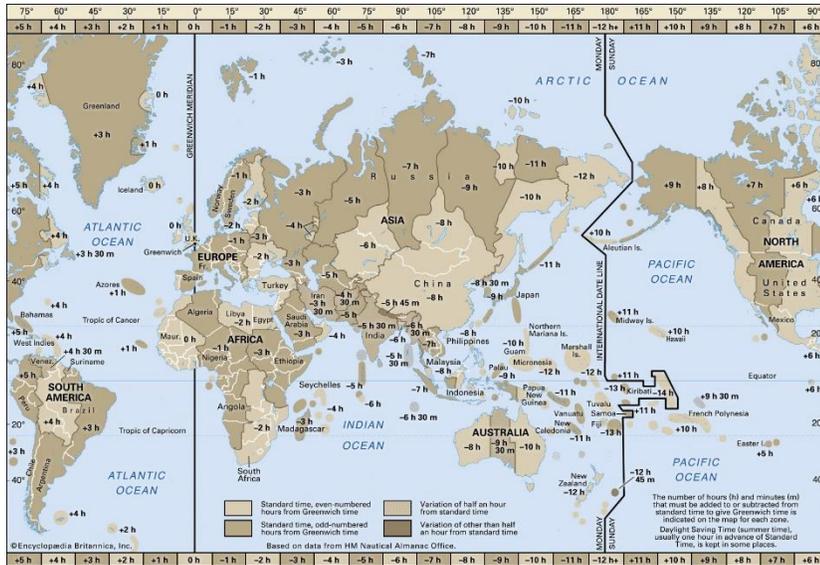


## Walk to Jerusalem Week 1 Report, 2-1 to 2-7

We had a great response for our first week of this walk. We had 46 participants and we walked a total of 818.5 miles this first week which is amazing! Thanks everyone for participating. On Monday we all met at the gym parking lot of the school and proceeded to walk north to the Charlotte airport, a 90-mile trip. We boarded our plane for Bangkok, flying on Japanese Air, leaving at 6:30 pm Monday evening. The flight was 28 hours long including layovers and we arrived at 11:30 PM on Monday evening. This was only possible because we flew west over the US west coast Japan and China. We crossed



the international dateline which runs roughly south between the west coast of Alaska and the east coast of Russia (see line on map left). As we crossed the dateline in this direction, we gained a day but because the flight is so long, we arrived late in the evening on the same Monday. When we return home, we will be flying from east to west so we will not cross the dateline a second time.

For many of us, our main impressions of Thailand have come from the movie "Anna and the King of Siam" or the more recent version, "Anna and the King". I expect that we will leave with

many different impressions! Bangkok is the capital and most populous city of Thailand. The city occupies 605.7 square miles in the Chao Phraya River delta in central Thailand and has an estimated population of 10.539 million as of 2020, 15.3 percent of the country's population. Over fourteen million people (22.2 percent) lived within the surrounding Bangkok Metropolitan Region per their the 2010 census, making Bangkok an extreme primate city, dwarfing Thailand's other urban centers in both size and importance to the national economy.

Bangkok traces its roots to a small trading post during the Ayutthaya Kingdom in the 15th century, which eventually grew and became the site of two capital cities: Thonburi in 1768 and Rattanakosin in 1782. Bangkok was at the heart of the modernization of Siam, later renamed Thailand, during the late-19th century, as the country faced pressures from the West. The city was at the center of Thailand's political struggles throughout the 20th century, as the country abolished absolute monarchy, adopted constitutional rule, and underwent numerous coups and several uprisings. The city, incorporated as a special administrative area under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration in 1972, grew rapidly during the 1960s and again through the 1980s and



now exerts a significant impact on Thailand's politics, economy, education, media and modern society.

The Asian investment boom in the 1980s and 1990s led many multinational corporations to locate their regional headquarters in Bangkok. The city is now a regional force in finance and business. It is an international hub for transport and health care, and has emerged as a center for the arts, fashion, and entertainment. The city is known for its street life and cultural landmarks. The Grand Palace and Buddhist temples including Wat Arun and Wat Pho stand in contrast with other tourist attractions such as the nightlife scenes of Khaosan Road and Patpong. Bangkok is among the world's top tourist destinations and has been named the world's most visited city consistently in several international rankings.

Bangkok's rapid growth coupled with little urban planning has resulted in a haphazard cityscape and inadequate infrastructure. Despite an extensive expressway network, an inadequate road network and substantial private car usage have led to chronic and crippling traffic congestion, which caused severe air pollution in the 1990s. The city has since turned to public transport in an attempt to solve the problem, operating five rapid transit lines and building other public transit, but congestion still remains a prevalent issue.

Bangkok's economy gradually expanded through international trade, first with China, then with Western merchants returning in the early-to-mid 19th century. As the capital, Bangkok was the center of Siam's modernization as it faced pressure from Western powers in the late-19th century. The reigns of Kings Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851–68) and Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868–1910) saw the introduction of the steam engine, printing press, rail transport and utilities infrastructure in the city, as well as formal education and healthcare. Bangkok became the center stage for power struggles between the military and political elite as the country abolished absolute monarchy in 1932.

As Thailand allied with Japan in World War II, Bangkok was subjected to Allied bombing, but rapidly grew in the post-war period as a result of US aid and government-sponsored investment. Bangkok's role as a US military rest and relaxation destination boosted its tourism industry. Disproportionate urban development led to increasing income inequalities and migration from rural areas into Bangkok; its population surged from 1.8 million to 3 million in the 1960s.

Following the US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, Japanese businesses took over as leaders in investment, and the expansion of export-oriented manufacturing led to growth of the financial market in Bangkok. Rapid growth of the city continued through the 1980s and early 1990s, until it was stalled by the 1997 Asian financial crisis. By then, many public and social issues had emerged, among them the strain on infrastructure reflected in the city's notorious traffic jams. Bangkok's role as the nation's political stage continues to be seen in strings of popular protests, from the student uprisings in 1973 and 1976, anti-military demonstrations in 1992, and frequent street protests since 2006, including those by groups opposing and supporting former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra from 2006 to 2013, and a renewed student-led movement in 2020.



MahaNakhon,(left) the city's tallest building from 2016 to 2018, stands among the skyscrapers of Sathon Road, one of Bangkok's main financial districts. Bangkok is the economic center of Thailand, and the heart of the country's investment and development. In 2010, the city had an economic output of 3.142 trillion baht (US\$98.34 billion), contributing 29.1 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). This amounted to a per-capita GDP value of 456,911 baht (\$14,301), almost three times the national average. Bangkok's economy ranked as the sixth among Asian cities in terms of per-capita GDP, after Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Osaka–Kobe and Seoul, as of 2010. Poverty does exist in the city but it only a small percentage of the inhabitants and is considerably less than in other areas of the country. It was a bit disconcerting to see children in rags begging in front of gold covered buildings housing gold statues.

