

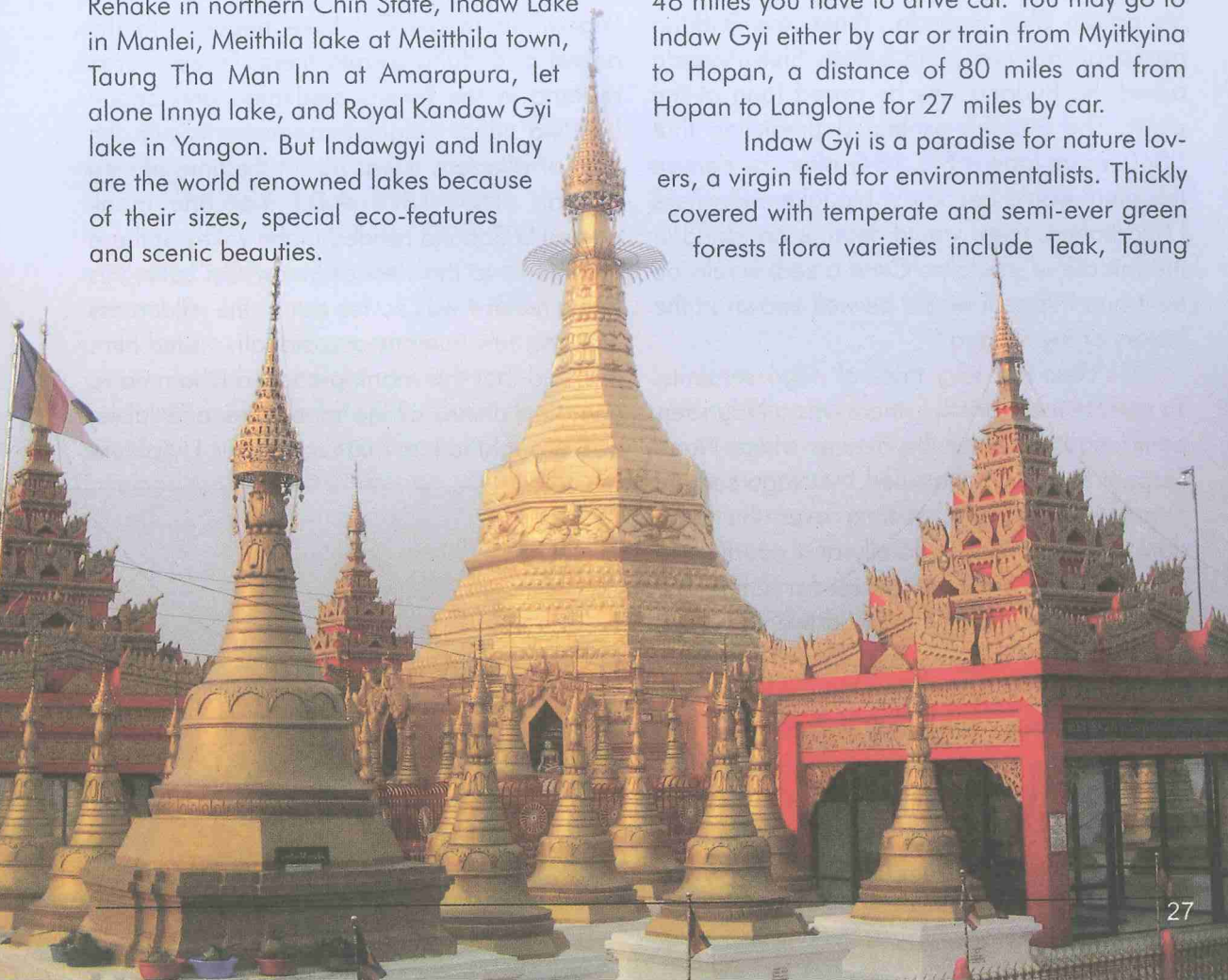
INDAW GYI LAKE and SHWE MYITZU PAGODA

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Indaw Gyi Literally means "great royal lake" which is the largest natural lake not only in Myanmar but also in South east Asian region. It is in Mohnyin District in Kachin State. There are many other bodies of water in Myanmar formed by nature. To mention but a few are Inlay lake in Southern Shan State, Mangtone lake in Kyaing lone town, Eastern Shan State, Rehake in northern Chin State, Indaw Lake in Manlei, Meithila lake at Meitthila town, Taung Tha Man Inn at Amarapura, let alone Innaya lake, and Royal Kandaw Gyi lake in Yangon. But Indawgyi and Inlay are the world renowned lakes because of their sizes, special eco-features and scenic beauties.

Indaw Gyi is the Largest wetland eco-system in the country. Its water surface and water body measure 100 square miles and its forested areas cover 214.67 square miles_a total of 314.67 square miles. Accessible by car and train_for a long distance between Mandalay and Mohnyin you can use car or train. But from Mohnyin to Longlone, a journey of 48 miles you have to drive car. You may go to Indaw Gyi either by car or train from Myitkyina to Hopan, a distance of 80 miles and from Hopan to Langlone for 27 miles by car.

