

Mandalay



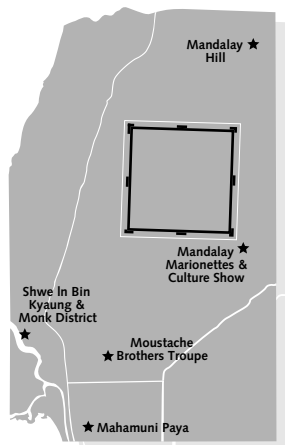
The country's last royal capital, and still an infant at 150 years old, Myanmar's second city is so *not* Yangon. Quieter, more laid-back and snuggled into its setting on the banks of the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River, 695km north of the capital, Mandalay spreads lazily along a wide, flat grid of streets filled less with cars and commuter-packed buses than squeaky bicycles and trishaws. And dust – even the palm trees are caked with the stuff.

Some visitors love it; some could live without it. Mandalay's not particularly pretty, but few visitors to Myanmar skip a few days here. That's long enough to climb steep Mandalay Hill, lined with Buddhas and *nats* (spirit beings), for views of the Shan hills. It's long enough for a glimpse of the famous Mahamuni Paya, an evening with the Moustache Brothers and day trips to the remarkable ancient cities hovering at the city's outskirts (see p248). For some, the best pastime is sitting over tea at dusk and watching kids and adults fly plastic kites over the rush-hour scene.

After opening borders with China, Mandalay became something of a boom town in the 1990s, though the city remains richly Buddhist, home to some 60% of Myanmar's monks, many of whom reside in the villagelike leafy area southwest of downtown.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Mandalay's most worshipped site, the **Mahamuni Paya** (p234) houses a (stolen) Buddha re-covered in gold leaf daily
- The city's best vantage point is from **Mandalay Hill** (p229), where, the story goes, Buddha pointed out the setting of the future capital
- Culture shows: banned jokester heroes the **Moustache Brothers Troupe** (p240) churn out political comedy, while **Mandalay Marionettes** (p241) keep the tradition of puppetry on the stage
- Mandalay's **shopping** (p241) is the country's best – options include old and new puppets and finely embroidered *kalaga* (tapestries)
- A bike ride is best through the leafy, off-the-beaten-track Monk District, home to hundreds of robed monks; the **jade market** (p242); and the intricate wooden monastery **Shwe In Bin Kyaung** (p234)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02 ■ POPULATION: 801,000 ■ ELEVATION: 74M

HISTORY

Despite erroneous references to the contrary, Mandalay is a comparatively young city, and its time as the capital of the last Burmese kingdom was short. Most of its monuments and buildings are therefore fairly recent, although some temples long predate the city. For centuries this area of Myanmar was the site of the capitals of the Burmese kingdoms; from Mandalay you can easily visit four former royal cities – all now deserted.

King Mindon Min, penultimate ruler in the Konbaung dynasty, founded the city in 1857 and began construction of his new capital, which moved from Amarapura in 1861. In true Myanmar tradition, the new palace was mainly constructed from the dismantled wooden buildings of the previous palace at Amarapura. Mandalay's period of glory was short – Mindon was succeeded by the disastrous Thibaw Min and, in 1885, Mandalay was taken by the British. Thibaw and his notorious queen were exiled and 'the centre of the universe' or 'the golden city' (as it was known) became just another outpost of the British Empire.

Fifteen years after independence in 1947, Mandalay slumbered, like the rest of the country, through the socialist mismanagement of Ne Win and company. However, with the reopening of the Burma Road through Lashio to China the city has been undergoing an economic boom since the 1990s. The money fuelling this boom is generated by three trades – rubies, jade and heroin – and controlled by Kachin, Wa, Shan, Kokang and Chinese syndicates.

The population has broken 800,000, with new townships springing up along the edges of the city, many inhabited by former squatters once at home in the city's central area. The Chinese presence has grown by a great deal since the easing of foreign trade restrictions with Myanmar's northerly neighbour. Many new office buildings, 10-storey hotels and department stores have flourished along downtown blocks.

ORIENTATION

The hill with the huge grounds of old Mandalay Palace at its base is the natural focus of Mandalay. The city sprawls away to the south and west of the fort, bounded on the west by the Ayeyarwady River.

The city streets are laid out on a grid system and numbered from north to south and east to west. Some people may make a distinction between east–west 'roads' and north–south 'streets', but in everyday practice the Myanmar people use these terms interchangeably, and also the word *lan*. The east–west streets run into the 40s only, while the north–south streets start in the 60s and run through to the 80s. For moving across the city quickly, 35th St serves as the main east–west thoroughfare, while 80th St is the main north–south street. The two major business thoroughfares are 26th and 84th Sts. It's also worth remembering that, between 35th and 26th Sts, the major thoroughfares of 81st and 83rd Sts are north-bound one-way streets, and 82nd street is a south-bound one-way street.

The city centre here – called 'downtown' on signs and by English-speaking locals – runs roughly from 21st St to 35th St, between 80th St and 87th St or 88th St. Cutting it in half, east–west 26th St divides south downtown (home to many Indians and Nepalis) from north downtown (where there's a notable Shan community).

Maps

Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT; see p229) sells a Mandalay map with advertisements for K100.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

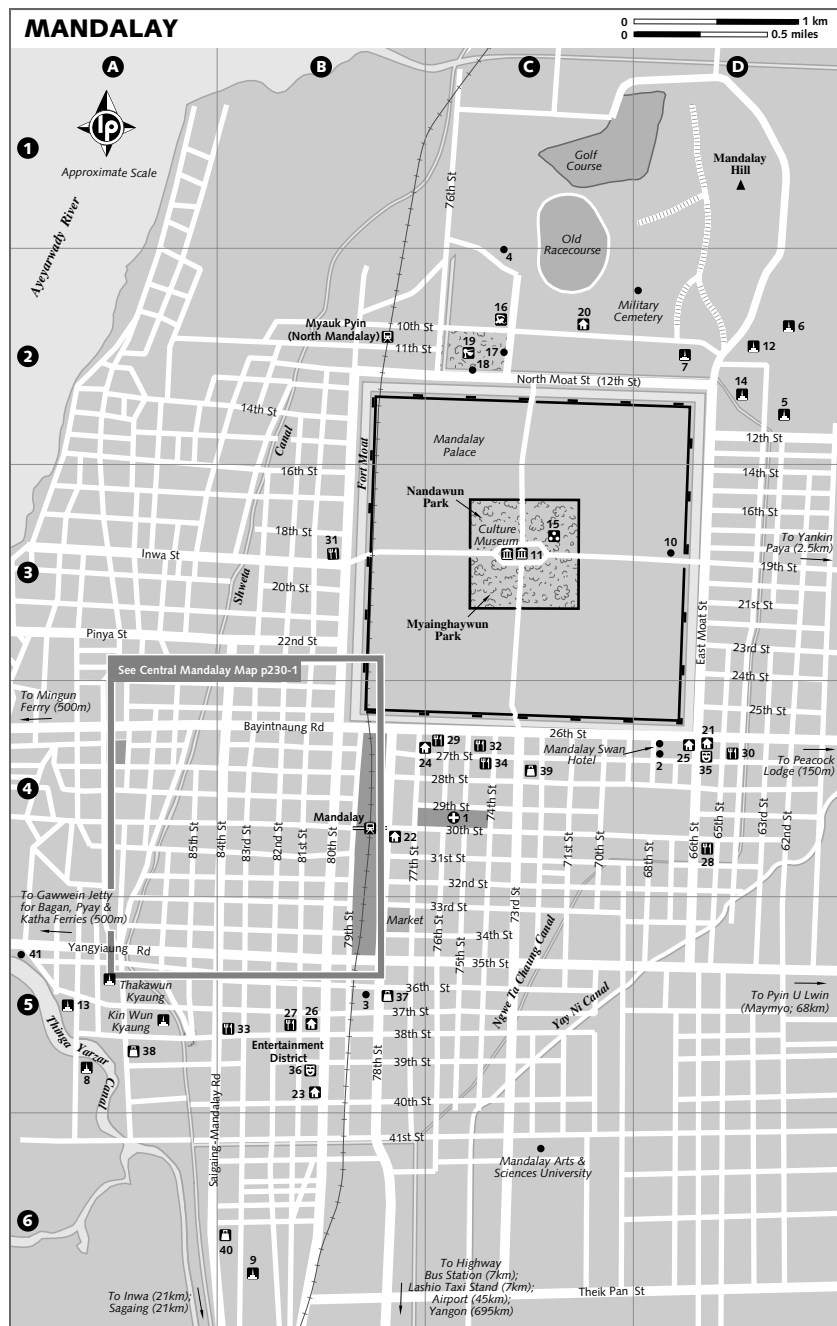
Many guesthouses and hotels have a lone computer offering Internet access for K1000 or K1500 per hour. Shops downtown with quicker access and a few computers:

Micro-Electronics Email Service (Map p230; 83rd St, 23/24; per hr K1000; ☎ 9am–8.30pm)

Winner (Map p230; 83rd St, 22/23; per hr K1000; ☎ 8am–8pm)

MANDALAY ADDRESSES

A street address that reads 66th (26/27) means the place is located on 66th St between 26th and 27th Sts. Some of the longer east–west streets take names once they cross the Shweta Chaung (Shweta Canal) heading west. Hence 19th St becomes Inwa St, 22nd St becomes Pinya St, 26th St becomes Bayintnaung Rd and 35th St becomes Yangyiaung Rd.



