

Drivers of Cultural Tourism in Mrauk-U, Myanmar

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Abstract

Tourism is becoming a major driver for economic development in Myanmar since the adoption of a market-oriented economic policy in 1989. Mrauk-U, an ancient capital of Rakhine, has a great tourism potential because of its historic monuments and a splendid landscape. As tourism provides real income for local people, economic development of Mrauk-U can be generated through tourism. Against this backdrop, the aim of the article is to analyse which drivers are responsible for the development of urban tourism in Mrauk-U and which tourism potentials of the cultural heritage town still have to be developed.

Key words:

Urban tourism, economic development potentials, Mrauk-U

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, the growth of tourism has presented great opportunities for economic development in several Southeast Asian countries due to general economic and political changes. In many countries of the region, tourism is still an attractive and relatively 'soft' means to promote development. Due to the macro-economic significance of tourism in Southeast Asia, this industry has also played an important role on a sub-national level (Hitchcock 1993: 16–17).

In Myanmar as well, tourism is becoming a major force for economic development. After adopting the market-oriented economic policy in 1989, the government has made obvious efforts with the aim of boosting economic development through the tourism industry. However, as compared with other Southeast Asian countries, the development of the tourism sector in Myanmar is comparatively low. This is reflected in tourist arrival figures to ASEAN countries. The calculation shows that in 2006 only 1.3% of the total tourist arrivals to the ASEAN region reached Myanmar, whereas 28.4% visited neighbouring Thailand (<http://www.asean.org>). Tourist arrival peaked in 2011–12 with 4,815 tourists (Zin Nwe Myint et al. 2016).

The main tourist attractions – among them major urban areas – in Myanmar are well-known, such as Bagan, Taunggyi (Inlay Lake), Mandalay and Yangon. Although many new sites have been discovered, there are still some places with strong potential for further tourism development. Among them, Mrauk-U, one of the ancient capitals of Rakhine, has the greatest potential because of its historic monuments, such as an old palace site and ancient pagodas. As tourism provides real income for local people, economic development of Mrauk-U can be promoted through tourism.

Against this backdrop, the main aim of this study is to find out which drivers are responsible for the development of cultural tourism in Mrauk-U and why such a cultural heritage town has not yet been developed well. Thus, the objectives of this study are:

- to understand the present situation of cultural tourism business in Mrauk-U,
- to identify the major driving factors and their impact to cultural tourism development in Mrauk-U,
- to suggest the creation of a local destination management organization, and
- to highlight the importance of integrated planning through a local destination management organization for cultural tourism development of Mrauk-U.

The situation which is analysed in the following reflects the stage of development of the year 2011.

The rapid appraisal approach is mainly used in this context (Gibbs 1989). Although the general credibility of these methods is low as compared to formal survey methods, their strength is that even if there is limited availability of resources it can rapidly generate relevant information with relatively low investment. Besides, they can provide in-depth understanding and useful information for further situation analyses. Interviews were conducted with many key informants, such as local authorities, hotel and guesthouse owners, businessmen in the transport sector, restaurants, tour guides and many informal workers who are somehow involved in the tourism business in Mrauk-U.

The term tourist generally refers to a person who has travelled away from home, is visiting another location and does not plan to relocate or stay away from home permanently (Hotel and Tourism Training Centre 1996: 1). The definition of tourism for this study is based on Goeldner et al. (2000), and describes tourism as the sum of the phenomena and relations arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments and host communities in the processes of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors. It is a composite of activities, services, and industries which delivers a travel experience, transportation, accommodations, eating and drinking, shops, entertainment, activity facilities and other hospitality services available for individuals or groups who travel away from their home (Goeldner 2000: 14).

Visitors in Mrauk-U can be differentiated into three types, namely local visitors, domestic tourists and international tourists. The local visitors are mainly pilgrims from the vicinities, and their main interest are the famous pagodas of Mrauk-U. They usually come in the early morning and leave in the evening. Domestic tourists include various visitors from outside the Mrauk-U area, mainly from other parts of Myanmar and the term international tourists refers to all foreigners who come to Mrauk-U on package tours or as individual, independent travellers (FIT = Free Individual Tourists).

2. Mrauk-U: A Cultural Heritage Town

Mrauk-U is one of the ancient capitals of Rakhine, founded during the last kingdom of Rakhine in the period between 1430 and 1785 AD (Fig. 1). It lies in the northeastern part of Rakhine State (latitude 20° 35' N and longitude 93° 15' E). The whole Mrauk-U Township has an area of 490.98 square miles (1271.63 km²) and is composed of six urban wards and 94 village tracts (Khin Myo Hla 2000). Mrauk-U town proper, is composed of six wards, has an area of less than five square miles (less than 13 km²). The area demarcated as archaeological zone of Mrauk-U by the Archaeology Department, Ministry of Culture, has about 20 square miles (about 52 km²). In 1996, the government declared Mrauk-U a cultural heritage area, recognizing the tourism potential of the region (Gutman 2001: 4)

Mrauk-U strongly took advantage of its topographic situation for defence. Being surrounded by hills and valleys separated by numerous natural and artificial streams and lakes, it was built as a fortress city. It is located northeast of Sittway, 40 miles upstream by waterway, and 89 miles by motor way from Sittway (Sittwe) via Kyauktaw. It was founded in 1430 by King Mong Saw Mon. It existed for 355 years and was ruled by 48 Rakhine kings. During this period, Rakhine culture reached its climax. It was contemporary to the Ayuthaya Kings and the Ava (Inwa), Taungoo and Hantharwaddy Kings of Myanmar (Shwe Zan 1995: 17).

Once, the city was a cosmopolitan city, fortified by 30 kilometres of fortification and an intricate net of moats and canals. At the centre of the city was the Royal Palace, looming high above the surrounding area (Shwe Zan 1995: 14). At its heyday between the 16th and 17th century, it was no longer only a provincial but a commercial centre on the eastern shore of the Indian Ocean. The city gained wealth from coastal trade with the neighbouring countries Bengal and Burma (Myanmar) (Gutman 2001: 78). Since Buddhism flourished together with the wealth of Mrauk-U under the ancient Rakhine Kings, the city's remnants are mainly pagodas.