Bangkok is faced with multiple problems—including and especially subsidence (gradual settling or sudden sinking of the Earth's surface) and flooding—which have raised the issue of moving the nation's

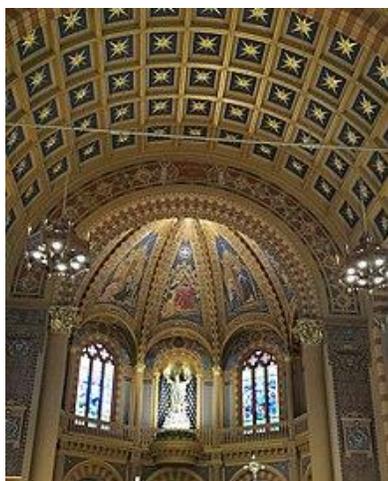
capital elsewhere. The idea is not new: during World War II Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram planned unsuccessfully to relocate the capital to Phetchabun. In the 2000s, the Thaksin Shinawatra administration assigned the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) to formulate a plan to move the capital to Nakhon Nayok Province. The 2011 floods revived the idea of moving government functions from Bangkok. In 2017, the military government assigned NESDC to study the possibility of moving government offices from Bangkok to Chachoengsao Province in the east.

Bangkok is a cosmopolitan city; the census showed that it is home to 567,120 expatriates from Asian countries (including 71,024 Chinese and 63,069 Japanese nationals), 88,177 from Europe, 32,241 from the Americas, 5,856 from Oceania and 5,758 from Africa. Migrants from neighboring countries include 216,528 Burmese, 72,934 Cambodians and 52,498 Lao. In 2018, numbers show that there are 370,000 international migrants registered with the Department of Employment, more than half of them migrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.

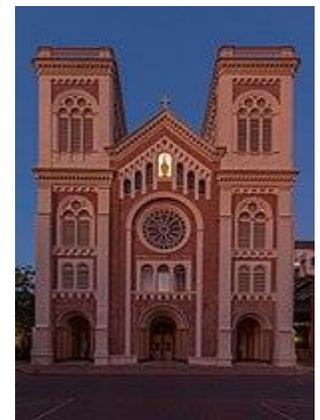
Most of Bangkok's population identify as Thai, although details on the city's ethnic make-up are unavailable, as the national census does not document race. Bangkok's cultural pluralism dates back to the early days of its founding: several ethnic communities were formed by immigrants and forced settlers including the Khmer, northern Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Mon and Malay. Most prominent were the Chinese, who played major roles in the city's trade and became the majority of Bangkok's population—estimates include up to three-fourths in 1828 and almost half in the 1950s. Chinese immigration was restricted from the 1930s and effectively ceased after the Chinese Revolution in 1949. Their prominence subsequently declined as younger generations of Thai Chinese integrated and adopted a Thai identity. Bangkok is still nevertheless home to a large Chinese community, with the greatest concentration in Yaowarat, Bangkok's Chinatown.

Religion in Bangkok (2015)		
Religion		Percent
Buddhism		93.95%
Islam		4.18%
Christianity		1.68%
Hinduism		0.19%
Unaffiliated/others		0.01%

Our first stop on Tuesday morning was to find a Catholic Church. According to Catholic Social



Communications of Thailand, as of 2019 there are 388,468 Catholics in Thailand, a figure that represents about 0.58% of the Thai population of 69 million. There are 11 dioceses with 526 parishes and 662 priests. We found Assumption Cathedral (left and right) which is the principal Roman Catholic church of Thailand. It is the main church of the Archdiocese of Bangkok. It was visited by Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis during their trips to Thailand in 1984 and 2019.



The original building was the result of the request from a French missionary, Father Pascal in 1809 and the work of a French architect which saw the cathedral completed in 1821 during the reign of King Rama II. The cathedral was named Assumption after the Virgin Mary and she is commemorated at the church during The Feast of the Assumption, on St. Mary's Day on 15 August.

Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, the church and surrounding area played an important role for Christian missionaries arriving in Bangkok, particularly after 1860. The cathedral is part of a series of buildings which consist of Assumption Convent School (Thailand), Catholic Mission of Bangkok, Assumption Printing Press and rectory which were inhabited by the missionaries during their time in the city.

Around 1909 or 1910 the church underwent significant reconstruction and was rebuilt in the Romanesque style between 1910 and 1918. The church has a relatively tall rectangular structure with a red brick exterior which stands out against its surrounding white buildings. In 1942, during World War II, nearby buildings were destroyed by bombing which resulted in serious damage to the church. It underwent extensive restoration shortly afterwards and was partly refurbished in the 1980s and 1990s. Stained glass windows are now used in the cathedral today.

The first historical record of an attempt to introduce Christianity was about 1550 when a French Franciscan named Bonferre went on a Portuguese ship from Goa to Siam, where for three years he preached the Gospel, but without any converts. In 1553 several Portuguese ships landed in Siam, and at the request of the Siamese king three hundred Portuguese soldiers entered his service. The following year two Dominicans, Fathers Hieronymus of the Cross and Sebastian de Cantù, joined them as chaplains. In a short time, they established three parishes at Ayutthaya with about fifteen hundred converted Siamese.

Over the year there were variations in the tolerance for Catholics: sometimes they were accepted and at other time persecuted. Thanks to the broad-mindedness of Kings Mongkut (1851–1868) and Chulalongkorn (1868–1910), the Catholic Church in Siam enjoyed peace under Bishops Dupont (1862–1872) and Vey (1875–1909). Owing to the complications between France and Siam, in 1894, the missionaries had to endure the ill will of local mandarins, though the minister of foreign affairs promised that no harm would be done to the missionaries and their work on account of the French invasion. Today only 0.44% of the population is Catholic but the Thai government has established diplomatic ties with the Vatican which signals that Catholicism will remain a part of the culture for some time.

After visiting the Cathedral, we started our tour of the city with a visit to Wat Phra Kaew in the Grand Palace which is among Bangkok's major tourist attractions. Wat Phra Kaew is commonly known in English as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is regarded as the most sacred Buddhist temple in Thailand.



The complex consists of several buildings within the precincts of the Grand Palace. We then explored the rest of the Grand Palace (below, left). The palace has been the official residence of the Kings of Siam (and later Thailand) since 1782. The king, his court, and his royal government were based on the grounds of the palace until 1925. The Grand Palace is still used for official events. Several royal ceremonies and state functions are held within the walls of the palace every year.

Among Bangkok's other well-known sights are the major Buddhist temples, including Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Pho, and Wat Arun.



Wat Pho temple is first on the list of six temples in Thailand classed as the highest grade of the first-class royal temples. It is associated with King Rama I who rebuilt the temple complex on an earlier temple site. It became his main temple and is where some of his ashes are enshrined. The temple was later expanded and extensively renovated by Rama III. The temple complex houses the largest collection of Buddha images in Thailand, including a 151 foot long reclining Buddha, shown left. The temple is considered the earliest center for public education in Thailand, and the marble illustrations and inscriptions placed in the temple for public instructions has been recognized by UNESCO in its Memory of the World Program. It houses a school of Thai medicine and is also known as the birthplace of traditional Thai massage which is still taught and practiced at the temple.



