Burma & the Irrawaddy River: Bagan to Mandalay

SMALL SHIP CRUISE TOUR

Plus optional extensions in
Vientiane & Luang Prabang, Laos;
Angkor Wat, Cambodia;
Maymyo & Inle Lake, Burma;
Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, Thailand

BUR 2015

Grand Circle Cruise Line
Golden Pagodas & the Irrawaddy River Cruise
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1. PASSPORT, VISAS AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Passport Required

U.S. citizens need a valid passport for this itinerary.

Your passport should meet these requirements for this itinerary:

- It should be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- It should have the recommended number of blank pages (see below for details).
- The blank pages must be labeled "Visas" at the top. Pages labeled "Amendments and Endorsements" are not acceptable.

Recommended number of blank pages:
This recommendation is based on a "worst case" scenario. On this trip you might use fewer pages depending on the whims of the Immigration officials you meet. Since the consequence of having too few pages can be severe—you could be denied entry into a country—we take a *better safe than sorry* stance, and we recommend these guidelines:

- **Main trip and Burma post-trip extension:** 4 blank "Visa" pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Laos:** You will need 2 more pages for a total of 6.
- **Pre-trip extension to Cambodia:** You will need 2 more pages for a total of 6.
- **Post-trip extension to Northern Thailand:** This extension does not require any additional pages beyond the 4 blank pages for the main trip.

Please take a moment to ensure that your passport meets *all* of these requirements. If not, you could be refused entry into a country and **you might be required by that country to return to the U.S. immediately, which would be at your own expense**.

If you need to renew your passport or get extra pages:
Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778,** or visit their website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport, renewing your existing passport, or for additional pages. You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

NOTE: When updating your passport, it is worthwhile to check the prices on all the different services that might apply to you. For example, it might be less expensive to renew your passport than to have pages added, depending on the number of pages you need.

Visas required for Burma, Cambodia, and Laos; Visa not required for Thailand

We'll be sending you a detailed Visa Packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure. In the meantime, we're providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. *This info is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.*

- **Burma (Myanmar)—visa required. Can only be obtained in advance.** You must obtain your visa for Vietnam before you leave home; it cannot be obtained on arrival.
- **Thailand—no visa needed:** For a U.S. citizen, a visa is not required for entry into Thailand for a stay of up to 30 days.
- **Laos and Cambodia (optional extensions)—visas required. We recommend you obtain these in advance.** Although these visas may be obtained upon your arrival, we recommend you obtain them in advance. Entry requirements can change at any time; obtaining your visas in advance decreases the likelihood that you will encounter problems at the border and may protect you if entry requirements subsequently change.

If you are staying longer in any of these countries, you should check with their embassy for the applicable regulations:

Burma (Myanmar):	(202) 332-3344	Laos:	(202) 332-6416
Thailand:	(202) 944-3600	Cambodia	(202) 726-7742

No U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about possible visa requirements. For your convenience, we recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at 1-800-556-9990 or www.pvsinternational.org.

Backup Photocopies

The smartest and easiest security precaution you can take is to carry photocopies of the personal information pages of your passport, your air ticket, traveler's check serial numbers (if you're carrying these checks), and your credit cards. Store them separate from the originals. Bring along extra passport-sized photos. Add phone and fax numbers for reporting lost credit cards, for your travel protection plan company if you have purchased one and for your medical emergency network. This can save you immeasurable time, money, and bother if your documents are lost or stolen during your trip. In addition, you can scan these photocopies and email them to your personal email address so that a replacement can be printed out if needed (if/when Internet service is available.)

Overseas Taxes and Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency). If applicable, you will receive a list of these fees with your Final Documents approximately 14 days prior to departure.

Optional Tour—Reserve Early

During your trip, you will have the opportunity to join optional tours to further your discoveries. Most of these tours may only be booked during the trip with your Program Director, but the following tour must be reserved at least 30 days prior to your departure to guarantee space. All optional tour costs are subject to change without notice.

Hot-air Balloon Ride over Bagan

Early risers can take flight for a memorable hot-air balloon ride over the Bagan Archaeological Zone, where you'll enjoy a stunning sunrise view over the shrines and temples that dot the plain. A glass of Champagne awaits you upon your landing. This tour is only available from January 1-March 31 and again from October 1-December 31. (These are the dates in Bagan, not the date you depart the U.S.) Travelers who book this tour will be asked to fill out and return a brief medical form prior to departure.

Due to limited space this optional tour must be booked before your departure. **Pre-bookings must be made by 30 days prior to departure**, no exceptions. The cost of this optional tour is $320 per person.

2. YOUR HEALTH

Keep Your Abilities In Mind

We've worked closely with our local Program Directors and regional associates to identify the aspects of this adventure that you should be aware of, from physical requirements to cultural factors. **Please carefully review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.**

We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

Pacing

- 16 days, with 7 nights aboard the RV Paukan, and 6 hotel stays, including a single 1-night stay
- International flights from U.S. to Bangkok depart around midnight, crossing the International Date Line; and 4 internal flights, **2 of which require early wake up**

Physical Requirements

- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- You must be able to walk 2-3 miles unassisted and participate in 3-5 hours of physical activities each day, including stairs, and walking over hilly terrain and river banks
- Agility and balance are required for embarking RV Paukan, 4x4 vehicle, and horse cart

TIP from our Program Directors*: The number one physical requirement that previous travelers were unprepared for is the lack of modern docks and piers during the river cruise. Ports in Burma simply do not have the same easy access that you'd find in other parts of the world. You will need to walk up and down riverbanks at most ports of call—and sometimes this can be a steep climb.*

Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 70-90°F during cruising season
- February through mid-May are the warmest months, followed by the rainy season ending in September

Terrain

- Travel over some bumpy unpaved roads, walk along city streets and ancient ruins, and visit monuments, often with uneven paths and walkways with no handrails

Transportation

- Travel by 45-passenger coach, 4x4 vehicle, and 34-passenger riverboat
- 4 internal flights of approximately 1 hour each

Accommodations & Facilities

- All accommodations feature private baths and Western-style toilet facilities
- RV Paukan does not feature an elevator
- When touring, Asian-style toilets (squat-style, rather than with seats) may be the only available facilities

Cuisine

- Meals will be a mix of local specialties and familiar American standards
- Meals onboard feature a variety of entrée options, including vegetarian

Health Check and Inoculations

If you have any ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date. Your trip will take you into remote areas, with no nearby medical facilities. Please notify us in writing about any medical condition that may require special attention. (If your report is normal, you don't need to send it to us.) If you do send us a medical report, we don't use it to determine if you should take this trip, or if you are likely to enjoy it. Those decisions are up to you and your doctor. Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your international itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling. You may want to have a dental exam before your trip.

If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition. If you take medications regularly, be sure to pack an ample supply that will last your entire trip, as obtaining refills of your medication can be difficult during your trip. Pack these medications in your carry-on bag, and keep them in their original, labeled containers. To be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications, you should also bring copies of the prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name.

Vaccinations

Check with the CDC: To ensure you receive any needed vaccinations we suggest that you check the current recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for your destination. You can contact them:

On-line — if you have access to the Internet, we suggest you visit the CDC's Web site at **www.cdc.gov/travel**, where you will find comprehensive information about preventing illness while traveling.

By phone — at the CDC's Hotline toll-free at **1-800-232-4636** 24 hours a day. Please note that automated information may be arranged topically by disease, rather than by country or region.

Consult your doctor: After checking the CDC's recommendations we strongly suggest that you consult your family physician (at least 6 weeks prior to departure) concerning any vaccinations or medications that you may need on this trip. At the time of print there were no specific vaccinations required for entry into any of the countries on your itinerary.

Also, when you visit your doctor, get a prescription for an antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness. In addition, you should ask your doctor for a prescription for a pain medication, such as Tylenol with codeine. You might need this in the unlikely event of an injury in a location where medical attention would be delayed. Our Program Director does not carry prescription medications.

Prevention of Malaria

The CDC recommends that travelers to Bagan—and some other parts of Burma—take an anti-malarial medication. Anti-malarial medication is also recommended for Laos and Siem Reap, Cambodia, which we visit on the optional extensions. Malaria is a mosquito-borne disease, so the most important steps you can take to prevent malaria are to use insect repellent (preferably containing DEET at 30-35% strength) and to wear clothing that keeps your arms and legs covered. Malaria is also easily treatable by use of a prescription anti-malarial drug.

Please consult your health care professional well in advance of your trip to discuss which anti-malarial regimen (if any) you will follow. For further information, you or your health care professional can obtain the CDC document “Prescription Drugs for Malaria” on the CDC website. Symptoms of malaria do not present themselves until at least 7 to 9 days after the infection; so if you feel unwell or have flu-like symptoms in the weeks after you return home, please let your doctor know about your recent trip.

Jet Lag Relief

You will feel better on the first days of your trip if, shortly before you leave home, you start to adjust to the different time zone of your destination. Since you will cross several time zones to reach your destination, you may lose many hours of regular sleep. On arrival, your body then will have to suddenly adjust to new sleeping and eating patterns. The result is jet lag. Its symptoms are fatigue—often compounded by insomnia and general restlessness—irritability, and vague disorientation. You cannot totally avoid jet lag; but you can minimize it. Here's how:

- Start your trip well rested. Switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane. Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Try to sleep on overnight flights.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcohol right before–and during–your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying.
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane, and make an effort to get up and walk about the cabin a few times to keep your blood circulation normal.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap. Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Safe Water: Tap water is **not** safe to drink. Bottled water is readily available. We recommend you use only bottled water for drinking and brushing your teeth throughout this trip, and avoid drinks with ice. Carry a bottle in your daypack at all times. Bottled drinks and juices, and hot drinks that have been boiled, are safe to drink. Before you buy a bottle, inspect it to make sure the cap is sealed properly. Carry a handkerchief to dry the tops of bottled drinks before and after opening.

Carry your own handkerchief to dry your hands thoroughly each time you wash them. For times when running water is not handy when you want it, you can bring moist towelettes or anti-bacterial "water-free" hand cleanser. Avoid touching your face, biting your nails, and putting things in your mouth out of habit. Don’t share your water bottle with others.

Safe Food: We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Your Program Director can suggest restaurants for meals you take on your own. Carry a handkerchief to dry any wet utensils or plates. When dining on your own, don't eat meats sold by vendors on the street, as they may not have proper refrigeration. Avoid uncooked foods, such as green salads and raw vegetables, as they may have been washed with unpurified water. Be cautious with non-pasteurized milk products. Fruit you peel yourself is usually safe.

3. LUGGAGE REGULATIONS

Size, Number and Weight Restrictions

In addition to the international flights, you will also take domestic flights within the region on your main trip. The luggage limits on these flights are less than the average allowance for international flights. **This means that even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions, as indicated in the following chart.**

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current **standard** is **44 lbs for checked bags** and **15 lbs for carry-on bags**.
Size restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (*length+width+depth*). Generally, **62 linear inches is the checked bag limit**; **carry-on limit is 45 linear inches**.
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Most of the extensions have the same luggage restrictions as the main trip. The only extension that has its own limits is the post-trip in Northern Thailand (Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai). During this extension ONLY your **checked luggage cannot be more than 33 lbs** and **your carry-on cannot be more than 15 lbs**. But fortunately, there is a work around if you feel you cannot meet the 33 lbs limit: Bring a small additional bag with you, and use it to store your excess luggage at Donmuang airport on the day you fly to Chiang Rai. Your Program Director can arrange this for you onsite.	
REMARKS / SUGGESTIONS	
One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person: Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for international flights. **Note**: Enforcement of published restrictions by countries and airlines is a matter of governmental and corporate policy. Enforcement may include spot checks and may be inconsistently applied. Expect penalties and fines to be imposed immediately, however, when and if enforced. Before you choose to ignore the published restrictions you should ask: *Do I feel lucky?* And, even if you answer yes, you should make sure that you have the ability to pay the fine.	

Should I confirm luggage restrictions with my U.S./international airline(s) before departure? Absolutely, confirm current restrictions about a week or so before your departure. You should take this step no matter if your vacation has a lower limit then the average international flight or not, because there may be recent changes, such as new security regulations, or an update to the standard weight/size allowances. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our webpage in the *FAQ* section.

You should also check with the airlines on luggage fees—many airlines charge to check luggage, sometimes even on international flights. Others will charge a fee if you bring a second carry-on item, like a purse or a laptop. **These fees are not included in your trip price**; they are payable directly to the airlines. If you are making a connecting flight, you should also confirm if your luggage can be checked through to your final destination. For more information about air travel, see the "Air Travel" section of your Important Information booklet.

Luggage Suggestions

Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase for your checked luggage. Due to space limitations on our motor coaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.

Travelers on the post-trip extension in Northern Thailand might want a small additional bag. This extension has a lower luggage limit than the main trip or other extensions. You can work around this limit by leaving excess luggage at Donmuang airport on the day you fly to Chiang Rai. If you would like to take advantage of this "left luggage" service, please bring an additional small bag with a lock.

Tip**:** *Bring a second, empty lockable bag folded into your main suitcase, with a luggage tag and small lock. Use this to carry souvenirs home – but remember that you may incur extra luggage fees. If you're traveling with a companion we recommend "cross-packing," i.e., pack 2 outfits of your clothing in your companion's luggage and vice-versa, in case one bag is delayed.*

Airport Security/TSA

Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage may change. To avoid inadvertently packing restricted items in your carry-on, we suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website, at **www.tsa.gov** which keeps a current list of restricted items. From the main website click on *Our Travelers*, then *Air Travel*, and then you will see a link for *Prohibited Items*.

