



From Pilgrimage to Leisure Travel: The Historical Evolution of Domestic Tourism in Myanmar



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[*Abstract*]

This study examines the historical evolution of domestic tourism in Myanmar, tracing its progression from traditional Buddhist pilgrimage to contemporary leisure-centered travel. Historically, religious devotion characterized the travel landscape; however, the 1996 Visit Myanmar Year campaign signified a crucial transition towards varied recreational activities and the development of secular destinations. Despite the significance of these transitions, a scholarly gap remains regarding the long-term historical development of Myanmar's domestic tourism sector. Drawing on colonial-era literary sources, this paper argues that the transformation of domestic tourism was not a sudden postcolonial phenomenon but was rooted in the shifting economic and administrative conditions of the colonial period. Specifically, it identifies pagoda festivals as a critical transitional phase where religious practice began to incorporate commercial activities, social entertainment, and modern infrastructure. By analyzing how these festivals reconfigured pilgrimage into a multifaceted experience, the study demonstrates that the boundaries between the sacred

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and the secular in Myanmar's travel culture have long been fluid, laying the essential foundation for modern domestic leisure tourism.

Keywords: Domestic tourism, Myanmar, Buddhist pilgrimage, pagoda festivals, leisure travel tourism

I . Introduction

While Western contexts have long dominated global travel discourse, Asian tourism has expanded rapidly in recent years, garnering significant academic attention. Existing research has extensively covered Asian domestic tourism, international travel trends, and intra-Asian mobility.

Traditionally, pilgrimage was the principal form of travel for Buddhists across Asia (Chan Khoon San 2001: 12). Since the early colonial period, groups of Myanmar Buddhists had travelled to pagoda festivals using bullock carts and boats in both Upper and Lower Myanmar. Along with the development of modern transportation, pilgrims extended their journeys to sacred sites such as Pagan and Mandalay in Upper Myanmar and the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon and Kyaikhtiyo in the Mon region in Lower Myanmar. These journeys were both for purposes of devotion and entertainment. After the launch of the Visit Myanmar Year campaign in 1996 by the State Law and Order Restoration Council, new tourist destinations emerged across the country and domestic tourism began to shift from religious pilgrimage to leisure travel (Aung Zaw 2007). Despite this burgeoning literature, a critical gap remains regarding domestic tourism in Myanmar.

To trace this historic evolution, the paper examines colonial travel literature, identifying pagoda festivals as a transitional juncture in Myanmar tourism history. These sources provide rich evidence of how colonial-era religious festivals facilitated the shift from traditional pilgrimage to a recognizable form of domestic tourism, thereby laying the foundation for modern leisure travel. Through close reading, this paper argues that these religious festivals

served as a pivotal phase in the evolution of the nation's domestic tourism sector.

II . Pilgrimage in Myanmar

2.1. Pilgrimage

Before tracing the evolution of domestic tourism in Myanmar, it is instructive to examine the definition of pilgrimage within the Indian context, as it shares a common cultural and religious lineage with Myanmar's Buddhist traditions. A comprehensive definition of "pilgrimage" is provided in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (Second Edition, Volume 10) as follows:

A religious believer in any culture may sometimes look beyond the local temple, church, or shrine, feel the call of some distant holy place renowned for miracles and the revivification of faith, and resolve to journey there... Whatever the site or culture, the general features of a pilgrim's journey are remarkably similar (Jones 2005: 7145).

The middle stage of a pilgrimage is marked by an awareness of temporary release from social ties and by a strong sense of *communitas* (community, fellowship), as well as by a preference for simplicity of dress and behaviour, by a sense of ordeal, and by reflection on the basic meaning of one's religion. Movement is the pilgrim's element, into which she or he is drawn by the spiritual magnetism of a pilgrimage centre (Jones 2005: 7145).

This definition suggests that pilgrimages serve two primary purposes: first, journeying to distant holy sites for religious reasons; and second, a temporary releasing from social ties, fostering a sense of community and reflection. Therefore, pilgrimage can also be seen as a means of temporarily escaping everyday life's social and environmental pressures, particularly in crowded and polluted urban areas.

Bharati's paper, "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition," published in the *History of Religion* in 1963, offers a detailed account of the pilgrimage tradition in India, where Buddhism flourished.

