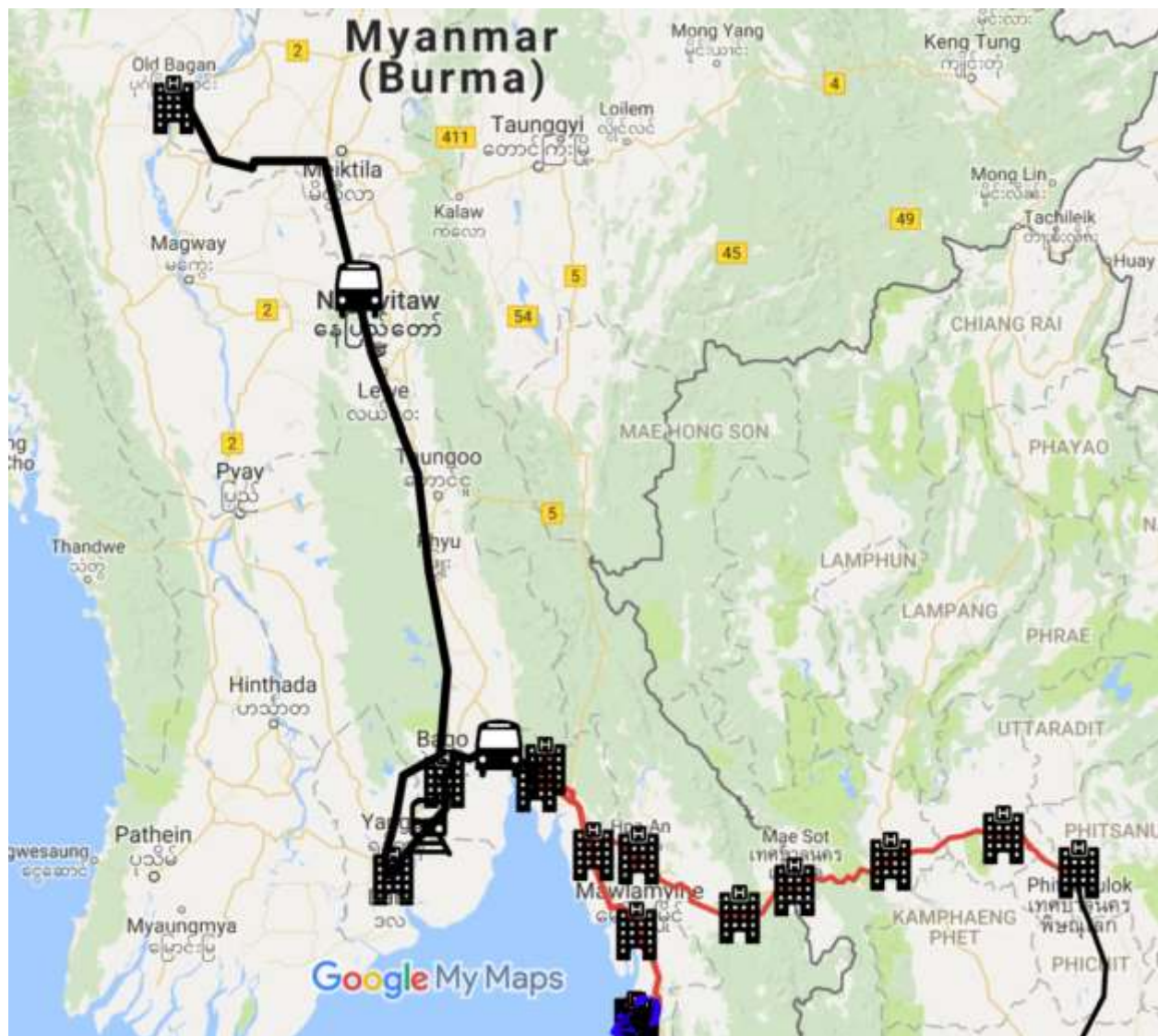


Season 7 – Part 4. Bus trip to Yangon and Bagan.



Th 12.5.2016, day 305. Depositing our bikes (Kyaykto – Bago by bus, 0 km)

It was clear that we were not going to do any biking, so we didn't set any alarm. Breakfast was included in the hotel and was quite OK: fried rice, fried egg, coffee and melon. We asked if we could leave our bikes, that were parked in a corner of the breakfast hall, at their place for a couple of days, which seemed no problem. So after breakfast, we packed everything we would need for a short stint to Yangon and Bagan and piled all our other bags into the breakfast hall behind our bikes. There were some old Myanmar Beer tarps lying around so I covered the bikes and bags with one of the tarps and everything looked rather tidy and inconspicuous.

