

Myanmar Highlights – A Wildlife & Cultural Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Yangon (Rangoon).
Day 3	Hlawga Wildlife Park.
Day 4/5	Heho and Inle Lake.
Day 6/7	Kalaw.
Day 8/9	Paleik Wetlands and Mandalay.
Day 10	Cruise Mandalay to Bagan.
Day 11/12	Bagan complex.
Day 13	Return to Yangon.
Day 14	Fly London.

Mount Victoria extension

Day 13/16	Kanpalet and Mount Victoria.
Day 17	Bagan.
Day 18	Yangon (Rangoon).
Day 19	Fly London.



Bagan Temples



Mingun-pagoda



Fisherman on Inle Lake



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Dates & Costs

2028

Sunday 12th November – Saturday 25th November	£5,995
Mount Victoria extension: to Thursday 30th November	£2,495

2030

Sunday 6th January – Saturday 19th January	£5,995
Mount Victoria extension: to Thursday 24th January	£2,495

Sunday 10th November – Saturday 23rd November	£5,995
Mount Victoria extension: to Thursday 28th November	£2,495

Single room supplement

£1,495 (extension: £695).

Grading

A (easy). This is a cultural and wildlife tour, with little walking except for a long walk at Kalaw. On extension: Easy for the most part, occasionally moderate.

Focus

Culture, mammals and birds.

£600 reduction if booked without flights, land-only trip (Yangon/Yangon).

Introduction

For many years Myanmar has been uncharted territory for naturalists, thanks to its government's introspective attitude and a plea by opposition politicians for tourists not to visit the country. However, Myanmar may open soon and welcomes responsible tourists who are interested in integrating with Burmese people and supporting local economies. Naturetrek is therefore delighted to offer tours to Burma.

In a sense Myanmar is a difficult destination in which to promote a nature tour as large areas of the country have been little explored in recent decades by naturalists and have no infrastructure for tourists. By contrast the country is laden with many of the world's most priceless archaeological sites, in beautiful scenery inhabited by gracious people still living traditional lives. In response to this challenge we have devised a tour of two halves. The main tour is more cultural in focus than most Naturetrek tours, and visits many of the country's most spectacular and celebrated sites, in addition to spending a day cruising the celebrated Ayeyarwaddy (Irrawaddy) River from Mandalay to Bagan. Rest assured, though, that as our tour journeys through Burma's incomparable cultural heritage, we will also be avidly identifying wildlife and stopping in areas of good habitat for birds and other wildlife. In fact some areas of special cultural interest, for example Bagan, fall within unique eco-regions with rare, endemic birds.

For the die-hard birders we've included an extension on the end of the tour to Mount Victoria. This is the southern extension of the Chin Hills and is home to a staggering diversity of beautiful birds, numerous endemics and further fascinating human cultures.



Herding ducks



Paper brollies in Shan state



Toddy maker's house



Nuns on U-Bein bridge

Day 1**Sunday****In Flight**

We depart London in the evening on a Qatar Airways scheduled flight to Yangon (Rangoon), via Doha where duty-free shopping is amongst the best and cheapest in the world.

Day 2**Monday****Yangon (Rangoon)**

Having reached Yangon, we will be met and transfer to our hotel. Our stay in Yangon for this holiday is usually at the 5-star hotel, usually The Sedona for a convenient access to the international airport and the bustling city centre, (we cannot guarantee a particular hotel, but always endeavor to book one of a high standard). The hotel features an array of eclectic and exciting eateries. Whether you're looking for a quick bite while you're on the go or a comfortable setting in which to savour a meal, tantalizing options, are at hand. With a varied variety of five restaurants and lounges at Sedona, you can indulge in different Asian cuisines. We may also make use of its facilities, which include a pool and a spa and health centre before the next phase of our journey. Our stay in this comfortable hotel is well deserved after a long flight! If we do not stay at the Sedona, a hotel offering an equivalent standard of rooms and service will be used.

