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Be enchanted

KAYAH STATE



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HIGHLIGHTS

Join the pioneering spirits in the state's new journey

Places

Closed for over half a century, recently opened to visitors, and finally accessible by air and road, Kayah is one of Southeast Asia's last frontiers for inspiring, authentic travel. Its tranquil yet appealing capital, Loikaw, is usually the base for visitors whereas local villages and hamlets offer the perfect opportunity to understand the traditional, tribal way of life. While visiting the museum deepens knowledge of indigenous artifacts like the frog drum and tribal costumes, spending time with locals against a natural backdrop of forests and mountains enriches the soul. Visitors will enjoy breathtaking, unspoiled views, especially in the south.

People

Kayah was known as Karenni State until late the 1950s, before it was renamed Kayah State. Its various tribes and clans also spread into neighbouring states, this, coupled with its remoteness and incredible ethnic texture has endowed Kayah and its populace with a fascinating heritage of historical intrigue. Myanmar's smallest state is quite probably the most culturally diverse. Tourists can choose to simply enjoy local hospitality or delve deeper into its unique history by taking part in community-based tourism activities. Developed in select villages, they aim to enrich the visitor while also sustainably preserve the indigenous cultural heritage.

Traditions

Visitors will find Kayah's lush landscapes and weave of cultures visually enchanting but what truly sets the destination apart is the opportunity to experience the endearing warmth of the people, their sense of humour and passion to share their rituals, crafts and music. Immerse yourself in their traditions by going to an animist temple, visiting totems, seeing a hunting shaman and shrine, shooting a catapult or tasting some local wine and sausage. A forest trek is a must; the state is rich in teak and bamboo so such natural resources are often used to make musical instruments, cooking utensils, household items and handicrafts.





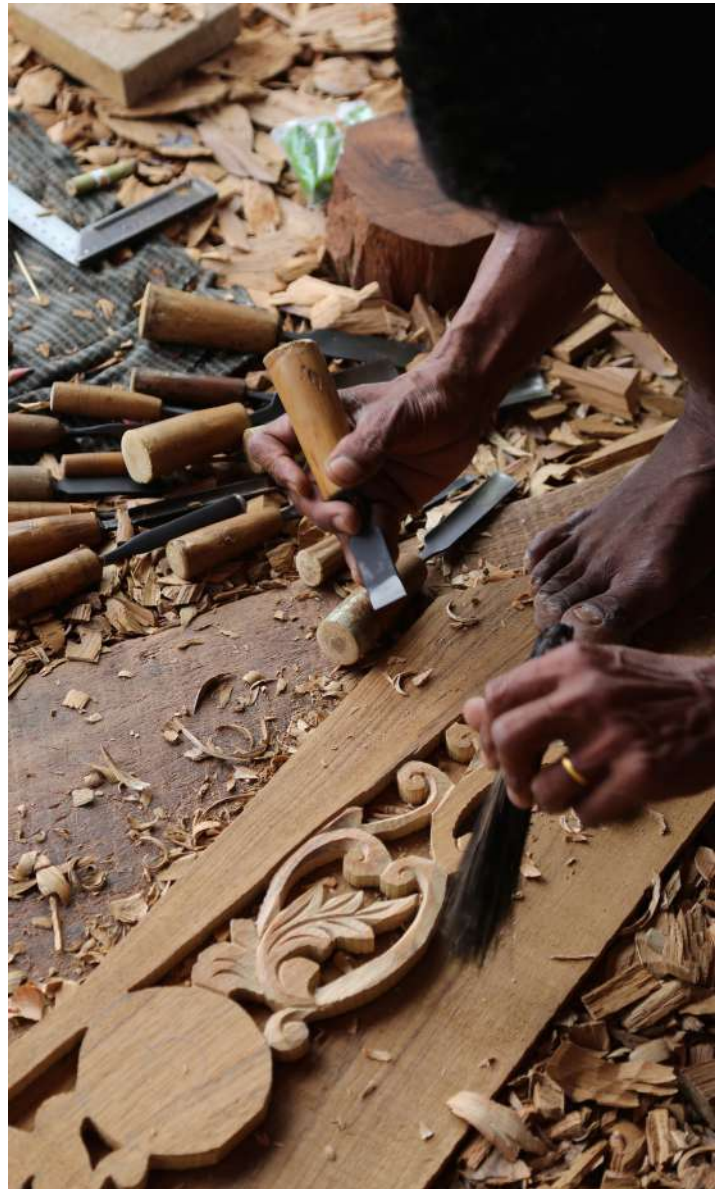
WELCOME TO KAYAH

A treasure trove of traditions and customs awaits discovery in Kayah State

Handicrafts play a key role in domestic, artistic and spiritual life. Unusual musical instruments are crafted from bamboo and other woods. Skilful villagers produce woven bamboo items like baskets and purses, use natural dyes and weave traditional fabrics on the loom. Visit local workshops to explore how indigenous products are made and purchase souvenirs. Many items are for sale, while others (like the frog drums) are considered highly sacred, and only played on special occasions.

If you visit during April you can witness the state's most important festival "Kayhtoboe Tagundaing", during which traditional offerings are made to the spirit guardian to request "peace for the region, fair weather and a successful, bountiful harvest, free from all dangers". In October "Kawhyin htoke" festival (glutinous rice wrapping) takes place. Kayah's cuisine is simple, fresh and healthy. Be sure to try local dishes including the Kayah sausage seasoned with Kayah pepper harvested in the surroundings of Demoso and Pan Pet villages coupled with some millet wine (known locally as "rice wine").





