paya (Buddhist monuments) – the **Shwe-kyet-kyia** and the **Shwe-kyet-yet**, or Golden Fowl's Run, a string of stupa ruins cascading down from a high bluff. If the river level isn't too high, you can get a boatman to take you out in a local *hgnet* (swallow-tailed boat) for a view of the two paya, the Sagaing hills and the sun setting behind the Ava Bridge.

### PAHTODAWGYI

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Built by King Bagyidaw in 1820, this well-preserved paya, near the lake, almost 2km north of the bridge, stood outside the old city walls. The lower terraces have marble slabs illustrating scenes from the Jataka (stories of the Buddha's past lives). There's a fine view over the surrounding countryside from the upper terrace. An inscription stone within the temple precinct details the history of the monument's construction.

### BAGAYA KYAUNG

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The history of the **Bagaya Kyaung**, now a government-built reconstruction dating from 1996 and a **museum**, dates back two centuries. Based on a still-standing predecessor in Inwa, the first version of the Bagaya Kyaung dates from King Bodawpaya built it after moving the capital to Amarapura, but it was destroyed by fire in 1821. A second version, built in 1847, was again burned down in 1866, leaving only eight brick stairways. These were gradually overgrown until the Myatheindan *sayadaw* (master teacher) built a two-storey brick building in 1951, in which he deposited 500 Buddha images and 5000 sets of *pe-sa* (palm-leaf manuscripts) from throughout Myanmar. The project to rebuild it was

based on ground plans and drawings found at the Kyauktawgyi Paya.

Ask the caretaker to open the museum; it's usually locked.

Bagaya Kyaung is located just off the Mandalay road, about 1km northeast of Pahtodawgyi.

### PALACE RUINS

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Little remains of the **old Amarapura palace**, just east of the Bagaya Kyaung, but you can find the old treasury building and watchtower (next to a modern water tower). King Bagyidaw and King Bodawpaya were both cremated here, and their ashes were placed in velvet bags and thrown into the Ayeyarwady. Stupas still stand at the four corners of the once-square city.

### Festivals & Events

In August, a week after the end of the Taungbyone *nat pwe* (spirit festival; p61) and the full moon of Wagaung, Myanmar's *nat* (spirit being) worshippers move to the Irinaku (Yadanagu) Festival, just south of Amarapura, and to the east of the road. The festival celebrates Popa Medaw, the mother of the Taungbyone brothers. At one point, the festival was one of the wilder ones in Myanmar and an important date in Myanmar's gay scene.

### Getting There & Away

If arriving by pick-up, the best access point to U Bein's Bridge is just after you see a government-made sign for it on the left-hand side of the road. Tell the driver where you're headed beforehand. You can also get on and off buses just north of Pahtodawgyi,

#### LOCAL FESTIVAL LOWDOWN

**Mingun Nat Festival** (February/March) Mingun (see p256) .

**Thon Ban Hla** (February/March) Inwa (opposite).

**Paleik festival** (June/July) Paleik (see p252).

**Taungbyone Festival** (August) North of Mandalay (see p61) This includes the grandest of all *nat pwe*.

**Irinaku Festival** (Yadanagu; August) South of Amarapura (see above).

**Paya pwe** (pagoda festival, Festival of Lights; October) At Kyauktawgyi Paya (see p249) .

but it's a long, confusing walk to the bridge from there. See p249 for day-trip info.

Touring by bicycle from Mandalay is an other alternative. Pedalling to Amarapura should take 45 minutes or so.

### INWA (AVA)

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Cut off from roads by rivers and canals, the ancient city of **Inwa** (admission US\$10 combo ticket) served as capital of the Burmese kingdom for nearly 400 years, longer than any other city. It tilts towards the touristy – it's part of the Mandalay US\$10 ticket. The only way around the scattered sites is via horse cart with prepriced system in place, and some postcard vendors linger at the sites – but it offers a more revealing glimpse into thatched-hut village life than the other ancient cities. Beside the road, villagers till the soil where the royal palace once stood; others fish and bathe in inland ponds near ruined stupas.

Inwa – known as Ava to the outside world until relatively recently – is reached by ferry, from near the Mandalay side of the Ava Bridge, a few kilometres southwest of Amarapura. On its south side, the Myittha Chaung (Myittha Canal) connects the Myitnge and Ayeyarwady Rivers, making Inwa an 'island' – a good place to base a kingdom.

The **Inwa Nat Pwe** celebrates the *nat* Thon Ban Hla from the 10th day of the waxing moon through to the full moon of Tabaung (February/March).

Convenient horse carts make a clockwise loop through the old gate and past a handful of sites (listed in order below). You'll need two to three hours to visit. There are a couple of food stalls outside the Maha Aungmye Bonzan, but no places to stay.

### History

Inwa's classical Pali name was Ratnapura (City of Gems), Tadanabon in Burmese. Inwa (Mouth of the Lake) served as the Burmese capital from 1364 to 1841 (give or take an interlude or three), when the final shift was made to Amarapura.

Before 1364 Sagaing had been the capital of the central Bamar kingdom, but after Sagaing fell to the Shan, the capital was moved to Inwa. The kings of Inwa set about re-establishing Bamar supremacy, which had

been in decline since the fall of Bagan. Although Inwa's reach soon extended as far as Pyay, the Mon rulers of Bago proved to be a strong match for the Bamar.

In 1555 Inwa fell to Taunggo, then to the Mon in 1752. A few years later Alaungpaya vanquished the Mon forever, and after a period with Shwebo in the north as capital, Inwa once again became the centre of the kingdom.

When the British occupied southern Myanmar following the Second Anglo-Burmese War, much of northern Myanmar was known as the Kingdom of Ava. The city was finally abandoned as a capital, in favour of Amarapura, in 1841.

### Sights

#### BAGAYA KYAUNG

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One of Inwa's finest attractions is the happily unrenovated **Bagaya Kyaung**, which dates from 1834. The entire monastery is built of teak and supported by 267 teak posts (the largest measures 18m in height and 2.7m in circumference). The cool and dark interior feels old and inviting. You may catch a class in progress inside.

