

## **Information for Foreign Meditators at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery**

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery (“Pa-Auk Tawya” in Burmese) is a Buddhist monastery in the Theravāda tradition, with emphasis on the teaching and practice of both samatha (tranquillity) and vipassanā (insight) meditation. The number of residents varies seasonally from approximately 1,000 to 1,800 (during festival times) – this includes more than 300 foreign monks, nuns and lay practitioners, coming from more than twenty different countries. All are here to practise meditation under the guidance of the Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw and his authorised meditation teachers at this monastery.

This document provides you with an outline of the monastery’s basic requirements and services, plus it tells you how to get here.

### **Arrival**

- Pa-Auk Forest Monastery is divided into the Upper, Middle and Lower Monasteries. Upon arrival, foreigners must register at the following locations: male residents – the Registration Office for Foreigners in the Upper Monastery; female residents – the Lower Monastery Office. Please be sure to obtain and read a copy of our “Rules for Foreign Meditators” (Appendix III of this book, which you can pick up at either office).

### **In General**

- Meditators must strictly observe the fourfold purification during their stay here. This purification consists of:
  - (1) The 227 rules of the *Pātimokkha* (and all other *Vinaya* rules) for Theravāda monks; the 10 precepts and 75 *Sekhiya* (training) rules (and all other *Vinaya* rules that

apply) for novices; and the 8 or 10 precepts for laypersons and nuns.

- (2) Restraint of the six sense faculties – of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.
- (3) Purification of livelihood (Right Livelihood) – livelihood that accords with the precepts.
- (4) Reflection on (and moderation in) the use of the four requisites – food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

### **Meditation**

- Everyone must attend the group sittings at their respective meditation hall (unless their meditation teacher has given them permission to meditate in their own kuti). Group sittings are held at the following times: 4:00-5:30 am, 7:30-9:00 am, 1:00-2:30 pm, 3:30-5:00 pm and 6:00-7:30 pm.
- Interviews with Pa-Auk meditation teachers are an important aid to one's practice. New arrivals should come for an interview every day (or make a suitable arrangement that accords with their meditation teacher's schedule).
- Meditators must practise according to the instructions of their meditation teacher.

### **Smoking, Drinking and Drugs**

- Smoking, drinking, chewing tobacco or betel nut, and the use of recreational drugs are strictly forbidden. If you use any of these items, please dispose of them before entering the monastery. There are no exceptions to this rule. If you break this rule, you will be asked to leave.

### **Diet and Piṇḍapāta (receiving of almsfood)**

- Meals are offered in the Piṇḍapātasāla (alms hall). Please arrive for piṇḍapāta at the following times:
  - Breakfast – 5:30-6:00 am (depending on the time of dawn)
  - Lunch – 10:00-10:15 am
- The kitchen prepares a vegetarian diet only, including both white and wholegrain brown rice. Other than this daily fare, no special diets are offered.

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- Boiled and filtered drinking water are available at various locations throughout the monastery.

### **Attire**

- Theravāda monks and novices should wear only allowable robes, sandals, etc. Robes must be kept clean. Highly colourful robes (red, bright yellow, etc.) are not acceptable.
- Lay practitioners should dress modestly at all times:

Men – no bare shoulders, no bare calves, no bare knees; no shorts, no sleeveless shirts, vests or undershirts; no ripped or otherwise improper attire.

Women – no bare shoulders, midriff, calves or knees; no short skirts, no shorts, no sleeveless shirts or blouses; no thin, transparent, tight, revealing, brightly coloured or otherwise improper attire.

### **Medical Care**

- There are quarters for the sick and a clinic, with a resident nurse. A dentist and doctors trained in Western medicine visit every week; another trained in traditional Burmese medicine visits once a fortnight.

### **International Mail**

- Excessive correspondence can disturb meditation. Please keep your correspondence to a minimum.
- Outgoing mail should be left in the Outgoing Mailbox at the Piṅḍapātasāla; incoming mail can be picked up on the table next to the Outgoing Mailbox. It is best for important incoming and outgoing letters to be registered.
- To protect incoming parcels against loss or damage, all international parcels should be insured. Ask the sender to mail you a copy of the insurance form.
- Be aware that parcels are subject to customs formalities, censorship and duties.

### **International Telephone Calls**

- You can receive incoming calls on the telephone in the Lower Monastery Office – service is intermittent and low quality. You will need to go outside the monastery to make outgoing calls; international calls can be made from the local internet café for a reasonable price, although reception is sometimes poor. Calls from other commercial establishments can be quite expensive and must be paid in US dollars.

### **E-mail/Internet**

- Permission to send/receive e-mail is granted on a case-by-case basis.

