



# **A BACKPACKER'S TRAVELOGUE**

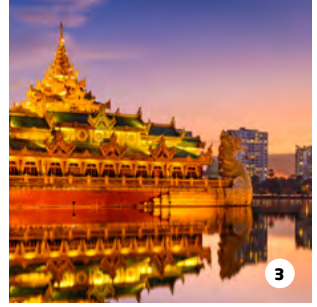
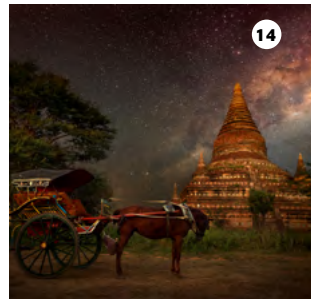


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# INTRODUCTION

Myanmar's temple town Bagan has something for everyone, especially for backpackers. It is a backpacker's paradise, providing varied pocket-friendly options for travellers. With untouched areas, ancient temples, affordable accommodation, delicious food at reasonable rates, Bagan is **a gold mine for backpackers**. It promises an incredible experience to travellers, being a place still away from the general backpacker crowd.

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## A WALK DOWN THE PAGES OF HISTORY

Located on the banks of the **Ayeyarwady River**, Bagan has the largest concentration of Buddhist stupas, temples and pagodas in the world. The **Bagan Archaeological Zone** consists of **2,000 temples** built in the **11th and 12th century**. Each of these buildings has magnificent architecture, unique in their own way, which exhibits the craftsmanship of Myanmar's finest craftsmen.

The most popular temples include **Ananda Temple, Bupaya Pagoda, Dhammayangyi Temple, Htilominlo Pagoda, Maha Zedi Pagoda, Shwezigon Pagoda, Ahlodawpye Pagoda** and **Shwesandaw Pagoda**.





**TRAVEL TIPS:**

There are no currency exchange kiosks at the Nyaung U Airport. Hence, ensure to carry enough Kyats with you when landing in Bagan because you will have to purchase the Bagan Archaeological Zone Pass worth 25,000 Kyats leaving the airport as per regulation.

**BY FLIGHT** 

The town is well connected with the entire country. Bagan's Nyaung U Airport is well connected with large cities such as Yangon and Mandalay as well as small towns such as Putao and Heho.

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**BY TRAIN** 

Overnight trains are available daily from Yangon, which departs from Yangon at 4pm and reaches Bagan at 10am the following day. Two trains depart from Mandalay for Bagan daily. This train ride takes about 7 to 8 hours. The night train is a great option to save some time and reaches Bagan in the morning. A train ride takes one through the scenic countryside. Hence, if you have time, they can be a great travel experience.

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**BY BUS** 

The New Bagan Shwe Pyi Highway Bus Terminal is well-connected with the entire country. Highway buses from almost every major town in Myanmar stop here.

## BY BUS

Most major bus companies also offer transfers to hotels and guesthouses in mini-buses.

### FROM YANGON:

Overnight bus journeys are available between Yangon and Bagan which cost around 15,000 Kyats. The buses leave Yangon at 6pm and 7pm and reach Bagan at 3am and 5am, respectively. VIP or express buses leave Yangon around 8pm and cost 18,500 Kyats including snacks and drinks. They are more comfortable and reach Bagan within 9 hours. It is advisable to book the tickets beforehand to avoid last minute rush.

### FROM MANDALAY:

You can choose to travel from Mandalay in a coach or a minibus, which can cost around 8,500 Kyats. Four minibuses leave Mandalay daily – two in the morning and two in the evening. It takes around 5 hours to reach Bagan from Mandalay using the new highway.



### FROM INLE LAKE:

There is a bus service from Inle Lake to Bagan which leaves the junction at Inle Lake at 7am.

#### TRAVEL TIPS:

The bus ticket includes a drop off to your accommodation. Look for a mini-bus next to your bus with the same company name. People might say that the transfer is for locals only. The transfers are meant for everyone. So just hop on.

Buses are usually heavily air-conditioned with a temperature of around 18 degree Celsius. Hence it is advisable to carry some warm clothing or a thin blanket to enjoy a comfortable journey.