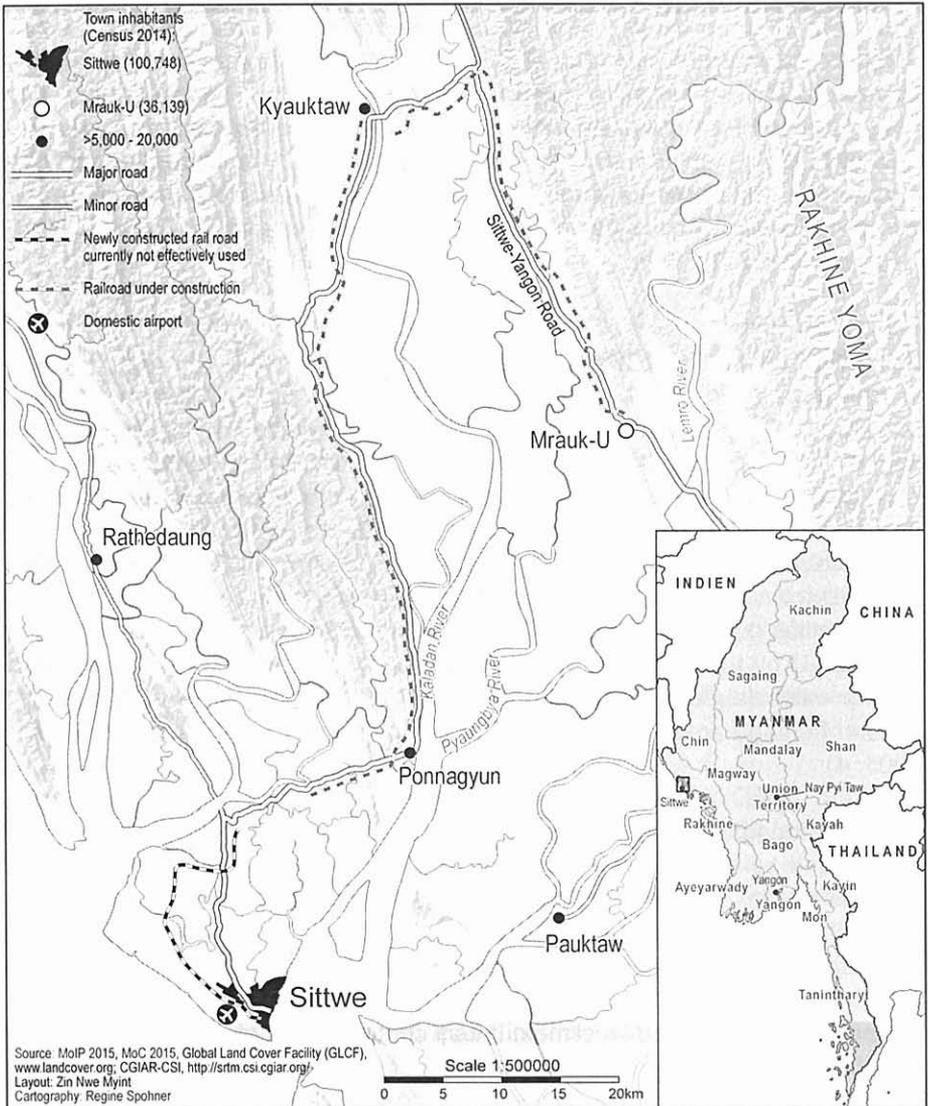


Fig. 1: Overview map

A variety of architectural wealth can be found in the pagodas and temples of Mrauk-U. Each has its own architectural, cultural, literary and historical values. The stone pagodas in Mrauk-U were built five centuries ago and many have been totally neglected for the last 150 years. Generally, pagodas in Mrauk-U can be divided into three distinct periods: the earlier period (1430-1513), the middle period (1513-1638) and the late period (1638-1785). The earlier buildings were not massive types. Temples in Mrauk-U have a variety of styles like octagonal base, bell-shaped base, ornamented receding cone without any relic-casket, etc. the extensive occurrence of ornamental pedestals is a remarkable characteristic of the early Mrauk-U style.

The middle period is characterized by the introduction of massive structures, which reflects its prosperity. With inner temples, galleries and internal decorations, these temples induced a sense of inner calm rather than imposing height. Shit-thaung, Htuk-kant and Koe-thaung temples stemmed from this tradition. During the second half of the middle period conical pagodas came into vogue. In this period, imposing structures made their way into the style, the use of elaborate ornamentation was minimized and restricted to temple entrances only (Shwe Zan 1995: 22–23).

Twenty-three types of silver coins and three types of gold coins were found in Mrauk-U (Shwe Zan 1995: 26) reflecting the high civilization and particularly its wide networks of trade and production at that time. A city wall, gates, fortresses, moats and monastery sites are other historical heritage sites that prove the overwhelming wealth and importance of the city.

3. Development of cultural tourism in Mrauk-U

Due to many interesting natural, historical, cultural, social and religious phenomena, Myanmar has had a lot of experience with tourism since it gained its independence from the British in 1948. Places like Bagan and Inlay Lake in Shan State have been famous since then. However, this situation did not last long due to the adoption of ‘socialist economy’ in 1962. Since then, different perspectives and strategies in respect to tourism have been initiated which gradually have led to present-day development of tourism which is at a comparatively low level within the ASEAN region, although there are good conditions for tourism in Myanmar.

Since the adoption of market-oriented economy in 1989, tourism has been perceived as a smokeless industry which can bring rapid economic development for the country without investing so much for infrastructure. The government also made considerable changes in rules and regulations, as well as adopting new laws to promote the tourism sector. The government enacted the Myanmar Tourist Law in June 1990. With the aim to enhance tourism development forcefully, the ‘Visit Myanmar Year 1996’ was launched.

Before adopting market oriented economy, there was no proper service for tourists in Mrauk-U. Local visitors used to come and stay at monasteries, and the arrival of international tourists was relatively seldom as compared with the present situation. However, there was a considerable increase in tourist arrivals to Mrauk-U after the nation wide promotion of tourism with the slogan ‘Visit Myanmar Year 1996’.

According to the Archeological Department of Mrauk-U, international tourist arrivals increased four times from 1996-1997 to 2006-2007, as shown in Figure 2 and 3 (Zin Nwe Myint, Khin Myo Hla 2009).

Month	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
April	0	19	36	8	57	52	56	86	72	71	76
May	0	30	18	71	20	30	27	21	22	11	22
June	0	1	1	8	11	8	9	15	7	11	3
July	6	10	2	3	25	33	19	21	15	7	18
August	43	50	27	80	36	37	38	83	57	43	72
September	5	18	7	16	46	17	13	36	17	14	24
October	67	39	84	26	34	110	146	77	61	118	125
November	49	76	187	138	253	310	442	319	469	431	570
December	128	110	52	151	162	285	299	301	319	380	382
January	55	61	173	207	200	264	333	315	289	430	470
February	126	68	143	239	240	289	339	361	397	338	430
March	39	127	131	95	119	169	219	112	243	210	269
Total Number	518	609	861	1042	1203	1604	1940	1747	1968	2064	2461
Total Zone Fee (US\$)	2590	3045	4305	5210	6015	8020	9700	8735	9840	10320	12305

Fig. 2: Arrival of international tourists to Mrauk-U from 1996 to 2007 (Source: Archaeology Department of Mrauk-U, April 2007)

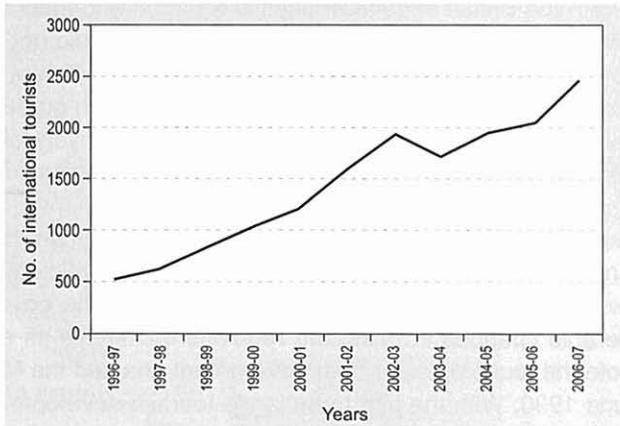


Fig. 3: Arrival of international tourists to Mrauk-U (1996-97 to 2006-07) (Source: Archaeology Department of Mrauk-U, April 2007)

However, only a small portion of the total number of international tourists who come to Myanmar visits Mrauk-U. Although the graph in Figure 3 shows an increase of foreign visitors, the calculation based on the Statistical Yearbook 2005 shows that only 0.8% of the total number of foreign tourists visited Mrauk-U in 1997–1998, 1% in 2000–2001, and, until very recently, still a very low portion of only 1.3% in 2004–2005. These figures are very low as compared with figures from other places of touristic interest in Myanmar. For example between 40% and 60% of all international tourists visit Inlay Lake in Shan State (Aye Myint 2006: 24).