INFORMATION			
Main Hospital.....	1	C4	
Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT).....	2	D4	
New Horizon Travels.....	3	B5	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
Asia Centre Driving Range.....	4	C2	
Atumashi Kyaung.....	5	D2	
Kuthodaw Paya.....	6	D2	
Kyauktawgyi Paya.....	7	D2	
Ma Soe Yein Nu Kyaung.....	8	A5	
Mahamuni Paya.....	9	B6	
Main Palace Entrance (Foreign Tourist Entrance).....	10	D3	
Mandalay Palace Compound.....	11	C3	
Sandamani Paya.....	12	D2	
Shwe In Bin Kyaung.....	13	A5	
Shwenandaw Kyaung.....	14	D2	
Tomb of King Mindon.....	15	C3	
Yatanaban Swimming Pool.....	16	C2	
Zoological Garden (East Entrance).....	17	C2	
Zoological Garden (South Entrance).....	18	C2	
Zoological Gardens.....	19	C2	
SLEEPING			
Mandalay Hill Resort Hotel.....	20	C2	
Mandalay View Inn.....	21	D4	
Pacific Hotel.....	22	B4	
Power Hotel.....	23	B5	
Royal City Hotel.....	24	B4	
Sedona Hotel Mandalay.....	25	D4	
Tiger Hotel.....	26	B5	
EATING			
Aya Myit Tar Myanmar Restaurant.....	27	B5	
Barbecue Restaurants.....	28	D4	
BBB.....	29	C4	
Green Elephant.....	30	D4	
Ko's Kitchen.....	31	B3	
Marie-Min Vegetarian Restaurant.....	32	C4	
Minn Thi Ha Teashop.....	33	B5	
Oriental House.....	(see 30)		
Too Too Restaurant.....	34	C4	
ENTERTAINMENT			
Mandalay Marionettes & Culture Show.....	35	D4	
Moustache Brothers Troupe.....	36	B5	
SHOPPING			
Gold-Leaf Makers.....	37	B5	
Jade Market.....	38	A5	
Mann Shwe Gon.....	39	C4	
Stone-Carvers' Workshops.....	40	B6	
Sunflower Arts & Crafts.....	(see 32)		
Temple Paraphernalia.....	(see 9)		
TRANSPORT			
Inland Water Transport Office.....	41	A5	

Medical Services

Main Hospital (Map p228; 30th St, 74/77)

Money

Kyaw Kyaw Aung Email (Map p230; 27th St, 80/81; ☎ 9am-6pm) Has iffy Internet, but can cash American Express or Thomas Cook travellers cheques at a whopping 20% commission.

Nan Myint (Map p230; 29th St) This shop can use Visa or MasterCard on purchases of US\$100 or more.

Sedona Hotel (see p238; 26th St) At research time, the Sedona was the only hotel that accepted credit cards.

Post

DHL Express Office (Map p228; 22nd St; ☎ 39274) Cannot send packages to the USA, because of the sanctions.

Main post office (Map p228; 22nd St; ☎ 9.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) Next door to the DHL office; sends your postcards overseas for K75. Mail is free (up to 7000g!) if you're blind.

Telephone

Local calls can be made for K200 from street stands all over Mandalay.

Central Telephone & Telegraph (CTT) (Map p230; 26th St; calls to Europe/North America/Thailand per min US\$3.20/4.50/1.40; ☎ 7am-8.30pm) Make expensive international calls at this official-looking, unsigned building set back from the street.

Tourist Information

Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT) (Map p230; ☎ 60356; cnr 68th & 27th Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm) The government-run tourist office, behind the Mandalay Swan Hotel, can book package trips to Mogok (per person US\$400; minimum of two people) or in mid-January to Khamti (aka Naga Land; from Mandalay/Yangon US\$670/920) to witness the Naga people's New Year celebrations on January 15. Only MTT can arrange trips to these destinations. For either, you'll need to book seven days in advance. MTT staff members speak English and sell a Mandalay map for K100.

New Horizon Travels (Map p230; ☎ 60767; 122 36th St, 78/79; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) This is a helpful branch of a dependable Yangon agency. Staff can help find long-term drivers, arrange guides, make hotel reservations and sell tickets.

SIGHTS

Mandalay Hill

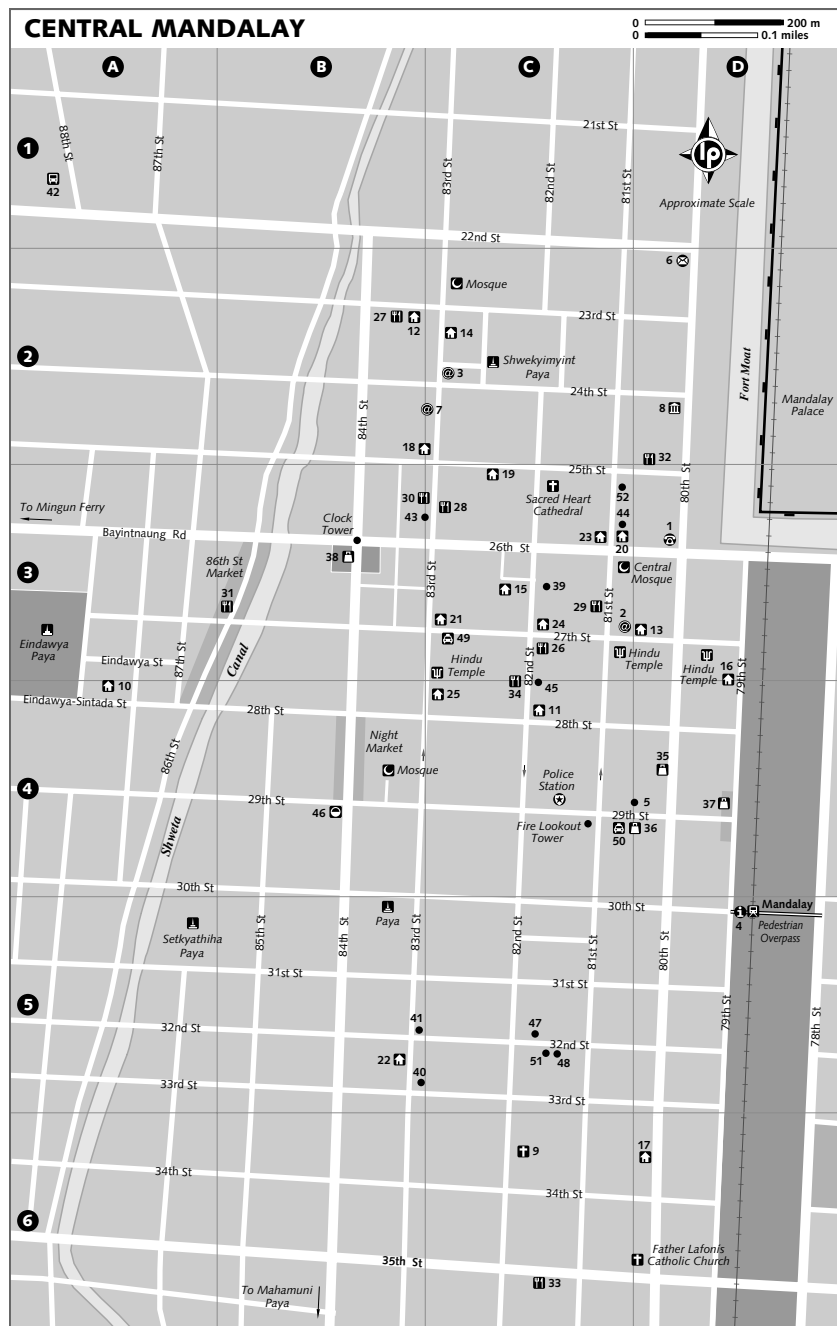
မန္တလေးတောင်
Many people begin a Mandalay stay at the one place that breaks out of the pancake-flat plain, 230m-high **Mandalay Hill** (Map p228;

THE US\$10 COMBO TICKET

Since 2002 the government has charged foreign tourists a combo US\$10 ticket fee (for the 'Mandalay Archaeological Zone') that includes entrance to Amarapura (p248) and Inwa (Ava; p251) outside the city, plus entry to all of the following Mandalay sites (easily Mandalay's biggest attractions):

- Atumashi Kyaung (p232)
- Cultural Museum Mandalay (p231)
- Kuthodaw Paya (p232)
- Mahamuni Paya (p234)
- Mandalay Palace (p233)
- Paleik Paya (p252)
- Shwenandaw Kyaung (p232)

At research time, not all places checked for the ticket; sometimes a secondary entrance bypasses the government fee collector. Some travellers report that local guides were able to steer them clear of fees in all but the palace. Ten dollars may sound steep, but at least a visit now is cheaper than when each sight charged up to US\$5 admission.



INFORMATION		Nylon Hotel.....18 B2	Night Market.....37 D4
Central Telephone & Telegraph (CTT).....1 D3	Royal Guest House.....19 C3	Sabai Phyu Hotel.....20 C3	Zeigyo (Central Market).....38 B3
DHL Express Office.....(see 6)	Silver Star Hotel.....21 C3	TRANSPORT	
Kyaw Kyaw Aung Email.....2 C3	Silver Swan Hotel.....22 B5	Air Mandalay Office.....39 C3	
Micro-Electronics Email Service.....3 C2	Taung Za Lat Hotel.....23 C3	Leo Express.....40 B5	
Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT).....4 D5	Unity Hotel.....24 C3	Mann Shwe Pyi.....41 B5	
Nan Myint.....5 D4	Universe Hotel.....25 C4	Monywa & Shwebo Bus Station.....42 A1	
Post Office.....6 D2	Winner.....7 C2	Mr Htoo Bicycles.....43 B3	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Chapati Stand.....26 C3	Myanma Airways Office.....44 C3
Cultural Museum Mandalay.....8 D2	Lashio Lay Restaurant.....27 B2	Nepali Food.....29 C3	New Seven Star Tours.....45 C4
Judson Baptist Church.....9 C6	Mann Restaurant.....28 C3	Nylon Ice Cream Bar.....30 B3	Pick-ups to Amarapura, Ava & Sagaing.....46 B4
SLEEPING		Produce Market.....31 B3	Pick-ups to the Highway Bus Station.....(see 49)
AD1 Hotel.....10 A4	Shwe Pyi Moe Cafe.....32 D2	Pyaw Bus Office.....47 C5	
Bonanza.....11 C4	Shwe Taung Food Centre.....33 C6	Pyin U Lwin & Hispaw Bus Ticket Office.....48 C5	
Classic Hotel.....12 B2	Snack Vendors.....34 C4	Pyin U Lwin Share Taxis.....49 C3	
Dream Hotel.....13 D3	SHOPPING		Shwe Airport Taxi.....50 C4
ET Hotel.....14 C2	Blazon.....35 D4	Toe Express.....51 C5	
Mandalay City Hotel.....15 C3	FUJI Film.....36 D4	Yangon Airways Office.....52 C3	
Mother's World Hotel.....16 D3			
Myit Phyar Ayer Hotel.....17 D6			

camera/video camera fee K350/1000). Visitors can taxi halfway up along a switchback road (allegedly built with the aid of forced labour), where an escalator leads to the top and an elevator goes back down (it's too steep up for trishaw drivers). Alternatively, you can make the half-hour barefoot climb that takes in numerous Buddha and nat shrines; there are many pleasant places to stop for a rest or a drink. At the top the reward is a full panoramic view – the hazy blue outline of the Shan hills to the east, the Mandalay Palace (and city sprawl) to the south and the Ayeayarwady to the west.