On the outside, look for the Keinayi peacock – half bird and half woman. How long this pristine wooden structure will escape the heavy hand of renovation is not certain, but visit it while you can.

A small sign in Burmese at the entrance warns: 'No footwear; if you are afraid of the heat on the floor, stay in your own house.'

#### NANMYIN

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The 27m-high masonry **watchtower** Nanmyin is all that remains of the palace built by Bagyidaw. The upper portion was shattered by the 1838 earthquake and the rest has taken on a precarious tilt – it's known as the 'leaning tower of Inwa' – that is clearly noticeable when you're climbing the steps. Visible up the top, across the Ayeyarwady, is the hemisphere-shaped Kaunghmudaw Paya (p254).

#### MAHA AUNGMYE BONZAN

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Also known as the Ok Kyaung or the Me Nu Ok Kyaung, this is a brick-and-stucco **monastery** built by Meh Nu, the chief queen

of Bagydaw, for her royal abbot U Bok (Nyaunggan *sayadaw*) in 1822. Monasteries were generally built of wood and were prone to deterioration from the elements or destruction by fire. This monastery's masonry construction has ensured its long life. The 1838 earthquake badly damaged it, but it was restored in 1872 by one of King Mindon's queens.

Located nearby, the **Htilaingshin Paya** dates back to the Bagan period; in a shed in the compound an inscription records the construction of the wooden palace during the first Inwa dynasty.

### AVA BRIDGE

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Visible from the tower and from the ferry, the British-engineered, 16-span **Ava Bridge** (aka Inwa Bridge or Sagaing Bridge), which leads to Sagaing, dates to 1934. It was the only structure that crossed the Ayeyarwady River until 1998, when a new Chinese-engineered bridge was completed at Pyay. At research time, a new bridge (just north) was about a quarter finished, and may be completed in 2005.

In 1942 the British demolished two spans of the bridge to deny passage to the advancing Japanese. Not until 1954 was it repaired and put back into operation. It carries two lanes of traffic, plus a railway line.

Photography of – or from – the bridge is forbidden.

### OTHER SIGHTS

At research time, waterlogged roads prohibited access to these sights, which aren't always on horse-cart drivers' itineraries.

The massive **old city walls** can easily be traced around Inwa. The best preserved are near the northern gate, facing the Ayeyarwady (northwest of the Maha Aungmye Bonzan). This gate was also known as the **Gaung Say Daga** (Hair-Washing Gate), where kings went for a shampoo.

On the southern side of the city stand the remains of the huge four-storey **Le-htat-gyi Paya**. There is also the **Lawkatharaphu Paya**, while to the south of the city stands the **Singyone Fort**.

### Getting There & Away

If you're not coming by taxi (see p249), pick-ups will drop off passengers near the

Ava Bridge, where you can hire a trishaw (K200) or walk 1km to the ferry. (In the rainy season the ferry leaves from near Ava Bridge at the Thabyedan Fort, just below the bridge to the south.)

### Getting Around

Essentially, the only way to get around the ancient site is by horse cart (K2500 for one or two people) on a three-hour tour. A motorcycle or bicycle can easily board the ferry to Inwa. If you're alone, you could hire a motorcycle taxi (rather than blue taxi) in Mandalay to take you to and around Inwa.

### PALEIK

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Most visitors on the Ancient Cities circuit miss Paleik's Yadana Labamuni Hsu-taung-pye Paya, better known as the **Snake Pagoda** (Hmwe Paya). It's named after the three giant pythons that sleep curled around the Buddha images, which are tenderly washed and fed at 11am daily. The modest temple, dating alternatively to the early 11th century or the 15th century, received little notice until 1974, when three pythons appeared from the nearby forest. Now daily revellers (including a scared baby or two) pose for photographs with the snakes, which are led by attendants to the main Buddha image.

Paleik is surrounded by an estimated 325 stupas and paya in varying states of repair, many from the Konbaung period – it's something like a mini-Bagan.

A big **festival** takes place in the two weeks following the full moon of Waso (June or July).

Paleik is about 20km south of Mandalay (about 45 minutes) on the highway to Meiktila and Yangon. A lovely tree-lined back road leads 10km east to Inwa; it's possible to arrive for the 11am event and reach Inwa by noon.

### SAGAING

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Home to 500 stupas, even more monasteries and nunneries, and some 6000 monks and nuns, lovely Sagaing is where Buddhists in Myanmar go when they're stressed. Set on the riverbank across the Ayeyarwady from Inwa, its peaceful pace – led by a *lot* of local meditation – is welcome to visitors as well.

Those also trying to cram in Amarapura and Inwa in a day usually get only a whirlwind look at Sagaing in 90 minutes. Considering the massive network of leafy paths connecting hilltop stupa to riverside stupa, and with licensed accommodation here, there's much to explore for those willing to linger. If you're unable to ruin-hop in Bagan, Sagaing may provide an interesting substitute.

Named for the trees hanging over the river, Sagaing became capital of an independent Shan kingdom around 1315, after the fall of Bagan had thrown central Myanmar into chaos. Its period of importance was short, for in 1364 the founder's grandson, Thado Minbya, hopped the capital to Inwa. For four years, from 1760 to 1764, Sagaing was once again the capital, but its historic importance is comparatively minor.

Devotion is the name of the game these days. In addition to the many sites, there's a major monastic hospital here. During the full moon of Tazaungmon (October/November), devotees from Mandalay and beyond flock to Sagaing to offer robes. Kyaswa Kyaung holds a 'foreign yogis retreat' in December or January (foreigners are welcome), and visitors are sometimes invited to stay in monasteries around Sagaing Hill by friendly monks.

Sagaing is also famous for its acoustic guitars. Ask a trishaw driver to take you to a 'factory' if you want one.

### Sights

#### SAGAING HILL

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If you have limited time in Sagaing, come to this **hill** (admission incl Mingun US\$3). The ticket is valid for five days and includes admission to the nearby town of Mingun. Trees hang over stone steps that lead past stupas, monasteries and nunneries to a glorious top, where you can take in many of Sagaing's 500 stupas and views of the river back towards Mandalay. There are several ways up, not all of which have government ticket stands en route; trishaw drivers (if not taxi drivers) will know where to go.