Liquids and your carry on: Per the **TSA's 3-1-1 rule**: Liquids must be in a 3.4 ounce or less (100ml) bottle (by volume); all bottles must be in a 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin. One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring. The 3.4 ounce (100ml) container size is a security measure. Note that this rule is used increasingly in Europe.

Locking your luggage: To reduce the risk of damage to your luggage, *either* do not lock your bags when checking in for flights that originate in the U.S. *or* use TSA-approved locks. (These are locks that TSA screeners can open and relock with a special tool, avoiding damage to your luggage or lock if a physical inspection is required. Look for the words "TSA" or "TSA-approved" on the lock's packaging.) Outside of the U.S., we strongly recommend that you lock your luggage as a preventative measure against theft.

4. WHEN YOU ARRIVE

GCCL Air Travelers

U.S. Departure: If you are among a group of ten or more GCCL travelers who depart the U.S. from your international gateway city, it is our goal to have a GCCL Representative assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. Unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond our control, the Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time. If you are flying domestically before your international flight, the representative will be stationed at the check-in counter for your departing international flight, not at the domestic arrival gate.

Arrival: A GCCL Representative will meet you at the airport after you exit luggage claims area and escort you to a private motorcoach for your transfer to the hotel. The bus transfer from the Airport may take anywhere from 30-45 minutes, or a bit longer, depending upon traffic. Please be advised that there may also be some waiting time at the airport before the bus transfer takes you to the ship – depending on the time between incoming flights.

Important note on porters: *Airport porters are NOT allowed in the customs hall area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your motorcoach. Your motorcoach driver will load your luggage onto your motorcoach.*

Delays *Do* Happen – Despite the Best of Plans. In the event your flight is delayed or you miss a connection and must be re-booked, please remember to let Grand Circle know by calling the emergency number provided in your final documents so that we can make appropriate arrangements for your arrival.

U.S. Return: At the end of your base trip or optional post-trip extension, you'll be transferred by motor coach to the airport for your return flight to the U.S. If you are among a group of ten or more GCCL travelers who return to the same U.S. gateway city, a GCCL Representative will meet you as you exit Customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights. Again, it is our goal to have our GCCL Representative waiting to assist your group. In rare instances, unforeseen circumstances may prevent this service.

Please note: *If you plan on booking your own international flights or arranging with our air department to arrive/depart on an earlier/later date than standard for your program, airport transfers will NOT be included in your program price. Transfers must be purchased separately, as an optional add-on, and are subject to availability. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Traveler Support team at 1-800-321-2835. For more information, please see your Important Information booklet.*

Flying with a Travel Companion

If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.

5. MONEY MATTERS

How to Carry Your Money

Burma's economic situation is evolving rapidly, but we recommend a conservative approach to money handling. You may find that credit cards are gaining more traction there, but most Burmese business are still "cash only", and ATMs are not common. **Therefore, it is important that you bring enough cash to cover your basic expenses in Burma.** (And if you are taking the extension to Laos, cash is a good idea there too.) In addition to cash, bring some plastic—credit card or two and an ATM card—as backups.

Special Note—Cash in Burma

Since it is important that you bring enough cash to cover your expenses in Burma, let's review what type of cash to bring. **Overall, you'll want a mix of denominations and bills in very good condition.**

You'll find that a lot of businesses—particularly tourist-related businesses like hotels—will accept U.S. dollars. When paying in dollars, smaller bills are preferred. Plus they are useful because you can pay as close to exact change as possible. Larger bills can be used to exchange for Burmese kyats, and will get you a better exchange rate than if you were to exchange smaller bills. Typically kyats are accepted at businesses that cater to locals only or for transactions that involve a small amount of cash (a "Mom and Pop restaurant, taxi fare, etc.)

TIP from previous travelers*: Some previous travelers have remarked that they used U.S. dollars more often than kyats. They also suggested that future travelers bring more small bills than large bills.*

Once you arrive in Burma, you'll be able to exchange money at the airport or in private exchange booths in/near your hotel. We recommend that you wait and exchange at a private booth—the booth at the airport is OK, but it is not as reliable (odd hours, long lines, more paperwork). Our regional staff estimates that you should exchange about $150-$250 per person on your first day in Burma, but you should adjust this amount according to your own spending habits.

No matter how much cash you bring, or in what denominations, one thing is **VERY IMPORTANT**—the condition of the bills. Due to concerns about counterfeit U.S. dollars in Burma, businesses and exchange booths can be very picky about what bills they accept. (Or not so picky, depending on the how the clerk's day is going.)

Bills should be in perfect condition—no rips, no marks, not folded—think "pristine". They should also be from the new, more colorful, "large portrait" series (i.e. dated 2006 or later). The best choice would be un-circulated bills, if you can find them. **Despite these precautions, you should expect that some of your bills will be rejected at some point.** *We suggest you bring extra bills to account for this.*

ATMs

ATMs are NOT common in Burma. **Instead of relying on ATMs for the whole trip, our recommendation is to bring enough cash to cover your basic expenses (meals, souvenirs, tips) and use ATMs as a backup plan, or a way to get extra cash if you spend more than you expected.**

The reason we make this recommendation is because ATMs are not nearly as widespread in Burma as in other countries. Here's a quick comparison from MasterCard to put it in context: In the city of Boston, MA there are roughly 1,205 ATMs that accept MasterCard. In Burma—the entire country—there are roughly 95 MasterCard ATMs.

The good news for travelers is that ATM availability is expected to change rapidly as Burma develops. (There weren't any ATMs in Burma at all a few years ago, so there's been big change already.) By the time you arrive, there might be a lot more ATMs. But our Program Directors have found that even when new ATMs are installed it doesn't always mean travelers can use them. Like anywhere else in the world, most ATMs in Burma will work without a problem, but some will be out of order, out of money, or limited in what type of card they will take. In other countries, these problems are easy to work around—you just move on to the next ATM. But in Burma there might not be another ATM nearby. This is why we suggest that you bring more cash than usual.

As far as the other countries on this trip, Laos is like Burma—it has a small number of ATMs. But Cambodia and Thailand have a large number of ATMs, especially in Bangkok, Thailand.

Always notify your bank before you leave home that you are going abroad so that they may remove any blocks on your account and also ask them about the number of withdrawals you may make abroad. For cash withdrawals, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

TIP: *Many banks charge a fee ranging from $1 to $5 for every time you use an ATM in a foreign city. Others will charge you a percentage of what you withdraw. Check with your bank on what fees they charge before you leave the country. That way you can decide if it is better for you to take out one or two large sums, or make smaller but more frequent withdrawals. Your Program Director can advise you on ATM locations, but when to withdraw money is left to your discretion.*

Traveler's Checks?

Traveler's checks are *not* recommended. We urge you not to rely on traveler's checks for your personal expenses. They can be difficult to exchange and are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants. It's more practical to view any traveler's checks you might bring as a last resort for an emergency.

Credit Cards (and Debit Cards)

Like ATMs, credit card use is just starting to gain traction in Burma. Most businesses are still "cash only". And unfortunately, the places that do take credit cards can be very inconsistent. They may only take one type of card (MasterCard only or Visa only)…they may or may not charge you a fee…the fee may or may not be the same fee as yesterday…you get the idea. Because of these inconsistencies, it is important that you don't rely on your credit card alone. Burma is changing fast, but cash is still king.

Laos is similar to Burma when it comes to credit card use—cash is usually a better choice. But credit cards are commonly accepted in Thailand, and somewhat accepted in Cambodia. And even if you don't end up using it, having a credit or debit card as a backup is helpful in an emergency. T**he bottom line: bring a credit card or two, but expect to use cash more than plastic.**

TIP*: To avoid an accidental fraud alert or security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company or bank that you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. You should also double-check what phone number you should call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad, since most 1-800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!*

Currency by Destination

For current exchange rates, please refer to our website, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

In Burma

The basic unit of currency in Burma is the kyat. The kyat is divided into 100 pyas. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Banknotes: Kt 100, 200, 500, 1,000, 5,000 and 10,000
- Coins: Kt1, and 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 pyas. Coins are rarely used.

Burma is still mostly a "cash only" society. You'll want a mix of smaller U.S. bills to pay with, plus a few large bills to exchange to kyats. Bill must be in very good condition. See "Special Note—Cash in Burma" on page 13 for more details.

Banking hours: 9 am to about 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, and 9:30 am to 12:30 pm on Saturday.

In Thailand

The basic unit of currency in Thailand is the baht (THB), easily distinguished by color and marked with both Thai and Arabic numerals. The baht is divided into 100 satang. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Banknotes: 20 (green), 50 (blue), 100 (red), 500 (purple), and 1000 baht (reddish brown)
- Coins: 25 satang, 50 satang, 1 baht, 2 baht, 5 baht, and 10 baht

Baht are generally preferred. When changing U.S. dollars to baht, you will get a slightly better rate if you exchange $50 or $100 bills instead of $1 to $20 bills.

In Laos
The basic unit of currency in Laos is the kip (LAK). The kip is divided into 100 att. Banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Banknotes: 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, and 50,000 kips
- Coins: 10 att, 20 att, and 50 att

Some businesses will accept U.S. dollars, but it is more common to use the local kip. When using or exchanging U.S. dollars know that crisp bills in very good condition are vastly preferred—bills that are worn, torn, or even folded might be rejected. In Laos, the bills can be the newer “large portrait” style or the older, less colorful style; the condition is more important than the age.

In Cambodia
The official currency of Cambodia is the riel, but U.S. dollars are widely accepted. Some businesses will also take Thai baht. Riel banknote denominations are as follows:

- Banknotes: 100, 500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 and higher
- Coins are no longer in general circulation

Previous travelers have suggested that since U.S. dollars are widely accepted in Cambodia, and prices are low, a mix of smaller bills—such as ones, fives, and tens—is more useful than a few large bills. A small amount of local currency is useful for some situations, such as to pay/tip the attendant at a public restroom. If you pay in U.S. dollars, it is fairly common to get your small change back in riels.

Optional Tour Payments
During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Program Director. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, or American Express only. (We also accept debit cards with the logo of one of these credit card companies, but it must be a card that allows you to sign for purchases. You will not be able to enter a PIN)

In order to process these charges, there can be a delay of 2-3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2-3 months following your return. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "**OPT Boston**" (depending on your credit card company).

Shipboard Expenses
Cash in U.S. dollars is the only payment accepted for onboard expenses (drinks, onboard services, etc.). Credit/debit card payment cannot be accepted onboard.

Shopping

There is **no** requirement to make a purchase at local markets or shops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. **Grand Circle Cruise Line cannot be responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.**

If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop or gold dealer will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price, and ultimately, you must use your best judgment when deciding whether an item is worth the price being asked.

By Destination

Burma is famous for its exquisite handicrafts, most of which were handed down from generation to generation. Burma is also famous for its rich natural resources, ruby and bloodstones, and its lacquerware which dates back to the 11th Century. There are many lacquerware workshops in Bagan and Nyaung Oo area. In Yangon, a good place to shop is Bogyoke Aung San Market, which sells luxury items, handicrafts, foodstuffs, clothing, jewelry and consumer goods.

Bangkok is famous the world over for its street markets—Pratunam, Chatuchak Park, Khlong Toey, Sampheng (Chinatown), Banglamphu, and many more—where you'll find things you never imagined you wanted, but once you see can't do without. Even if you don't want to spend any money, they're great places to wander around. And by all means, bargain, especially at outdoor stalls. The price tag is a hint as to what they hope to get, but they'll often settle for much less.

For top-end shopping, the two main centers in Bangkok are the area around the Oriental Hotel off Charoen Krung (New) Road and the River City shopping complex on the river next to the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel. Thailand's two big department store chains, Siam Paragon and Central World Shopping Complex, have several branches in Bangkok.

Laos offers many fine craft items at good prices. Handicrafts abound; woodcarvings, silk (scarves and fabric), weaving, and Lao coffee from the Bolaven area are good buys. Traditional souvenirs include precious stones, hilltribe handicrafts, including elaborate jewelry, colorful textiles, and opium pipes, bronzeware cutlery, nielloware silver inlaid items, and lacquerware.

Bargaining

Merchants enjoy negotiating prices almost everywhere. If this is your first experience at bargaining, don't worry—you'll quickly find your own style. Your opening offer should be well under the asking price. The only rule is that if you make an offer, you should be prepared to buy at that price. And remember, whatever price you pay is okay, as long as the item is worth that price to you.

U.S. Customs Regulations and Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, **www.cbp.gov** has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511.**

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is $800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than $800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S**. Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the *export* duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the *import* duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20229
Tel. **1-877-227-5511**
www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/

Problem with a Purchase?

The best way to address a problem with a purchase is to not have one in the first place! So don't forget to examine merchandise before paying for it, check contracts or agreements before signing, and review your receipt before leaving the shop. For major purchases, don't hesitate to ask in advance about the return policy—local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up.

But what if you do discover an issue with an item later on? In that case, your best recourse is to contact the vendor directly. For this reason we recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. due to delays in communication, the complexities of international shipping/customs duties, and even cultural differences in how business is conducted.

To Tip or Not to Tip

Sometimes *that* is the question. Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. For those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Your tour price includes gratuities on the main trip and optional extensions for all local guides and motorcoach drivers that may assist you during the scheduled activities on your vacation. Listed below are our recommendations for the tips that are not included in your tour price. All tips are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars. Do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

- **GCCL Program Director:** It is customary to express a personal "thank you" to your GCCL Program Director at the end your trip, especially if he or she has provided you with individual assistance. As a guideline, many travelers give $7-$10 per person, per day.

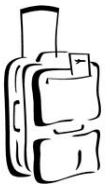
- **Shipboard:** Shipboard gratuities to the cruise personnel are not included in the cost of your cruise. The ships' tipping guidelines recommend a flat tip of $10-$12 U.S. per person, per day, which will be pooled among all cruise staff. For your convenience tips for the crew can be paid in U.S. cash or local currency (no credit card payments are accepted for tipping).

