

IS TRAVELING TO MYANMAR SAFE?



Almost three years after the military coup in Myanmar, the crisis-hit country is trying to revive the tourism industry despite an ongoing civil war.

At the ASEAN Tourism Forum, which takes place from January 22-27 in neighboring Laos, the junta wants to present the country as an attractive travel destination. Laos is chairing the Southeast Asian community of states this year. Travel companies from the USA and Europe are also taking part in the forum. **The biggest question from potential travelers to Myanmar is: How safe is traveling to Myanmar?** That is the biggest challenge for the country.

With Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi as head of government, the former Burma had once again become a popular tourist destination before the overthrow. The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bagan, magical pagodas, the famous Inle Lake, and the former capital Yangon (formerly Rangoon) are considered important tourist sites.

According to official data, more than 4.3 million foreign visitors came to the country in 2019, but only around 900,000 came in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Since February 1, 2021, when the generals ousted Suu Kyi from power, hardly any international guests have traveled here due to the dangers. The few who dare to visit come mainly from neighboring Thailand and China. Most of them are business travelers.

Although it has been possible to apply for tourist visas again for some time, **most Western governments strongly advise against traveling to Myanmar.** Western travelers are advised to leave the country. Among other things, explosive attacks are repeatedly carried out, resulting in deaths and injuries. Just a few days ago, at least 15 people were killed in a military airstrike in the west of the country.

Even large cities such as Yangon or Mandalay are not completely safe; the newspaper "Laotian Times" quoted a journalist from Myanmar who has fled to Thailand. Therefore, the tourism sector will remain difficult for Myanmar, and the military junta knows this well.

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