The camera fees are collected at the top of the hill.

Those walking the whole way will likely sweat off some of the previous night's chapatis. But the trek's not that hard. You can start at either of two entrances on the south side (which wind their way up and meet halfway to the top), or make a steeper ascent from the west. Two immense carved lions guard the southwest entrance to the hill, and the southeast entrance is watched over by the *Bobokyi Nat* (Boboki spirit). Leave your shoes with the attendants (the fee is K100) or keep them out of view in a bag. For most of the year it makes most sense to climb before 10am or after 4pm to avoid the midday heat.

The first shrine you come to, halfway up the hill, contains the so-called **Peshawar Relics**, three bones of the Buddha. The relics were originally sent to Peshawar, now in Pakistan, by the great Indian king Asoka. The stupa (Buddhist religious monument) into which they were built was destroyed in

the 11th century, but in 1908 the curator of the Peshawar Museum discovered the actual relic casket during excavations. Although Peshawar had once been a great Buddhist centre, it had by that time been Muslim for many centuries; therefore, the British government presented these important relics to the Burmese Buddhist Society.

Close to the top of the hill is a huge **standing Buddha image** that looks out towards the royal palace with its outstretched hand pointing in that direction. It's not saying 'go back' but pointing to where the Buddha prophesied the location of the future capital. According to legend, the Buddha, accompanied by his disciple Ananda, climbed Mandalay Hill while on one of his visits to Myanmar. There he prophesied that, in the 2400th year of his faith, a great city would be founded below the hill. By our calendar that 2400th year was 1857 – the year King Mindon Min decreed the move from Amarapura to Mandalay.

Those interested in military history can also find a monument to the British regiment that retook the hill from the Japanese in 1945. The monument is in a small building attached to one of the shrines at the top of a wide, steep flight of steps.

Cultural Museum Mandalay

မန္တလေးမြို့တိုက်
This **museum** (Map p230; ☎ 24603; cnr 24th & 80th Sts; admission US\$10 combo ticket; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) features a collection of Mandalay regalia, royally commissioned art and palm-leaf manuscripts, coins, and Bagan-period Buddha images. It's not brilliant, but it can

get you out of the sun (or rain); staff members don't always seem to check if you have the US\$10 ticket or not.

Sandamani Paya

စန္ဒာမာနီဘုရား

To the southeast of Mandalay Hill, close to the bus stop and near the road up to the hill, is the **Sandamani Paya** (Map p228). Similar to Kuthodaw (below), which is to the east, off the main road, the slightly run-down Sandamani features a cluster of slender white-washed stupas built on the site of King Mindon's temporary palace while the new Mandalay Palace was under construction.

King Mindon had come to power after the successful overthrow of King Pagan Min, an operation in which he had been assisted by his younger brother Prince Kanaung. Mindon tended to concentrate on religious matters and leave the niceties of secular rule to his brother, but in 1866 Prince Kanaung was assassinated in an unsuccessful revolt inspired by Prince Myingun. The Sandamani Paya was built as a memorial to Prince Kanaung on the spot where he was killed.

The paya enshrines an iron image of the Buddha cast in 1802 by Bodawpaya and transported here from Amarapura in 1874. Around the stupa lies a collection of 1774 marble slabs inscribed with commentaries on the Tripitaka (Buddhist canon). Another project of the venerable U Khanti, they were erected in 1913.

The government doesn't (yet) charge to visit here.

Kuthodaw Paya

ကုသိုလ်တော်ဘုရား

Frequently dubbed 'the world's biggest book' for its surrounding 729 marble slabs (apparently fewer than Sandamani's count, but why fuss over details?), the **Kuthodaw Paya** (Maha Lawka Marazein Paya; Map p228; admission US\$10 combo ticket) sees a lot of worship – and tourists. The entire 15 books of the Tripitaka are inscribed on the slabs, each of which is housed in its own small stupa. Building of the paya commenced in 1857, the same time work began on the royal palace. Kuthodaw was modelled on the Shwezigon Paya at Nyaung U, Bagan (see p309).

It took an editorial committee of over 200 to produce the original slabs. It has been estimated that, reading for eight hours a day,

one person would take 450 days to read the complete 'book'. King Mindon convened the 5th Buddhist Synod and used a team of 2400 monks to read the whole book in a nonstop relay lasting nearly six months! In 1900 a paper edition of the stone original was printed in 38 volumes, each with about 400 pages. A 730th slab in the corner of the inner enclosure tells of the construction of this amazing book.

Atumashi Kyaung

အတုမရှိကျောင်း

Recently rebuilt by convict labour, the **Atumashi Kyaung** (Map p228; admission US\$10 combo ticket) stands a couple of hundred metres south of Kuthodaw. Originally built by King Mindon in 1857, at the same time as the Kuthodaw, this *kyaung* (Burmese Buddhist monastery) features the traditional Burmese monastic construction – a masonry base topped by a wooden building – but instead of the usual multiroofed design it has graduated rectangular terraces. Atumashi was once home to a famous Buddha image clothed in king's silk clothing and with a huge diamond set on its forehead, but the image was stolen following the British takeover of the city in 1885. Five years later, a fire gutted the monastery and destroyed its contents (including four complete sets of the Tripitaka in teak boxes).

The renovated version is most impressive from outside (the basement area is particularly betel splattered).

Shwenandaw Kyaung

ရွှေစန်းတော်ကျောင်း

Just east of the Atumashi Kyaung stands the wooden **Shwenandaw Kyaung** (Golden Palace Monastery; Map p228; admission US\$10 combo ticket). This monastery is of great interest, not only as a fine example of a traditional Burmese wooden monastery, but also as a fragile reminder of the old Mandalay Palace. It was once part of the palace complex – King Mindon lived here, and in fact died in the building. Afterwards, King Thibaw Min had the building dismantled and reassembled outside the walls; it became a monastery in 1880. It's a good thing he did, as all the other royal buildings were lost to WWII bombs. It's said that Thibaw used the building for meditation, and the couch on which he sat can still be seen.

The building is covered inside and out with carved panels, but unfortunately many

of the exterior panels have weathered badly and some have been removed. At one time the building was gilded and decorated with glass mosaics. The carved panels inside are still in excellent condition, particularly the 10 Jataka (past-life stories of the Buddha).

Kyauktawgyi Paya

ကျောက်တော်ကြီးဘုရား

Directly south of Mandalay Hill (across 66th St from the previous sights) stands the **Kyauktawgyi Paya** (Map p228), built over a 25-year period that ended in 1878. The pagoda's nice enough, but its fame comes from its central occupant: an 8m, 900-tonne Buddha, carved from a single block of marble. The marble block (from the mines of nearby Sagyin) was so colossal, it's said, that 10,000 men spent 13 days transporting it from a canal to the current site. Ornamented with royal attire, the image was completed and dedicated in 1865.

Around the shrine are figures of the Buddha's 80 *arahats* (enlightened disciples), arranged in groups of 20 on each of the four sides. In a building in the southeast of the compound are a giant alms bowl and colourful renderings of King Mindon's visit here in 1865.

Originally, this paya, like its namesake in Amarapura, would be modelled on the famous Ananda Pahto of Bagan (p300), but due to a palace rebellion this grand plan was not carried through.

Mandalay's biggest festival is held at Kyauktawgyi Paya for seven days in early to mid-October to commemorate Thadingyut (see p341).

Mandalay Palace & Fort

The overwhelming centrepiece of Mandalay, the **palace compound** (Map p228; admission US\$10 combo ticket; ☎ 7.30am-5pm), sprawling south of Mandalay Hill, is surrounded by a fort made up of immense 3.2km-long, 8m-high walls and guarded by a 70m-wide moat. Visitors can enter at the east gate only (by trishaw, taxi, bicycle etc), where a road passes off-road army barracks to the royal palace site, surrounded by an internal ring road in the centre.

The rebuilding of the crimson and gold palace was stained the use of prison and forced local labour in the late '90s (when young males in Mandalay had to contribute

one day's labour per month). The new version sports a concrete construction topped by aluminium roofs. Many visitors abhor the reconstruction. Considering the toil taken to build it, many locals do too. The pavilions and most of the wall are original.

HISTORY

The original palace was more than just royal living quarters; it was a walled city within Mandalay. It served as the home to two Burmese kings, King Mindon Min (who built the palace in 1857) and King Thibaw (who lived here until British forces seized the city in 1885). Afterwards, the British used the palace as the colony's government house and British Club, packing King Thibaw off to India.