**Tilawaguru** (donation K500), near the southwest base of the hill, is an impressive mural-filled cave temple that dates from 1672. Though much was damaged by fire 80 years ago (and frisky bats hang out in some chambers), a walk-through can be

superb. Monks from the outside monastery may turn on the electricity, but it's best by the (provided) candlelight, where colourful murals slowly reveal themselves in the dark hallways.

Other sights around the hill include **Padamya Zedi** (which dates from 1300); **Umin Thounzeh** (30 Caves), which has 45 Buddha images in a crescent-shaped colonnade; and the 29.3m-high **Soon U Ponya Shin Paya**, built in 1312 and home to large bronze frogs on wheels that serve as collection boxes.

If you don't want to go up the hill, you can still soak up Sagaing's atmosphere by roaming along the pathways that cover the hillsides and link up the hundreds of *tazaung* (shrine buildings) down to Thayetpin jetty.

About a quarter of the way from the market to Sagaing Hill, you'll pass the **Hsinmyashin Paya**. It's known as the Pagoda of Many Elephants for its elephant statues stationed at each entranceway – a departure from the usual *chinthe* (half-lion, half-dragon deities). The paya dates from 1429 (the scissors at the eastern entrance are the logo of a recent sponsor's company).

A few kilometres north are a couple of **silver shops**, where you can see artisans bang away at various pieces.

#### SOUTH OF AVA BRIDGE Buddhist Sites

Heading along Strand Rd, following the water south of the bridge, you can drop by a couple of interesting pagodas. About 500m south is the **Tupayon Paya**, built in 1444, which has an unusual style for Myanmar. It consists of three circular storeys each encircled by arched niches. A temporary wooden bridge was constructed across the Ayeyarwady when the *hti* (umbrellalike pinnacle of a stupa) was raised, and a huge festival was held. The 1838 earthquake toppled the superstructure, and it's never been completely reconstructed.

Another few hundred metres to the south, Strand Rd passes the entrance to the sandstone **Aungmyelawka Paya**, built in 1783 by Bodawpaya on the site of his residence before he became king. It was built in imitation of the Shwezigon Paya at Nyaung U, Bagan (see p309). It's a little frayed at the edges, but you can climb up the stupa rim to look around.

## Forts

Overlooking the Ayeyarwady are three forts, built by an Italian engineer as a last-ditch defence by the Myanmar people in the Third Anglo-Burmese War. About 1km south of Aungmyelawka Paya is the most easily accessed, the riverside **Asekhan Fort** (Fort Savage). Follow Strand Rd south (to its end) and then continue on side roads about 200m further south.

Once the site of a minor 1886 battle, the fort now is mostly home to grazing cows ('they match the intelligence of our army now', one local joked). Just north, under a large tree, is a small walled cemetery with three tombstones of British soldiers.

From the riverside wall you can just make out the other forts across the river. **Thabyedan Fort** is amid the trees, just south of the Ava Bridge. (You can easily see the walls from the road to Mandalay.)

To the south (in Inwa, maybe 200m south of Lawgtharaphu Paya) are the barely visible remains of a concrete wall (low, with much vegetation), where **Singyone Fort** stood.

Some locals lament that the forts weren't used to stand up to the British more. Advisors persuaded Thibaw that it was futile.

## KAUNGHMUDAW PAYA

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The best known of the Sagaing stupas, actually 10km west towards Monywa, is the Kaunghmudaw Paya. The enormous white dome rises 46m and was modelled after the Mahaceti (Great Stupa) in Sri Lanka (although legend also says that it represents the breast of a Myanmar queen). Also known by its Pali name, Rajamanicula, the stupa was built in 1636 to commemorate Inwa's establishment as the royal capital of Myanmar.

Around the base of the structure are 812 stone pillars, each 1m to 1.5m high and with a small hollow for an oil lamp. Images of *nat* can be seen in the 120 niches that also circle the base. A nearly 3m-high polished marble slab stands in a corner of the paya grounds; its 86 lines record details of the monument's construction.

You'll need to hire a taxi in Sagaing to get there.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Happy Hotel** (☎ 072-21420; s US\$8-15, d US\$15-\$25; 🍽️) A couple of blocks north of the highway,

this simple hotel has clean rooms. Cheaper, fan-cooled rooms have a shared bathroom; more expensive rooms have generator-run electricity, air-con and private bathroom. Downstairs, you'll find a good restaurant serving Chinese and Bamar food. Coming from Mandalay, turn right at the market, then take the second right.

At research time, the **Sein Pann Myaing Inn** (☎ 072-21200; Thudumar St; r K3500), one block west and three blocks south of the market, charged foreigners the local price for its clean, basic rooms.

Greenland Restaurant, a block north of the Happy, has good noodles, draft beer and a courtyard setting for half the price of Happy.

## Getting There & Around

Sagaing is about 20km southwest of Mandalay and is reached by a road that crosses the Ayeyarwady via the Ava Bridge (p252).

Pick-ups stop on the main road just after the bridge and near the market. See p249 for information about taxis to Sagaing.

It's possible to catch local transport 10km north to Mingun a few times a day.

Sagaing is spread out, so it's best to get around by trishaw or taxi. A trishaw costs about K2500 for half a day.

