



PARENT
GUIDE TO
YANGON



THE BRITISH
SCHOOL
YANGON

A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

Inspiring confidence, defining futures



Content

Myanmar	2
Yangon	3
Transportation in Yangon	4
Food hygiene in Yangon	5
Currency and money	6
Mobile and internet	7
Is Yangon safe?	8
Cultural do's and don'ts	9
Emergency numbers	9
Public holidays in Myanmar	10
Shopping	11
Basic conversation in Myanmar	11

Mingalabar!

We are delighted that you are joining our BSY family and look forward very much to welcoming you and your family to our school. As you prepare to move to Yangon, or indeed even if you are already here, we hope you might find this short guide of use. The tips have been compiled by members of our Parent Support Group and our Communications Executive, and are intended to help answer some questions that you or your children may have about life in this wonderful city and the wider country. Of course, we are all here to support your transition and if you have other queries, don't hesitate to contact any of us. Best wishes from all our team and we will see you very soon!

Myanmar

Myanmar (formerly Burma) is a Southeast Asian nation of more than 100 ethnic groups, bordering India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand. Yangon (formerly Rangoon), the country's largest city, is home to bustling markets, numerous parks and lakes, and the towering, gilded Shwedagon Pagoda, which contains Buddhist relics and dates to the 6th century.

Capital: Naypyitaw Currency: Burmese kyat President: Win Myint Population: 54.05 million (2019)

Places to visit in Myanmar

Yangon
Mandalay
Bagan
Bago
Monywa
Inle Lake
Mrauk U
Ngapali Beach
Nyaung Oo Phee Beach
Golden Rock
Mount Popa
Pindaya Cave
Temples & Pagodas

Climate

Peak season (Nov – Feb)

“Winter”

Although it is considered as “Winter” or the cold season in Yangon, the temperature rarely drops below 20°C.

Hot season (Mar - Apr)

“Approaching peak of summer”

Where the temperatures in Yangon often reach 40°C!

Monsoon period (May - Oct)

“Wet, wet and wet”

Where the heaviest rainfalls register, during June and July. Flooding is common in Yangon and throughout the country.

Yangon

Yangon is the largest city in Myanmar and the center of economic activity. The city that is also known as Rangoon was the capital of the country until 2005, when a completely new city called Naypyidaw was built and became the new capital.

Yangon is located in the Irrawaddy delta on the Gulf of Martaban, in the North Andaman Sea. It is the city where most foreign tourists arrive in Myanmar. Yangon is a city of about 5 million people that has grown very rapidly since the 1950's.

Main areas in Yangon

- Watch the sunrise over the Shwedagon Pagoda
- Stroll through Kandawgyi Park
- Admire the stunning colonial architecture in downtown Yangon
- Experience Yangon's downtown
- Karaweik Palace
- Kid friendly places (People park and Yangon Zoo)



Transportation in Yangon

Yangon provides several means of transportation, but the most ubiquitous and convenient for visitors are the numerous taxis. The main reason for this is because motorcycles and bicycles are not allowed within the city of Yangon whereas taxis are available everywhere.

There are thousands of public buses in Yangon; but unfortunately, they are not visitor friendly. The circular train is more of an activity than a mode of transportation, and taking a ferry is an adventure.

Walking

For those who like to walk, Yangon is not bad. If you are staying somewhere near the downtown area, it is possible to walk to some attractions. Because of traffic congestion, it may even be faster to walk downtown, plus you can see a lot more by walking and with a good map, and if you take it easy, you can walk to many places.

Unfortunately, the sidewalks in Yangon are in very bad shape. There are large holes, loose paving, and missing drain covers. You really need to be careful, and watch where you are walking. However, there is now a program of concreting over sidewalks and side streets in the city. Also, as in some other Asian countries, traffic does not stop for pedestrians, and you need to be careful when crossing the street.