Bharati's research indicates that while the Vedas highlight the benefits of travel, it was only in the Purana texts that pilgrimage was recognized as a religious practice in Hinduism. Around 200 BC, the law teacher Gautama preached that those visiting mountains, rivers, or temples could absolve sins (Bharati 1963: 137). However, Hindu pilgrimage regulations were formalized in the third century A.D. with the creation of the Matsya Purana. Bharati's study also shows that Hindu pilgrimage sites possess rich topography, hagiography, and mythology elements (Bharati 1963: 146).

In contrast, Bharati asserts that pilgrimage is not a mandated religious obligation for Buddhists according to the canonical texts of the Pali tradition. Although Buddhist texts neither prohibit pilgrimage nor insist upon it, he suggests that early Buddhist pilgrimage practices were centred on visits to stupas (*ceti*), which are monuments containing the relics of the Buddha. This tradition of visiting the Buddha's relics after his *Mahaparinibbāna* (final passing) is believed to be the origin of Buddhist pilgrimage practices (Bharati 1965: 152). However, he also points out that the custom of Buddhist monks visiting pagodas likely arose from the Buddhist regulation prohibiting the establishment of a permanent dwelling place. (Bharati 1965: 152).

Therefore, while pilgrimage has distinct doctrinal statuses in Hinduism and Buddhism, both traditions have developed rich practices centered on travel to sacred places. In the case of Myanmar, this shared heritage invites a closer look at how pilgrimage evolved as a religious tradition but also as a social experience.

2.2. Pilgrimage in the Inwa Period

One of the most celebrated travel poems in classical Myanmar literature is *Shwesattawthwatawla* (The Verse on the Pilgrimage to Shwesattaw Pagoda), composed by the monk Venerable Maha Rahtatharra approximately 600 years ago. The poem narrates his journey from the Inwa capital to the Shwesattaw Pagoda, located near Sattawya Village in Minbu District, Magwe Region. The pagoda is believed to enshrine the two sacred footprints of the

Buddha, which are believed to have been imprinted during one of the Buddha's visits to Myanmar (Tin Shein 1983: 187). These footprints are the focus of pilgrimage and worship at the site. The pagoda is situated deep in a forested and remote area. The mythical significance of the Buddha's footprints, combined with the distinctive topographical and hagiographical elements of the site, fulfils the classical criteria of a pilgrimage destination.

The *Shwesattawthwatawla*, composed by the monk Venerable Maha Rahtatharra, provides profound insight into the landscape, motivation and spiritual meaning of travel during the Inwa Period (1365-1555). To understand the early intersections of pilgrimage and nature, a summary of the poem's thematic structure is presented below:

The first stanza illustrates the spiritual intent of the travelogue. The poet establishes the religious foundation of the journey, framing the pilgrimage to the Shwesattaw Pagoda as a pursuit of spiritual liberation. He posits that honoring the Buddha—revered throughout the universe for the teachings leading to Nirvāṇa—is the ultimate motivation for the traveler (Uttamakyaw and Rahtatharra 1967: 31). The second stanza offers a lyrical depiction of the natural landscape. The poem details a dense, blooming geography where trees are so thick with blossoms they appear to touch, and the journey unfolds through mist-covered hills and deep valleys (Uttamakyaw and Rahtatharra 1967: 31-32). The third stanza depicts the aesthetic resonance of the poem. Here the poem focuses on the delightful atmosphere created by the sounds of the forest. The resonance calls of birds and wild animals are described as a harmonious farewell to the pilgrim, illustrating a deep emotional and aesthetic appreciation for the natural world that accompanies the act of devotion (Uttama Kyaw and Rahtatharra 1967: 32-33). The fourth stanza records the perseverance and arrival of the pilgrim. The final section portrays the pilgrim traveling into twilight. Depicting encouraging dust, the poet emphasized a steadfast determination to reach the sacred site, capturing the physical endurance required for pre-modern travel (Uttama Kyaw and Rahtatharra 1967: 32-33).

Up to the end of the Inwa Period, evidence suggests that Buddhist pilgrims in Myanmar visited sites endowed with similar attributes, rich mythological narratives, saintly associations, and distinctive landscapes. The journey undertaken by Venerable Maha Rahtatharra and his uncle, for example, included not only spiritual devotion but also an appreciation of the natural environment or temporary liberation from the daily life in the Inwa capital of the Myanmar Kingdom. Their pilgrimage, therefore, may be interpreted as both a religious act and a contemplative retreat into nature. This dual experience suggests that before the colonial era, Myanmar's pilgrimage culture has not yet been diverted from the original purpose of the pilgrimage.