- **Housekeeping staff at hotels**: $1-2 per room, per night

- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.

- **Waiters:** Your Program Director will handle any tips, if appropriate, for included meals. If you dine on your own, know that tipping waiters is not common practice, but if the service is excellent you may leave about 10% of the bill in appreciation.

6. PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP



In General

Travel light: We've compiled some *suggestions* from our local Program Directors and from past travelers to help you refine your packing and ensure that nothing critical is forgotten. Our travelers' top three comments about packing are "I wish I had brought less," "I should have double-checked the weather," and "You said I'd need (*insert something you don't need here*) and I didn't." These suggestions are springboards, **not** requirements – take them with a grain of salt. Finally, remember the **Golden Rule of Packing Light**: whatever you think you need at first—take half the clothes and twice the money.

Pack casual clothes: Comfortable, informal apparel is perfectly acceptable at each of your destinations. Basic pants, shirts, sportswear, everyday dresses/skirts, supportive shoes, and functional outdoor clothes are recommended.

Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, our list suggests several layers of clothing so you can adjust accordingly. Most of your clothing can be made of cotton or cotton-synthetic blends. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, bring socks and underwear, and even shirts and pants, made of silk, synthetics, or a cotton-synthetic blend that will dry out overnight. Look for clothes that offer adequate sun protection.

Comfortable, supportive walking shoes are essential: You'll be on your feet and walking a lot, sometimes over rough and slippery surfaces, so choose your footwear carefully. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction. You can find especially supportive shoes designed for walking. Light hiking boots might be useful for the ankle support, but they are optional.

Trekking pole: Many past travelers have recommended bringing a folding trekking pole, sold in most camping stores. This is very useful when exploring ruins and trails that have no handrails.

Bring a jacket: Please bring a warm jacket during the cool season (November-February) and a light jacket the rest of the year for our stay in Maymo and near Inle Lake. (The rest of Burma may be hot, but this area is cooler because of the higher elevation.)

Light rain gear is recommended: Regardless of when you travel, rainfall is a possibility. While it may not rain on your trip, we suggest you bring a waterproof shell or coat, preferably with a hood. This is usually a better choice than a folding umbrella, which is less effective in wind.

Style Hints and Dress Codes

Dress on our trip is functional and casual. The most formal you might need for a city evening would be a sport jacket with no tie for men, a dress and dressy sandals for women—but this is not necessary on this trip—the decision is yours.

Wearing shorts is acceptable in most situations for both men and women. However, the traditional culture of Southeast Asia is somewhat conservative, so avoiding sleeveless shirts, tank tops, or short shorts—especially at Buddhist temples—shows the greatest respect for it.

Shorts and knee-baring skirts are forbidden in the temples, so we suggest that you stick to trousers or a long skirt for temple visits. If you forget and wear shorts on a day that includes a temple visit, all is not lost—temples will generally loan cover-ups to visitors who are perceived as "too bare"—but you *must* cover up to go inside.

It is common practice in Burma to go barefoot inside the temples, so consider a pair of shoes that you can get on/off easily. In other countries, like Laos, you usually take off your shoes only and leave your socks on. If you are taking any of the extensions you might want to bring a couple extra pairs of socks to replace the ones that will get extra dirty in the temples. (Or you could designate a couple pairs as your "temple socks" and wear them more than once.)

***TIP**: We will provide moist towlettes/wet wipes in Burma so you can wash the bottom of your feet after walking through temples barefoot. However, you might want your own wipes because they can be useful for other reasons—cleaning your hands when there is no soap or freshening up on a hot and humid day, for example. If you'd like to have your own pack of wipes for these reasons, bring them; if you'd rather save space in your luggage, leave them at home.*

Proper dress is required for entry at the Royal Grand Palace in Bangkok: trousers and a sleeved shirt for men; a long skirt or long pants and a sleeved shirt for women are acceptable.

Clothing Options

The luggage weight and size restrictions imposed by travel realities today have made traveling light an absolute necessity. With modern fabrics – Gore-Tex, Polarfleece, polypropylene, etc. – lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy. A visit to any on-line or local sporting goods/outdoor stores (L.L. Bean, REI, EMS, etc.) will yield a treasure trove of lightweight, specialized, easy to care for and fashionable clothing and gear that is readily adaptable to your itinerary. The outdoor industry has devised some compact, lightweight and functional solutions for traveling light – from soft water bottles to powerful, tiny flashlights to quick drying microfiber washcloths.

Packing Your Carry-On

Using a daypack as a carry-on bag for your flights is a smart solution. We **strongly urge** you to pack your carry-on with at least one full change of clothes, your camera gear, medications, changes of socks and underwear, your important travel documents, and other irreplaceable items, in case your checked bags go astray. Store camera gear and important papers in plastic bags to protect them from dirt and moisture. With a daypack you can then remove these items on arrival and load your bag with the gear you'll need on walking tours and excursions.

Travel Gear Suggestions

Though it's fun to do things the locals do, it can be frustrating when daily necessities or conveniences from home aren't available. To travel wisely these days you must juggle your personal needs and preferences against the physical constraints of your transportation—whether it's an international airplane, a transfer motorcoach, a small ship or a daylong trek on a camel. You'll have to distinguish between what you **must** have, what you'd *like* to have, whether you can zip your suitcase closed, and what you can reasonably expect to wrestle through airport hallways and security checkpoints. Consult the following items to create your personal checklist – ignoring what you don't need and making the tough decisions over borderline cases. Remember that many airlines today will charge you extra for added luggage.

Our hotels/ships provide basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do *not* provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.

Don't Forget: Emergency photocopies of your passport, air itinerary, and prescriptions, a list of your credit card numbers and phone number to reach the credit card company or bank to report loss or theft.

Clothing

- ❑ Shirts: short and long-sleeved in a breathable fabric, (cotton or blend.) Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts; sleeveless tops are optional.
- ❑ Light rain jacket with hood, particularly for the rainy season (May-Oct)
- ❑ Shoes and socks: Casual and good-traction walking shoes or sport sandals (like Tevas). You'll go barefoot in temples in Burma, so consider shoes you can get on/off easily.
- ❑ For winter months (November-February): sweaters, fleece, warm jacket, warm socks
- ❑ Pants/jeans: Comfortable and loose fitting is best for comfort and movement.
- ❑ Walking shorts: long cut for modesty
- ❑ Cotton sweater or sweatshirt for the air-conditioned bus
- ❑ Wide-brim sun hat or visor (seasonal)
- ❑ Swimsuit, for hotel pools
- ❑ Underwear and sleepwear
- ❑ If you wear skirts, one long (below the knee) skirt for visits to temples

Consider …

- ❑ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush, shaving items, deodorant, shampoo/soap, shower cap, body soap, etc.
- ❑ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ❑ Sunglasses and a neck strap
- ❑ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger.
- ❑ Insect repellent with DEET
- ❑ Compact umbrella
- ❑ Washcloth (not always supplied)
- ❑ Pocket-size tissues
- ❑ Anti-bacterial "waterless" hand cleanser OR
- ❑ Moist towelettes/wet wipes. We will provide wipes for your feet in Burma (you go barefoot in temples there). But you might want to bring your own wipes to clean your hands when there's no soap or to freshen up on a hot day.
- ❑ Flashlight
- ❑ Travel money purse, worn under your shirt or jacket; money belt

Medicines

- ❑ Your own prescription medicines
- ❑ Vitamins
- ❑ Cold remedies: Sudafed/Dristan
- ❑ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ❑ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ❑ Antihistamine: Benadryl
- ❑ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ❑ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ❑ Band-Aids
- ❑ Moleskin foot pads
- ❑ Antibiotic: Neosporin/Bacitracin
- ❑ Motion sickness medicine

Optional Gear

- ❑ Travel alarm or watch with alarm
- ❑ Compact binoculars
- ❑ Hanging toiletry bag with pockets
- ❑ Washcloth, handkerchiefs
- ❑ Basic sewing kit
- ❑ Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite), clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ❑ Electrical transformer & plug adapters—see “Regional Electricity”
- ❑ Travel journal/note pad/reading material
- ❑ Home address book
- ❑ Photos, small gift for home-hosted visit
- ❑ Phrase book
- ❑ Collapsible walking staff
- ❑ Pocket calculator for exchange rates

7. REGIONAL CLIMATE INFORMATION

We can't predict the weather you'll have on your travels – our local weathermen are lucky to get tomorrow right! So, as your departure nears, it's a great idea to visit the *My Account* feature of **www.gct.com** for a current 10-day forecast of temperatures and conditions at your destinations. Or check Internet weather sites (www.wunderground.com is very comprehensive) for those forecasts and tweak your wardrobe accordingly. You'll find historical averages and general information on local climates below – but, given recent weather extremes, it's even more important to consult up-to-the-minute resources.

Burma: Burma has a largely tropical climate with three seasons: the monsoon or rainy season, from May to October; the cool season, from late November to February; and the hot season, generally in March and April. Rainfall during the monsoon season totals more than 200 inches in upper Burma and over 100 inches in lower Burma and Rangoon. Central Burma, called the dry zone, and Mandalay, the chief city in the area, each receive about 30 inches. Mandalay is usually warm to hot, with average daily temperatures ranging from 56-82°F in January (cool season) to 77-100°F in April (hot season).

Like the central region, lower Burma is warm to hot most of the year, especially in the delta and coastal areas. It is also the most humid region. Average daily temperatures in Rangoon range from 64–90°F in January (cool season) and from 75–97°F in April (hot season).

The climate in upper Burma—Maymo and Inle Lake—is more temperate than the other two regions because of the higher altitudes, which range from about 1,000–3,500 ft. Upper Burma can get chilly at night, even in the hot season, and can be downright cold in the cool season. For example, the average nighttime low temperature near Inle Lake is 45°F in January (cool season) and 60°F in April (hot season).

Thailand: High temperatures and humidity levels are experienced throughout the year. The country is hottest from March to May, and coolest from November to February. Monsoon season, which brings rain to the entire country, runs from June to October.

Laos—optional extension: Laos has a typical tropical monsoon climate, but with some cool temperatures in winter. During the rainy season (May to October), the winds of the southwest monsoon deposit an average rainfall of between 50 and 90 inches. The dry season (November to April) is dominated by the northeast monsoon. December through February can be quite cool at night—lows can be in the 50s, even though daytime highs will be warm. Daytime highs increase to more than 90° F in March and stay that way through September. In October and November, the average temperature is in the 80s.

Cambodia—optional extension: Cambodia's climate can generally be described as tropical with seasonal monsoons. There are two distinct seasons, the rainy and dry. Temperatures during the rainy season, between June and October, average 80-95°F. The dry season is characterized by cool months, November to February, with temperatures averaging 80-95°F and hot months, from March till May, which sees temperature range between 84-100°F.

Climate Charts

The following charts reflect the average *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. As your departure approaches you may wish to monitor current weather conditions online. Here is the official data from the weather observation stations closest to our destinations.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity, & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	BANGKOK, Thailand			RANGOON, Burma		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average Number of Days with Rainfall)
JAN	89-71	88-49	0.4	89-65	86-40	1
FEB	91-75	89-53	1.1	94-67	88-33	1
MAR	93-78	88-55	1.2	97-71	91-35	2
APR	94-80	86-56	2.8	99-76	90-40	2
MAY	92-80	87-62	7.5	92-78	92-65	17
JUN	91-80	85-64	6.0	86-77	96-84	26
JUL	90-78	86-64	6.2	85-76	96-85	28
AUG	90-78	87-66	7.4	85-76	97-86	28
SEP	89-77	91-68	12.6	86-76	96-80	22
OCT	89-77	92-67	9.1	88-77	95-72	13
NOV	88-74	87-58	2.3	89-73	92-60	6
DEC	87-70	84-49	0.4	88-67	88-48	1

MONTH	MANDALAY, Burma			TAUNGGYI, Burma (for INLE LAKE)		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	82-56	68	0.1	72-45	66	0.1
FEB	88-60	57	0.2	76-47	59	0.4
MAR	96-68	47	0.2	81-52	49	0.1
APR	100-77	47	1.4	84-60	55	1.3
MAY	98-79	64	5.9	81-63	72	9.8
JUN	93-79	70	6.0	77-64	82	7.8
JUL	93-79	70	2.9	75-64	83	11.3
AUG	92-78	73	4.0	76-64	85	13
SEP	91-77	78	5.8	76-63	84	8.5
OCT	89-75	80	5.0	75-61	82	6.8
NOV	85-68	76	2.5	74-52	76	1.5
DEC	81-59	72	0.4	71-47	71	0.6

MONTH	LUANG PRABANG, Laos			VIENTIANE, Laos		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average number of days with rainfall
JAN	82-56	70	0.6	83-64	--/49	2
FEB	89-58	62	0.7	86-68	--/48	1
MAR	93-63	58	1.2	91-72	81/45	3
APR	96-69	58	4.3	93-77	84/48	5
MAY	95-73	62	6.4	90-78	91/62	13
JUN	93-74	71	6.1	89-78	92/68	17
JUL	90-74	71	9.1	88-78	--/68	17
AUG	90-74	78	11.8	87-78	--/70	19
SEP	91-73	72	6.5	88-77	--/67	14
OCT	89-69	71	3.1	87-75	--/61	7
NOV	85-64	70	1.2	85-70	--/53	2
DEC	81-59	71	0.5	81-63	--/48	1

MONTH	Chiang Mai, Thailand			Siem Reap, Cambodia		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity	Average number of days with rainfall
JAN	84-58	90-41	0.3	88-67	71	0.3
FEB	89-60	84-34	0.2	90-70	70	1.1
MAR	94-66	78-33	0.6	93-74	69	2.4
APR	97-73	78-38	1.8	94-76	68	4.5
MAY	93-75	83-52	6.0	93-76	75	5.5
JUN	90-76	86-60	5.3	91-76	79	11.6
JUL	89-75	88-63	6.6	89-75	81	12.5
AUG	88-75	90-65	8.9	89-75	82	12.5
SEP	88-74	91-64	9.9	87-75	84	13.2
OCT	87-72	90-60	5.2	87-73	84	12.2
NOV	85-67	90-53	1.7	87-71	80	6.5
DEC	82-59	90-45	0.6	86-67	75	1.3

Please note: The data cited here reflect *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions, and serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. A 60 degree ***average*** high temperature means that days may be as warm as 80 or as cool as 40 – but it's most likely you'll encounter temperatures in the 50 to 70 degree range.