Nationalities	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Europe: German, Belgium, British, French, Greek, Hungarian, Dank, Italian, Austrian, Swiss and Dutch	189	135	269
North America: American, Canadian	33	19	25
Southeast Asia: Singaporean, Thai, Indonesian, Malaysian	4	12	3
East Asia: Korean, Japanese	25	15	17
India and China	1	0	7
Others: Russian, New Zealander, Australian	5	4	7
Total	257	185	328

Fig. 4: Nationalities of international tourists lodged in Mrauk-U Hotel (Source: Mrauk-U Hotel, April 2007)

The normal peak season in terms of tourist arrivals to Mrauk-U is between October and February. Figure 4 shows the nationalities of international tourists who lodged in government owned Mrauk-U Hotel from 2004–2005 to 2006–2007. Although it is restricted to Mrauk-U Hotel only, it can give a general view on the origin of international tourists. This clearly shows that more than 73% of foreign tourists who visit Mrauk-U were mainly from Europe, whereas tourist arrivals from East Asia, mainly from Japan and Korea, are still low with less than 10%. According to interviews, about 60% of international tourists visit Mrauk-U as free individual tourists and 40% come to Mrauk-U on package tours booked through travel agencies.

The arrival of domestic tourists cannot be determined exactly because there are many pilgrims who lodge in large monasteries free of charge during their stay in Mrauk-U. During Shit-thaung Pagoda festival, for instance, there are many domestic tourists from various parts of Myanmar as well as from the vicinity of Mrauk-U. It is the peak season for domestic tourism in Mrauk-U and visitors sometimes even have to stay at basic high schools.

4. Major Driving Forces Shaping the Tourism Development of Mrauk-U

Tourism is a composite of various drivers of different activities. The quality and quantity of the actions as well as the combination of the drivers determine the success of development in general and of tourism in particular in any area (Goeldner et al. 2000: 364). As such, it is necessary to know how tourism-related activities are functioning in Mrauk-U. Because these are the main driving forces shaping the tourism development of Mrauk-U, which in turn is shaping the socioeconomic situation and its urban structure (Hamhaber and Lee 2007: 16).

4.1 Transportation and accessibility

Transportation is among the most important driving forces for the development of tourism in Mrauk-U. It is one of the most important factors controlling the development of tourism in Mrauk-U at present and can be divided into two parts: the accessibility of Mrauk-U and internal transport within Mrauk-U. Mrauk-U can be reached directly by motor road from Yangon and other cities, such as Patheingyi, Mandalay and Taunggyi. It can be reached by air and water via Sittway as there are no direct flight or boat connections to Mrauk-U. However, the road conditions are difficult, and it takes at least two days to cross the Rakhine Range from Yangon. Besides the long travel time and the bad road situation, the highway infrastructure is also insufficient. Only some domestic tourists visit Mrauk-U from Yangon by bus, mainly through a tour company. It can also be reached by coastal water way from Yangon, via Sittway. However, this mode of transportation is not used as it takes at least four days by ocean liner. Besides, there is no regular service of ocean liners to Sittway, sometimes only one in two months for cargo transport. Thus, most of the tourists travel first to Sittway by air and continue by road or water to Mrauk-U.

Although both international and domestic tourists can travel by air from Yangon to Sittway, there are very limited flight schedules. The government-owned Myanmar Airways International (MAI) has three flights per week to Sittway from Yangon, and even this is not certain depending on the weather situation, especially in the rainy season. Besides, the availability of air tickets for MAI is extremely limited and all international tourists usually rely on privately owned airlines.

Apart from the government-owned MAI, there are three airlines: Air Bagan, Yangon Airways and Air Mandalay, which cost twice as much as Myanmar Airways International (MAI). Flight schedules are also very limited. With these airlines, a single flight to Sittway from Yangon cost about 80000 Kyats (about US\$ 73) in 2007 (Note: This is the price before the abrupt increase of oil prices in Myanmar in September 2007). These airlines are mainly used by foreigners and businessmen who are involved in fisheries. However, all these airlines have limited flight schedules to Sittway. Flight schedules of these private airlines are also changeable depending on passenger volume and partly on the weather situation as the Sittway airport is not well equipped. This is the first obstacle for foreign tourists who want visit Mrauk-U. The alternative option to use the motor-road is also inconvenient.

In the case of domestic tourists, only the higher income class can use the air route, mainly MAI. Even so, the availability of airline tickets is uncertain. Long queues, the uncertainty of obtaining an airline ticket and the unreliable flight schedule strongly hamper visits to Mrauk-U. Return tickets from Sittway to Yangon are even more difficult to get, because about 40% of the available seats of

the airplane, generally Fokker planes with about 80 seats, are always already occupied by staff of the Ministry of Defence. The rest usually goes to higher civil servants from different institutions in Sittway. This creates long waiting times for MAI tickets, sometimes up to two weeks. Besides, the total number of MAI planes for domestic flights for the whole of Myanmar is extremely limited. All these aspects favour a black market for airline tickets and have considerable impacts on tourism to Mrauk-U.

From Sittway to Mrauk-U, the motor road with a length of 89 miles (143 km) is not completely tarred yet. In the rainy season heavy rainfall, with annually more than 200 inches (5080 mm), and an improper road infrastructure make transportation rather difficult and sometimes impossible for a certain period. Although it usually occurs in the rainy season, in most of the cases annual road damages due to heavy rain cannot be repaired immediately. This makes the road situation between Sittway and Mrauk-U rather difficult in all tourist seasons.

In the dry season, a local bus with 48 passengers usually takes five and half hours to Mrauk-U from Sittway. The transport charge per passenger from Sittway to Mrauk-U for the local bus was 2000 Kyats (about US\$ 2) in April 2007. During these days, a gallon of gasoline from Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) was 1500 Kyats whereas the price on the black market of Sittway was 5500 Kyats. As MOGE cannot supply gasoline sufficiently, buses have to rely on black market. This illustrates the influence of the gasoline price on travel costs, which directly affect the touristic development of Mrauk-U. An indirect effect of this are the high prices in Mrauk-U, since most goods are imported from Yangon. All this increases the costs of visiting Mrauk-U as compared with other places.