Day 3**Tuesday****Hlawga Wildlife Park**

In the early morning we will travel by road to Hlawga Wildlife Park on the outskirts of Yangon in search of Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Racket-tailed Treepie, Black-naped Oriole, the 'white-eyed' form of Striped-throated Bulbul, White-crested Laughingthrush, Olive-backed Sunbird and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker and many other species. We will also visit the nearby wetlands, which might well provide our first Oriental Darter or an Asian Openbill.

In the evening we will visit the spectacular Shwedagon Pagoda which towers over the city, glowing gold.

Day 4**Wednesday****Heho & Inle Lake**

This morning we fly to Heho in the cooler hills to the north-east, and from here we drive to our hotel near Inle Lake. We will take a boat ride on the lake in search of both wildlife and the region's unique culture. Among the commoner Asian wetland species including Grey-headed Lapwing, Purple Heron, Chinese Pond-heron and Pheasant-tailed Jacana, we will look for several local specialities such as Jerdon's Bushchat and Collared Myna. Another highlight here will be the leg-rowers whose unique mode of transport is a characteristic sight on the lake.

Day 5**Thursday****Inle Lake**

After breakfast, we will start our journey by boat, following the currents of a small river to reach the Inn Dain Pagoda Complex, a site that makes us feel as if we have stepped through a forgotten portal in time. To access the

complex, we will walk through verdant bamboo groves that open up to a field covered with the ancient pagodas constructed over 1,000 years ago. We will also visit the Phaungdaw Oo Pagoda, the home of some of the country's most sacred Buddha statues covered in gold leaf by devout followers. We will also spend time birding along the way.

Day 6

Friday

Kalaw

We will visit the Red Mountain Estate to tour of the lush vineyard situated on the side of mountain, taste some of Myanmar's premiere wines, and observe the different aging methods completed in their cellar cave. Then drive higher into the hills to Kalaw, a British colonial hill station on the edge of the Shan Plateau.



Burmese Shrike



Leg rowing, Lake Inle



Royal Barge Replica



White-browed Nuthatch

Day 7

Saturday

Kalaw

This is an area of natural interest, as it is home to many species of hill birds including Black-headed Greenfinch and Burmese Yuhina; the area is also of cultural interest as here it is possible to see several of Myanmar's scantily clothed tribes. We will spend one whole day here, gently walking and visiting villages and stupas, plus forested areas for birds.

Day 8

Sunday

Mandalay

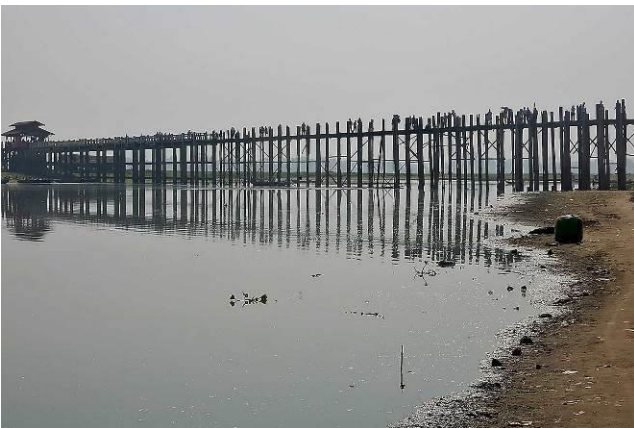
Today after some morning birdwatching, we will travel by road for around 225 kilometres to the near-mythical city of Mandalay, on the banks of the Ayeyarwaddy (Irrawaddy) River. Time permitting, we will begin to explore the city's sites in the afternoon.

Day 9

Monday

Mandalay

In the early morning we will enjoy a birding excursion to Paleik Wetlands followed by a visit to Python Temple. We spend rest of the day exploring the beautiful natural and cultural sites around Mandalay. One highlight will be the celebrated U Bein bridge, built of teak, which stretches more than a kilometre across Taungthaman Lake. Here we will also visit Mingun, a few miles along the river by boat, which is the site of what was destined to become the world's greatest pagoda had construction not been interrupted by the death of King Bodawpaya. All the while we'll have our eyes peeled for the region's rich diversity of birds.