8. TRAVEL AND TECHNOLOGY

In General

Smartphone, tablet, digital camera/camcorder, MP3 player: travel today can involve technology that didn't exist even five years ago. The usefulness of digital devices is enormous: smartphones can keep you connected and offer up-to-the-minute information via your cell plan or a local Wi-Fi connection. With a tablet (or smartphone) you can store multiple country guidebooks, access maps and connect to the internet in a small, lightweight device. (***Tip****: you can download* ***this*** *document from the Grand Circle Travel website and import it into your tablet or e-reader, many of which can display PDF files.)*

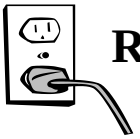
Compact and lightweight, digital camcorders and cameras take high definition movies and still images of the people you meet and places you visit. For robust use a laptop may be effective; for occasional use it's wiser to rely on Internet cafes or a tablet and hotel Internet access rather than shoulder the heft and size of a laptop.

To use these devices you should first consider the services available at your destinations. You'll encounter a range of electrical standards, varied plug configurations to access the local current, erratic availability (electricity and internet access), and differing technological standards.

You'll need to assess your power and data storage needs, and the accessories required to recharge/connect/use these devices. Finally, it's smart to read the owner's manual *before* you depart. Pay particular attention to electrical, power and storage requirements to ensure that you understand exactly what you need. Thorough preparation is the best guarantee that your devices will work up to their potential.

Email & Internet in Burma

Most hotels in Burma have Internet services available, some for free, some for an hourly charge. Internet cafes are also available in each town we visit. Most hotels will provide free Wi-Fi, but please expect painfully slow downloading and connection.



Regional Electricity

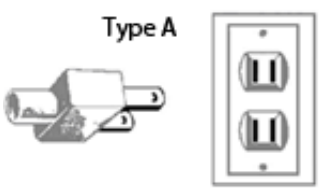
The standard U.S. electrical system—110 volt current and flat two- or three-pronged plugs—is rare elsewhere. The overwhelming choice for the rest of the world is 220-240 volts with a variety of plug shapes, sizes, and configurations. Some plugs will work with multiple outlets, while others won't. When traveling, you'll need to consider three things about the electricity in your destination: the voltage, the plugs, and the availability of power.

Voltage: **Electricity in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia is 220 volts**. Plugging a 110 volt U.S. appliance into 220 volt current will ruin the motor. We suggest that you bring *dual* voltage appliances that work on both 110V and 220/240V. Dual voltage appliances are inexpensive and need only plug adapters. Plus they are common; most of the things a traveler would want to plug in—a camera, a battery charger, a tablet—can work on both 110V and 220/240V. Check the owner's manual or the item itself (sometimes the voltage is stamped on the back or on the charger).

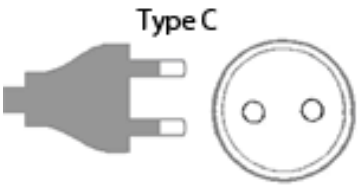
If you bring something that needs 110 volts—like a hair dryer, shaver, or curling iron—you'll need a transformer to halve the 220/240V current. The problem with transformers is that they tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave the hair dryer, shaver, etc. at home. (Reminder: Hair dryers are available onboard the ship and in most hotels.)

Plugs: **Overall a Type C plug adapter will be the most useful one to bring on this trip, and if you travel often you might want to consider a universal adapter or a kit.**

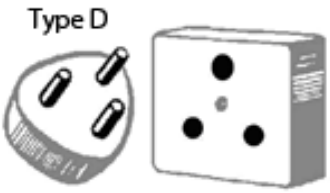
Burma uses a variety of plugs that reflect the country's colonial and regional influences. Depending on when the building was built, you could need a Type C (European plug), a Type D (Indian plug), or a Type G (British plug). On our ship, we use the Type C, which is by far the most common in Burma. In Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia the most common plugs are U.S. and European. *TIP: Sometimes the plugs will look like Type E below, but a Type C/European plug will work with these too.*



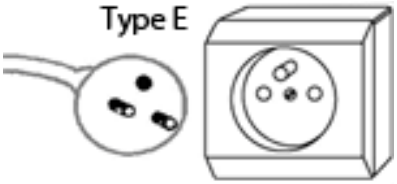
Type A=U.S. plug



Type C=European plug



Type D=Indian plug



Type E=modified European; works with Type C

Type G=British plug

Because you'll need various plug types on this trip, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter kit. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you *might* also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

Availability: A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. In some places, electricity may be supplied by a generator, and lighting may not be as bright as you are used to. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different GCCL vacation.

Can You Hear Me Now?

Just picking up the phone or getting a paper can be a new experience in a foreign country. To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your final documents package. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

When calling overseas from the US, dial 011 for international exchange, then the country's code, then the number. The country code, which is indicated by a plus sign (+), is +855 for Cambodia, + 856 for Laos, +95 for Burma, and +66 for Thailand. Phone numbers abroad may not have the same number of digits as US numbers; even numbers within a country can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

When calling the US from abroad, generally you dial 00 for international exchange, then the US country code +1, and then the number with area code.

Phone Availability in Burma

Public phones are rare, even in the financial capital, Rangoon. Some small towns and most of the villages still do not have telephones. Generally phone calls will have to be made at the hotel. Domestic calls costs aren't extravagant, but overseas calls from Burma are some of the most expensive in the world. GSM phones do not work in Burma and phone cards from home will not be accepted anywhere inside Burma.

Local GSM SIM cards for travelers can now be rented after a $100 deposit at the Yangon International airport. Travelers must have their own handset and a prepaid top-up card should be purchased at the expense of minimum $12. (Actual fees may vary from exchange rate of the day based on local currency.) Travelers can retrieve their deposit at departure from the rental service.

Smartphones

It will require some effort to get the most out of your smartphone when you travel. Even with an international roaming plan, costs can add up quickly – those handy apps often pile up download fees. The simplest solution is to shut down all cell phone functions, automatic data feeds and roaming options, and take advantage of the apps via available Wi-Fi. With an Internet VOIP app (like Skype) you can make inexpensive calls. If necessary, turn international roaming back on and your phone will work as usual – albeit at some cost. If your phone doesn't support international roaming (most smartphones do), some carriers offer loaners.

Cell Phones

If you want to use a standard cell phone while traveling overseas, be sure to check with your service provider (www.verizon.com, www.t-mobile.com etc.) to see if your phone will work outside the U.S. or whether you're better off renting an international phone. The websites www.travelcell.com and www.globalcellularrental.com have good information on rentals. Or, consider buying an inexpensive local phone for your stay.

Phone Calling Cards

If you don't carry a phone, you can use a prepaid calling card to call the U.S. with minimal additional charges. Besides the prepaid long distance charges, you might have a local fee of a few cents and possibly a connection fee if you are using your card at a hotel. Check with the reception desk prior to using it to avoid unexpected charges.

Calling cards purchased in the U.S. generally will not be accepted in Burma, so if you are planning on using them it is best to purchase them abroad. Note that dialing a U.S. 1-800 number outside the continental United States will incur costly long distance fees, since 1-800 does not work outside the U.S.

Photo Gear

For many people, capturing the highlights of their travel experiences in photographs or movies and sharing them is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the journey. Remember, however: some individuals and cultures and are less tolerant of photography than others. It's always best to respect local customs. And in some places you may be charged for photography at specific sites, or restricted from any photography at all.

Digital cameras and camcorders are excellent travel companions—and many do dual duty by recording movies *and* still images. Fist sized camcorders can capture HD movies and high quality still photos; cameras the size of a deck of cards are great for snapshots and casual movie clips. With an ample supply of high-capacity memory cards you can record your whole trip with a small, lightweight package.

But you must remember the batteries. Recharging batteries is sometimes impossible, cameras can drain batteries *very* quickly, and replacements may be unavailable. Whether you need standard or proprietary batteries, it's good to have spares. Be sure your charger will work with the local electrical system, and bring more than enough memory cards—they may be hard or impossible to find. Memory cards are small, thin and light: you can never have too much storage.

Compact cameras are impractical for distant subjects. Some models have a zoom lens of up to 120mm, which is good for middle distances. For distant subjects a *megazoom* (with a zoom lens of at least 300mm) or a single lens reflex (DSLR) camera with up to a 300mm telephoto lens are good choices. With a DSLR you can use multiple lenses, though your gear can quickly get complex, weighty and cumbersome. Cameras or lenses that need a tripod are impractical for travel photography. A single mid-range telephoto lens coupled with a small, fast prime lens (for low light/no flash situations) is an effective, flexible and compact kit. Consider mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras (MILC), which combine small bodies and multiple, small lenses with high quality for both still and HD movie images.

If you use a DSLR or MILC camera, protect the lenses with a UV filter and bring lens caps, covers, cleaning paper and a waterproof bag (a heavy duty Ziploc-style bag is good) to protect your gear. Be sure your camera has a flash that you can turn off, and if it's detachable, remember to pack it. (At many sites and museums, flashes are ***not*** permitted.)

Consider disposable cameras, as well. They are inexpensive and capable of acceptable photos as long as the light is not too dim *or* bright. X-rays do not damage the data of digital cameras (in any media format), and so pose no problems for travelers using digital cameras.

9. YOUR IRRAWADDY RIVER CRUISE

The *RV Paukan 2012*, Your Irrawaddy River Ship

Completed in 2012, the *RV Paukan 2012* has a noble lineage on the Irrawaddy. The ship's design hearkens back to the original *Pandaw*, which still works the Irrawaddy as the *RV Pandaw 1947*, and which was built in Scotland to the original design of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company paddle steamers. These shallow draft vessels were specially built for the Irrawaddy's fluctuating depth (due to the monsoons). The *RV Paukan 2012* river ship has four decks, 18 cabins and accommodates 34 passengers. Rooms and common areas feature a clean, contemporary design and layout.

Amenities: Your ship features four decks: a lower deck with ship's systems and crew quarters, a main deck which hosts the dining room and cabins, an upper deck with a lounge, bar and cabins, and a sun deck, open to the weather and fitted with lounge chairs.

Your cabin amenities include a private bathroom with shower, hair dryer, in-room safe, cabin-to-cabin phones, and air-conditioning. The decks, dining room, and lounge areas are comfortable and attractively decorated, providing welcoming locations for relaxing with your traveling companions.

Cabin Assignments: You will receive confirmation of your deck and/or cabin category upfront in writing; it will be on your invoice and online in My Account at www.gct.com/myaccount. However, your cabin number may not be assigned until you arrive onboard the ship. (This is normal procedure for ships in many parts of the world, including Burma.) If there's no cabin number on your invoice or online, you can presume it will be assigned later and communicated to you when you board.

Dining: Meals are taken in the window-lined dining room and feature an open seating plan. Breakfast and lunch may be casual and buffet-style, but dinners are always full service and formally seated. The food on board includes international food and typical local dishes. If you require a special diet, please request this in advance—you may do so by contacting one of our Travel Counselors. There is no room service on board, though early morning tea and coffee can be requested for your room. Dining times may vary according to the scheduled daily activities. Tea, coffee, and bottled water are always available in the cabin, lounge and saloon at no charge.

Docks and Piers: Ports in Burma simply do not have the same easy access that you'd find in other parts of the world. You will need to walk up and down riverbanks at most ports of call—and sometimes this can be a steep climb.

Dress: There are no formal dinners on board; casual dress is encouraged. Note that the ship requires that you relinquish your shoes for cleaning whenever you board. You'll be given slippers to use for the hour or so it takes for this process.

Electricity: Cabins are equipped with 220-volt outlets, using the Type C European plug. (See the "Regional Electricity" section in chapter 8.)

Elevators: There are no elevators aboard. Upper decks are reached via stairways.

Internet and TV: Internet access is available onboard ship but is extremely slow. Even should your device show full stream Wi-Fi, you may not be able to connect to internet (the infrastructure simply isn't that far advanced.) There is no television onboard.

Laundry Services: Laundry service is available on board. Prices vary according to the item in question, but generally are less than $4 per piece.

Medical Services: The crew is trained in First Aid and medical facilities are rarely more than a half hour away. There is no doctor on board. Rangoon and Mandalay have international standards hospitals, and in Monywa and Bagan a medical assistant is available if necessary.

Security: When moored or docked, the ship's staff will monitor the boarding area to control access to the ship.

Water: Tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled water is readily available on board at no charge.

Shipboard Payments: U.S. dollars are accepted for purchases made on board at the end of the trip, prior to departure for home.

Smoking Policy: Smoking is prohibited in all inside areas of the ship, but is permitted on outdoor deck areas.

Wheelchairs: The ship is not built to accommodate wheelchairs.