We checked out and went to look for a bus to take us to Bago. There are busses going every couple of minutes and it is not clear who is running them or where to buy tickets. We were first almost hustled aboard a bus that would have knocked us back 6\$, far too much for the short distance, so we said "no!"

and cursed at the guy who was hassling us to get on board, we asked around some more and finally got a bus for 3\$. Still too much, but it was a nice one.

We got to Bago in the early afternoon and checked into the San Francisco Hostel, the first one we came across which turned out to be very nice and OK priced at 20\$. After a bit of a snooze we took a walk down to the main pagoda. We had heard that after 5:30pm no admission was collected, but this information turned out to be wrong. The government guys were still there at the “foreigner fee” desk, so we turned around and looked for a side entrance. Sure enough we found one with no check-point. However, after strolling around the pagoda for a couple of minutes, one of the government guys came up to us asking for tickets. So that put a premature end to our pagoda visit! Just to be clear: I am very much in favour of paying something to visit the temples and pagodas here and I also put cash into the tip box. The problem with the “foreigner fee” is that the 10\$ we were supposed to pay goes straight into the pockets of the ruling military junta, an organization I certainly don’t want to support!







Fr 13.5.2016, day 306. The tourist tour of Myanmar (Bago – Yangon by bus, 0 km)

I got up at 5am to do some free sightseeing at some other temples in the west side of Bago. The early rise was certainly worth it, seeing the sun rise and having all the temples and reclining Buddhas to myself. Highlight was certainly climbing up on top of one of the pagodas and enjoying the early morning 360° panorama on top. After the obligatory roti and coffee, I caught one of the scooter-minivan collective taxis back to the hotel for second breakfast, which was traditional Myanmar rice noodles and fish soup and was great. We decided to take the train, as it went straight to the centre of Yangon, whereas the bus station was almost a 1h taxi ride outside of the centre. Once again the whole train experience with the completely antiquated infrastructure was fascinating. They even had a Morse code transmitter and a phone that had a handle to turn to get the phone charged in the ticketing office. Yangon was completely different than I had expected. The (ridiculous!) law banning scooters and bicycles seems to be enforced and so the streets are very quiet as almost nobody (except government officials, who made the law) can afford a car. The hostel we (or rather Siria) had booked, the Shann Kalay, was great. We dumped our stuff and went for a very nice stroll round downtown Yangon, ending up in quite a nice street side restaurant for some food and a couple of beers.



























Ticket No. 0000537		1000 Kyats		My	
Fare 2.53 Kyats		Train No. 10300		Upp	
Insurance 0.47 Kyats		1000 Kyats		Bago	
Passport No. 2069475		Train No. 10300		Coach	
A Upper Class		Coach		Seat	
Two People		Coach		Seat	
at Kan station		Coach		Seat	
76.5.21		Coach		Seat	
Foreigner Ticket		Coach		Seat	
Issued		Coach		Seat	

Handwritten notes on the form include: 'လက်မှတ်ခံ ကျပ် 1/15 / 2016', 'နေ့စွဲ', 'သုတေသန', 'on CYE2', and 'Foreigner Ticket Issued'.









