

# TRAVELS IN THE *Golden Land*

woman&home's editorial director  
Sue James fell in love with magical  
Myanmar and its gold-plated temples  
on an early morning balloon ride...

Sue's snap of  
the sun rising  
as she soars in  
a hot air balloon

**W**hether marvelling at the majestic golden Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, the astonishing temple ruins of Bagan or the "floating villages" on Inle Lake, you'll be captivated – like I was – by Myanmar.

Thanks to the recent relaxation of its strict military rule, it's now much easier to experience this Southeast Asian gem. The warm, gentle locals are so pleased to see you that you're greeted everywhere you go with a beaming smile.

Unspoilt by external (and by that I mean Western) influences, this beautiful country boasts pristine beaches, snow-capped mountains and jungle wildernesses – and we saw them all during our 12-day visit.

Flying into Yangon (via Bangkok) on an escorted tour brilliantly organised by Cleveland Collection, we were surprised that just five years ago this now bustling city was a provincial small town. The highlight

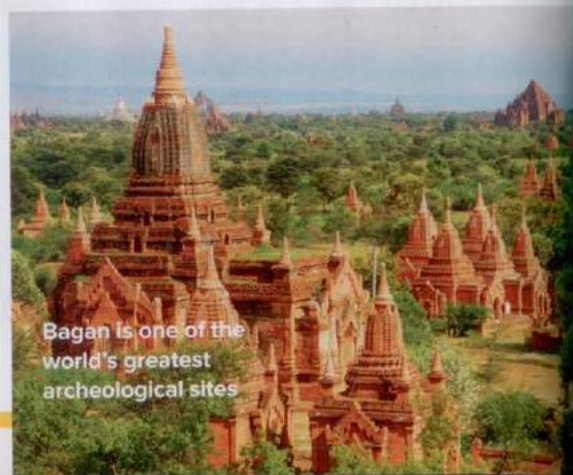
here is the centuries-old Shwedagon Pagoda. Surrounded by smaller pagodas, wishing wells, ancient bells and temples with all kinds of sacred Buddhas inside, it's transformed during sunset. The last of the sun's rays look like they're setting the whole thing alight – stunning.

Our next stop was Bagan, where we embarked on a four-night cruise onboard the Strand Cruise, which took us along the Ayeyarwady River to Mandalay. We met with three other English travellers and became part of "The Famous Five". We enjoyed cocktails with the captain and excellent food, and it was over dinner (and a few glasses of wine) that we made the best last-minute decision of the trip. We decide to book the hot air balloon ride at sunrise the following morning.

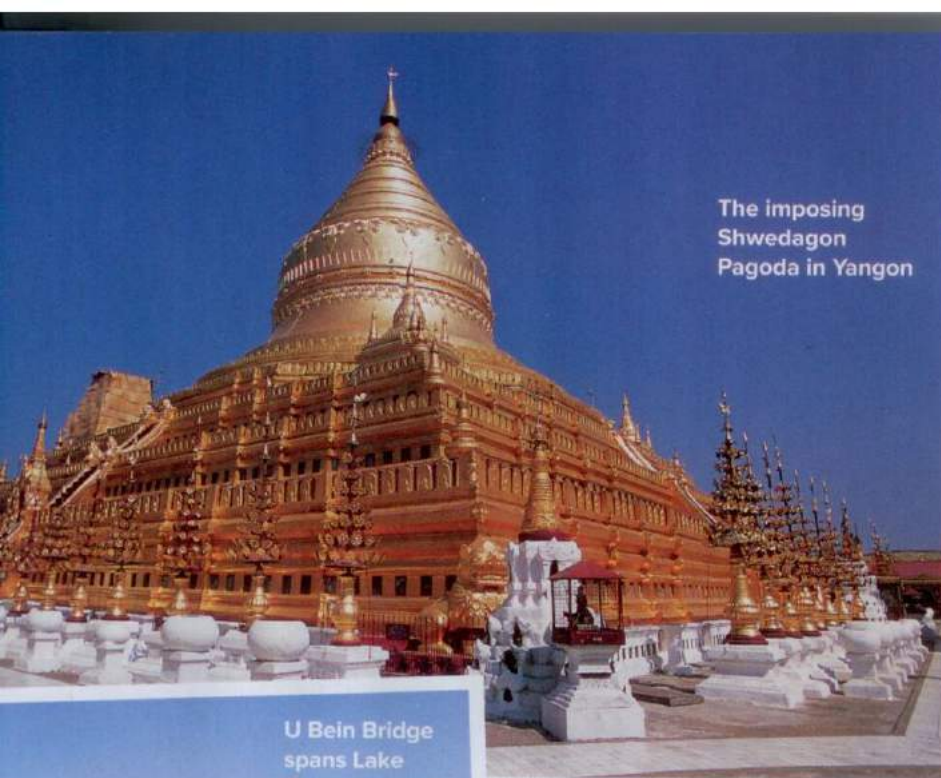
Wow – what an experience. It starts with watching the balloons inflating in front of you and

