



SANCTUARY  
RETREATS



*Your holiday guide to*

# MYANMAR



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YOUR HOLIDAY GUIDE TO MYANMAR



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*Your holiday guide to*  
**MYANMAR**

# MYANMAR

Set on the westernmost edge of Southeast Asia, Myanmar is one of the most physically diverse and beautiful countries in the region – if not the world.

With spectacular landscapes, a rich history and a profoundly Buddhist culture, it is a destination like no other, and a remarkable place to visit. The ancient capital, Yangon (once known as Rangoon) is the gateway to any Myanmar holiday. This is a city of cobbled streets, sleepy tree-lined avenues and crumbling moss-covered buildings that hark back to an era of Kipling and crumpets.

Myanmar's colonial trappings are remnants of over a century of uneasy British rule in Burma, between 1824 and 1948. Although independence was welcomed, it was not a smooth transition, as Burma's nascent democracy was quashed by the 'bloodless' coup of 1962, which heralded 50 years of socialist government by a military junta. During this time, Burma pursued a

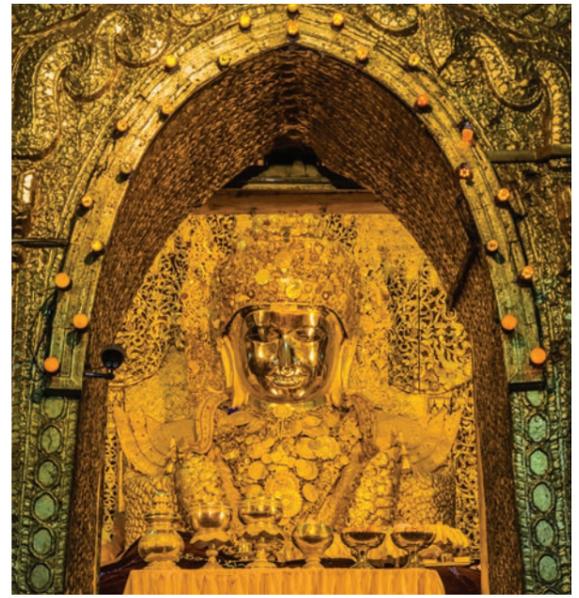
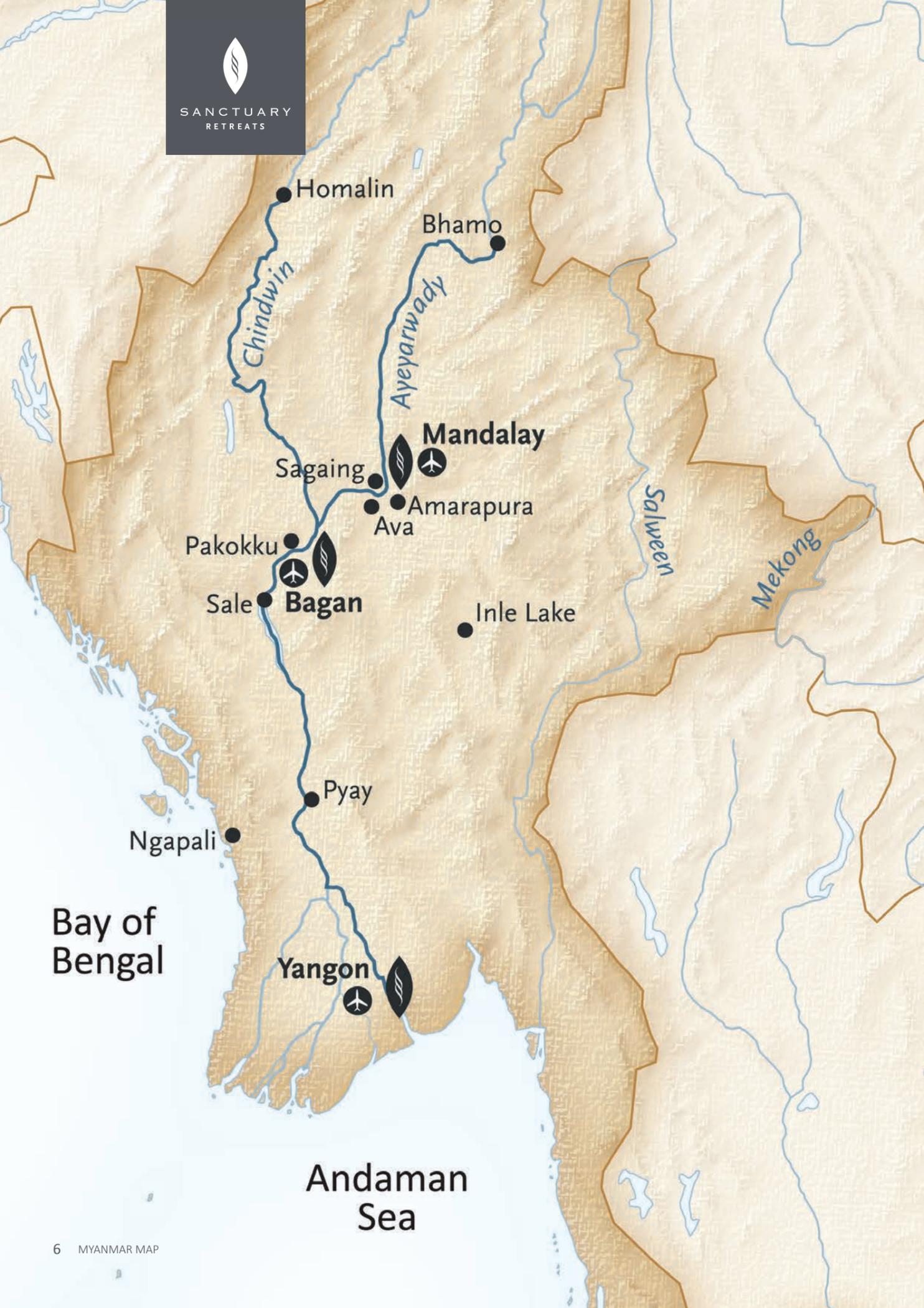
policy of isolation from the rest of the world, seriously restricting foreign visits and all but refusing to take part in international dialogue. For more than half a century, Burma was off the map as a holiday destination. This, however, is changing. Burma, renamed Myanmar in 1989, is beginning to turn its face to the world once more. In 2010, parliamentary elections were held, marking the start of a transition from military to civilian rule. Soon after the investiture of President Thein Sein, pro-democracy campaigner and opposition party leader Aung San Suu Kyi was freed after 21 years of house arrest. Although there is still dispute about the legitimacy of the election, speculation as to how much power the military actually has relinquished, and some political and religious tensions remain, it is undeniable that Myanmar is adopting a more progressive approach and the country is readying itself for a return to the world stage. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid a landmark visit in December 2011, followed by President Obama a year later – each of them meeting with both Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss Myanmar's place in the 21st-century community of nations.

Today, as sanctions are lifted and attitudes are changing, Myanmar presents the inquisitive traveller with a host of

temptations and intrigue. This densely forested country – the world's largest exporter of teak – is full of gems to discover, whether literal (it's rich in jade, pearl, ruby and sapphire), or figurative (its lush green landscape, punctuated by the majestic spires of thousands of ancient temples and pagodas). There are few true 'undiscovered countries' left in the world, but Myanmar could well be considered one of them. There's never been a better time to discover it.



*“This is Burma. It is quite unlike any place you know about.”* RUDYARD KIPLING



## GETTING TO MYANMAR

All foreign nationals arriving in Myanmar must have a tourist visa and at least six months' validity remaining on their passport from the date of their arrival.

