architecture was that there were hardly any multi storied buildings – a total contrast from Dhaka's landscape. Most of the buildings were two or three storied. We could see some 6-7 storied buildings, and only a few high-rises. So the city looked less cluttered and the sky was easily visible. We visited the big lake surrounded by pretty gradens in the middle of the city and saw many people come for walks or exercises, or men, women, young and old walk leisurely, enjoying the park. The weather was not too warm; the sky was clear and there was a cool breeze blowing across.



We visited a 100-year-old market place, named Bogyoke Aung San market, named in honour of the famous Myanmar General Aung San. This market was originally named Scott Market, after a British Municipal Commissioner, Mr Scott. It was famous and very popular, fairly big, with more than 1,600 shops. There were all kinds of shops, selling garments, jewelry, paintings, food, wood and ivory carvings, lacquerware, silverware, brassware, shoes and sandals, handicrafts, souvenirs and so on. The most impressive were the jewellery and precious stones shops. They were selling rubies and emeralds along with many other types of rare stones. Most of the shops had women salespersons and we found out that many of the shops were family-run.

A visit to one of the biggest Buddhist temples in the world, the Shwedagon Temple (Golden Dagon Temple), located in the heart of Yangon, seemed incumbent for anyone visiting Yangon. Shwe in Myanmar language means 'gold' and Dagon is the name of hill on which the temple is located. This is a 2,600-year-old temple. We had seen many Buddhist temples around the world, but this one was gigantic and awe-inspiring. In one of the temples, there was a huge, larger-than-life, golden Reclining Buddha. It was a full-moon day so there were thousands of people who came in the evening to pray and make offerings. Everything was so serene and peaceful. People were sitting inside and outside the temples, quietly praying; some were just walking and observing; many were with their family members and children; some young men and women were busy taking each other's pictures. There were seven Buddhist white marble statues around the main temple, each dedicated to a day, i.e. Sunday, Monday etc. These statues were all garlanded. People born on a particular day of the week, would go to the statue of that day, put garlands on the Buddha and pour water on him and they were supposed to wish for something. Most were wishing for the good of their family and life. A small queue could be seen in front of each statue. Children looked most excited.

We had the pleasure of enjoying a Myanmarese traditional cultural programme in a restaurant which was on two huge decorated boat-like structures beside a large park, floating on the river. The performers sang and danced in traditional costumes to traditional music.

On the third day, we flew out of Yangon to Bagan. Bagan is simply beautiful. It is a city of a couple of hundred thousand people, located in the North from Yangon. The flight time is about 1 hour 15 minutes by small turbo-prop aircraft. Bagan is home to the largest and densest concentration of Buddhist temples, monasteries and stupas in the world with many dating from the 11th and 12th centuries. We came to know that stupas were solid and temples were hollow with Buddha statues inside, in monasteries monks lived and were trained and educated. There is an eleven-storied modern tower with a lift. We went up there and saw a spectacular panoramic view of the whole city of Bagan, and up to the horizon on all sides you could only see temples. More fascinating was viewing the sunset from up there.

As the sun was going down, the gorgeous city was bathed in orange-yellow sunlight. The different light and shade of the evening, the amber colours changing as the sun was setting was spectacular. We came to know that there are more than 2,000 such structures in Bagan spread over the whole area.

We stayed in a Bagan resort right by the river Irrawaddy. The resort had one-story cottages around the area, each with two-bedroom suites. There was also an outside seating area with reclining seats and a beautiful garden around the cottages by the river bank. In the evening, the natural beauty was calm and very peaceful. One could write poetry there!

We came back to Yangon by a 'hopping' flight, which touched the airports of Mandalay and Heho. We had thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Yangon and Bangan and it had been definitely worth taking advantage of the new Biman-Bangladesh route.

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