The Japanese held Mandalay for much of WWII. In March 1945, amid fierce fighting from advancing British and Indian troops, the royal palace caught fire and was destroyed. Only the huge walls and moat, the base on which the reconstructed palace buildings stand, and a few masonry buildings and tombs remain of the original palace. Beyond, in the restricted areas around the palace, Myanmar soldiers live in meagre barracks and grow fruit and vegetables for a little extra money.

THE SITE

Visitors are allowed to tour the central oval-shaped site, which is surrounded by a ring road, and a couple of sites in the field immediately northeast of the entrance. In the oval area, several crimson and gold pavilions loom ahead. Within the **palace compound** (to the left of the Mye Nan Pyathat temple, where the US\$10 combo ticket is asked for, or sold) is the 33m watchtower, Nan Myint Saung, where you can climb the spiral stairs to get views of the compound and city.

The central pavilion, just west of the 'Hall of Victory', is the so-called **Glass Palace**, where kings lived. The last building on the site's west side is the **Culture Museum**, which includes 13 life-size models of former cabinet members in traditional attire; signs in English tell their tale. One cabinet member, Prince Kanaung, is given props for being 'very clever' as he 'sent young scholars to western (sic) countries to study'. (Not exactly the same message the government gives today.)

About 100m northeast of the oval palace compound is the **tomb of King Mindaon**. It still has a little of its former gilded glory, when it was decorated with glass mosaics. An 1898 restoration obliterated all traces of the earlier craftsmanship. The large open sheds – back towards the road – contain over 600 inscribed **stone slabs** that were collected by King Bodawpaya (r 1782–1819) and were later moved to the palace from Amarapura just before WWII. Other reminders of the former glory of the old palace are the Royal Mint and the Sabbath Hall, which are also close by.

Foreign visitors must enter the compound from the gate on the eastern wall.

Mahamuni Paya

မဟာမုနိဘုရား

In southwest Mandalay, off the road towards Amarapura, stands the **Mahamuni Paya** (Map p228), one of Myanmar's more famous Buddhist sites (it's also known as Payagyi, or Big Paya, or the Rakhaing Paya). The gold and crimson site was originally built by King Bodawpaya in 1784, when a brick road was constructed from his palace to the paya's eastern gate. You can still find traces of this royal highway. In 1884 the shrine was destroyed by fire; the current one is comparatively recent.

The paya's fame comes from its shrine centrepiece, the highly venerated **Mahamuni Buddha image**, which was seized from Mrauk U (Myohaung) in Rakhaing (Arakan) State in 1784. It was believed to be of great age even at that time and it may even have been cast during the 1st century AD (though many in Rakhaing believe it to date from a legendary visit by the Buddha in 554 BC). The 4m-high seated image is cast in bronze, but over the years thousands of devout Buddhists have completely covered the figure in a 15cm-thick layer of gold leaf. Only men are permitted to walk up to the Mahamuni image and apply gold leaf. In the rainy season it is cloaked in monastic robes.

During festivals the image is thronged by so many worshippers that caretakers have installed video monitors in other parts of the complex so that the Burmese can pay their respects to the Mahamuni's video image; you'll actually see people bowing down before the TV screens. Each morning at 4am a team of monks washes the Mahamuni's

face and even brushes its teeth – an event worth getting up to see.

In the northwestern corner of the outer courtyard, a small building houses **six bronze Khmer figures** brought back from Rakhaing along with the Mahamuni Buddha. Three are lions (the heads of which have been replaced with ones in the Burmese style), two are images of the Hindu god Shiva, and one is Airavata, the three-headed elephant. Originally, these figures were enshrined at Angkor Wat in Cambodia; they were taken from Angkor by the Thais in 1431. King Bayinnaung subsequently looted them from Ayuthaya in 1564 and brought them to Bago, where in 1663 they were nabbed by King Razagyi of Rakhaing. (That's a lot of nabbing.) According to legend, rubbing a part of the image will cure any affliction on the corresponding part of your own body. Local legend has it that there were once many more Khmer figures here, but they were melted down by order of King Thibaw to cast cannons for the defence of the Mandalay Palace.

In the southeastern corner of the courtyard are **inscription stones** collected by King Bodawpaya, who appears to have had quite a thing for this pursuit.

There are many interesting **shop stalls** at the entrance to the shrine (though the little stone elephants are cheaper from the stone carvers to the west; see p242. See p348 before you buy, though). This was one of the few places in the country where photographs of Aung San Suu Kyi were openly sold during the long period of her house arrest.

During the Mahamuni Paya *pwe* (festival) in early February, thousands of people from nearby districts make pilgrimages to Mahamuni. The temple is always a centre of activity – including many palm readers and sly would-be 'guides' (have small notes handy).

Shwe In Bin Kyaung

ရွှေအင်ပင်ကျောင်း

On the lip of a rivulet, this large and elegant wooden **monastery** (Map p228; 89th & 38th Sts) dates from 1895, when a pair of wealthy Chinese jade merchants commissioned it. Called simply 'the teak monastery' by many locals, the central building stands elevated on tall poles, and its balustrades and roof cornices are covered in detailed engravings. It's incredibly peaceful and seldom crowded.

The surrounding villagelike neighbourhood is like a **monk's district**, with hundreds of robed monks walking to and from smaller monasteries on the leafy lanes, or playing football. One of the other more contemporarily active monasteries, **Ma Soe Yein Nu Kyaung**, is just across the bridge to the south from Shwe In Bin.

Other Sights

The **Zoological Garden** (Map p228; ☎ 60267; admission K1500; ☘ 8am–6pm) has a small collection of animals. It can be entered from the south (north of the palace walls) or from the east, near the Mandalay Hill Resort.

Mandalay has several churches and mosques among the many temples, including the **Judson Baptist Church** (Map p230; 82nd St, 33/34), named for the American missionary who has virtually become a saint in Myanmar. Other key churches and mosques are marked on the map.

Yankin Paya, perched on Yankin Hill about 3km east of Mandalay Palace, is a good spot for watching sunsets. You can bike to its base or go by the No 5 bus.

ACTIVITIES

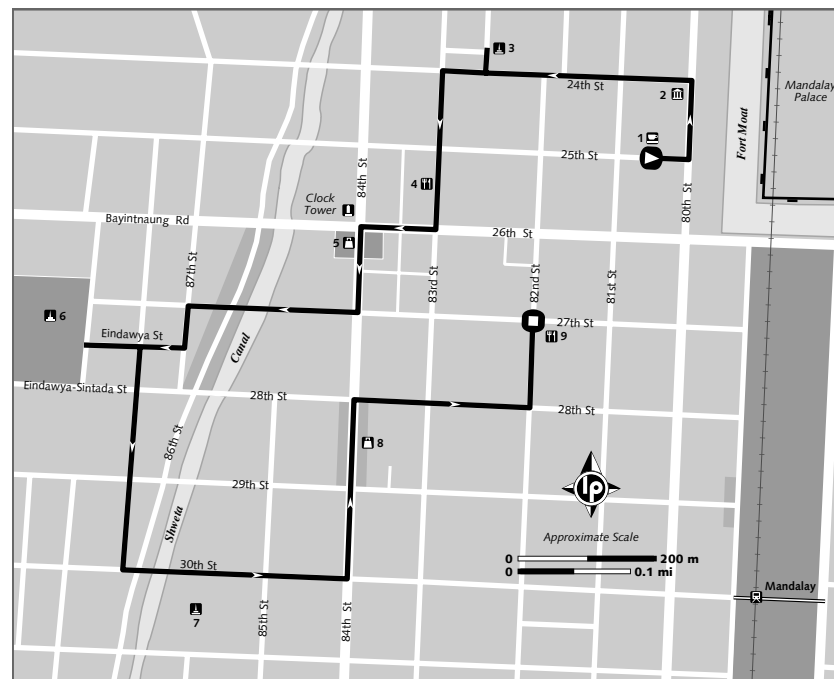
The outdoor **Yatanaban Swimming Pool** (Map p228; admission K200; ☘ 5am–6pm), next to the east entrance to the Zoological Garden, is the best bet for a cheap dip. A restaurant, bumper cars and a karaoke club surround the Olympic-sized pool, which is generally pretty quiet during the heat of the day. The kids' pool looked thoroughly urinated in, but the main pool was OK. Pay at the stand under the bleachers on the far side.

Asia Centre Driving Range (Map p228; ☎ 64583; club hire per club/half set K300/1500; tray of 60 balls '1st class'/dented '2nd class' K800/300; ☘ 6am–7pm), north of the zoo, has a line of shaded, fan-cooled outdoor spots facing Mandalay Hill. You can hire clubs. Ask here about playing the nearby **golf course** (green fee US\$30, caddie K500).

DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

Distance: 2.3km

Duration: About two hours



Not much of Mandalay can be seen on foot, but this loose tour takes in some (mostly) secondary sights and the city's most interesting street life in a few hours.

Start a block from the Mandalay Palace moat with tea at the **Shwe Pyi Moe Café** (1; p240); if the desire strikes, take a cultural chaser a block north at the **Cultural Museum Mandalay** (2; p231). Head west a couple of blocks to see the lushly shaded and peaceful **Shwekyimiyint Paya** (3; Map p230; btwn 23rd & 24th, 82nd & 83rd Sts), which considerably predates Mandalay itself. Prince Minshinzaw (the exiled son of King Alaungsithu) founded it in 1167, during the Bagan period. The shrine is notable because it contains the original Buddha image consecrated by the prince. It also contains many other images, made of gold, silver or crystal, which were collected by later Myanmar kings and removed from Mandalay Palace after the British occupied it. These images are only shown to the public on important religious occasions. The small, glass-enclosed stupa (near the east entrance) houses several Buddha images.

Afterwards, take 83rd St south, perhaps stopping at **Nylon Ice Cream Bar** (4; p240), then turn right onto busy 26th St. Looming ahead is a clock tower, standing smack-dab in the middle of 26th and 84th Sts on the northern side of the relocated **zeigyo** (central market; 5; see p242). The original market, designed in 1903 by Count Caldari (the Italian first secretary of the Mandalay Municipality), was dismantled – much to the dismay of locals – around 1990 and moved here to these two three-storey buildings done in People's-Republic-of-China style. Less atmospheric, for sure, but the market still represents a fascinating collection of stalls and sells all things Myanmar – plus a fair assortment of smuggled goods.