Wat Arun temple "Temple of Dawn" (right), is a Buddhist temple in Bangkok Yai district of Bangkok, Thailand, on the Thonburi west bank of



the Chao Phraya River. The temple derives its name from



the Hindu god Aruna, often personified as the radiations of the rising sun. Wat Arun is among the best known of Thailand's landmarks. The first light of the morning reflects off the surface of the temple with pearly iridescence. Although the temple had existed since at least the seventeenth century, its distinctive *prang* (spires) were built in the early nineteenth century during the reign of King Rama II.

Wat Phra Kaew is commonly known in English as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (left) and officially as Wat

Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram, is regarded as the most sacred Buddhist temple in Thailand. The complex consists of a number of buildings within the precincts of the Grand Palace in the historical center of Bangkok. It houses the statue of the Emerald Buddha, which is venerated as the country's palladium.

Construction of the temple began in 1783 under the orders of Rama I, the first king of the Chakri dynasty. Since then, each successive king has been personally involved in adding, restoring and embellishing the temple during their reigns as a way of making religious merit and glorifying the dynasty. Many important state and royal ceremonies are held within the temple each year, presided by the king in person and attended by government officials. This makes the temple the nation's preeminent place of worship and a national shrine for the monarchy and the state. Throughout the years, each king has donated sacred and valuable objects inside the temple, making it a treasury as well. The temple complex comprises various buildings for specific religious purposes built in a variety of Thai architectural styles, while still adhering to the traditional principles of Thai religious architecture.



That evening we went to see traditional Thai dancers telling a story in the Khon style. This link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdV3KXzQ3Sk> will take you to a 3.22-minute video about this type of dance. The narration is in Thai but there are subtitles. It is impressive to see some of the training required!

The next day we continued touring the city and visited some of the famous shrines. Erawan Shrine, right) demonstrate Hinduism's deep-

rooted influence in Thai culture. The Shrine of Lord Brahma the Great houses a statue of Phra Phrom, the Thai representation of Brahma, the Hindu god of creation. It often features performances by Thai dance troupes who are hired by worshippers in return for seeing their prayers answered at the shrine.

According to official census data approximate 95% of Thais follow Buddhism. However, the religious life of the country is more complex than how it is portrayed by such statistics. Of the large Thai Chinese population, most of those who follow Buddhism have been integrated into the dominant Theravada tradition, with only a negligible minority having retained Chinese Buddhism. Otherwise, a large part of the Thai Chinese have retained the practice of ethnic Chinese religion, including Taoism, Confucianism and Chinese salvationist religions (such as Yiguandao and the Church of Virtue). Despite being practiced freely, these religions have no official recognition, and their followers are counted as Theravada Buddhists in statistical studies. Also, many Thai and Isan practice their ethnic Tai folk religion.



Muslims are the second largest religious group in Thailand at 4% to 5% of the population. Thailand's southernmost provinces — Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and part of Songkhla and Chumphon — have large populations of Muslims, consisting of both ethnic Thai and Malay. Christians, mainly Catholics, represent just over 1% of the population. A small but influential community of Sikhs in Thailand and some Hindus, mostly live in the country's cities and are engaged in retail commerce. There is also a small Jewish community in Thailand, dating back to the 17th century. For those of you who are interested, I have included a summary of the complex religion/philosophy that is Buddhism at the end of this week's report.

Next, we went to Bang Krachao Park, a beautiful oasis in this city. Bangkok's status as a concrete jungle is well known but lesser known is the real jungle that's hidden here. Nestled inside this sprawling city is the enclave of Bang Krachao. Known as Bangkok's green lung due to its green spaces and geographical shape, Bang Krachao is a calming natural space in one of the world's more chaotic cities. Getting there was easy; we crossed the river near to Wat Khlong Toey Nok temple, doing so in a wooden longtail boat. After arriving at Bang Krachao, it's hard to believe this is Bangkok at all – there are no skyscrapers or tall building of any sort, no factories or signs of industry and the din of traffic melts away, what was a short boat journey feels almost like a portal to another world. We used bicycles for exploring the park.



While it technically isn't an island, exploring Bang Krachao almost feels like visiting an island that time forgot. For starters, it looks like a typical rural Thai village, with rustic wooden houses sitting amongst the palm trees and jungle, rather than garish condominiums.

Elevated paths above the ground provided a greater sense of immersion and great

views. There are also typical Thai temples which we visited.



No visit to Bang Krachao would be complete without taking in Sri Nakhon Khuean Khan Park and Botanical Gardens. There's an abundance of natural features to enjoy from pretty flowers to scenic water features such as ponds and lakes, that provide a taste of what one could expect from Thailand's amazing national parks.

The presence of locals, Thai day trippers and foreign tourists meant there was plenty of things to provide entertainment. There are a scattering of restaurants located in the area, as well as a floating market. Bang Nam Pheung floating market comes with a sense of authenticity and "real" Thailand that can be lacking at similar places in Bangkok.

To facilitate this travel report, I have taken the Thailand map and drawn the route we took north on the Thailand map below.

From Bangkok we headed north 50 miles and stopping at the ancient city of Ayutthaya was certainly worth the time. It is a UNESCO Heritage Site expanding over 289 hectares with the massive complex of ruins located on an island surrounded by three rivers. The Menam, Lopburi, and Pasak rivers ring Ayutthaya Historical Park, the island where most of the temple ruins lie.

Ayutthaya was the capital of Thailand from the time it was founded in 1351 until it was razed and burned by the Burmese Army in 1767. Though many of the buildings were destroyed and many objects stolen over the years, the massive temples and stucco towers that remain were still awe-inspiring.