Tourist e-visas, allowing a single visit of up to 28 days, may be applied for online at [www.myanmarvisa.gov.mm](http://www.myanmarvisa.gov.mm) for a US\$50 fee. The visa-approval letter is usually issued by email within five working days of application, and is valid for 90 days from the date of issue.

Upon arrival at immigration at Yangon airport, you will be required to present your approval letter, passport, return ticket and a 6cm x 4cm photograph taken within the last three months.

All other types of visa (including business and media visas) must be applied for through the Myanmar embassy in your country of origin.



## STAYING HEALTHY

Myanmar's hot weather can be tiring if you are out in the sun for a few hours or more, and dehydration can be a risk – particularly when visiting dry-zone areas such as Bagan and Mandalay. Ensure you drink plenty of bottled water; tap water is best avoided – even for brushing teeth.

Mosquitoes are common, especially in the evenings, so ensure you have – and apply – plenty of repellent. A small travel first-aid kit containing remedies for minor stomach ailments and motion sickness is advisable. Visitors should also ensure that an adequate supply of any prescribed medication required is accessible in their hand luggage.

Travellers with physical disabilities and those who require frequent or on-going medical attention should advise us of their health situation at the time of booking (Or afterwards, if the problem arises later).

We recommend you take out comprehensive travel insurance to ensure you are appropriately covered in the event of a medical emergency.

## TIPPING

Tips are not as widely expected in Myanmar as elsewhere in Asia – largely due to the relative youth of its hospitality industry. However, small sums as tokens of appreciation are generally received with gratitude, especially in parts of the country more accustomed to foreign visitors.

Tipping on board the Sanctuary Ananda is discretionary; however we are pleased to give you the following guide to tipping in Myanmar. All figures are in US dollars.

### Tipping on board

#### Guides

- \$5 per person, per day

#### Drivers

- \$2 per person, per day

#### Crew

- \$100 per cabin, per cruise

### Tipping pre/post-cruise (per person)

#### Local guides

- \$10 for a group of two travellers in the group
- \$8 for four

#### Drivers

- \$5 for two travellers in a vehicle
  - \$4 for four or more
- (For half-day tours, reduce the amount by 50% per person).

#### Airport transfer drivers

- The equivalent of \$4 per person per transfer

#### Room service/restaurant waiting staff

- \$2 per person per meal

#### Hotel porters

- \$1 per bag

#### Hotel housekeeping staff

- \$2 per person per night

#### Taxi drivers

- Tips are not expected, but rounding up the fare will be appreciated.

- Tips are usually awarded on the last day spent with the staff member.



## TALK THE TALK

The official language of Myanmar is Burmese or – as it's known officially but not as popularly – Myanmar. It is a tonal, largely monosyllabic language, with formal and informal registers, and a number of mutually intelligible dialects spoken in various regions of the country. The written language, Burmese script, consists of rounded letter forms (the palm leaves traditionally used to write on would have been torn by straight lines), with no spaces between words. Burmese script evolved from the Old Mon script of the 6th century, which was in turn developed from the Brahmi writing system of ancient India.

Although it is not as widely spoken, Pali, the language of Theravāda Buddhism, is commonly used in worship (often then translated), and a number of its words have found their way into everyday Burmese language.

As Myanmar is ethnically diverse, there are also dozens of minority languages and dialects, with around a hundred languages spoken across the country. Written English is taught as a second language in schools from an early age, although spoken English tends to be less fluent.