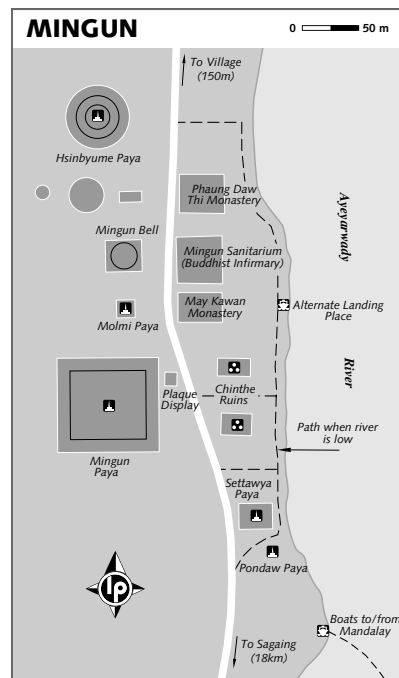
## MINGUN

မင်းတွန်း

About 11km upriver from Mandalay (and visible from Mandalay Hill), **Mingun** (admission incl Sagaing US\$3) is as interesting to visit for its ancient sites as for the pleasant boat trip to get there. Mingun's half-dozen sites run along the bank on the opposite side of the Ayeyarwady from Mandalay. Most famous is the partly completed Mingun Paya, which would have been the world's largest paya (if King Bodawpaya hadn't upped and died before it was finished). The village itself is a friendly place – although some hawkers can be a little too friendly.

The ticket includes admission to Sagaing and is valid for five days. Depending on water levels, boats usually drop off passengers at the southern end of the site. In the past, some travellers have arranged to stay at one of the monasteries here, but it's frowned upon nowadays.

Food stalls, art galleries and souvenir stands line the road. Most visitors have time



for a quick noodle meal. The path along the road – if the water level is down – is often less dusty.

## Sights

### PONDAW PAYA

ပုံတော်ဘုရား

On the southern end of the site (just north of the usual boat drop-off point), this unassuming structure, a 5m-high white **pagoda**, is a working model for the gigantic, unfinished Mingun Paya, 100m north. It's worth seeing to get a picture of what could have been.

### SETTAWYA PAYA

စက်တော်ရာဘုရား

On the river immediately north of the Pondaw Paya is the **Settawya Paya**, a hollow, vaulted shrine containing a footprint of the Buddha. King Bodawpaya brought the footprint to Mingun when the relic chamber in the base of his huge *pahto* (temple) was sealed up. Settawya Paya was built in 1811.

Some travellers have reported that an 'official' charged extra admission to see

this pagoda, but no-one was doing so at research time.

## MINGUN PAYA

မင်းတွန်းဘုရား

Looming high and wide on the inland side of the road, the **Mingun Paya** is actually just the cracked brick base of the original plan. The grandiose pagoda King Bodawpaya had in mind was set to reach 150m (three times the paya's present size). Construction began in 1790 with a labour force of thousands of slaves and prisoners of war. Bodawpaya often supervised construction from a set-up residence on an island offshore. (You can bet the slaves loved that.) Work halted in 1819 when Bodawpaya died.

An earthquake split the monument in 1838 and reduced it to partial rubble – it's possibly the world's largest pile of bricks. But what a pile! Each side of the enormous base measures 72m, and the lowest terrace measures 140m. There are projecting four-layer lintels over the porticoes on each of the four sides. Beautiful glazed tiles in brown, pale brown, cream and green were intended to be set in panels around the terrace; some of these tiles can be seen in the small building in front of the enormous ruin.

Despite its dilapidated state, you must go barefoot if you intend to climb the base. From the flat top you have a fine view of the Hsinbyume Paya, Mingun village and the river.

A pair of large **chinthe** (half-lion, half-dragon guardian deities) have just about crumbled away at their guard posts closer to the river.

## MINGUN BELL

မင်းတွန်းဘေဇင်းလောင်း

In 1808 Bodawpaya had a gigantic **bronze bell** cast to go with his gigantic stupa. Weighing 55,555 *viss* (90 tonnes), the bell is claimed to be the largest hung, uncracked bell in the world. (A larger bell in Moscow is cracked.)

The same earthquake that shook the *zedi* base also destroyed the bell's supports, so it was hung in a new *tazaung* (shrine building) close to the riverboat landing. The bell is about 4m high and over 5m across at the lip. You can scramble right inside it, and some helpful bystander will give it a good thump so that you can hear the ring from the interior.

Between the Mingun Paya and the bell (100m north) stands **Molmi Paya**; this new pavilion shelters a life-size standing bronze statue of Molmi Sayadaw, a famous Buddhist abbot from the nearby village of Molmi.

### Hsinbyume Paya

ဆင်ဖြူမယ်ဘုရား

Also known as Myatheindan, and built by King Bagyidaw in 1816, three years before he succeeded Bodawpaya as king, this **stupa** was constructed in memory of his senior wife, the Hsinbyume princess. It is built as a representation of the Sulamani Paya, which, according to the Buddhist plan of the cosmos, stands atop Mt Meru (the mountain that stands at the centre of the universe). The seven white-washed wavy terraces around the stupa represent the seven mountain ranges around Mt Meru, while the five kinds of mythical monsters can be found in niches on each terrace level. This structure was also badly damaged in the 1838 quake, but King Mindon had it restored in 1874.

Just north, past some of the souvenir hassle, is the village.

### Mingun Sanitarium

Also called the **Buddhist Infirmary**, this nursing home for the elderly is worth checking out. Visitors (and donations) are welcome. The friendly head nurse here is Thwe Thwe Aye, who speaks excellent English. You can wander into the two monasteries on either side of the building.

### Festivals & Events

The **Mingun Nat Festival** takes place between the 5th and 10th days of the waxing moon of Tabauing (February/March). This celebration pays homage to the brother and sister of the Teak Tree, who drowned in the river while clinging to a trunk.

### Getting There & Away

Government-run riverboats to Mingun depart at 9am from the western end of 26th St in Mandalay, and leave Mingun at 1pm to make the return journey. A return ticket is K1500. The upriver journey usually takes about an hour (and occasionally goes by the rare Irrawaddy dolphins), though sometimes it can take as long as two hours.

It's possible to buy tickets in advance from the small **jetty office** (☎ 22294), or from

### GOVERNMENT TRIPS

From Mandalay's MTT office (see p229) you can arrange (expensive) trips to Khamti ('Naga Land') in January and Mogok (so-called 'Ruby Land') year round. Trips start at US\$400 per person. It's presently the only way to visit these destinations.

your hotel. It's almost always possible to show up and get a ticket. If you miss the return boat, you'll need to arrange your own ride back (for about K7000).

