

Thingyan

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Monday, April 13, 2015 10 th waning day of Tagu, 1376 A-kyo-nay (the pre-day) Feasting, religious observances, but hold off on throwing water! (Don't get upset if others don't.) Flowers to represent each day of the week should be placed outside to welcome Thagyamin. Mayor's pandals open.	Tuesday, April 14, 2015 11 th waning day of Tagu, 1376 A-kya-nay (the descending day) The descent of Thagyamin – this year on a mythical bird – starts the festival. At precisely 4:31.15am the transition begins. Prepare to get drenched! But be good: Thagyamin is watching.	Wednesday, April 15, 2015 12 th waning day of Tagu, 1376 A-kyat-nay (the intervening day) On leap years there are two a-kyat-nay days, to keep the calendar in sync. Enjoy treats, songs and fun, but make sure Thagyamin writes your name in the golden book, not the one made of dog-skin leather!	Thursday, April 16, 2015 13 th waning of Tagu, 1376 A-tet-nay (the ascending day) At 8:35.57pm, the transition period ends and Thagyamin departs. Make sure you get your fill of splashing before this time!	Friday, April 17, 2015 New-moon-day of Tagu, 1377 Hnit-hsan-ta-yet-nay (new year's day) Happy 1377! Hang your shorts to dry and put on your best pressed longyi. It's a day for quiet contemplation and paying respect to elders.



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Thingyan in Shan State

WADE GUYITT

If you're like me, you find Thingyan delightful – for about a day. After that, it's traffic jams, ear-shattering loudspeakers, drunk drivers, dance clubs (sorry, “pandals”), pockets lined with plastic bags and no way from point A to point B without getting doused. Some say this all adds up to more than the sum of its parts; I'm not one of them.

Not that I'm against Thingyan in spirit – just that the spirit is lacking. Or mostly lacking: Head to the back-alley neighbourhoods, or *yat kwak*, and you can still find the joy in children's eyes. Better yet, skip town entirely. But don't fly out of the country for shopping – put those stat holidays to better use by exploring more Myanmar. Sure, it's a brutally hot time to travel, but you'll get a new perspective on the nation and its biggest holiday.

Last year we set course for Hsipaw in Shan State. We flew to Mandalay,

then headed downtown for a glimpse of local festivities. All roads led to the moat, where trucks, motorcycles and revellers jammed the streets. Even at the hour of 8am, merrymakers in one truck were passing around beer in a plastic baggie – not beer cans, just beer, which they poured into their mouths at stoplights.

Okay then – on to Pyin Oo Lwin. After a pleasant afternoon watching groups of friends splash pedestrians walking by our hotel, we ate dinner and turned in early. So far so dry.

The train

The next morning we caught the Mandalay-Lashio train, which would take us across the fabled Gokteik bridge before dropping us in Hsipaw. We weren't the only ones with this plan: Our car was full of backpacking tourists exploring their way across Myanmar, most in their early 20s, some primed and preppie and others so ostentatiously mellow they opted to walk around entirely barefoot. Everyone settled into their



seats and, after sliding open the windows to bring in the pleasant morning breeze, became absorbed in their tablets, laptops, phones and occasionally each other.

Now, in ambush warfare, the best strategy is to find the right place to hunker down, then simply wait until the target comes straight to you. In this case, a train carrying foreigners, sitting by open windows, with expensive brand-name electronics spread about them – well, it must have been just too tempting. If the tourists were anticipating a few quiet hours of rest and respite from exotic globetrottery, what happened next could be dubbed The Water Festival Strikes Back.

The first volley came like a bucket of water to the face. Which it was. Ladies shrieked, gentlemen roared, everyone sprung from their seats and dived for cover in the aisle. Outside, platoons of dacoit children launched wave after wave. Some shots glanced harmlessly off the side of the train, but the better-aimed penetrated our defences, hitting home with a force amplified by the forward velocity of the train. With nowhere to run and nowhere to hide, this was a massacre in the making.

There was only one hope. “Shut the windows!” cried one quick-thinking soul. The brave among us leapt into the breach like a Secret Service agent ready to take a bullet to protect the president's iPad. Unfortunately, the windows

were not exactly quick-release; struggles ensued, some requiring reinforcements, before all slammed shut.

The party – for we were a party now, as the attack had bonded us – emerged from cover. Dripping, we looked back at our seats to find Pompeii-like silhouettes of dryness, outlining where we'd been relaxing when the first blast struck. Everyone began to shake out their possessions, hurriedly wiping books and screens and restoring items into cavernous dangly backpacks.

While doing so, a surge of adrenaline began to course through our veins. We had won! As we passed other children, their splashes now slide feebly off the glass, and we felt the thrill of the unvanquished. As Churchill said, “Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result.”

Before long the mid-morning April sun began to dry us. But then, as the temperature rose, it began to cook us. And a terrible realisation dawned: They were going to sweat us out. Sooner or later, we'd have to open the windows.

When surrounded by gorgeous red-earth hills and farmland, we let our guard down, throwing open the windows and drinking in the pure country air. But at the first sign of habitation, a sharp-eyed watchman near the front of the car would send out a call of “Windows!” and we would all leap to action.

Sometimes a stray house caused an unnecessary panic. But like all drills, the false alarms kept us on our guard. We worked in pairs, each responsible for one latch.

Other times we'd be caught dozing, and a sneak-attack would surprise us as the train rumbled passed a crossing where children had been waiting, possibly for hours, to take their best shot. But by then everyone had relaxed, and the occasional soakings prompted grins, both inside and outside of the train.

The walk

As spectacular and vertigo-inducing as the Gokteik bridge was when we reached it, our purpose in coming to Hsipaw was to do some hill-walking. The next day we rose early to meet our guide who would take us out of town for a roughly four-hour walk ending in a Palaung village. Our guide was a former forestry worker who was able to read the landscape like a book, and the journey – through a shocking, stirring landscape of naturally red earth and artificially charred trees, the remnants of slash-and-burn forestry – took almost eight



Photos: Wade Guyitt

hours, twice as long as it should have. From stopping to watch a father and children dig for edible bugs to talking to a young hunter who was hand-making his own gun, we took our time in spite of the sun's scorching heat.

In addition to the many packets of Royal-D we mixed into our water bottles to keep us hydrated, what carried us onward was, surprisingly, the Thingyan spirit. We'd got out of Yangon to avoid the holiday, yet here it was: At each village, and sometimes along the road between them, we encountered children merrily splashing away, always happy to see us and eager to include us in their fun.

Our first encounter was with several young monks on an otherwise empty pathway who were equipped with water guns just in case. Later, in villages, we encountered homemade roadblocks where children had rigged a bamboo pole across a road to halt vehicles and enact the mandatory Thingyan payment for passage – a bucket of water down the back. These poles could be raised and lowered, toll-gate-style, but the first one we saw wasn't set up properly and the tallest child stomped her feet in embarrassment before running around to lift up the pole herself so we could duck under.

At the next village we came to a stream passing under a bridge with a shaded rest area just past – the perfect spot for a break. In the stream were children, frantically heaving water across the bridge from either side, in spite of the fact that no passersby were yet within range. If each side was aiming at the other, they were falling short, as the water never seemed to go far enough to strike the other side. But they worked



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over-40C heat, we had certainly worked up an appetite. As we relaxed after the repast, one of the family's daughters came by bearing jugs of water and a bundle of flowers. Not for drinking and decorating, though: Here the New Year is celebrated by visiting one's seniors and offering them water and flowers. While the village now has a central well installed by the UN, the water for Thingyan celebrations is fetched in a mass procession downhill to the river, which had happened the previous day. People make the long trek down and then haul the water back up the hill in containers and buckets.

Making a gift of water to one's elders spares them this challenging trip, and is a way of paying respect to their importance in bringing you up. It also allows the elders to gain more merit, because the gifted water can then be carried to the monastery and donated as an offering. The water is used to wash the sacred statues of the Buddha which are brought out of the monastery only at Thingyan and placed inside a special building in the courtyard. The walls are a kind of lattice-work – it's more of a wooden cage than a building – so the statues are visible but not directly accessible. If you climb some stairs at one end, though, you can pour your water into one end of a drainpipe, which lets it run down and wash over the statues.

We saw all of this firsthand a couple of hours later, in the golden glow cast by a soon-to-be-falling

sun. What we didn't realise until we arrived, however, was that the water – after cleansing the statues – pours straight out the bottom of the structure, which is elevated about two feet off the platform. Water washed over a Buddha statue is thought to be especially holy – the origin of Thingyan splashing is thought to come from royalty bathing in water first used to wash a Buddha statue – but for the children gathered on the monastery platform to play, it's also



It was a classic case of ranged weaponry versus hand-to-hand fighting, all in the bid for high ground.

an ideal ammo refill point. Why let all that good water go to waste if you can throw it at your friends instead?

The space under the statues was crowded by kids kneeling down with all manner of container, and the area outside the monastery was soon to be the scene of an epic battle. It was a classic case of ranged weaponry versus hand-to-hand fighting, all in the bid for high ground. The young monks held down their spot at the top of the stairs near the monastery

door: Shooting with water guns, their elevation and superior firepower enabled them to cover wide ground. However, those below – who were carrying buckets – sometimes broke through, at which point the young monks' precise but narrow range of fire proved less suited to close-quarters melee combat. In dire cases, some monks broke ranks and retreated back inside the darkness of the monastery. This seemed mostly a no-splash zone, though I did see one young girl charge inside in pursuit, skipping out of her sandals at the door without missing a beat.

