

Suggested Reading List for Myanmar

Books

The Glass Palace (*Amitav Ghosh*)

Set in Burma during the British invasion of 1885, this novel depicts the events that shaped modern-day Myanmar, India and the Malay Peninsula through the story of Rajkumar, a poor boy who is lifted on the tides of political and social chaos and creates an empire in the Burmese teak forest. When soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, a young woman in the court of the Burmese Queen, whose love will shape his life.

From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey (*Pascal Khoo Thwe*)

This is the story of a young man's upbringing in a remote Padaung hill tribe village in Myanmar and how he escaped his strife-torn country to the tranquil quads of Cambridge. The author describes how Christianity influenced his tribe's ancient practices of ancestral worship and spiritual communion and how his grandmother was exhibited as a circus freak due to her elongated neck, a common feature of women in the tribe. In the late 1980s, the military regime of Ne Win began to crack down on 'dissidents' and Pascal took to the jungle with a guerrilla army. In a dramatic turn of events, he was later rescued by Cambridge scholar, John Casey, who expedited Pascal's departure to England.

The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma (*Thant Myint-U*)

Telling the story of his own family, the author provides an account of Myanmar's rise and decline in the modern world, from the time of Portuguese pirates and renegade Mughal princes through the decades of British colonialism, the devastation of World War II, and a sixty-year civil war that continues today and is the longest-running war anywhere in the world. Descended from a long line of courtiers from the royal court of Ava, Thant Myint-U is the grandson of a schoolmaster who rose to become UN secretary-general. He himself was educated at Harvard and Cambridge and later served on three United Nations peacekeeping operations in Cambodia and in the former Yugoslavia.

Moon Princess (*Sao Sanda*)

Narrated by the eldest daughter of the Prince of Yawnghwe, Sao Shwe Thaik, this novel recounts the writer's early life and provides a fascinating memoir of her father who, in 1948, became first President of the Union of Burma after the country gained its independence. She describes growing up in the Shan States and records the changes that occurred during the periods of British colonial rule, war and Japanese occupation, the return of the British administration, the troubled years after Burma's Independence and, finally the military takeover in 1962.

Letters from Burma (*Aung San Suu Kyi*)

A collection of letters written by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Through her words, Suu Kyi reaches out beyond Burma's borders to paint for her readers a vivid and poignant picture of her native land. She celebrates the courageous army officers, academics, actors and everyday people who supported the National League for Democracy and reveals the impact of political decisions on the people of Burma, from the terrible cost to the children of imprisoned dissidents to the effect of inflation on the national diet.

The Burman: His Life and Notions (*George Scott*)

Despite being written at the end of the 19th-century, this book provides a fascinating insight into Burmese people, their rituals, customs, beliefs, food, dress and lifestyle. Detailed and diverse, the author, a British Colonial administrator, approaches his subjects in the golden lands of Myanmar with positive and unbiased curiosity, chronicling a world in which "people are small and ghosts are big", where a Sunday-born man may think twice before marrying a lady born on a Wednesday and where houses are seen to have male, female or neutral foundation posts.

Television and Films

Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown – Myanmar (2013)

A CNN series that ventures into little-known destinations and diverse cultures to reveal fascinating insights into the world's people, food and traditions. Led by Anthony Bourdain, a well-loved television personality, world-renowned chef and bestselling author, the show featured Myanmar in its first ever episode, taking viewers on a culinary journey from mohinga, a typical morning staple, to pig's-head salad, mouth-watering prawn curry and assorted barbecued meats.

Youth of Yangon (2013)

Directed by James Holman, this documentary follows a small, but growing community of skateboarders living in Yangon, Myanmar. Capturing an alternative view of a nation that just recently starting opening up to the world, and giving voice to a new generation, the show celebrates skating - a sport that is relatively new in Myanmar - and reveals the beginnings of a youth culture emerging from decades of military oppression.

Beyond Rangoon (1994)

The Burmese government was aggressively opposed to the making of this film, which brings to light some of the harsh realities of life under the military government of then-Burma. The year is 1988 and Laura is traveling in Rangoon (now Yangon) with her sister and tour guide Spalding Gray. She is inadvertently caught up in a demonstration supporting Aung San Suu Kyi and is forbidden to leave the country. She then embarks on a fast-paced series of adventures to find allies amongst the chaos and flee across the border into Thailand.

The Lady (2011)

Starring Michelle Yeoh as Aung San Suu Kyi, this French-British film directed by Luc Besson depicts the life of Myanmar's political leader, her role in the democracy movement and her relationship with her husband, writer Michael Aris.

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