## BY BOAT

Backpackers looking for an affordable yet fun option of travelling to Bagan from Mandalay need to explore this. A daily express ferry service runs from Mandalay which takes travellers down the Ayeyarwady River. It takes around 8-9 hours to travel and is the most interesting option. It is fun to enjoy a cruise down the scenic Ayeyarwady River while watching the scenic countryside. The tickets cost around 67,500 Kyats. The ferry arrives at Bagan between 3pm and 5pm. You can buy water (500 Kyats) and beer (3,000 Kyats) onboard. The ferry tickets can be taken from most hotels in Mandalay.

Another slow ferry service runs between Mandalay and Bagan which takes around 14 to 17 hours and costs 15,000 Kyats. It is usually used by locals.

#### TRAVEL TIPS:

Taxis are available from the ferry terminal to hotels in Bagan and costs around 5,000 Kyats for three people. Don't hesitate to negotiate.

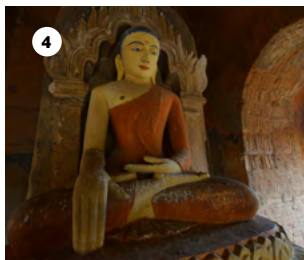
This ferry service is not available in April, May and June, the monsoon months in the country, due to a rise in the water level.



# EXPLORING BAGAN

## A TEMPLE TOUR

Bagan has 2,000 temples at the moment, strewn all across the town. It is humanly not possible to explore all. Travellers usually choose the important ones as per the length of time available and the energy to explore.



### TRAVEL TIPS:

All temple signs are written in Burmese. Some have English, but they are on the back of the sign.



### SHWESANDAW TEMPLE:

Popularly known as the sunset temple, head to this temple around sunset. You can climb up the stairs to enjoy the breathtaking sunset against the backdrop of hundreds of temples jutting out of the thick canopy of trees.

### TRAVEL TIPS:

Head early to the temple (4.30pm or even earlier) to beat the crowd. If the temple is too crowded, head to the nearby Shwe Gu Gyi Temple which also has excellent views.

### ANANDA TEMPLE:

The most famous and the holiest temple in Bagan, Ananda Temple was built in 1091 AD.

**Location:** On the left side of the southern stretch of Nyaung Oo Road.



### THATBYINNYU TEMPLE:

Built in the 12th century, this is the tallest pagoda in Bagan, measuring up to 66 metres.

**Location:** You can find it on your left after entering the Tharaba Gate.



### SHWEGUGYI TEMPLE:

Built in 1311 AD, this temple will take you back to Bagan's golden old days. It is a good place to catch the sunset, and less crowded too!

**Location:** Right in front of the Thatbyinnyu Temple.





### SHWEZIGON PAGODA:

One of the oldest and most impressive monuments in Bagan, Shwezigon Pagoda is easily recognisable thanks to its gleaming gold-plated facade.

**Location:** About 5 kilometers northeast of Old Bagan.



### SULAMANI TEMPLE:

An impressive pagoda with an ornate architectural style, this pagoda is pyramidal in shape with six decreasing terraces and the main structure.

**Location:** Southeast off the southern stretch of Anawrath Road.



### BAGAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM:

This museum houses old artefacts recovered from different temple sites. A good place to get a more detailed understanding of the history of the town.



### THARABAR TEMPLE:

This majestic old-time gate is located right amid the town. It was built in 849 AD and is believed to be guarded by spiritual beings.



### BAGAN VIEWING TOWER NAN MYINT VIEWING TOWER:

This tower has been built to enjoy the panoramic sunset. It is not a historic monument, but a simple structure which can give you a 360-degree view of the surrounding.



### NOVICE MONK INITIATION RITES:

Observe the rituals of inductions of boys into monkhood amidst loud temple music and celebration. The ritual is attended by parents and relatives of the boys and is a celebration to watch. This usually happens during the school holidays.

### TRAVEL TIPS:

Entrance fee - 7,500 Kyats. The museum is closed on Mondays and public holidays.