Ⅲ. Pivotal Role of Pagoda Festivals in the Colonial Period

The evolution of domestic tourism is a complex phenomenon that sits at the intersection of religious practice and colonial administration. This section examines colonial travel literature, identifying pagoda festivals as a transitional juncture in Myanmar tourism history. By analyzing how these festivals reconfigured pilgrimage into a multifaceted experience, the study demonstrates how colonial-era religious festivals facilitated the shift from traditional pilgrimage to a recognizable form of domestic tourism, thereby laying the foundation for modern leisure travel.

3.1. Discourse on the Transition

Early scholarship often treated pilgrimage and tourism as mutually exclusive activities. However, Smith (1992) challenged this binary, suggesting a sacred–secular continuum. He argues that the tourist, a secular vacationer, and the pilgrim, a religious traveler, share a common quest for authenticity and otherness. In the Buddhist context, going to pagoda festivals in the colonial period had always contained elements of social recreation alongside merit-making. This study builds on this by examining how the pagoda festivals in the colonial period accelerated the

move toward the secular end of this spectrum.

The work of Victor Turner (1969) is central to understanding the social engine of the pagoda festival. He defined pilgrimage as a liminal process—a threshold experience where travelers leave their mundane lives behind. When a group of people goes through this liminal period together, *communitas* emerges within this space, allowing for a unique form of social bonding that transcends class.

3.2. Colonial-Era Literature on Domestic Travel

By examining literary accounts and firsthand recollections, this small section proves that the pagoda festivals served as a transitional phase in the evolution of domestic tourism; they also included events encompassing commerce, entertainment, and socialization.

The transition reflects broader shifts in Myanmar's society under colonial influence, including the commercialization of religious events and the expansion of travel infrastructure. Festival attendees during the colonial period were often motivated not only by religious devotion but also by the opportunity to watch performances, trade goods, and engage in leisure. As the *Encyclopedia of Religion* notes, such festivals also provided a temporary release from daily social obligations and became occasions for recreation and business. A striking feature of the colonial-era pilgrimage was group travel. Large caravans of pilgrims journeyed by boat or bullock cart to pagoda festivals. Unlike the more solitary journeys of earlier centuries, these trips were often lively social occasions. Pilgrims participated in group activities, purchased goods, and enjoyed local entertainment.

Three Myanmar literary sources are selected to be scrutinized in this study to examine how Buddhists in Myanmar celebrated pagoda festivals during that time. Two pieces are essays that reflect the personal experiences set during the colonial period, entitled Shwedagon (Shwedagon Pagoda) and Anya Phayapwe (Pagoda Festival in Upper Myanmar), extracted from *Gndaloka Magazine* (the World of the Book), published in

1936 and 1934 and composed by Theikpan Maung Wa (science student Mr. Wa), a pen name for U Sein Tin, an Oxford-educated sub-divisional gazette official of the British colonial government. The other is an autobiographical account by U Chantha, another Oxford-educated officer who was in high-level administrative positions both in the colonial period and the independent period. These texts, written by British-educated Burmese elites, offer detailed descriptions of travel and festival life, capturing the hybrid nature of pilgrimage during the colonial era.

3.3. Commercialization of Ritual in Pagoda Festivals

In the essay Anya Phayapwe (Pagoda Festival in Upper Myanmar), Theikpan Maung Wa reflects on his visit to the Kuthinayon Pagoda Festival in Salin, Magwe region, in 1936. The essay describes the joy experienced by pilgrims in the celebratory atmosphere in the pagoda festival (Maung Wa 1965b).

Maung Wa emphasizes that pagoda festivals have become both religious ceremonies and temporary economic hubs. Festivalgoers lived in temporary shelters made from bullock carts and engaged in land transactions and other commercial activities. Some attended the Kuthinayon Pagoda festival not only for the festivities but also to lease or sell farmland, taking advantage of the opportunity to register their contracts at the Salin Town Hall (Maung Wa 1965b: 174). Market stalls sold a variety of goods from religious paraphernalia to clothing, and circuses, theater performances, and food stalls also came with the celebrations (Maung Wa 1965b: 174-176). Therefore, the pagoda festival functioned as a multidimensional event encompassing spiritual, economic, and social dimensions. These transformations reflect the influence of colonial economic systems and administration, which reshaped the traditional functions of religious festivals in Myanmar. In other words, pagoda festivals in the colonial period transformed sacred spaces into centers of trade and entertainment. This essay shows how a temple became a site for economic transition during the pagoda festival.