Normally, international tourists are not allowed to use the motor road from Sittway to Mrauk-U, except package tours with a special permit from the Ministry of Defence. Getting such a permit is also difficult and takes time. Without this, foreigners are only allowed to travel by waterway from Sittway to Mrauk-U. The government-owned boats, under Inland Water Transport (Fig. 5), operate twice per week and the transport charge was 4 US\$ for each foreigner and 300 Kyats (about 0.3 US\$) for a local commuters and domestic visitors in early 2007.

Since government-owned boats are scarce, foreign guests have to rely on small private boats (Fig. 6) which have low safety standards. Some groups of foreigners hire the whole boat from its private owner, which is more convenient. The price depends on negotiation with the boat owners through middlemen (brokers), who are usually local tour guides. Some foreign tourists use small private boats which operate regularly for the local population, at a price of only 1 US\$ per person.

The distance from Sittway to Mrauk-U by ship is only 46 miles (74 km). However, the Laymyot (Lemro) River has a strong current. Going downstream, it takes boats



Fig. 5: Government-owned boat which commutes twice per week between Sittway and Mrauk-U.



Fig. 6: Small private boats which commute between Sittway and Mrauk-U.

4 hours to reach Mrauk-U. But, heading upstream, it takes at least seven hours. The mean flow velocity of the Laymyot (Lemro) River is seven miles per hour which considerably reduces the speed of locally built small boats. In such a case, due to the late arrival, foreign tourists have to stay one night longer in Mrauk-U, and this causes some difficulties with their limited time of stay in Myanmar.

For internal transport within Mrauk-U town, visitors rely on trishaws (Fig. 7), horse carts (Fig. 8), and cars. Local visitors also use Htaw-lar-gi (i.e. trailer-jeep, Fig. 9) for internal commutation. In Mrauk-U, cars for tourists are mostly old jeeps, even though this is very often not an option for ordinary visitors, partly because of the gasoline price and partly because the number of jeeps is limited. For a one-day visit to the famous pagodas, a jeep cost at least 18,000 Kyats (US\$ 16.4) in early



Fig. 7: Trishaws for passenger commuting within Mrauk-U Town.

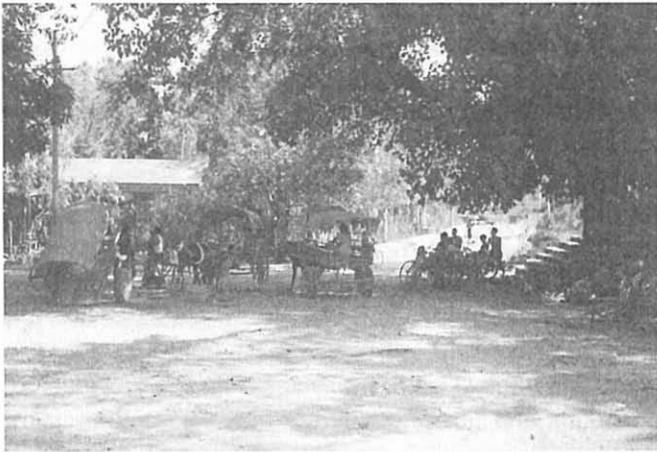


Fig. 8: Horse carts at Gated No. 1, beside the Palace wall, waiting for passengers.



Fig. 9: Htaw-lar-gi (trailer-jeep) for internal transportation, especially used by local commuters for a day-trip.

2007. By jeep, a group of at least five people can access all famous pagodas in one day and it is less time consuming and more economical than using a trishaw or a horse cart. Mainly visitors who do not want to stay longer in Mrauk-U mainly use these jeeps. However, even during the Shit-thaung Pagoda festival period, only 15 jeeps are available. Visitors on package tours use their cars, buses or minibuses brought along from Sittway or mainly from Yangon.

Local visitors rely mostly on horse carts if they are in groups of four or five, whereas a trishaw can be used for two passengers. Horse carts have been used for internal transport of goods and passengers in Mrauk-U for 30 years. At present, there are 36 horse carts in Mrauk-U. Out of these, only 20 can be hired by visitors. The other 16 usually run on regular internal routes for daily local commuters between Mrauk-U and the surrounding villages. On these regular routes, the transport charge for a person in early 2007 was about 500 Kyats (US\$ 0.45) from Mrauk-U's main market place to Sin-oe, a village six miles away. However, to visit the famous pagodas of Mrauk-U by horse cart cost at least 8000 Kyats (US\$ 7.3) per day, meaning from 9 o'clock in the morning to about 5:30 in the evening. Formerly, horse carts used wooden wheels, however nowadays, due to bad road conditions, these are replaced by tires. Such horse carts are less attractive to tourists. Horse carts must pay taxes to the Mrauk-U Town Development Committee. These have increased from 1500 Kyats per year per horse cart in 1997 to 5000 Kyats per year in 2007.

Most of the international tourists do not prefer horse carts due to the bad road situation. Many foreign tourists use bicycles. By April 2007, there was only one bike rental service in Mrauk-U with 18 bicycles (Fig. 10). However, during the tour season, some hotels and guesthouses keep additional bicycles especially for international tourists. During 2007, the price for renting a bicycle for one day was 1000 Kyats for both local and foreign tourists.



Fig. 10: The one and only bicycle rental service in Mrauk-U.

According to interviews, this bicycle rental business is becoming more profitable although it is limited to the tour season. It started in 2002 with four bicycles, and the income was only 70,000 Kyats (US\$ 64) that year. During the tour season of 2007, the income increased to 1.4 million Kyats (US\$ 1275) since the total number of bicycles had increased to 18. Out of this total income, 0.4 million Kyats (US\$ 364) were received from local visitors and the rest was from foreign tourists. Although the number of international tourists was far lower than the number of domestic tourists, the larger part of income of this service came from foreign tourists which reflects the behavioural differences. If there were more tourists, especially foreigners, such services would become better, and this would be a direct improvement of the socioeconomic situation of the local people.

Another mode of internal transportation is Htaw-lar-gi. It can carry about 16 passengers and goods as well. On weekends many people from neighbouring villages are used to coming to Mrauk-U early in the morning with Htaw-lar-gi and buy the necessary things. During the remaining time they visit the pagodas and in the evening they go back with the same Htaw-lar-gi.

Apart from ancient pagodas, foreigners usually go to villages along the Laymyot (Lemro) River to experience the traditional living style of the Chin and Rakhine ethnic tribes. Near Sin-O village, there is a village with houses whose inhabitants live from traditional taung-ya (shifting cultivation). In these villages, the way of living of the villagers is still quite traditional, and traditional weaving of thatch for roofing, portrait making, weaving clothing, etc. can be seen. Some old women have tattoos on their faces. These villages are one of the tourist attractions around Mrauk-U.

4.2 Accommodation situation

Lodging, which is limited in Mrauk-U, is fundamental for the tourism business. It is the second main driving force shaping the tourism development in Mrauk-U.

