

Information for Foreign Meditators at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery (“Pa-Auk Tawya” in Burmese) is a Buddhist monastery in the Theravada tradition, with emphasis on the teaching and practice of both samatha (tranquillity) and vipassana (insight) meditation. The number of residents varies seasonally from approximately 500 to 1,000

– this includes more than 100 foreign monks, nuns and lay practitioners, coming from more than twenty different countries. All are here to practise meditation under the guidance of the Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, the abbot and principal teacher at this monastery.

This document provides you with an outline of the monastery’s basic requirements and services, plus it tells you how to get here.

Arrival

- Pa-Auk Forest Monastery is divided into the Upper, Middle and Lower Monasteries. Upon arrival, foreigners must register at the following locations: male residents – the Registration Office for Foreigners in the Upper Monastery; female residents – the Lower Monastery Office.

In General

- Meditators must strictly observe the fourfold purification during their stay here. This purification consists of:

(1) The 227 rules of the Patimokkha for Theravada monks; the 10 precepts and 75 Sekhiya (training) rules for novices; and the 5, 8 or 10 precepts for laypersons and nuns.

(2) Restraint of the six sense faculties – restraint of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

(3) Purification of livelihood (Right Livelihood) – livelihood that accords with the precepts.

(4) Reflection on (and moderation in) the use of the four requisites – food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

Daily Schedule

3:30 am Wake-up

4:00~5:30 am Morning Chanting & Group Sitting

5:45 am Breakfast Pindapata
(approximate) (Exact time of Pindapata depends on the time of dawn)

7:00~7:30 am Cleaning & Personal Time

7:30~9:00 am Group Sitting

9:00~10:00 am Interviews, Walking Meditation & Personal Time

10:10 am Lunch Pindapata
(approximate)

1:00~2:30 pm Group Sitting

2:30~3:30 pm Interviews & Walking Meditation

3:30~5:00 pm Group Sitting

5:00~6:00 pm Interviews, Work Period & Personal Time

6:00~7:30 pm Evening Chanting & Dhamma Talk (in Burmese)

7:30~9:00 pm Group Sitting

Meditation

- Everyone must attend the group sittings at their respective meditation hall. Group sittings are held at the following times: 4:00-5:30 am, 7:30-9:00 am, 1:00-2:30 pm, 3:30-5:00 pm and 7:30-9:00 pm.

- Interviews with Pa-Auk meditation teachers are an important aid to one's practice. New arrivals should come for an interview every day (or make a suitable arrangement that accords with their meditation teacher's schedule).

- Meditators must practise according to the instructions of their meditation teacher.

Smoking, Drinking and Drugs

- Smoking, drinking, chewing tobacco or betel nut, and the

use of recreational drugs are strictly forbidden. If you use any of these items, please dispose of them before entering the monastery.

- There are no exceptions to this rule. If you break this rule, you will be asked to leave.

Diet and Pindapata

- Meals are offered in the Pindapatasala (alms hall). Please arrive for pindapata at the following times:

- Breakfast – 5:30-6:00 am (depending on the time of dawn)
- Lunch – 10:00-10:15 am

- The kitchen prepares a vegetarian diet only; no special diets are offered.

- Boiled and filtered drinking water are available at various locations throughout the monastery.

What to bring

Theravàda bhikkhus need to bring the obligatory set of three robes: under robe, upper robe, and double robe, and an alms bowl. Other necessary items may be obtained/borrowed from the Sangha office.

Lay yogis may bring the following:

- suitable clothings- light and easy-to wash type, slippers/sandals, a jumper, socks and maybe a sleeping bag for the colder periods of the rainy/cold seasons
- a large umbrella, meditation mat and cushion (if yogi has preference)
- a set of eating utensils, mosquito net, insect repellent, a canteen for water
- toiletries (+ spare razors), dental floss, washing powder/detergent, torch/batteries, alarm clock, writing paper/envelopes, 10-12 (or more) passport size photos (for visa extension), a spare pair of prescription glasses
- medicine, vitamins/health supplements

- sufficient financial means to meet all expenses other than food (special food excepted) and lodging, which is provided free of charge by the Monastery.

