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Country Profile: Burma

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth Garden.



Welcome

From Tom Garden, CEO



Country Profile: Burma



“This is Burma” wrote Kipling, “and it will be quite unlike any land you know about. Burma is a beautiful and unique country that is rich in tradition; unfortunately current events have created many hardships for its people.”

In 1948 Burma achieved independence from the United Kingdom as the “Union of Burma”. The name changed to Myanmar in 1988 when the military staged a coup. However, many western governments do not recognize the ruling military regime and still refer to the country by its original name, Burma. Burma is located in Southeast Asia and is bordered by India, China, Thailand, Laos, and Bangladesh. The capital of Burma is Nay Pyi Taw and some of its larger cities are Rangoon (the previous capital) and Mandalay. The population of Burma is estimated to be 54.3 million but an official census has not been conducted since 1983.

There are over 100 different ethnic groups living in Burma. Seventy percent of the people belong to the Bamar, also known as Burman, ethnic group and speak Burmese. Some of the other main ethnic groups include the Karen, Shan, Kachin, Chin, Mon, and Rakhine. There are also more than 100 indigenous languages spoken in the country, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Southeast Asia. Many of the Burmese coming to Minnesota belong to the Bamar and Karen ethnic groups. These groups both live in Burma but they speak very different languages and follow different customs because their ancestors originated from different regions in Asia. The official religion of Burma is Buddhism and almost 90% of the population practices this. The other religions that are observed are Christianity, Islam, and Animist.

The current Burmese government is ruled by a military junta that took control of the country on September 18, 1988 after a military coup to replace what they viewed as an increasingly corrupt democracy. There have been reports of numerous human rights abuses since this regime took power. The junta is also responsible for the internal displacement of ethnic minorities living in rural villages in eastern Burma. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center these minorities are forced to relocate because their land is being confiscated for the development of military bases. They are being forced to move into towns and consolidated villages but many are hiding in the forests surrounding their former villages. BBC News reports that censorship is imposed on all citizens and anyone that speaks out about the conditions risks serious consequences.

Currently, there are more than 170,000 Burmese refugees living in camps in Thailand and Bangladesh. Many have come to the United States from these camps and it is estimated that there are about 500-1500 Burmese now living in Minnesota with the hopes of starting a new life.

Dear Readers,

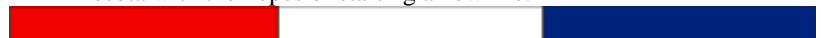
Garden & Associates had another exciting and successful year assisting our friends with their communication needs. We are staying busy serving all of our clients in the medical, legal, social service, and corporate fields. Our clients are located in the Twin Cities, Rochester, St. Cloud, Faribault, Red Wing, and our geographical area continues to expand. We are grateful to all of you for your continued loyalty and support to our agency and interpreters.

We are working hard to ensure that our interpreters are qualified professionals. They must demonstrate comprehension in English and their native language and pass our specialized orientation, which covers the Interpreter Code of Ethics.

This newsletter is focusing on the plight of the people in Burma. Many of the refugees coming to Minnesota currently are from Burma. We hope that you will learn something new about this fascinating country and its people. The newsletter is also aimed to keep you informed about what is new at our agency.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any comments or suggestions about the newsletter that you would like to share with us. We welcome feedback to improve this newsletter or our services.

Regards,
 Tom Garden, CEO Garden & Associates, Inc.
 tom.garden@gardentranslation.com





When the military government took control of Burma in 1988 Amy Twe was working as a high school English teacher in the city of Rangoon. After the military uprising, Amy feared for her safety because she is Karen and practices Christianity. She left for Thailand in 1989 to join her husband who had already left and was living in the city Chiang Mai. Her husband left two years earlier than Amy, in 1987, because the poor economic conditions in Burma forced him to find new employment opportunities in Thailand. In Thailand, Amy became an instructor at Payap University teaching English to students.

Amy and her husband came to the United States in 2003 and a few years later she began working with Garden & Associates as a Burmese and Karen interpreter. She also speaks fluent Thai. She is very involved with the Burmese community in the Twin Cities. She helps with the Refugee Resettlement Program at the First Baptist Church, and also works with the Karen Community of Minnesota, advising members of the Karen community on various issues.