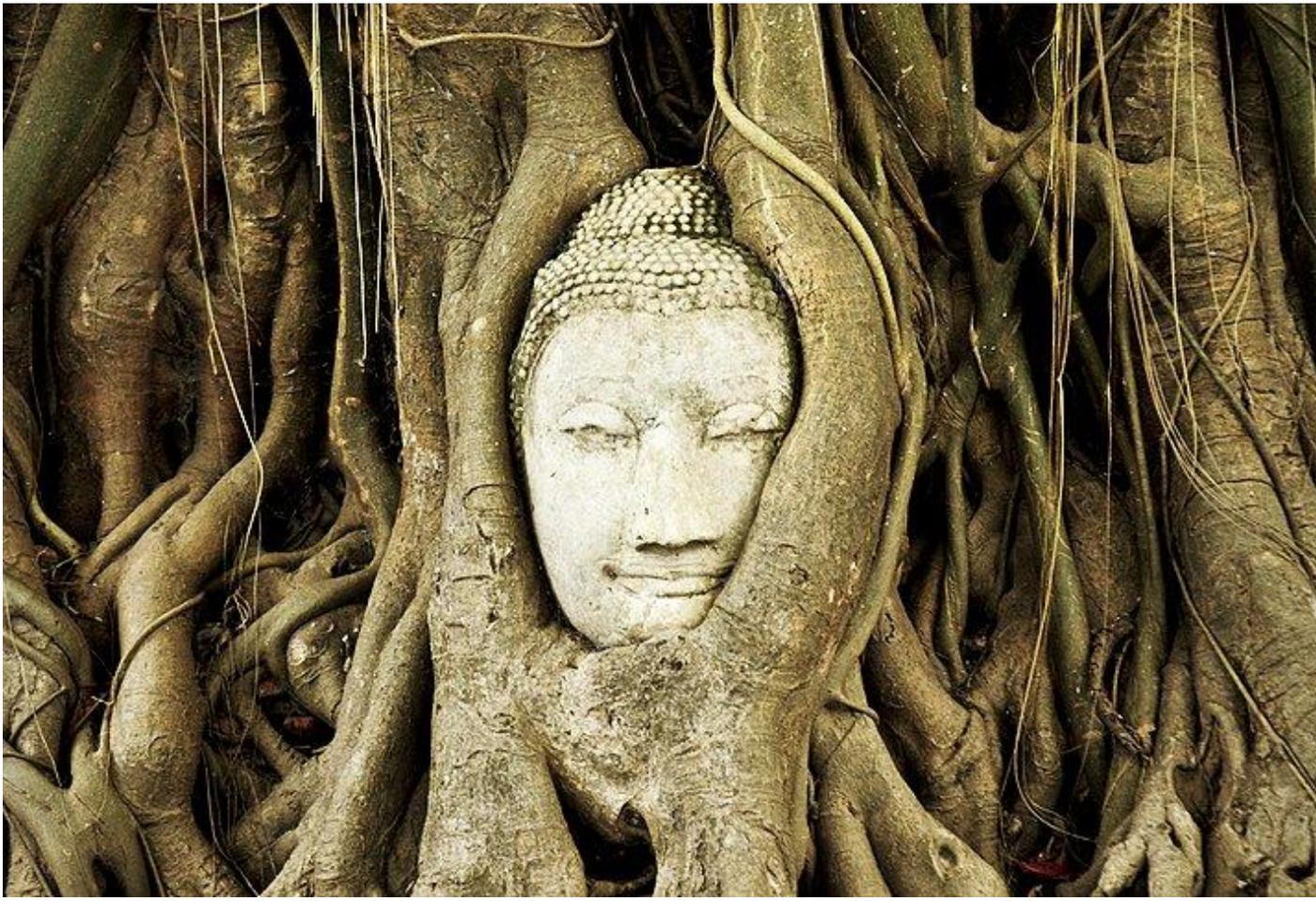
One of Ayutthaya's best-known temples is Wat Chaiwatthanaram, with a 35-meter-high prang (tower-like spire) and eight chedi-like chapels at the heart of the structure. Wat Mahathat, a smaller temple, is famous for the head of a Buddha statue caught in the roots of a tree. We visited both, along with some other ruins.!

Restoration efforts starting in 1987 transformed Wat Chaiwatthanaram from a looted ruin to one of the most visited attractions in the Ayutthaya Historical Park. This large complex on the west bank of Chao Phraya river is one of Ayutthaya's most impressive temples and offers insight into the influence of Buddhism on the Thai community. Built in the traditional Khmer



style, the complex consists of a central prang or spire perched atop a rectangular base amid four smaller prang and eight chedi-like temples or merus. Reliefs portraying scenes from the life of the Buddha once adorned the exterior of the merus, but only fragments now remain. We stayed until Sunset which was important because the buildings glow in the late light.





Wat Mahathat

Wat Mahathat, which tradition claims King Ramesuan was built in 1384. Its most famous feature is the face of a stone Buddha peeking out from among the roots at the base of a tree. The central prang here is one of the old city's most impressive edifices. In about 1625, the top portion broke off and was rebuilt in 1633. Later, it collapsed again and only the corners survived. In 1956, a secret chamber was uncovered in the ruins. Among the treasures found inside were gold jewelry, a gold casket containing a relic of the

Buddha, and fine tableware.

On the eastern outskirts of Ayutthaya stands the exceptionally striking Wat Yai Chai Mongkol (or Mongkhon), its huge chedi rising from a square base surrounded by four smaller chedis. One of its most notable features is the massive reclining Buddha near the entrance. The wat, built in 1357 under King U Thong, was assigned to monks of a particularly strict order trained in Sri Lanka, members of which still live there. Before we left, we climbed the stairs of the chedi for views over the statues and gardens. See the picture left.





St Joseph's Church Uwe Schwarzbach / photo modified.

While we were in Ayutthaya, we visited the church above. In its glory days, Ayutthaya drew settlers from all over the world, making the city a diverse and cosmopolitan one. The European influence is responsible for the number of Catholic churches in the area, including St. Joseph's Church, which still stands today. Located in the French quarter, the church was built in 1666 and is a testament to the French settlers, who left home to settle in what was formerly Siam. St. Joseph Church is not very remarkable in architecture but stands brightly at its location along the Chao Phraya River. The main interest of the church is its religious history. The church has been a place of continuous Catholic worship in Thailand for over 300 years.

Nakhon Sawan, a city whose name literally means "Heavenly City", was our next stop as we proceeded north in Thailand. The city is the capital of Nakhon Sawan Province. As of 2006 it has a population of 93,141. Nakhon Sawan is 147 miles north of Bangkok.



The city marks the point of confluence of two of Thailand's major rivers, the Ping and the Nan which converge in the city to form the Chao Phraya which flows south to Bangkok and out into the Gulf of Thailand. The city's surroundings are mostly flat, but in the city itself a hill rises about 360 feet above the plain.

The St. Anna Cathedral is in downtown Nakhon Sawan and we went there to pray but no one remembered to take a picture! Afterwards we continued north.

Phitsanulok, our next stop, is an important, historic city on our route north and is the capital of Phitsanulok Province. Phitsanulok is home to Naresuan University and Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, as well as to a major Royal Thai Army base. As of 2017, the population of the city was 68,086. Phitsanulok is one of the oldest cities in Thailand, founded over 600 years ago. Phitsanulok was also a provincial center of the Khmer Empire during the Angkorian period. Phitsanulok was originally named "Song Khwae" (Two Rivers) as it used to situate between the Nan and Khwae Noi Rivers, although the Khwae Noi River now drains into Nan River north of Phitsanulok.



King Naresuan, left

In 1584, Prince (and later King) Naresuan ordered the evacuation of all cities in the Sukhothai region including Phitsanulok down south in preparations against Burmese invasions. Phitsanulok was abandoned until it was later restored in 1593 as a first-level city held by a governor, becoming the center of Siamese administrations in

northern regions.