Teak bridge of U Bein



Hog Deer



Wildlife Watching



Day 10**Tuesday****Mandalay – Bagan (Ayeyarwaddy River)**

With cultural interaction and easy wildlife-watching in mind we will leave early morning from Mandalay by ferry boat service on the Ayeyarwaddy River, travelling towards the extraordinary cultural hub of Bagan. We sail for all day, observing the gentle pace of Burmese life and watching common wetland birds including lapwings, pratincoles, martins, egrets, herons, whistling-ducks and kingfishers.

After the pleasant and long sailing, we will arrive Bagan in the late afternoon and transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 11 – 12**Wednesday – Thursday****Bagan**

The temples of Bagan constitute one of the most significant archaeological sites on earth. Here are temples representing many centuries of Burmese history and Buddhist culture. We will visit a selection of them, from the most grandiose and celebrated to the quiet and undiscovered. These will include the busy Nyaung Oo market, Shwezigon Pagoda, the 13th century cave-temple of Wetky-in-Gubyaukgyi, and Ananda Ok Kyaung, one of the few surviving brick monastery buildings from the Early Bagan period.

For the naturalist this is also a fascinating and important area. The Bagan temples are in an endemic Burmese eco-region known as the ‘dry zone’ which is home to several of the country’s endemic birds including White-throated Babbler and the exquisitely lovely Jerdon’s Minivet. Other dry-country birds we may encounter here include Red Collared Dove, Pied Bushchat, Barred Buttonquail and Burmese Shrike.

Day 13**Friday****Yangon (Rangoon)**

This morning we take a flight to Yangon. Upon arrival, we will visit the National Museum, Bogyoke Aung Sun Museum, colossal reclining Buddha Chaukhtatgyi Pagoda and the beautiful Kandawgyi Lake. Our tour finishes with a visit to the Botahtaung Pagoda. After a farewell dinner, we will be transferred to the airport to board our flight back to London.

Day 14**Saturday****London**

Fly on Qatar Airways schedule flight, which departs Yangon during the night, arrives back at London around midday, via Doha. (Flight timings subject to final confirmation nearer the time of departure.)



Mount Victoria extension

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is five, however we may run it in case of less numbers at our discretion, with local guides.)

This extension is in search of Myanmar's endemic, near-endemic and wealth of other birdlife, plus a little culture on the way. With a current list of over 1,060 bird species, Myanmar is also a wonderfully rewarding country for anyone keen to enjoy its birdlife, not least because there is so much excitement to be experienced in exploring a country whose avifauna is still relatively little-known, access to visiting naturalists having been impractical for a generation or more during the decades of military government. Please note that all services and accommodations on the Mount Victoria extension are rustic and simple. (The minimum number of people required to run this extension is five; however, we may decide to operate it with fewer people, at our discretion, with local guides.)

Day 13

Friday

Kanpalet

Today is largely devoted to the 8-hour drive to Kanpalet where we will stay at the Pine Wood Guest House or Mountain Oasis Resort for 4 nights. Along the way we will pass the villages of Chauk, Seik Phyu, Kanzanma and Saw and we'll have our eyes peeled for endemic birds including the extremely beautiful Hooded Treepie. At Saw we will have a lunch of local food, taken at small 'home' restaurant. We will continue driving for the rest of the afternoon on a rough mountain road, reaching the hill town of Kanpalet in the evening.

White-browed Fulvetta

Day 14 – 15

Saturday – Sunday

Mount Victoria

We will drive for about two hours on poor roads to the base of Mount Victoria. This is one of the key sites for montane wildlife in Myanmar and we'll devote two days to exploring the forest for birds, butterflies, plants and other species. Highlights here may include bamboo specialists including the delightful Buff-breasted Parrotbill and the splendid Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler.