Amy and her husband have not been back to Burma since 1989. While living in Thailand, they returned to Burma often to visit the ethnic tribes living in the hills for her husband's missionary work. In speaking with Amy, she indicated that because of their frequent comings and goings, the Burmese army's intelligence unit thought that they were spies for the resistance. Amy, her husband, and many of their relatives were heavily interrogated by the Burmese army. To this day Amy is not in contact with them for fear that it would cause them many problems with the government.

Amy mentioned that when Burmese refugees come to the United States the biggest challenges that they face are the language barrier and adapting to a new culture. Amy decided to become an interpreter to help people overcome these challenges. She has enjoyed going to many different medical appointments ranging from general check-ups to surgeries. She also has interpreted in the schools and for the public housing agency.

The main advice that Amy has for healthcare professionals is to be aware that the healthcare system and medicine here in the United States is vastly different than in Burma. For example, Burma does not have prescription requirements like the United States. As a result patients are accustomed to going to the market to buy prescription drugs rather than having them prescribed by a doctor and picking them up from a pharmacy. Also, ethnic peoples that live in small villages may be used to herbal and jungle remedies not available in the U.S. Amy also wants healthcare professionals to know that if they have a question regarding the Burmese culture they should not be afraid to ask because she will be happy to explain it to them. She is excited that being an interpreter allows her the opportunity to help the doctor and the patient understand each other and to make the process run very smoothly.



The Full Burmese Dining Experience



Burmese dishes are distinctive and incorporate certain elements from the cooking of neighboring countries India and China. At a Burmese meal there will usually be many different dishes served. The main dish is usually a meat, fish, or vegetable curry.

This is served with white boiled rice or coconut rice. In many other countries the rice is usually steamed. A soup is nearly always included as well and a spoonful is taken between each bite. Desserts are rarely eaten, but at the end of the meal fresh fruit may be served. It is Burmese tradition to eat the meal with one's hands.

Recipe Box



Burmese Soup Recipe (Kyazan Hin Cho)

Ingredients:

- 10 cm bunch Cellophane noodles
- 5 cups Chicken broth
- 1 Onion, finely sliced
- 2 cloves Garlic, finely slices
- 1 Zucchini, finely sliced in disks
- 6 Button mushrooms, sliced
- 1 tablespoon Light soy sauce
- 4 oz Fresh shrimps or prawns

Soak the noodles in hot water and when softened, cut into short lengths. Bring the broth to a boil. Add the onion and the garlic. Add the drained noodles and cook until they are soft. Add the mushrooms, shrimps, zucchini, and soy sauce. Cook just until the shrimps are done. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately while hot.



Cultural Events in the *Twin Cities*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2007; 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

"Cloud, Wind, Thunder, and Rain; An Instrumental Introduction to Korean Traditional Percussive Music"
Presented by The Consortium for the Study of the Asias

Barbara Barker Center for Dance
Room 100
500 21st Ave S.
Minneapolis, MN

Dong-Won Kim gives a lecture on and performs traditional Korean music. For more information call 612-625-6103

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2007; 12:00 PM 4:00 PM

"Dias de Los Muertos Celebracion (Day of the Dead Celebration)"
Presented by the Minnesota Historical Society

Minnesota History Center
345 Kellogg Blvd. W
St. Paul, MN

A day dedicated to a national holiday in Mexico and its traditions. For more information call 651-259-3000

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2007 to SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2007; 8:00 p.m

"Faustin Linyekula and Les Studios Kabako Festival of Lies"
Presented by the Walker Art Center and the National Performance Network

Cedar Cultural Center
416 Cedar Ave S.
Minneapolis, MN

A choreographed theater performance focusing on the Congo. For more information call 612-338-2674

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007; 5:00 PM 8:30 PM

"A Taste of Many Cultures"
Presented by The Multicultural Development Center and Cub Foods

Crowne Plaza , St. Paul Riverfront
Minnesota Ballroom (lower level)
11 East Kellogg Boulevard
St. Paul , Minnesota

A night filled with multicultural food, entertainment, and art. For more information call 952-881-6090