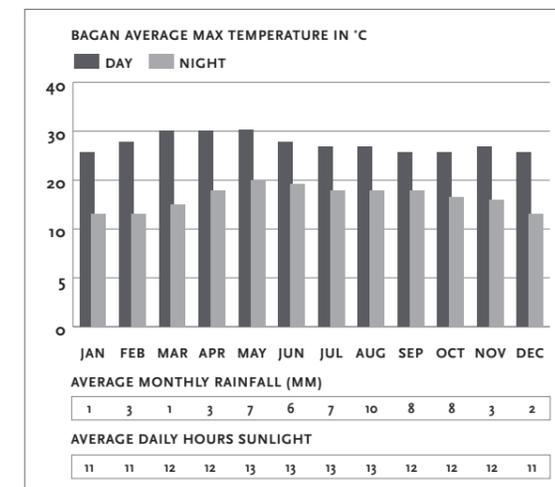
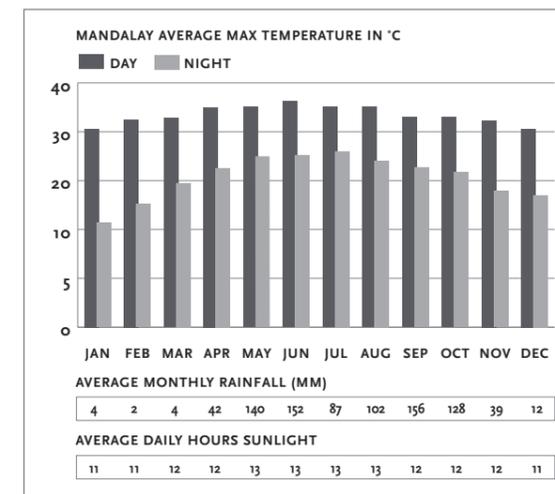
### Useful phrases

<i>Hello</i>	<i>min ga lar bar</i>
<i>How are you?</i>	<i>nay kaung lar</i>
<i>I am fine</i>	<i>kaung par dal</i>
<i>I am not fine</i>	<i>ma kaung bu</i>
<i>Thank you</i>	<i>kyay zu bae</i>
<i>Beautiful</i>	<i>hla dal</i>
<i>Goodbye</i>	<i>thwa-ba-oun-me</i>



## WEATHER

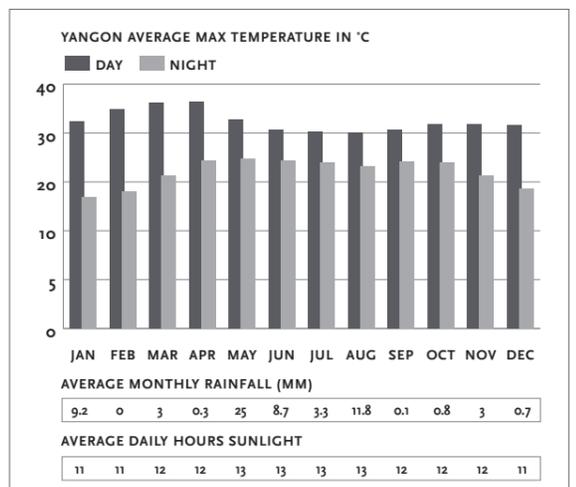
October through to February are known as dry season, when the temperatures are also slightly cooler. The highest temperatures occur between March and May, before the onset of the monsoon season from June until September.



## WHAT TO PACK

We want you to feel relaxed aboard our boat, but it's important to respect that Myanmar is quite conservative when it comes to dress, and when visiting temples or religious sites shoulders and knees must be covered. When spending time in public areas of the ship, please observe our suggested smart-casual dress code. Dinner in Talifoo restaurant is a more formal occasion, when gentlemen are required to wear long trousers, closed shoes and collared shirts, evening wear for females.

- Blouses/shirts with long sleeves for sun protection
- Cotton T-shirts and tops
- Fleece or jumper for cooler mornings and evenings
- Long trousers for the evenings
- Slippers or sandals – socks and shoes must be removed when visiting pagodas and monasteries
- Sun hats, sunglasses and sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent and prescription medicines



## MONEY

The Myanmar currency unit is the Kyat (pronounced 'chat'), subdivided into 100 Pyas. Most transactions are conducted in cash, and although Visa and MasterCard are becoming more widely accepted, traveller's cheques are not, and there are only a small number of ATMs in larger cities.

It would be sensible to inform your bank before travelling to Myanmar to avoid any issues arising during your stay.

