

PREFACE

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia with a land area of 261, 218 sq. miles (67,655 sq. km). Myanmar is bordered by Bangladesh and India in the north-west, China in the north and the northeast, Laos in the east, Thailand in the Southeast and the south, and the long coastline on the Indian Ocean from the Bay of Bengal to the Andaman Sea forms the national boundary to the south and the south west.

The interior of the country comprises of a series of river valleys—those of Ayeyawady, Chindwin, Sittaung, and the Thanlwin rivers running from north to south and divided one another by mountain ranges and plateaus. The highland areas are inhabited by the tribes of Myanmar, of which the largest group are Kachin, Chin, Shan and the Kayin.

Ayeyawady is the main artery of Myanmar—Kiplings Road to Mandalay and the entrance to the north of Myanmar, originating at the northern most frontiers on the borders of Tibet it flows south through Kachin State, and is joined by its major tributary the Chindwin, southwest of Mandalay. The Ayeyawady is navigable from Yangon to Bhamo which is 155 miles (250 km) from Myitkyina, while its tributary the Chindwin is navigable for some 400 miles (640 km). Rail and road traffic used to be landlocked and one river bridge existed spanning the Ayeyawady near Mandalay. Now, no less than two dozen major bridges have been newly built throughout the country greatly improving travel and communications everywhere.

Myanmar proper is subdivided into a Dry Zone which is Upper and Central Myanmar, the fertile plain and delta of Lower Myanmar forms the principle rice growing area.

The climate in Myanmar is predominantly tropical with the annual rainfall varying from as much as 200 inches along the coastline which receives the brunt of the monsoon winds, to 25 to 50 inches in the Dry Zone, and the average of 100 inches in the plain. The climatic conditions differ from place to place according to the location and topography of each area. Seasonal changes in the monsoon wind directions create summer, rainy and cool seasons.

Administratively, Myanmar consists of seven States (Chin, Kachin, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine and Shan State) and seven Divisions (Ayeyawady, Magway, Mandalay, Bago, Yangon, Sagaing and Tanintharyi Division).

Articles and books on Myanmar already exist and are generally prepared from the travel point of view, but not from that of history and culture. This book, covering the missing viewpoint, intends to give a fuller appreciation, a broader perspective of the historical and cultural facets of this ancient land.

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