For, mostly, it was a case of boys against girls. The boys, mostly younger, pestered and prodded their older female friends. Some were more aggressive in the teasing than others, and I reckon more than a few pre-adolescent crushes were being worked out among the fun. Mostly the boys won – their precision aim and faster feet allowing face-shots calculated for maximum annoyance – and I was beginning to feel sorry for the girls. But every now and again one of the older girls got fed up, grabbed a full bucket and sought revenge. Being older, taller and stronger – and capable of hefting the bucket right up over the boys' heads – they brought a satisfying turnabout that left watery carnage in their wake.

After a while everyone settled down. The children sat with the adults to listen to a sermon by the elder monks. (This happened in the

courtyard – next morning, the town would gather again, this time inside the monastery, for prayers, sermons and song.) But before the evening sun got too low, we decided to slip out from the ceremony and take a walk through the nearby hills with our guide to see the tea plantations before the sun went down.

The area is known for producing excellent green tea, and the best, we were told, is plucked during Thingyan time. Well, I'm no expert. But given all we'd seen so far, it seemed to make sense: Tea, like Thingyan, is a "just add water" experience, after all. ■



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Who will be where?

As in previous years, Yangon will definitely be the busiest party spot, followed by Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw and, this year, Chaungtha beach, due to a famous music band set to rock there with eight shows over four days

CHIT SU AND MYO SATT

YANGON'S top venues are, as usual, the downtown, Kabar Aye Pagoda Road, Pyay Road and Kandawgyi Lake. Here's who is set to be where as of press time:

Sky Net Pandal

Corner of Anawrahta and 19th Street Among the celebrities confirmed here will be **Hae Lay, Kyaw Thiha, Thiha, Htet Yan, Shin Thant Linn, Hein Thit, Shwe Htoo, Wunna, Joker, Tha Htee Lu** and **Thein Linn Soe**. **Psycho Land** band will feature vocalists like **Lwin Po, Lain Hmaw Thi, Waso Moe Oo, Khon Sint Nay Chi, Baby Maung** and **Jessica Dar Dar**.

Alpine Stage

Kabar Aye Pagoda Road Expect a huge crowd here with **Sai Sai Kham Leng**, well-known hip-hop vocalist.

Grand Royal pandal

Karaweik, Kandawgyi Lake Rock hard with **Iron Cross** and famous singers like **Lay Phyu, Ah Nge, Myo Gyi** and **Wine Wine**.

Now, for something new this year, **Chaungtha beach** is getting a boost with **Emperor** music band set to present eight programs over four days, April 13-16, at Hotel Max. Dozens of celebrities will join bandleader **Zaw Win Htut** onstage. Among the vocalists confirmed to perform are **Lin Lin, G Latt, Bo Bo (Outsider), Chit Thu Wai, Su Wut Yi Thuang** and **San Thit La**.

Khun Sint Nay Chi

I will be at the Sky Net stage on 19th Street for all four water festival days. I used to either stay in Yangon or go out to the districts, but this year it will be Yangon. I just feel like singing rather than going out to throw water.

Zaw Win Htut

I will be at MCC field on April 11, the eve of Thingyan. I am fed up with playing music in Yangon all four

days. That's why we will do that pre-Thingyan show, and then I will be in Chaungtha all four Thingyan days.

Yone Lay

Last year I was at the Yangon Mayor's pandal. This year I will be in Mandalay at the Mayor's pandal there. It is a good opportunity to meet with my audience. Thingyan is a very joyful event for me.

Yadanar Myaing

I will either be in Myitkyina in Kachin State or at the Sky Net pandal. At the moment, it is more likely to be Kachin. I will be singing all four days. Thingyan is the time when we can meet our fans close-up. It is full of fun.

Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein

I will be at the Polo Club Residence pandal for all four days. On New Year's Day I will be at the Sky Net pandal on 19th Street.

Hae Lay

I will be in Mandalay's Alpine pandal all four days. Thingyan is the happiest moment for us all. All singers will be singing during these four days.

Translation by Myo Lwin

Photo: Staff



A guide to festivities in Nay Pyi Taw

HSU HLAING HTUN

THE official Thingyan opening ceremonies in Nay Pyi Taw commence on April 13 at ministries' pandals, with most of the government officials, including the president, the vice presidents and military officers, participating.

Well-known artists like **Yan Aung, Ye Aung, Mandalay Thein Zaw, Kyi Thar Pwe Kyite Khin, May Than Nu, Moe Yu San** and **Chan Chan**, as well as some new names, will perform there. Choreographed dance performances and contests held by ministries and hotel zones will also feature, though only 21 groups are listed this year.

Events begin at 5pm on April 13. Water-throwing time runs until 7pm and a Thingyan feast will be served at the Feast Pandal.

In the Hotel Zone

A crowded pavilion every year, Sky Net's Shwe Than Lwin pavilion will see nationally famous vocalists and models, with the bright April sun serving as nature's spotlight. This year at Shwe Than Lwin pavilion will be **Lu Min, Ye Aung, Thu Htoo San, Si Thu Lwin, Jet Mya Thuang, Yan Paing Soe, Bo Phyu, Mandalay Thein Zaw, Kyi Thar Pwe Kyite Khin, May Than Nu, May Sweet, Chan Chan, Tin Zar Maw, Mee Mee Khe, Khin Bone** and **Moe Yu San**, among others. Word is that this pavilion is already preparing a feast capable of feeding more than 20,000 people.

Ambassadors are confirmed at three pavilions: Sky Net, Ace and Royal Kumudra Hotel of Max Hotel Group. Many hotels will have their own pavilions. Nway Oo Padauk pavilion will host entertainment and allow 100 staff to be able to play in the water water. **Big Horse Band** and up-and-coming vocalists will perform.

A common pavilion in Oketara Thiri Hotel Zone will hold its opening ceremony at 8am, earlier than other pavilions, early plans say.

Places to visit in Nay Pyi Taw

If you want to go around Nay Pyi Taw for Thingyan, here are some things to enjoy.

At the Water Fountain Garden in Thabyay Kone, families can play games and try things such as surfing, see-saw riding, walking under waterfalls and crossing a rope bridge. Don't miss the three-storey tower.

Another place to visit is the Zoological Gardens. You can see white tigers and red pandas, and even take elephant rides. Buzzing with crowds, this is a good spot for family trips. There are buggies for those who cannot walk far, though they sometimes require a wait. You can also visit the astronomical gallery and

even see animals from Africa.

Next to the Zoological Gardens, another place good for visiting is the National Ethnic Villages. This place was more alive in previous years because of entertainment plans. But you can still enjoy the small pandals set up. Images and models of famous landmarks from each region and state can be also seen. The Ferris wheel and boats can be enjoyed for a fee.

If you like to ride a buggy, you can choose either shared or private. There are also replicas of famous bridges from across the country. When you are hungry, you can take a meal at Myaw Sin Nyi Naung tower enjoying the scenery.

Also popular for Thingyan is the Paung Laung river by the Hlay Khwin mountain. It's a hot spot because the beach of the river sees restaurants opened for the holiday. Hlay Khwin Taung used to be a special spot for families; now it's a resort mostly for officials from ministries and the authorities. It is, however, getting a little rowdy during the holiday, with some dressed inappropriately. Also, though swimming is common, the river moves quickly and there are casualties almost every year.

Pyinmana Thingyan

Pyinmana has fewer pandals now that Nay Pyi Taw has been established. Residents must feel nostalgic for the days when Bogyoke Street was full of people and so alive. Now only one pavilion there has applied for a permit. There will also be two pavilions by Shan Kan lake. Small pandals through Pan Khin Street and Paung Laung Street are also waning.

Business and Thingyan

Vendors will be busy, and though selling alcohols and beer is forbidden it's common practice during traffic jams. Groups of sellers can be seen in crowded areas, a welcome sight even though prices are jacked up.

Security and traffic

In the Hotel Zone, all visiting cars will be examined and people will have to pass through a security gate to enter the water-throwing area. Motorcycles will need to be parked at the entrance. Police will keep an eye on everything, but in past years have been friendly, even sharing food and cigarettes with partiers.

Traffic, however, is a mess each year. All eight lanes of the expressway are usually blocked. Last year two lanes on each side were fenced in with razor wire and vehicles there had to keep on moving, which helped a little. However, after about two days it was as bad as ever. Let's hope it goes more smoothly this year. ■

Translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin



Photo: Zarni Phyo

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Has Mandalay Thingyan become a headache?

For organisers and participants, celebrations are in danger of growing out of control

PHYO WAI KYAW

IT'S here again: Thingyan songs are playing in stores, hammers are ringing near the royal moat, and leaflets are being passed out at night to woo passers-by to join the fun.

For some these are the exciting sights and sounds of the season. For others, though, they are signs of a mounting sense of worry or disappointment. I confess, I am among this second group – today's water festival celebrations just don't live up to the memory of those from my youth.

For me, modern Thingyan doesn't compare to when I went around the neighbourhood throwing water with a water squirter and a bucket of water in the bag slung on my back. Modern Thingyan is becoming worrisome rather than enjoyable.

Sure, I've gone around by car and by motorcycle. However, there was no place to go except the royal moat, and to get from one pavilion to another took a lifetime of getting a sunburn. When we got to one, all I got was five minutes of making noise and throwing water.

Most pavilions are only on the southern (26th Street) and eastern

(66th Street) sides.

Head of Revenue for MCDC U Soe Lin told *The Myanmar Times* that the city is concerned that the moat's primacy as a scene for celebrations is actually keeping some people away from it.

"People are crowded in only around the moat, and only a few people go around in the town. But as for middle-aged people, they don't dare to go anymore to 26th Street because most pavilions are there."

He said this year "only 10" pavilions will be allowed in the most crowded section around the moat, to try to bring in a measure of crowd control and break the image of the pavilions as intimidating to all but the youngest and most wild.

It's not the only effort authorities are making. CCTV cameras are to be installed on pavilions, and extensive rules are being handed down. And for the first time, premiums went up above K200,000 this year.