Indaw Gyi is a paradise for nature lovers, a virgin field for environmentalists. Thickly covered with temperate and semi-ever green forests flora varieties include Teak, Taung



Taman, Sey Khar, Thinkan, Ma U, Baing, Ngu (Indian Laburnum), Yamanay, Ka-nyin, Hpet-win, Hpan-kha, Htaut Kyant, Saga War (Champa), Kha Paung, Hpet Hpyu, Myauk Nyo, Lauk-ya-gyi, Goke-te, Thit-ta-zin, Kyee-lan, Kyee-hetein, etc. And several other fruit, flower and medicinal trees, plants and creepers. Fauna varieties range from tiger, leopard, bear, wolf, gaur, banteng (wild ox) to wild goat, mountain goat, sambhur, barking deer, wild dog, jackal, hog badger, many kinds of monkey, porcupines, many winged creatures_birds, bees and butterflies and ants and insects. The lake also abounds in aquatic and amphibious lives.

Fascinating Legends enshroud Indaw Gyi-Lake. First the arrival of Lord Gotama Buddha on the summit of Nalagiri Mountain with his cousin Shin Ananda. When the Buddha gazed at the vast plain below, Shin Ananda asked the Buddha why he gazed long at the plain. The Buddha explained predicting that "360 years (about B.C.184) after my demise this plain would become a big lake and where I had halted, there would emerge an island in the middle of the lake. On it a zedi would be built and this zedi would be well-known in the history of my Sasana."

Next are fairy tales of *naga* serpents. To narrate them briefly _ there was a Naga serpent kingdom under the oceans where Naga Serpent King Erapatta ruled. As Naga serpent population boomed, spilling over the kingdom the king told his family and courtiers to go out and look for new places for habitation. Three naga serpents father and two sons went out in quest of a new living place. They came upstream the Ayeyawaddy River. When they reached a place near Indaw, they turned it into a lake. To-day this Lake is called Manlei Inn.

Later the two sons left there to look for another place where they would set up their own kingdoms. When they reached where Indaw

Gyi Lake is to day, they found an extensive plain surrounded by forested lofty mountains. They also met beautiful guardian eagles of the mountains. There was romantic and adventurous love affairs between the two brothers and guardian angles. The two naga serpent brothers decided to settle there. They caused rain for days untill the vast plain turned into a big deep lake ie. Indaw Gyi in which the two naga serpent brother set up their kingdoms. The legend turns to many adventures, warfare and love affairs. Palm leaf manuscripts such as Shan, Kachin and Myanmar palm leaf manuscripts and their translations kept at old monasteries in the area give slightly different versions of the same legend.

The history of Shwe Myitzu Yeylei Pagoda in Indaw Gyi Lake began with the arrival of Buddha sasana there. Forest monks residing in the forests meditated and began building minor religious momuments with the help of villagers. It was about the time of king Mindon (1853-1878 A.D.) that one monk named U Sobhita resided in the valley of these mountains to the west of Indaw Gyi Lake. His forest recluse was so far out in the wilderness that only few humans occasionally visited him. It is said that this monk preached Dhamma to guardian deities of the mountains and lakes, who brought to him fruits and water. U Sobhita



thought he should introduced Buddha sasana to the lake area. So he came to the nearby villages and told the local people to help him build a zedi on the island in the middle of the lake. The villagers happily and obligingly agreed and started collecting construction material and money. Local authorities also gave all possible assistance. So began the building of Shwe Myitzu Pagoda on the island in the middle of the lake in the Buddha sasana year 2421, Myanmar Era 1230, (1868 A.D.) on Saturday 11th waxing moon of Tabaung (march). On the 8th waning moon of waso (July) of the same year the construction of the Pagoda was completed. It was 10 cubits high. Because sacred relics enshrined in it were miraculously granted by Shwedagon Pagoda when U Sobhita prayed for them, the Pagoda was named Shwe Myitzu. The first festival was held from the 8th waxing moon to the 1st waning moon of Tabaung. Later Shwe Myitzu was renovated and embellished by devotees and donors. In Myanmar Era 1235 (1872 A.D.) one Maung Shin Nyee of Nant Phaung Sin village raised the height of the Pagoda to 18 cubits, 2 mites and 4 thits. Apart from the sublimity of the pagoda, scenic beauty of the lake and the forested surroundings, one strange phenomenon that appears when the festival time approaches, is the occurrence of two sand pathways in the Lake leading to Shwe Myitzu Pagoda_one for human pilgrims and visitors and one for deities and spirit nats, so they say. There two sand corridors are formed by waves in the lake which move opposite directions bringing up soil and sand making two pathways in the lake. After the festival they gradually disappear.

Devotees and pilgrims believe that there



are nine wonders of Shwe Myitsu Pagoda. They are:

1. The appearance of two sand pathways in the lake, leading to the Pagoda at festival time
2. In spite of heavy rain and storm, lake water never touches the base of the Pagoda.
3. There are no crows at the time of the festival. They come back only after the festival.
4. All ethnic nationalities, regardless of their Faiths, come to the festival but there is no crime.
5. All aquatic creatures especially fish frolic around the island but no one catches them.
6. Visitors of all religions visit Pagoda. They all feel happy and peaceful.
7. There appears a pool of shallow water at the entrance to the sacred island, to remind you to take off your footwears.
8. A red line appears in the lake around the sacred island, meaning the deities pour medicine into the lake to purify the water.
9. If Wednesday falls on the fullmoon night of Tabaung some pilgrims witness emissions of rays of light from Shwe Myitzu Pagoda and some Arahats coming down from the sky to worship the Pagoda. ☸