

Ever wanted to try cruising Myanmar's Inle Lake?

Updated on 15th January 2016 by Katie Roberts

Time stands still at Inle Lake in central Myanmar's Shan Hills, says KATIE ROBERTS explains why this stunning region deserves a place on your bucket list – and how to see it in style at any time.

For years, my plan to visit Myanmar was thwarted by unforeseen events, so when I finally found myself standing on the tarmac at Yangon Airport with hubby Sean (and the kids safely with their grandparents), I was feeling very pleased with myself. Boon-to-boon, the journey took almost a day, but leaving urban Singapore at last and arriving at this rural lake by 1pm was utterly worth it. And the best bit? You can visit any time of the year – summer and winter are equally appealing and enjoyable.



There's much to see on a one-day trip around Inle Lake, including the Intha fishermen who have traditionally swept their wooden canoes with one leg wrapped around the oar to leave their hands free for fishing and managing their vertical fishing nets. The image of one of these men, backlit by golden sunrise, has made the region justifiably famous, and is just as impressive to see in person.



Our itinerary included a look at the floating gardens, a term that fails to make the huge scale of the thousands of acres of tomatoes, chilies and flowers that seemingly float on the lake surface. These gardens are an important source of food and income, and are dropped from the bottom of the lake and glued onto bamboo rafts that are lashed together to form a bed thick enough to support families. With the long-term sustainability of this agricultural practice in question, it's an impressive sight, especially when villagers row in and out to harvest the lines of plants and harvest their crops.

Our 'fish-day market' is held in five different locations over the days, the market where you'll see two caught the action at Sam Paei. It's always fun for young hunters and photographers peering at practical people doing their shopping. The market sells everything from locally made garments to food, clothes, boat parts and household supplies; villagers pack their purchases securely into long tail boats before making home to their village houses.



Cottage industries abound on and around the lake, and opportunities to observe craftsmen at work are included in many tours. It's impossible not to admire the skill and patience that goes into lacquer ware, bamboo crafts, umbrella making, silverware-making, and silver-working (silver), boat-making, and silver-working – and there are numerous opportunities to purchase souvenirs.

Cultural and religious sites abound; they include Phaung-Uay Pagoda, a massive Buddhist temple; Nga Phe Chaung (Shawing) famed for its jumping cat and other Heritage House, renowned for its art gallery, hotel training school and Buddhist art teaching centre (unfortunately closed on the day we tried to visit).

Phaung-Uay Pagoda, it's the Inle Pagoda. This remarkable complex of a thousand Shwe Stupas dating from the 13th to the 18th century rises majestically up a hill. These of the pagoda are adorned in gold and silver, and with hundreds of tiny bells that chime in the wind. There were few tourists the day we visited, and it felt utterly worthy, almost as if Buddha himself was bowing the brows. We spent a good hour scrambling amongst the stupa, more disheveled stupas, and we loved the weeks to snap some Indian. Just a worthy photo.



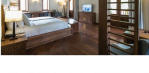
We managed to fit it all in with a leisurely dinner lunch before making back to the jetty at Sam Paei by about 1pm. The floating boat was arranged by the hotel and at 1000 it was absolutely value for money. If we'd had another day, we could have headed further south and explored more of the lake.

STAY

Monastic Splendour

I was staying in a room at the hotel when we arrived at Inle. Not only is it a very nice hotel, but it also changes how you feel about your accommodation.

Sometimes when you make a booking, it's with this idea in mind: "It'll be our first trip, so we just need to stay in a nice hotel." In other words, you think "We'll just want to stay in a nice hotel and relax." Thankfully I'd spent the last few months adding an extra day to our itinerary giving us time full nights and days at Inle Lake's home Sam Paei. It's perfect for trying to see it all in one go – a couple of quiet nights on the edge of the lake, and a few busy nights before taking the boat trip on the final day were more than satisfying.



This 10-room hotel has been designed in a traditional monastic style, complete with traditional architecture and fittings of beautiful teak and natural wood. The proportions are lovely, and the first facilities of French designer (light) furniture by Chateau have contributed to making this a beautiful and luxurious retreat.

Rooms range in size from 40 to 100 square metres, and feature lofty ceilings, natural wood floors, glass beds, air-conditioning, Wi-Fi and cable TV. There are four different room types and a connecting room for families and groups, plus larger free-standing villas. The monastic style windows and large doors open to wide verandas that are perfect for contemplating the lake, the rice paddies, the farmers tending water buffalo, and the view looking behind distant hills.

The in-house spa features a wide range of treatments, including a massage, which is said to be like a Thai-style treatment but without all the oil. The massage is a traditional Burmese style, and is said to be a very good one. The spa is a lovely place to relax, and the view is lovely.

There's a swimming pool to cool off in, but the climate is mild and pleasant year-round, so you can enjoy the lake's location on a pleasant 500-metre walk. The pool is a lovely place to relax, and the view is lovely. The pool is a lovely place to relax, and the view is lovely.

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SURROUNDS



Beyond Inle Lake
– Cross the lake to the hotel and explore the lake's history. The hotel is a lovely place to stay.
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SAVOUR

Burmese Cuisine
The delicate local cuisine is unique, though influenced by Myanmar's Thai and Indian neighbours. Burmese is a popular dish all over the country. It consists of a light broth of ground chicken and vegetables, topped with a mixture of rice and a special of chili flakes. It's a lovely dish to eat, and it's a lovely dish to eat.



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SNAP

Photography Heaven
Inle Lake is truly a photographer's paradise. Whether you're capturing the busy markets, the rice paddies, or the view of the lake, there's always something to see. The resort is a lovely place to stay, and it's a lovely place to stay.

Getting to know the locals

Sam Paei's Resident Manager, who has lived in Myanmar for 10 years, is a lovely person to talk to. He's a lovely person to talk to, and he's a lovely person to talk to. He's a lovely person to talk to, and he's a lovely person to talk to.

Make it happen

Opening room rates at Sam Paei Inle Resort (sapa.inle-resort.com) start from \$150 per night. Flights between Yangon and Inle Lake take 75 minutes on KLM Airways (\$150 per person). It's a one-hour drive by car to Sam Paei Inle Resort from the airport. My travel plan is to go to Inle Lake.

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