Chartered express boats also go to Mingun from here; a return ticket is K8000 to K12,000. These boats are usually geared to tour groups.

A loosely scheduled pick-up connects Sagaing with Mingun, usually arriving in the morning and returning 'around 1pm'.

## UPPER SAGAING DISTRICT

North of Sagaing town (p252) near Mandalay, the Sagaing District sprawls northward to the Indian border. Few tourists visit here, which is part of its appeal. Monywa is near some top-shelf attractions; historically key Shwebo (p260) kicked off Myanmar's last dynasty. Further north – and only reachable by air – Kalaymyo (p262) is a quiet valley town with a sizeable Chin community.

During the 17th century, when the Portuguese adventurer Philip De Brito was defeated at Thanlyin, all the Portuguese and Eurasians living at De Brito's 13-year-old colony were exiled to areas around Monywa and Shwebo (notably the villages of Monhla and Chantha near Monywa). Called *bayingyis*, rare fair-haired residents may occasionally be seen, although no linguistic or cultural legacies remain.

### MONYWA

မုံရွာ

☎ 071

Set on the eastern bank of the Chindwin River, about 136km west of Mandalay, Monywa is a scrappy trade town of some 300,000 people. There's not much in its yard for travellers, but a few superb attractions

nearby (see p259) warrant more than an exhausting day trip from Mandalay.

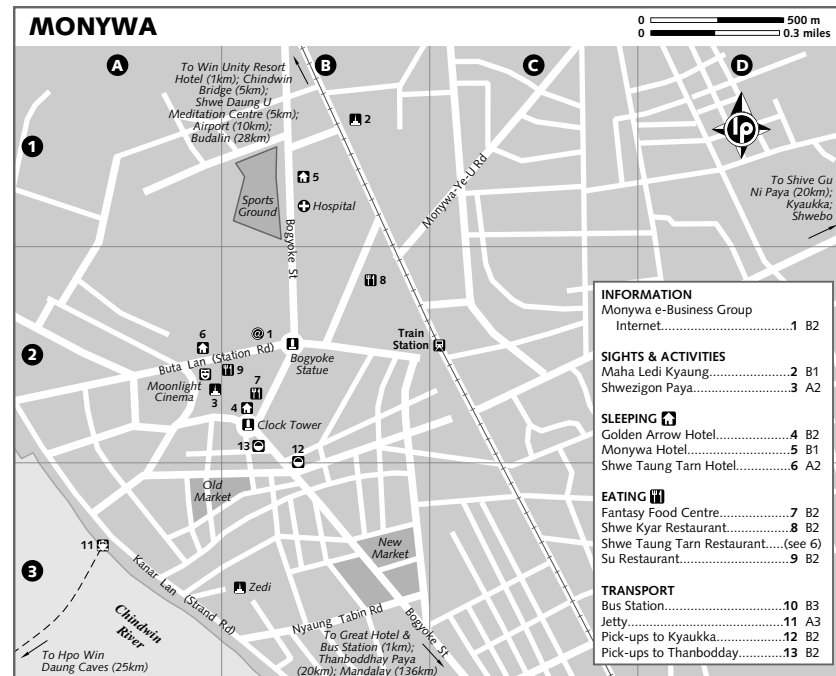
In WWII Monywa found itself between the British and Japanese forces twice; it was flattened by bombs in 1942 and 1945. The area – particularly west of the river – was for many post-war years a centre for the Burmese Communist Party.

Monywa sees a lot of trade to and from India. Agricultural products and hardwoods (including teak) come in from across the Chindwin River via a new Chindwin Bridge that opened north of town in 2004. Monywa is famous for churning out the rough cotton blankets you see in cheaper guesthouse rooms around the country.

### Orientation & Information

The Shwezigon Paya, north of the old market, occupies the centre of Monywa, with the chief landmark being the clock tower on Bogyoke St to its southeast, and the Bogyoke roundabout to its northeast.

**Monywa e-Business Group Internet** (Station Rd; per hr K800; ☎ 9am-11pm) is on the first floor of an official-looking building.



construction at research time. Plans for a pool and tennis court, and the riverside location north of town, would likely make it Monywa's splashiest sleep.

**Shwe Taung Tarn Hotel & Restaurant** (☎ 21478; 70 Station Rd; r per person US\$5-8; 🏠) The higher-priced doubles in this central hotel are surprisingly comfy, set behind a lush garden and the old building (which houses the cheaper rooms). There are wooden floors, balconies and air con (if the power's on – it usually is). The TVs had *no* channels at last pass. The free breakfast is served in the restaurant next door (see below). English-speaking staff members hire out bicycles and help arrange day trips.

**Monywa Hotel** (☎ 21581; Bogyoke St; s/d US\$15/20; 🏠) About 500m north of the clock tower, off the highway north, the Monywa is a leafy complex reminiscent of a barracks. There are 50 bungalow-style motel rooms, each with nice dark-wood floors and TVs juiced by satellite, but the details are a little cheap (eg bubbly vinyl floors in the bathroom). Rates include breakfast.

**Golden Arrow Hotel** (☎ 21548; Bogyoke St, across from the clock tower; s/d US\$5/10; 🏠) This is the best deal for a fiver in town. Clean (to the point of being clinical) rooms above a bank reopened as a hotel in 2004. Rooms have satellite TV, and windows are painted translucent white. Rates include breakfast.

**Great Hotel** (☎ 22431; Bogyoke St; s US\$10/15; 🏠) In an unflattering location next to the bus station, rooms here are OK, not great.

## Eating

**Shwe Kyar Restaurant** (Thazi St; dishes K1000; 🍴 8am-9.30pm) A block to the northeast of the Bogyoke roundabout is this clean and airy, concrete-floored, wooden-boothed Chinese-Myanmar restaurant. The Shwe Kyar has an English menu with typical but tasty shrimp, pork and chicken dishes (and nine veggie options). There's no English sign, but it's at the base of a modern burgundy-coloured building.

