

# **TOWARDS A TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ZONE FOR ANCIENT CITY OF MRAUK-U AND ITS ENVIRONS**

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## **Abstract**

The ancient city of Mrauk-U is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Myanmar. Among the ancient city of Myanmar, the ancient city of Mrauk-U still retains its richness in art and architecture of religious monuments. Now, the inventory list of ancient monuments shows that there are 157 ancient monuments around Mrauk-U. Majority of ancient monuments except a few were built of stone. Many stupas and temples were ruined by heavy rain or by bombing during the Second World War. Similarly many stupas and temples were destroyed by treasure hunters who are in search of antiquities and valuable jewellery. On the other hand, the ancient city lacks proper tourist facilities as well as communication and transportation facilities. The aim of the paper is to revive the historic atmosphere of the ancient city of Mrauk-U by preserving and restoring ancient monuments and establishment of efficient tourist facilities to attract more tourists. Then, creation of further tourism facilities which fit into the tourism products, handicraft development and physical control with the development of human settlements and activities are necessary. The main objective of the paper is to develop tourism in the historic city of Mrauk-U area in a controlled manner. If unplanned, the ancient city could lead to uncontrolled development which would quickly degrade the religious monuments, the natural resources and the cultural fabric of the ancient city. To safeguard the sound future development of tourism in the historic area of Mrauk-U, it is essential that the local residents be integrated into all programmes and that their social and economic welfare improve alongside increasing tourist activity.

## **1. Introduction**

This paper outlines the Tourism Master Plan for ancient City of Mrauk-U and its environs, Rakhine, Myanmar. Mrauk-U was built as a defense city by King Min Saw Mon in the year AD 1430. Mrauk-U is a vast treasure house of the cultural legacy of Myanmar. A maze-like chain of lake and moats were also constructed both inside and outside the city walls. The palace walls, moats, ponds, palace gates, temples, stupas and monasteries of Mrauk-U are still standing in evidence. The total area of the city is approximately 21 sq-miles. The earth banks of Mrauk-U cover an area of more than 20 sq-kilometers (7.72 sq-miles). In an administrative definition, this area covers 6 quarters and existing municipal area is about 2.428 sq-miles. Tourism industry in Myanmar is organized and managed by the Hotel and Tourist Corporation

under the Ministry of Trade. It is also responsible for safeguarding against negative effects of tourism.

