

Mandalay day 5d  
Mandalay second day

As we had already learned, there are many modes of transportation in Myanmar. They drove us to a dock and put us on a small boat at the river's edge where we crossed the river to another shore. As we approached, we saw a woman washing herself in the water. I think I may have already mentioned that women in Myanmar are very modest. So even when washing, they wear their sarong to stay covered up.



As we pulled onto the dock, we were greeted by a large group of children, all trying to sell us necklaces and clothe and every other souvenir possible. They are the welcome committee.

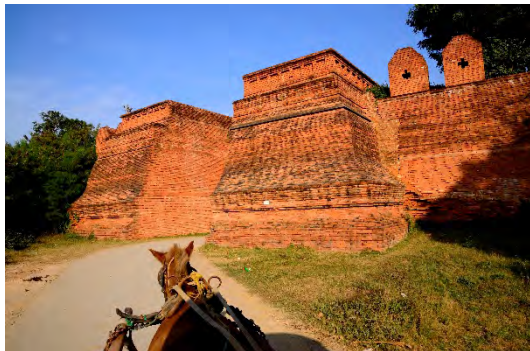
We climbed up the embankment and our eyes and noses were bombarded by the sight and smell of horses and buggies. We climbed into ours, Ben and Phyllis in one, and Toe, Andy and I in the other. Andy sat in the front this time.



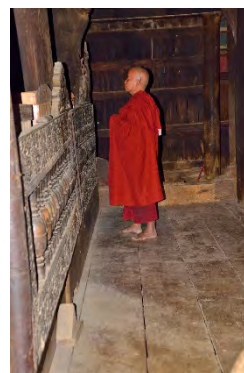
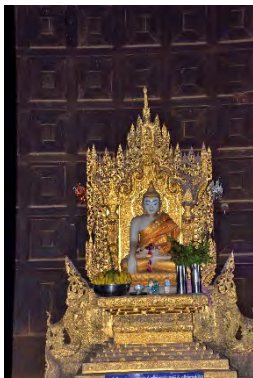
And off we went, bump, bump, bumping along. It was not easy taking pictures! We again passed farms and fields, houses and stupas, oxen pulled carriages, rice fields reflected in the sun. We drove through tunnels made of tree branches. And headed to Ava, now called Inwa, the four-time royal capital in Myanmar.



While the palace no longer stands, a part of the fort wall and gate and one tower still exist. We rode through the gate and passed the watchtower which leans so much that it is called the Leaning Tower.



But the real reason to come here was to see the Grand Bagaya Monastery, built in 1834. A great fire swept through and destroyed the whole thing. Then it was rebuilt in 1992. What makes this so special is that the building is made entirely of teak wood with 267 gigantic posts holding it up, the largest being 60 feet high and 9 feet wide. It is decorated with wood carvings of florals, figurines and reliefs of birds and animals. This monastery is still used as a school, and in one corner there were tables and chairs and globes hanging from the ceiling, and a monk sitting and resting.





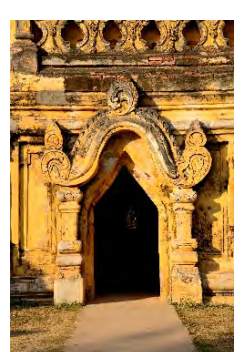
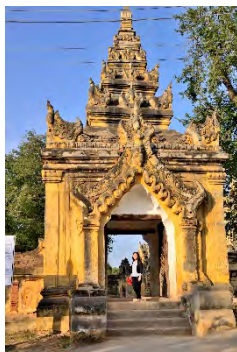
Then it was back in the horse and buggy. I have no idea given the number of tourists there, and given the number of horse and buggies, how each driver found the same group that came with him (or her, as there were some women buggy drivers). And once again we bumped, bumped, bumped along, once again being entertained by the beautiful scenery.



And then we saw this bird in the tree. This very large bird. I have not been able to identify what it is, but it was beautiful, with a split black and white tail, a brown back and a grayish/black head. Anyone know?

On the way back to the river and back to the boat and back across the river, we made one more stop at one more pagoda. The Maha Aung Mye Bonzan Monastery.

The monastery, also known as the Brick Monastery, is a well preserved building made of yellow bricks. It is very ornate and is decorated with intricate stucco sculptures. The monastery entrance is protected by two large Burmese mythological lions, called Chinthes. There are white stupas in different sizes on the grounds, each with a golden spire umbrella-shaped ornament on top. We walked around, but did not go inside. The doorways and windows and staircases were all so elaborate. I stood there imagining first how it was built, brick by brick and carving by carving. Then I tried to imagine what it was like in its heyday, with monks in their orange or red robes among the yellow bricks.





t this point we had been bumping back and forth on the horse and buggy. So I really had to use the restroom. Toe was very hesitant as there was no real restroom. But there was an outhouse that she thought I would not want to use. I have traveled the world so this was nothing new. It was a rickety small wooden structure over a hole in the ground. Same as in Papua New Guinea. Same as in some areas of Bhutan. Same as in so many different parts of Asia. It served its purpose. And then on the way back to the road to meet everyone else, I passed a woman chopping vegetables with a large device, something I had not seen before. This helps get more greenery chopped faster. A different view of progress.



