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Mandalay

## TRAVEL

## Burma's Strand Cruise begins

*On a languid journey along the Irrawaddy River, the new Strand Cruise reveals the core of Burma in exceptional comfort*

BY JOHN O'CEALLAIGH

DECEMBER 24, 2015 12:14

It has been a momentous year for [Burma](#) and perhaps one of the best places from which future visitors can observe and consider the changes so dramatically altering the country will be on [a languid cruise along the Irrawaddy River](#) (also known as the Ayeyarwady River). Lined by tiered pagodas, ancient temples and isolated villages, it bisects the country and cuts a 1,348-mile route that stretches from the snow-capped Himalayas to the Indian Ocean. [Plenty of cruise companies already serve the route](#), but having set sail for the first time this week, the Strand Cruise offers a level of comfort and quality that few others will be able to rival.

Named after its sister property, the Strand Hotel in Yangon, the cruise ship is set to offer three and four-night itineraries between [Bagan, one of the world's greatest archaeological sites](#), and Mandalay for a maximum of 54 passengers in 27 air-conditioned en-suite cabins. Whichever





The Strand Cruise rooftop pool

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category guests might book they'll find floor-to-ceiling windows with Juliette balconies and will enjoy a 24-hour butler service, but most appealing are the 40sq metre Strand Suites. Guests here will be pampered with complimentary spa treatments, transfers and a gratis night at the Strand Hotel either before or after departure.

Finished in teaks and decorated with gold leaf, common areas and shared facilities are impressive too. Lined by loungers and with a cabana to the side, an outdoor pool takes centre stage on the sun deck; spa treatment rooms overlook the river; and a reasonably well-equipped gym is there for those who need it. It's likely, though, that the top deck bar, where passengers can try Burmese wines alongside more customary cocktails, will prove more popular. Meals – either Burmese dishes inspired by the region through which the ship is sailing or international options - will be served in the Strand Restaurant, on the sun deck or in guests' rooms.

But the biggest draw of all is of course what guests will encounter beyond the confines of the ship itself. Excursions will see visitors explore the royal cities



One of the ship's cabins

[Enlarge](#)

of Mingun, Amarapura and Ava by horse-drawn cart; take in landmarks such as the U Bein bridge - a rickety wooden walkway that stretches for over one kilometre across Taungthaman Lake; and marvel at the enduring beauty of the country's innumerable temples and monasteries.

And for those lazy hours between activities, observers who while away their time peering at the riverbanks should be rewarded by sightings of thatched homes raised on stilts,

bullock carts and ox-ploughs, and everywhere enduring vestiges of a way of life that has remained unchanged for so long but may not last much longer.

*Travelling between Mandalay and Bagan, three-night low-season trips on The Strand Cruise cost from \$1,782 per person based on double occupancy; four-night tours cost from \$1,976. Rates include excursions, board and WiFi.*

#### THE STRAND CRUISE

[www.thestrandcruise.com](http://www.thestrandcruise.com)