

Day 4b Mandalay



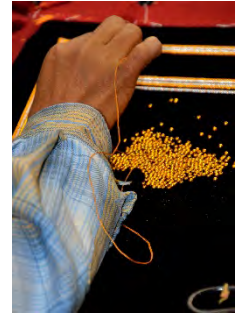
The day was just beginning. We stopped at a wood carving factory where they also made marionettes. Mandalay is famous for its marionette shows and exquisite marionettes (more on this tomorrow when we go to a show). Since the last palace



of Burma was here in Mandalay, the best silk is used for weaving the clothes for the puppets.



When we walked into the studio, there was a large poster of Aung San Suu Kyi. Her image appeared almost everywhere we went. The people recently voted her back in and there is great hope and excitement that she will bring great change to Burma.

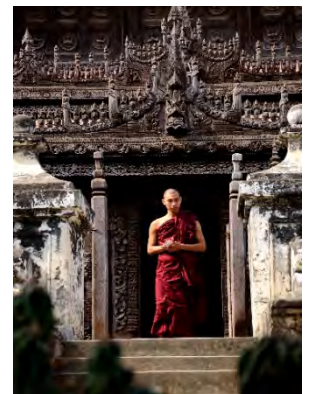
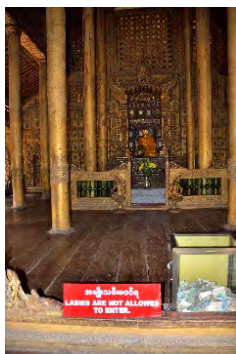


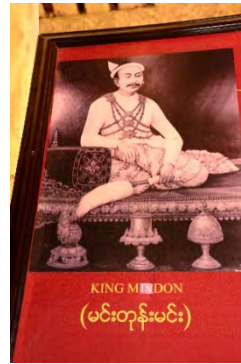
Since I am always behind in writing this diary, as I write this Aung San Suu Kyi is the de facto leader of Myanmar as well as Myanmar's state counselor, a position created just for her which effectively makes her the head of the government. Because her children are British citizens, she is not allowed to be President.

But no dawdling. It was time to move again, this time to the Shwe Nandaw monastery, also called the Golden Palace Monastery. It was once the private residence of King Mindon who died here. His heir moved it out of the palace and donated it to a monastery, which saved it from being destroyed during WWII. It is a teak pavilion completely covered with carvings of mythical creatures and motifs, once which were totally covered in gold (thus the name, Golden Palace). It is thought that the gold on the outside was destroyed by the weather. But, as mentioned above, in many of the temples and monasteries, the gold is missing, the Buddha's are missing, the jewels are missing, all stolen. Here again we saw a sign proclaiming "No women allowed." There was also a very interesting sign at the entrance proclaiming no photography or video with drones allowed. And this is why we try to travel to these more remote countries before too many drones, and



other signs of the Western world, get there. Walking around room after room of carved walls, carved columns, teak floors, high carved ceilings, and of course the ubiquitous Burmese bell, one can't help but imagine what it was like decades ago.

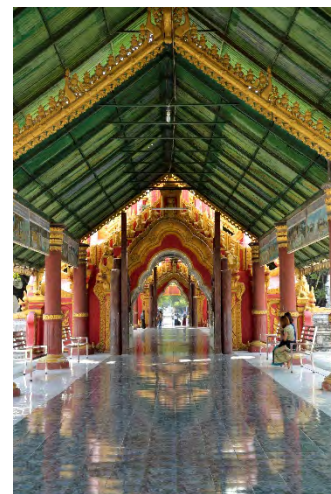




After wandering around the in and outside of this magnificent building, we drove to the next monastery. This one holds the world's largest book. Kuthodaw Pagoda (meaning Royal Merit), and was also built during the reign of King Mindon.



The main entrance has two large teak doors ornately carved with floral designs, scrolls and nats. The underside of the roof is covered in frescos and the entrance hall seems to be completely covered in mirrors of different colors. There are flowering trees in between the stupas and families picnic there, collect the flowers to leave for Buddha and watch their children play hide and seek.



The monastery holds 730 stone inscribed caves (really little stupas), each containing a marble slab inscribed on both sides with a page of the text of the entire canon of Buddhism, for a total of 1460 pages. Each slab is 3.5 feet wide and 5 feet tall and has its own roof with a precious gem on top of its stupa.



The stupas are arranged around a central golden pagoda, modeled after the one in Bagan.



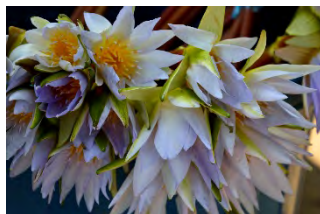
One thing we noticed in many of the temples, is that there is neon everywhere. This sort of fits in with the sign about the drones. Burma is becoming “modernized” but in many of the worst ways. We found the neon surrounding the Buddha’s to be almost sacrilegious, but again we are coming from the Western perspective.

And of course there were souvenirs to be had. Young women walked around selling bells and postcards and others had masks displayed on blankets. And of course I added two masks to my collection (one of an old man with a hair knot and one of a village girl) and one bronze Burmese flat bell.



Outside the temple were women with carts selling beautiful flowers for dedicating to Buddha, and while the beauty of the brilliant colors of the flowers made me smile, the look on the vendor's face told a different story. Life is not always as beautiful as it may look like from the outside.

There was also street food for sale for sustenance or perhaps also for dedications. And we realized we were hungry. It was time for lunch.



Lunch was at a restaurant called Unique Myanmar Restaurant. The restaurant was large and all wood with an outside seating area. It was clean and welcoming. We were handed wet, warm towels to freshen up as soon as we walked in. And then we enjoyed all the traditional dishes including lentil soup, fried sweet corn, tea leaf salad, curried vegetables and chicken potato. The staff were extremely friendly and the food excellent.



We got to go back to the hotel to rest for about an hour, which we all seemed to need. We checked into the Mandalay Hill Resort Hotel and were greeted with a green fruit drink. Our rooms faced the front of the hotel with the peacock fountain and views of the green fields beyond. This hotel was OK, but the least impressive of all the places we stayed.