3.4. Liminality and Communitas among Festivalgoers

The sense of liminality and *communitas* can be studied in U Chan Tha's essay and Theikpan Maung Wa's other essay; that group dancing and playing musical instruments were common practices on the way to pagoda festivals during the colonial era.

In the first chapter of his autobiography, U Chantha recalls childhood memories of traveling by bullock cart with his parents to the Shwesattaw Pagoda Festival. The narrative describes caravans of people from neighboring villages and towns, many led by monks. Festival attendees brought food and clothing, spare parts for potential cart breakdowns, and straws from their homes for the cattle to eat at the camp (Chantha 2018: 20). Several caravan parties carried musical instruments, and people sang and danced during their journeys for relaxation and enjoyment. Some contemporary monks travelled with record players, playing dramas and songs at various locations during the day and night. Many festivalgoers experienced great joy during this period (Chantha 2018: 20-24). This source throws light on many festivalgoers being in that in-between state together; a special bond formed.

The narrative of group pilgrimage in Upper Myanmar indicates that group dancing and playing musical instruments were common practices during the colonial era, paralleling similar festivals described in Theikpan Maung Wa's subsequent essay on the Shwedagon Pagoda festival in Lower Myanmar. Although attending a pagoda festival was still a pilgrimage, the journey became an occasion for dancing and musical performances, setting it apart from traditional pilgrimage practices. While the destination remained sacred, the journey itself had become an occasion for entertainment. This blend of devotion and leisure marks a key transition in how pagoda festivals were celebrated and perceived during the colonial period.

In 1934, while working as a deputy commissioner, Maung Wa wrote the essay Shwedagon (Shwedagon Pagoda). He incidentally encountered an elderly Karen man during his visit to Aywe Village

in Nyaungdong Township, Ayeyarwaddy Division. In this essay shared by an elderly Karen man during a visit to Aywe Village, Theikpan Maung Wa portrays the liminal process and the state of *communitas* of the festivalgoers.

The narrative was adapted to depict the older man's childhood journey to the Shwedagon Pagoda Festival with his companions. The older man, aged 86 at the time of recounting, had attended the festival when he was approximately 20 years old, situating his experience around 1848, roughly 16 years after the British occupation of Lower Myanmar (Maung Wa 1965a).

The Shwedagon Pagoda Festival is held annually in Yangon during Taboung, the 12th month of the Myanmar calendar, typically between January and February. The festival attracts people from cities and villages throughout the Irrawaddy Division, and from neighboring areas in Yangon Division. These festivalgoers travel by boat and cart from locations such as Myanaung, Hinthada, Zalon, Zagakyi, Danuphyu, and Nyaungdon (Maung Wa 1965a: 155). The essay highlights how festivalgoers from Lower Myanmar attended the Shwe Dagon Pagoda Festival, bearing a striking resemblance to the Anya Phayapwe in Upper Myanmar.

The story's central theme is the pilgrimage of the older man and his companions to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda Festival. The older man recounted that during Taboung, Yangon hosts the Shwedagon Pagoda festivals each year. Generally, Buddhists from far and near, and residents from cities and villages along the Irrawaddy and Panhlaing rivers, went to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda Festival. Festivalgoers engaged in singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments during their journey. They also brought their food, stopping at convenient locations to cook and eat (Maung Wa 1965a: 155-156).

The narrative vividly describes the journey, emphasizing the participants' joyful experiences even before the festival. It depicts food preparation and communal dining scenes, evoking the pleasure of cooking and sharing meals during the pilgrimage. This writing allows readers to empathize with the youth attending the festival (Maung Wa 1965a: 155-156).

The article also details the accommodation for the pilgrims, those who are traveling by bullock cart, like attendees of the Kuthinayon Pagoda festival at Salin. They constructed temporary homes using bullock carts with elongated roofs. Food-related aspects are prominently featured, as restaurants play an integral role in pagoda festivities in Myanmar. The elder Karen's retellings include the pilgrims' purchases and dining experiences at these eateries (Maung Wa 1965a: 156).