seeing the sun slowly rise above the landscape. Then, standing in the basket, you slowly lift off the ground and float gently over the several thousand pagodas and temples below.

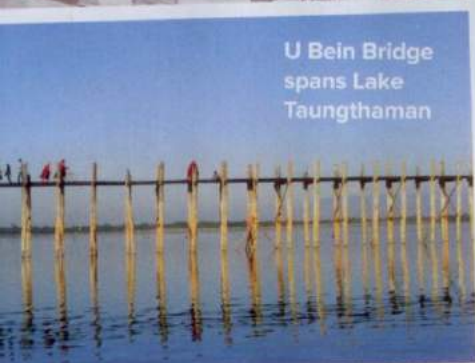
These are spread out around Old Bagan in a 15-square-mile area and have an enterprising English general to thank for their preservation. During the Second World War, Burma was occupied by the Japanese and the general politely asked Winston Churchill not to bomb them – so he didn't! You can also make out the local



Bagan is one of the world's greatest archeological sites



The imposing Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon



U Bein Bridge spans Lake Taungthaman

farmers ploughing the fields with white oxen and the tin-roofed bamboo huts they live in. It was certainly worth every lost minute of sleep the previous night.

We return to the boat with plenty of time for breakfast before we set sail upstream towards Mandalay, relaxing on the sundeck or in the swimming pool.

For the next three days onboard, we're treated to a traditional Burmese cultural show, a puppet show, cooking demonstrations by the chef and a dinner on the riverbank close to Mingun. There the whole crew treat us to not only amazing food but also traditional singing and dancing.

Mingun, a former capital, is just by the "Unfinished Pagoda", one of the largest ever built in Myanmar. Travelling by horse-pulled tuk-tuks on roughly hewn country roads wasn't the best form of travel to the Mingun Bell (in fact, all five of us elected to walk back!). However, it's claimed to be the largest uncracked hanging bell in the world – and is another sightseeing box we ticked.

With Sagaing, Ava and Mandalay all ticked off too, the next stop on the Heritage Trail was the incredibly photogenic U Bein Bridge. Three-

### The standout moment was travelling by tuk-tuk boat

quarters of a mile long, it spans the Taungthaman Lake near Amarapura. Held up by more than 1,000 wooden posts, the bridge is believed to be the oldest and longest teakwood bridge in the world.

After saying goodbye to our new friends – both those in the Famous Five and the crew members – we head to Inle Lake. From Mandalay airport our short flight to Heho airport (an hour from the lake) takes just about 35 minutes.

The scenic drive to Inle takes in the Gokteik viaduct, an engineering masterpiece built around 1900, along with a visit to a beautiful wooden monastery. But the standout moment of this part of our adventure was exploring the lake areas in our own private tuk-tuk boat. Speeding past traditional fishermen, water taxis and the famous one-legged rowers (named after their technique of wrapping one leg around an oar to paddle) we stop first at Mr Toe's lakeside restaurant.