The Burmese General Maha Thiha Thura laid siege on Phitsanulok in 1775. The city held on for four months until the city finally fell to the Burmese and was destroyed. After warfare, Phitsanulok was in ruins and depopulated through the nineteenth century. The Phra Buddha Chinnasri image (right) was moved to Wat Baworn Niwet in Bangkok in 1829. Phitsanulok slowly recovered to be an urban center. The Phitsanulok fire of 1957 destroyed much of the older portion of the city, which at the time consisted mostly of wooden buildings.

Over the years since then improvements have been made including the King Naresuan Shrine was completed at Chandra Palace in 1961. On 25 January 1967, the Phitsanulok campus of what is now Naresuan University was established as the northern branch of the degree level College of Education. In 1974, the College of Education was upgraded as Srinakharinwirot University, with Phitsanulok as one of the six campuses. In 1990, the regional campuses became independent universities, and the Phitsanulok campus was named after Phitsanulok-born King Naresuan the Great. Naresuan Dam was constructed from 1976 to 1985 on the Nan River as part of the Phitsanulok Irrigation Project. The dam was designed to help prevent flooding of the city. On 8 March 1999 Phitsanulok was upgraded to a city municipality. Phitsanulok has many waterfalls, forests, and caves.



Phitsanulok's main tourist attraction is Wat Phra Sri Rattana Mahathat, known locally simply as Wat Yai. This famous temple, built in 1357, is home to the Phra Buddha Chinnarat (Shown above), which is one of the most revered Buddha figures in Thailand, and the official symbol of Phitsanulok Province. The beautiful mother-of-pearl inlaid doors were built in 1756 by order of King Boromakot of Ayutthaya. The Buddha Chinnarat National Museum, on the temple grounds, houses a sizeable collection of Sukhothai period art. A large provincial fair is held at the temple every January.

After our visit to the temple, we continued north to Lampang, a tourist town in the north that retains a retro atmosphere. Carriages are the main source of transport within the city. There are also ancient architectural buildings such as in Kad Kong Ta, an old commercial area by the Wang River Ratsadaphisek Bridge or the White Land Bridge, an old landmark of the city, more than a hundred years old. Khun Than Tunnel is another landmark that is reputed to be the most beautiful and longest railway tunnel in Thailand. We took the Tha Ma O Tram which runs through major tourist attractions such as Pratu Pong Temple, Pong Sanuk Temple, Ku Chao Ya Suta, Wat Phra Kaew Don Tao Suchada Ram, Ban Sao Nak and Baan Louise .

Having been the most revered and Historical Temple of Lampang for a long time since the reign of Queen Chammathewi in the late 15th century, according to legend, this monument is one of the country's most complete wooden temples (pictured below) enhanced with numerous ancient architectures. Phrathat Lampang Luang is the designated stupa for people who were born in the Year of the Ox, according to the Chinese zodiac. The construction was also begun and finished in the Year of the Ox. The stupa features a lotus molded base supporting the round-shaped body in the Lanna style covered with Thong Changko or alloy plate. The top is made of gold embossed with various Prachamyam patterns. This stupa style had an influence on Phrathat Hariphunchai and Phra Borommathat Chom Thong. Its body enshrines the Lord Buddha's hair and relics from his right forehead, and the front and back of his neck. On the brass fence encircling the stupa is a hole from the bullet that NanThip Chang, a Lampang hero, shot Thao Maha Yot, a ruler of Lamphun.



Next, we headed to Wat Phrathat Doi Phra Chan which is situated on a peaceful mountaintop called Doi Phra Chan where the breathtaking scenery of Amphoe Mae Tha can be seen. Visitors can appreciate a panoramic view of the lush vegetation in the rainy season and admire the beauty of the sea of mist in the morning in the cool season.



Formerly known as Wat Chaloe Phrakiat Phra Chomkiao Rachanuson (Wat Phrabat Pu Phadaeng) or locally called Doi Pu Yak (Doi Phrabat Pu Phadaeng), the Temple (below) is acclaimed to be the Unseen Thailand attraction that encompasses steep rocky terrain and a golden pagoda built on the top of a high hill. At the pagoda's peak is installed a sacred Buddha's Footprint. We had to walk a bit to reach the top of the mountain, but the views were extraordinary.

Wat Phrathat Doi Phra Chan is situated on a peaceful mountaintop called Doi Phra Chan where the breathtaking scenery of Amphoe Mae Tha can be seen. The Temple is acclaimed to be the unseen Thailand attraction and encompasses steep rocky terrain and a golden pagoda built on the top of a high hill. At the pagoda's peak is installed a sacred Buddha's Footprint. It took a bit of a hike to reach the top section, but the views were spectacular!



After our visit to the various sites around Lampang, we headed to Chiang Mai, which is in the northern portion of Thailand. The laid-back city of Chiang Mai is easy to navigate and considered the ideal base for outdoor lovers. It's surrounded by national parks, waterfalls, and mountains dotted with historic temples, including Doi Inthanon, Thailand's highest mountain.

Chiang Mai is very vegetarian-friendly, and it offers ethical options to get closer to nature. While many cities in Thailand offer ethically questionable elephant rides, Chiang Mai is home to several elephant sanctuaries set deep in the mountainside, where visitors can interact with rescued animals in their natural habitats. It also has the cathedral for the Catholic Diocese of Chiang Mai, below left.



Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

The present Chiang Mai Diocese is composed of four provinces in the northern region of Thailand: Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Lamphun, and Lampang. As of 2014, there were 68,975 Catholics with 15,080 Catechumens.

The principal church of the diocese is the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Chiang Mai. The current church, already the third cathedral building of the diocese, was inaugurated on 30 October 1999. The first Sacred Heart church was built in 1931. Shortly before the elevation to a diocese, a new, and larger, church was inaugurated on 28 February 1965.

The Sacred Heart College and the kindergarten school that surround the church building were added later in 1932. Originally there were 40 students, now there are over 4,000. In the last few years, an English program has been created. This currently has just over 100 students. Each class is small, around 16 students or so, and has two teachers: a native Thai-speaking teacher and a native English-speaking teacher. Whilst Sacred Heart College is a private school, its prices are controlled by the government and are lower than international private schools in the area. Students range from pre-school to university age.

Famous for its many Thai cooking schools, Chiang Mai is also a great destination to see temples, including the 14th-century golden Wat Phra Singh and Wat Phra That Doi Suthep at the top of a mountain.



Wat Phra That Doi  
Suthep Vyacheslav Argenberg / photo  
modified.

This mountaintop temple is must-see in Chiang Mai. Wat Doi Suthep's central shrine contains a much-revered seated Buddha and is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city. We hopped on a songthaew (red trucks that essentially operate as communal cabs) to reach the mountain top temple base. At the base of the staircase leading up to the temple, we found vendors selling souvenirs, antiques, and snacks. We climbed up the steep staircase, but the effort is well worth it. Statues of two demons guard the entrance to the temple precinct. Generally, only two of the six gates leading to the gallery and the chedis are open. The gallery is adorned with statues of Buddha in the Chiang Mai and Sukhothai styles. The temple itself is ornate, with many representations of the Buddha, detailed dragon statues, and elephant carvings. There is also a small museum on the premises.