### 1.1. Location of Mrauk-U and Environs

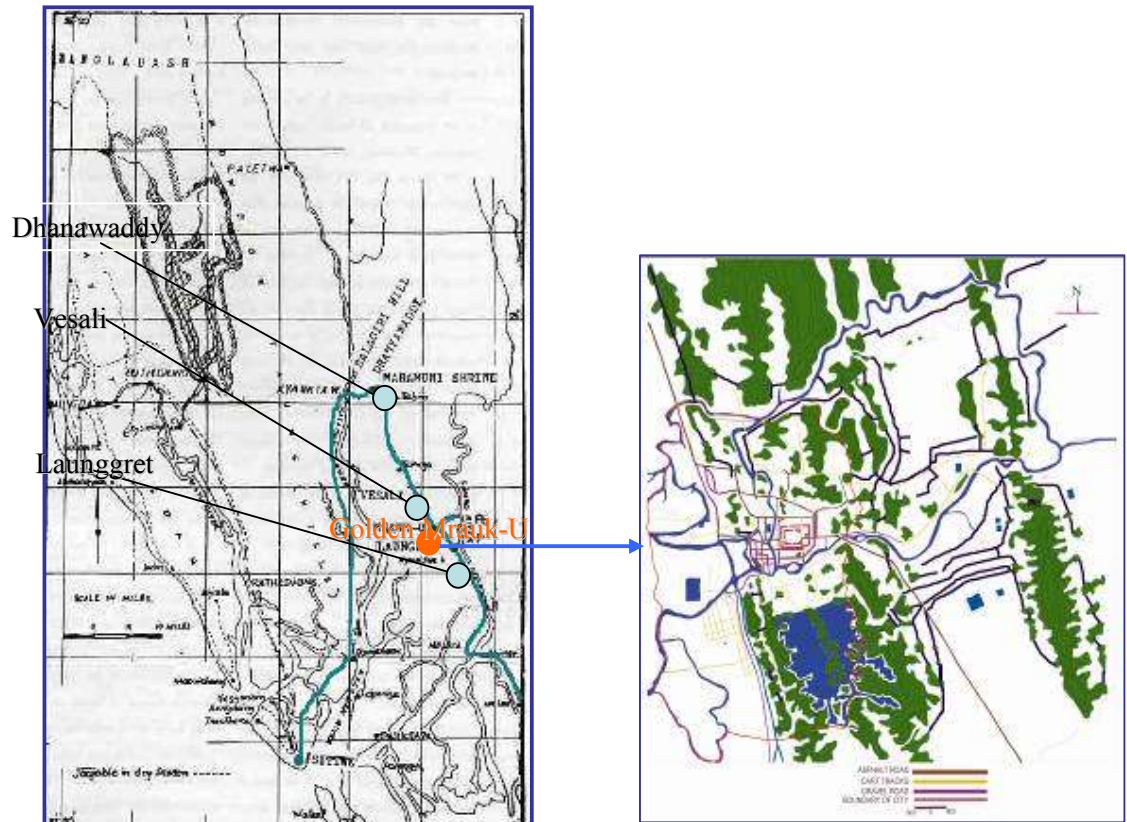


Figure 1: Location of Mrauk-U and Environs

The ancient city of Mrauk-U is situated about 45 miles to the north-east of Sittwe the capital city of Rakhine State. Ancient cities like Dhanawaddy, Vesali, Launggret cities are situated in the environs of Mrauk-U. Dhanawaddy is lies 16 miles north of Vesali and 21 miles north of Mrauk-U. Another ancient city of Vesali is situated five miles north of Mrauk-U. Lemro dynasty ancient cities are 5 miles far from Mrauk-U. The ancient city of Mrauk-U is located at latitude 20 25' N and longitude 93 11' E striding alluvial plains of Kuladan and Lemro rivers. The city walls and moats were constructed, in part, with natural mountain ranges, creeks and drainages. Amidst the mountain ranges and valleys in and around Mrauk-U, there exist a large number of ancient pagodas images, temples, stupas, man-made caves, monasteries and other edifices of all descriptions. The ancient city of Mrauk-U was located inside the elongated mountain ranges. Apart from natural mountain ranges, massive stone fortification walls were built to defend from the danger of military campaign from their rival Kingdoms. The view of Mrauk-U historic city can be seen from above with the surrounding mountain

ranges and encircling canals and moats. The ancient city of Mrauk-U can be said as the strongest fortress city built in 15<sup>th</sup> century A.

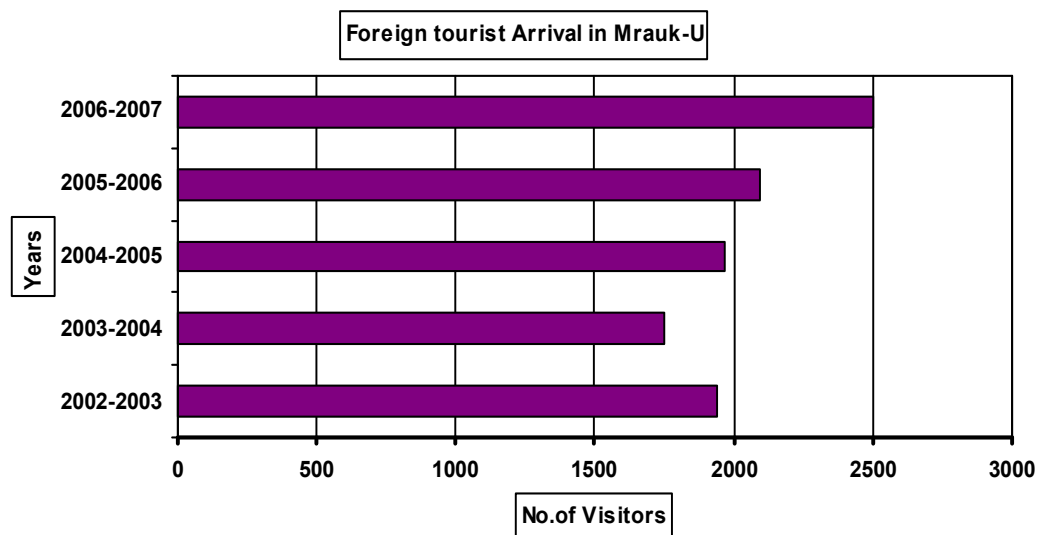
## 2. Present Tourism to Rakhine

### Attractions

Rakhine State is based on its cultural attractions. Such attracted towns are Sittwe, the capital city of Rakhine State, Ngapali beach in Thandwe, Kyaukphyu, Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Punnagyun, Myinbya, Taungup, Yanbye and Gwa. Mrauk-U is the most tourist attraction point in Rakhine and other tourist attraction near Mrauk-U environs are Dhanawaddy, Vesali, and Laungret which were old capital cities of Rakhine.