Then, as well as the obligatory monastery and pagoda visits, we are taken by our guide to a silk weaving village, which produces fantastic hand-woven cloth using thread spun from lotus-flower stems. Other local artisan workshops make longboats, hand-rolled cigars and cotton, which is spun and dyed by hand.

The floating market of Ywa Ma Village comes together every five days and we were lucky enough to experience this amazing gathering. Here you can buy everything from freshly caught fish to brightly coloured longyis (the traditional sarong-like dress worn by one and all in

once in a lifetime

## MYANMAR: THE ESSENTIALS

✦ **Avoid** the extremely hot summer from March to May. The best time to go is November to February.

✦ **Shop for** local crafts such as lacquerware in Bagan – lacquer is a traditional art form that started here when the first pagodas were built in the 11th century.

✦ **Take a bigger wallet** – there are around 1,500 Kyats to the pound and cash is king when it comes to shopping! Plus, locals appreciate tips in their local currency. And Cleveland Collection (who we travelled with) provide a handy guide of how much – from \$2 for porters per bag to \$10 a day for your guide.

✦ **Try** the good local wine!

✦ **Wear shoes** that are easy to take on and off when visiting temples.

Myanmar), along with jewellery and even umbrellas! Everyone arrives by boat and the jostling to get the best mooring is something to behold.

One lasting impression on our way back to the modern world is our flight from Heho airport to Yangon. Check-in was simple enough and we were given little round stickers denoting which airline and flight we were on (although nobody checks these!). The one TV screen in the departure lounge shows cartoons instead of flight information, and it took us a little while to realise that passengers were being called to flights by a rather small man carrying a tiny board with the next departing flight number on. We did make the flight, but it was touch and go. When it comes to flying, perhaps the Western influence wouldn't be so bad after all!

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EXPERIENCE

Follow in Sue's footsteps by joining a tour of Myanmar with Cleveland Collection on the next page...

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**EXPERIENCE**

# Follow in the footsteps of the editor

Discover the beauty of Myanmar on this exclusive tour of one of the world's most magical and unspoilt countries...



**I'M VERY EXCITED TO TELL YOU** about our new tour of Myanmar (Burma). We've partnered with travel experts Cleveland Collection, who I travelled with and are excellent, to offer you a tour visiting the same places that I did in this beautiful country.

You will be escorted by their wonderful local guides, stay at fabulous hotels and enjoy a cruise on a traditional Pandaw river boat. The tour starts in Mandalay and you fly in from the UK via Bangkok. During your stay you'll visit the stunning Bagaya monastery and U Bein bridge, Bagan, take a flight to Heho, visit Inle lake and then finish your 12-day tour in the capital, Yangon.

You'll get to see the very best places and meet the people I fell in love with. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

£3,495pp for  
travel 16-27  
October 2017



# YOUR ITINERARY...

**MONDAY 16 OCT** Depart London Heathrow on your overnight Thai Airways flight to Mandalay, via Bangkok.

**TUESDAY 17 OCT** Transfer on to your connecting flight to Mandalay, Burma. On arrival, the group will be met and transferred to the Mandalay Hill Resort for a two-night stay. This evening, take a trip to the top of Mandalay Hill – a height of 774ft – via steps or an escalator. Explore Su Taung Pyai Pagoda and enjoy the wonderful serenity of this beautiful place.

**WEDNESDAY 18 OCT** After breakfast, begin a full day of sightseeing. Visit Ava (also known as "Inwa"), founded in 1364 AD by King Thado Minbya due to its location at the confluence of the Ayeyarwaddy and Myint Nge Rivers. Carry on to Bagaya Monastery, the "Leaning Tower of Inwa" and the Maha Aung Myay Bon Zan Monastery. End your day watching the sun dip behind U Bein Bridge.

**THURSDAY 19 OCT** Today the group will board a Pandaw River Boat for a one-night river cruise from Mandalay to Bagan. Overnight stay on The RV Kindat Pandaw.

**FRIDAY 20 OCT** This morning, disembark in enchanting Bagan. Visit the local market in Nyuang Oo, where local residents meet to buy and sell an array of goods, ranging from fruit and vegetables to china and lacquerware. Next, explore some of the more popular temples, including Kubyaukgyi Temple, Htilominlo Temple and Shwezigon Pagoda. The next two nights will be spent at the Bagan Lodge Hotel.