What about skimpy dressing or outlandish behaviour? Authorities will decide when it is time, he said.

The pavilions themselves are getting crowded – and not just with people. It's a business space now.

Owners compete to see who has the biggest sponsors, pick-up rides, food



Photos: Phyo Wai Kyaw



and drinks, not to mention which singers will be where.

Each year there is scandal over reselling of licences, and extensive rules are put in place to try to crack down. Nor can pavilions advertise alcohol or cigarettes.

At night there is no place to go but the Mayor's pavilion, but the crowds are so big that one becomes exhausted from bumping shoulders all night. The line-up this year for entertainment is: **Zaw Paing, Greyham, Phyo Gyi, Wai Lian, Thar Soe, Soe Paing, Soe Thet, L Sai Zi, Sone Thin Par, Khin Su Su Naing, Po Po, May Zabal Nyo, Suzi, Nyi Nanda, Soe Pyae Pyae San, Hmuae Yadana and Soe Nanda Kyaw.**

Traditional satirical chanting, or *thangyat*, will also make a return to the Mayor's pavilion. Participants have to outline their chants before

the contest to authorities. Lu Maw from Hna Khan Mway Par Par Lay, a popular comedian group, said everyone is yearning for a return to the good chants from the past. "Authorities, please say there will be no censorship for chants, so we can hear the sound of the people," Lu Maw said.

Thingyan, of course, must change with the times. It doesn't mean splashing water with a Eugenia twig anymore, and we can't expect it to return to that. But we look to Thailand, where pole dancing and girls removing their tops have taken over everyone's attention, and we can see how easily our holiday too could go in a bad direction. I only hope we will feel more happiness than exhaustion when this year's festival comes to an end. ■

Translation by Kyawt Daryl Lin



Modern Thingyan is becoming worrisome rather than enjoyable.

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The water and sun of Thingyan are terrible for your skin. Here's what to do

NANDAR AUNG

SO you've got your ticket. You've rented your vehicle. You've made your plans with your friends. You've got your bestest, newest outfits laid out and ready to go. But have you prepared your skin? You know, your skin – which can dry out, go dark and get damaged due to the insidious mixture of water sunlight, dust and wind you'll be exposing it to over the coming days? You *haven't*? Well. Fear not – it's not too late to make arrangements.

First, take a look at that outfit. Are they practical trousers and long-sleeve dresses to prevent sun exposure? They should be – I daresay appropriate clothing is the simplest way to shade your sensitive skin. Of course, if you're one of those girls who wants to be cool – which really means hot – with short pants and a sleeveless blouse, you know that the price of chic is a sunburn. Heck, it's practically normal for



anyone who indulges themselves during the festival.

But that doesn't mean it's for you. To save yourself, you need to think about another layer of protection. Sunscreen is essential, and the higher the SPF the better (**see sidebar for sunscreen tips**). Okay, some feel less nice to apply than others. But all of them feel better than the sunburn you'll get if you don't use them. Re-apply regularly and get a friend to help you reach the tricky bits.

Next, drop your daily make-up routines. Instead, go waterproof – for foundation, mascara, eyeliner, eyebrow pencil, or whatever it is you use to put your best look forward. All of it should be waterproof, or else you might find yourself looking a little down in the face once your true colours start showing.

Be cautioned, though: Waterproof make-up contains something called dimethicone. It also appears in a lot of other cosmetics and beauty products too, as it prevents water loss by creating a water-barrier on the surface of the skin. However – there's always a "however", isn't there? – it can also cause discomfort, and even irritation, because as well as keeping everything out, it also keeps everything in. Your skin doesn't breathe as it should, and if used regularly may cause itching, burns, discolouration and red spots. Regular use – as in, daily, for a long time – will dehydrate your skin and lead to premature lines.

So, what to do? Well, don't overdo it. A few days at Thingyan is fine, but otherwise it's best saved for trips to the beach. Also, don't wash it off with normal facial foam. When you're wearing waterproof make-up, it's best to



Photos: Staff

use make-up remover first before washing your face. That will help remove the protective layer and let your pores breathe freely again.

For more advice, we sought out the opinions of four experts – three make-up artists and a model – and asked what they advise to keep water festival from being a wash.

May Oo Maung, make-up artist

It is true that Thingyan comes but once a year but I don't want girls to damage their skin during those four days. They should wear hats and protect their skin by wearing sunblock. Girls have to wear clothes to cover their skin when they go out. Who cares about appearance if you don't take care of your own skin?

The sun will get hot and you'll get wet, but you need sunblock. Make-up which has SPF sunscreen is necessary for your face and you should wear it with waterproof make-up.

Girls will wear make-up, blush, lipstick and mascara. Waterproof cosmetic needs to be used to avoid make-up melts. After make-up melts, your face will be uglier than normal. The mascara and make-up to use depends on your skin color.

If your skin is damaged because you go out too much during the festival, you have to cleanse to your skin more than before. Your skin will go back normal if you put on night cream before bed. Your skin will be better after two to three weeks.

Kyaw Moe, make-up artist

I think cream-type make-up should be used instead of foundation-type, with UV protection. For the body, you have to use sunblock so that you can get away with your short pants and sleeveless shirts.

After Thingyan you need to go to a spa to take treatment for your skin. For people who can't afford going to the spa, wearing a thicker layer of thanaka is best.

Waterproof make-up is different from other kind of make-up: It is stickier than normal. You have to avoid wearing it too thick. If you wear it thicker, it can fade at a specific spot when you accidentally rub or dab it with tissue paper.

Moreover, you need to wear make-up which is suitable for your skin colour. Girls who have tanned skin need to wear a tan colour and those with lighter skin need to wear a lighter colour. Tan make-up doesn't match with white skin.

I don't support plaiting the hair. If you wear your hair in braids, you should wash your hair as soon as you arrive home. Some people don't untie the plait and keep on wearing it the following days because of their miserly habits, and then their hair becomes too dirty and this leads to hair loss. Girls with long hair should opt to put their hair in a ponytail.

Wine, make-up artist

If you are planning to enjoy the festival by going round town, you will end up sunburned because your skin will be directly exposed to the sunlight. A sunburn – even a suntan – means you are damaging your skin. Thingyan is even worse than normal because you're encountering sun, wind and water all at the same time.

If you do go to a spa after Thingyan, don't go right afterward. Treatment such as body scrubbing should not be done because the skin is burnt and is too tender. Instead, eat fresh fruits rich in water and Vitamin C. And if you do hit the spa, opt for those cliché facial treatments such as putting cucumber slices or aloe vera gel on your skin, to speed the healing.

Ma Tin Moe Lwin, model

During Thingyan, waterproof make-up is the best because your skin gets wet, then dries because of the sun, then gets wet, then dries again, over and over while you are enjoying the festival. So, you need to protect your skin so it doesn't become dehydrated. Make-up with moisturiser in it is best during Thingyan. But you should wear a good-quality make-up base before you put on the waterproof make-up. If not, the texture is difficult to cleanse.

If you have time, it is better to cleanse and then re-apply your make-up every three hours while you are going round between pandals. If you can't, add the make-up again. It can protect your skin from damage.

Applying body butter over and over is one of the best tips for protecting your skin. Body butter contains more oil than normal lotion. It lasts longer than normal lotion and can keep the skin hydrated.

After the festival, it is best to go to the spa to take skin treatment, or do a body steam. The sun's rays are hotter than last decade. The skin gets damaged and can't heal quickly. It needs time – from a minimum of two weeks up to sometimes months. One of my acquaintances can't get her original skin back even six months after Thingyan. Wear thick clothes, sunglasses and a hat, as well as waterproof make-up and cream. ■

Translation by
Khant Linn Oo and Thiri Min Htun



SUN TIPS

TOSS your sunscreen as soon as it has expired. The protective agents stop working over time.

HIDE your sunscreen – except when you're out and about with it. When not in use, keep it somewhere cool and safe, or the heat will break down the preservatives. Your car is the worst possible place for it.

INVESTIGATE the label. SPF – which means "sun protection factor" – refers to UVB rays, which are the primary cause of sunburn and are blocked by window glass. To address UVA rays, which prematurely age your skin causing wrinkles and age spots, and which can pass through window glass, make sure you see the words "broad spectrum" somewhere on the packaging.

NUMBERS don't lie, but they can be misunderstood. Is SPF 60 twice as protective as SPF 30? Does it last twice as long? Nope, not at all. SPF 30 will block out about 96.7 percent of the sunburn-causing UVB rays. From there, it's diminishing returns: about 98 percent with SPF 50 and still under 99 percent with SPF 75. (Even 100+ doesn't mean 100pc.) So don't let the bigger numbers fool you into thinking you don't need to reapply as often, or that you can stay out extra long. The FDA has even considered capping labels at 50 to prevent misled customers.

GETTING wet? Reapply every hour, and let it soak in or it'll be washed off immediately. Even if you don't get wet, sunscreen is only good for about two hours. After that, reapply.

YOU aren't using enough. Most apply far too small a dosage. Use at least an ounce – two tablespoons, or enough to fill a shot glass – to cover any skin not covered by clothing.

Atan is like a bruise: If your skin changes colour, it's been damaged. But damage can occur before colour change happens, and those who don't tan easily are still at risk. Both UVA and UVB rays cause cancer, and skin cancer is the most common form of cancer on earth, affecting people of all skin colours – Asians included. And both intermittent intense exposure – such as during Thingyan – and chronic lifetime exposure can add to the cancer risk.

NOT just your skin needs protection. Use SPF lip balm, wear a hat and protect your eyes with sunglasses that block 100 percent of UV rays and absorb most HEV (high-energy visible) rays. The UV index, by the way, measures harmful rays from 0 ("No danger to the average person") to the highest category of 11+ ("Extreme risk of harm from unprotected sun exposure"). The forecast for April in Yangon? Straight 11s, across the board.

