

Myanmar (Burma)

Country name	Myanmar (Burma) ¹
State title	Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Name of citizen	Burmese
Official language	Burmese (<i>mya</i> ²)
Country name in official language	မြန်မာ (<i>Myanma</i> , literary language); ဗမာ (<i>Bama</i> , colloquial)
State title in official language	ပြည်ထောင်စုသမ္မတမြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော် (<i>Pyidaungzu Thammada Myanma Naingngandaw</i>)
Script	Burmese
Romanization System	Romanization of Burmese , though see below for information on its application
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	(MM/MMR)
Capital (PCGN recommended form)	Nay Pyi Taw
Capital in official language	နေပြည်တော် (<i>Nepyidaw</i>) ³
Population/Area	55 million/676,552 sq km (UN data)

Introduction

Myanmar (Burma) lies in southeast Asia, sharing land boundaries with China to the northeast, Bangladesh and India to the northwest and Laos and Thailand to the east and southeast. It has an ethnically diverse population (see more in *Language and Administrative structure*). Having achieved independence from British rule in 1948, Myanmar (Burma) has had mostly military rule and significant political unrest since, most recently seen in the military coup reverting to an authoritarian regime in February 2021.

Geographical names policy

PCGN policy for geographical names in Myanmar (Burma) is multi-faceted largely because of competing sources and information (and in some cases a lack of information) from the country

¹ See page 2 for details of country name.

² ISO 639 codes are given for the languages mentioned in this Factfile. Some of the minority languages are only encoded according to their language family or grouping, rather than having a specific code (e.g. Kuki-Chin-Naga, a grouping of Tibeto-Burman languages including the three named languages and others besides), so these are not included here.

³ Yangon (Rangoon) was formerly the capital of Myanmar (Burma). The government relocated to Nay Pyi Taw in 2006, but Yangon remains the country's largest city and most important commercial centre. The name of the capital is sometimes written as one word, i.e. Naypyitaw. (The form shown in brackets in the table is the romanization, see also footnote 4.)

itself. More information about the considerations and development of this policy is available on request from PCGN but in summary, the policy is to use Roman-script sources as described below for place names in Myanmar (Burma), rather than applying the BGN/PCGN romanization system for Burmese. Burmese practice has been to issue laws and documentation, including mapping, in two parallel editions, Burmese and English, the English versions showing *ad hoc* Roman-script spellings rather than romanizations. These “English” spellings are quite frequently dissimilar to the romanized Burmese forms⁴. Since officially-produced Roman-script names are available, it is felt that to romanize Burmese-script names is to risk coming up with a second spurious set of Roman-script names, which does nothing to aid standardisation. Furthermore, the romanization system is difficult to apply successfully without knowledge of the language.

The preferred sources for names are as follows: for the region/state, district and township (i.e. ADM1, 2 and 3) names, the names supplied by Burmese government sources⁵ in English. (State/region names appear in the *Administrative structure* section. District and township names are available on request.) Smaller populated place names, and physical feature names can be found on Burmese Survey Department (BSD) mapping or East View Geospatial 1:50,000 series of Burma (2008)⁶, or detail may be requested from PCGN. The maps available to download at the [Myanmar Ministry of Tourism](https://www.myanmar.gov.mm/tourism/) website are also a useful resource, though the spellings are unlikely in all cases to match the BSD mapping.

Country name

The country name advised by PCGN is **Myanmar (Burma)**; this dual form is an interim presentation with the intention to move to Myanmar alone in due course. More information can be supplied on request. It may be noted that the US Government continues to advise the form Burma, so US sources and information will use this name.

The name ‘Myanmar’ was introduced as the country’s preference as the English-language name in 1989 in the Adaption of Expressions Law (Law 5/89). The significant name changes specified in this law may be seen in Myanmar (Burma)’s submission to the UN in 2002: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/8th-uncsgn-docs/inf/8th_UNCSGN_econf.94_INF.75.pdf (names of ADM1s and their centres subject to the changes made in the law are also listed in footnote 9). More information and background are available in the PCGN paper: *An Introduction to the Toponymy of Burma*, see Useful references below.