### **Monastics and Money**

- Theravāda monks, novices and 10-precept nuns are not permitted to use, handle or possess money in any form, including: cash, credit cards, cheques, electronic transactions, gold, silver, jewellery, etc. Monastics who carry their own funds must relinquish them PERMANENTLY before taking up residence in the monastery. There are no exceptions to this rule. (For those monastics with allowable requisite funds, see below.)
- Monastics with allowable requisite funds must arrange for the proper transfer of requisites from their previous location to the Pa-Auk *kappiyakāraka* (steward; hereafter referred to as “kappiya” for short) or other such person. Transfer of funds MUST follow the prescribed procedure in the *Vinaya* (please refer to the *Pāṭimokkha*, *Nissaggiya Pācittiya* rules 10, 18, 19 & 20).
- If you come to the monastery as a layperson and decide to ordain, you must make proper arrangements for your funds before ordination; this can be done through the monastery kappiya.

**Visa Application/Extension, etc.**

- If you plan to stay at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery for more than one month, you will need a Pa-Auk Sponsorship Letter in order to apply for the appropriate type of Myanmar visa. You can obtain a Sponsorship Letter through a Pa-Auk Contact Person or by emailing the monastery, attention: U Candimā, with the details of your proposed visit and your meditation background. You will be sent an agreement letter, which you must fill out, scan and email back to the monastery, after which you will be sent a Sponsorship Letter by regular mail. Be sure to fill out the Sponsorship Letter and bring it with you when you go to apply for your religious entry visa at the Myanmar Embassy.
- Please check with the Myanmar Embassy in your home country for the latest visa policy and be sure to visit the Pa-Auk websites for more information. A listing of Pa-Auk Centres and Websites, and international contact persons can be found in our Resource Guide on page 81.
- Once you get to Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, you can apply for a three-month, six-month or one-year visa extension (stay permit). Payment for your extension can be arranged through the monastery kappiya. He will need nine passport photos plus sufficient funds in US dollars. Dollar bills must be in good condition: worn, torn, nicked, marked or questionable bills are unacceptable.
- Current cost of a one-year visa extension is US\$90. The visa extension should be applied for as soon as possible after your arrival in Myanmar. After that, applications for further extensions should be made at least two months before the expiry date of the visa extension. Please be aware that visa extension regulations and costs are subject to change.
- If you are a Theravāda monk, novice or 10-precept nun, the monastery will try to cover your expenses, but if the fees are in US dollars, the monastery's Burmese dāyakas (donors) will be unable to pay. So, to be safe, it is best for a dāyaka

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of your own to make arrangements with a local kappiya to handle the financial side of the extension fees.

- If you stay longer than three months, you are required to obtain a Foreigner's Registration Certificate (FRC), which must be returned at the time of departure. Like the visa extension, the FRC can be applied for at the monastery. Please apply at least one month in advance.

### **Sponsorship**

- A sponsorship letter grants permission for you to reside at this monastery and covers responsibility for your meals and lodging – nothing more. All financial requirements (including medical, dental, transportation, visas, FRC, departure forms and other requisite items) are your personal responsibility. Please arrive with SUFFICIENT FUNDS (IN US DOLLARS) for the duration of your stay.
- If your visa (or visa extension) was obtained with a Pa-Auk Sponsorship Letter, this means you have agreed to stay at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery for the visa's duration. To use an entry/meditation visa for sightseeing and tourism would constitute an abuse of the privilege granted to you by the Sponsorship Letter and could create problems for the monastery.

### **Suggested Items to Bring**

- The following list of suggested items was compiled by foreign meditators here: 10-12 passport photos; vitamin and herbal supplements; herbal teas; light, comfortable, easy-to-wash clothing; dental floss; toiletries; towel; talcum/medicated powder; large umbrella; earplugs; water resistant sandals; torch/flashlight; battery-powered alarm clock; mosquito repellent; yoga mat (if you practice yoga); spare glasses and copy of your prescription; get dental work done before coming. Most everyday-items can be obtained locally, name brands excluded; voltage here is 220V.

### **Climate**

- There are three seasons in Myanmar: a hot season (March-May); a rainy season (June-Oct.); and a cold season (November-February). Temperatures range from 15° to 40° Centigrade (59° to 104° Fahrenheit).

### **How to Get to Pa-Auk Forest Monastery from Yangon**

(Yangon → Mawlamyine → Pa-Auk → Mudon)

- Mawlamyine is 301 kms (187 miles) southeast of Yangon, and the monastery is another 14.5 kms (9 miles) southeast of Mawlamyine. Air-conditioned buses to Mawlamyine /Mudon depart daily from the highway bus station in Yangon. You can buy tickets along the south side of Aung San Stadium, opposite the central train station. Note: If you take the Mudon bus, ask the driver to let you off at “Pa-Auk Tawya” (the bus goes right past the main gate of the monastery on the way to Mudon). From this point, to get to the monastery proper, you can either walk or hire a vehicle.
- Travel options include a train service that goes direct from Yangon to Mawlamyine. If you take the train, be sure to go “upper class.”
- Contact persons in Yangon can help you get to the monastery. For a listing of contact persons, please check our Resource Guide on page 81.

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