**SATURDAY 21 OCT** Early this morning you can choose to take the optional balloon ride over Bagan (supplement applies). After breakfast, the group will begin an excursion to Mount Popa, rising 1,518ft from the otherwise flat plains of Bagan. The group will transfer back to the hotel, where you will have the rest of the afternoon at leisure.

**SUNDAY 22 OCT** After breakfast, the group will take a flight from Bagan to Heho, the gateway to Inle Lake. Set in the hills of the southern Shan state, you will fall in love with the charm and character of Inle, with its hundreds of villages built on stilts, inhabited mostly by the Intha people. Your lakeside hotel will be the Villa Inle Resort, where you will spend two nights.

**MONDAY 23 OCT** Today the group will embark on another boat ride along the densely forested river to Indein, a typical lakeside village. This afternoon, learn how to prepare traditional Shan dishes at a local village home.

**TUESDAY 24 OCT** After breakfast, the group will transfer by boat and vehicle back to Heho Airport, for your flight to Yangon. Today, explore three of the city's major sites – the Botataung and Sule Pagodas and Bogyoke Aung San Market. End your day at Shwedagon Pagoda. The next two nights will be spent at the Sule Shangri-La.

**WEDNESDAY 25 OCT** Today the group will visit the National Museum, where you can see the "Lion's Throne", a striking example of local woodcarving. You will also visit the impressive Reclining Buddha Pagoda, and take a stroll along the boardwalks that surround the peaceful lake – a perfect way to take in daily life in Yangon.

**THURSDAY 26 OCT** Your last morning in Burma is free to enjoy at leisure before the group share a farewell lunch at the acclaimed Le Planteur Restaurant. Overlooking Inya Lake, the mansion has been restored to its original colonial design with Myanmar influences. You are then transferred to the airport to check-in for your Thai Airways flight to London, via Bangkok.

**FRIDAY 27 OCT** Arrive London Heathrow early this morning.

## YOUR HOTELS



### MANDALAY HILL RESORT, MANDALAY

Mandalay Hill Resort is located at the foot of Mandalay Hill, close to the city centre and with great views of the pagodas, temples and Royal Palace.



### THE RV KINDAT PANDAW

is a charming river boat. The two decks have comfortable cabins and there is a large amount of outdoor space to relax and enjoy the views.



### BAGAN LODGE, BAGAN

A charming boutique hotel located in the heart of beautiful Bagan, with swimming pools in the grounds and a spa. Rooms here are romantic and nostalgic, with modern amenities.



### VILLA INLE RESORT & SPA, INLE LAKE

is a luxury boutique hotel on the banks of Inle Lake. The villas in this tranquil resort are designed traditionally and made entirely of wood.



**SULE SHANGRI-LA, YANGON** boasts ultra-luxurious accommodation, including an outdoor pool, and a superb location in the centre of Yangon, near all the major tourist attractions.

## COST & HOW TO BOOK

✦ TRAVEL DATES: 16-27 October 2017

✦ COST: £3,495pp (two sharing) including international flights and taxes, service of a tour manager, private transfers and transportation, B&B accommodation throughout, tours and entrance fees as described above, Pandaw River Cruise with lunch, dinner and breakfast and the farewell lunch on 26 October.

✦ BOOK AT: [womanandhome.com/travelburma](http://womanandhome.com/travelburma) or call 020 3111 0812.

WHAT THE PRICE EXCLUDES: Burma visa, if required, other meals where not mentioned in the itinerary, optional tours mentioned at a supplement, other sightseeing not mentioned, drinks/water at included lunches, overweight luggage, personal expenses, travel insurance, tips and gratuities. Single supplement applies (£1,395). Offer operated by Cleveland Collection, a company wholly independent of woman&home, published by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd.



Watch a video of Myanmar at [womanandhome.com/travelburma](http://womanandhome.com/travelburma)