Taxi

For longer distances, the easiest way to get around is by taxi and there are many taxis on the streets of Yangon day and night. However, only a few are well looked after, and most are dilapidated and in very bad condition. Standing taxis are almost always more expensive than roving taxis. Some of the taxis have meters, but they are never used. You will need to negotiate the fare before you get in. Drivers know the major landmarks, and they can understand basic English. There are “Taxi” services like Grab or Oway is available now in Yangon and it is very convenient for the expats. Rates can vary during rush hour traffic or heavy rain, etc..

City buses

New yellow buses, all with air conditioning, are being implemented into the revamped YBS.



Food hygiene in Yangon

Although the government is attempting to improve existing hygiene standards, the basics concept of hygiene in the food industry is low. Hygiene issues persist at every level, from raw ingredients, to cooked foods both domestically and commercially. Hot food, freshly prepared, is safe, and since turnover is high, the level of freshness ensures its safety for consumption. Avoiding prepared food, lying in the open, often uncovered, is recommended, just as much as uncooked foods.

While many residents may perceive this to be a snobbish perspective, this is the reality and stomach disorders are very common. Locals have been habituated long enough to develop immunity against harmful food bacteria. Bacteria are commonly found in roadside food and transfer easily and quickly.

The flip side of eating unhygienic foods illness and digestive disorders are a natural corollary to the consumption of unsafe, un-hygienic foods. The extent of contamination determines the symptoms that appear, like diarrhea, vomiting, cramps or nausea, besides various allergies. Dangerous bacteria like E.Coli and Salmonella spread due to poor food handling practices and can cause lasting health issues.

High Risk Foods in Yangon

- Street food
- Uncooked vegetables
- Unpeeled and unwashed fruits
- Raw, cold meats
- Unpasteurized dairy products
- Cold sauces, like salad dressings, mayonnaise, chutneys
- Ice in drinks
- Tap water
- Fruit juice from open stalls
- Uncovered foods with flies and insects visible around them.

A Few Don'ts

The biggest problem of eating carelessly, especially when in doubt about food hygiene, is the risk of being inflicted with amoebic dysentery. Food poisoning is common, and with a lack of quality healthcare facilities, there is a bigger risk involved. It is better to be safe, than sorry.

Do not drink just any water, ask for properly sealed bottled water only.

Do not have any fruit juice extracted in open juicers.

Do not eat raw vegetables or unpeeled fruits.

Do not eat street food.

Do not eat in small, unclean tea shops and food centers.

The best places to eat in Yangon are largely upscale, including all the restaurants in star rated hotels.

Having said all that, there are local tea houses that provide good, clean local food. A good tip is to have a specific tea house suggested to you.

Currency and money

The Burmese Kyat (K) is the currency of Myanmar. The currency code is MMK. Banknotes come in denominations of K20 (hardly seen), K50, K100, K200, K500, K1000, K5000 and K10,000.

Dollar bills should be brought to Myanmar in differing denominations: take plenty of \$10, \$5 and \$1 bills to pay for hotels, flights and historical sites, and take \$100 or \$50 bills for exchanging to kyat (larger denominations usually get a better rate). US dollar bills taken to Myanmar must be in perfect condition.

Blemishes of any kind – creases, marks, folds and so on – may result in getting a far worse rate of exchange or the money may not be accepted at all. Also, pre-2006 dollar bills or ones with the letters AB and CB at the start of the serial number (at the top left corner of note) may not be accepted. It is therefore advisable to carry US dollars in a safe, flat folder – not in a wallet.

Exchange and Rates

Money can be changed at banks in the downtown areas of larger cities and at most major airports, including Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Bagan and Thandwe (for Ngapali beach). In Yangon, you can also head to the popular and central Bogyoke Aung San Market (Scott Market) if you want to change money at the weekend – here you can find numerous money-changing shops (these tend to shut around 3.30 to 4pm).