Wade Guyitt

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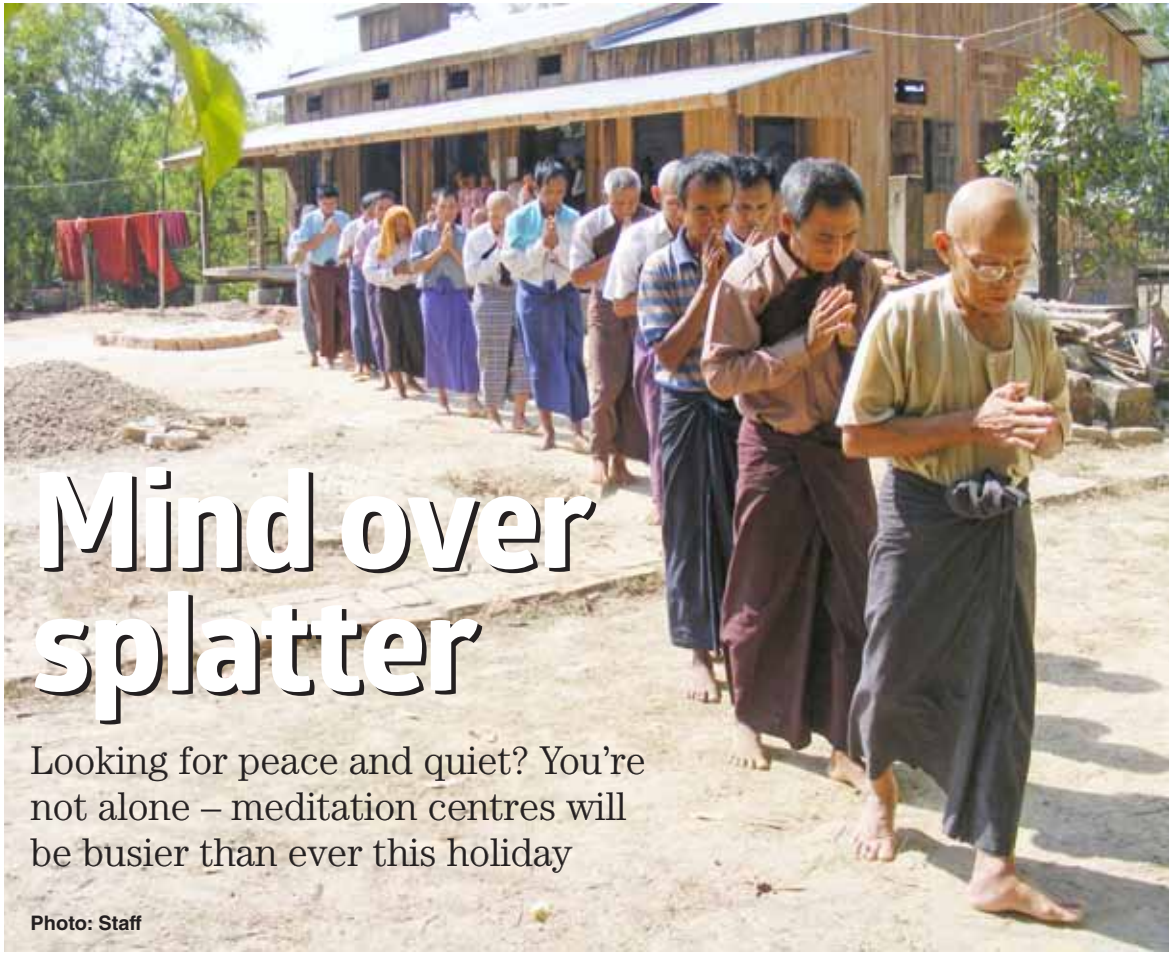
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Mind over splatter

Looking for peace and quiet? You're not alone – meditation centres will be busier than ever this holiday

Photo: Staff

AUNG KYAW MIN

MEDITATION centres in Yangon are expecting more Thingyan visitors than last year, with some even putting a cap on the number of participants allowed.

Such centres allow total immersion in meditation, something that requires an absolute split from your regular life. Those who are otherwise busy with choc-a-block schedules of business, education and family events – in other words, most everyone – but wish to meditate therefore tend to use the long government holiday as a time to put the rest of the world aside temporarily and ordain as monks and nuns, or just visit as a yogi.

The schedule is rigorous: waking at 4am, meditating on constant schedules with small breaks in between, and steady mindfulness at all times. Contact with the outside is also discouraged, as are entertainment devices like smartphones.

Some younger attendees are

initially encouraged to go by their elders, but may end up taking it up as a habit on their own. Ma Mya has been going to Pauk Zayti monastery since 2006. She said she was originally told to go by her grandmother.

“But at that time, I was 22 years old. I was not interested in meditation. In the following years, however, I have always gone to this monastery to meditate during the Thingyan period, to have a peaceful mind and live in a quiet environment,” Ma Mya said.

Ashin Pyinyar Sri, in charge of Pauk Zayti monastery, said it has run meditation events for 20 years. Of the four traditional times for seven-day meditation events – Thadingyut, Nattaw, early Dapodwe and Thingyan – the water festival is the most popular.

“Those who are spending a short period of time as monks and nuns, and then yogis who are participating in meditation only, mean the centre is more than ever [at Thingyan]. There are few yogis at other times,” said

Ashin Pyinyar Sri.

Ashin Eainda Sarra leads the Tharthana Zaya Mingalar Pitakas School, at Thone Htet Kyaung monastery. The monastery offers 11 meditation courses, each 10 days long, with participants limited to 130.

“We accept all young or old. The important thing is to be in good health for effective meditation.”

Some centres even cater to the crowds with overflow facilities, if the numbers prove too great at Thingyan. “I would like to help all people who want to participate in meditation events,” said Ashin Oaktamatharra who is in charge of Natural Meditation Centre. “If there are too many people, some are sent to nearby sub-meditation centres.”

If you're eager to escape the Thingyan madness, be sure to attend a centre that matches your experience and commitment level. Not all schools of meditation are alike, and some may prove too strict and challenging for the average Buddhist. ■

Translation by Mya Kay Khine

Places to keep in mind

If you'd like to spend part of your break at a meditation centre, here are some of the many options open to you. This listing is incomplete and for information only: Presence on or absence from the list does not represent any opinion or endorsement on the part of *The Myanmar Times*. Source: nyeinsae.blogspot.com

YANGON

Chanmyay Yeiktha
55A Kabar Aye Pagoda Road
Tel: 01-661479
Fax: 01-667050

Dhamma Joti
Wingaba Yele Kyaung, Nga Htat Gyi Pagoda Road, Bahan township
Tel: 01-549290

Mahasi
Pyay Road, 9 Mile, Mayangone township
Tel: 01-661167

Mahasi
16 Sarsana Yeiktha Street, Bahan township
Tel: 01-541971, 545918

Mingun Tipidaka Kyaung
12 Sagawah Street, Dagon township
Tel: 01-222277, 222278

Mogok Yeiktha
82 Natmauk Street, Bahan township
Tel: 01-541860, 550184

Nyaung Kan Aye
Yangon-Insein Road, Gyogone, Insein township
Tel: 01-642219, 641469

Pa-Auk Center
Thilawa Road (near Kyaik-Khauk Pagoda), Payargon Village, Thanlyin township
Tel: (95) 56-21927

Panditarama
80 A Thanlwin Road, Bahan township
Tel: 01-535448, 705525

Pauk Zayti
Pauk Zayti Street on Kyaik Waing Pagoda Road, 8 Mile, Mayangone township
Tel: 01-660148, 09-8534530

Saddhamma Ransi
7 Zeyar Khemar Road, Mayangone

township

Shwe Minn Wun
70 Sarsana Yeiktha Street, Bahan township
Tel: 01-542876

Shwe Oo Min
Pa Ywat Sate Kone, North Okkalapa township
Tel: 01-664807

Shwe Oo Min Forest Center
Aung Myay Thayar Street, Kontabaung Village, Mingalardon township
Tel: 01-638170, 636402

Sun Lun Gu
Thanlarwaddy Road, 7 Mile, U Lun Maung Street, 7 Ward, Mayangone township
Tel: 01-660860

Thae Inn Gu
Tat Yin 9 bus stop, Kontabaung Village, Mingalardon township

HMAWBI

Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre
588, No 3 Block, Hmawbi township
Tel: 01-620-321

Thae Inn Gu
Tat Yin 9 bus stop, Hnaw Gone Village, Hmawbi township

PYIN OO LWIN

Chanmyay Yeiktha
Toe Gyi Koun Village, near Anee Sakhann railway station
Tel: 0095-85-22457

MAWLAMYINE

Pa-Auk Centre
Mawlamyine, Mon State
Tel: (95) 57-22853

Source: nyeinsae.blogspot.com



Photo: Staff

HOTEL

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Hotel Grand United (Chinatown): No. 621, Mahabandoola Road (Corner of Bo Ywe Street), Latha Township, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: +95-1-372256, 372257, 372258 E-mail: grandunited.chinatown@gmail.com
Hotel Grand United (21st Downtown): No. 66-70, 21st Street (Enter from Strand Road), Latha Township, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: +95-1-378200, 378201, 378204 E-mail: grandunited.21@gmail.com

www.hotelgrandunited.com



Photo: Staff



Photo: Wade Guyitt

Beer: Any way you serve it, it's here to stay

KYAW PHONE KYAW

AS water festival rolls around again, some may find themselves anticipating a splash of a different sort. Though Thingyan is meant to be a time to cleanse ourselves, alcohol indulgence – and over-indulgence – is rife during mid-April, the hottest time of the year.