Burmese bushit

At 3,095 metres Mount Victoria is the highest peak in the Chin Hills, a range of mountains that constitutes a dramatic southward extension of the eastern Himalaya from Manipur in India. This remote area was not visited by ornithologists until the early part of the 20th century and remains largely unexplored even today. The forested slopes of this mountain alter in character according to elevation, with dry deciduous forest found at the lowest levels while stunted oak-rhododendron forest and short grassland is to be found around the four summits. The avifauna here is predominantly Himalayan, sprinkled with some enigmatic regional endemics and several local subspecies. The mornings can be cold and, as soon as dawn breaks, a great frenzy of bird activity commences as the first feeding opportunities of the day arrive, especially when the sun hits the forests. At the higher levels, we will search the gnarled, lichen-covered oaks for White-browed Nuthatch, Myanmar's best-known endemic and so far only recorded from here and the Mindat area, a few kilometres to the north. Amongst a host of other irresistible



Green-tailed Sunbird

species that we will look for during our exploration of these forests, one of south-east Asia's great ornithological hotspots, will be the endemic Burmese Tit, Broad-billed Warbler, the near-endemic Buff-breasted Parrotbill, Sickle-billed Scimitar-babbler, Spot-breasted Scimitar-babbler, the near-endemic Chin Hills Wren-babbler, Striped, Brown-capped and Assam Laughing-thrushes, Streak-throated Barwing, Grey Sibia and Hume's Treecreeper.

Return to Kanpalet and stay at the Pine Wood Guest House or Mountain Oasis Resort.

Day 16**Monday****Mount Victoria**

This morning we will travel to other part of Nat-ma-taung (Mt. Victoria) National Park. Here we visit the tattoo-faced K'Cho people and visit a Chin graveyard.

The birding here has the potential to be superb and we'll be looking for the endemic White-browed Nuthatch, whose scientific name, *Sitta victoriae*, hints at how restricted its range is. We'll also be hoping to encounter busy flocks of tits (including the endemic Burmese Tit), babblers, woodpeckers, minivets, barbets and sunbirds.

Return to Kanpalet and stay at the Pine Wood Guest House or Mountain Oasis Resort.

Day 17**Tuesday****Bagan**

Today we drive all day back to Bagan, stopping for lunch in Saw. Overnight we will stay in a comfortable hotel at Bagan.

Day 18**Wednesday****Yangon**

This morning we take a flight to Yangon. Upon arrival, we will visit the National Museum, Bogyoke Aung Sun Museum, colossal reclining Buddha Chaukhtatgyi Pagoda and the beautiful Kandawgyi Lake. Our tour finishes with a visit to the Botahtaung Pagoda. After a farewell dinner, we will be transferred to the airport to board our flight back to London.

Day 19**Thursday****London**

Fly on Qatar Airways schedule flight, which departs Yangon, arrives back at London at 12.25pm, via Doha. (Flight timings subject to final confirmation nearer the time of departure.)

Grading

This is a cultural and wildlife tour. The walking is limited to strolling around the grounds of the lodges we stay at, and the tour is graded A (easy) except for a long walk at Kalaw and on the extension. On extension: Easy for the most part, occasionally moderate.

Weather

The weather in January and February should be pleasant and dry, with daytime temperatures in the region of 15-30°C or more, dropping to around 7-12°C at night. It will be warm in the afternoons – sun hats, sun cream, cotton

clothes and shorts will all be necessary during this season. In Mount Victoria you would also require warm clothes. Rain is possible but unlikely to be prolonged at this time of year. In some areas it is possible it will be cold in the mornings – a jacket, hat, gloves, fleece and several layers are all advisable.

Food & Accommodation

These are all included in the price. We use comfortable tourist hotels with private facilities.

Flights

We use the scheduled service of Qatar Airways for this tour to Myanmar. This airline offers an excellent all-round service and for this tour we take flights from London to Yangon via Doha on the outbound journey and from Yangon to London via Doha on the return (inbound) journey. If you would prefer to travel Business or First Class, please call us for competitive quotes. There are no direct flights to Yangon from the UK.