Attire

- Theravada monks and novices should wear only allowable robes, slippers, etc. Robes must be kept clean. Highly colourful robes (red, bright yellow, etc.) are not acceptable.

- Lay practitioners should dress modestly at all times:

Men – no bare shoulders, no bare calves, no bare knees; no shorts, no sleeveless shirts, vests or undershirts; no ripped or otherwise improper attire.

Women – no bare shoulders, midriff, calves or knees; no short skirts, no shorts, no sleeveless shirts or blouses; no thin, transparent, tight, revealing, brightly coloured or otherwise improper attire.

Medical Care

- There are quarters for the sick and a clinic, with a resident doctor. A local doctor trained in Western medicine visits once a week; another trained in traditional Burmese medicine visits once a fortnight.

Climate

Myanmar enjoys a tropical climate with three seasons: a hot season (March - May), a rainy season (June-October), a cold season (November-February). Temperatures at Pa-Auk range from 15 -40 Centigrade.

International Mail

- Excessive correspondence can disturb meditation. Please keep your correspondence to a minimum.

- Outgoing mail should be left in the Outgoing Mailbox at the

Pindapasala; incoming mail can be picked up on the table next to the Outgoing Mailbox. It is best for important incoming and outgoing letters to be registered.

- International parcels must be picked up in Yangon. Please check at the Lower Monastery Office to see if they can suggest someone to do this for you.

- To protect incoming parcels against loss or damage, all international parcels should be insured. Ask the sender to mail you a copy of the insurance form.

- Be aware that parcels are subject to customs formalities, censorship and duties.

International Telephone Calls

- You can use the telephone in the Lower Monastery Office for incoming calls – service is intermittent and low quality. You will need to go outside the monastery to make outgoing calls; international calls are expensive and must be paid in US dollars.

E-mail/Internet

- Permission to send/receive e-mail is granted on a case-by-case basis.

Monastics and Money

- Theravada monks, novices and 10-precept nuns are not permitted to use, handle or possess money in any form: cash, credit cards, cheques, electronic transactions, gold, silver, jewellery, etc. Monastics who carry their own funds must relinquish them PERMANENTLY before taking up residence in the monastery. There are no exceptions to this

rule. (For those monastics with allowable requisite funds, see below.)

- Monastics with allowable requisite funds must arrange for the proper transfer of requisites from their previous location to the Pa-Auk kappiyakaraka (steward; hereafter referred to as “kappiya” for short) or other such person. Transfer of funds MUST follow the prescribed procedure in the Vinaya (please refer to the Patimokkha, Nissaggiya Pacittiya rules 10, 18, 19 & 20).

- If you come to the monastery as a layperson and decide to ordain, you must make proper arrangements for your funds before ordination; this can be done through the monastery kappiya.

Availability of goods

General basic daily essentials may be available at shops outside the Monastery, or at Mawlamyine. Imported goods generally come from China, India and Thailand. More sophisticated goods may be available in Yangon, but the range is likely to be limited.

Visa Application/Extension, etc.

- If you plan to stay at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery for more than one month, you will need a Pa-Auk Sponsorship Letter in order to apply for the appropriate type of visa (either an entry or meditation visa). You can obtain a Sponsorship Letter through a Pa-Auk Contact Person or by writing to the monastery, attention: U Kundadhana or U Candima. With the Sponsorship Letter, you have two options: you can apply for your visa at the Myanmar Embassy in your home country or you can apply in Bangkok, on your way to Myanmar. Be aware that the visa application process in your home country could easily take up to a month or

longer. If you apply in Bangkok, providing you arrive at the embassy early enough in the morning, you can usually pick up your visa the next day (same-day for a surcharge).

- Once you get to Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, you can apply for a three-month, six-month or one-year visa extension (stay permit). Payment for your extension can be arranged through the monastery kappiya. He will need 9 passport photos plus sufficient requisite funds in US dollars. Dollar bills must be in good condition: worn, torn, nicked, marked or questionable bills are unacceptable.

