



# *Burma*

A PHOTOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL JOURNEY WITH DAVID SAMUEL ROBBINS

SPECIAL DEPARTURE TO INCLUDE THE SHWEZIGON PAGODA FESTIVAL

DECEMBER 3 - 13, 2012



The Plains of Bagan: Days 2 - 4

## HIGHLIGHTS:

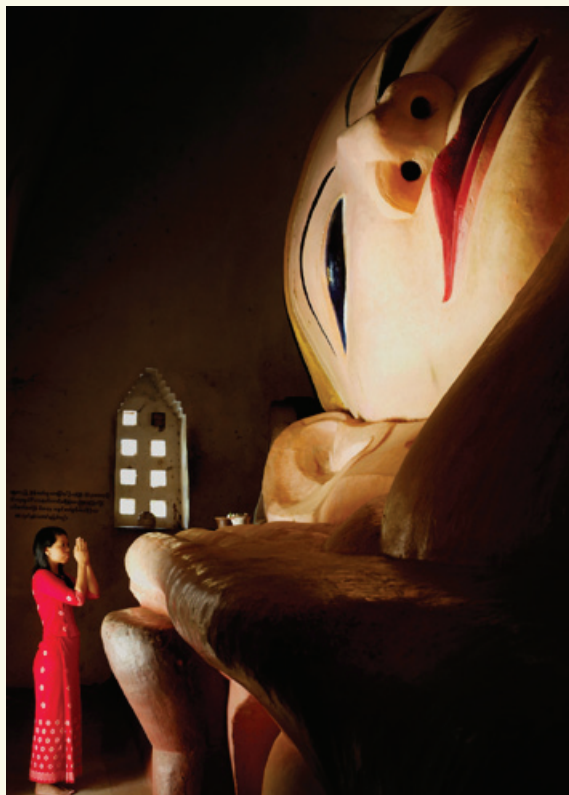
### INCOMPARABLE BURMA:

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**Group size: 12 maximum (8 is the average)**

- \* 10 full days in country, with visits to nearly all the truly iconic and quintessentially Burmese cultural landmarks: Rangoon's (Yangon's) Shwedagon Pagoda complex, the astounding temple-studded Plains of Pagan (Bagan), the old royal capital of Mandalay, the floating gardens and markets of Inle Lake and the volcanic "Nat Shrine" of Mount Popa.
- \* Special departure to include the ongoing Shwezigon Pagoda Festival, Bagan.
- \* Visits to traditional artisan workshops, including blacksmiths, silk tapestry weavers, gold and silversmiths, teak and marble carvers and lacquerware artists.
- \* Superb photographic opportunities for environmental portraiture, ornate religious architecture, varied and gorgeous landscapes and Burma's thriving traditional Theravada Buddhist culture.
- \* Optional sunrise hot-air balloon ride over the countless pagodas of Bagan.
- \* Deluxe hotel accommodations and superb restaurants.
- \* David and your local Burmese guide will offer informal commentary throughout the tour, providing a broad political, historical and philosophical context for understanding and appreciating Burmese culture.



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### DAILY ITINERARY

**Day 1**     **December 3:** Morning flight from Bangkok to Yangon (Rangoon), Burma.

Arrive at Yangon International airport and transfer to our hotel. Time permitting, we'll visit the enormous reclining Buddha of *Kyaukthatgyi* or Yangon's bustling *Bogyoke market*.

In the late afternoon, we join the procession of pilgrims circling the *Shwedagon Pagoda*, Burma's most sacred Buddhist shrine. The central stupa is clad in thick plates of solid gold (60 tons of it, by some estimates!) and stands over 300 feet tall, dominating Yangon's skyline. Around the stupa are many smaller shrines, where the Burmese make offerings of candles, flowers and incense. These rituals are a fusion of two belief systems: traditional Theravada Buddhism and Burmese astrology. Much more than a single stupa, the Schwedagon is a complex of incredibly ornate structures and fantastical statues, animated by a continuous stream of human activity. As the sun moves lower in the sky, the golden spires and multi-colored statues become ever more vibrant, and the photographic opportunities here are endless. When we've finished our tour of the Schwedagon, return to the city center for dinner. Overnight at the Chatrium Hotel.