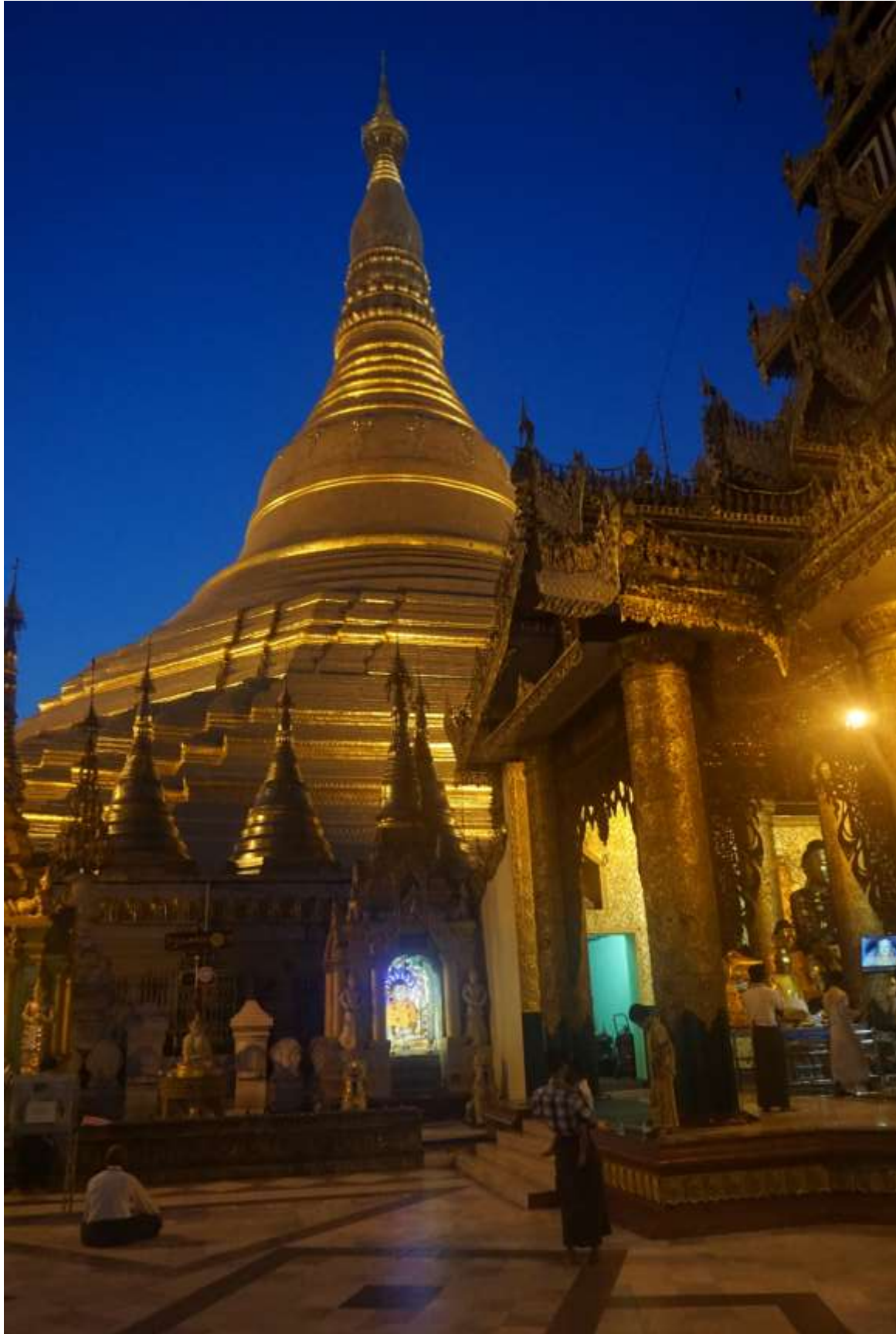
Sa 14.5.2016, day 307. Early rise and long day... (Yangon – Bagan, night bus, 0 km).

The alarm went off at 3:30 am, we battled our way out of bed and walked towards the Shwedagon Pagoda through the dark streets. It was somehow shocking to see all the kids who worked in the restaurants during the day sleeping on the tables of the very same restaurant during the night, also the bicycle-taxi drivers were all sprawled out over their bikes fast asleep. Then we walked past some roadworks, again young kids, who should really be going to school, were doing hard manual labour at 4 am on Saturday morning. Really sad. How desperately the government is failing this fantastic country and its lovely people. We arrived at the pagoda at 4:30, but the government's foreigner fee desk was already open, so there was no way round paying the fee. The pagoda was certainly the most impressive we have seen so far, absolutely stunning, as were all the smaller secondary pagodas, all with different styles, the Buddha statues and stupas.

We enjoyed the atmosphere while dawn slowly broke and eventually the golden spire of the pagoda got illuminated by the first rays of the sun. The place quickly filled up with tourists and worshippers and quickly got very crowded, so we decided to leave and walked back to the hostel, stopping for a roti (of course!) on the way and enjoying all the markets that had sprung up at every street corner.

Back at the hotel we had breakfast out on the balcony, arranged a first class night bus ticket to Bagan and went to our room for a bit of a snooze.

We had arranged to meet up with Anna and Andrea, two travellers we had met in Mablad in the Philippines, for lunch. It was great seeing them again and talk about the crazy good old times we had with the Green Warriors. Time went by very quickly and soon it was time for us to catch the bus up north to Bagan. We decided to travel in style. We took a taxi straight from the hotel to the bus and then boarded the huge first class bus and soon we were sitting there in our wide reclining seats, being served coffee while watching movies as we were chauffeured out of Yangon. Siria fell asleep immediately, I kept tossing and turning, simple unable to find a comfortable position to sleep. Finally, I lowered my seat slightly more than the one beside me resulting in a small step between the seats. This small step was perfect to rest my head against and immediately I fell fast asleep. It was funny to look at how all the people in the bus were using the seats. Most of them were somehow curled up sideways. I often think it is funny how we never really question how things are designed. Taking a reclining seat as example: It must be wide and reclining and it is expected that people sit on it straight. But this is not how the large majority of people use such a seat. Simple observing how people actually use such a reclining seat and adapting the design accordingly would lead to so much more comfortable seats. But somehow this is just not done. A seat is a seat and there is a preconceived idea what it should look like. Just like the small water faucet that is so often found mounted on a sink. Simply too short to get your hands under it. Sometimes you also find the ones where you need to push a button to get the water flowing. Impossible to wash your hands. Still they exist. Clinging to concepts of "how things are supposed to be" I think is one of man kind's biggest problems.