Before 1988, there were no proper hotels or guesthouses except a government-owned guesthouse in the military compound for government employees. It was normally not used due to its difficult accessibility from downtown Mrauk-U. Prior to 1988, there was only one privately owned guesthouse in Mrauk-U. It was just an ordinary house mainly used by government officers who needed to visit Mrauk-U occasionally because of government duties. Later it became a small guesthouse. Until 1995, Mrauk-U only had this guesthouse. At that time, only a few domestic tourists and hardly any foreign tourists visited Mrauk-U. Domestic tourists usually stayed in monasteries at that time. Until 1996, there were no proper accommodations for tourists in Mrauk-U, especially for foreigners.

After the 'Visit Myanmar Year' in 1996, two hotels and one guesthouse were added, which serve international tourists. These are the Mrauk-U Hotel, owned

by the government through the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, and the privately owned Prince Hotel and Royal City Guesthouse. In 2007, there were four hotels in Mrauk-U, including the Mrauk-U Hotel.

According to the Mrauk-U Township Development Committee, there were six registered guesthouses by April 2007, as shown in Figure 10. According to this, the total number of rooms of all guesthouses, both single and double, was only 57. Currently, there are seven functioning guesthouses and the total number of rooms is higher but does not exceed 100. However, it somehow reflects a slow development of the tourism business in Mrauk-U.

At present, hotels and guesthouses in Mrauk-U can generally be classified into three classes according to the provided facilities. In the first class are the hotels, which are too expensive for domestic tourists, such as Nawarat Hotel and Mrauk-U Hotel. These are mainly intended for international tourists. In Nawarat Hotel, the rate was 38 US\$ per night for foreigners and 38000 Kyats (about US\$ 36) for a double room for domestic tourists in 2007. In this hotel, there are 14 superior, 10 standard and 5 economy rooms. However, only in superior rooms 24 hour-electricity produced by a diesel generator is provided. Standard rooms have six hours of electricity, from 6 p.m. to midnight. In government-owned Mrauk-U Hotel, the rate per day is US\$ 36 for a single room and 48 US\$ for a double room. For domestic tourists, a normal double room cost 12000 Kyats (about 11 US\$) in early 2007. Electricity is limited from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. The other two hotels (Prince Hotel and Vesali Hotel) are included in the first class.

Name	Location	Total rooms		Remark
		Single	Double	
Mya-nan Theygi	Myin Saing Pyin Ward	6	5	Earliest guesthouse
Kant-kaw Phu	South Ward	10	5	Only for domestic tourists
Royal City	Aung-tat Ward	7	6	Can serve foreigners
Thazin	Aun-gtat Ward	3	7	Open in April 2007
Golden Star	Kan Hla Ward	3	5	Can serve foreigners
Kyun Tharyar	Aung-tat Ward	-	-	Still under construction
Total		29	28	

Fig. 11: Guesthouses in Mrauk-U during 2007 (Source: Mrauk-U Township Development Committee, April 2007).

Note: Some guesthouses are not registered yet at Mrauk-U Township Development Committee, although these are doing business. According to field observation, there are seven guesthouses and three are still under construction during April 2007.

Guesthouses with more facilities, where foreigners can stay, are included in the second class. Among seven guesthouses, Royal City, Shwe Thazin, Golden Star and Thazin-pan-khaing guesthouses are included in this group. Within this class, the rates differ. For example, in the Royal City guesthouse, the price for a foreigner is 15 US\$ per night including breakfast. For a domestic tourist it is 2000 Kyats (1.8 US\$) per night without breakfast. However, in the Golden Star Guesthouse, foreigners are charged 8000 Kyats (7.3 US\$) with breakfast and domestic visitors 2000 Kyats (1.8 US\$) per night without breakfast. The prices depend on the facilities provided by the guesthouses. However, since electricity is limited, it is impossible to use a fan during the hot time of the day in ordinary guesthouses.

The third class includes the guesthouses intended only for domestic tourists, such as Kankaw-phu, Myanan Theingi, and Thazin guesthouses. The rates in these guesthouses range from 1500 Kyats to 2000 Kyats (about 1.3 to 2 US\$) per person per night. The facilities provided are a bed and a shared toilet and bath. Rooms are usually small and intended only for beds. Most of the domestic tourists and businessmen (especially sales agents) use such guesthouses. The largest and most widely used guesthouse in Mrauk-U is Kankaw Phu, included in the third class. Sales agents for various goods, such as cold drinks, cigarettes, etc. mainly stay in this guesthouse because of its location near the market place and the convenience of being nearby toilets. This somehow reflects the lack of basic urban infrastructure provision, such as public places and public toilets for tourists. Although these seem to be of minor importance, the collective lack of such provisions indirectly hampers tourism development.

According to interviews conducted between 1996 and 2000, the price for one night stay in a second class guesthouse was between 400 and 800 Kyats per person for domestic guests without breakfast, and for foreigners it was 5 US\$ with breakfast. In 2007, these fees gradually rose to 2000 Kyats for domestic tourists per night and 15 US\$ with breakfast for foreigners. This increase is mainly due to inflation which is high in Myanmar. The standards of guesthouses vary widely. Besides, the provision of services in most guesthouses is limited, for example laundry service is not available in most guesthouses. Many jobs and a substantial amount of income for the local urban population could be generated by tourism services sector.

Beyond the hotel and guesthouse lodging capacity of Mrauk-U, there are two large monasteries, Yadana Manaung and Ahlowtawpye, where hundreds of domestic visitors can lodge free of charge. One example is the Yadana Manaung monastery, which was known as Yadana San Oo Kyung in ancient times. Thousands of monks were instructed Buddhist philosophy here. It is still the largest meditation centre in Rakhine State, and more than two hundred people can practice meditation here. Water and electricity for lighting are provided for domestic tourists by the monastery for a small donation of money. Monks take care of the accommodation of the

domestic tourists. Most of the visitors to these monasteries come from Yangon and the southern Shan State in groups of three to five large buses with a capacity of 45 passengers each. Pilgrims from Yangon, especially organized by Sein Win and Associate Tour Company, always let their customers stay in this monastery. This is partly because of a lack of guesthouses that can accommodate all their customers in one place and partly because it is more economical for their business. This clearly reflects the limited accommodation capacity in Mrauk-U, which is especially critical during the peak tour season.

Since hotels are costly for domestic tourists and for some foreign individual tourists, tourists rely mainly on guesthouses. However, the total number of both single and double rooms in all guesthouses in Mrauk-U is less than 100. This means that a maximum of up to two hundred tourists can be lodged in Mrauk-U in the same time period. This clearly limits the arrival of domestic tourists, especially in the peak tourist season.

Besides, there is no hotel of international standard for high-class foreign tourists. At present, a privately owned hotel that will meet international standards, Mrauk-U Princess Resort Hotel, is under construction in Aung-tat Ward with large investments. It is mainly intended for high-class international package tours. However, it is not yet regarded as a hotel by the Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, although it is far more advanced in both services and facilities provided than the government owned Mrauk-U Hotel. This reflects the miss-match of inefficient management and the regulation of tourism-related institutions.