Squeeze past vendors on 27th St to the west, then detour onto brick Eindawya St (where shops sell monk gear) to reach the nicely proportioned but slightly scruffy **Eindawya Paya** (6; Map p230), which is covered in gold leaf that shimmers on sunny days. King Pagan Min built the paya in 1847. Eindawya was the site of one of Myanmar's many small battles for independence. In 1919 a group of Europeans who defied the Buddhist ban on shoe-wearing within Eindawya were forcibly evicted by outraged monks. Four monks were convicted by a colonial court, and their

alleged leader, U Kettaya, received a life sentence. (So take your shoes off.)

OK, one more paya. Roam south to 30th St and head a block east to reach the elevated **Setkyathiha Paya** (7; Map p230; 30th St; admission free). It was badly damaged during WWII, but was subsequently repaired. Its main point of interest is the impressive 5m-high seated Buddha image, cast in bronze by King Bagyidaw in Inwa in 1823, just before the First Anglo-Burmese War broke out. Since then it's been moved to Amarapura in 1849 (during the Second Anglo-Burmese War) and then returned to Mandalay in 1884 (just before British troops overtook the city). Reclining Buddha images can be seen in the paya courtyard, along with a sacred bodhi tree planted by U Nu, a former prime minister of Myanmar.

From here, take a trishaw – or walk back via the **night market** (8; p242) on 84th St. If it's after 4pm or 5pm, consider finishing the tour off with a hot chapati at the **chapati stand** (9; p239) at the corner of 82nd and 27th Sts.

MANDALAY FOR CHILDREN

Mandalay has no designated kid zones. Most children will get more out of the Mandalay Marionettes & Culture Show (p241) than the Moustache Brothers Troupe (p240). The Mandalay zoo (p235) has several animals to see on shaded grounds. If a *pwe* is going there's a lot of fun to be had – including live music, small rides and balloon-popping games. (Note that some can bring a drunken element out as the night wears on, so go early.)

Some kids may enjoy taking close-up looks at the moat surrounding Mandalay Palace (p233); there's a shady promenade on the southern side, not far from downtown.

Many stores around town sell makeshift kites; dusk seems to be the peak hour for flying them along busy streets, particularly downtown. Note that some flyers use razor-webbed string and 'war' with each other. Plenty of kites dangle from power lines around town.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Traditional *pwe* (small or massive) happen all the time, for a wedding, a birthday, a funeral, a holiday and so on. You'll see them in side streets and payas. Ask a trishaw driver if they've passed one.

Mahamuni Paya pwe This happens in early February, when thousands of people from nearby districts make pilgrimages to Mahamuni (see p234).

Thadingyut Mandalay's biggest festival is held in early to mid-October at Kyauktawgyi Paya (see p233) for seven days.

SLEEPING

If you're just off the bus/train/plane from Yangon, expect greater value for your kyat. If you're staying cheaply, Mandalay's guesthouses huddle in the walkable 'downtown' and most are up on travel info.

Budget rooms are those where doubles are US\$16 and under; midrange rooms cost US\$17 to US\$35; and top-end rooms are more than US\$17. From April to October it's likely that all places will have empty rooms waiting for you. Try calling at least a day or two ahead at other times.

All room rates include breakfast and have private bathrooms with hot water unless otherwise stated.

Budget

Royal Guest House (Map p230; ☎ 65697; No 41 25th St, 82/83; s US\$3-7, d US\$6-10; 🏠) In the city centre, Royal Guest House tends to be the cheapest that fills first. The scrubbed-clean rooms are small but well designed. Free breakfast is served in the downstairs dining room. Guests can bring beer (from outside) to sit in the tasteful garden out the front or on the small top-floor terrace. The cheapest rooms have fan and shared bathroom; others have private bathroom with hot water; higher-priced rooms have TV.

ET Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 65006; No 129 83rd St, 23/24; s US\$5-6, d US\$8-10; 🏠) This friendly guesthouse near the Shan district has basic rooms and a book swap downstairs. Most rooms have TV; cheaper ones have a fan.

Nylon Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 66550, 60757; nylon@mandalay.net.mm; cnr 25th & 83rd Sts; s US\$3-5, d US\$6-10; 🏠 📺) A modern building above a generator shop, the Nylon has an array of rooms (most with air-con, some with TV). Rooms on the 4th and 5th floors have big views (room 401 is a good cheapie up there). Free breakfast is served in the upstairs dining area. Internet is K1000 per hour. Helpful staff can arrange transport, but some guests have paid some extra commission on things like toilet paper and taxis.

AD1 Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 34505, 09-69 71116; Eindawya Sintada St, 87/88; s/d US\$3/6; 🏠) A bit removed

from the rest, in the most 'kept-real' quarter of Mandalay (between the crazy market and Eindawya Paya), the friendly AD1 is on a brick lane lined with shops selling gear to monks. The halls are a little scuffed, but the 27 rooms are clean and cute, with sky-blue tiles. Breakfast is served on the roof.

Classic Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 32841; No 59 23rd St, 83/84; s/d US\$8/16; 🏠 📺) Near Lashio Lay Restaurant, in the north of downtown, the Classic has tidy rooms with TV; it's a bit pricier than ET Hotel around the corner, without a real jump up in quality.

Mother's World Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 33627; fax 66802; No 58 79th St, 27/28; s/d US\$10/18; 🏠 📺) The street's a little trashy (it's behind the train station), but the hotel has well-kept carpeted or green-tiled rooms with Chinese-style woodwork; single room No 506 has full views of Mandalay Hill and the Shan hills.

Sabai Phyu Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 64506; No 58 81st St, 25/26; s/d US\$4/8; 🏠) The 20 slightly worn rooms here have green carpet or bubbly plastic-tiled floors. There are excellent views from the breakfast area on the top floor.

Other downtown budget options (by the look of their lobbies, they're far swankier than the ones listed above but have little bonus value inside the rooms):

Bonanza Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 31031; cnr 28th & 82nd Sts; s US\$7-10, d US\$12-15; 🏠) Higher-priced rooms have a bit more space.

Taung Za Lat Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 33967; No 60 81st St, at 26th St; s/d US\$10/15; 🏠) Set up like a midrange hotel; no TV.

Tiger Hotel (Map p228; ☎ 23134; No 628 80th St; s/d US\$13/15; 🏠) On a dusty road south of downtown. Chinese-style woodwork adds some flair, and the front rooms have big windows.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Peacock Lodge (☎ 33411, 61429; No 5 Myaypadethar St, off 61st St, 25/26; s/d US\$12/18; 🏠) Lost in the back lanes east of the Palace walls, the Peacock offers villagelike peace, and the owners treat you like part of the family. Guests are likely to be offered a whisky over a leisurely afternoon chat in the photo-filled TV room. The seven wooden-floored rooms do fill up in the high season. Bicycles are available. A library of old books includes a 1938 Mandalay phone book (lots of British names in there).

Unity Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 35142; unityhotel@mptmail.net.mm; cnr 27th & 82nd Sts; s US\$12-16, d US\$14-18; ♿) Building has a lift. Higher-priced rooms have a small sitting area and a desk.

Midrange

Many of Mandalay's midrange hotels don't reward the extra dollars and seem to run off the same template: a 10-storey Chinese-style building with door guy, elevator and rather unloved clean rooms. Here are some that rise above the norm.

Royal City Hotel (Map p228; ☎ 31805; No 130 27th St, 76/77; s US\$13-15, d US\$18-20; ♿) Owned by the proprietors of the Royal Guest House, and likewise the top of its price bracket, the polished Royal City often fills up. Its big rooms, stylishly decked, come with TV, phone and serious views from the wood-framed windows. Breakfast is served on the outdoor/indoor roof garden, facing east for sunrise.

Mandalay View Inn (Map p228; ☎ 61119; mandalay.viewinn@mptmail.net.mm; No 17B 66th St, 26/27; r US\$30-35; ♿) Though there's really no view (other than of the Sedona Hotel across the street), this family-style hotel near the Palace is a welcoming place with a dozen rooms, which wins fans of its guests. The higher-priced rooms are worth the US\$5, with wood floors and a small balcony. All rooms have satellite TV. Reserve a table ahead.

Myit Phyar Ayer Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 66521; fax 35646; No 568 80th St, 33/34; s/d US\$20/25; ♿) This is the nicest of the Chinese-style hotels downtown. Marionettes and wood statues adorn the lushly air-con lobby; rooms have wood floors, sitting areas and satellite TVs.

Silver Star Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 33394; cnr 27th St & 83rd St; s/d US\$20/25; ♿) The high-rise Silver Star follows the same template as most midrange options, but, opened in 2004, it's newer than most others in this category. Rooms are slightly scented.

Silver Swan Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 32178; silverswanhotel@mptmail.net.mm; No 568 83rd St, 32/33; s US\$15-20, d US\$20-25; ♿) Rooms atop this towering hotel (slightly nicer than some midrange deals) come with a view. Pricier rooms have bathtubs (as opposed to showers) and a bit more space. Some package holidaymakers fill the rooms in December and January.

Midrange places with similar (but slightly less appealing) rooms than other midrange options are listed following:

Dream Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 60470; dream.mdy@mptmail.net.mm; No 152 27th St, 80/81; s/d US\$12/24; ♿)

Pacific Hotel (Map p228; ☎ 32506; cnr 30th & 78th Sts; r US\$25; ♿) Across from the train station.

Power Hotel (Map p228; ☎ 32406; No 686 80th St, 39/40; s/d US\$15/20; ♿)

Universe Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 33246; No 215 83rd St, 27/28; s/d US\$15/20; ♿) Asian pop lounge on 10th floor.