Su 15.5.2016, day 308. Temples, temples and even more temples (Bagan, 0 km)

Our bus arrived in Bagan at about 5 am. On arriving the bus was immediately smothered by a hoard of touts selling taxi rides. I had my camera out to film them as we stepped out of the bus, most tourists simply ignored them. We strolled over to a restaurant to have a coffee, still followed by a couple of touts who hadn't given up yet, to make plans. We decided we would start walking towards New Bagan, which was about 12 km away, but there were plenty of temples on the way and we figured we could easily catch a taxi if we had enough of walking.

It turned out to be a lovely walk and we ended up in walking the whole 12 km. The temples were fantastic and there were lots and lots of them, also the atmosphere early in the morning was great and the air was still cool. Also we encountered almost no other tourists. The only slightly annoying thing was that EVERYONE who saw us asked if we need a ride, want to buy sandpaper drawings, if we already have a hotel, if we need a guide, etcetc... We quickly got into the "no thank you", "no thank you", "no thank you" mode.

We had a small breakfast (rotis of course!) in New Bagan and checked into the hotel at about 10 am. At about 10:05 am I was fast asleep and was woken up by Siria at 4 pm feeling quite groggy. We had a quiet evening watching the sunset at one of the nearby pagodas, then we went for quite a spicy dinner and back to the hotel for an early night.



























Mo 16.5.2016, day 309. Temples at sunrise, temples at sunset (Bagan, 0 km)

The alarm went off at 4 am. We were planning to pick up the E-scooter at 4:30. Just after I got up I felt rumbling in my stomach. Soon afterwards I was running for the toilet. Dang, so the spicy food yesterday did it to me this time. Nevertheless, we headed out to one of the temples, climbed up the steep steps and just sat there enjoying the spectacle. We then randomly scooted round a bit on the many dust paths that lead from one temple to the next. We visited some, simply drove past others. After a while we really started to feel we were in a different world. After a couple of hours, we headed back to the hotel, just in time to catch breakfast. My stomach was really not doing well at all, bad diarrhoea and cramps. So it was a case of taking it easy. We snoozed until about 4 pm. I was feeling more or less OK, so we headed out again, Siria driving and me navigating. The temperature was unbearably hot, over 40°C. The wind in our faces felt like coming out of a hair dryer. We again crisscrossed past a myriad of temples, sometimes stopping to take a photo or two. We then found a large temple where there was a very narrow stairway leading up to a window facing west. It was the perfect spot to enjoy sunset and apart from us there was not a soul there. Sunset was absolutely magic, with some decorative clouds perfectly scattered round to add to the drama.

Then we went to a very nice vegetarian place for dinner, I went for the conservative choice: Fried noodles with vegetables. The good news was that my stomach seemed to be slowly getting back to normal. Siria left me off at the hotel, while she went to return the scooter and also to get bus tickets to Bago for the next morning. We spent the evening in the hotel room on the computers, had a quick Skype chat with Siria's family and kept our eyes glued to the live ticker of the game between Zurich and Siria's brother's team Vaduz. Vaduz won 2:1. Yeah!!

























































Tu 17.5.2016, day 310. Travel day back south (Bagan – Kyeikto, bus, 0 km)

Our travel budget is still “green”, meaning that we have spent less than half what we put aside. This means that we can splash out and travel in style and this is exactly what we did. After having a nice breakfast, our pick-up arrived to take us to the first class bus direction Yangon (OK, our pickup was a pretty crappy little truck with some benches out back, but fun all the same).

Going all the way to Yangon would have been quite a detour, so we had arranged to be dropped off in Bago. However, in spite of everyone saying “Yes, yes, to bus goes to Bago” the bus of course did not go to Bago, so we were dumped at some junction on the highway, miles from anywhere. Stupidly we paid some taxi driver 10\$ thinking he would take us all the way to Kyeikto, which would have been a good deal, as it was about 75 km. However, it turned out that he was only taking us about 7km to the bus station to Kyaikto. We gritted our teeth, grudgingly gave him the 10\$, after giving him a mouthful and were quickly besieged by the next tout, trying to sell us tickets for 3\$ each to Kyeikto. A bus arrived, I immediately went to ask about tickets and the tout tried to push ahead of me to talk to the bus driver in Burmese. I was really pissed off and told him to f*** off and pushed him away. Finally, we paid 2\$ per person, probably still 2x to much. It’s so much nicer to travel by bike! In retrospect we should really have hitch hiked. Once our budget gets tighter this will be the only option anyway.

We finally got to Kyeikto in good time and without problems, our bikes were still where we left them, patiently waiting for us.