Some say imbibers are just having fun. But some say they risk bringing their culture into disrepute – not to mention damaging their livers and, in some cases, the safety of those around them.

Who is right? We've gathered testimony from the major players: Read on and decide for yourself.

The drinker

"I start drinking from the earliest day of Thingyan until the last day. At every Myanmar new year day, I always have to get drip treatment," happy-go-lucky Yangonite Ko Than Htike Aung, 25, says with a smile.

Not everyone drinks as much as Ko Than Htike Aung when celebrating Thingyan in public. But head out where the parties are and it is rare to find those who don't drink at all. Young, old, male, female:

It seems like many are willing to indulge in a drop or more this time of year, even if they don't otherwise.

Beer, or *byit* as older people call it, bests wine, rum and even the ever-popular whisky as the alcoholic drink of choice for water festival.

"Beer can make you drunk only if you drink too much," says Ma Thandar Phyto, who hits the stages every year. She says she doesn't drink more than twice during the rest of the year, but during Thingyan she drinks mostly every day of the festival. "I choose beer as the weather is too hot. And I can protect myself among strangers as I don't drink too much."

When *The Myanmar Times* performed a straw poll of 10 young Yangonites, asking them why they drink beer at Thingyan, only two said it helped them keep cool in the hot weather. Seven said it was to help them lose control and have fun. The final respondent said he drinks to join in with what others around him are doing.

The seller

Ko Zaw Naing, who manages a beer pub in Thaketa township, says he'll be keeping his establishment open even as other shops and businesses stay shut for the holiday. So why doesn't he take a few days off as well?

"The amount of alcohol and beer sold in just four days of Thingyan is nearly equivalent to the amount sold over the whole rest of the year," Ko Zaw Naing says.

He says beer outsells all other orders, and by raising the price he is able to bring in a hefty tab.

"I am glad that I make a profit even though I have to open my pub while everyone else closes," he said.

For those who don't want to hit the beer halls, some entrepreneurs set out to bring the beer to you, right on the street.

It's illegal to sell alcohol in public

without a licence, but vendors who take it up at Thingyan time say they are not being forced to close. And it's a lucrative trade, even for just a few days' work.

U Myo Aye sells beer cans and bottles to passersby out of an ice box near Inya Lake.

"I can raise the price twice or three times there," he says, "and the selling rate is so good that I will sell there again this year."

A senior clerk at a civil office, U Myo Aye says the financial motivations for spending his precious holidays as an amateur bootlegger is obvious.

"The income I got during four Thingyan days was equal to my salary for four months," he says.

The demand for beer is so great during Thingyan that street sellers like U Myo Aye and legit operators like Ko Zaw Naing must use the pre-Thingyan period as "beer-collecting time". Otherwise, they won't be able to keep up with the constant demand from a thirsty public.

The brewer

Vendors aren't the only ones with a financial stake in keeping the beer flowing at Thingyan. In Myanmar, alcohol producers can't advertise on television or in newspapers. Pandal sponsorship, then, used to be an important way for companies to get their brand into the public eye. Starting a few years ago, however, authorities stopped giving permission to advertise alcohol on water festival stages.

For the past three years, the biggest selling brand during Thingyan has been Chang, a Thai import that comes in via border areas (*chang* means elephant, a symbol of Thailand). It consistently outsold its most popular local competitor, Myanmar Beer, said a beer distributor and seller who requested anonymity. With prices stable even during Thingyan –

many local brands get marked up dramatically – and with mild taste, it's been a popular choice in the past.

Chang may be hard to find this year, however, after authorities clamped down on imported alcohol in supermarkets, mini marts and other shops in big cities, taking action against shopkeepers and allowing imports only for hotels. Some have criticised the decision, and in mid-March wine imports were given the go-ahead once more.

It's unlikely, however, that wine will take off as a Thingyan tradition the way beer has. As of two weeks before the start of Thingyan, local alcohol brands dominated the shelves, and that monopoly is likely to translate into a big boost in revenue for local producers over the next month. Myanmar Beer, produced by military-owned UMEHL, seems the brand most likely to be crowned prince of the Thingyan season.

The doctor

Thingyan can be a dangerous time. Statistics showed last year that the week of Thingyan – April 13 to 19 – seven people died and 102 were injured in 62 traffic accidents just in Yangon. That's just counting incidents on the road, and only in one city. Hospital admittances spike dramatically during the festival.

"The most popular alcohol at Thingyan is beer," says Dr Kyaw Thet Naing. "And even if it is not too strong, all alcoholic drinks can dehydrate you. In the extreme heat of April, dehydration can be fatal."

Doctor's orders? Ease back on consumption – and if you must drink, bring mineral salts like sodium and potassium along with you, plus plenty of purified water.

After all, you don't want to have so much fun this year that you're not around to celebrate next year's festival as well. ■

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Need a ride?

If you're among those renting a vehicle for Thingyan, please don't bang on the roof, agents and owners plead

TOE WAI AUNG

ABROAD, vehicles can be rented from companies which own large fleets of vehicles. In Myanmar, however, rental services are simply go-betweeners, agents who serve as intermediaries between those wishing to rent and those willing to put their car on the line for a bit

of profit. Theoretically an easy way for car owners to make a bit of cash, the arrangement creates friction when over-indulging revellers bring back cars that aren't quite in original condition. "Renters are mostly young people. We tell this to the owners from the start when we accept cars from them. Owners give their cars for rent because they understood

this, I think," said Ma Moe Moe, an external relationship officer from Happy Day car rental service.

The day's rental means the car can be used from 6am to 6pm - so no after-dark carousing. Indemnities are charged in case of damage. It's rare, though, for a car to be returned without damage.

"Everybody wants to have fun as it is Thingyan," said Daw Yi Yi Khin, owner of Ruby car rentals. "I don't want to spoil their fun, as most renters are kids. But most kids are weak at following rules despite the rules being specified."

New rental vehicles, she said, aren't made to withstand the abuse that a gang of over-excited youth can dish out.

"Although we tell them not to hammer on the roofs and bodies of cars, roofs are dented when cars were given back," said Daw Yi Yi Khin.

In fact, the hassle is so great that Ruby will be renting cars only for travel this year. Daw Yi Yi Khin said she would rent only for travel this year, to avoid having to settle problems between young people who rent cars and car owners.

The fee for renting a car for travel is around K300,00 per day. Some also provide drivers, and while this costs more, it ensures customers are not held responsible for minor damages. This is especially suitable for larger parties.

"Most travellers to pagodas rent vehicles which seat between 10 and 45 passengers. This year we are getting quite a lot of rentals," said Daw Yi Yi Khin. Most popular, she added, are the 45-seaters and the 33-seaters, which cost around K400,000 and K300,000 per day respectively, though it can range according to how many kilometres you intend to put on the vehicle.

Ko Kyaw San, from East Dagon township, said he and his friends



Photos: Staff

have rented a car for the first day of Thingyan for K130,000.

"Last year it cost K120,000. As it is a light truck, it will hold around 15 people. There is also a price difference depending on which day you rent for."

Some say that the festival hasn't been the same, though, since the old-car trade-in scheme, rolled out September 2011, began sweeping well-loved clunkers off the road.

Most vehicles on the road this year will be luxury compact cars.

"Light Trucks and Townaces are rare this year," said Ma Tin Moe Myint, manager of MT & K car rental service. "I think Hijet and Carry would be rented mostly. Others are Hyundai Potter and Suzuki minis."

Townaces and pickups go for K130,000 to K150,000 per day. Hijet and Suzuki cost less, at about K100,000.

It's a far cry from the old days, remembers U Thway Thit, a poet.

"Jeeps as well as *lay bane* [four-wheelers] and *thone bane* [three-wheelers] were used back in the 1970s to get around during Thingyan," said U Thway Thit. "The rental fee for a Jeep cost was only in the three digits."

Later, Hilux, Nissan and Publica became the holiday steed of choice, U Thway Thit said.

He also recalls that some amateur bicyclist groups used to ride around with empty cans of condensed milk tied to the back of their bicycles, which was the fashion at the time. ■

Translation by Kyawt Darli Lin

Drive Safe!

From the Yangon Region Supervisory Committee for Traffic Rules Enforcement

1. Disciplines for drivers within Yangon region during Thingyan Festival
 - 1.1 Don't drive after drinking
 - 1.2 Don't drive like a racing car in a wild and crazy manner
 - 1.3 Don't drive a car without a muffler
 - 1.4 Don't drive a car without a number plate
 - 1.5 Don't drive a car with a fake number plate
 - 1.6 Don't drive in a car with the side doors or back roof removed
 - 1.7 Don't drive without driving licence and wheel tax
 - 1.8 Don't drive cars without registration or vehicles under repair
 - 1.9 Don't drive with any international flags
 - 1.10 Don't drive any motorcycle in the Yangon municipal area
 - 1.11 Don't honk in horn-free zones
2. If anyone breaks the above rules, he or she will be subject to serious action
3. Alcohol testers will be applied and action will be taken for drunk driving
4. Broken cars will be towed if parked in the middle of the street
5. CCTV cameras have been installed to record any law breakers
6. Don't let accidents happen because of you

Translation by Mya Kay Khine



FARFALLA

ဝင်္ကံပုဂံနိုင်ငံမှတိုက်ရိုက်တင်သွင်းသော လျှပ်စစ်ပစ္စည်းများ

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- အခရောင်းပြခန်း(၂) အမှတ် - ၉၉ - လှည်းတန်းလမ်း၊ တာဝတိံမြို့နယ်၊ ခုနား - ၀၉၄ ၂၀၀၈၇၇၆၃

KHIN MYA ZIN

THE songs of Thingyan began to shock me when my son was 16 and 17. Since then, I have been worried that fighting will break out among teenagers who are drunk while throwing water. Because of this, I can no longer enjoy the fragrance of the Padauk flowers as they waft through the breeze, released by the first Thingyan showers.