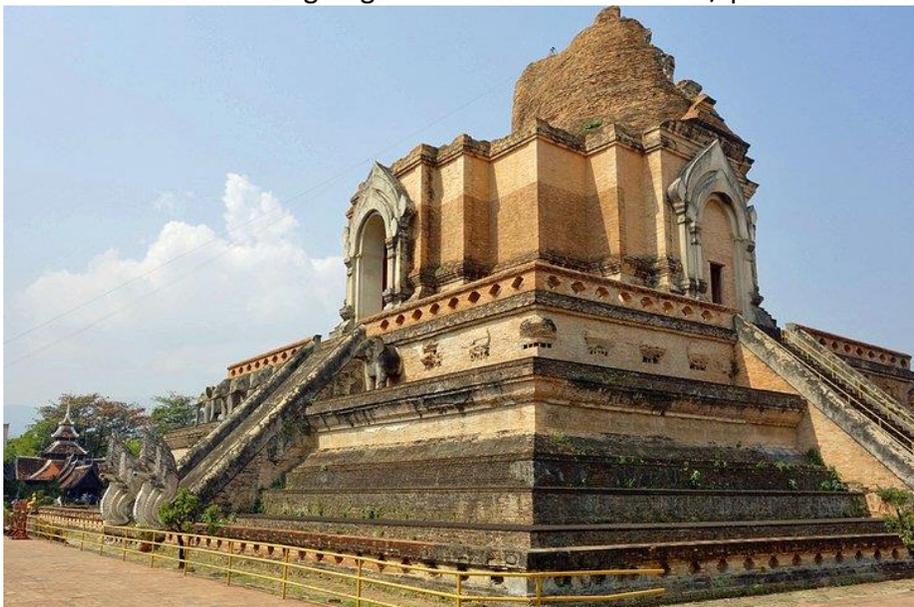
From the temple we headed to Doi Inthanon National Park (below).



This is the highest peak in Thailand, and the national park that surrounds it is filled with some of the many natural wonders that make the country such a draw in the first place. We took a leisurely route around the park. Several waterfalls and a hill tribe village are other attractions, along with two pagodas built to honor King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit.

Our next visit was to Wat Chedi Luang.

Wat Chedi Luang Miguel Vicente Martnez Juan / photo modified



Ruins aren't exactly a rare sight in Chiang Mai, or in Thailand generally, for that matter. But there's something about Wat Chedi Luang that is particularly beautiful and haunting. Constructed in 1401, we could still see the massive elephant carvings that adorn it.

Beneath a huge gum tree on the left of the entrance to the precinct stands a delightful little temple, the Lak Muang. Built in 1940 on the site of an earlier wooden building, the shrine is the abode of Chiang Mai's guardian

spirit (Lak Muang). According to tradition, if the great tree should fall, disaster will overtake the city. The temple is something to behold at any time of day, but it's particularly lovely at night, when it is all lit up.

We then left the mountain top to visit the old city to see the Wat Prasingh(right)

Wat Prasingh bwaters23 / photo modified.

This temple stands at the heart of the Old City. Amid the sois, or alleys, and heavy motorbike traffic, Wat Prasingh rises at the end of Rachadamnoen Road. It is the largest wat in the city and dates to 1345, when an ancient king built it in his father's honor. The decadent structures are impressive.



*Elephant Nature Park*

*(Shutterstock)*

Since I promised you an opportunity to interact with elephants, we next went to Elephant Nature Park, one of the best-known elephant conservation projects in Thailand. Set on the edge of a rainforest near Chiang Mai, in Thailand's north, the sanctuary was founded by award-winning conservationist Lek Chailert in 1995. More than 75 elephants roam free here and each has a heart-breaking story: many have been saved from torturous camps that exploit elephants for tourism or logging purposes or other abusive situations.



The refuge is also home to a ragtag menagerie of adopted cats, dogs, horses, warthogs, water buffalo and other animals. Volunteers help prepare fruit and vegetables for the elephants and food for the other animals. So, we took the opportunity to help feed the various rescued animals.

Next, we headed to Chiang Rai, a city located close to the border of Myanmar and Laos. It is 415 miles from Bangkok.

Our first stop was to see The Nativity of Our Lady Cathedral in Chiang Rai. It is the most beautiful and highest catholic church in Thailand, located on the riverbank of Mae Khlong river. It is more than 100 years old, using the French Gothic style of art. Inside, it is decorated with stained glass. The arch shows the story of the mother and saints. Moreover, there is also a gracious statue of Jesus Christ. It is gorgeous. It is



in French Gothic architecture style, plastered with mortar. The inside is decorated with beautiful stained glass. There are statues, pulpit, Baptismal Font, various forms of candle stands and carvings on the door that explains anecdotes in the Bible. This Catholic church is the cathedral of Ratchaburi Mission. It was built in the honor of the birth of the Virgin Mary and is a sacred place for Roman Catholic Christians who live around the area. It was built around 1890 by Pastor Paolo Salmon, the French missionary. The construction period was 6 years. It is Gothic architecture that was built by burnt bricks and the wall was plastered with mortar with the syrup from black sugar canes. The inside is decorated with the beautiful stained glass from France, which tells the story about the Virgin Mary according to the Bible and the pictures of saints. There are statues, pulpit, Baptismal Font, various forms of the candle stand, and carvings on the door that explain anecdotes from parts of the Bible. It a high structure with a tall tower on the top (used as the bell tower) that makes it to have a sky-high shape; the curve of the ceiling, arch/window, and the internal arch are different from other arts that is they have the intersection point on the topmost points. The external style of the cathedral has the most beautiful proportions in Thailand.

Inside the cathedral there is one thing that is outstanding and can hardly be seen and the most beautiful in Thailand, which is the stained glass in the niche of arches and windows. They are several pictures that are put within the same frame. When considering the picture from the niche that light passes through, it looks like that picture is painted by the stained glass. In 1993, Nativity of Our Lady Cathedral had been renovated again but still maintained the same structure. The cathedral door used applied Thai art with lacquer art from Chiang Mai that was made since the ancient times, but it remains until now. Regarding the pulpit, there was no amplifier in the past. So, the pulpit must be situated in a place that has passed the test to be the broadcasting point which covers all areas of the cathedral. When the time changed with the incoming amplifier, the pulpit is hardly used. The cathedra was certainly a good place to stop and pray.

Chiang Rai doesn't get as much traffic as other northern cities. But the stunning scenery and the sunrise at the Phu Chi Fa national forest park are stunning. Perhaps the best-known spot in the city is Wat Rong Khun (also known as "white temple" see below), which is technically not a religious building but the brainchild of a local visual artist. The temple is full of Buddha imagery; a bridge that seems to float over water and represents crossing purgatory before you enter the main chapel in the building; and elaborate murals with colorful images of spaceships, Harry Potter, and even characters from *Star Wars* and *Spiderman*.