### Foreign exchange

US dollars are accepted throughout the country, and travellers are advised to use them for most purchases (small denominations are best because change will be given in Kyat). Be sure to carry new, crisp bills as tattered or marked notes may not be accepted. You can change currencies in a few hotels, but the best rate will be in exchange offices in the main cities. The import and export of Myanmar Kyats is strictly prohibited.



## RELIGION & ETIQUETTE

There are a number of religions practised in Myanmar, although the most widespread, Theravāda Buddhism, is the de facto, if not official, state religion. With around 53 million practising Buddhists in a population of 60 million, and the highest proportion of monks to laymen of any country, Myanmar can claim to be the most Buddhist nation in the world. As well as Buddhists, there are around three million Christians, two million Muslims, 300,000 Hindus and a million people of other faiths. Myanmar's only synagogue is located in Yangon – a testament to the once-substantial Jewish population. Today, however, only around 20 Jews remain.

The phenomenal number of temples, pagodas and monasteries you see as you journey around the country provides striking visual evidence of Buddhism's influence on Myanmar.

Before entering any place of worship, it is customary to remove shoes and socks (wearing sandals will make this process easier). Appropriate dress should also be worn – avoid sleeveless tops, short shorts or above-the-knee skirts.

As in many other parts of Asia, in Myanmar, the head is considered the most sacred part of the body; the feet, the most taboo. Avoid touching a person's head, which is considered highly offensive, and do not present the soles of your feet to anyone, or use your feet to point. In addition, take care not to step over anyone sitting or sleeping on the ground, and be sure to apologise immediately if you do.

When giving and receiving things, use two hands to do so whenever possible – this will be interpreted as a mark of respect.

## LOCAL FOOD & DRINK

Myanmar's cuisine is strongly influenced by that of its neighbours in India, Thailand and China – although it is generally less spicy than Indian food, and not as hot as Thai. The unofficial national dish, especially for breakfast, is mohinga – a fish broth of rice vermicelli with onions, garlic, ginger, lemon grass and sliced core of banana-stem, served with boiled eggs, fried fish cake and deep-fried gourd.

Typical meals in Myanmar include meat or fish curries and steamed rice, often served with fried vegetables, dips and fresh or boiled vegetables with salty fish sauce. Salads (Athoke) are a popular fast-food option, and tend to be built around one main ingredient such as noodles or potato, mixed with baked aubergine, ginger and tomato or pickled tea leaves, garlic oil, peanuts, coriander and dried shrimp.

Meals are often served without drinks, but with a communal bowl of light broth. Outside meal times, the Myanmar drink of choice is green tea or still water.

Tropical fruit are abundant – durian, pineapple, mango, banana, avocado, papaya, pomelo, watermelon, mangosteen and rambutan are all enjoyed as desserts in themselves, and often available as freshly squeezed juices.



## SOUVENIRS

There are plenty of locally made handicrafts available to purchase as mementos or Myanmar, including colourful, painted parasols handmade from bamboo and cotton in the town of Patheingyi (Patheingyi Hti), hand-crafted silver jewellery, longyi (the comfy wraparound skirt worn by men and women), hand-loomed Shan shoulder bags, marionette puppets and cheroots, the cigars rolled by hand are sold in many markets.

Burmese teak lacquer ware (Yun-de) is highly prized for both its durability and the intricacy of its designs. The lacquer itself is the sap from the Thitsee tree, which grows abundantly in the forests of Myanmar. The process is long and complicated – a small box can take up to four months to create, while a larger piece of furniture might take as long as a year. The city of Bagan is famed as the centre of the art of lacquering, known as Pan yun.



## TIME ZONE

### Myanmar Standard Time:

- AEST – 3.5 hours
- AWST – 1.5 hours
- GMT + 6.5 hours
- CET + 5.5 hours
- EST + 10.5 hours
- PST + 13.5 hours

