

MYANMAR (BURMA): TRACING THE ANATOMY OF A CAPITAL CITY

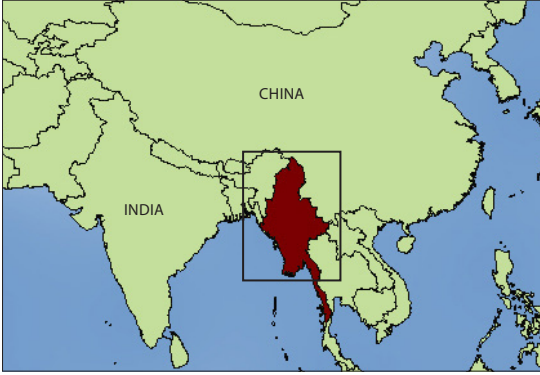
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

“This is Burma, and it is quite unlike any land you know about,” wrote Rudyard Kipling in 1898, of the isolated nation now known as Myanmar. Visitors today are equally entranced by a country seemingly untouched by time. Ancient temples, intact colonial-era cities, and vernacular villages whose customs have changed little in centuries all provide the opportunity to observe an architectural heritage that has been long lost in other nations. Myanmar has claimed nearly two dozen different capital cities since the fourteenth century, as rule shifted from dynastic kingdoms to British colonization, and more recently to a military junta that has given way to a fledgling democracy.

As the governing entity changed throughout Myanmar’s history, so too did the capital city and the architectural expression of its power. When kings of the later dynastic periods moved the capital, they quite literally took the architecture with them, by carefully disassembling and reassembling the royal palace in a new location. Following the destruction of the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, Yangon was completely rebuilt by British military engineers on an east-west grid, with new buildings of British design. And in 2005, the military government created the city of Naypyidaw on a greenfield site – a brand-new capital planned on a grandiose scale to reflect the regime’s ambitions.

When a new capital city is established, which architectural forms are retained? To what extent are they reimagined to reflect the ideology of the new rulers? While the socioeconomic forces are many and complex, (and beyond the scope of a two-week research trip), this project proposes to focus on three specific representative buildings in each city – one sacred, one civic, and one residential – in order to compare and contrast the ways in which those buildings were impacted by the cultural and stylistic influences of the time. While the formal architecture of major temples, for example, seems to have changed little from the ancient edifices of the Bagan to the newly-completed Uppatasanti Pagoda in Naypyidaw, typical civic and residential buildings show significantly more variation.

Each of Myanmar’s capital cities represents a unique period in the nation’s tumultuous history. By observing key buildings in each of these cities using photographs, sketches, and watercolors, one can begin to piece together the ways in which Burmese leaders sought to define their capital cities.



BUDGET

- \$1500 Round-trip airfare to Yangon
- \$50 Travel Visa
- \$1000 Hotel accommodations
- \$300 Meals
- \$450 Hiring local guides
- \$1000 Flights/buses in-country
- \$300 Admissions/tours

Note: While Myanmar has historically been criticized for corruption and human rights abuses, it has made strides towards democracy, and is generally very safe for foreign travelers. As a result, travel boycotts have been lifted, and resources are available to help responsible travelers maximize the positive impact of their tourism spending in local communities.

DAYS 1-2: TRAVEL TO YANGON
DAYS 3-4: YANGON
 Capital from mid-1850s - 2005
 British colonial rule; later independent
 Myanmar’s commercial center features the most intact British colonial core in Asia, and the iconic Shwedagon Pagoda, the country’s most sacred Buddhist site.



DAYS 5-7: BAGAN
 Capital from roughly 850 - 1300
 Bagan Kingdom
 A high plain studded with thousands of brick and stone Buddhist temples provides a window into the ancient cities of the Bagan kingdom.



DAY 8: INWA
 Capital intermittently from 14th c.
 Ava, Toungoo, Konbaung Dynasties
 The royal capital for almost 300 years, Inwa today is a fairly rural town dotted with remnants of its royal history.



DAYS 9-10: MANDALAY
 Capital from 1859-1885
 Konbaung Dynasty
 The last royal capital of Burma, Mandalay continued to be a Burmese cultural hub during British colonial rule.



DAYS 11-12: NAYPYIDAW
 Capital from 2005-present
 Military Rule replaced by Democratic Government
 This hastily-constructed and largely uninhabited city provides a bizarre reflection of the military government that built it, incorporating both modern and traditional elements on a grand scale.



DAY 13: YANGON
DAY 14: RETURN TO NYC