

MYANMAR PLANS TO REOPEN TO TOURISTS AMID POLITICAL INSTABILITY



Cambodia followed Thailand, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and India in reopening its borders to foreign travelers. Myanmar, the popular tourist destination, wants to keep up and announced that the government plans to reopen to tourists. Although this news may seem great to many, the situation in Myanmar is currently complicated.

Most countries have closed their borders over the past two years to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. **Myanmar, on the other hand, has also been struggling with the aftermath of a February 2021 military coup in which a military junta overthrew the country's democratically elected government.**

Myanmar, which was ruled by the military for a decade, has always presented travelers with a dilemma: Do they support the regime, which has been perceived as oppressive in the past, or the locals, who rely on outside aid? But the question now is more about whether anyone will travel to Myanmar at all, given the fact that Covid is still a current problem, as well as the political turmoil that is sweeping the country.

Officials have set up a website anticipating tourist interest, but have made it clear that any opening depends on successful Covid containment. Zeyar Htun, deputy director of the Public Relations and Information Department at the military-run Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, confirmed to CNN Travel, "We plan to reopen to tourists that are vaccinated when plans are well prepared for safe and convenient travel."

Meanwhile, international travelers from several countries have been warned by their own governments not to travel to the country due to the virus as well as post-coup instability. The U.S. State Department, for example, has issued level four "do not visit" warnings for Myanmar. One warning regards the number of cases in the country and the other regards the current political situation. A separate advisory states: "Myanmar is experiencing a severe political, economic, human rights, and humanitarian crisis due to the military's brutal crackdown."

Myanmar's official tourism website currently provides few details on the reopening plans, but reports indicate that the government wants to focus on visitors from Southeast Asia first. Once Myanmar's doors open, travelers returning to the country will notice big changes since their last visit.

According to media on the ground, the infrastructure has been significantly weakened. **Many businesses have closed due to economic pressures or because the owners have left the country.** The tourism industry is run by military generals and the country has even seen intermittent power outages and occasional Internet shutdowns. International brands are among those affected. For example, the five-star hotel in the capital, Kempinski Nay Pyi Taw, has been "temporarily closed" since mid-October, according to its website. The reason is not known.

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