Language

The official language of Myanmar (Burma) is Burmese (*mya*), spoken by the majority ethnic group (Bamar, or Burman) and as an additional language by speakers of the approximately 100 minority indigenous languages. The principal minority ethnic groups are those of the titular states (see *Administrative structure* below), their languages being Shan (*shn*); Chin; Kachin; Karenic variants (*kar*) encompassing Kayin and Kayah; Mon; Rakhine (or Arakanese). There are additionally 6 self-administered zones and districts, some of which constitute second-order administrative divisions, which are also the titular areas of smaller minority groups.⁷ A useful

⁴ A manifestation of this is the Burmese authorities’ use of the form Nay Pyi Taw in English for the capital of Burma. The Burmese for this city is နေပြည်တော်, which is romanized Nepyidaw, according to the BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Burmese.

⁵ The East View mapping reflects the geographical names on the BSD mapping.

⁶ Full series available at the British Library.

⁷ Danu, Kokang, Naga, Palaung, Pa-O, Wa

illustrative [map](#) of the minority languages of Myanmar (Burma) has been produced by the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU).

Burmese is written in Burmese script, which shares origins with other writing systems but has evolved to be a unique alphabet. It is an abugida, in which a vowel is contained as a default feature of the consonant, or marked by diacritical marks on the base consonants. Most of the minority languages use Burmese script or a variant of it.

PCGN and BGN have developed a romanization system for application to [Shan](#) geographical names. Shan is the most widely-spoken minority language in the country, with over 3 million speakers. More information can be supplied on request. It should be noted that, as for the romanization system for Burmese itself, this system is not applied to derive the names for HMG use, unless specifically required.

Rohingya people, the persecuted Muslim minority formerly resident in Rakhine state, but now mostly displaced in Bangladesh, speak the Rohingya language (*rhg*), a language close to dialects of Bengali.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings⁸):

The **BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Burmese** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script (shown with the appropriate Unicode encoding). Note though that the Roman-script spellings encountered on Burmese official sources are unlikely to include any diacritical marks.

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
È	00C8	è	00E8
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4

The **BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Shan** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script (shown with the appropriate Unicode encoding).

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
Ā	0100	ā	0101
Ě	0114	ě	0115
Ñ	00D1	ñ	00F1
Ö	014E	ö	014F
Ö	00D6	ö	00F6
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC

⁸ See www.unicode.org

Administrative structure

Myanmar (Burma) is divided into 7 regions (တိုင်းဒေသကြီး *taingdethakyi*); 7 states (ပြည်နယ် *pyinè*) and 1 union territory (ပြည်တောင်စုနယ်မြေ *pyidaungzu nème*) at the first-order level (ADM1). Broadly, the regions are ethnically Burman and the states, majority non-ethnically Burman. Though a federal structure has been desired by ethnic leaders, wishing to allow the divergent cultures a certain autonomy whilst maintaining the nation-wide federal union, the military leadership has feared that this would lead to disintegration, and has reduced the autonomy of all the divisions, retaining the central government control. Additionally, there are five *self-administered zones*⁹ and one *self-administered division*¹⁰ (five in the area of Shan State and one (Naga) in Sagaing Region). The zones are essentially administered by central government and the division is autonomous. Though the status of these areas differs from ADM2s (districts across the country), they are not ADM1s *per se* and have not been included in the list below.

Administrative division (Roman script with English generic)	Administrative division (Burmese)	ISO 3166-2 code	Centre (Roman script)	Centre (Burmese)	Coordinates of centre
Ayeyarwady Region	ဧရာဝတီတိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-07	Pathein	ပုသိမ်	16° 46' 45" N 94° 43' 56" E
Bago Region	ပဲခူးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-02	Bago	ပဲခူး	17° 20' 07" N 96° 28' 53" E
Chin State	ချင်းပြည်နယ်	MM-14	Hakha	ဟားခါး	22° 38' 40" N 93° 36' 39" E
Kachin State	ကချင်ပြည်နယ်	MM-11	Myitkyina	မြစ်ကြီးနား	25° 23' 11" N 97° 23' 40" E
Kayah State	ကယားပြည်နယ်	MM-12	Loikaw	လွိုင်ကော်	19° 40' 41" N 97° 12' 35" E
Kayin State	ကရင်ပြည်နယ်	MM-13	Hpa-An	ဘားအံ	16° 53' 22" N 97° 38' 05" E
Magway Region	မကွေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-03	Magway	မကွေး	20° 08' 58" N 94° 55' 57" E
Mandalay Region	မန္တလေးတိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-04	Mandalay	မန္တလေး	21° 58' 11" N 96° 05' 15" E

⁹ Danu, Kokang, Naga, Pa Laung and Pa-O self-administered zones.

