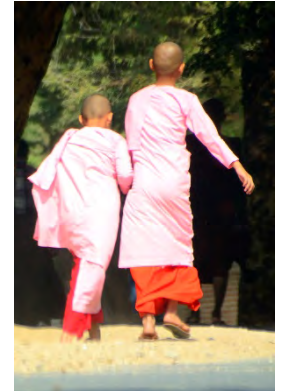


Mandalay day 5c
Mandalay second day

Back on the road again our car was suddenly surrounded by young nuns. There must have been a school close by as there seemed to be tens about tens groups of them. It



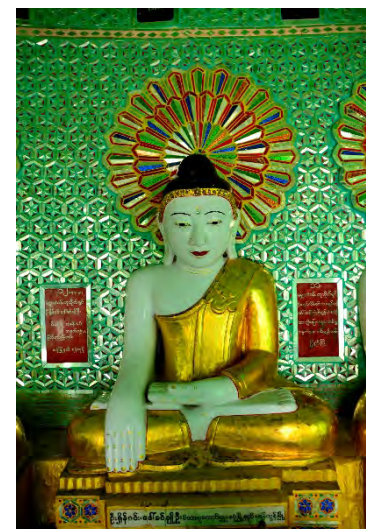
was a sea of pink.



Toe had asked us what we else we wanted to see in Mandalay. We told her we were a bit burned out on temples. But she insisted there were two more we had to see. And we trusted her. And we were glad we did. One of the ones not to be missed was the Oo Hmin Thone Sel Pagoda.

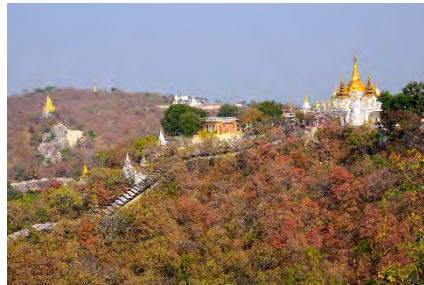
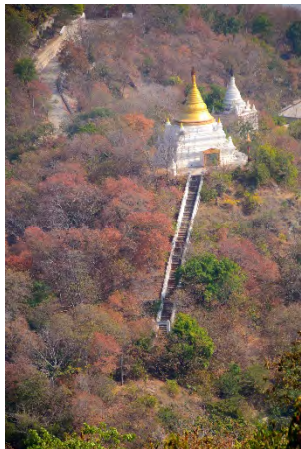
This pagoda has had many donors which has allowed for lots of renovations including new paint, thousands of new green tiles, paved walkways and new artwork. This is very different than in Bagan where the pagodas are protected and frozen in time (remember – they could not become a UNESCO Heritage Site because that had fixed some of the pagodas. In Mandalay, it is not that way. In fact, in Mandalay, if you give enough money, you can even decide what color paint and new tiles will be applied.

Oo Hmin Thone Sel is on top of Sagaing Hill across the river from Ayeyarwaddy River from Mandalay. We crossed a long beautiful bridge to get there with beautiful views of the hills covered in gold pagodas. There are 6000 nuns and monks that live in this area, which explains why we saw so many nuns on the way here. The layout of Oo Hmin Thone Sel Pagoda isn't your typical temple layout. It's a large crescent looking out from the hill over the surrounding countryside. It's not actually a cave, but when you're inside it feels a bit like you're in a long, shallow cave carved into the mountainside. The walls and the floor are covered with reflective jade-colored tiles. There are dozens of doorways, each rimmed with ornate golden designs. Inside, there is a row of 50 Buddha statues that line the wall looking out. They're all nearly identical visually, but each has its own significance. They stretch out around the gentle curve of the cave, so that you can't see the end of them if you stand at one end of the room. It was breathtaking and reinforced why we listen and trust our guides.





The other one not be missed was the Soon Oo Pon Nya Shin Pagoda. This is one of the oldest and richest pagoda of the many in Sagaing. It sits on top of Nga-pha Hill with a magnificent view of other gold pagodas and the river. It was built in 1312 by Minister Pon Nya, after whom it's named. But it too has been redone. At one end of the great hall is the Gautama Buddha, towering above the walls around him. He is a very cheerful Buddha, dressed in gold robes and sitting on a gold throne and surrounded by jade colored tiles that also line the walls and ceiling.





The outside patio is also very colorful as it is covered in tiles. I loved the colors and the patterns – blue, yellow, green, pink. They literally made me smile as it was so cheerful. As I mentioned, from this patio you can see the Ayeyarwaddy River and the surrounding hilltops which are covered with gold stupas. Because the hill is shaped like a frog, the pagoda's name has something to do with frogs. We spent a long time walking around as there are a whole series of paintings, each teaching a lesson from Buddha. Toe explained them all to us.



And then it was back across the bridge over the river. There are two bridges over the river, each not far from the other. One is the old bridge and one is the new bridge. The old bridge is a 16 span cantilever bridge which used to be the only way to drive across the river. The new one, parallel to the old, is used both for cars and trains.



I had mentioned to Toe on the way over the bridge that the view would make a great picture, the view of the golden and white pagodas on the mountains. So, on the way back, the driver pulled over – on the bridge – helped me out of the car and ran across 3 lanes of traffic with me to the other side, dodging between the cars. For the first time, I wasn't sure I would make it to tell the story. But I trusted him. That's the adventure of travel for you.

