



## The journey to Myanmar (Burma) â€“ part 1

### Description

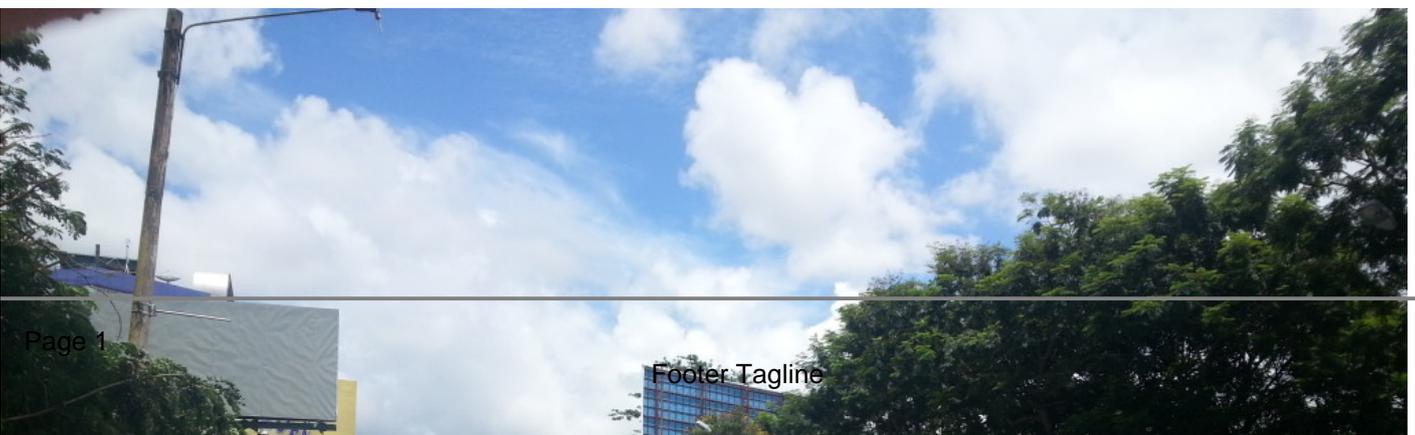
### First contact

A man in maxi dress gently approaches me. Makes an offer. Keeps my personal space. Waits for an answer. My heart melts to him, opens up, a smile spills all over my face and paints the twilight of our first evening in Yangon in bright colors. This is our 16 days in Myanmar travel blog.

The man is a local taxi driver, the maxi dress is a **longyi**, the traditional Burmese men clothing. The offer was for a ride from the airport to the hotel and like many other offers that followed it was served gently and with a smile. There is no need to haggle because the Burmese simply propose a fair price to begin with. So a price is set and off we go. Everything is calm and pleasant. There is no concern that the driver will take a detour or fake the meterâ€™s reading, like in other countries in SEA, no need to name names.

We arrived in Burma on a flight from Bangkok, following a flight from Surat Thani and a ferry from Ko Phangan (Thailand). It was a long day that started at 4am and ended late at night. We were tired, hungry, and The Natives rightfully complained about us. We really havenâ€™t eaten all day (how does it still happen to us after 11 months of traveling, itâ€™s a mystery to me). The shy smile of the taxi driver was only the opening of our falling in love with Burma (or Myanmar).

**Yangon** (formerly known as **Rangoon**) overwhelmed us. A city with sky full of birds, surprisingly delicious food on every street corner, restaurant or market. Old cars jam the roads. Two wheels vehicles are not be seen, which is very non-Asian style. Red spots dot the pavements from the spittings of the local chewing tobacco, the same one that turns the lovely smiles of the Burmese red.



Only 4-wheelers on the streets of Yangon. No motorbikes allowed.

## Streets of Yangon

There are almost no tourists in Yangon. If it wasn't for the visa to Thailand we wouldn't have gone there either. So it's good that we came. The Natives were of course a great attraction, but I've got to admit that me too provided some funny moments to the locals, like the time I tried to chew their tobacco (it's actually a betel nut) and almost wet my pants from laughter. It was horrible. I can't even start describing how disgusting it is. I didn't know how to spit it out without insulting the street stall lady who rolled for me a leaf filled with all that goodness and a lot of positive intentions. Eventually I just spit it out, while laughing embarrassedly. The lady and her customers were very amused with the situation and like the Burmese way laughed with me and not at me. They gave me some water and probably continued laughing long after we were already gone.

On the first evening, about twenty steps from the hotel, we discovered a wonderful restaurant *Shan Yoe Yar* and enjoyed its special amazing Shaan style soups (Shaan is one of the many states that are part of the huge Myanmar) and other excellent dishes, but the highlight was the street food. Stalls and stalls of Samusas and Pakoras, all fresh and crunchy, different variations of the famous Burmese Lphet Tok "tea leaves salad, various coconut delicacies and cheap sushi.

Talking about cheap, I just spent 4\$ on a haircut and a somewhat nineties style pedicure. That's me, a spender. On the other hand, accommodations in Burma are not very cheap, but the low prices of food compensate for that.



â€œLephet Thokâ€œ. Tea leaves salad. Traditional dish in Myanmar.



## Simple honest friendliness

One of the first things one can notice in Burma is that people are looking for eyes contact to smile at you. How sweet. How non-Western it is. Is it wonder your heart melts ?

It is being said about Burma that it is a difficult country to travel, itâ€™s difficult to get cash (ATMâ€™s), transitions are hard and lengthy and conditions of guesthouses are not the bestâ€™. Part of that is true, but itâ€™s not the main part. Itâ€™s true, A 9 hours ride on a low standard bus and arriving in town in the middle of the night is not the best deal. But when The Natives are cold in the bus and one of the fellow passengers gets a longyi and covers them and then gets a sweater to Little One and watches her the whole ride with a sweet smile, who cares that the bus is pretty horrible. When the stewardess in the bus lights my way with a flashlight so I can find the toilet, who cares that toilets in Burma are the worst weâ€™ve met through the entire year.

When a local guide in one of the pagodas in Yangon offers us a guided tour for 5\$ and we refuse politely, because after all weâ€™re still budget travelers, and then a few minutes later he notices The Natives are a bit lost searching for the toilet, he decides to accompany them there and even pays the

small entry fee. We are speechless.

When the night bus drops us in weird early dawn hours in this town or another and the receptionist is always smiling and welcoming and checks us in, in spite of the fact that it's 5am, and even invites us for breakfast. It's so sweet. Need I say more ?

## Yangon

*We arrived in Yangon with an Air Asia flight from Bangkok (50\$ per ticket). It is usually better to order tickets at least one month ahead to find the best deals. Transportation in Yangon is almost always on four wheels, but here and there you will be able to spot "taxi bicycles". There is no point in asking the drivers to use the meter since there simply isn't any. You agree on a price and go. Most chances are that you will get a fair price between 2000 and 3000 kyat (1.5\$-2\$).*

*A must site in Yangon is the **Shwedagon Pagoda** which is one of the most beautiful and impressive temples in SEA with an extravagant dome built of tons of gold. Another cool place to hang around in is Chinatown between the 18 and 19 streets. Lots of restaurants, lively market and tasty street food. Another nice day trip is to **Kandawgyi Lake** with the royal barge floating there (which today turned into a restaurant).*

*We stayed in Yangon in a mediocre hotel called [MGM Hotel](#) for 40\$ a night including a not very tasty breakfast. If you are on a budget and plan to stay for a few days it is an okay choice. Otherwise, find some place else.*

*In the next post " [the journey continues to Bagan, Inle Lake and Mandalay](#). Stay tuned.*



## Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon



### Category

- 1. Myanmar

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