**Day 2**     **December 4:** Fly from Yangon to Bagan (Pagan)

After an early breakfast, transfer to the airport for the short flight to Bagan (approx. 6:30 AM - 7:25 AM direct). Upon arrival, check in to our hotel. Then we'll begin our explorations of Bagan, including the Ananda Temple, a whitewashed masterpiece of Mon architecture with four standing Buddhas, and the adjacent brick monastery, containing exquisite, well-preserved 18th century murals. Next, we'll make a photo stop at the tallest temple, *Thatbyinnyu*. At over 60 metres high, *Thatbyinnyu* is known as "The Temple of Omniscience" and dates back to 1144. We'll look for events of the ongoing Shwezigon Pagoda festival, which may include lively markets and puppet shows, food stalls, and comic plays. Overnight at the Bagan Thande Hotel.

**Day 3**     **December 5:** Further Explorations of Bagan

Optional sunrise hot-air balloon ride above the temple-studded plains of Bagan. (5:30 AM departure from hotel). Depending on the direction of the wind, we may fly over Bagan for 45 - 60 minutes, enjoying spectacular views of the ancient pagodas below. The balloon ride ends...wherever the wind has brought us! A glass of sparkling wine ends the adventure...and then we return to our hotel via shuttle bus for breakfast.

Following breakfast, we visit the colorful *Nyaung Oo* outdoor market, the *Shwezigon Pagoda*, the *Wetkyi-in Gubyaukkyi* (a cave temple with exquisite mural paintings), the elegant *Htilominlo Temple* (noted for its plaster carvings) and *Tharaba Gate*. Next we continue onward to *Dhammayangyi*, a massive temple dating from 1170 that is famous for its precise interlocking brickwork, achieved without the use of mortar. After lunch and an afternoon break at the hotel, return to one of the temple tops for a great sunset, followed by dinner. Overnight at the Bagan Thande Hotel.

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### Day 4 December 6: Day Excursion to Mt. Popa

After breakfast at the hotel, we'll begin the drive to *Mt. Popa*, about 60km southeast of Bagan. Popa is an extinct volcano and considered to be a deeply auspicious site. Surrounding Popa are many shrines dedicated to animistic spirits known as 'Nats'. Stop at *Minnanthu Village* and the palm tree plantations that produce jiggery (palm sugar candy). We'll climb Mt. Popa under a covered walkway to reach the complex of pagodas at the summit, 1520 metres high. Next, visit the *Mahagiri Nat Shrine*. Return drive to Bagan.

In the afternoon, visit to a lacquer craftsman's workshop in nearby *Myinkaba village* and proceed to *Phawsaw village* to observe local village life. Overnight at Bagan Thande Hotel.

### Day 5 December 7: Fly Bagan to Mandalay

Morning transfer to the airport for the flight to Mandalay (approx. 7:35 AM - 8:05 AM direct). Upon arrival, tour the former royal capital of Amarapura. We'll also visit the *Mahagandayon* monastery, where there are more than a thousand monks in residence. We continue the day with a visit to a traditional silk weaving workshop.

Return to Mandalay and check in to our hotel.

After lunch, visit to the *Mahamuni Pagoda*, home to Mandalay's holiest Buddha statue. Next, we travel to *Shwenandaw Monastery*, an ancient wooden building with exquisite and intricate carvings, which was once King Mindon's personal residence. Continuing onward, we view the 'world's largest book' - the Buddhist scriptures inscribed on hundreds of marble slabs at the *Kuthodaw Pagoda* and finally, enjoy the sunset from Mandalay Hill. Overnight at the Hotel by the Red Canal.

### Day 6 December 8: Mandalay / Day Excursion to Sagaing

Breakfast at the hotel. This morning we'll take the local ferry to visit Innwa (Ava) village, located on an island between the Ayeyarwady and the Myitnge Rivers. We'll visit Innwa by horse cart and pass through the ancient city walls to view the brick and stucco monastery *Maha Aungmye Bonzan* (also known as Ok Kyaung). Next we continue onward to *Nanmyin Watch Tower*, offering lovely views of the river below. We'll also visit the impressive wooden monastery of *Bagaya Kyaung*. If time permits, stop at a local village to see the making of traditional handicrafts, such as silk weaving, cane mats and alms bowls.