# ADVENTURE IN BAGAN

Bagan is a laid-back town. Yet it offers a variety of things to do, with options ranging from extremely adventurous to completely relaxing.



## A HOT AIR BALLOON RIDE:

A hot air balloon ride is probably the number one must-do activity while in Bagan. This is a once in a lifetime activity where you can fly over hundreds of temples jutting out of the thick canopy of trees while the sun rises slowly in the horizon, breaking away from the darkness of the night. You can choose the classic or the premium service depending on the kind of experience you want.

**Cost:** 525,000 Kyats – 675,000 Kyats

**Flight duration:** 45 mins

## RENT AN E-BIKE:

You must have rented bikes a lot of times during your travels. Rent an e-bike in Bagan and enjoy a greener trip around the town. Most hotels offer e-bikes on rent.

**Cost:** 5,000 Kyats per day. You can also rent bikes which will cost you around 2,500 Kyats per day.



## ATTEND A COOKING CLASS:

If cooking is a hobby, sign up for cooking classes available in Bagan. You will not only be able to learn to whip up some local delicacies, but you will also be able to learn interesting trivia about the country's food.



## RENT A BOAT:

This is an offbeat way to enjoy the sunset. You can hire a boat and enjoy a cruise on the river Ayeyarwady. Usually, the boats accommodate 4-6 people. Hence, if you can form a group, it will be fun.

**Cost:** Around 21,000 Kyats for a 1-2 hour trip.

**Departure Time:** 4.30pm (usually)

## VISIT THE NIGHT MARKET:

A carnival cum night market is organised in the middle of the town usually every day. It is a great way to understand the lives of the locals. Concerts are conducted in an indoor stage which anyone can attend free of cost. There is a Ferris Wheel in the middle of the carnival which runs solely on human strength. Men climb up the equipment and rotate it using their body.





## SHOPPING IN BAGAN

Bagan has unique things that you will love, even if you are not a shopaholic. You can pick up exquisite stuff as mementos of your trip.



### LACQUER WARE:

Lacquer Ware is the traditional handicraft in Bagan and there are loads of factories all around. You can visit these and see how the products are made from a woven bamboo framework. It's an interesting sight!



### SAND PAINTING:

You will also find shops selling sand paintings, another speciality of Bagan. There are some shops around Shwe Gu Gyi Pagoda.



### OIL AND WATERCOLOUR PAINTINGS:

You can also find several shops selling beautiful oil and watercolour paintings. And oh! Don't forget to check out the paintings on a bottle while you are in a shop.



# SUSTENANCE

Over the years, Bagan has grown in size considerably, hence providing innumerable options to backpackers to stay and eat.



## ACCOMMODATION:

There are two principal areas where you can choose to stay – Old Bagan or Nyaung U and New Bagan. There are several pocket-friendly and comfortable places to stay in both with prices as low as 15,000 Kyats. However, staying in Old Bagan keeps you close to the attractions. Old Bagan also has a good concentration of restaurants.

## EATING OUT:

Bagan is dotted with eateries varying from local food shacks to posh restaurants. From noodle soups to western delicacies, you can have any cuisine of your choice here. And the prices are pretty affordable too. You can enjoy buffets for as low as 6,000 Kyats.





## ON THE SAFE SIDE



- Wear comfortable footwear while roaming around. Plastic slippers or flip flops are the best because they will suit the heat and they will be easy to take off in the temples where you need to go in barefooted.
- It's going to be sunny out there. Don't forget to carry a hat. And yes, use sun-screen.
- Carry your water bottle while going out. The heat is exhausting. You will need a lot of water.
- Be careful while having outside water and drink from sealed bottles only.
- Carry lots of wet-wipes to stay refreshed amidst the dusty roads and sticky sweat.
- Be careful at the less visited temples. There can be beehives and sometimes snakes too!
- Usually, the climbable temples have stairs on all the four sides. Climbing up the shaded side will be easier on your body.
- Bagan is quite dusty. Hence if you have respiratory troubles, take adequate precaution.
- Bagan is like a family village where no one has the intention to harm the other person. Hence, do not worry about safety.