In all honesty, while the pagodas were each different and beautiful, the best part was the horse and buggy ride and the boat ride as we got to pass through villages and fields, watch the reflections in the rice fields, see people and their homes, watch people bathing in the river, and just enjoy the beautiful countryside and scenery. And take a look at our faces. Don't we look happy?!



But wait, There was more. More stops. Next was a weaving shop. Thein Nyo U Bi Ko-Daw Toke Loon Yar Kyaw Silk Weaving in Amarapura (City of Immortality). We came here to look for longyi, but realized we would never wear them. The shop was wall to wall shelves with fabrics of all colors. Red, green, blue, pink, stripes. We bought blouses. We bought shawls. We did not buy any longyi.



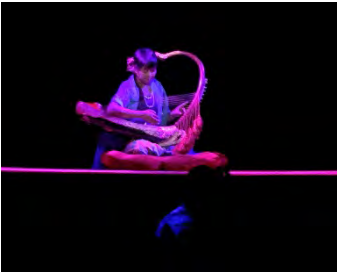
We had time to grab some dinner (back at the same restaurant as lunch, the Sagaing) and then proceed to the Myanmar Marionette and culture show, something Mandalay is famous for. We were shown into a small

room with rows of wooden armchairs. Very pretty, not so comfortable. We had asked for reserved good seats, and so Phyllis and I were in the second row (there were only three seats on each side of the aisle) and Andy and Ben sat behind us. The show began with the musician, who sat below us in front of the raised stage, playing a musical prelude on classical Burmese instruments. This was followed by a young woman playing the traditional harp, something you see in every lobby of every hotel. The harp is 16 strings and shaped like a boat. It is often made of padauk wood and the neck is made of acaci wood. The drum part is made of deer skin. Very different from a traditional harp we are used to. But, that is their traditional harp. There were then a series of short stories as told by the marionettes. Puppetry in the past was used not just for entertainment but also as a way of informing people about current affairs or educating them in literature, history and religion. The puppets served as messengers of the king. They were used to teach people how to dance. And they taught morality and history through the stories. They also carried news from the capital city to remote towns and villages thus serving as a form of media. The puppet shows would take place at pagoda festivals, and still do, beginning at 8:00pm and lasting until dawn the next day. Luckily, our demonstration was only one hour long.



The marionettes are made of yamanay wood, which is particularly light. The one rule for all puppets is that they all must have sexual organs. There are two types of puppets made. This first is the dancing puppets which are actually used in the shows. They are very intricate and very ornately dressed. Only dancing puppets have real hair implanted in their skulls. The proportions for the puppets were set in ancient times and are very clearly marked. For example, the head is four human finger-joints long. When sitting, it must measure five times the size of the head. When standing it is seven times the size of the head. Puppets that do not dance, such as those that are comedians or celestial beings, are often bigger than the dancing puppets. Female puppets have very wide hips as that is considered beautiful. In fact, beauty in a woman is defined as three broad and three slender areas. The forehead, shoulders and hips should be broad and the nose, hands and waist should be slender. All in all, there is great detail to follow in making puppets. Dancing puppets have to have great

flexibility. Strings are attached in different places depending on what that puppet character has to do. Tiny pads of soft cloth are placed on the knees to look like knee caps. Joints are wrapped in cloth to permit a relaxed stance. And the paint used to paint the puppets was once made of tamarind seeds mixed with talc. Of course today acrylic paints are used.



The shows are displays of the lifestyle and customs. The show begins with three beats of a gong and cymbal, a ritual dance by a Human Being (as it says in the program), who pays respect with the dance to the nats (guardian spirits) by offering coconuts and bananas. The first animal puppet to appear is always the horse. Why, you might ask? The ancient



Burmese believed that there were magical animals that lived in the Himalayan Mountains. According to the Buddhist belief, the first constellation to appear in the sky is a group of stars is shaped like a horse's head. Therefore, the horse is always first. Another popular story that is always shown is that of the alchemist. Zaw-Gyi is a demi-god who is always dressed in red, is full of vigor, and who lives in the forest. Since he is an alchemist, he grinds medicinal plants on a stone slab with his magic stick. When he is successful, he dances about and does acrobatics and even sits on his stick. He is

the only puppet character that can fly through the air and bore into the earth. As an aside, there are masks and wall decorations of the alchemist everywhere and in every stall of souvenirs. You will now find one on my wall as well. Another short story had a live woman and a puppet doing the same dance.

There are other stories that are traditional, but the show always ends with the Prince and the Princess which is a love story. Only the very best puppeteers are selected to perform this dance. One fun part was that at the end, they opened the curtains and we could see the puppeteers doing their magic.



It was a long, long day. We saw so much. We traveled by car, boat and horse and buggy. We visited the city and the villages. We saw pagodas centuries old and bright modern neon lights. We were steeped in culture and in the arts. A full day in all.