There is a special restriction on the construction of new hotels and guesthouses in Mrauk-U by the Ministry of Culture and Archaeology. The whole area of Mrauk-U comprises about 30 square miles and the area demarcated as archaeological zone is 20 square miles large. The Mrauk-U area is scattered with ancient remnants, and even the sites of existing buildings are not free of some major archaeological remnants. For example, the present-day Vesali Hotel was constructed on the site of a former rice storage godown (storehouse/warehouse) of the ancient Rakhine Kings, and the moat surrounding the rice storage godown for security reasons to protect against rats has been transformed into a swimming pool. Although there are restrictions for the construction of hotels, the Archaeology Department cannot forcefully prevent these undesirable developments in advance. This accounts for a loss of ancient historical sites, and such events have occurred quite frequently in the recent past. This will have a strong influence on the development of tourism in Mrauk-U in the long run although it is difficult to prove at present.

4.3 Food supply

One of the most essential components of the tourism industry are food supply services which are also limited in Mrauk-U. Guesthouses in Mrauk-U cannot

provide food except for breakfast for foreigners in some cases. All visitors, except high-class tourists who lodge in hotels, have to rely on restaurants which are mainly clustered near the main market place. However, there are no proper restaurants of considerable standard in Mrauk-U, especially for international tourists. Restaurants are very limited in both quality and quantity, with only four ordinary restaurants for normal domestic visitors. Out of these four, only three restaurants have a food business licence. One is not registered yet (Mrauk-U Township Development Committee 2007). Among the registered restaurants, only one (Moe Cherry Toe restaurant) can serve a suitable standard of food for international tourists. However, it mainly caters to foreigners who visit Mrauk-U on package tours arranged by its own Moe Cherry Toe Travels and Tours Company. Thus, this service is very limited and the price of a meal is 3.5 times higher than at the other restaurants. However, meals are much better and are prepared especially to suit foreign tourists.

The other three restaurants are suitable only for domestic tourists and their capacity is not sufficient in the peak tourist season. However, one of them has been serving foreign tourists since 2002, as there is no alternative. Apart from the above mentioned three registered restaurants, there are a few low standard restaurants and some small road-side food vendors. At present, Mrauk-U needs neat and tidy restaurants which provide safe and suitable meals for tourists, especially for foreigners. The standard of restaurants needs immediate upgrading.

4.4 Electricity supply

Another important driving force which is shaping the development of tourism in Mrauk-U is the limited supply of electricity. Electricity is supplied by Myanma Electric Power Enterprise and is produced by an old diesel generator. However, the actual management is under the Township Electricity Supply Committee, composed of some administrative authorities and local representatives. This committee has the main responsibility for electricity distribution and determines the fees. The price of electricity in Mrauk-U was 350 Kyats per 1 kWh in early 2007 before the abrupt increase of oil prices in Myanmar in September 2007, whereas it was only 50 Kyats in Yangon. Electricity is only supplied for three hours a day, from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. However, electricity supply is not sufficient in all parts of Mrauk-U. Some important government institutions also need electricity, and thus wards are supplied through alternative sources. Sometimes, electricity cannot be supplied due to frequent break-downs of the old generator and a limited supply of diesel fuel from Yangon due to difficult transport conditions.

Most of the hotels rely partly on this electricity supply between 7:00 and 10:00 p.m. and run their own generator for the rest of the night. This accounts for the higher rates in hotels of Mrauk-U. Guesthouses are located mainly in residential wards and also rely on this central three-hour supply of electricity. During day

time, the whole town does not have electricity. This limited supply of electricity greatly hampers tourism development through a lack of entertainment facilities and telecommunication infrastructures, which are essential in the development of tourism. Even at night, there is no proper street lighting. Lack of sufficient electricity has very profound effects on the development of cultural tourism.

4.5 Communication facilities

Another important factor which also shapes tourism development in Mrauk-U is the telecommunication sector. There were only ten auto-telephones in Mrauk-U until early 2007. All these phone lines had many extensions, and thus were often busy. One of the digital phones is in Mrauk-U Hotel, since it is the branch office of the Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, and there are some digital phones in important government institutions. It is difficult to make a phone call from Mrauk-U to Yangon or to other places. There was no internet and email access prior to April 2007.

4.6 Maintenance of ancient remnants

An important factor to be aware of for further tourism development in Mrauk-U is the improper maintenance of ancient remnants. The ruins of Mrauk-U stand as a silent testimony to the irreversible laws of nature. Maintenance of the ancient pagodas and monuments is insufficient. Besides, restoration usually bears the danger of destroying the original structure of pagodas, especially in the part of the umbrella (Htee) of the pagoda.

Disputes always occur between local people who want to renovate the pagodas and the Archaeology Department which wants to maintain their authenticity. Even in the most famous Shit-thaung Pagoda, since the Pagoda Trusteeship Board is stronger than the Archaeology Department, the corridor which leads up to the temple has been completely paved and covered with modern flooring material, eliminating the original structure. The entrance has also been reconstructed and the original ancient structure has disappeared. The reconstruction costs for the entrance area were quite high.

Some of the ancient pagodas were totally demolished during the construction of a new road in 1999 near Baungdut-thar-Su village, a settlement in the south of Mrauk-U. In former times, it was the main trading town controlled by the kings of Mrauk-U, where many western merchants came for trading. Remnants of such a flourishing trade were manifest in the ruins of the Dutch trade centre (Shwe Zan 1995: 137), which were completely torn down due to the construction of the new road in 1999.

Recent restorations at Mrauk-U often have not been undertaken properly in order to maintain its authenticity and historical value. This leaves a questionable im-



Fig. 12 and 13: Remnants which show the results of intensive weathering and lack of proper maintenance.

(top): Remnants at the upper floor of Koe-thaung Pagoda.

(bottom): Former stairway to a pagoda on the hill, which is now in bad shape.

pression on foreign tourists which in turn has strong effects not only on the present but also the future development of tourism in Mrauk-U. This is one of the most important driving factors that will determine the future of tourism, and it will indirectly influence the urban development of Mrauk-U.

4.7 Water supply

Mrauk-U usually faces water scarcity during tourist season. Thus, water supply also must be taken into account in the further development of the tourism business. For water, Mrauk-U mainly relies on wells as well as ponds, in which rain-water is collected and stored for the whole dry season. Pond water is used for drinking, cooking, washing and all other household needs. Water from wells is

mainly used for drinking. However, since Mrauk-U is located on a thick, hard layer of rock, it is not always possible to dig a well. Besides, the water quality is also low. Thus, some households rely on public wells which are already scarce. Some of the wells have been in use since the period of the Rakhine Kings (Fig. 14 and 15).

A litre of purified drinking water, which is imported from Yangon and mainly consumed by tourists, costs 500 Kyats in Mrauk-U. In Yangon the retail price for the same brand is 200 Kyats, whereas the wholesale price is only 150 Kyats. Drinking water is also transported from Sittway in 50-litre plastic bottles, which is cheaper. This water is not potable for tourists and availability is also limited. Besides, the quality of purified drinking water from Sittway is not as reliable as that of the imported water from Yangon. In some guesthouses, water is usually bought from the water carrier who fetches it from a nearby pond. In this case, the water itself is free of charge, but the water carrier charges a labour fee. However, water from the well at Yandana Manaung monastery, where many domestic tourists lodge, is not of sufficient quality, not even for baths (Interview 2007).