Banks, Atms And Credit Cards

While visitors once had to bring in all the necessary cash for their travels into Myanmar, there are now thousands of ATMs that accept international bank and credit cards located

around the country – although bear in mind that most are concentrated in Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Bagan and Inle Lake. Cardholders can also withdraw local currency from ATMs and use their cards at a growing number of major outlets such as hotels, restaurants, and retailers.

Currently only Visa, Mastercard (Maestro/Cirrus), China's Union Pay and Japan's JCB can be used; the biggest providers of compatible ATMs are CB (Co-operative) Bank and KBZ (Kanbawza) Bank. Others include AGD Bank, AYA Bank and United Amara Bank.

For ATM cash withdrawals, there is typically a K5000 transaction fee, and a withdrawal limit of K300,000 per transaction. Depending on the conditions set by your own

bank at home, you may be allowed multiple withdrawals per day. The use of ATMs in Myanmar is sometimes restricted by internet failure.

There are no international banks in Myanmar at the moment, and local banks are in the process of becoming part of the international banking system.

KBZ Bank and CB Bank are the largest local banks and have a country-wide network of ATMs that accept Visa, Mastercard, Union Pay and JCB. Yangon locations include Yangon airport, all major shopping centres and markets, as well as many smaller branches dotted around town. Outside of Yangon, they have branches and ATMs in all major cities, airports and tourist spots.

Mobile and internet

Mobile Phones

For many years SIM cards in Myanmar were expensive and difficult to obtain, but cards sold by the Telenor, Ooredoo, Mytel and MPT (Myanmar Post & Telecommunications) networks are now generally available for a cheap K1,500. Cards work on a top-up basis, with K1000, K3000, K5000 and K10,000 cards available.

Shops selling cards usually display the Telenor, Ooredoo, MPT or Mytel logo.

To purchase a SIM card, foreigners need to have photocopies of their passport photo page and Myanmar visa page, as well as one passport photo. SIM cards are 3G mobile data enabled and standard SIM and micro SIM cards are available.

Note that mobile network access is often patchy or non-existent in rural areas, but usually works well in towns.

Internet

Given the lack of development in Myanmar, the availability of internet access is surprisingly widespread: you can find an internet café or hotel with wifi even in remote locations. However, internet speeds can be slow, especially in rural areas. Prices at internet cafes are usually around K500 per hour, although they may be higher outside cities. You can find free wifi at many restaurants and bars.

Previous government internet restrictions have now been lifted, so people are free to access most websites and services – including Facebook, Twitter, Gmail, and so on.



Is Yangon safe?

The vast majority of people in Myanmar are friendly and helpful, but there are various safety and security issues to be aware of:

Roads, pavements and many types of transport are generally in a very bad state of repair. Cars are sometimes driven with little thought to road safety or discipline and vehicles are often driven at night without their lights on.

When walking, particularly at night, you should be careful where you step. Pavements can have big holes in them and, because of bad lighting and frequent electricity black-outs, taking a torch is a good idea.

It is advisable to avoid large public gatherings and demonstrations, as there is always the outside possibility of clashes and violent incidents.

It is important to guard against insect bites. Vaccinations and disease preventions should be taken before travelling to Myanmar. The following are the most commonly recommended:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Diphtheria
- Polio

- Tetanus
- Japanese Encephalitis B
- Rabies
- Tuberculosis
- Yellow Fever
- Typhoid
- Malaria

If you take regular medication, you should make sure to have enough for your entire stay; buying over-the-counter drugs in Myanmar should be avoided for safety reasons or limited availability. You should use insect repellent outside of major cities.

Myanmar has some poisonous and potentially deadly animals – be aware of them! Diseases such as rabies are prevalent amongst animals like dogs and monkeys, and can be extremely dangerous for humans. Snakes bites can also cause illness and death.

Women travelling on their own are unlikely to encounter any problems, although short skirts and bare shoulders might attract some unwanted attention or accusing looks in a country that is deeply Buddhist.