Ship Specifications

	Entered service	*Length*	*Width*	*Passenger capacity*	*Crew members*	*Decks*	*Cabins*	*Elevator*	*Chairlift*
RV *PAUKAN 2012*	2012	138	33	34	20	4	18	no	no

Your GCCL Program Director

During your Grand Circle Cruise Line Small Ship Cruise Tour, you'll have reliable assistance available at all times from an on-site Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Director. Your Program Director is fluent in English and can give you an inside perspective on your destinations. Along the way, your Program Director will guide you expertly through particular sites and cities.

Many Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Directors are graduates of professional education programs for travel guides. In addition, they receive specialized training directly from Grand Circle Cruise Line, training that is based on what we've learned from thousands of past travelers about how to make the trip most enjoyable. Your Program Director offers both a deep knowledge of the region and a commitment to make this a very pleasant, informative, and rewarding travel experience for you.

Your Program Director will provide sightseeing tips, handle all travel details, reserve optional tours you choose to take, oversee your Discovery Series events, and provide any other assistance you may need. You will be in the company of the Program Director throughout your Small Ship Cruise Tour, and during the optional trip extensions in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Burma if you choose to take them.

10. ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS

We're including some handy practical details and a brief introduction to the places you'll visit on your Small Ship Cruise Tour. If you expect to explore in depth on your own, we recommend that you consult one of the many available book-length guides to your destinations. If you have one or two specific sites, museums or features that you're interested in, an Internet search is the ideal way to get-up-to-date information and details. And of course your Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Director or Hospitality Desk Representative will be able to assist you with suggestions and arrangements of activities you wish to participate in during your stay.

Burma in Brief

Key Points to Know

Here are a few points that our Program Directors want you to know before you arrive in Burma:

- It is a big part of Burmese etiquette and culture to take off both your socks and your shoes inside temples and in homes.
- Travelers are also asked to take off their shoes when they board the ship (so that your shoes can be cleaned); bamboo slippers will be provided.
- You will have two flights during the trip that require an early morning wake up.
- Ports in Burma simply do not have the same easy access that you'd find in other parts of the world. You will need to walk up and down riverbanks at most ports of call—and sometimes this can be a steep climb.
- The top three things you can do to prepare for this trip are: 1. Read the "Keep Your Abilities in Mind" section of this Handbook. 2. Bring cash in good condition (think "pristine"), and be prepared to pay in cash more frequently than plastic. 3. Check the weather forecast online about a week before your departure and adjust your packing accordingly.

Cuisine

Myanmar food has its own special identity. Although it draws on its' neighbors, it is neither as hot as Thai, as spicy as Indian nor does it resemble Chinese cooking much except in the stir-fry vegetables.

Different regions of Myanmar have different variations of "standard" dishes. Use of seafood is more prevalent along coastal cities such as Mawlamyine (formerly Moulmein), while land animals are more commonly used in landlocked cities. Beef and pork, although certainly not forbidden, are avoided by many Buddhists and Muslims. Vegetarian dishes are also common, as the Buddhist lent (*Wa-dwin*), a three-month fasting after midday is observed by many orthodox Buddhists.

Myanmar dining tables are round and low-footed. Family members sit on the mat around the table to have meals. Unlike the Western kitchen, food is not served in courses. Dishes with different items are spread out on the table for people to take from themselves. Food is eaten with the fingers of the right hand. Homes in cities and towns have dining tables and chairs, some people eat with standard western utensils (fork, knife, and spoon.)

Burma or Myanmar?

Both names have origins in the local language—one is from the familiar word "Burmar", and one is from the more formal "Mranma". (It's like the difference between the shortened "USA" and the more formal "United States of America".)

However, due to historical and recent events, both names carry political overtones. According to the government, "Burma" is a colonial name that evokes British rule. Citing this reason, they changed the name of the country to Myanmar in 1989. For those opposed to the current government, the use of "Burma" shows a rejection of the current government's legitimacy.

As a result, the use by official bodies and the media varies quite a bit. The U.S. Department of State, the BBC, and the Washington Post use "Burma", while the United Nations, CNN, and New York Times use "Myanmar". Regardless, the nationality and language are still referred to by all as "Burmese".

Ultimately, the best solution might be the one used by many local people themselves—it is currently common practice to use "Burma" in everyday settings and "Myanmar" on official documents or for dealings with the government. (In our materials, you will notice that our usage mirrors this practice—"Burma" in this handbook, but "Myanmar" for your visa application.)

Language Barrier

You can have some great "conversations" with local people who do not speak English, even if you don't speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Your Program Director can help get the ball rolling.

Our Flights

Air scheduling in this region is not as reliable as in the U.S., and delays and routing changes are often part of the picture here. Your Program Director will do everything possible to make the appropriate adjustments to our itinerary. We hope, that like most of our travelers, you take it in stride and develop an accepting and even lighthearted attitude. It's part of the adventure.

Religion

Buddhism is the predominant religion in Burma, so an understanding of the religion will assist your discoveries. Based on the teachings of the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha, the religion focuses on moving past the suffering and pain of the everyday world to reach a union with the universe known as nirvana, or enlightenment. The religion is an ancient one, predating Christianity by at least 400-600 years. Over the many centuries different paths to enlightenment have been put forward, resulting in different schools of Buddhism. Most of the Buddhists in Burma belong to the Theravada school, which is the oldest surviving school. It is estimated that Theravadins number more than 100 million worldwide, with large populations concentrated in southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

Theravada Buddhism holds critical or analytical thought in high esteem. The main idea is to advance towards enlightenment through experience, reasoning, and studying the teachings of the wise instead of blind faith alone. Like all Buddhists they believe that worldly attachments impede spiritual growth, and that through rightful thoughts, deeds, and words, one can achieve the wisdom to transcend suffering. Practicing Buddhists are expected to practice charity, moderation, and follow their school's teachings.

In Burma, much of Buddhist religious life centers on the monasteries. Monks and nuns are highly respected, and many parents send their children to the monasteries for religious instruction. Most Burmese boys have a shinbyu ceremony, in which they briefly join a monastery as a novice at about age 7. During the ceremony, the young novice reenacts the Buddha's journey from prince to prophet. It starts with a procession in princely attire to the monastery, where he dons monastic robes and his head is shaved. Usually the boy stays with the monks for a week or so, receiving religious instruction. When he 20 years or older, he can chose to return to the monastery for upasampada, or ordination.

Girls do not have a shinbyu ceremony, but they do receive religious instruction and can be ordained as nuns at or after the age of 20. The female rite of passage, the na htwin, is a ear-piercing ceremony (as in a physical piercing, not a loud or screeching noise). This ceremony is more of a social event then a religious one, since Burmese women traditionally wore earrings as a sign of social status.

Religious holidays include Thingyan (the New Year Water Festival), Vesakha ("Buddha's Birthday"), and Wa-dwin (Buddhist Lent). Buddhist holidays follow a lunar calendar, so their exact date changes from year to year. But generally Thingyan falls in mid-April, Vesakha is always in May, and Wa-dwin is three months from roughly mid-July to mid-October. Local religious festivals are usually pagoda festivals, which double as old-fashioned market fairs, with stalls selling food and handicrafts.

Taking Photographs

The etiquette of photographing most people is about the same as it would be on the streets of your hometown. You need permission to take a close-up, but not for a crowd scene. Be especially polite if you want to photograph an older person. If you want to shoot a great portrait, show interest in your subject, try to have a bit of social interaction first. Then use sign language to inquire if a picture is OK. Your Program Director can help.

Please do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Don't be overly nervous or suspicious, but keep your eyes open. If you are venturing out after dark, go with one or two other people. Carry a one-day supply of cash in your pocket. Carry most of your money, and your passport, in a travel pouch or money belt under your shirt. Replenish your pocket supply when you are in a safe and quiet place, or in our vehicle.

Do not leave valuable items unattended in your room. Almost all of our hotels offer use of a hotel safe at the front desk or an electronic in-room safe (for which you can set a personal pin number). Please utilize them.

Pickpockets may create a sudden distraction. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your money belt. If an encounter with a local turns out to be long and complicated and involves money or your valuables, be very careful. Con artists sometimes target travelers.

Bangkok in Brief

City Layout

Bangkok was not developed according to an “urban plan” and has no downtown or city center. The streets, like the traffic, seem to veer off in every direction. Learning your way around can be a challenge. There are, however, some discernible sections. The area around the Temple of the Emerald Buddha has most of the city’s antique architecture. Most of the ministries are in this area and along Rajdamnern Avenue. Chinatown lies between New Road and the river. The city’s business section (if one can be said to exist) occupies the area between Silom and Satorn Roads and between Rama 4 Road and New Road.

Most hotels lie east of Phya Thai Road and south of the Victory Monument. The major shopping areas are along Rama 1, Ploenchit, Rajdamri, Silom, and Suriwong Roads. The Chao Phraya River winds like the letter “S” through the western half of the city, and can serve somewhat as a directional landmark. Most of Bangkok’s major attractions lie on the right side of the upper half of the river.

Vientiane in Brief—Optional Extension

City Layout and Details

The Lao capital of Vientiane (pronounced Wiang Jan) sits on the northern bank of the Mekong River facing the Thai town of Sri Chiang Mai. The original city was overrun on a number of occasions and completely destroyed by the Siamese (Thais) in 1828, after which the city was abandoned. The French redesigned the city plan when they oversaw the rebuilding of the city from the 19th to 20th centuries, so the city is typical of most colonial French cities: broad, often leafy boulevards, colonial mansions (often romantically rundown), and rustic wats and coconut palms. The contemplative city pace, however, is all Lao.

As a capital city, Vientiane is quite small: it’s quick and easy to get around and the riverfront is always nearby. You’ll find a wide selection of Lao and Western restaurants and cafes, as well as an eclectic – if not overwhelming — mix of sights and attractions. The city did not begin to bloom until the early 1990s, and the new architecture is not particularly noteworthy.

It’s a city for savoring, with enough sights to keep you engaged, but not enough to induce a frantic scramble. Relax, slow down and take the time to absorb the local lifestyle, and you’ll find that Vientiane’s best characteristics are intangible, but no less lovely for that.

Cuisine

Laotian food ranges from the simple (sticky rice) to the pungent and spicy (like papaya salad, which is seasoned with chilies and fish sauce.) Sticky rice is the staple (Laotians eat more sticky rice than anyone else in the world.) "Larb," a marinated meat and/or fish dish served with herbs, greens and spices (sometimes served with chilies) is one of the more famous dishes. Noodle soup, much like Vietnam’s “pho” is also popular. Beerlao, a light lager, is the national beer (there is a full-bodied dark version, as well); or you can try Laotian rice based whiskey: "lao lao". Laotians drink it neat, but you can mix it to dilute its powerful alcohol content. If a cup of coffee becomes necessary, Lao coffee (made from locally cultivated beans) is usually served in a big glass with lots of chipped ice and sweetened condensed milk at the bottom — and it’s quite tasty. In Vientiane, you’ll find the French legacy in the local French restaurants (with an Asian accent) and the baguettes that are sold on the street.

Drinking Water

Tap water is generally not safe to drink in Laos. Expect to rely on bottled water. You may want to bring a bottle of your own (refillable and collapsible for packing/carrying) to use during sightseeing excursions.

Laundry Service

Laundry service and dry cleaning are available through your hotel for an additional fee.

Local Transportation

Most of the things you will want to see in Vientiane are completely accessible by foot. If you want to travel a little bit farther or a little bit faster you can do it by bicycle. Rentals are readily available. Fees vary, but average around a dollar a day. If you want to visit further out, visit the local bus stations at Talat Sao. Motorized options include Tuk-Tuk and Jumbo. Tuk-tuks come in three flavors: those that target tourists are the most expensive – often twice the price of a regular tuk-tuk. You'll find them at large hotels and sites, and their drivers are aggressive.
Regular tuk-tuks roam the city looking for fares, and are generally less expensive than the tourist-based tuk-tuks. Finally, opt for the fixed rate Jumbos (slightly larger versions of the tuk-tuk). They operate much as local buses in the U.S., with fixed routes and fixed prices – usually from $.20 to $.40 per destination. Taxis are less common here than in many other cities.

Chiang Mai in Brief—Optional Extension

City Layout

Despite its urban growth over the last decade, the heart of Chiang Mai is still compact and can be explored with ease on foot, with the occasional use of transport for temples, shops, and attractions outside the city center. The modern section of town lies between the Ping River and the old walled city. It contains the business and shopping districts. The charming old city is a neat square bounded by moats. Several of Chiang Mai's important temples are near the moat area, but there are others to the north and west. Doi Suthep rises up to the west of the city, and you can enjoy a fine view over the city from its temples.

Shopping

Chiang Mai is the center of hill-tribe crafts. These include interesting embroidery, clothing, bags, and jewelry that can be purchased in the shops along Chiang Mai's "Golden Mile"—a ten-mile stretch of road from Chiang Mai to San Kamphaeng. On both sides, large emporiums sell regional crafts and goods. Some of the all-round best buys are at the Chiang Mai night bazaar in the center of town.

Thai shoulder bags are generally quite well made, and Chiang Mai offers the best selection. The *yaam* comes in many varieties, some woven by hill tribes, others by artists at Thai cottage industries. Some of the best are made by the Lahu hill tribes, whom the Thais call "Musoe."

Many types of woodcarvings are available throughout the area, including countless elephants, affordable Teak salad bowls, and the beautiful hand painted umbrellas of Bo Sang, which has become known as the umbrella village. Framed leaf paintings from here are also very attractive.

Siam Celadon, about four miles north of Chiang Mai, turns out ceramic ware modeled on the Sawankhalok pottery that used to be made hundreds of years ago at Sukhothai and exported all over the region. With their deep, cracked, glazed finish some pieces are very beautiful. Prices may be high, but they tend to be lower here than in Bangkok.