- Please be aware that visa extension regulations and costs are subject to change. Current cost of a one-year visa extension is US\$90. The visa extension should be applied for as soon as possible after arrival in Myanmar. After that, applications for further extension should be made at least two months before the expiry date of the visa extension.

- If you are a Theravada monk, novice or 10-precept nun, the monastery will try to cover your expenses, but if the fees are in US dollars, the monastery's Burmese dayakas (donors) will be unable to pay. So, to be safe, it is best for a dayaka of your own to make arrangements with a local kappiya to handle the financial side of the extension fees.

- If you stay longer than three months, you must obtain a Foreigner's Registration Certificate (FRC), and when you leave, a Departure Form. Please apply for the FRC at least one month in advance.

For the latest news on visa applications and extensions, please contact Daw Amy at attbbpp@myanmar.com.mm. Contact information for the Myanmar Embassy in Singapore is listed below:

Singapore

Embassy of the Union of Myanmar

15 St Martin's Drive, Singapore 257996

Tel: (65) 67350209 • Fax: (65) 67356236

Open: 9:30 am - 12:30 pm, Monday – Friday

Those wishing to stay longer than 3 months must apply for a "Foreigner Registration Certificate" (FRC). Extension of stay beyond the initial visa period may be applied for with an existing meditation visa; extension of up to 12 months may be granted (although the extension actually granted may be shorter than that). It is to be noted that the regulations pertaining to visa do change from time to time, and the fee and the period granted for visa extension may vary consequently. If your stay in Myanmar exceeds 1 month, a "Departure Form" has to be completed and submitted on leaving the country.

Sponsorship

- A sponsorship letter grants permission for you to reside at this monastery – nothing more. All financial requirements (including medical, dental, transportation, visas, FRC, departure forms and other requisite items) are your personal responsibility. Please arrive with SUFFICIENT FUNDS (IN US DOLLARS) for the duration of your stay.

- If your visa was obtained with a Pa-Auk Sponsorship Letter, this means you have agreed to stay at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery for the visa's duration. To use an entry/ meditation visa for sightseeing and tourism would constitute an abuse of the privilege granted to you by the Sponsorship Letter and could create problems for the monastery.

Suggested Items to Bring

- The following list of suggested items was compiled by foreign meditators here: 10-12 passport photos; vitamin and

herbal supplements; herbal teas; light, comfortable, easy-to-wash clothing; dental floss; toiletries; towel; talcum/medicated powder; large umbrella; earplugs; water resistant sandals; torch/flashlight; battery-powered alarm clock; mosquito repellent; yoga mat (if you practice yoga); spare glasses and copy of your prescription; get dental work done before coming. Most everyday-items can be obtained locally, name brands excluded; voltage here is 220V.

Climate

- There are three seasons in Myanmar: a hot season (March-May); a rainy season (June-Oct.); and a cold season (November-February). Temperatures range from 15° to 40° Centigrade (59° to 104° Fahrenheit).

How to Get to Pa-Auk Forest Monastery from Yangon

(Yangon > Mawlamyine > Pa-Auk > Mudon)

- Mawlamyine is 301 kms (187 miles) southeast of Yangon, and the monastery is another 14.5 kms (9 miles) southeast of Mawlamyine. Air-conditioned overnight buses to Mawlamyine/Mudon depart daily from the highway bus station in Yangon. You can buy tickets along the south side of Aung San Stadium, opposite the central train station.

Note: If you take the Mudon bus, ask the driver to let you off at "Pa-Auk Tawya" (the bus goes right past the main gate of the monastery on the way to Mudon).

- Travel options include a weekly flight to Mawlamyine and a new train service (not yet in operation) that will go direct from Yangon to Mawlamyine. If you take the train, be sure to go first class.

- Contact persons in Yangon can help you get to the monastery.

Major holidays/festivals

The services of government offices, commercial shops, banks, and public transportation are sometimes affected by major holidays/festivals. Yogi may wish to avoid traveling on such days.