The government-run Mandalay Swan Hotel is not recommended.

Top End

Mandalay's high-end hotels can't compare with the standards of Yangon's.

Mandalay Hill Resort Hotel (Map p228; ☎ 35688; fax 35639; mdyhill@mptmail.net.mm; standard r US\$90 & US\$120, ste US\$150-550; ♿) This former French-run Novotel (now a Thai joint venture) sits impressively between the north end of the Palace and Mandalay Hill. Rooms are fine, but the bathrooms are notably small, even in the suites. The pool is super, though, and there are two bars and a restaurant.

Sedona Hotel Mandalay (Map p228; ☎ 36488; fax 36499; www.sedonahotels.com.sg; cnr 26th & 66th Sts; superior r US\$108, deluxe r US\$120; ♿) This palatial hotel (a Singaporean joint venture) faces the southeastern corner of the palace. Rooms are a bit standard for the price, but the pool sprawls, and the deluxe views of the Palace moat and far-off Mandalay Hill can't be beat. Also, at research time, this hotel was the only one in town that accepted credit cards.

Mandalay City Hotel (Map p230; ☎ 36136; fax 61705; mdycityhotel@myanmar.com.mm; s/d US\$50/55; ♿) Opened in 2004, this locally run hotel features a lush garden and a lit-at-night pool in a very unlikely location in a lot behind stores (a bus station used to be here). The hotel seemed to rush its opening (there are some awkward room designs and so on), but it's the cheapest hotel in town with a pool.

EATING

Mandalay offers a bit more eating potential beyond the usual rice-and-curry shops you see around the country. But not a lot. Those looking for fresh goods can go to the **produce market** (Map p230; 86th St, 26/28) off the canal between 26th and 28th Sts.

Bamar & Shan

Too Too Restaurant (Map p228; 27th St, 74/75; meals K800; ☎ 10am-9pm) Many locals vow that this

long-running brick-floored hole-in-the-wall serves Mandalay's best traditional dishes. Go to the counter at the back and pick-and-point what you want – catfish curry, prawn fish ball, fried chicken. Everything comes with rice and a tableful of condiments. The soups are tasty too.

Lashio Lay Restaurant (Map p230; No 65 23rd St; dishes K300-400; ☎ 8am-10pm) One of a couple of great Shan restaurants in the area (and with the best food downtown), this two-floor spot is constantly crammed. Two dozen Shan dishes (mostly curries with rice, plus several vegetarian options daily) are on offer, served under blazing fans by attendants sporting a yellow, green and red Shan flag.

Aya Myit Tar Myanmar Restaurant (Map p228; 81st St; meals K800-1900; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm) Near the Moustache Brothers and between Mahamuni Paya and downtown, this airy two-room restaurant sees a busy local crowd. Staff members speak minimal English, but there's an English menu for traditional dishes – including lobster curry for K1900 – that come with the usual condiments.

Green Elephant (Map p228; ☎ 61237; No 3H 27th St; curries K2000-4000, soups K1000-1500; ☎ 10am-9pm) This great upscale restaurant, one of a few in the area, occupies a pretty colonial-era building. There are bamboo-covered areas in the garden, and period-piece relics (including a green elephant called 'Freddie' – just joking, it's not named) in the air-conditioned rooms inside. Beef curry with soy paste and lime leaves (K3000) delivers the goods. The sprawling menu includes Chinese and Thai dishes too.

Shwe Taung Food Centre (Map p230; ☎ 23127; 35th St; meat dishes K1500-2500, veg dishes K800-1000; ☎ 10am-9.30pm) If you *must* have air-con, this rather formal place, south of downtown, serves a cool breeze along with Myanmar fare. There's a nightly music performance at 7.30pm.

Some locals advise that Burmese food is best at lunch (when it's freshest), and go for Chinese or Indian later on. A key exception can be found at the hopping **barbecue restaurants** (Map p228; 30th St, 65/66), which are best after dark. Each has open-air and inside seats with fans. Out the front, pick the skewers of meat (pork, chicken, whole fish) or a couple of veggie options (lady fingers, spiced bean curd) and hand to the cooks. A full meal plus a beer or two runs around K3000 to K4000.

Indian & Nepali

Mandalay has many a chapati, veggie curry and dhal filling grateful tummies, particularly in crater-in-the-wall restaurants around downtown. You can find a cluster on 27th St between 80th and 81st Sts.

Nepali Food (Map p230; 81st St, 266/27; dishes K900; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) Our favourite veggie curries came from this place, run by a welcoming Nepali family. The *thali* (dollops of curry served on banana leaves or a metal plate) features three curries (the banana-leaf one is particularly good), chapati, rice and dhal. There's no meat, no alcohol and no eggs.

Marie-Min Vegetarian Restaurant (Map p228; 27th St, 74/75; dishes K600-1400; ☎ 8am-9pm, closed May) Run by a smiling Indian Catholic family, this traveller-oriented restaurant serves all veggie meals (the sign out the front says, 'be kind to animals by not eating them'). The tasty lasis are made with purified water. Also there are plenty of chapati meals (aubergine dip with vegetables is a nice choice) and Western breakfasts. The two-floor restaurant/home is down a lane, roughly midway between 74th and 75th Sts. The family also runs an impressive antiques shop (see p242).

Chinese

Several Chinese restaurants can be found on 83rd St between 25th and 26th Sts, not far from the *zeigyo*.

Mann Restaurant (Map p230; 83rd St; dishes K600-800; ☎ 7am-10pm) This bare-bones downtown eatery attracts red-faced local men drinking Tiger Beer presented by a Ms Tiger rep, and more than a handful of foreigners huddled over guidebooks. The food's good, and the

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE: CHAPATIS AT DUSK

For people watching and price, nothing beats the unnamed open-air **chapati stand** (Map p230; cnr 27th & 82nd Sts; meals under K300; ☎ 5-9pm) where diners in turbans, *longyi* (sarong-style lower garments), skullcaps and an occasional traveller's backpack sop up veggie and meat curries with just-made chapatis. It hops in the early evening as rush-hour traffic – and kids with kites – fill the roads and airways around the tiny wooden-stool and plastic-chair sitting areas on the footpath.

place is an easy walk from most guesthouses. There are lots of horns on the walls.

Oriental House (Map p228; ☎ 61143; cnr 27th & 64th Sts; dim sum per piece K200; ☎ 6.30am-2pm dim sum, 5-9pm dinner) This big banquet hall – with waterfalls out the front, kiddie toys in the huge ground floor and more seating up-stairs – is best for its midday dim sum.

Thai

Ko's Kitchen (Map p228; ☎ 34214; cnr 19th & 80th Sts; soups & dishes K1700-4500; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-10pm) This snazzy two-floor restaurant, facing the Palace walls and moat, smacks of a Western version of Thai (ie quite comfy and cool) and has a big menu, including a knock-out prawn hotpot and several northern Thai specialties, including eggplant chilli dip and crispy pork skin. A favourite salad is the *yam pla duk foo* (spicy catfish salad with cashews).

Western

BBB (Map p228; ☎ 25623; No 292 76th St, 26/27; dishes around K3000; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) A two-floor bamboo lodge done up to provide serious Western comfort (ie big-time air-con and ESPN on the telly), the BBB (Barman Beer Bar) offers a good respite from dust (and rice) with pastas, burgers, superb BBQ chicken and steak with mushrooms. Soups come with piping-hot bread.

Teashops

Mandalay teems with teashops, which are great for picking up snacks; these are two of our favourites.

Shwe Pyi Moe Cafe (Map p230; 25th St, 80/81; tea K80; ☎ 5.30am-5.30pm) Downtown's busiest teashop. Shwe Pyi Moe makes top-quality teas, boils up fresh *ei-kyu-kwe* (long, deep-fried pastries, known as *you tio* in Chinese; K70) in the giant wok up the front, and fries pancakes with banana (K180).

Minn Thi Ha Teashop (no English sign; Map p228; 38th St, 83/84; ☎ 5am-6pm) Between downtown and Mahamuni Paya or the jade market, this quiet teashop is another one worth steering to. The young snack-serving staff isn't 100% used to seeing foreign faces, so get ready for curiosity.

Cafés

Nylon Ice Cream Bar (Map p230; No 173 83rd St, 25/26; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm) The de-facto meeting place

for locals and downtown-based travellers, the Nylon has outside tables (the shade starts in the afternoon) worth lingering for in the evening. A scoop of chocolate, strawberry or vanilla ice cream is K200. The shakes and lassis are good too. You can get a Myanmar Beer – to stay or go – for K1000.

Snack vendors (mostly serving Indian desserts and sweet rice) fill the downtown streets from 4pm. A good place is in front of the mosque on 82nd St between 27th and 28th Sts (Map p230).

DRINKING

See left for details of a couple of teashops in Mandalay.

Beer Stations

Mandalay doesn't have pubs and bars (it's Myanmar after all). A couple of buzzing eating places good to sit over a beer are the barbecue restaurants (p238) on 30th St, and the Nylon Ice Cream Bar (left) downtown. Hotel-wise, the Gem Club and Kipling's Lounge at the Mandalay Hill Resort Hotel (p238) are nice, if a little stuffy, though the latter has live music nightly; you can order drinks by the pool too.

Small shops around Mandalay sell cold beer for about K1000 to K1200 per bottle of Myanmar Beer, the local Mandalay Beer (a bit watery) or Tiger Beer, which you can take to your hotel (best if it has a roof terrace).

ENTERTAINMENT

The neighbourhood surrounding the house of the Moustache Brothers – Mandalay's 'West End', as their troupe leader Lu Maw jokes – is home to many *pwe* troupes (not banned by the government), which practise their craft during June and July from 10am to 4pm daily. Visitors are welcome to wander and watch, free (donations are appreciated). You'll see traditional *pwe* (see p236) in side streets and payas.