Maung Wa's account captures not only the physical journey but also the emotional and cultural experiences of those who participated in the Shwedagon Pagoda Festival. It reflects the hybrid nature of colonial-era pilgrimage, rooted in religious tradition but open to secular pleasures.

3.5. Scared-Secular Continuum in Domestic Tourism

In his seminal work published in 1882 titled *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, J.G. Scott observed key changes in Myanmar's festival culture during the colonial period. He made three critical points. First, the boundary between pilgrimage and tourism was increasingly blurred. Second, festivals held near urban areas spoil the national character of the festival. Third, modern entertainment, such as merry-go-rounds and horse-drawn hack carriages, were becoming common features of pagoda festivals (Scott 1882: 212; Michalon 2008: 125). These observations align with Maung Wa's essay written in 1936, which vividly illustrates the social atmosphere of the pagoda festival, best understood through Turner's concepts of liminality and communitas.

As previously discussed, on their way to the pagoda festivals, festivalgoers were in an in-between state, and they were in the state of communitas who enjoyed their pilgrimage singing songs, dancing, and listening to music and dramas. These practices in which religious festivals were celebrated and underwent significant transformation. Alongside these changes, it can be observed that traditional pilgrimage practices rooted in Buddhism also began to shift from being primarily religious and tradition-oriented journeys to increasingly taking the form of leisurely travel experiences.

IV. Domestic Tourism Development in Myanmar

Domestic travel among Myanmar Buddhists became increasingly common, with pagodas remaining among the most popular destinations. Many travelers chose to stay in rest houses or monasteries, continuing a tradition rooted in religious pilgrimage. However, as transportation infrastructure improved, Myanmar Buddhists began to travel more frequently and widely visiting pagodas. As early as 1900, four prominent pilgrimage destinations were recognized: Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay, Shwesattaw in the Magwe region, and Kyaikhtiyo in the Mon region (Ferrar 1990; Michalon 2008: 125).

As pagoda festivals became seasonal travel opportunities, the scope and purpose of domestic tourism began to shift. While pilgrimage remained a central theme, leisure gradually emerged as a primary motivation for travel. This shift was catalyzed by broader changes in Myanmar's economy, transportation systems, and governance. Over time, domestic tourism moved beyond its religious origins and embraced forms of travel increasingly shaped by leisure and recreation.

4.1. Pilgrimage in Contemporary Myanmar

Today, most of Myanmar's population identify as Buddhist, and religious travel remains deeply embedded in the country's cultural life. Traditionally, Buddhist pilgrims have traveled to pagodas located not only in cities but also in remote hills and forests, with many of these religious monuments such as pagodas, and monasteries, donated by kings, queens, nobles, and laypersons across centuries. These sites continue to function as centers of daily worship and annual festivals are important destinations for spiritual journeys.

In contemporary Myanmar, the term *phayaphu* (pilgrimage) is still widely used to describe domestic religious tours. Even when the main objective is not overtly religious, travel agencies and local groups commonly refer to their excursions as *phayaphuaphwe* (pilgrimage tour groups), and their buses are

often labeled *phayaphucar*. Therefore, although the line between tourism and pilgrimage has blurred, religious terminology persists.

In many cases, these pilgrimage tours are organized by local travel agents offering group trips to sites such as Inlay Lake, Pagan, and Pindaya. These trips are often led by a guide or tour leader and combine sightseeing with spiritual activities like offering prayers at sacred shrines. According to a report published in *Global New Light of Myanmar*, there are now approximately 600 registered domestic pilgrimage companies operating in Myanmar, highlighting the scale and institutionalization of this form of travel (*Global New Light of Myanmar* 27/11/2023).

The continued use of the term *phayaphu* may reflect more than just linguistic habit. On one hand, it suggests that domestic tourism in Myanmar remains closely tied to its religious roots and has not yet fully transitioned into a secular leisure industry. On the other hand, the expansion of travel destinations and increasing popularity of non-religious tourism activities since the 2000s suggest that change is well underway.