For nearly 30 years, these beautiful images of our Thingyan have been disappearing. We have even seen Thingyan times when no Padauk flowers fell, due to overheating and no rain. Today, varieties of alcohols are being sold at roadside shops starting well before the annual four-day event. The smell of alcohol is so strong it makes me confused whether Thingyan is a water-throwing festival or a beer-, rum- and whisky-throwing festival.

In our childhoods, we were so afraid that Sakka would note our names down on his dog-skin parchment, even if we teased and joked until one of us grew upset, as children do. If we talked back at our elders, we would be threatened with the words “dog-skin parchment”.

In my son's era, the “dog-skin parchment” is not popular anymore. Digital media devices have become popular and children are already familiar with a variety of games at a young age. As children and young people are able to defeat even the strongest monsters in their games,



Children splash water in Kyt Sone Pwe village, Magwe Region, in 2014. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

they are no longer afraid of Sakka's dog-skin parchment.

Children learn about violence and cruelty from movies and TV shows. They aren't being given time and taught to be polite and to live at peace, either by parents or the education system. So it is no surprise that most young people consider Thingyan as just a time to have fun and party.

Girls become so drunk and overjoyed that one wonders whether Thingyan days cause alarm for their parents.

News about the sheer number of gallons of water used at each pandal during Thingyan in Yangon makes me think about nearby places with water scarcity, like Twante, Dala, and towns and villages in Bago Region. Not even Yangon itself has enough water in

summer.

The area of flotsam in Inya Lake is already expending and the area of water is contracting.

It is a relief to know from papers that amphetamines are forbidden and being cracked down on by authorities. However, it is still worrisome that lives of teenagers could be ruined because of drugs.

Just a few days ago, I read on the

internet that the police in Thailand have arrested teenagers who had been increasing their sexual experience by exchanging their partners. That made me think about what trouble this habit would cause if it came to be spread here.

This year's *Thingyan-sar* – a written yearly horoscope for Myanmar which comes out before the Thingyan festival – starts one paragraph with bad news: “Winged insects such as locusts and bumblebees will be crowded. There will be many wars. The people will suffer and be stressed.”

But in the concluding paragraph, it says only good things. One sentence says, “The internal affairs of the nation will be transparent and there will be international surprise and praise about that.”

I just had to mutter, “Aww, *Thingyan-sar*; aww, *Thingyan-sar*.” I don't know what percentage of the population still reads *Thingyan-sar* today.

My little nephew, who came to Yangon from the districts to learn IT, is going to return to his hometown for Thingyan. He is looking forward to taking part in water festival with his friends there. It gives me hope that small towns will continue to be beautiful with their golden blossoms of Padauk. ■

Writer Daw Khin Mya Zin is a National Literary Award winner.

Pop-up cuisine

Thingyan is boom-time for street-food sellers, whether they're in it for love or money

MYA KAY KHINE

LAST April, Ko Myo Ming Thant and four of his friends set out in a white Nissan van from Thingangyun township at about 7:30am. Their destination?

Inya Lake at Hledan. Their cargo? Fried vermicelli, noodle packages and Korean-barbeque-style sausage meats.

“My love wanted to enjoy Thingyan with friends, but as a vendor. So I fulfilled her wish. We opened the back of the van to display the food we had



Photo: Staff

for sale,” said Ko Myo Min Thant.

He said it was something he had never done before, but that it proved to be a memorable experience.

They weren't alone. There are always roadside sellers looking to hawk their wares to passersby near pandals. Some vendors sell food year-round and count on extra business during Thingyan. But some, like Ko Myo Min Thant and his friends, are just looking for a novel way to spend the holiday.

While the vermicelli and noodles could be fried at home, the sausages were trickier to prepare. Ko Myo Min Thant had to seek out a spot near the van but away from the water and crowds where he could fry them using a gas tank and stove.

In all, the costs came to K250,000, covered entirely by Ko Myo Min Thant and his partner. Their friends tagged along just to help. They sold their food at a price of K500 per package.

Ko Chan Myae Aung, who will sell chicken rice this year, last sold food in 2010 with his partner's mother, dishing up Rakhine food at a pandal.

This year he plans to sell in the Kandawgyi and Inya areas. He does admit, though, to being a bit worried about the crowds. His last

outing, in 2010, was marred by bomb explosions, and he worries about some similar tragedy happening this year. Also, he worries about traffic accidents caused by intoxicated drivers. No one is allowed to sell alcohol without a licence from the municipal authorities, but that doesn't mean they don't. Plus, many revellers opt to BYOB.

“I have to patient while dealing with drinkers and try to stay far away from them,” Ko Chan Myae Aung said.

Ko Chan Myae Aung estimates his chicken rice will require K100,000 per

day of costs, and he has already set his price: K200 per serving.

Will he make money? “I believe in just having fun while selling at Thingyan,” he said

Ko Myo Min Thant, the noodle-and-sausage-seller, takes a similar view. Last year by 11:30, he said, “We wanted to dance and pour water, but goods still remained. So we fried all the sausage meats and donated them, for I wanted to spend time happily with my love.

“My profit was that we had so many funny memories of our Thingyan festival experience.” ■



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Getaway options

The long break is, for many, the best time to travel, in spite of the heat and expense

EI EI THU

DRIVEN by market demand, the boom in the travel sector is allowing a wider range of options for holiday-makers, with an unprecedented number of agencies waiting to cater to their every whim.

"Travelling during Thingyan became a tradition because students and office workers get long holidays," said U Myo Oo, owner of domestic pilgrimage and tour company Thukamein. "That's why the number of travellers has been up year to year."

For religious pilgrimages, one popular destination this year is the Shin 9 Shin Pagoda in Dawei township, Tanintharyi Region, said U Myo Oo, who is also an adviser for the Domestic Pilgrimage and Tour Operators Association (DPTOA).

According to DPTOA figures, "over 50 express buses" are set to visit the pagoda.

U Myo Oo said Thingyan marks the end of the annual high season for domestic pilgrimage trips, and that this, combined with demand, means a slight bump in prices for pilgrimage trips.

"There are no significant ticket-price hikes for domestic pilgrimages during

Thingyan. Mostly, it increases by about K20,000."

That means a pilgrimage might be the cheapest way to travel, he added. "Normal ticket prices will increase from K180,000 to K300,000 because of insufficient express buses." He said hotel accommodations are also expected to shoot up, though those willing to wait until after the holidays may see relief.

"There are few pilgrims after new year's day," he said.

The associate initially predicted 4.5 million domestic pilgrimage travellers this year, but the actual numbers are likely to surpass it.

As for non-religious tourism, people mostly choose Chaungtha and Ngwe Saung beaches, U Myo Oo said.

Daw Eindray Kyaw Khaung, managing director of Tango Tours, agreed, saying Chaungtha was popular, though Taunggyi proved a big draw also.

"People mostly visit beaches every year. The price for beaches are three times higher than other places, but people are still choosing them," Daw Eindray Kyaw Khaung said.

She cautioned, though, that Thingyan is not the easiest time to travel.

"The difficulties faced during Thingyan are the crowds, the expense, and getting wet accidentally and having to visit a pagoda with wet clothes."

She also pointed out the temperature as a worry this time of year, with temperatures in some areas shooting up into the mid-40s Celsius. "It is necessary to take care of travellers' health because of the hot weather. Diarrhea is also common at this time. Guides should carry first aid kits and warn travellers to eat carefully," she said.

Daw Sabei Aung, managing director of Nature Green Travel and Tours, which specialises in guiding visitors from Russia and Europe, said



Photos: Staff

that while this is a prime season for domestic travellers, it's less attractive for inbound foreign visitors.

"Because of the increase of local travellers, it is difficult to get air tickets and to book hotels, and the cost for tourists to travel here is becoming expensive. The number of tourists visiting Myanmar during Thingyan has decreased compared to last year," said Daw Sabei Aung.

"The number of tourist is down because of the prices. The decrease is 20 percent in the tour package sector - tourists who visit here via travel agencies. Individual visits and other kinds of visit are not included there. Basically they want to observe Myanmar Thingyan festival."

She said tourists don't tend to have difficulties on their trip due to the Thingyan holiday, though the heat at this time of year can be a problem. Their tour guides take care of their security, Daw Sabei Aung said.

"Foreigner love to visit traditional *mandats* [pavilions] rather than *mandats* not representing Myanmar culture and featuring scanty dress. So we send them to the townships with national races culture, to the places serving free food, and to City Hall where the Thingyan dance contest is held," Daw Sabei Aung said, adding most take tours to "Yangon, Mandalay and Taunggyi".

"More tourists would enter if the price of air tickets and hotel rooms were stable the whole year, and if there were impeccable service. If not, Myanmar's tourist sector will lag behind compared to other countries," she said.

While the shine may be off for some inbound travellers, the reverse is true for those in Myanmar, who are finding it increasingly easy to travel abroad. More travel agents, an economy on the rise, and fewer concerns over getting passports and visas means a big rise in outbound holiday travel, said U Sithu Myo Win, customer service director from New Motion Travels and Tours Company.

The most common tours are of Japan and Thailand, said U Sithu Myo Win.

"Over 1200 people will travel abroad during Thingyan through our company alone. Most people will go to Asia, Europe, the Middle East, China and India. They choose to go there because they believe that these places are safe and popular tourist destinations," he added.

U Myo Oo did say, however, that travellers need to be careful when booking, making sure that their agent is legitimate, has travel insurance and are selling trips to places which are actually real. ■

Translation by Khant Lin Oo

Home away from home

TIN YADANAR TUN

SOME hotels offer special Thingyan packages and provide special services and rates over the holiday. The following listings are per night, in US dollars, and are presented for information only - rates and packages may change without warning and availability is not guaranteed.