Moustache Brothers Troupe (Map p228; 39th St, 80/81; donation K2500; ☎ 8.30pm) Performed in the home of the banned Moustache Brothers, this famous, colourful troupe has celebrated traditional Myanmar folk opera for over three decades. The show is quite in your face, and pretty cornball, as it's relayed from atop a miniwood-crate stage, with a dozen or so plastic chairs 1m away. The one-time famous troupe is now banished from public

MOUSTACHE BROTHERS – FROM SLAPSTICK TO SATIRE

A Moustache Brothers show is not just a glimpse of a traditional *a-nyeint pwe* (a vaudeville folk opera with dance, music, jokes and silly walks); it's about artists brave enough to continue their work in a country where a joke can get you jailed – or worse. Two of the 'brothers' know this all too well. In 1996, after telling politically tinged jokes about Myanmar generals at an Independence Day celebration at Aung San Suu Kyi's compound in Yangon, Par Par Lay and bare-faced cousin Lu Zaw (two-thirds of the troupe) were seized by police and sentenced to seven years' hard labour. Initially they worked amid violent criminals, breaking rocks for roads and digging ditches, and were unable to receive visits from their family.

In 1997 several Hollywood comedians (including Rob Reiner and political comedian Bill Maher) wrote to the government in protest. Meanwhile, Par Par Lay's brother, the outgoing Lu Maw, kept up the show here with his wife.

After serving five years of their seven-year sentence, Par Par Lay and Lu Zaw were released in 2002. The Moustache Brothers remain 'blacklisted' from playing at outside events (marriages, funerals, festivals and so on) – and continue to be off the government's lists of artists that locals can legally hire. So the brothers celebrated the occasion at home with a series of gala performances, attended – inevitably – by government agents with video cameras.

The regional commander soon summoned Par Par Lay and told him not to perform at home any more. When he got home, some Westerners had already gathered for that night's show, and he and his family cleverly decided to perform without costumes and makeup. Thus the show went on for the tourists (and the 'KBG' people – Lu Zaw's nickname for Myanmar's military intelligence). They explained they were merely 'demonstrating' a performance since they couldn't do a 'real' one without costumes. It worked. Since that defiant evening they have been generally left alone, doing nightly shows at their home for anyone who wants to see them. (And some of the costumes have come out too.)

Historically, Par Par Lay was the famous one. As the only English speaker, tireless bundle of energy Lu Zaw has become the clear spokesperson for the group now that the shows are limited to English.

performances, and its original *schtick* in Burmese has shifted to English. The leader, Lu Maw, kneels over an antique microphone stand and jokes through a minispeaker, as the night meanders through slapstick, political satire, Myanmar history, traditional dance and music, and how to tie up your *longyi*. Lu Maw's English is pretty good – he's particularly fond of expressions like 'cat out of the bag' and 'hold the fort' – though if you speak English as a second language you may struggle a bit. He retells the story of their woes (even showing a clip from the Hugh Grant film *About a Boy*, which mentions his brother Par Par Lay). It's a good idea to bone up on some Myanmar factoids (eg Ne Win, 1988, Aung San) before attending. T-shirts are K5000. You can drop by any time to chat. See also the boxed text, above.

Mandalay Marionettes & Culture Show (Map p228; ☎ 34446; www.mandalaymarionettes.com; 66th St, 26/27; admission K3500; ☎ 8.30pm) Opened in 1986, this small theatre holds popular hour-long shows daily. Five traditional musicians

play on the floor – a couple sit in drum circles, while another plays the distinctive *hneh* (oboe-like instrument) – before a small stage. These musicians introduce traditional dancers and puppeteers, who recreate tales of *zat pwe* (Buddhist Jataka tales) and Yamazat (tales from the Indian epic Ramayana) traditions. Many handmade marionettes line the walls; all are for sale (puppets start at US\$6). At various points the curtain is raised to show the artists – some are pretty wily characters – performing their art. Traditionally, such shows were used for education and to convey news. This troupe (though based on tourism) is the most serious, among several around the country, about preserving the folk art.

SHOPPING Arts & Crafts

Mandalay is a major crafts centre, and probably the best place in the country for traditional puppets (antique or new) and hand-woven *kalaga* designed in the style of

Myanmar's royal days. If you enter without a tout or a driver, you can get (slightly) better deals, as touts usually get commissions.

Handicrafts are available at a few vendor stalls in the *zeigyo* or at the Mahamuni Paya (Map p228) entrance. Keep in mind that some of the items sold at these shops – older *kalaga*, *parabaik* (Buddhist palm-leaf manuscripts), *kammawa* (lacquered scriptures), gems, jade and any authentic antiques – aren't legally supposed to be taken out of the country.

Mann Shwe Gon (Map p228; No 14 27th St, 72/73; ☎ 7am-10pm) This tapestry and handicrafts shop – founded in 1990 and run by a friendly family – was being relocated, without choice, at press time, though the new location wasn't yet known. Ask around to find it for (some pricey) intricately hand-woven handicrafts including *kalaga* pillowcases (from US\$5) and wall hangings done in the fashion of royal *longyi* (US\$65 and up). Everything's made at the workshop on site.

Sunflower Arts & Crafts (Map p228; 27th St, 74/75) Part of the Marie-Min Vegetarian Restaurant, the Sunflower fills two excellent showrooms on either side of the alley with new and old bronze and wood doodahs (small wooden elephants with bending tusks are about US\$7). There are also antique (and quite anatomically correct) puppets. Quoted prices start at around US\$15, but new puppets are cheaper (US\$3 to US\$5).

Mandalay Marionettes (p241) sells new puppets during the day or at nightly shows.

If you have a dilapidated stupa in need of refurbishing, head for the western exit of the Mahamuni Paya – here you'll find workshops manufacturing all sorts of temple paraphernalia (Map p228). If the *hti* (pinnacle of a stupa) has toppled, then this is the place to come for a new one.

Mandalay's gold-leaf makers (Map p228) are concentrated in the southeast of the city, near the intersection of 36th and 78th Sts. Sheets of gold are beaten into gossamer-thin pieces, which are then cut into squares and sold in packets to devotees for gilding images or even complete stupas. The typical gold-leaf square measures just 0.000127cm, thinner than the ink on this page. Gilding a Buddha image or a stupa with gold leaf brings great merit to the gilder, so there's a steady growth of gold leaf on many images in Myanmar.

Markets

Zeigyo (central market; Map p230; 84th St, 26/28) This downtown market offers wall-to-wall stands selling just about everything Myanmar in two large modern buildings and in stalls spilling out onto the footpaths.

Produce market (p238; 86th St 26/28) Just to the west, over a small creek, this is an up-to-your-neck, open-air produce market where ox carts, trishaws and trucks bringing and taking goods can fill up the little lanes.

Night market (Map p230; cnr 28th & 84th Sts) Offering all kinds of food, music and clothing, this market keeps the area lit up and active after dark.

Other

Blazon (Map p230; 80th St, 28/29; ☎ 9am-8.30pm) This new four-floor mall sells imported goods (at a price), if you need a US\$50 pair of Adidas, US\$6 Haagen Daz ice cream, US\$20 designer shirts, or food or wine from abroad.

Fujifilm (Map p230; 29th St, 80/81; developing fee K200, per photo K50) Develop film downtown in K200.

Stones & Sculpture

The **jade market** (Map p228; admission US\$1; ☎ 7am-5pm) is the lively market amid the 'monk district' in the back lanes southwest of the centre. It features dozens of open-air stalls and low tables where locals squat and get serious about rough and polished pieces of jade and other gems. While most of the jade seen here is genuine (and unlicensed), not all is of high quality. In the past, some vendors sold jade 'boulders' smuggled in from Kachin State; these may be fakes with thin sheets of jade peering through the brown outer 'skin', with the inside filled with cement or worthless stone. Only foreigners pay to go in, but often no-one collects the fee.

Just across from the west entrance of the Mahamuni Paya is a whole series of **stone-carvers' workshops** (Map p228), around the corner of 45th and 84th Sts. You can see workers blast slabs of rock, chip them into shapes (Buddhas, small elephants etc) and polish them. A tiny elephant costs about K1000, a medium-sized Buddha K10,000.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Mandalay's huge, gleaming airport – a staggering 45km south of the centre – sends and

receives daily flights around the country via Air Mandalay (AM), Yangon Airways (YA), Bagan Air (BA) and the government's risky Myanmar Airways (MA). Travel agents and airline offices offered the following one-way rates on nongovernment airlines at research time. Most destinations are connected daily. Flights to Thandwe usually make a stop in Yangon.

Destination	Price (US\$)
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Heho	US\$42-50
Kengtung	US\$87
Nyaung U	US\$42-46
Tachileik	US\$125
Thandwe	US\$107
Yangon	US\$96-102

MA has exclusive services to several destinations, including Kalaymyo (US\$55) on Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday; and Khamti (US\$80) on Monday and Friday. There are also a couple of flights to Monywa (US\$35). Flights to Lashio (US\$40) only operate when government officials make the flight and open seats get sold!

Airline offices downtown (have your passport and US dollars handy):

Air Mandalay (Map p230; ☎ 31548; 82nd St, 26/27; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Head office for AM.

Myanmar Airways (Map p230; ☎ 35221; 81st St, 25/26; ☎ 9am-2pm) Eerily, a poster ('You're safe with us') hangs behind the front desk.

Yangon Airways (Map p230; ☎ 31799; 81st St, 25/26; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Several travel agents book air tickets (only), often at a slightly discounted rate (about US\$5 per ticket). One downtown choice is **New Seven Star Tours** (Map p230; ☎ 60990; No 269 83rd St, 27/28; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun).

Boat

Government-owned **Inland Water Transport office** (IWT; Map p228; ☎ 36035; 35th St; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), at the western end of Yangyiaung Rd (35th St), sells tickets for destinations up and down the Ayeyarwady including Bagan, Pyay (Prome) and Bhamo. Often hotels can get the tickets (and save you a trip); alternatively, you can get them (at 10% commission) from the MTT offices (see p229). It's sometimes said that you need to buy tickets a few days in advance,

but often it's OK to buy them one day beforehand. IWT generally accepts US dollars only.