. From Chiang Rai, we crossed the border into Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, and headed for Mong Pan, 107 miles away.



But first a word about Myanmar. The is much unrest now in the country due to a recent takeover of the government by the military. This happened after our tour was planned and since we are a virtual tour there is no real fear for our safety. The 2021 Myanmar coup d'état began on the morning of 1 February 2021 when democratically elected members of Myanmar's ruling party, the National League for Democracy, were deposed by the Tatmadaw—Myanmar's military—which vested power in a stratocracy. The Tatmadaw declared a year-long state of emergency and declared power had been vested in Commander-

in-Chief of Defense Services Min Aung Hlaing. The coup d'état occurred the day before the Parliament of Myanmar was due to swear in the members elected at the November 2020 general election, thereby preventing this from occurring. President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers and their deputies and members of Parliament.

On 3 February 2021, Myint was charged for breaching campaign guidelines and COVID-19 restrictions under section 25 of the Natural Disaster Management Law. Suu Kyi was charged for breaching emergency COVID-19 laws and for illegally importing and using radio and communication devices, specifically six ICOM devices from her security team and a walkie talkie; which are restricted in Myanmar and need clearance from military-related agencies before acquisition. Both were remanded in custody for two weeks.



President Win Myint

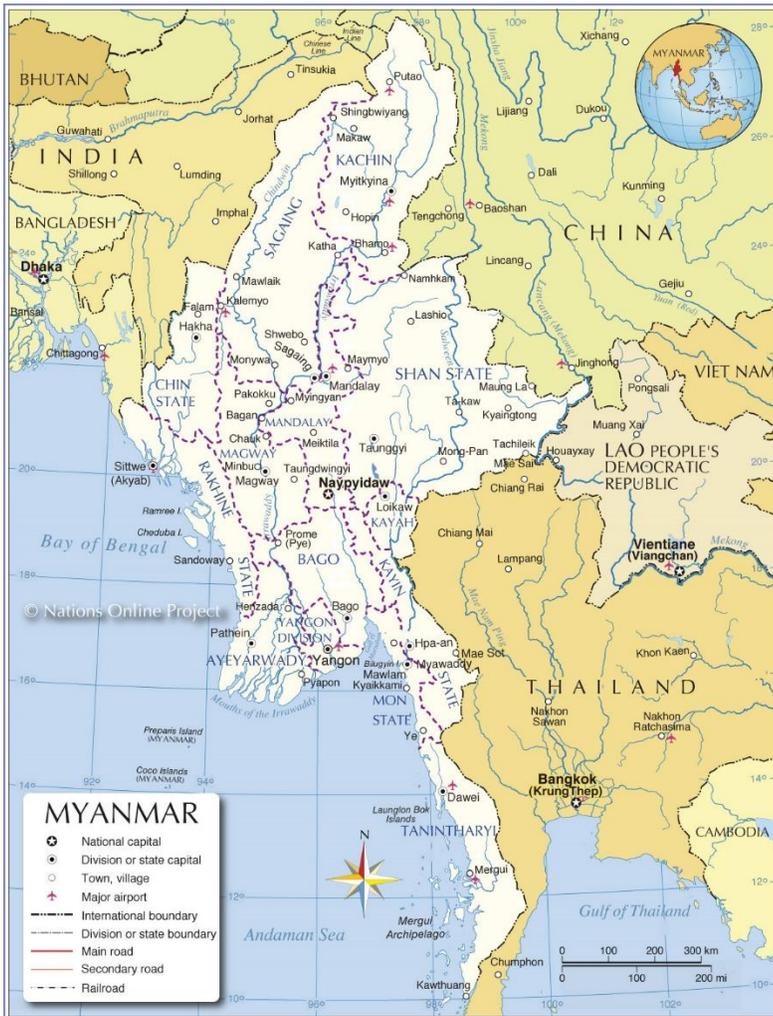


Min Aung Hlaing.

## A little history of the country.

Myanmar (formerly Burma) has been beset with political instability since it declared independence from Britain in 1948. Between 1958 and 1960, the military formed a temporary caretaker government at the behest of U Nu, the country's democratically-elected prime minister, to resolve political infighting. The military voluntarily restored civilian government after holding the 1960 Burmese general election. Less than two years later, the military seized power in the 1962 coup, which under the leadership of Ne Win, precipitated 26 years of military rule.

In 1988, nationwide protests broke out in the country. Dubbed the 8888 Uprising, the civil unrest was sparked by economic mismanagement, leading Ne Win to step down. In September 1988, the military's top leaders formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which then seized power. Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the country's modern founder Aung San, became a notable pro-democracy activist during this period. In 1990, free elections were allowed by the military, under the assumption that the military enjoyed popular support. Ultimately, the elections resulted in a landslide victory for Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy. However, the military refused to cede power and placed her under house arrest.



The military remained in power for another 22 years until 2011,<sup>1</sup> following the military's roadmap to democracy, during which the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar was drafted. Between 2011 and 2015, a tentative democratic transition began, and elections held in 2015 resulted in a victory for Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy. However, the military retained substantial power, including the right to appoint  $\frac{1}{4}$  of parliament members.

The 2021 coup occurred in the aftermath of the general election on 8 November 2020, in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 396 out of 476 seats in parliament, an even larger margin of victory than in the 2015 election. The military's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, won only 33 seats.

The army disputed the results, claiming that the vote was fraudulent. The coup attempt had been rumored for several days, prompting statements of concern from Western nations such as the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Australia.

Myanmar (formerly Burma) has an estimated population of 51.4 million people, consisting of diverse ethnic groups speaking over 100 languages and dialects. With a new Constitution and transition from military to civilian rule in 2008, as well as free elections held in 2015, Myanmar was undergoing increasing economic development and engagement with the international community. Many non-governmental organizations are actively working to support this development and provide aid within its borders and

neighboring regions. However, the country continues to face multiple ongoing challenges including widespread poverty, lack of access to infrastructure and services (including electricity), as well as civil, ethnic, and religious tensions in multiple regions, especially in the states bordering India, Bangladesh, China, and Thailand. Of grave concern at this point for its inhabitants is the consequences of military rule. In the past, military rule was very oppressive and secretive. People disappeared without due process and violence from authorities toward people who disagreed with the government was common.



*Villagers in traditional dress.*  
Past,

Myanmar is the largest country in Mainland Southeast Asia and the 10th largest in Asia by area. As of 2017, the population was about 54 million. Its capital city is Naypyidaw, and its largest city is Yangon (Rangoon).