¹⁰ Wa self-administered division; sometimes referred to as Wa State.

TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

Administrative division (Roman script with English generic)	Administrative division (Burmese)	ISO 3166-2 code	Centre (Roman script)	Centre (Burmese)	Coordinates of centre
Mon State	မွန်ပြည်နယ်	MM-15	Mawlamyine	မော်လမြိုင်	16° 29' 26" N 97° 37' 42" E
Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory	နေပြည်တော်	MM-18	Nay Pyi Taw	နေပြည်တော်	19° 44' 42" N 96° 07' 47" E
Rakhine State	ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်	MM-16	Sittwe	စစ်တွေ	20° 08' 46" N 92° 53' 54" E
Sagaing Region	စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-01	Monywa ¹¹	မုံရွာမြို့	22° 06' 30" N 95° 08' 30" E
Shan State	ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်	MM-17	Taunggyi	တောင်ကြီး	20° 47' 21" N 97° 02' 16" E
Tanintharyi Region	တနင်္သာရီတိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-05	Dawei	ထားဝယ်	14° 04' 25" N 98° 11' 39" E
Yangon Region	ရန်ကုန်တိုင်းဒေသကြီး	MM-06	Yangon ¹²	ရန်ကုန်	16° 48' 19" N 96° 09' 22" E

¹¹ Sources appear to indicate Monywa as the centre of Sagaing Region. It is difficult to confirm this authoritatively, or to verify when this larger town became the centre, replacing Sagaing.

¹² The June 1989 “Adaptation of Expressions Law” (Law 15/89) that altered the country name in an English language context also altered a number of other names of significant cities and features in the country. Amongst these was Yangon as the preferred name for the previously used Rangoon. Rangoon may still be encountered on older sources and some colloquial references will still use this spelling. Other name changes included: Bassein to Patheingyi; Pegu to Bago; Tavoy to Dawei; Karen to Kayah; Moulmein to Mawlamyine; Prome to Pyaw; Arakan to Rakhine; Akyab to Sittwe and Tenasserim to Tanintharyi. (A longer list is included in the PCGN paper: *An Introduction to the Toponymy of Burma*, see Useful references below).

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Approved Name	Location	Feature Type
Andaman Sea	10° 00' 00"N 95° 00' 00"E	sea
Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy)	15° 50' 00"N 95° 06' 00"E	river
Bay of Bengal	15° 00' 00"N 90° 00' 00"E	bay
Chindwin	21° 28' 49"N 95° 17' 20"E	river
Gamlang Razi	28° 18' 21"N 97° 28' 04"E	mountain
Gulf of Mottama (Gulf of Martaban)	16° 18' 00"N 96° 51' 54"E	gulf
Hkakabo Razi	28° 20' 00"N 97° 32' 00"E	mountain
Manaung Island (Cheduba Island)	18° 48' 08"N 93° 38' 20"E	island
Mount Saramati	25° 44' 24"N 95° 02' 15"E	mountain
Mouths of the Irrawaddy	15° 41' 53"N 94° 49' 39"E	river mouth
Thanlwin (Salween)	16° 31' 00"N 97° 37' 00"E	river
Shan Plateau	22° 00' 00"N 98° 00' 00"E	plateau

Useful references

- BBC country profile (no longer maintained): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12990563>
- BGN/PCGN Romanization of Burmese: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693688/ROMANIZATION_OF_BURMESE.pdf
- BGN/PCGN Romanization of Shan: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693772/ROMANIZATION_OF_SHAN.pdf
- Burmese Survey Department: <http://www.surveydepartment.gov.mm>
- CIA World Factbook country profile: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burma/>
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Travel Advice <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): <http://www.iso.org>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui>
- Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) [map](https://mimu.org/) of minority languages: [Ethnologue Map Main Spoken Languages of MyanmarNeighbour MIMU1300v02 27Nov2017 A1.pdf](https://mimu.org/Ethnologue_Map_Main_Spoken_Languages_of_MyanmarNeighbour_MIMU1300v02_27Nov2017_A1.pdf)

- Myanmar Ministry of Tourism (maps): www.tourism.gov.mm/maps/
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- PCGN paper *An Introduction to the Toponymy of Burma*, 2007: [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\]](#)
(nationalarchives.gov.uk)
- Unicode www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: <http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html>

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