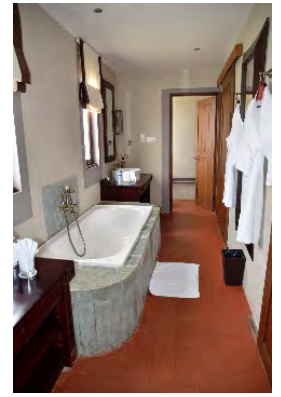


Day 2 Bagan Jan 7 (con't)



Then it was back along "Temple Road" to check into our hotel, the Bagan Lodge. The lobby is all teak with sitting areas. This runs out, with no wall, onto the large (but cold) pool with a bar on



one side and the restaurant on the other. Our rooms were absolutely beautiful, large, all wood, and homey. Even the bathroom was beautiful. We ended up eating dinner here both nights as we were not walking distance from any restaurant, and there aren't a lot of good restaurants here anyway, as Toe told us.



After resting for about an hour, it was time to hit the road again. Toe and our driver picked us up for the short ride back towards Temple Road. We waited for a few moments for our horse and buggies to arrive. Yes you read correctly, horse and buggy rides. But it turns out this wasn't your typical buggy. I got to sit in the front with the driver since I was taking pictures. The back of the buggy was more like a mattress where generally four people would sit cross-legged. Since it's harder for us Americans to sit that way, Andy got to sit in the back facing sideways with his feet stretched out. With this meant was that he was uncomfortable, and he could hardly see anything. And that of course was the whole point, to see

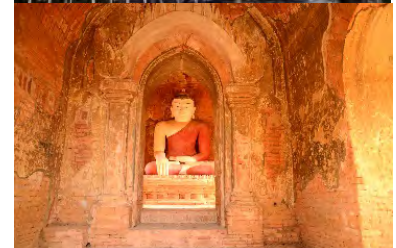
everything. (Ben and Phyllis had their own buggy since we couldn't fit four people in one buggy. And Phyllis had the same problem as Andy).



We drove through the fields between the different stupas and temples, watching farmers in the fields, watching the sun begin to go down. We saw oxen pulling carts (a very common sight in Myanmar). We saw groups of women walking together carrying packages on their heads. It was all really quite beautiful. There were lots of other horse and buggies too, as this is the thing to do. At one point



the road was so narrow that we had to wait almost 10 minutes for all of the horse and buggies to pass by in the other direction. And at one point our driver stopped the carriage, and to save me climbing down (which was not easy to do), took my camera and ran into one of the temples to take a picture of the Buddha.







Our driver was born and raised here in Bagan and lives in a village that is right here as well. He said the village has almost 2000 people, to which I replied that's not a village, that's a city. Currently he is a horse and buggy driver, but during farming season he farms and during non-farming season he is a carpenter. Farming has been difficult as that has been very little rain here and most of the crops have died or just are not growing. I also asked him since he grew up around all these temples, does he still see the beauty. And he gave me a big smile and said, "Oh yes, in every season they look different and they are so beautiful. You should see them in the rain."

We passed Thatbyinnyu, the highest temple in Bagan, the massive Dhammayangyi Temple, noted for its remarkable brickwork, and the Sulamani Temple. The sheer number of stupors and temples is what makes Bagan so special and so different from any other place we have visited. We have seen golden temples before but we have never seen thousands of temples all within a short distance of each other. The landscape in the horizon was just covered with temples.

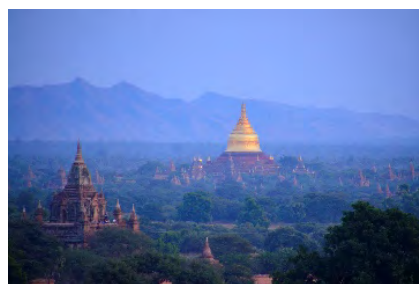
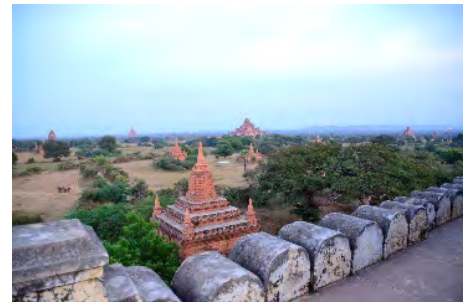
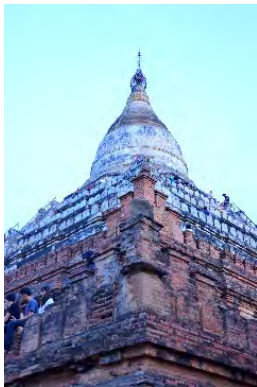
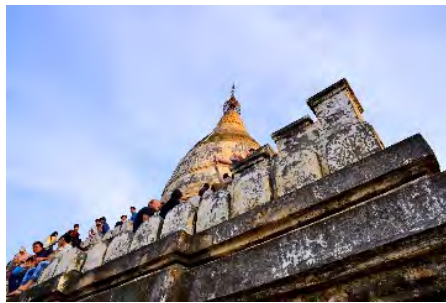
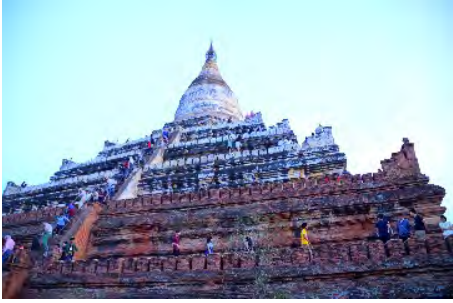


We finally reached the temple which we were going to climb to watch the sunset, Scwesandaw Paya, Bagan's most famous sunset-viewing spot. The Shwesandaw is a graceful white pyramid style pagoda with steps leading past five terraces to the circular stupa top, with good 360-degree views. Shwesandaw means 'golden holy hair' and legend has it that the stupa enshrines a Buddha hair relic. The terraces once bore terracotta plaques showing scenes from the

Jataka but traces of these, and of other sculptures were covered by rather heavy-handed renovations. The now-gilded *zedi* (stupa) bell rises from two octagonal bases, which top the five square terraces. This was the first Bagan monument to feature stairways leading from the square terraces to the round base of the stupa.



I hesitated for only a moment, and took off my socks and shoes and started climbing. The steps were extremely steep but they were handlebars on either side and I slowly pulled myself up. I only climbed three levels, not to the very top, but that was enough to find a spot to perch and watch the sun go down over the steeples of the temples. It was not the most beautiful sunset I have ever seen, the sky did not burst into flames of color, but it was beautiful enough. Even with what seemed like hundreds of people all around me, it was still peaceful watching that large ball of fire turn the clouds into orange and pink.







And of course there were vendors waiting for us both on the way up and on the way down.

We returned to the hotel, had a quiet dinner here, and once again crashed early as tomorrow is another early day.