PLACES

Take the road less travelled and experience local hospitality

Whether you enjoy visiting established, cultural sites; or heading “off the beaten track” to explore market towns and villages, rubbing shoulders with local folk; Kayah’s colour and diversity will keep you interested. The joy of Kayah is its simplicity, authenticity and rich ethnicity. Village tribes delight in sharing their traditions with visitors.

Take time to slow down and watch the world go by, soak up the town’s relaxed atmosphere or meet village people. Be sure to sample some of their traditional delicacies like rice wine and sausage at the markets and local eateries. Alternatively you can enjoy the countryside by trekking, having a jungle picnic or a Kayah barbecue at the Seven Lakes.





Loikaw

The capital of Kayah state, Loikaw (named by the Shan people) describes the dividing point between two mountains: Shwe Taung and Thiri Mingalar Taung. Loi means mountain and Kaw means separate. The town's most iconic site is Taung Kwe Pagoda, also known as Broken Mountain, which offers stunning panoramic views of the urban area and surrounding mountains. The reclining Buddha, the colourful, bustling market, the museum, churches and traditional craft and product workshops are also worth visiting.

Nature

Kayah's landscape is a tapestry of fields, rolling hills and lush forests. Visitors can now enjoy soft adventure trekking, accompanied by local guides. These inspiring people have lived with the forest since childhood. Their deep knowledge of wild foods, natural dyes, herbal medicines, and local legends helps to bring the relationships between nature and local people alive, adding insight to adventure. Additionally there are scenic lakes, waterfalls and caves to visit many of which remain very rural and untouched.

There a number of natural and embellished caves worth visiting around Kayah State. Aung Tha Pyay Cave is located near Htee Se Kha Waterfall and features 10 sitting Buddha statues. Kyat Cave 19km from Loikaw is an impressive limestone and dolomite cave where ancient wooden coffins can be found. The highly sacred Lwel Ta Mu Cave has 15 pagodas and 254 statues.

Villages

Exploring local communities is, for most visitors, the highlight of their trip to the state of Kayah. The villages of Daw Ta Ma Gyi, Hta Nee La Leh, Htay Kho and Pan Pet offer vibrant contrasts of customs, costume, languages and local dishes. Each provides amazing insights into tribal ethnic cultures, Daw Ta Ma Gyi and Hta Nee La Leh into the Kayah way of life, Pan Pet into Kayan and Htay Kho, Kayaw. Villagers can be shy at first but if you take time to share in their way of life you find they are gentle, fun-loving, friendly folk.



PEOPLE

A rich, colourfully authentic fabric woven from diversity and hospitality

Kayah state is home to nine distinct ethnic groups, which diversified and evolved from Karen culture. The biggest groups are the Kayah, Kayan, Bre, Lahta, and Yinbaw. Many tribes still practice their indigenous customs, handed down for centuries and dress in their traditional costumes. The Kayah are well known for their bright, red attire. The Kayan are one of Southeast Asia's most recognisable ethnic groups, due to the practice of wearing bright, brass neck rings. This practice continues to this day but is becoming a rarer occurrence.

Traditionally animists, the people of Kayah paid their respects to spirits, through various rituals and sophisticated ceremonies known in Kayah as "Kayhtoboe". In return for protection, and to appease these spirits in the event of misfortune, villagers would offer animals and food. Today, it is more common for families to follow other faiths like Baptism, Buddhism, Catholicism and Christianity. This religious diversity means tourists can observe local festivities, like Christmas, Easter, Buddhist New Year and Lent as well as Animist harvest festivals.





TRADITIONS

Discover customs preserved by isolation, rugged terrain and pride

For travellers seeking a deeper connection, Kayah's charm is experienced in the warmth, friendly curiosity and passion of the people who are proud to share their fascinating traditions and way of life including local crafts, artistry, music and tribal costumes. There is a rich heritage of beliefs known as "Kayhtoboe" and legendary forest skills around which activities revolve.

Take the nature trail, forest trek or artisans' trail with local villagers as guides. Sample local cuisine at a "jungle picnic", participate in a Kayah barbecue by the scenic lakes or make your own Kayah sausages. Any trip to the state gives visitors the opportunity to enjoy rare cultural insights and experiences as well as encourage locals to continue to preserve long-held customs.







Myanmar with its cities and neighbouring countries

Destination: Kayah State

Destination Climate: Mild - generally warm & temperate

State Borders: Shan State, Kayin State & Thailand

State Size: 11,670 sq km / 4,506 sq miles

State Capital: Loikaw

State Population: 286,627 (2014)

Destination Lineage: 9 different tribes including Kayah, Kayin and Kayan (Padaung), but primarily inhabited by the Kayah group (also known as Red Karen), a Sino-Tibetan people

Destination Languages: Kayah Li, Myanmar/Burmese & limited English

Religions: Christianity (mostly Catholicism & Baptism), Buddhism & Animism

How To Get There: Kayah, Myanmar's smallest state, is packed with diversity and potential for 'off the beaten track' experiences. To the north, Kayah borders Shan State; to the east, Thailand; to the south, Kayin/Karen State; and to the west, Kayin State. Newly opened to tourists, most visitors arrive in Loikaw, the state capital, by air from Yangon; by boat or road from Inlay Lake; or by road from Heho airport.





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