

A Jeep Safari from Yenangyaung

It was Sunday, the 22nd of February, when we started out on a safari into the desert hills of the Dry Zone. We had a goal, and the goal had us. Hsale, Sale, Hsalay? All we knew was to expect a group of hilltop temples / pagodas overlooking the Ayeyarwady . A hint in a travel book served as an idea. We erred in indistinguishable dirt roads. Local people we expected must know. Did they? It was after many round trip excursions. dead-ends, bumpy hiccups and many well-meant tips that a local guide took us to the hilltop wonder.



Three dozens of temples of smaller or larger size drew us into an unexpected world of an assortment of hills overlooking the Ayeyarwady. The beauty : No wandering tourists, no waste. The drawback: We had become beduins, covered with dust, collected from our rough road experience. But the sites compensated us. We wandered around the temples, walked inside and discovered wall paintings as intricate and beautiful as can only be seen in famous Bagan. They are said to be from the Bagan era, 13th century and have some mahayana motives. We could admire them close up, well preserved, colorful, powerful. It must have been a place of significant importance. Of course, much of the 41 temples are in disrepair. But, nobody was there to disturb us, no watchman to prevent us, no entrance fee to be paid, no hawkers to follow us.

The quality und intricacies of the wall paintings surpassed by far our expectations. We became to treasure what we saw was very, very special. Words cannot express our delight.

We spent our time. Eventually we had to pull ourselves away, expecting another back-testing, dust-eating return. But our pickup guide led us another way until we reached his little village (Odo?). Shortly thereafter we stopped at a river, ca. 50 meters wide. Eric, our never timid friend and leader stepped out of the pickup car, rolled his pants up off and tested various depths. "We have a diesel engine" he proclaimed. "Get into the pickup " he ordered us." We need weight" was his reasoning. Well, we did, and ... expected everything from a rough across to a swim. The pickup pressed, tracked, jumped, and made it through.



From then on there was a road, well sort of. But it was better than before. It was close to Yenangyaung that Eric stopped the car. He let us step out and invited us for a yogurt. Mhmmmm. What a delight. We had once mocked at the idea of Eric adding a swimming pool at Gentle Breeze. Now we are ready to welcome his vision as a befitting addition to an experience we will never forget. PMJ
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