Clothing

A full list of items we suggest you take is included in the pre-departure information, which will be sent to you on receipt of your booking. Take lightweight clothing for daytime wear and warm clothes for early mornings and evenings when it can be slightly cold. Khaki and other ‘bush’ colours are recommended, since bright colours can often scare the animals. A wide-brimmed hat is essential for protection against heatstroke and sunburn.

Focus

Culture, mammals and birds.

Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to Myanmar. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel or telephone 0870 6060290 regularly prior to travel.

Entry Requirements

All UK passport holders and most other nationalities require a visa for Myanmar, which is obtainable in advance from your nearest High Commission or Embassy. No vaccinations are mandatory for entry, but as recommended in our brochure we think it is wise to be protected against TB, polio, typhoid, tetanus and hepatitis A and take malaria prophylactics. Above all, it is essential that you consult your GP or local Travel Health Clinic about your individual requirements as soon as possible before travelling.



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Incomparable Myanmar

We operated our first ever tour to Burma (Myanmar) in March 2013, having designed an itinerary that offers a blend of both magnificent wildlife and fascinating Burmese culture and looks set to become a Naturetrek favourite. Nick Acheson was the first tour's leader.

In March 2012 a group of regular Naturetrekkers cornered David and Maryanne Mills, and me, in Tadoba in central India. Since the National League for Democracy had revised its policy on tourism, they wanted a tour to Burma. They wanted wild landscapes and ancient culture; they wanted birds in the forests and temples on the hilltops. Could we oblige?

Of course we could: so we did. Rajan and I set to work researching Burma, or Myanmar as its people near-universally call it. But what to include? Should we include a visit to the Shwedagon Pagoda which glows gold over the skyline of Yangon, with Peregrines slicing the skies around it? Of course we should: so we did. Should we include a visit to Inle Lake in the hills of Shan State, where fishermen ply their trade in traditional leg-rowed boats, where



people live and farm in stilt house communities over the lake, and where thousands of ducks, gulls and herons crowd the reed and rush beds of the lake's shore? Of course we should: so we did.

We felt we were on a roll so we threw in a visit to Kalaw, a British-era hill station surrounded by beautiful forest and farmland walks where Burmese Yuhinas and Burmese Shrikes dart through the trees and Black-headed Greenfinches twitter from the hedges of coriander-scented gardens. We also included a visit to Mandalay, the cultural capital of Myanmar, where bronze is cast into great statues of the Buddha, exquisite textiles are hand-woven on clattering wooden looms and – bizarrely – a half-flooded patch of scrub by our hotel was host to Burmese Bushlarks, Plaintive Cuckoos and a Watercock.

Our next stop, via the silty vastness of the Ayeyarwady (formerly the Irrawaddy), was Bagan, perhaps the greatest cultural treasure in Myanmar. Here, on a dry plain on the bank of the mighty river, stand hundreds of stately pagodas, covering hundreds of years of history, politics and devotion. Between them are ox-ploughed fields, where Baya Weavers and Scaly-breasted Munias pick through the crops, and patches of remnant dry forest, which are loud with the trills of endemic White-throated Babblers and the chips of Plain-backed Sparrows (a bird which far outshines its illustrations in any field guide).

For good measure we included an extension to the wonderful forests of Mount Victoria in Chin State. This is a remote and little-visited area of Myanmar but the birding here is superb. At the top of the mountain, in grassland

lightly forested with dark red rhododendrons, are endemic White-browed Nuthatches and Burmese Bushtits, dazzling Mrs Gould's and Fire-tailed Sunbirds and shy Little Buntings. In the dense forest of the lower slopes are Cutias, Grey Sibias, Green-tailed Sunbirds and countless Blyth's Leaf and Buff-barred Warblers. Overhead, all the while it seems, are Black Eagles. This is a fine place indeed for watching birds.

Our Burma tour, made even better on the basis of our experience this year, will run again in February 2014. Why not join us to explore the natural and cultural highlights of this friendly, beautiful country?



Burmese Yuhina



Jerdon's Minivet



Neglected Nuthatch



Vivid Niltava