In the afternoon, we'll proceed to picturesque *Sagaing Hill*, the living center of Buddhist faith in Burma today. The hillsides around Sagaing are dotted with numerous pagodas and monasteries.

Enroute, make a stop at Amarapura to view the sunset from the 200 year - old *U Bein teak bridge*, built at the time when Amarapura was Burma's royal capital. Overnight at the Hotel by the Red Canal.

### Day 7 December 9: Fly Mandalay to Heho, drive to Inle Lake

Breakfast at hotel. Transfer to the airport for the short flight to Heho (8:20 AM - 8:50 AM direct).

Upon arrival at Heho airport, we'll drive to the piers at Nyaung Shwe on the edge of Inle Lake, board small, traditional wooden boats and ferry to our lakeside hotel.

After lunch, explore Inle Lake by boat, watching the unique "leg rowers" – the Intha people, who row standing up, with one leg wrapped around the oar. We'll see the vast floating gardens of vegetables and flowers. Continue by boat to visit *Nga Phe Kyaung* Monastery, famous for its "jumping cats" and then stop to see silk weaving on wooden hand looms at Inn Paw Kone village. Next, visit *Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda*, the holiest religious site in

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southern Shan State. Return by boat to our hotel. Overnight at the Inle Lake View Resort & Spa.

**Day 8**    **December 10:** Inle Lake

After breakfast at hotel, we'll travel by boat to the lively open market, held every 5 days, its location rotating around to different villages along the shoreline. We'll also visit local village artisans, including silk weavers, blacksmiths and cheroot (cigarette and cigar) makers.

Return by boat to our hotel. Dinner and overnight at the Inle Lake View Resort & Spa.

**Day 9**    **December 11:** Inle Lake

Explore the *Indein Pagoda complex*, nearly a thousand pagodas built in the 17th and 18th centuries. Our boats cruise upstream to the trailhead for the short hike to the pagodas. Along the way, we'll pass farmers working a variety of crops. We'll wander amongst the pagodas and nearby bamboo forests, then return by boat to our hotel. Overnight at the Inle Lake View Resort and Spa.

**Day 10**    **December 12:** Inle Lake - Yangon

Breakfast at hotel. Relax at hotel in the morning. Leave the hotel by boat/car for transfer to the airport for domestic flight to Yangon (4:25 PM -6:35 PM, via Mandalay). Upon arrival in Yangon, transfer to our hotel. Chatrium Hotel.

**Day 11**    **December 13:** Yangon - Bangkok

After breakfast at the hotel, we'll transfer to the airport for our flight back to Bangkok. Tomorrow you will begin the flight back to the USA or other side excursions within Southeast Asia. You may also begin the 2-day Bangkok City Tour, *The Insider's Guide to Bangkok*, with our old friend and colleague, Annie Minisclox. A detailed PDF description of Annie's tour is available on our web site, under the Burma, Nepal, and Bhutan tour pages. We require a minimum of 4 people to offer Annie's tour of Bangkok.

*Accommodations listed in the itinerary are subject to change, pending availability and confirmed reservations. Daily activities described in the itinerary may change, based on weather, road conditions, or the delightful, spontaneous opportunities that often present themselves during our travels.*

*Burma is a developing country and its tourism infrastructure may not always match American or European standards. A spirit of adventure and a flexible, open-minded attitude will help you make the most of this tour.*

# INCOMPARABLE BURMA

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### TOUR PRICING

\$5,495 Per person, based on double occupancy hotel rooms, all nights in Burma.\*

\$ 495 Internal flights.

\$ 295 Optional sunrise hot air balloon ride, Bagan.

\*Single supplement: + \$895: private hotel room for one person, covers all nights in Burma

Tour pricing includes all hotels, transportation, guide services, monument entry fees and group meals within Burma. Not inclusive are alcoholic beverages, laundry, telephone, other personal expenses, or staff tips (optional). These prices are exclusive of international airfare and other transit expenses from the U.S. to Burma and return.

The Bangkok (BKK) to Rangoon (RGN) round trip airfare is not inclusive in the tour cost. We will advise you of the specific flights to book so that we will all arrive and depart Burma at the same time. Estimated cost of this round-trip airfare is currently under \$300.