**Su Restaurant** (Station Rd; dishes K1500; 🍴 9am-9pm) Just east of the northern Shwezigon Paya entrance, this friendly Myanmar restaurant has all-you-can-eat, pick-and-point pots of curries (that come with 10 or so condiments) that feed many local families.

**Shwe Taung Tarn Restaurant** (☎ 21478; 70 Station Rd; dishes about K1000) This popular Chinese

restaurant artfully prepares its tasty rice dishes. There are three eating areas – inside, in the leafy garden, and up on the modern wood-decked rooftop.

**Fantasy Food Centre** (Bogyoke St, near clock tower; BBQ skewers K50-300; 🍴 8am-10pm) This big barbecue beer station has plenty of life, thanks mostly to the Myanmar Beer on tap. The menu is mostly meat.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The shiny new airport is a 30-minute ride north of town, with connections to Mandalay, Yangon and Kalaymyo.

### BOAT

Ferries head up the Chindwin River to Kalaymyo in four days, but the route was restricted for foreigners at research time. Sadly, there was no boat service downriver to Pakokku.

### BUS

Monywa's bus station, off the highway towards Mandalay 1.5km south of the clock tower, has no English signs.

At research time, a nice express air-con bus left for Yangon (K6000, 13 hours) at 6am. Hourly buses connected Monywa with Mandalay from 5am (K700, four hours) and Shwebo (K700, four hours) from 6am. Note that buses *to* (not from) Monywa from Mandalay were often reluctant to take foreigners at press time (see p244).

Four daily buses (presently leaving at 6.30am, 9.30am, 12.30pm and 3pm) go to Pakokku (K600, 4½ hours) to catch the ferry to Bagan (see p281).

See opposite, p260 and p260 for details of local transport to sites around Monywa.

### CAR

By taxi it's only a three-hour drive to or from Mandalay on a decent two-lane road. The going rate in Mandalay is US\$30 or US\$35, depending on petrol prices.

### TRAIN

Monywa is on the Mandalay–Budalin branch railway, but service to Mandalay (six to seven hours) bumps along at a far slower pace than bus or car. At last pass, a ticket agent quoted foreigners K240, then K3000, for the journey; and we saw passengers pushing a faulty

carriage to another track, three hours behind the scheduled noon departure.

## Getting Around

Trishaw and 'blue taxis' are the main form of local transport (the police outlawed the four-seater motorcycle taxis in late 2004). A trishaw ride from the bus station to the centre is about K400 or K500; a ride between the centre and the jetty for boats across the Chindwin River is K150.

White plain-clothes taxis linger on Station Rd, near the northern Shwezigon Paya entrance. You can generally find cheaper blue taxis near the clock tower. A blue taxi costs K3000 for the 30-minute ride north to the airport.

Most hotels hire out bikes for about K1500 per day.

## AROUND MONYWA Thanboddhay Paya & Around

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The magnificent, carnivalesque **Thanboddhay Paya** (admission US\$3; 🍴 6am-5pm) bursts with pink, orange, yellow and blue spikes, and has so many Buddha images in the inside nooks and crannies in halls and archways – one tally makes it 582,357 – that it feels like a Buddha House of Mirrors to walk through. Some compare the building to Borobudur in Indonesia, though Thanboddhay is smaller. It's certainly unique for Myanmar.

Nearby is a display of moving waves surrounding a praying Buddha, where worshippers toss offerings into a 'floating' basket, and a pastel tower with encircling steps (and often young kite-flyers up the top).

It's worth heading 4km further east to see a serious Buddha-rama at the western edge of the Po Khaung Hills. Peering from a hilltop is a 90m **reclining Buddha** you can climb to. Behind it, a giant standing Buddha was under construction at research time – it will break 167m when it's completed (in 2006), making it the world's second tallest.

Just west, the enormous white **Aung Setkya Paya**, standing 130m high and surrounded by 1060 smaller stupas, has dark tunnels inside that lead to the stupa rim for nice views. There are more tasty views from the tower amid 8000 (and counting) Buddhas in the sprawling **Bodhi Tataung** (1000 Buddhas), begun in 1994; it's a couple of hundred metres west of the stupa.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Thanboddhay Paya, near the eponymous village, is 20km southeast of Monywa, a few kilometres east of the highway to Mandalay. Share taxis to the sites cost K6000 to K7000. Direct local buses to Thanboddhay village leave frequently from Bogyoke Rd south of the clock tower in Monywa. From the village, you can hire a taxi or take a pick-up.

## Hpo Win Daung Caves

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Across the Chindwin River and 25km west of Monywa, Hpo Win Daung is a long mountain shaped (locals claimed convincingly) like a reclining Buddha. It features 492 cave temples built inside the limestone cliffs. The **caves** (admission US\$2), built between the 14th and 18th centuries, sprawl up and down the west side (along the 'Buddha head') of the mountain, and are packed with 2588 Buddhas and some boldly coloured murals.

To the southwest of the long-inhabited hills lies the Pondaung-pon-nya mountain range, where the fossilised remains of **Pondaung Man** (a primate ancestor who may have lived 30 million years ago) were found. The hills are named after U Hpo Win, a famous *zawgyi* (alchemist) hermit who once lived among them.

From the starting point, the main caves lead up and left (west). A guide is not a bad idea, as some caves aren't easy to find; one English-speaking guide (at least) hangs around the Monywa jetty and offers four- to six-hour tours for K5000.

The cave chambers vary in condition. In some there are giant reclining Buddhas; others are packed with smaller Buddhas and have streams of light shining in from holes in the walls. Many murals are painted '3D' – what's above the eye level is far, what's below is near. In one mural, you can see 'Portuguese-looking persons' burning in hell. Sadly, relic smugglers have feasted on some statues, but much remains intact and thankfully unrestored.

The weeklong Hpo Win Daung festival, the year's biggest here, takes place in November. The area has 12 monasteries, where it's possible to overnight or arrange longer stays for meditation.

The facing hill to the south, **Shwe Ba Taung**, features 46 more caves.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

It's a bit of a heist coming here. From Monywa's jetty, 'special boats' (aka local ferries minus the locals) whisk foreigners across the Chindwin River to Nyaungbingyi village for a whopping K1500 each way; boats run 6am from to 6pm.