Early

civilizations in Myanmar included the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Pyu city-states in Upper Burma and the Mon kingdoms in Lower Burma. In the 9th century, the Bamar people entered the upper Irrawaddy valley, and following the establishment of the Pagan Kingdom in the 1050s, the Burmese language, culture, and Theravada Buddhism slowly became dominant in the country. The Pagan Kingdom fell to Mongol invasions, and several warring states emerged. In the 16th century, reunified by the Taungoo dynasty, the country became the largest empire in the history of Southeast Asia for a short period.<sup>1</sup> The early 19th-century Konbaung dynasty ruled over an area that included modern Myanmar and briefly controlled Manipur and Assam as well. The British East India Company seized control of the administration of Myanmar after three Anglo-Burmese Wars in the 19th century, and the country became a British colony. During WWII after a brief Japanese occupation, Myanmar was conquered by the Allies and granted independence in 1948. Following a coup d'état in 1962, it became a military dictatorship under the Burma Socialist Programme Party.

For most of its independent years, the country has been engrossed in rampant ethnic strife and its myriad ethnic groups have been involved in one of the world's longest-running ongoing civil wars. During this time, the United Nations and several other organizations have reported consistent and systematic human rights violations in the country. In 2011, the military junta was officially dissolved following a 2010 general election, and a nominally civilian government was installed. This, along with the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, had improved the country's human rights record and foreign relations and has led to the easing of trade and other economic sanctions. There is, however, continuing criticism of the government's treatment of ethnic minorities, its response to the ethnic insurgency, and religious clashes.

Myanmar is a member of the East Asia Summit, Non-Aligned Movement, ASEAN, and BIMSTEC, but it is not a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. It is a country rich in jade and gems, oil, natural gas, and other mineral resources. Myanmar is also endowed with renewable energy; it has the highest solar power potential. The income gap in Myanmar is among the widest in the world, as a large proportion of the

economy is controlled by supporters of the former military government. As of 2020, according to the Human Development Index, Myanmar ranks 147 out of 189 countries in human development.

Mong Pan was our first stop in Myanmar. It is part of Myanmar that is not open to foreigners so we couldn't technically be there, but it is the first place on the map in the direction we needed to walk. Because it is a restricted area not much information is available on the city. We continued, headed toward Mandalay, some 590 miles from Chiang Rai but were short about 200 miles to make it all the way. So, we will pick up from here in the next report.

## Buddhism Brief Summary

Buddhism is a family of beliefs and practices thought by most to be a religion, although some describe it as more of a philosophy of life. Buddhism is formed upon the teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, known as "The Buddha" (the Awakened One), who was born in the country that is today Nepal. He taught in the northeastern region of the Indian subcontinent and died around 400 BC.

Buddhists recognize him as an enlightened teacher who shared his insights to help human beings end their suffering by understanding the nature of phenomena, thereby escaping suffering and rebirth (saṃsāra), that is, achieving Nirvana. The number of Buddhists in the world is between 230 million and 500 million, resulting in Buddhism being the 4th most popular world religion.

### Karma

Karma, the energy which drives Saṃsāra, is the cycle of suffering and rebirth for each being. Good, skillful, and bad, unskillful actions bear "seeds" in the mind which come to fruition in this life or in a rebirth to follow. The avoidance of unwholesome actions and the doing of positive actions is called Śīla. In Buddhism, Karma refers to those actions that spring from mental intent and bring about a consequence or result. Each time a person acts there is some quality of intention at the base of the mind and it is that quality that determines its effect.

### Rebirth

Rebirth refers to a process in which beings go through a succession of lifetimes as one of many possible forms of sentient life, each running from conception to death. Each rebirth happens within one of five realms, according to Theravadins, or six according to other schools. These are subdivided into 31 planes of existence.

Learn how Buddhist beliefs compare to Christian beliefs of rebirth, by taking a bible quiz.

1. Naraka beings: those that live in one of many Narakas (Hells)
2. Animals: sharing space with humans but considered another type of life.
3. Preta: Sometimes sharing space with humans, but invisible to most people; an important variety is the hungry ghost.
4. Human beings: one of the realms of rebirth that attaining Nirvana is possible.
5. Asuras: variously translated as lowly deities, demons, antigods; not recognized by Theravada (Mahavihara) tradition as a separate realm.
6. Devas including Brahmas: translated as gods, deities, spirits, angels, or left untranslated.

According to East Asian and Tibetan Buddhism, there is an intermediate state in between one life and the next, but Theravada rejects this.

### The Cycle of Samsara



Sentient beings crave pleasure and are averse to pain from birth to death. In being controlled by these attitudes, they perpetuate the cycle of conditioned existence and suffering (Samsara) and produce the causes and conditions of the next rebirth after death. Each rebirth repeats this process in an involuntary cycle, which Buddhists strive to end by eradicating these causes and conditions, applying the methods laid out by the Buddha.

### Suffering

According to the Pali Tipitaka, the Four Noble Truths were the first teaching of Gautama Buddha after attaining Nirvana. They are sometimes considered as containing the essence of the Buddha's teachings and are presented in the manner of a medical diagnosis and remedial prescription – a style common at that time:

1. Life as we know it ultimately is or leads to suffering/uneasiness (dukkha) in one way or another.
2. Suffering is caused by craving or attachments to worldly pleasures of all kinds. This is often expressed as a deluded clinging to a certain sense of existence, to selfhood, or to the things or phenomena that we consider the cause of happiness or unhappiness.
3. Suffering ends when craving ends when one is freed from desire. This is achieved by eliminating all delusion, thereby reaching a liberated state of Enlightenment.
4. Reaching this liberated state is achieved by following the path laid out by the Buddha.

### Nirvana

Nirvana means "cessation", "extinction" (of craving and ignorance and therefore suffering and the cycle of involuntary rebirths Samsara), "extinguished", "quieted", "calmed"; it's also known as "Awakening" or "Enlightenment" in the West. Buddhists believe that anybody who has achieved nirvana is in fact a Buddha.

### Devotion

Devotion is an important part of the practice of most Buddhists. Devotional practices include bowing, offerings, pilgrimage, chanting. In Pure Land Buddhism, devotion to the Buddha Amitabha is the main practice. In Nichiren Buddhism, devotion to the Lotus Sutra is the main practice.

### Buddhist Ethics

Buddhists generally undertake to live by the five precepts, which are common to all Buddhist schools. If they wish, they can choose to undertake the eight precepts, which add basic asceticism.

The five precepts are training rules to live a better life in which one is happy, without worries, and can meditate well:

1. To refrain from taking life (non-violence towards sentient life forms)
2. To refrain from taking that which is not given (not committing theft)
3. To refrain from sensual (including sexual) misconduct
4. To refrain from lying (speaking truth always)
5. To refrain from intoxicants which lead to loss of mindfulness (specifically, drugs and alcohol)

The precepts are not formulated as imperatives, but as training rules that laypeople undertake voluntarily to facilitate practice.

### Meditation

Buddhist meditation is fundamentally concerned with two themes: transforming the mind and using it to explore itself and other phenomena. According to Theravada Buddhism the Buddha taught two types of meditation, samatha meditation (Sanskrit: śamatha) and vipassanā meditation (Sanskrit: vipaśyanā).