4.2. New Tourism Landscape and Leisure Travel

Myanmar's domestic tourism landscape began to diversify rapidly following the launch of the Visit Myanmar Year campaign in 1996. This government-led initiative encouraged the development of new tourist sites, including public parks, beach resorts, and other natural retreats (Aung Zaw 2007). As these options became available, domestic tourists, especially affluent and middle-class urban dwellers, began seeking leisure experiences that diverged from traditional pilgrimage practices.

Western tour operators and travelers have looked for fresh, alternative, more exciting, and exotic locations away from the crowded, overdeveloped resorts of Europe and North America (Teo and Chang 1998: 120; King 2008: 1). This trend reflects the growing influence of global tourism patterns. The increase in travel destinations in the 2000s attracts both domestic and foreign travelers. Parks and beaches are the newly created

alternative travel destinations in Myanmar. Increasingly, Myanmar citizens are drawn to the kinds of travel associated with relaxation, like trends observed in neighboring countries.

Today, many domestic tourists prefer day trips or weekend getaways to parks and coastal areas, especially those close to Yangon and Mandalay. Notable beach destinations include Ngapali in Rakhine State, as well as Chaungtha and Ngwesaung in Ayeyarwaddy Region and Maungmagan in Mon State (Global New Light of Myanmar 1/10/2024). Goyangyi Island, off the Tanintharyi coast, has also become a popular resort destination offering activities such as swimming, beach volleyball, and seafood dining (WorldPress 13/4/2017).

Public parks are also attracting more local tourists. For instance, the famous Botanical Garden of Maymyo, located between Central Myanmar and the Shan Hills. It is now a popular site for leisure, particularly during seasonal flower blooms and pleasant weather (Inside Asia n.d.).

These developments illustrate a growing demand for non-religious travel options. The emergence of beaches, resorts, and botanical gardens as alternative destinations signals a departure from the pilgrimage-centric model of earlier centuries. Although the language of pilgrimage still lingers, the essence of Myanmar's domestic tourism has expanded to include diverse experiences shaped by relaxation, recreation, and lifestyle preferences.

This shift is supported by academic studies. Michalon (2018), in his article "Domestic Tourism and Its Spatiality in Myanmar: A Dynamic and Geographical Vision," acknowledges the enduring influence of religion in shaping the geography of domestic travel but also emphasizes the growing diversification of travel motivations. Similarly, Lubeigt's doctoral dissertation raises a provocative question: what draws most visitors to pagoda festivals—the religious rituals, commercial fairs, or entertainment? He concludes that affinity for the strictly religious aspect has become secondary, further reinforcing the idea of a hybrid pilgrimage-leisure travel model (Lubeigt 2000; Michalon 2008: 126).

Existing research reveals that the boundary between pilgrimage and leisure travel is increasingly blurred. While religious rituals still hold significance, they have become secondary to other motivations such as entertainment and relaxation.

V. Conclusion

During the Inwa Period, travel was defined as a spiritual contemplative engagement with nature, as evidenced by Maha Rahtatharra's poem. However, the British colonial era marked a critical turning point. Drawing on colonial-era literary sources, this paper argues that the transformation of travel was not a sudden postcolonial phenomenon but was rooted in the shifting economic and administrative conditions of the colonial period. Specifically, the works of authors like Theikpan Maung Wa and U Chantha reveal that pagoda festivals served as a transitional phase, reconfiguring solitary devotion into large-scale social events that integrate trade, modern transportation, and communal entertainment.

These festivals function as the foundational architecture for modern leisure travel, a trend that accelerated with the Visit Myanmar Year of 1996 to include secular destinations like beaches and national parks. Today, the traditional term *phayaphu* encompasses a multi-layered experience where religious rituals often coexist with, or become secondary to, recreation and relaxation. On the other hand, the increasing commercialization of rituals presents a new challenge. As sacred traditions are packaged for the tourism market, the deep spiritual meanings of certain rites risk being overshadowed by economic convenience. The rise of food stalls, cloth shops, and farm product shops reflects how the market entered a temple during a pagoda festival.

Ultimately, domestic tourism in Myanmar is a living bridge between the past and the present. The essence of the journey is still rooted in the liminal experience—whether on a bullock cart or a modern bus, the act of leaving home creates a threshold where everyday social roles are suspended. By balancing *communitas* with commercialization and sacred duty with secular relaxation, Myanmar

society continues to redefine what it means to be a traveler in the 21st century.

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