During festivals you can take a bus from the village to the caves. At other times you'll need to hire a jeep (K5000 for up to five people) at the yellow booth on the right in Nyaungbingyi. The ride takes 45 minutes each way. It's possible to go by taxi from Monywa, via the new Chindwin Bridge. No English signs are posted.

**Kyaukka**

ကျောက်က

About 45 minutes east of town by taxi (or double by bicycle) along a lovely tamarind tree-lined road, Kyaukka has been a centre for pre-Chiang Mai style **lacquerware** since the Konbaung era. Pieces are more basic and utilitarian than those you'll find in Bagan. The prices aren't necessarily cheaper, but the household factories are worth checking out; there are also some shops outside the interesting 14th-century **Shwe Gu Ni Paya** (famous for its wish-fulfilling powers), about 750m west of town.

Few tourists come out here, and wide-eyed looks from locals often lean into outright laughter.

All Shwebo-bound buses go by Kyaukka, and pick-ups leave from near Monywa's old market during the day.

**SHWEBO**

ရွှေဘို

☎ 075

Messier and dustier than Monywa, Shwebo sees even fewer tourists, but its sights and historical importance – King Alaungpaya kicked off Myanmar's third empire here, and the area has been settled since at least the 4th century AD – can make for a rewarding day or two for the adventurer. (See p38 for more about the great Alaungpaya.)

Occupying the flat (and hot) plain between the Mu and Ayeyarwady Rivers, Shwebo has a Bamar majority, and sizeable Muslim and Christian communities. The local economy depends on the trade of nuts, pulses, rice and sesame cultivated on surrounding farms, where more than a

couple of snakes do their slither; a Monywa warned, 'You're going to Shwebo? Watch out for cobras, brother.' Nevertheless, many Myanmar folk reach for the dirt when coming to Shwebo. It's considered good luck to take home some earth from 'Victory Land' (as Shwebo's reputation goes).

**Orientation & Information**

Shwebo's main street, Aung Zeya St, runs from north to south past the market and leads north.

The post office, on a dirt road northwest of the market, sends postcards overseas, but not faxes. There's Internet access east of the market at **MCC Shwebo Computer** (per hr K1500; ☎ 7am-9pm).

**Sights**

Several pagodas in the blocks south of the market give Shwebo's centre a gold-studded backdrop. The biggest, **Shwe Daza Paya**, is said to have been built by King Narapati-sithu over 500 years ago. **Maw Daw Myin Tha Paya**, about 1.5km north of the market, is the city's most important Buddhist site and a peaceful enough place. Take Aung Zeya St north, past the train tracks, where an English sign points to it, about 100m east.

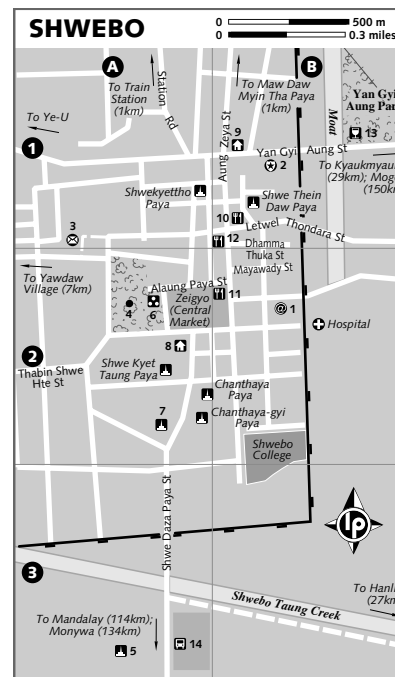
If you're waiting for the bus, **Aung Mye Hsu Taung** (aka 'Army Pagoda') is about 100m south of the bus station. It's said to be the spot used by King Alaungpaya as a staging point before going into battle, and it remains the city's wishing ground (for military too). A 15-ministupa maze up the front has glass-spiked 1m-high walls to deter cheats.

As the capital, Shwebo was an enormous walled city. Remnants include bits of the walls and the **moat** (the most visible legacy of Alaungpaya's original plan); the moat is best seen from **Yan Gyi Aung Park**, northeast of the centre.

The British built a jail on the **Alaungpaya Palace grounds** (admission K50, camera fee K200), which the government moved recently and rebuilt as the palace; you can see a few structures, similar in form to the Mandalay Palace (but less complete). At the gate is the **King Alaungpaya Memorial**, where his body was burned following his death in 1760.

**Sleeping**

If you're looking for luxury, stay in Mandalay instead.



**Zin Wai Lar Guest House** (☎ 21263; Yan Gyi Aung St; r K5500-10,000) Shwebo's best guesthouse (no doubt), just off the main drag Aung Zeya St, is signed only in Burmese but has friendly English-speaking staff. A modern, three-storey affair, it has 14 ordinary doubles with common bathroom and squat toilet, two double rooms with attached bathroom and sit-down toilet, and a lone triple with attached bathroom, fridge and local TV. Breakfast is included.

**Myo Ma** (☎ 21259; r K9000) A back-up to the Zin Wai Lar, Myo Ma has small cell-like rooms with concrete floors, wall-to-wall thin mattresses, and private bathroom with cold-water shower and squat toilets. A small fan is strapped to the ceiling. The English-speaking manager, however, is great, and can help find motorcycle transport to Hanlin (see p262). Myo Ma is south of the market.

**Eating & Drinking**

**Eden Culinary Garden** (Aung Zeya St; dishes K450-900; ☎ 6am-10pm) An inviting restaurant with baked goods up the front, a leafy courtyard filled with tea-and-noodle diners in the

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morning, and some booths in the inside bar at the back. Eden is notable for having good Chinese and Myanmar dishes, some European food (hamburgers, eggs and toast; note that the 'orange juice' is actually soft drink), and an English menu. Homeboy waiters sure put up a fuss to serve the rare foreigner.