If there were more tourists, there would be a water supply problem and this would affect the local urban population. As such, ways to secure a sufficient water supply should be considered in advance in order to provide clean water for the increasing number of tourists.

4.8 Internal roads

The roads in Mrauk-U need to be upgraded. Only very small portions of the internal roads are tarred. Except for some parts of the main roads, all the rest are earthen roads with no proper drainage. Fortunately, many creeks, which pass through the town, serve as natural drains. Once, Mrauk-U was famous for these creeks and their strategic importance for defense, especially against an invasion by Burmese troops, which was a threat at that time. The creeks also functioned as trade and transport routes. However, at present, these small creeks are used mainly as waste dumps, and some parts of the creeks are blocked with waste, making the town filthy. Such an impression is not favourable for tourism development in Mrauk-U and it indicates that a systematic waste disposal system is urgently needed.

4.9 Other tourist attractions and entertainment

According to field work and interviews, pagodas are the main attraction in Mrauk-U. This is especially true for domestic tourists. Only very few domestic tourists, mostly educated people, are interested in the archaeology and culture of ancient Rakhine which can be mainly found in Mrauk-U. For international tourists, even though pagodas are interesting, the main emphasis is on the architectural au-



Fig. 14: A public well of more than 100 years old in Mrauk-U which is still used for drinking water.



Fig. 15: One of the large ponds of Mrauk-U namely Kan-Hla Kan (pond), which was constructed by the Rakhine Kings and is still used now. Water is carried by human labour with a labour charge. Traditionally, girls and young women of the households carry water every evening, and it is perceived as a usual habit.

thenticity and historical value of the pagodas. There are other interests apart from pagodas, such as the landscape, original sites and culture.

Concerning amenities, there are no further places for recreation in Mrauk-U, such as theatres, cinemas, parks and playgrounds, etc. the provision of such amenities with the aim of promoting tourism development would improve basic urban infrastructure.

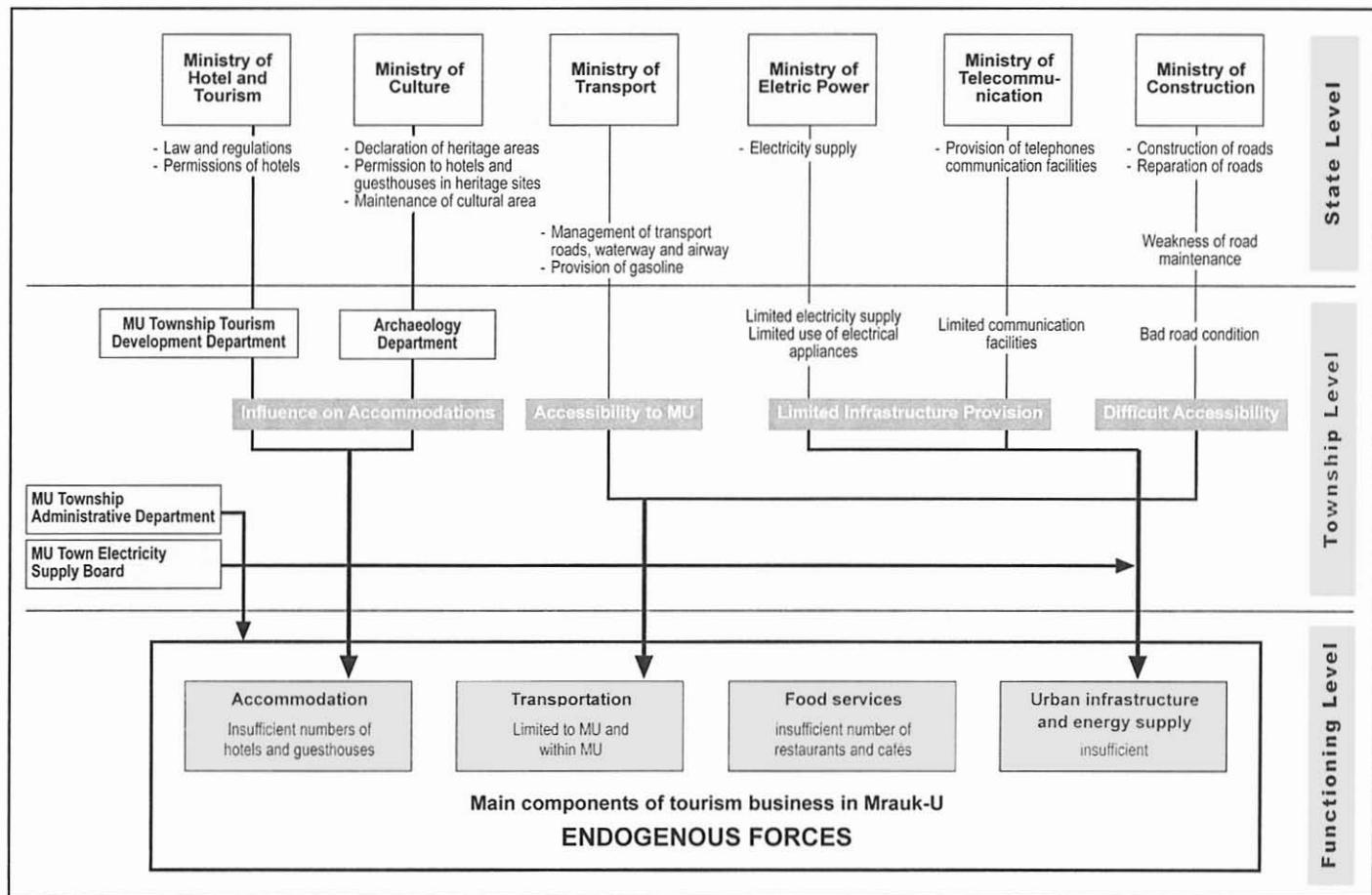
5. Searching an immediate solution

Tourism is a powerful economic force providing employment, foreign exchange, income, and tax revenue. The generators of economic impact for a city, a province, a state, a country, or a destination area are visitors, their expenditures, and the multiplier effects. The tourist industry is not only important as an income generator, but also as a generator of employment (Goeldner et al. 2000: 412–414). As a cultural heritage zone and an open-air museum of Rakhine culture and tradition, Mrauk-U can profit from tourism, especially in respect to its urban development (Zin Nwe Myint et al. 2016).

According to Goeldner, tourism supply components can be classified into four broad categories: natural resources and environment, the built environment, transportation, and hospitality and cultural resources (Goeldner et al. 2000: 366). As such, Mrauk-U already has highly valuable ancient buildings as cultural resources. However, there are deficits in the built environment, the transport sector, accommodation and infrastructure provision and energy supply, etc.. Although Mrauk-U is rich in cultural resources, these are not properly managed in order to make a profit through tourism. Besides, it can be said that the present level of tourism development in Mrauk-U is not as high as it is in other places in Myanmar. Figure 16 summarizes the driving forces of tourism development which have led to the low level of tourism in Mrauk-U of its high potential.