Chatrium Hotel

Single or double room: **\$150**
Extra services included for Thingyan

Kandawgyi Palace Hotel

Single or double room: **\$175**
If booking online with a credit card, receive special rate of \$90 without breakfast during Thingyan

Parkroyal

Single or double room: **\$150**
Extra services, promotions and addition nine hours booking, from 9am to the next day at 6pm

Novotel Hotel

Single room: **\$228**
Double room: **\$246**
No Thingyan package

The Strand Hotel

Single, double or superior room: **\$234**
Deluxe room: **\$263**
April to June, enjoy 30 percent discount, and 40pc discount when booking more than two nights

Sule Shangri-La Hotel

Single or double room: **\$178**
Extra services included for Thingyan

Nga Lite Kan Thar Resort (Nay Pyi Taw)

Single or double room: **\$40-130**
20-25pc discount during Thingyan

BOB Hotel (Ngwe Saung)

Single or double room: **\$160-250**



A new place to splash

Whether in Myanmar or abroad, beaches are de rigueur destinations at Thingyan

MYAT NOE OO

WITH water festival nearing, everyone is excitedly planning how best to spend their time - and their money, for holidays usually mean a bit of a splurge. Since most in Myanmar don't get to take many holidays the rest of the year, Thingyan tends to become the de facto travel slot - especially for those seeking a little r-and-r.

"During water festival, people have long holidays and they go with their family or friends," said Ko Mo Lwin, director at Peak Point Travel and Tour. Beaches make the most common destination, he said, as they provide good venues to sit and catch up on quality time, not to mention a chance to eat some fresh local seafood. Some companies, he said, even organise staff trips to local beaches during the holiday break.

Among local beaches, the big three are Chaungtha, Ngwe Saung and

Ngapali beaches, in order of increasing expense and decreasing crowds.

Most beachcombing locals, including Ma Su Mon, plan trips to Chaungtha, because it is less costly and they can celebrate Thingyan at the beach, she said. This year, Chaungtha-goers will also be treated to special shows by Emperor rock band.

Ko Mo Lwin said foreigners opt for Ngwe Saung, north of Chaungtha on the same stretch of coast.

"Ngwe Saung beach is quiet and most of the foreigners like it. It can be made like an international beach, though it is a little expensive. But it is really nice place for people who want to rest on the holiday."

At the top end locally is Ngapali, though it is costly, and not least because it requires a flight to access.

For those already willing to get on a plane in search of bucolic beach experiences, heading abroad might be in the cards. Most booking outbound from Myanmar choose a package tour,



Bali. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

as it makes planning easier and can put first-time travellers at ease.

Ko Mo Lwin said many Myanmar travellers are choosing Bali as their destination. Filled with beautiful beaches, Bali provides the best of both worlds, letting you choose between proximity to urban areas, for a taste of culture and nightlife, and secluded relaxation, with the feeling that there is just you, the sea breeze and maybe a coconut-shell cocktail in hand.

Gorgeous white-sand stretches await those who pick Bali - unless you prefer something different, in which case the striking black sand expanses may be for you. They're formed in areas of volcanic activity. Be careful,



Chaungtha. Photo: Staff

though: The colour absorbs heat, so it's extra-hot on the feet!

Kuta is one of the best beaches in Bali, down the coast from the city of the same name. The waves are higher and the currents are strong, making it a perfect haven for surfers. A three-night-four-day package costs US\$700, including hotel, flight, meal, tour guide and driver.

Thailand has long been a favourite of Myanmar people looking for a quick shopping jaunt. But get out of Bangkok and you can find world-famous beaches. Phuket is located in a small sheltered bay, surrounded on either end by rocky headlands. Kata, to the southwest, is among the

finer beaches. Add in an extra stop in Bangkok for shopping and you've got the best of both worlds. A three-night-four day package costs \$889, also including hotel, flight, meal, tour guide and driver.

Maldives, a popular spot for global travellers, is a bit more costly, with a five-day-four-night package costing \$1800 for hotel, flight, meal, tour guide and driver. This island destination, though, boasts shimmering clear waters and perfect white beaches. If you're into snorkeling alongside denizens of the deep, this could be the place for you.

Just try not to make your friends at home too jealous. ■



To get in the holiday mood, *MT* reporter Aung Kyaw Nyunt hits the streets to ask people about their favourite parts of the water festival and new year celebrations.

Translation by Emoon

Ma Ye Linn Linn Than, musical buff

I am very fond of *Thingyan Moe*, a film shown on TV when Thingyan approaches. My favourite part is the theme song but I love the whole film. I love the actor and actress, Zin Wine and May Than Nu, and how the essence of Thingyan is completely expressed through the theme song with them. I do not really remember when I became fond of it, but I remember paying attention when the film's songs were released as a CD. I love the songs. Each year I watch the movie whenever Thingyan is near. What I dislike in the festival is the pouring of grubby water. As I have an allergy to dirty water I can't stand it when it touches my skin when I go out in a car for the festival.



Daw Hla Hla Thwin, flower lover

What I love at Thingyan is Padauk flowers. It is a flower which blooms only once a year and is also very beautiful. I think the flower and the smell show the spirit of the Thingyan festival. I always see lots of Padauk in all the flower shops in the market when Thingyan is coming. Neighbours give Padauk as presents to their neighbours. Some adorn their hair with Padauk and some offer them to the Buddha image at home if they are Buddhists. Padauk flowers bloom only during the Thingyan period when it has been touched by the damp Thingyan rain. I find them very meaningful.

Kyaw Win Hlaing, free foodie

My favourite thing at Thingyan is the foods in the free feast (*stude thar*). I especially prefer *mont lonn yay bor* (boiled rice balls with molasses) rather than Thingyan rice. I have a strange feeling that it does not taste as delicious when I buy *mont lonn yay bor* at other times of the year. I think it is because of my mind. The *mont lonn yay bor* I eat during Thingyan tastes incredible! The feeling is great when the palm sugar melts off the wheat in the mouth. But I don't like when chilli is put in the *mont lonn yay bor*. There are many enchanting things in Thingyan. Among them, I love *mont lonn yay bor* most, as the ultimate Thingyan food.



Photos: Aung Kyaw Nyunt

Yarza Ko Ko, music lover

What I like most is to listen to Myanmar traditional Thingyan music during the festival. This love of music began back when I was young, when I first learned about Thingyan. The festival is associated with some of my favourite Myanmar songs by old and well-known vocalists, including a song called *Shar Pon Daw Min Tha Gyi* (The prince who looks for his love who was lost during Thingyan). I don't like loud and noisy music. I also don't like those who try to manipulate Thingyan. I hate those who make money by different ways and means, and take advantage of the merry-making festival and the freedom of people.



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What's in the forecast for 1377?

Aung Myin Kyaw
103 Thameinbayan St, Tarmwe township, Yangon
Ph: 0973135632, 09450029183