Cultural do's and don't's

Greeting people

A firm handshake with a smile and nod is acceptable. With the exception of monks and nuns - when dealing with them, a curtsy or bow in a “praying gesture” is imperative; ideally, people (especially women) are not supposed to have any sort of physical interaction with monk.

Basic etiquette

- Pointing one's feet at someone is considered improper.
- Patting someone's head, even a child's, is deemed improper.
- Removing footwear when entering someone's house is polite.
- Removing footwear (including socks) is a must when you are entering a Pagoda and monastery.
- Young people are expected to bow one's head when crossing in front of older people.

Emergency numbers

Police (Emergency): 199

Police (Yangon Division): 01 545 455

Fire: 191

Ambulance: 192

Yangon General Hospital: 01 256 112



Public holidays in Myanmar

Below is the list of the known public holidays for 2021.

1 January

New Year Holiday

4 January

Independence day

13 January

Kayin New Year

12 February

Union Day

2 March

Peasants' Day

26-27 March

Full Moon Day of Tabaung

Buddhist devotees use this time to visit a temple and "make merit". It is also the time of the Shwedagon Pagoda Festival, the biggest one of the year in all of Myanmar.

27-29 March

Armed Forces Day

Commemorates the beginning of the Burmese National Army's resistance to Japanese occupation in 1945.

13 to 19 April

Thingyan Water Festival

The biggest nationwide holiday in Myanmar with some offices closed for a longer period than the official festival period. This ensures that Burmese citizens have the opportunity to enjoy the Water Festival. It is a time for happiness and friendly attitudes.

1 May

Labour Day

25 May

Full Moon Day of Kasong

Also known as "Buddha Day", it commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and nirvana (death) of Buddha, all of which are believed to have occurred on the same day of the year.

19 July

Martyrs' Day

Commemorates the sad day in 1947 when Myanmar's seven top independence leaders were assassinated.

23 July

Full Moon Day of Waso

Marks the commencement of "Buddhist Lent", which lasts for three full months during the rainy season.

19-21 October

Full Moon Day of Thadingyut

One of the most important of public holidays in Myanmar, it celebrates Buddha's return from heaven, where he stayed during Buddhist Lent, teaching his mother and other heavenly gods his various laws and doctrines.

17-18 November

Full Moon Day of Tazaungmone

Buddhist monks receive new robes on Tazaungmone which are often given to them as offerings of the people. They may also receive such things as new slippers, an umbrella, bath soap, or food to eat.

28 November

National Day

25 December

Christmas Day

31 December

New Year Eve

Unknown

EID

Depavali



Shopping

While Yangon may not be a world-class shopping destination, it does have many shopping opportunities for those who love silverware, lacquerware, jewellery, and handicrafts. Myanmar is well-known for its precious gem production such as rubies, sapphires and jade, and there are many gem and jewellery shops in Yangon.

Although only a few well known brands are available in Yangon, brand-name products are at slightly lower prices here than in developed countries, and can be found in larger and newer shopping centres. Larger shoe sizes are quite hard to find as the majority tend to have smaller shoe size.

For your daily grocery shopping, there are Marketplace, City Mart and Ocean supermarkets and these can be found spread across the city. Online services also available.

Basic conversation in Myanmar

Hello	Min ga la ba
How are you?	Nay Kaung Lar?
I am fine	Nay Kaung par dae
Nice to meet you	Twae ya dar wan thar par dae
How much is it?	Bal lout lae
Turn right	Nyar Kwae
Turn Left	Bel Kwae
Please stop here	De mher yat bar
Please wait	Kha na lay bar
Goodbye	Nhot sat par dae
Thank you	Dje zoo tin par dae



Taw Win Street, Mayangone, Yangon, Myanmar.

Telephone: +95 (0)979554 1805

www.britishschoolyangon.org



Adventure • Courage • Integrity • Kindness