Chiang Rai in Brief—Optional Extension

City Layout

The small market town of Chiang Rai is the closest city to the hill tribes and the Golden Triangle. In the past decade, it has experienced a lot of expansion in order to accommodate the great influx of travelers coming to this region of the world. Singhakrai Road, its major riverside thoroughfare, follows the course of the Mae Kok River. On it are the local Thai Tourist Office, the launch for riverboat rides, and several of the bigger hotels. A few blocks south of Singhakrai, and running parallel to it, is Tanalai Road, where the Hill Tribe Museum is located. Major roads that run perpendicular to Singhakrai, away from the river, include Saksaith Road (site of the Clock Tower and Wat Chet Yot) and Ratanaket Road (Wat Klang Wieng sits at its intersection with Uttarakit Road, and the post office is midway down it).

Siem Reap in Brief—Optional Extension

City Layout

Siem Reap, the gateway town for visits to the ancient temples of Angkor, is located just north of the large lake called Tonle Sap, the largest freshwater body in Southeast Asia. The Siem Reap River flows through the center of town on its course to the lake. Cambodia's National Highway 6 cuts across the northern part of Siem Reap, with the Grand Hotel d'Angkor and the town's central market located along it. Today's town of Siem Reap is within the boundaries of the ancient holy city of Angkor, which occupied an area of approximately six by sixteen miles.

Cuisine

Cambodian cuisine is similar to that of its Southeast Asian neighbors, though in comparison to its neighbors it is relatively unknown to the outside world. It is often described as most similar to Thai cuisine, just not as spicy.

Cambodian cuisine consists of fish and rice, stewed meats and spicy vegetables, shrimp, and seafood fritters. A Cambodian meal usually includes soup (samla), served at the same time as the other dishes. Cambodians eat a lot of fish, caught in the waters of Tonle Sap. Grilled fish is a local specialty. Most often fish is cut up into pieces, rolled in a lettuce or spinach leaf and dipped into fish sauce. Cambodian salads are flavored with cilantro, mint leaves and lemon thyme. The French influence can be found in the bread, roasted turtle and frog's legs which are sold in the markets. Desserts include sticky rice cakes and pudding. Rice noodles (khao phoune) are sold on every street corner.

Shopping

At Angkor Wat and in Siem Reap, hawkers and shops offer many souvenir items produced for the tourist trade. While of course you can buy anything that strikes your fancy, you are likely to find higher-quality products and more authentic local crafts at other cities you visit on your itinerary.

11. DEMOGRAPHICS AND HISTORY

We encourage you to learn about the regions of the world you will soon be exploring before your departure. The ancient and contemporary cultures of this area are rich and complex. Even a small amount of background reading can help you make sense of the kaleidoscope of facts and impressions that will come your way. Having some knowledge in advance can complement and enrich what you can learn from your expert Program Director.

Burma

Burma Today
Capital: Nay Pyi Taw
Population: 53,400,000
Ethnic groups: Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Mon 2%, Indian 2%, other 5%
Languages: Burmese, ethnic and regional dialects
Religions: Buddhist 89%, Christian 4%, Muslim 4%, animist 1%, other 2%

The Land

Look at any map of Southeast Asia, and it is quickly apparent that Burma is wedged in between two giants—India to the west, and China to the east. The country also shares borders with Laos and Thailand, and has coastline on the Andaman Sea. Within the borders, the country's terrain is dominated by steep, rugged highlands that ring the central lowlands. Through the lowlands flows Burma's major river, the Irrawaddy, which empties into the Andaman Sea through a large delta covering over 63 million acres. Although the administrative capital is Nay Pyi Taw, the two largest cities in Burma are actually Rangoon (about 5.5 million) and Mandalay (about 1.2 million).

Historical Overview

Early History—The Pyu and the Mon

Human habitation in the area around the Irrawaddy river valley dates back many thousands of years. Little is known about the Stone Age peoples, but artifacts from the Bronze Age point to a fairly sophisticated culture that grew rice and domesticated chickens and pigs. By 500 BC, the Iron Age cultures that lived in the Samon Valley (south of Mandalay) seem to have been trading with China; their decorated coffins and pottery suggest a prosperous community with a distinct culture.

Perhaps it was the prosperity that drew the Pyu people from their northern lands in the first century BC. Over the next five centuries, the Pyu founded several cities, established a lucrative trade route between China and India, and adopted Buddhism. During this era, the greatest of the Pyu cities was Sri Ksetra (near modern-day Pyay). It was from Sri Ksetra that the Pyu oversaw their expansion into a federation of 18 city-states spread throughout northern Burma.

During the same time, the Mon people migrated from an area in present-day Thailand into southern Burma, and established a few small kingdoms there. It seems that the Mon and the Pyu largely tolerated each other, possibly because their trade routes were to different parts of the world (the Mon worked with Arab traders, the Pyu with the Chinese). Or maybe it was that as Buddhists, both groups were generally quite peaceful. Chinese records from the eighth century AD describe the Pyu as a gentle people who refrained from wearing silk so as to avoid killing silkworms. In other words: not warriors. Which perhaps explains why the Pyu city-states quickly fell to the invading Burman cavalry around 830 AD.

Empire, Division, Repeat
In 849 AD, Pagan (present-day Bagan) was founded by the Burman invaders. Over the next 200 years, the settlement grew into a major power base for the Burmans, who slowly absorbed the Pyu into their new nation. In 1044, the Burman leader Anawrahta ascended to the throne. Considered to be the first king of Burma, Anawrahta defeated the southern Mon in the 1057 siege of the city of Thaton, thus uniting the old Pyu and Mon territories under one ruler.

But his ambitions were not limited to the Mon. Over the course of 30 years, the king laid the foundation of what was to become the Pagan Empire—a major power in Southeast Asia that rivaled the Khmer kingdom in Cambodia. During their 240-year-reign, the Pagan Dynasty implemented many key changes that would impact Burma for centuries. For example, they implemented large-scale agricultural and irrigation projects, made Burmese the court language, and introduced the Theravada school of Buddhism as the official religion. They also built thousands of pagodas, monuments, and monasteries, especially in their capital city of Pagan (Bagan).

As with many dynasties in Asia, the undoing of this "Golden Age" was the Mongol hordes, who swept in and conquered Pagan in 1287. In the resulting confusion and destabilization, Burma divided into a series of small rival kingdoms such as Ava (near modern Mandalay) and Hanthawaddy (near modern Pegu). Politically unstable, subject to internal rebellions, and often at war with each other, the kingdoms were a patchwork of ever-shifting alliances.

It wasn't until the 1500s that Burma was re-united once again. This time it was the charismatic King Tabinshwehti who brought the kingdoms together. Together with his successor, Bayinnaung, the king founded the Taungoo Dynasty, re-united Burma, and conquered additional territory such as some Chinese Shan states, parts of Thailand, and parts of Laos. But the additional territories over-extended the dynasty's resources, and ultimately proved to be too much to hold on to. In 1599, the Taungoo capital city at Pegu was sacked.

The Taungoo Comeback
What makes the 1599 sacking of Pegu such a key moment in Burma's history is who the attacking force was backed by—the Portuguese. It was the first hint of a European power trying to widen its influence in Burma through force. Yet despite the damage to their capital, the Taungoo were able to regroup and successfully reclaim some of their territory in northern Burma by 1605. They used this territory as a base from which they challenged the Portuguese forces, defeating them at Thanlyin in 1613. By 1650, the Taungoo Dynasty had recaptured and reunited Burma.

While other neighboring countries where being colonized by European powers, the Taungoo managed to hold in to Burma until 1752, when internal fighting divided the country once again. Although the feudal period was long over, the country split into rival groups that echoed earlier history—the Taungoo, who were a Burman dynasty with roots in the old kingdom of Ava, were ousted by a rebellion of Mons with roots in the old kingdom of Hanthawaddy.

The Hanthawaddy rule was brief—only seven years. In 1759, they were successfully challenged by the military-minded Konbaung Dynasty. At first the Konbaung kept the European powers at bay. They even managed to conquer territory in Thailand, China, and India. However, it was their involvement in India during the 1820s that drew the ire of the British.

Anglo-Burmese Wars
In 1824, a series of border raids between India and Burma sparked of the First Anglo-Burmese War. The war was brief—only two years—and resulted in Burma ceding almost all of its foreign territory. With the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, the British seized part of Burma itself, yet allowed the king to continue his rule. With the Third Anglo-Burmese war in 1885, the British took the entire country, and sent the king into exile in India.

Although their rule was relatively brief, and they eventually lost to the British, the Konbaung Dynasty oversaw an important transition period. The arts thrived, especially literature and theater. The country's first standard coinage was introduced. They also started a major reorganization of the monasteries, known as the Sudhamma Reformation. Under the Konbaung, it seemed that Burma was recapturing some of its importance from the days of the Taungoo Dynasty.

In contrast, when the British took over, they made Burma a province of India, essentially reducing it to a backwater. Economically, the union created a boom in rice and other crops, but the profits rarely reached the locals. Adding to the complexity of the situation was the fact that many workers and professionals from India were brought in to Burma; because of the already existing ties between India and Great Britain, the Indians were viewed as suspect by many of the local population.

The Thirty Comrades

During the 1920s and 1930s, the main resistance against the British rule came from religious groups like the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association) and the RUSU (Rangoon University Students Union).
With the outbreak of World War II, these young nationalists were torn between serving with Great Britain—who might thereby grant independence after the war—or joining the forces against Britain. Led by respected activist Aung San, a group known as the "Thirty Comrades" secretly approached Japan with an offer to collude against the British. But when it became apparent that the Japanese government would not keep its promises, the Burmese army, now headed by Aung San, officially joined the Allied forces.

After the war, Great Britain did acknowledge Burma's independence. A constitution for an independent Burma was in the works when tragedy struck—a political rival assassinated Aung San and several members of his political party on July 19, 1947. Despite the shocking event (or perhaps because of it) the new constitution was quickly passed in 1948. From 1948 until 1962, the government was a parliamentary democracy headed by a Prime Minister. But internal politics and divisions among ethnic groups meant the government's hold was tenuous. In 1962 a coup lead by General Ne Win abolished the constitution and established military rule.

Military Junta and Resistance

The military government's extreme socialist economics meant that everything was nationalized—utilities, industry, even retail shops. This in turn slowed the national economy to a virtual standstill. In March of 1988, a student protest against the worsening economic conditions won public sympathy and touched off a wave of protests and rallies throughout the country. It was during this time that Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, began to emerge as the voice of the opposition party, the NDL (National League for Democracy).

In September of 1988, a group of generals formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). To control the uprisings, SLORC used the army against the protesters. It is estimated that over 3,000 protesters or activists were killed and roughly 10,000 fled. SLORC then placed the country under martial law and announced an election to select an assembly that would write a new constitution. Unfortunately for SLORC, it was the opposition— Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD—who won the majority of the seats in the 1990 election.

The military responded by refusing to let the assembly meet, and by holding two of the NLD leaders, Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin U, under house arrest. It was while under house arrest that Aung San Suu Kyi won her Nobel Peace Award in 1991. For the next two decades, the government would periodically relax its restrictions on Aung San Suu Kyi, only to detain her again or re-arrest her.

It wasn't until 1993 that the Constitutional Assembly was allowed to meet, and in the end they could not overcome the restrictions set by the military; the assembly was dissolved in 1996 without having created a constitution. It was not reconvened until 2005, but major pro-democratic groups like the NLD were barred from participating, and once again the assembly failed to produce a constitution.

Recent History
On May 10, 2008 the government held a referendum on the constitution, which many international observers questioned, especially since it was held in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. The cyclone had hit the Irrawaddy and Rangoon areas on May 2 and May 3, causing extensive damage and loss of life. It is considered the worst natural disaster in Burma's history. Burma's government was widely criticized by the international community for holding the referendum only one week later. In addition, the government created many delays and complications in delivering humanitarian aid, actions that were also strongly criticized.

Although the 2010 election results were largely pro-government, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2010, and her open participation in the 2012 elections (she won a seat in Parliament) signaled a major change in Burmese politics.

Thailand

Area: 198,455 square miles
Capital: Bangkok
Government: Constitutional monarchy
Languages: Thai (Siamese), Chinese, English
Location: Thailand occupies the western half of the Indochinese peninsula and the northern two-thirds of the Malay Peninsula in southeast Asia. Its neighbors are Myanmar (formerly Burma) on the north and west, Laos on the north and northeast, Cambodia on the east, and Malaysia on the south.
Population (2012 estimate): 67,091,089
Religions: Buddhist 95%, Muslim 4.2%, Christian 0.7%, other 0.1%
Agricultural Products: Rice (world's largest exporter), corn, cassava, sugarcane
Industries: Textiles, rubber, seafood (world's largest exporter of farmed shrimp), tourism
Time zone: Because Thailand is so close to the equator, it does not have daylight-saving time. When the U.S. is on DST, Thailand is 12 hours ahead of EST: when it is 12 noon in Bangkok, it is 12 midnight in New York, and 9 pm the previous day in Los Angeles. For the remainder of the year, when the U.S. is on regular time, Thailand is 13 hours ahead of EST.

Historical Overview

Archaeological work at Ban Chiang in northeast Thailand shows that a sophisticated Bronze Age culture thrived there as far back as 5,600 years ago. Although nothing is proven yet about the people who lived in this time, theories have suggested various origins, including Melanesian, Australian, and Indonesian. Much later, from the 6th to 13th centuries, known as the Dvaravati period, the Thais migrated southward from the Asian continent into the fertile basin of the Chao Phraya River in northern Thailand, then controlled by the Khmer empire.

In 1238, in a decisive battle, two Siamese chieftains joined forces, defeated the Khmers, and established an independent nation with Sukhothai as the capital. Most Thais today regard this event as the real beginning of the Thai kingdom. Thai society and culture flourished, but in 1350, after a political breakdown and a major epidemic, the capital moved south to Ayutthaya in the central plain just 55 miles north of the present capital Bangkok.