Sunday-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers Northeast</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others East</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business Southwest</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way South</p>	<p>In 1377, you may fall in with fake friends from "West". You might have chosen the wrong person for your mentor. There might be many disturbances in the educational field. You might deprive your business due to your depravity.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Bad</p> <p>Devoid of mutual trust</p> <p>Doubts leads to misunderstandings</p> <p>End of love will lead to divorce</p> <p>Promises or responsibilities will be broken</p>	<p>Education and health</p> <p>Outlook: Bad</p> <p>Some difficulty in learning sector</p> <p>Mental faculty faint</p> <p>Inability to recognise truth</p> <p>Weak in nervous system</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Fair</p> <p>View of friends unclear</p> <p>Might have solipsism</p> <p>Weak in perception</p> <p>Lack preparation</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Donate shampoo</p> <p>Offer feast to monks at dawn</p> <p>Eat vegetarian</p>
Monday-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers East</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others Northwest</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business West</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way Southeast</p>	<p>In 1377, you might become indisposed with "West". Social life may bring no rapport. Different views of controversial issues cause arrogance, doubts and grudges. Prosecution cases may fail.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Able to build mutual understanding</p> <p>Decisions will be effective</p> <p>Doubtful relationship will be made clear</p> <p>Love is leading to a proposal</p>	<p>Education and health</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Good in learning and absorbing</p> <p>Mental faculty adequate</p> <p>Able to see truth and wisdom</p> <p>No worry for health and mind</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Mutual respect and value</p> <p>Build firm belief in business</p> <p>Have sympathy</p> <p>Keep your word</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Donate soap</p> <p>Donate water</p> <p>Worship with white umbrella</p>
Tuesday-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers Southeast</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others South</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business Southwest</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way West</p>	<p>In 1377, unpleasant thing might happen in the "West". You might meet with a bogus physician and your health might be in danger. Disruptions may happen in education. A marriage may dissolve.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Fair</p> <p>May not get what you want, get what you don't want</p> <p>Leaving present partner for new will not bring good relationship</p> <p>Misinterpretation of your partner's love</p>	<p>Education and health</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Easy in learning and absorbing</p> <p>Strong striving and bright</p> <p>Accurate and strong in consideration</p> <p>Fresh healthy mind</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Workaholic</p> <p>Consideration of others</p> <p>Conduct yourself bravely in incisive way</p> <p>Take responsibility</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Offer rice and provisions to monks</p> <p>Offer jasmine</p> <p>Donate nutritious foods</p>
Wednesday-morning-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers South</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others North</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business North</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way Southwest</p>	<p>In 1377, no businesses or firms should be based in the "West". There may be arguments over immovable property like houses or land. Uneducated louts will predominate in places. Festive events such as wedding or joyous shouldn't be celebrated there, as injustices will occupy them.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Complications in love affairs</p> <p>Determined decisions confirm loyalty</p> <p>Difficulty with different religions or race</p> <p>Pleasant happy ending</p>	<p>Education and health</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Weak in learning</p> <p>Eager to learn</p> <p>Able to evaluate after analysis</p> <p>Strength in health and heart</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>High self-confidence</p> <p>Able to have mutual negotiations</p> <p>Excellent social and interpersonal skills</p> <p>Value promises</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Donate shwe yin aye</p> <p>Worship with electric light</p> <p>Save lives (zewita darna)</p>
Wednesday-afternoon-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers Northwest</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others Southeast</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business Southwest</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way East</p>	<p>In 1377, the "West" is the resting place for wrecked lives. Firms will improve and will unexpectedly gain achievement. Increase your power and you will find many attendants. Offspring will be flourished. Remorse will be seen.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Able to choose as your desire</p> <p>Seeing with empathy to others</p> <p>Enduring or sacrificing on your partner</p> <p>Deep understanding to others as a respectful and admirable person.</p>	<p>Education and health</p> <p>Outlook: Fair (education), Good (health)</p> <p>Highly passionate in acquiring and learning</p> <p>Less chance acquiring</p> <p>Weak at analytics</p> <p>Strong, fresh and healthy</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>High self-confidence</p> <p>Good in interpersonal skills</p> <p>Highly understanding and shrewd</p> <p>Ego and welfare are balanced</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Gild pagodas</p> <p>Worship with lotus</p> <p>Donate toothpaste</p>
Thursday-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers West</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others Northeast</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business East</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way Southeast</p>	<p>In 1377, do not seek a place in the "West". Huge misdeeds and evil will hover in that direction. Attendants will be loosened. Plenty of fraud and deceit will be faced. Power and authority will be ruined. Reputation will be withered.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Bad</p> <p>Weak in mood, appalling in emotion</p> <p>Repeated mistakes may ruin family reputation</p> <p>Longing for someone that is hard to predict</p> <p>Becoming devout</p>	<p>Education and Health</p> <p>Outlook: Fair (education), Bad (health)</p> <p>Learning may rely on striving</p> <p>Weak in studies</p> <p>Not able to get to the heart of things</p> <p>Stresse</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Bad</p> <p>Lacing self-confidence</p> <p>Misinterpret others</p> <p>Not understanding social relations</p> <p>Narrow conceptions</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Donate gourd fritter</p> <p>Worship with red rose</p> <p>Feed food to fish and tortoise</p>
Friday-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers North</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others South</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business South</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way Southeast</p>	<p>In 1377, similar personalities will meet at an event at "West". Lose the way and reflection on misdeeds will happen. There might be lack of food. You might be trapped in a tricky situation regarding sensuality. The deed and the result will differ.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Big attachment, fewer egos</p> <p>Empathetic mind will bring the value of life</p> <p>Mutual understanding prospers</p> <p>Challenge life</p>	<p>Education and Health</p> <p>Outlook: Fair (education), Bad (health)</p> <p>Weak in studies</p> <p>Not worthy of education</p> <p>Good in contemplation</p> <p>Might get anaemic and weak in cardio</p>	<p>Economics and business:</p> <p>Outlook: Bad</p> <p>Not obvious in self-reliance</p> <p>Disputatious character</p> <p>Not caring for social atmosphere</p> <p>Not good with interpersonal Skills</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Offer fruits to monks</p> <p>Donate pickled tea leaves</p> <p>Worship with oil light</p>
Saturday-born	<p>Improve status, find trustworthy people for friends or helpers Southwest</p> <p>Influence power or command obedience from others West</p> <p>Become prosperous or see improvement in business Northeast</p> <p>Inauspicious; throw your trash this way North</p>	<p>In 1377, loads of dangers might happen due to fighting at "West". Power and authority might not be affected. Clever people tend to unscrupulous. Trustworthy people can betray. Hypocrites will influence this area.</p>	<p>Love and marriage</p> <p>Outlook: Fair</p> <p>Life partner may not be one you expect</p> <p>Both sides' parents have different ideas</p> <p>Fall in love with the nearest person</p> <p>Marriage brings responsibility</p>	<p>Education and Health</p> <p>Outlook: Fair (education), Good (health)</p> <p>Studying brings few gains</p> <p>Will to study is poor</p> <p>Good insight</p> <p>Fresh mind, optimistic, kind</p>	<p>Economics and business</p> <p>Outlook: Good</p> <p>Strict in principles</p> <p>Use time systematically</p> <p>Brilliant in forethought</p> <p>Good in interpersonal skills</p>	<p>Astrologer's advice</p> <p>Offer biryani</p> <p>Donate one umbrella</p> <p>Worship with victory leaves</p>

The show must go on

MT's Nay Zaw Aung Win talks to pandal organisers and customers about their plans and preparations

Ko Aye Chan, organiser, 2015 Barrack Water Festival, Kabar Aye

We do not have any special plans for the week before Thingyan. It is going to be just some workers and ticket sellers. And of course there will be music and that is not special because we do that every year. The sound system will be all set up by then. We have not hired the ticket sellers. The organisers are still talking about that issue. Right now, only the organisers are taking care of ticket-selling. We give a delivery service if someone orders more than five tickets. You can also purchase them online. I cannot even give you an estimation of how many tickets we expect to sell. Since we just got a permit from the government, we cannot really tell.

On the day before Thingyan starts, we are going to throw a party on the pandal. It will just be for the people who have booked their place on the pandal. We have not invited any celebrities for Thingyan yet.

Ko Si Thu, organiser, 2015 Channel-5, Pyay Road at 6 1/2 Mile

You can get tickets from any of us organisers, at the pandal or online. There are 10 organisers including me. Each of us has an allotted number of tickets to sell. The ticket prices are K59,000 for all days and K22,000 for just one day. We cannot really say how many tickets we expect to sell but we will set our limit soon. It has been confirmed that a total of 500 hoses will be installed.

We do not have any specific plans for the week before Thingyan. But we have started contacting the celebrities who might be interested in joining us during Thingyan. We have managed to get some of them to agree to the offer.

Htin Kyaw, pandal enthusiast

I still haven't decided which pandal I will be booking as I have been a little busy this year. But my friends and I have been making plans. Thingyan has always been the happiest time of the year for me since I was young. Last year my friends and I played at H20 pandal for the first two days. For the rest of the days we rented a truck, which could accommodate 10 of us in the back, to tour around Yangon. At the end of the days we had parties with my friends and neighbours.



Photo: Zami Phyo



Photo: Staff

William, pandal enthusiast

This is my best time of the year. I get to meet with all my friends and since Thingyan is a shared holiday, we can plan the fun together. On the last night of Thingyan, we go on a trip. Last year we went to Chaungtha beach and spent two nights there before coming back to Yangon. The last two days of Thingyan are intense but our social group has always been careful not to have fun in a wrong way. Alcohol is all you need to make a person wild and animalistic. Two years ago I saw a crime where an intoxicated man stabbed his friend in the arm.

Last year was the charm. For four days we threw water at the pandal, having our meals together and spending the nights singing karaoke. We got to meet with celebrities too. ■

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7



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9

What to do when splashing's not for you

Not everyone's enamoured with the antics of Thingyan – though it has its quieter pleasures

ZON PANN PWINT

MY defining Thingyan moment came one morning when I was 10 years old back in late 1990s.

After my father generously filled a big plastic container in front of our house with water on the pre-Thingyan (*A-Kyo*) day, I was feeling pretty keen. But our lane saw not one single person about at that hour – not even a dog.

It was boring. With no one else around, from time to time I splashed some water from the container onto my own face and feet, just for pretend.

Soon after, though, I saw a man coming down the lane. I got ready by scooping some water into my bowl and running to him. I threw the water at him. But only a small amount reached his feet, nothing more. Then I turned back.

All of a sudden, I was shocked as, with a bang, the full force of a water balloon exploded against me with a bang. It was really painful, the more so because it was so unexpected. I cried and ran into my house.

I will never forget that moment as long as I live. Because of it, I didn't feel like going out to throw water anymore. In fact, I didn't go out again until years later, when I was a teenager.

My Thingyan memories, then, are different than most people's. I don't feel nostalgia over splashing. However, I try to enjoy the holiday by listening to Thingyan songs on radio and tv, starting a few weeks before.

I also have fond memories of friends of mine – who also preferred staying in – visiting me and watching TV together. Thingyan songs and dances were broadcast every evening: We even got up and danced in front of the television. We were very happy.

I also came to look forward to the Myanmar traditional snacks that were delivered every day from neighbours. At least two or three kinds of foods would be brought over each day. The

traditional foods are *mont lon yay paw* (sticky rice ball with molasses inside), *moke let saung* and *kyauk kyaw* (sweets in coconut milk), and Rakhine rice vermicelli salad. We enjoyed sharing them together, joking with one other and anticipating what delicious treats would arrive the next day.

We also heard stories of what was happening outside: car accidents, often, and also instances where people had to be hospitalised due to heat stroke.

When I grew older, even my love of Thingyan songs waned, as I felt the newer versions that were coming out were not as pleasing as the classic versions. And while there are now



A water balloon exploded against me. It was really painful, the more so because it was so unexpected.

many movies relating to Thingyan, for me none compares to *Thingyan Moe* (Thingyan Rain) which was the very first movie about Thingyan.

Sometimes friends came to take me around town during Thingyan. But I don't like to be ambushed by high-pressure water from powerful pumps. I felt like my eyes and ears were being blown apart, like protesters were being dispersed with water cannon. It was like torture.

Maybe if water is poured gently, like in olden days, I might consider going out again. Until then, I prefer to stay inside – with a book, and a snack, and some friends. ■

Tranlation by Myo Lwin

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