For the development of cultural tourism in Mrauk-U, many exogenous determinants, usually perceived as business environment, are essential. This business environment includes the political and social environment, the level of infrastructure and superstructure development, the availability of resources, social and cultural attractions, barriers and obstacles, restrictions, rules and laws, technological advancements, accessibility, etc. (Hall and Page 2006: 69). All these exogenous determinants depend on government policies and encouragement and how well private sector cooperates. However, on the operating level, the local population and the local situation play an important role as they directly deal with tourism-related businesses. Thus, the local situation and local actors can be perceived as endogenous forces. To develop tourism in Mrauk-U, both exogenous and endogenous forces should operate better, which is difficult at present due to a miss-match of policy matters and operating structures at the local level. It is necessary to harmonize these two main forces which shape cultural tourism in Mrauk-U. To quickly eliminate barriers for tourism development, the participation of local people is urgently needed as they are the main actors. As such, it is important to include them in problem solving and decision making in tourism-related activities. Thus, the role of the local civil society is becoming important in tourism development in Mrauk-U, and this directly influences urban development by providing more basic infrastructure.

Fig. 16: Flow-Chart showing the major driving forces of tourism development and their impact on cultural tourism of Mrauk-U (MU) [Layout: Zin Nwe Myint]



There is an immediate need to improve the electricity supply. Although natural gas has been found in Rakhine offshore, electricity production using natural gas is still impossible for Rakhine State. Planned hydroelectric projects are also still in the stage of investigation. In this situation, alternative ways of generating electricity should be considered, especially the use of gasifiers (electricity generated from biogas which is produced from agricultural residues, mainly from rice husk which is especially abundant in Mrauk-U due to the surrounding vast rice fields). This alternative way of electricity production is affordable for local businessmen, and authorities should encourage it. It is definitely possible to establish a bio-gas generator in Mrauk-U, because during the construction of the high-class hotel, Mrauk-U Princess Resort in Aung-tat Ward, preparations were already made to construct a gasifier in order to provide electricity for advanced facilities and a communication system, including internet through its own satellite receiver.

Concerning communication, auto telephone (IDD), and access to the internet and emails should be provided. This is essential in the tourism business in the era of globalization.

Apart from ancient pagodas, Mrauk-U should consider its other unique attractions when further developing tourism. It is necessary to offer tourist attractions other than pagodas to international tourists. For example, there should be a trail to the ruined fortress. Besides creating new sites, Mrauk-U's traditional stone and bronze sculptures should be displayed an interesting handicrafts exhibit, along with folk songs and traditional dance. By doing so, a once wide spread traditional profession could be revived and income could be generated for the local people.

Besides, a town tour could be offered focussing on the way of life in Aung-tat village, which is part of Mrauk-U town. Sites such as the small morning market, etc. could be interesting, especially for international tourists. Furthermore, a tracking route could be created along the fortress line which encompasses the town.

For the successful development of tourism, the town needs to be kept clean. This is especially true in the contest of international tourism. During the preparation of their visit to Mrauk-U, most of the international tourists gain some knowledge about the once beautiful and prosperous cosmopolitan capital of Mrauk-U which had a splendid palace, palace walls, moats and creeks in the ancient Rakhine Kings' period. However, the actual situation at present has changed in that the once beautiful moats and natural creeks are now used most inappropriately as sewerage and waste disposal sites, creating a filthy Mrauk-U. This situation should be improved to a degree that the natural creeks are clean enough for tourists to use small boats for sightseeing, which could be a further tourists attraction.

Concerning entertainment, Mrauk-U should create a place where traditional Rakhine dance can be performed regularly, especially in the tourist season.

Besides, events such as Rakhine traditional wrestling (Kyin-kain pwe) should be arranged periodically as an entertainment for tourists. As such, Shit-thaung Pagoda festival is the event with the highest potential for tourism development in Mrauk-U. One should also create an attractive place where tourists can learn something about Rakhine culture, e.g. by showing traditional costumes, handicrafts, food, and household devices, etc... According to the interviews, many people involved in the tourism business in Mrauk-U want to have a direct flight connection with Yangon and other places of main touristic interest. Concerning the airport, there is an old airport in Mrauk-U for small planes. If it were renovated, there could be direct flights to Mrauk-U from Yangon as well as from Mandalay or Bagan. This could reduce undesirable problems occurring due to transport constraints. Besides, triangular flight routes between Yangon, Bagan and Mrauk-U, or Yangon, Mandalay and Mrauk-U, could be considered to increase tourist arrivals to Mrauk-U, especially international tourist arrivals that bring real income.

In an interview with a key informant on how to improve the socioeconomic situation of Mrauk-U through tourism, one important perspective was mentioned: "It needs to amend men" (Interview April 2007), i.e. the people's behaviour. This clearly reflects the inefficient performance of local, state and national level government institutions which are directly related to the tourism business. Besides, it also reflects the local people's behaviour, who – unlike people from other places of Myanmar – are quite reluctant to deal with tourists. Hospitality and proficiency in English are urgent requirements. The attitude of local people towards tourists, especially foreigners, should be changed; people need to improve their hospitality towards tourists (Zin Nwe Myint 2011, 2014). This will take time and it can be achieved only through educative programmes. However, only a local organization which can strengthen social cohesion can fulfil this task.

For the tourism-related government institutions it is very difficult to improve the socioeconomic situation of Mrauk-U through tourism; most important and of immediate need would be to organize a working team, such as a destination management organization (DMO), with business owners and authorities from tourism-related government institutions. Multi-stakeholder dialogue and participation is needed. As such, a clear responsible cooperation and mutual trust become important. Members of this organization should be elected by both businessmen and tourism-related government institutions, including local administrative authorities. This organization should also adopt clear aims with long term and short term plans for the development of cultural tourism in Mrauk-U. By organizing such a team, problems such as conflicts related to responsibility sharing could be avoided. Working as a local DMO it could also have a stronger role in educating the local people, and speed up decision making processes, problem solving and the implementation of aims and objectives for tourism development.

The needs for development of tourist industry in Mrauk-U are;

- to found an effective working organization with local businessmen working in the tourist industry, community leaders and local administrative authorities with equal decision making power,
- to improve transportation both to Mrauk-U and within the Mrauk-U area,
- to improve the electricity supply immediately through self-reliance programmes (such as giving permission and encouragement to the private sector to provide gasifiers) as well as by the Ministry of Electric Power,
- to design a mid and long term integrated tourism development plan,
- to create new tourist attractions,
- there should be strict regulations to conserve the authenticity and cultural value of Mrauk-U Archaeological Zone,
- to provide sufficient basic telecommunication infrastructure,
- to establish a special zone for the further construction of new hotels,
- to provide regular entertainment and organize events to attract tourists, and
- to make sure that Mrauk-U stays a clean town.

A supply and demand analysis with a systematic approach in order to investigate the tourism industry in Mrauk-U will be of primary importance for an improved planning and management through a Destination Management Organization.

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