Ayutthaya remained the capital for the next 400 years and the reigns of 33 kings. Though there were sporadic conflicts during those four centuries with the Cambodians in the east and the Burmese in the west, it wasn't until 1767 that the Burmese succeeded in overrunning Ayutthaya, plundering its treasures, and decimating its population from one million to 10,000. The Thai army regrouped under General Taksin, established a capital on the Chao Phraya River at Thonburi (opposite present-day Bangkok), and engaged in 15 years of wars with the Burmese, Laotians, and Vietnamese.

The wars subsided in 1782, and General Chakri assumed the throne. Taking the name of Rama I, he established the Chakri dynasty of which the present king is the ninth monarch. Rama I immediately moved the capital across the river to a small village or bang filled with wild olive and plum trees called kok. Hence, the name Bangkok. The city was then renamed Krung Thep ("City of Angels"), a title blatantly ignored by Western cartographers, who continued to call it Bangkok.

King Mongkut (Rama IV), the monarch depicted in The King and I, ascended the throne after 27 years as a Buddhist monk. He reformed the laws and set Thailand on the path towards modernization. He also encouraged contact with the West, signing a treaty with Britain in 1855. His progressive efforts were continued by his son King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910), and Thailand moved firmly into the 20th century. By brilliant political maneuvering, he preserved Thailand's independence by ceding to Britain a snippet of the land that is now Malaysia and to the French a sliver of what is today Cambodia.

Under King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1911-1925) further political reforms were granted. During the First World War, Thailand sided with the Allies. Economic troubles stemming from the post-war World Depression compounded the problems faced by King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, reigned 1925-1935). The pressure for sweeping reform culminated in a bloodless coup in 1932, and Thailand's long-standing absolute monarchy was replaced with a representative government.

During World War II, Thailand was occupied by the Japanese and became one of the springboards for the Japanese campaign against Malaysia. After the fall of its pro-Japanese puppet government in July 1944, Thailand pursued a policy of passive resistance against the Japanese, and after the Japanese surrender, Thailand repudiated the declaration of war it had been forced to make against Britain and the U.S. in 1942.

The 1950s were a time of turmoil for Thailand, with numerous coups d'état and a succession of military-backed governments. In the 1960s, Thailand experienced an economic boom as a result of investment by the U.S. in support of the war in Vietnam. In 1973, a popular uprising toppled a despised dictatorship, ushering in a three-year period of true democracy. A right-wing counter-coup in 1976 re-established military rule. Several governments were chosen in popular elections, but always as the military hovered in the background.

For the next few decades, the government would vacillate between civilian democracies and military regimes. A recent example of this type of political reversal occurred in 2006 with the dissolution of parliament and a bloodless coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, which was resolved by a 2007 national referendum approving a new constitution. The subsequent general election in 2007 gave a majority to the People's Power Party, which was allied with the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin. But in 2008 the party was forced to disband amidst a storm of controversy over charges of election fraud.

The 2006 coup and subsequent controversy continue to mark Thai politics. The two main factions—the Red Shirts and the Yellow Shirts—each accuse each other of having been involved in some wrongdoing. The Red Shirts view the Yellow Shirts as supporting the coup and therefore interfering with the democratic process; the Yellow Shirts counter that the Red Shirts are controlled by former Prime Minster Thaksin Shinawatra, whom they view as corrupt.

Although there have been some clashes, the resulting demonstrations by both groups have been largely peaceful and often mediated by the royal family, for whom both sides have shown great respect. (As a constitutional monarch the power of the king is limited to a symbolic figurehead, however the institution elicits huge amount of respect and reverence from the Thai people.)

Laos—Optional Extension

Laos Today
Capital: Vientiane
Population: 6,834,345 (2010 estimate)
Ethnic groups: Lao 55%, Khmou 11%, Hmong 8%, other (over 100 minor ethnic groups) 26%
Languages: Lao (official), French, English, and various ethnic languages
Religions: Buddhist 67%, Christian 1.5%, other and unspecified 31.5%

Today, though Laos is still a developing country, its government is welcoming to visitors and its economy is growing and transforming this once war-torn land. Laos has some good natural resources that include gold, copper, zinc, and some oil reserves. The country also has excellent timber resources and grows great quantities of rice. Fishing in the rivers is a source of local food and income.

The Land

Laos is a narrow, landlocked, mountainous country approximately half the size of the United Kingdom. It shares borders with Thailand, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Burma. Unlike many of its neighbors, Laos is somewhat sparsely populated. The rugged and difficult terrain makes farming a struggle, and while fishing is important along the rivers, Laos has no coastline. The Mekong River, an important source of commerce and transportation, runs through Laos and links the country to the outside.

Historical Overview

Early History

Civilization in the Mekong River Valley where Laos is located stretches back at least 10,000 years and centers around the Mekong River. The Thai and Lao people who now inhabit Laos were originally ruled by the Mons and Khmers. In the 13th century, the Mongols under Kublai Khan in China overran the region. A long period of discontent led to local uprisings that finally drove out the Mongols and brought the kingdom of Northern Thailand into existence. From the kingdom of Northern Thailand and the Khmer lands, the first Lao nation, called Lan Xang, began in the 14th century.

An early leader, Fa Ngum, embraced Buddhism and made it the official state religion. He also accepted from the Khmers the Pha Bang, a gold Buddha that became a symbolic and powerful influence throughout Lao history. Lan Xang soon became the most powerful of the many kingdoms in the Mekong Valley, and by the 17th century Vientiane was established as its capital and used as the name of the nation.

Foreign Influence

Siam, one of the other powerful nations in the Mekong Valley, and the kingdom of Vientiane fought a series of wars that by 1820 left the region in tatters. The Siamese continued with their aggression and by 1885 ruled all of the Mekong Valley. The power of the Siamese was not to last, however. The French arrived in Southeast Asia about this time and, using what we now call gunboat diplomacy, took over the various small kingdoms that now existed and turned them into a single principality that they governed and called Laos.

The French did little for Laos—concentrating instead on developing the territories of Vietnam and Cambodia where they built cities, roads, and railroads, and supported education and commerce. Laos, however, was neglected by the French and did not share in the prosperity of its neighbors.

Modern History
The French influence came to an abrupt end when the Japanese invaded Indochina in 1941. Laos, and the other countries in the region, were turned into Japanese territories until the end of World War II in 1945. The French tried to retake their former colonies when the war ended by landing paratroopers in Vientiane and declaring it a French protectorate. A resistance movement led by a group called the Pathet Lao quickly grew in the region, and by 1953 the French gave in and granted sovereignty to Laos.

The decade of the 1950s saw the rise of nationalism in Laos with two dominant groups, the Viet Minh and the Pathet Lao. After a decade-long struggle for control of the country, the internal conflict left Laos divided and weak. By 1964, as the civil war continued, Laos was dragged into the conflict between North Vietnam and the United States. The notorious Ho Chi Minh trail ran through Laos and helped supply the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops fighting against U.S. forces. Heavy U.S. bombing devastated the country during this period and Laos broke apart into two sections—the Royal Lao government in Vientiane and the Pathet Lao in the northeast. The Royal Lao government was ineffective, and by the late 1960s the communist Pathet Lao controlled many sections of the country.

The peace agreement that ended the Vietnam War in 1973 brought only more instability to Laos. By 1975 the Pathet Lao, who continued to grow in power, effectively controlled the entire country. However, large parts of the population were afraid of the Pathet Lao and fled Laos. This loss of people convinced the Pathet Lao to change their harsh policies, which they did gradually through the 1980s. In 1987, important trade and financial restrictions were lifted and the economy entered the modern era. Religious restrictions against Buddhism and travel restrictions on visitors were also lifted.

By the end of the 1990's the improvements in government policies and the re-opening of the country began to reverse the pervious exodus—more than 28,000 refugees voluntarily returned to Laos and in 2001, the UN High Commission for Refugees closed their Laos office. But despite these positive signs, one the country's greatest challenges—inflation—continued to trigger economic crises and political unrest. In response, the government turned to tourism as a way to improve the economy, creating a successful "Visit Laos" campaign. Today tourism remains a major force in the Lao economy.

In June of 2012, Hillary Clinton became the first U.S. Secretary of State to visit Laos in over fifty years. As part of the historic trip, the U.S. agreed to continue a clean-up effort to rid the country of unexploded cluster bombs leftover from the U.S. bombings in the late 60s and early 70s.

Cambodia—Optional Extension

Facts & Figures
Area: 69,898 square miles
Capital: Phnom Penh
Languages: Khmer is the official language; English and French are also spoken.
Location: Cambodia is bordered by Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.
Geography: The ancient Khmer kingdom we now call Cambodia is a nation of 14.5 million people in a country about the size of Missouri. This is a country of geographical contrasts—the borders of Cambodia are mountainous and rugged, but a rich, alluvial plain dominates the center of the country. Here the Mekong River, the Sap River, and the Tonle Sap create a prosperous farming and fishing region full of rice fields and fishing villages.
Population: 14,494,293
Religion: Buddhist 96.4%, Muslim 2.1%, other 1.3%, unspecified 0.2%
Time Zone: Cambodia is on Indochina Time, twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Phnom Penh.

Historical Overview

Early History

Cambodia was once the center of the great Khmer empire that ruled much of central Southeast Asia for five centuries. We can trace the history in this region back to at least the 6th century when Cambodia was part of the Kingdom of Funan. The Khmer people broke away from the Funans and established their own state, Chinla, which after centuries of conflict was itself invaded and conquered by warriors from Java. By A.D. 800, under Jayavarman II, the great Khmer temples were built and a centralized government ruled the land from the Tonle Sap to Angkor. The Khmer continued to expand their influence until by the end of the 10th century they controlled what are now Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.

The next several centuries brought a succession of wars as the Khmers fought off invaders. During a period of peace and prosperity from 1181 to 1201, the Khmer rulers conceived and built an elaborate capital at Angkor Thom. Perhaps because of the lavish lifestyle and the costs associated with the construction of Angkor Thom, the Khmer empire began a gradual decline from this opulent peak, hastened by a series of wars with the Siamese.

Foreign Influence

As the Khmer empire declined, foreign pressures appeared. In 1596 a Spanish expeditionary force invaded and attacked the capital Phnom Penh. The Spanish presence didn't last; they were in turn defeated and expelled by the Siamese.

The Khmer empire continued its decline after this with various occupations and an almost constant state of war with Thailand and Vietnam, which both claimed lands once ruled by the Khmers. Asian control over the region ended in 1863 when the French sent gunboats into the area to create a French protectorate. The French succeeded and began a long period of domination of Cambodia by installing French administrative, financial, and education systems.

Modern History

France ruled Cambodia until 1941 when the Japanese army swept across Indochina and, while expelling the French, brought terror of its own. With the defeat of Japan and the end of World War II, the French returned to Cambodia. But now they found opposition. By 1953 a strong local leader, King Sihanouk, had risen to power with the Khmer and sought independence for his country. King Sihanouk was a masterful politician and succeeded in wringing form the French the independence of Cambodia. King Sihanouk also established the People's Socialist Communist Party at this time. After abdicating the throne to pursue a political career, Sihanouk became the country's first prime minister. He managed to keep Cambodia neutral in the Vietnam War until 1965, when he broke with the United States and allowed North Vietnam and the Vietcong to use Cambodian territory. This led to the bombing of Cambodia by United States forces.

Sihanouk was deposed by one of his generals in 1970 and fled the country to China, where he set up a government in exile that supported the Cambodian revolutionary movement known as the Khmer Rouge. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, United States and South Vietnamese forces invaded the country in an attempt to eliminate Vietcong forces hiding there. For the next five years, as savage fighting spread throughout Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge gained land and power. In 1975 the capital at Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, and their leader, Pol Pot, became the leader of Cambodia.

What followed for the next three years remains one of the most horrific incidents in world history. The Khmer Rouge forced the entire population of Phnom Penh and other cities to evacuate to the countryside where they were placed in slave labor units and forced to do manual work until they dropped from exhaustion. Pol Pot and his followers began a campaign of systematic genocide against their own people, with the aim of returning Cambodia to the agrarian society of centuries before. Great segments of the population were slaughtered senselessly. People with any type of education, those who wore glasses or were doctors and nurses, anybody who had worked at a bank—these people were all mindlessly killed. Banks were blown up, airports closed, and money was abolished. The horror of the Pol Pot regime went unnoticed for several years.

Finally in 1978, Vietnam, which had been watching the persecution and death of its own citizens trapped in Cambodia, invaded Cambodia and chased Pol Pot and his followers out of the cities and back into the remote mountains. By 1979, Pol Pot had been ousted and the Vietnamese installed a new government. Until 1990 civil war continued sporadically in Cambodia, but gradually the murderous followers of Pol Pot were eliminated from power. Pol Pot died under house arrest in 1998.

Throughout the 1990's United Nations peacekeeping efforts helped stabilize the country. By 1997, a government amnesty convinced most Khmer Rouge partisans to cease fighting, and on October 4, 2004 the Cambodian National Assembly agreed with the U.N. to set up an international war crimes tribunal to try senior Khmer Rouge officials for the genocide of the 1970s. The first trial began in 2009 against the former head of the infamous Tuol Sleng Prison, Brother Dutch. He was convicted of crimes against humanity in 2010, and although he appealed, the conviction was upheld in 2012. More leaders are expected to be tried over the next decade.

Recent History

Another stabilizing influence during recent decades has been the return of the monarchy in 1993, when King Sihanouk was restored to the throne. In 2004, ill health forced him to abdicate in favor of his son, Norodom Sihamoni, who currently reigns as a constitutional monarch (similar to the system in Great Britain). But even after abdicating, King Sihanouk continued to be a popular figure, and many were saddened when he passed away on October 15th, 2012 from a heart attack only 16 days before his 90th birthday.