**Group size is limited to 12 maximum, with 8 being average. A non-refundable \$1,500 deposit confirms your reservation. The remaining balances of the tour costs are due 120 days prior to departure, or upon registration if enrolling less than 120 days prior to departure.**

Payment can be made in the form of Visa or MasterCard, check, money order, or wire transfer. There is a 4 % service fee for payment by credit card. Please make payment out to:

**Himalayan Odyssey Tours  
5014 48th Avenue South  
Seattle, WA 98118**

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*Cancellation policy: The initial deposit is non-refundable. Balances are subject to the following cancellation policy: 50% refund if cancelled at least 90 days prior to the departure date. For cancellations made less than 90 days prior to the departure date or during a trip in progress, no refunds can be made. Trip cancellation and interruption insurance is required for this tour.*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is it ethically appropriate to travel in Burma, knowing that some of my tourist dollars may (directly or indirectly) enrich their government?

There is no one simple answer to this question - in the end, it's a matter of personal discretion. Generally, boycotts and embargos of any kind tend to negatively impact the average citizen far more so than the privileged elite.

Much of Burma's wealth is derived from extracting the country's natural resources, such as forest hardwoods, gemstones and natural gas. Tourism generates significant revenue without long-term environmental degradation. Tourism creates jobs and encourages the preservation of the country's ancient, varied and unique cultural treasures. Tourism keeps the Burmese in touch with the outside world - and vice versa.

We carefully research the ground operators and hotels we partner with on our tours, to insure they are privately owned and operated rather than government owned.

Despite their government, the Burmese people are amongst the friendliest and open in all of Southeast Asia, and they will greet us with genuine warmth and curiosity.

Is this tour physically demanding?

Overall, this tour is graded easy, with no high elevations or extremes of temperature. The hotel accommodations are deluxe and the food is superb. Travel will be by jeep, mini-van or bus (depending on group size) and riverboat. A series of internal flights will move us quickly between distant points of interest within the country.

Why is this tour scheduled for January?

This time of year offers the coolest average daytime temperatures (65-80 F) and lowest humidity of the year.

Can I stay in touch with my family and work colleagues back home?

Internet access will be available in Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and possibly Inle Lake.

Can you assist me with my connecting flight and transit hotel arrangements?

We will recommend a common flight from Bangkok into Rangoon (Yangon), Burma, so we might all start the tour at the same time. If you prefer to transit into Burma via a city other than Bangkok, please let us know and we will assist you with those details.

Do I have the option to add a pre- or post-tour extension?

Yes, we offer the very popular 2-day *Insider's Guide to Bangkok* city tour, lead by our colleague Annie Minisclox. A detailed description of this pre-Burma tour is available on our web site.

Can you provide references from past clients?

Yes, and we're happy to do so! Please review the "Testimonials" section of our website. We can also put you in direct contact with past clients and you can speak with them candidly about their experience traveling with us.

## TOUR LEADER



David Samuel Robbins is a Seattle-based photographer and guide, specializing in projects concerning traditional indigenous cultures and adventure travel. He has over fifteen years' experience working on assignment throughout the world for many leading publications, including The New York Times' *Sophisticated Traveler*, National Geographic *Traveler* and National Geographic *Adventure*.

David has a particular expertise and affection for the Himalaya and Southeast Asia, where he has worked as a documentary photographer, cultural guide or photographic workshop instructor on over 50 trips to the region. His photographic book *Himalayan Odyssey* was the culmination of ten years' work and over 2,000 miles of trekking through Tibet, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

David has served as a trip leader for National Geographic Expeditions in Tibet and Bhutan and arranged a variety of private tours throughout the Himalaya. He is conversant in the Nepali language, and his infectious love and respect for Himalayan culture sets the tone for every trip he leads.

The majority of our clients are personal referrals from people who have traveled with David previously – and many of them return for a second or third trip. You are welcome to review the testimonials section of our website. We are also happy to put you in direct contact with past clients to talk about their experiences traveling with David.

For more information, please visit our website:

[www.himalayanodyssey.net](http://www.himalayanodyssey.net)

or e-mail us at: [info@himalayanodyssey.net](mailto:info@himalayanodyssey.net)



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