

SUGGESTED READING FOR MYANMAR

Burma now officially known as Myanmar has suffered a turbulent 20th century but is now attaining previously inconceivable levels of stability and prosperity. This is bringing travelers to the country in droves to experience its natural wonders and its rich culture and history. To understand Burma's 20th century and its current state these books are indispensable guides, all of which reflect the personal stories behind the turmoil which has haunted the country.

I. **Burma Chronicles** – Guy Delisle

A unique take on Burma, Guy Delisle's *Burma Chronicles* is a graphic novel depicting the year Delisle spent in the country with his wife and young son, and their surreal experience of dealing with the autocratic military junta which ruled the country. It depicts the seemingly small but telling cases of authoritarian repression which affect Delisle and his family, and which reveal the wider truth about life under the generals.

II. **Burmese Days** – George Orwell

The most popular read about Myanmar, Orwell's classic is set in 1920s imperial Burma. The novel is a loosely fictionalized account of his time there, and reveals the dark side of the British Raj in a way that few have before or since. It undermines the sanctified narrative of the 'colonizing mission' and depicts a racially motivated campaign of conquest and exploitation, all managed by a corrupt and incompetent imperial bureaucracy.

III. **Defeat into Victory** – Field Marshal Sir William

Sir William Slim led shattered British forces from Burma to India in one of the lesser-known but more nightmarish retreats of WWII. The book recounts allied forces retaking Burma in WWII.

IV. **Finding George Orwell in Burma** – Emma Larkin

Emma Larkin uses Orwell as a guide as she travels across Burma, visiting the places he lived in and finding the lingering influence of the colonial bureaucracy of which he was a part of. Her travels allowed her to see both Burma and Orwell anew and to understand the political development of one of the 20th century's most vital literary figures.

V. **From the Land of Green Ghosts: A Burmese Odyssey** – Pascal Khoo Thwe

A stunning memoir of a former Burmese student rebel leader. Born into the Padaung tribal minority in remote Burma, Pascal Khoo Thwe suffered under the fierce persecution of his country's military dictatorship, before escaping to start a new life in the UK. The novel is both an incredible survival story and a depiction of a little known culture and society.

VI. **Letters from Burma** – Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi is the embodiment of the decade long struggle for political rights and an end to authoritarian rule in Burma, and her recent release was a hugely important even on the road to freedom and accountability in the country. *Letters from Burma* collects her letters from her period of house arrest which reveal her tireless work to spread the cause of Burmese democracy as well as offering an insight into her selfless mentality, and her thoughts and reflections of her countrymen and women, for whom she strived for so long.

VII. **Living Silence in Burma** – Christine Fink

Christine Fink gives powerful insights into the life of ordinary Burmese people under the military regime. The brutal repression of demonstrations in 2007 was a desperate response to a political opposition better informed and more united than ever before. Through extensive interviews conducted inside and outside the country, she builds a richly textured picture of how people cope with their daily life – and some innovative forms of resistance.

VIII. **Old Rangoon** – Noel F. Singer

Historical account on the origins and development of Yangon from 1450s to 1940s.

IX. **The Glass Palace** – Amitav Ghosh

The Glass Palace is an epic tale of colonial intrigue, adventure and betrayal which follows the downfall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay, the British rule over the country and the sudden encroachment of the second world war into the jungles of this previously remote country. Ghosh offers readers a captivating portrayal of courtly intrigue and aristocratic downfall in Burma.

X. **The Lady and the Peacock: The Life of Aung San Suu Kyi** – Peter Popham

A rich new biography of Burma's most famous dissident. This revealing portrayal of her personal life makes apparent the sacrifices Aung San Suu Kyi undertook in her struggle for Burmese democracy, thus reinforcing the saintly radiance which still surrounds this most potent activist.

XI. **The River of Lost Footsteps** – Thant Myint U

The River of Lost Footsteps attempts to explain the complexities of Burma's social and political world, which can often seem esoteric to outsiders, and to place it within the wider context of South East Asian history. The novel is solely based on the perspective of Thant Myint U,

whose family was amongst the group of nationalists who took control of Burma following the end of British colonialism, and his grandfather went to serve as secretary general of the UN.

XII. **The Road to Wanting** – Wendy Law-Yone

The novel depicts the story of Na Ga, a young girl from Burma's North Eastern border region, who is searching for a better life. Beset by poverty and the malaise of rural life, Na Ga is swept up by various apparent rescuers, who only lead her to dissolution and further despair. This novel is an insightful depiction of life on the fringes of Burmese society, whilst also being a deeply personal exploration of anomie and depression, which transcends all national borders.

XIII. **The Trouser People** – Andrew Marshall

The Trouser People is a vivid account of two adventures, a century apart, into the heart of Burma. The novel begins with Sir George Scott who was a largely-forgotten Victorian adventurer who hacked, bullied, and charmed his way through uncharted jungle to help establish colonial rule in Burma. Marshall follows in Scott's footsteps a century later, and discovers a Burma far removed from that of Scott, bristling under political repression and corruption. Combining travel writing with reportage and history, this is an insightful and humorous introduction to the British in Burma, and an unforgiving account of the lingering consequences of their rule.

XIV. **Twilight over Burma: My Life as a Shan Princess** – Inge Sargent

The autobiography of a young Austrian woman who falls in love with a young man from Burma. It's only at their lavish wedding that she learns that he is the Prince of Hsipaw, the ruler of an autonomous state in Burma's Shan mountains. *Twilight over Burma* is a story of a great happiness destroyed by evil, of one woman's determination and bravery against a ruthless military regime, and of the truth behind the overthrow of one of Burma's most popular local leaders.

XV. **Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia** – Thant Myint U

Thant Myint U's *Where China Meets India* is a vivid, searching, timely book about the remote region that is suddenly a geopolitical center of the world. Thant's book is an engaging combination of history, contemporary travelogue and personal and family recollections, along with a certain amount of policy analysis. Western readers are likely to be especially drawn to its rich, loving, but tragic portrayal of Myanmar.

USEFUL MYANMAR WEBSITES

I. **Myanmore** – <http://myanmore.com/yangon/>

The best guide to Myanmar's city life. The website covers events, restaurants, art, theater and travel.

II. **Train Travel in Myanmar** - http://www.seat61.com/Burma.htm#UxmTH_vHZ8V

Everything there is to know about train travel in Myanmar including train times, fares and other information.

III. **E-Visa** – <http://www.mofa.gov.mm/>

Official site for Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Provides a good resource for embassy locations, updated visa information and travel announcements.