Recent events in Cambodia have focused on the government's approval of a controversial hydroelectric dam on a tributary of the Mekong River. Known as Lower Sesan 2, the dam could provide much-needed electric power and improve Cambodia's relations with other countries (some of the funding is coming from abroad, mostly China). But opponents fear the dam's impact on the ecology and the thousands of villagers who will need to be moved from the floodplains.

12. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books, Maps, and Movies

If your local store or library doesn't stock the books or movies below, the Internet offers a wide variety of options for finding older or rare stock – try AbeBooks (abebooks.com), Alibris (albris.com), Amazon (amazon.com) or Barnes & Noble (bn.com) — or any of the smaller websites. Of course, this selection is not meant to be comprehensive, and is offered as a starting point for your research.

Suggested Reading

General Southeast Asia:

A Dragon Apparent, Travels in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam by Norman Lewis (Travel Narrative) A classic account from 1951 of travels and adventure, of local cultures and archaeological treasures. Although this book can be harder to find, it is still available online, and is worth seeking out for its first-hand account of the last days of French Indochina.

A Traveller's History of Southeast Asia by J.M. Barwise and Nicholas J. White (History) As compact history of a diverse region, this book packs a wealth of information into its well-written and well-organized pages. Covers the history of diverse nations such as Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. (And yes, the title has two "L"s; the series is British).

All the Wrong Places: Adrift in the Politics of the Pacific Rim by James Fenton (History/Politics) A journalist for British and American newspapers based in Asia, Fenton once made a living by reporting from "all the wrong places"—Vietnam during the war, Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge era, and South Korea during its struggles for democracy. This book may not be in stock at your local store, but can usually be found online.

The River's Tale, A Year on the Mekong by Edward Gargan (Travel Narrative) Describes in beautiful detail a year spend on the Mekong River during a 3,000-mile journey from its source in China through Tibet, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Sri Rahula (Religion) A useful overview of Buddhism as it is practiced in Southeast Asia by an internationally recognized authority who just happens to also be a Buddhist monk.

Burma:

Finding George Orwell in Burma by Emma Larkin (Travel Narrative) A Burmese-speaking American journalist travels the country in search of another young writer—the brilliant George Orwell, author of ***Animal Farm*** and ***1984***—who lived in Burma during the 1920s. Larkin's use of Orwell's life and writings from the colonial period offer touching and unique insights into present-day Burma. If you enjoy this book, or just like Orwell in general, you might also want to look for his first novel, *Burmese Days.* It was loosely based on his experiences as a police officer in the Indian Imperial Police when Burma was an adjunct of British India.

Flame Tree, A Novel of Modern Burma by Keith Dahlberg (Literature) George, a quiet and unassuming teacher in Burma, finds himself mediating between two warring factions—a dictator and a group of rebel—in an attempt to save his wife, who is being held hostage.

Freedom from Fear by Aung San Suu Kyi (Memoir/Political Commentary) Aung San Suu Kyi, a human rights activist and winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has been repeatedly placed under house arrest by the government of Burma since 1989. This collection of her writings includes some of her best-known speeches, letters, and essays. If you are interested in Ms. Kyi, a good biography of her remarkable life is ***The Lady: Aung San Suu Kyi*** by Barbara Victor.

Quartered Safe Out Here: A Harrowing Tale of World War II by George MacDonald Fraser (Memoir) An exciting and action-packed memoir about the author's experiences in Burma during the final year of World War II as a 19-year-old private.

Laos:

The Coroner's Lunch, Thirty-three Teeth, Disco for the Departed, Anarchy and Old Dogs, Curse of the Pogo Stick, The Merry Misogynist, and Love Songs from a Shallow Grave by Colin Cotterill (Mysteries) An award-winning mystery series set in Laos featuring Dr. Siri Paiboun as the detective.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down by Anne Fadiman (Culture/Medicine) A sympathetic look at the culture clash between the Hmong parents of Lia, a child with epilepsy, and her American doctors. Alternates between the family and the doctors, between the American's trust in science and the Hmong's spiritual beliefs.

Cambodia:

A History of Cambodia by David Chandler (History) A clear and succinct account of modern Cambodia that starts in 1953 and extends to the rise and fall of the Khmer Rouge, the death of the noxious Pol Pot in the late 1990s, and the return of peace to this lovely land.

Golden Bones, An Extraordinary Journey from Hell in Cambodia to a New Life in America by Sichan Siv (Memoir) Deputy Ambassador to the UN during the Bush administration, Siv looks back on a remarkable life, from his privileged childhood in Pochentong to the murderous reign of Pol Pot, his escape from a work camp to freedom and, eventually, life in America.

Many Many Many Gods of Hinduism by Swami Achuthananda or ***Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*** by Kim Knott (Religion) Although the primary focus of these books is on Indian Hinduism, some previous travelers felt that knowing about the Hindu religion is helpful to put the Angkor temples in context.

Odyssey Guide Angkor, Cambodia's Wondrous Khmer Temples by Dawn Rooney Considered by many as *the* indispensable guide to Khmer culture and history

Guidebooks:

Your Program Director will be happy to provide recommendations and suggestions during the trip, so a guidebook is not a necessity. But a good one can be invaluable as a one-stop reference, so for those travelers who have asked for suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Since different guidebook series each have their own target audience and structure, it is well worth your time to browse your local library or bookstore to find the one(s) you like best. To get you started, here is some general information on the most popular series:

Culture Smart! – Focuses on local customs and etiquette instead of sights, dining, etc.
DK Eyewitness – Innovative visuals make these books easy to use and a nice souvenir once the trip is over. The focus is primarily on the sights and activities.
Fodor's – A classic guidebook with strong information on activities, shopping, and dining. Good mix of upscale recommendations and budget suggestions.
Frommer's – A comprehensive guide series that is known for its restaurant recommendations.
Insight – Offers more information on history and culture than usual, nice visuals, good maps.
Lonely Planet – Practical guides geared towards a more adventurous traveler on a budget.
National Geographic – From the same company that publishes the magazine. Excellent photographs, good information on history, nature, and culture.
Rough Guides –For the independent traveler on a budget. Particularly known for their maps.

Maps

Most hotels will provide maps free of charge at the reception desk or in your room. These maps are usually sufficient for our travelers, but if you plan on any independent exploration, you may wish to consider purchasing a map before your departure. This can be especially useful in a country that doesn't use the Roman alphabet as the hotel maps may only be printed in the local language.

Some recommended map series include: Rand McNally international maps (especially the ***StreetWise*** series), Insight's ***FlexiMaps***, and Rough Guide's destination maps. We suggest that you visit your local bookstore or library to get a better sense of which type of map is best for your needs before making a purchase.

Suggested Movies

Here are few of our favorite movies that are about, or set in, or from the region you'll be traveling. Most are available at movie rental stores and websites—or even your public library. Sometimes films produced outside of the US may be harder to find, but they are usually available online.

BURMA

Beyond Rangoon (John Boorman, 1995) Starring Patricia Arquette, U Aung Ko
Trying to put her life back together after the murder of her husband and son, Laura goes on vacation with her sister to Burma. She loses her passport at a political rally, and is stuck in Rangoon. She falls in with students fighting for democracy, travels through Burma and witnesses the brutality of its dictatorship.

The Burmese Harp (Kon Ichikawa, 1956) Starring Rentaro Mikuni, Shôji Yasui
Set in Burma at the end of World War II. A Japanese platoon in Burma surrenders to the British and is sent to a POW camp. One private accepts a special task and in completing it, confronts his death as well as the deaths of thousands of other soldiers and civilians. He retreats into a life of Buddhist prayer, dedicating himself to healing a wounded country. Ichikawa offers a sensitive meditation on peace, war, life, and death.

Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country (Anders Østergaard, 2009)
A well-made documentary that follows several undercover video journalists (VJs) during the 2007 anti-government protests in Burma (the "Saffron Revolution"). Paced quickly, it is both suspenseful and sometimes difficult to watch – knowing that it is a documentary—there are no special effects.

The Lady (Luc Bresson, 2011)
The story of the peaceful quest of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is at the core of Burma's democracy movement. A story of devotion and human understanding set against a background of political turmoil, which continues today, this is the tale of an extraordinary couple (with her husband, Michael Aris) and family and their sacrifices for a higher cause. Despite distance, long separations, and a dangerously hostile regime, their love endures.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Apocalypse Now starring Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen (1979, color) Set in the midst of the Vietnam War, this intense drama follows a special ops soldier on a dangerous mission. The film is actually an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's book, *Heart of Darkness*.

City of Ghosts starring Matt Dillon and James Caan (2002, color) A con man looking for his payout, his criminal mentor, a trustworthy cyclo driver, and a pretty NGO worker are just some of the people that inhabit this increasingly dangerous story, which is mostly set in Cambodia. Filmed on location in Phnom Penh and at a pre-Angkor temple.

Good Morning Vietnam starring Robin Williams and Forest Whitaker (1987, color) While the irreverent humor of Armed Forces Radio Service host Adrian Cronauer (Williams) amuses the troops stuck in Vietnam, he clashes with the Army brass who try to censor his show.

In the Mood for Love starring Tony Leung Chui Wai and Maggie Cheung (2001, color) Although this story of two spurned spouses finding comfort in each other is set in Hong Kong of the 1960s, most of the exteriors and street scenes are actually Bangkok, and the final sequence was filmed in Cambodia's Angkor Wat complex. In Cantonese with subtitles.

Indochine starring Catherine Deneuve and Vincent Peres (1992, color) When a well-to-do French plantation owner and her adopted Vietnamese daughter both fall for the same naval officer, their lives get swept up in the burgeoning nationalist movement. Set in French Indochina of the 1930s; in French with subtitles.

MASH starring Donald Sutherland and Elliott Gould (1970, color) A group of U.S. Army doctors fight disease, war, and military insanity in Southeast Asia. Although the action is meant to be the Korean conflict, it was widely understood to be a comment on the Vietnam War. The darkly comedic tone of the movie was so popular that it was developed into a long-running TV series, *M*A*S*H.*

Never So Few starring Frank Sinatra, Steve McQueen, and Gina Lollobrigida (1959, color) When American OSS operatives are sent to train local Burmese fighters against the Japanese during WWII, they didn't expect the lack of support from their commanders, the overwhelming odds against them, or the interference of murderous Chinese rebels. Can just a few soldiers really make a difference?

Red Dust starring Jean Harlow, Clark Gable, Mary Astor, and Gene Raymond (1932, B&W) Set on a rubber plantation in French Indochina, this film is all about desire and romantic intrigue. Although initially attracted to a tough and brassy beauty (Harlow) plantation foreman Gable soon falls instead for the classy wife of an employee (Astor). Surprisingly, the film includes some fairly accurate depictions of rubber production and the challenges of a remote jungle plantation (monsoons and malaria, just to name two).

The Beach starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Virginie Ledoyen (2000, color) An American backpacker in Thailand searches for an idyllic secret beach community described by a fellow traveler. But if and when he finds it, will it be a paradise or a purgatory?

The Bridge on the River Kwai starring William Holden and Alec Guinness (1957, color) The dramatic story of the dangerous construction of a railway bridge by British POWs under the control of the Japanese army during WWII. At the time of its release, the movie was unique among WWII films in showing how some POWs came to identify with their captors (a psychological condition known today as "Stockholm Syndrome").

The Killing Fields starring Sam Waterston and Haing S. Ngor (1984, color) Based on the work of New York Times reporter Sydney Schanberg (Waterston) and his translator Dith Pran (Ngor), this war drama explores the tragic rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

The King and I starring Deborah Kerr and Yul Brynner (1956, color) A colorful and fun production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that is loosely based on the life of Anna Leonowens, the British governess to the King of Siam (modern-day Thailand). The same story also inspired two other (non-musical) movies: ***Anna and the King of Siam*** starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison (1946, B&W) and ***Anna and the King*** starring Jodie Foster and Chow Yun-Fat (1999, color).

The Quiet American starring Audie Murphy and Michael Redgrave (1958, color) A classic love triangle between a British journalist, a young Vietnamese woman, and a U.S. official, based on the novel by the same name. The 2002 remake starring Michael Caine and Brendan Fraser puts more emphasis on the intrigue and seedy side of Saigon in the 1950s, but is also quite good.

Grand Circle Community & Useful Websites

If you have access to the Internet, the following sites offer good travel information:

Grand Circle Travel Store
www.grandcircleshop.com

Electric current and plug types
www.kropla.com/electric2.htm

Foreign exchange rates
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM locators
www.mastercard.com/atm for Cirrus ATMs
www.visa.com/pd/atm for PLUS ATMs

Tourist information
http://www.myanmar-tourism.com/ **Burma**
http://www.tourismmyanmar.org/ **Burma**
http://www.myanmars.net/ **Burma**
http://www.bangkok.com/information/ **Bangkok**
http://www.tourismlaos.gov.la/ **Laos**
http://www.visit-mekong.com/cambodia/jewels/index.htm **Angkor Wat**
http://www.mot.gov.kh/ **Cambodia**
http://www.tourismthailand.org **Thailand**

Travel books
www.amazon.com
www.barnesandnoble.com

World weather
www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Foreign languages for travelers: basic terms in more than 80 languages
www.travlang.com/languages

Travel tips: packing light, choosing luggage, etc.
www.travelite.org

Net café guide: 100s of locations around the globe
www.cybercafes.com

U.S. Customs & Border Protection: traveler information
www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel

Transportation Security Administration (TSA): agency that screens luggage in U.S.
www.tsa.gov/public

National Passport Information Center (NPIC): for passport information
www.travel.state.gov