There are two ferry services between Mandalay and Bagan. The express boat has fewer stops. Everyone gets seats on the deck below, or you can pay K2000 for a deck chair to lounge up top. There's also a reasonable dining area and plenty of deck space to move about. The slow boat has no reserved seats, but it's usually not too mad finding a spot.

At research time, the following were the prices and times for some trips out of Mandalay. (When applicable, multiple prices are for lower deck/upper deck/cabin.)

Destination	Price (US\$)	Duration	Frequency
Bagan (slow boat)	US\$10	15hr	5.30am (Sun & Wed)
Bagan (express boat)	US\$16	9hr	6am (Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat)
Bhamo	US\$9/24/54	2-3 days	5.30am (Tue, Fri & Sun)
Katha	US\$7/21/47	1-2 days	6am (Mon, Thu & Sat)
Myitkyina	US\$9/27/56	3-4 days	6am (Mon, Thu & Sat)
Pyay (slow boat)	US\$10	2-3 days	Tue & Sat

For more on the fun, long-haul boat trips on the Ayeyarwady from Myitkyina, see p219.

Bus

Mandalay has moved around its bus stands and stations a lot in recent years – and things could change again. Presently, most buses leaving or arriving in Mandalay en route to destinations to the south and southeast operate from the Highway bus station, 7km south of the centre. This giant dusty lot is lined with a mind-numbing array of bus companies, often selling tickets to the same places leaving at the same time.

Schedules, just like bus terminals or the mood of an ox, are prone to constant change, so take the following sample of fares and schedules from the Highway bus terminal as a loose guide only. Local buses have no air-conditioning and some are 32-seaters.

Destination	Price	Duration	Frequency	Type
Bagan	K4200	8hr	9am, 2pm & 9pm	local
Magwe	K3000	12 hr	4pm & 5pm	air-con & local
Meiktila	K600	3 hr	frequent	local
Pyay	K3000	20hr	1pm	local
Taunggyi (to Inle)	K4500	10-12 hr	6pm	air-con
Yangon	K4500	12-15 hr	5.30pm	air-con

At research time, a 5.30am bus left for north-eastern destinations such as Pyin U Lwin, Kyaukme, Hsipaw and Lashio from a 'new bus station' a couple of kilometres east of the Highway bus station. Apparently a few drivers frowned on taking foreigners. This is likely to change. A ticket cost K2300 regardless of where you exited.

To reach Shwebo or Monywa to the west and northwest by bus, a small bus station downtown (off 88th St between 21st and 22nd Sts) sends frequent local buses to both. It takes three hours to either town. At research time, some drivers were reluctant to allow foreigners on the bus to Monywa (but not to Shwebo); others claimed that foreigners could only take the 6am bus. Some travellers had to pay up to K5000 to get on, others about K1000. The no-problem Shwebo bus costs K700 or K1000. The situation is likely to improve, but you can consider starting at Shwebo for a less tricky route.

BUYING TICKETS

If you don't want to get help from your hotel or guesthouse, several small stands on 31st and 32nd Sts, between 81st and 83rd Sts, sell tickets. Stands selling K4500 tickets for 5pm buses to Yangon and offering a transfer to the bus station at 3.30pm:

Leo Express (Map p230; ☎ 39323; No 367 83rd St, at 33rd St)

Mann Shwe Pyi (Map p230; ☎ 88267; cnr 32nd & 83rd Sts)

Toe Express (Map p230; ☎ 64926; 32nd St)

Another ticket stand on 32nd between 81st and 82nd Sts sells tickets for Pyay (K3000), which leave at 1pm. Nearby, another bus stand sells tickets for local buses to Pyin U Lwin (K2300) and Hsipaw (K2300), which leave at 5.30am. Note that these buses don't leave from here.

Taxi & Pick-Up

Hotels in Mandalay can arrange share taxis to Pyin U Lwin, or you can get one downtown for K5000; check at the corner of 27th and 83rd Sts. To get to Hsipaw or Lashio, contact the **Lashio taxi stand** (☎ 80765) at the Highway bus station. The trip is K8000 per person (to either destination) and takes five hours to Hsipaw, six to Lashio. Taxis run from 7am till noon.

Many travellers hire long-term taxis with driver for a couple of days or more. One quote to go from Mandalay to Monywa, tour around its sights, stay overnight and then go to Pakokku to catch the Bagan ferry was US\$70. A share taxi to Inle Lake was about US\$50 or US\$60. For sample fares, ask at your hotel or at New Horizon Travels (p229).

For information on taking taxis or pick-ups to nearby towns, see Amarapura (p250), Inwa (p252) and Sagaing (p254).

Train

The newish (largely bare) **train station** (Map p228; 30th St, 78th/79th Sts) is a mostly unused, modern, multistorey building with four drive-up ramps, elevated taxi stands and escalators leading to waiting areas with TVs. Meanwhile it's generally the same ol' poky, packed trains that ferry mostly locals on slow-going trips back home.

Just inside the main entrance downstairs is an **MTT office** (☎ 22541; ☎ 9.30am-6pm), which can sell tickets at 10% commission. You may be able to buy tickets (sans commission) at the upstairs counters, but usually they'll send you to MTT, you foreigner you.

At research time, seven trains a day left for Yangon (via Thazi, Pyinmana, Taungoo and Bago). The quickest were the No 6 Down (3.15pm), the No 15 Up (5.15pm), and the No 17 Up (6.30pm), which took about 12 hours. Others took 14 to 16 hours. Note that the private company Dagon-Mann runs the No 17 Up service; bookings can be made through travel agents. Ordinary train tickets cost US\$11 to US\$15, 1st class are US\$30 to US\$35, and sleepers are US\$45 or US\$50.

Trains operated by the private Mehka Mandalay company depart Mandalay for Myitkyina at 4.40pm on Wednesday and Sunday. Upper-class seats are US\$25. The Malikha Mandalay company runs trains on Monday and Friday, and the fare and departure times are the same. These tickets can

be bought at the Mandalay train station at window Nos 7 and 8.

Other sample fares (ordinary/1st class/sleeper) and schedules include the following. Ask travel agents for details of services run by private companies.

Destination Price (US\$) Duration Departure

Destination	Price (US\$)	Duration	Departure
Bagan (Nyaung U)	US\$4/9/-	7hr	10pm
Hsipaw	US\$3/6/-	10hr	4.45am
Lashio	US\$5/10/-	14½hr	4.45am
Myitkyina	US\$10/27/40	24hr	1.50pm & 5.45pm
Naba	US\$-/12/18	12hr	1.50pm & 5.45pm
Pyin U Lwin	US\$2/4/-	3¼hr	4.45am
Shwebo	US\$5/15/-	3hr	1.50pm & 5.45pm

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport & Stations

It's usually more expensive getting to town from the airport than the other way around. The trip takes about one hour. Taxis meeting flights charge K7000 to K9000. Upmarket hotels can arrange transport for US\$10. Arranging your own ride to the airport costs K4000 or K5000. You can also contact **Shwe Airport Taxi** (Map p230; ☎ 64084; No 109 29th St, 80/81).

A taxi between downtown and the Highway bus station is about K2500 or K3000. You can get a pick-up to the station (Map p230; K1000) from the corner of 27th and 83rd Sts.

Note that trishaws are discouraged from hanging out at the train station and aren't allowed on the entry ramps on the west side.

Bicycle

Several bicycle-rental shops stand on footpaths downtown, including **Mr Htoo Bicycles** (Map p230; 83rd St, 25/26; hire per day K1000; ☎ 8am-7pm). Most hotels and guesthouses can get you a bike for comparable prices.

Bus

Mandalay's buses are virtually always crowded, particularly during the 7am to 9am and 4pm to 5pm rush hours. It can be fun. Few locals know routes by number, but here are some of the useful services:

- Gawwein jetty, train station and airport; blue bus No 2

- Mahamuni Paya to Mandalay Hill; red-and-yellow Mann Sit Thi bus
- Mahamuni Paya to *zeigyo* and Kuthodav Paya; blue bus No 1
- Mandalay Hill from the clock tower and *zeigyo*; bus No 4
- Mandalay Hill to south of the city and airport; red bus No 12
- Yankin Hill, *zeigyo* and the boat jetty to Mingun; white bus No 5

Motorcycle

As elsewhere in Myanmar, many locals are reluctant to hire out motorcycles to foreigners due to insurance worries in case of accident. Marie-Min Vegetarian Restaurant (p239) hires out motorcycles for K7500 per day. Downtown guesthouses such as Nylon Hotel (p237) can find one for about the same rate.

Taxi

Taxis and 'blue taxis' (teeny blue Mazda pick-ups with room for four or so in the covered cab) whisk people around Mandalay most hours. They're easy to find downtown. Prices are negotiable. A ride from downtown to the Bagan jetty is about K2000. You can hire a blue taxi on a full-day trip to Amarapura, Inwa and Sagaing for about K15,000; a regular taxi is about K8000 to K15,000 more.

Trishaw

The classic double back-to-back seat trishaws still ply the back lanes of Mandalay. It's about K200 to K500 for shorter rides and K1000 or more for longer ones, say from Mandalay Hill to the *zeigyo*.

Probably no-one in Mandalay knows the town and traveller's info – eg what streets are hosting a *pwe*, where share taxis to Hsipaw leave from, who sells the cheapest veggie curry – like trishaw drivers. Those lingering by guesthouses usually know some English and are pretty good guys. A good day, one said, is getting a couple of 'good jobs' (K1000 to K2000 each) and 90 minutes off at lunch to see his children; 'it's enough to rent the trishaw and feed my wife and three kids'.

It's probably worth spreading your kyat by taking one from a nontouristy area too.

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