



## The allure of Burma

Ever enthusiastic, I have little difficulty explaining the natural allure of this remarkable country: a land with over one hundred separate tribal groups; amazing festivals; gentle people, some with strange beliefs; dramatic, ever changing landscapes, incredible colours, delightful smells and intriguing customs. It is also impossible to travel far before coming across an enticing local carnival. Always worth a stop, visitors are considered good luck, are welcomed and immediately included. Buddhism is the country's key faith, but other religions are accepted. There is history too, a recent British colonial history that has left its mark.

## Rangoon

I arrived in Rangoon (Yangon) a couple of days before the group in order to re-familiarise myself and check on any changes that may have occurred since my last visit. Wandering around, it appears Rangoon has been of low precedence since the government's withdrawal to their new safe retreat and sadly it shows, the city generally looking and feeling a little scruffy. Of course after a recent series of natural and human disasters one can easily forgive neatness being given such low priority, also it is no surprise that the world recession has filtered into Burma, tourism is strangely the only growth industry. This year has seen a marked improvement in foreign tourism, especially from continental Europe and other parts of Asia; Japan heads the list from Asia, while Germany is Europe's forerunner.

## The Golden Rock and Twante

As usual with a Golden Rock visit early in the programme, our tour is initially quite frantic, starting off with a series of early morning starts. The sight of this beautiful and remarkable Buddhist site in the soft morning light is wonderful. The rock is also hugely significant, attracting pilgrims from all over the country to pay homage to this precariously balanced shrine. On this occasion the sunset was the clearest I have experienced in all my visits.

After calling in at the pottery town of Twante we then visited the school at Paya Ngoto, re-built after almost total destruction from hurricane Nargis by Audley fundraising. An arranged Burmese lunch was also provided by the children of the school while we were there and an impromptu collection from guests raised a further 50,000 Kyat for books, pencils and other stationery. A quite delightful visit well appreciated by guests and the school children.

## Ballooning in Pagan

A 4 am wake up call on day six and a flight to Pagan culminated our series of early morning starts. No complaints though, everyone was keen

# A Tour Leader's Diary

*Terry Sullivan has been leading Audley group tours for over 16 years. An inveterate traveller, his work and personal travels have taken him to a whole host of countries but when ever asked as to which is his favourite, the answer requires no deliberation, it is always Burma. After returning from his final tour for Audley, he explains why by sharing a few passages from his tour diary.*

Inle Lake



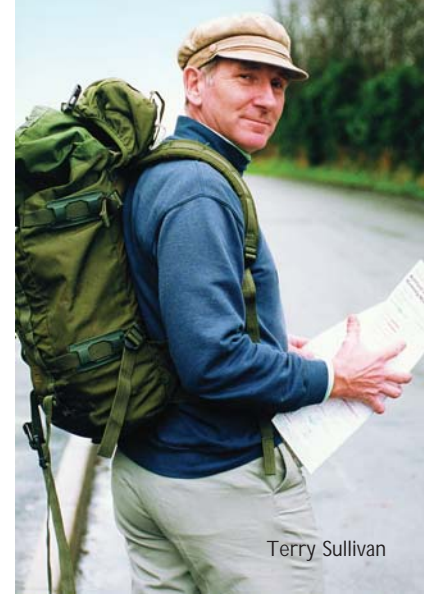
Girls from Karen tribe, Inle Lake



School children, Paya Ngoto



Golden Rock



Terry Sullivan

## Hanging up his boots