**Shwe Taung** (Aung Zeya St; dishes K500-800) With its enviable corner spot, this popular Chinese brick-floor eatery is as good a place as any to down a cold beer, eat some noodles and watch Shwebo pedal-squeak by. There's no menu, but staff will understand 'no pork, no beef, no chicken' if you want veggie fare.

On the north side of the market are several appealing open-air Myanmar restaurants buzzing (with insects too) after dark. There's also a small beer station facing the moat from Yan Gyi Aung Park.

**Getting There & Away****BOAT**

Ferries heading up and down the Ayeyarwady River between Mandalay and Katha stop at Kyaukmyaung, 29km to the east; pick-ups run between Kyaukmyaung and Shwebo.

**BUS**

The Shwebo bus station is about 1km south of the centre. A few bus companies travel the 114km route between Mandalay and Shwebo. The busiest is Yan Gyi Aung's 35-seat bus (K700, three hours), which departs hourly from 6am to 4pm from Mandalay's bus station off 88th St (between 22nd and 21st Sts).



Hourly buses also connect Shwebo with Monywa – via a quiet 1½-lane road (K700, 3½ hours). Pick-ups make these trips from the same starting and stopping points for a couple of hundred kyat less, but they take an extra hour.

### TRAIN

The Shwebo train station is 1km north of the centre. Four daily trains travelling between Mandalay and Myitkyina stop here going either way. The best to catch for Myitkyina are the No 55 and the No 57, which leave around 5pm or 7.15pm and take 19 hours. For Mandalay, the No 58 leaves around 7.45am and takes 4½ hours. Trains on this route are often late, though.

### Getting Around

Trishaws (and a few horse carts) are the main modes of public transport. A trishaw ride from either station to the centre is K200 to K400. There are no taxis, but jeeps are sometimes for hire. Ask at the guest-houses about bike hire for about K1000 per day. Much of the centre is easily walkable.

### AROUND SHWEDO

About 26 butt-kicking kilometres southeast of Shwebo, the town of Halingyi is set just south of the architectural remains of **Han-lin** (also called Halin), a massive 3.2km by 1.6km walled city from the Pyu kingdom (which existed between the 4th and 9th centuries). Little is left, but locals can point out overgrown gates to the wall. In another part of town is a monastery with a small **museum**, which has some pots and other artefacts excavated from the ‘old city’.

Halingyi village is interesting in that it’s set atop a network of hot springs; the water is collected in stone cauldrons and pools for bathing and washing clothes. Many stupas in the area are charmingly decrepit, their bricks exposed or covered in vegetation.

Foreigners almost never make it here. (At last pass, a teen swore we were ‘the first foreigner’ they’d ever seen.) You may be asked to show your passport and keep notes of what you see and when. Locals will most assuredly lead you around. A donation would be appreciated, but it won’t be asked for.

Each day a lone tractor/taxi makes the trip out from Shwebo’s bus station, but it doesn’t always make the trip back. It’s best

to hire a jeep (if you find one); a motorcycle with driver is about K6500 for the trip, and it’s helpful to have a local figure out where to go. It’s possible to bike (with soft seat!), but it’s a hard full-day trip. The road to Halingyi begins south of the aqueduct next to the bus station. After about 10km you’ll see a big pagoda across the water. At the next village (the biggest you’ll see), turn left over the bridge; you’re halfway there.

### KALAYMYO

ကလေးမြို့

☎ 073

Travellers with up-for-grabs expectations – and an interest in meeting Chin folk without taking a government-guided trip to Chin State – can fly to Kalaymyo, a long way north of Mandalay and about 100km from India. There’s not much to do in town, but it’s interesting for the make-up of its population (half Burmese, half Chin) and its slender setting, ringed by far-off lush mountains (the town is 15km long and rarely more than two blocks wide). Most foreign faces who do make it here belong to Christian missionary types, who donate time and money to the Chin population (who are 95% Christian), who live in the western half of town. The Chin folk sometimes refer to Kalaymyo as ‘Zomi’. There’s some local debate on who lived here first, Bamar or Chin.

**Moonstar Internet** (cnr Bogyoke Rd & Yu Dan Than St; per hr 1500k; ☎ closed Sat) offers quiet access, 1.5km west of the airport.

### Sights

Foreigners are restricted to staying within town. The **downtown (Burmese) market**, in and around the roundabout about 500m east of the airport, is worth a look. Many locals pluck on guitars around town; you can get your own guitar here for K2000 to K3000.

The principal Chin district, **Tahan**, is 3km west of downtown and has a market too. Just before the sign, turn south on Taung Za Lat Rd to reach the local **golf course**, set below a small mountain with a **pagoda** you can reach by foot.

About 15km west of the airport, in the Chin Hills (and into restricted areas), is **Shukintha** (aka Mt Zion View Point), where a local can usually take you if you ask at the unsigned police stand near the Kalaymyo

University, about 10km west of airport. There are jaw-dropping views.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Taung Za Lat Hotel** (☎ 21463; Bogyoke Rd; r per person US\$10-15) The lone hotel licensed for foreigners is directly across the street from the airport. There are slightly grubby but doable rooms and balconies, fans, screened windows and squashed ‘squitoes left on the walls. The Chin staff speaks some English. More expensive rooms are slightly bigger but not really worth it.

You’ll find some eateries in Tahan and around the downtown market. The best is **Thein Shwe Restaurant** (☎ 21313; Bogyoke Rd; dishes K600; ☎ 9am-9pm), about 100m west of the roundabout. It’s run by a welcoming English-speaking Burmese-Chinese woman

who provides good local information and has a bike to hire out or lend.

### Getting There & Around

Boat and bus journeys here from Monywa were off limits for foreigners at research time. Myanma Airways has only a few weekly connections to Yangon (US\$120 or US\$130 one way), Mandalay (US\$50 or US\$55) and Monywa (US\$35 or US\$40). The MA ticket office is halfway between the airport and the downtown market; arrange to buy a ticket (with passport and dollars in hand) at 9am the day before your flight.

You can hail a truck between the market and Tahan for K200 during the day and up to K1000 after dark. Many locals offer a seat on the back of a bike or motorcycle for free.

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