### 2.1 Foreign Tourist Arrival in Mrauk-U

Foreign tourist arrival in Mrauk-U is fairly small, at present, due to lack of transportation facilities and public facilities in Mrauk-U.



### 2.2 Tourist Arrivals by Mode of Transport in Mrauk-U

The number of arrivals in Mrauk-U is still fairly small (3000 in 2006-2007) and the increase in the arrivals is depend on transport and the physical capacity of the tourism

plant. Most of the package tourists and foreign independent tourist choice by plane from Yangon airport to Sittwe and another selection by car from Yangon to Sittwe which takes long one night two days. It takes about two hours by speed boat from Sittwe jetty along the Kaladan River and five hours by car from Sittwe to Mrauk-U.

### 2.3 Accommodation Facilities in Mrauk-U

Only one HTC hotel and eight private guests are in Mrauk-U at present condition. There are only 4 hotels and total capacity of 68 rooms.

#### Mrauk-U Accommodation, 2006-2007

HTC Hotels	Rooms	Beds
Mrauk-U Hotel	22	38
Private Hotels		
Nawarat Hotel	18	36
Prince Hotel	16	32
Vesali Resort Hotel	12	24

#### Private Guest Houses

Private Guest Houses	Rooms	Single	Double
Thazinpaingkhine	12	8	4
Nanmyotaw	20	16	4
Shwekhinkyi	8	5	3
Kyawsoe	8	5	3
Myanantheingyi	11	6	5
Gankawphoo	16	10	6
Thazin	5	3	2
Pleasant Island	7	4	3
Total guest houses	<b>87</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>30</b>

### 3. The Monuments as a Tourist Attraction

Mrauk-U is the single most attraction tourist destination in Rakhine but also in Myanmar. Like Pagan, the attraction of Mrauk-U is mainly the magnificent archaeological site with its numerous large and small pagodas. Almost all of the temple and pagodas are built of sand stones. Some temples continue to

be places of worship, while others are historic relics of the past from which a panoramic view of the whole archaeological site can be observed.

Hundreds of temples, stupas and other Buddhist monuments from the golden city of Mrauk-U are the main tourist attractions in Mrauk-U. First of all the beautiful cultural landscape in which pagodas and temples are set. Small hills and valleys are formed among numerous temples. The view over the hills is to be admired both in the full light of the morning and in sharp silhouette at sunset. Many stupas and temples lies at the foot of the hills and on the slopes and top of the hills. The ancient ponds which are scattered all around the archaeological site provided the main source of water supply, such as, Moreleikkan and Leksaykan etc. Furthermore, Rakhine traditional building style and village life of Rakhine is an attraction in itself which fascinates the tourists. The final attraction of ancient city of Mrauk-U is the rural and aspects of cultural and nature (including performing arts, food and drink) are not forgotten or overlooked.

The main attraction of Mrauk-U cannot be identified as one or a few main structures. The attraction is the vast number of monuments, the variation in their size and architectural style, the possibility of viewing a large number of monuments in a single visit, their historical background and the natural setting of the monuments. However, the tourists have a number of "must", of which the following can be pointed out; Shitethaung Temple, Htukkant Thein Temple, Anndaw Thein, Kothaug Temple. The most important destination competing with Mrauk-U in this respect are; Ayutthaya, living historic city of Thailand, Indonesia, with Borobudur and the temple island of Bali; and Kampuchea, with the gigantic temple complex of Angkor. Ancient city of Mrauk-U is situated in the dense jungle and offers a little possibility of enjoying on overall view of the archaeological area.

Types of structures	Nos.	In History
Temples and stupas	157(inventory)	6341(thazinpankhine)
Stone fortresses	11	11
Moats	15	28
Enclosure wall	18	18
City wall	13	13
Granaries	13	13
Gates	23	25
Libraries/ Pitakateik	6	48
Monasteries	-	-
Outpost	-	30

Table 1: List of Cultural Significant in Mrauk-U [Internal report from Department of Archaeology (Mrauk-U)]

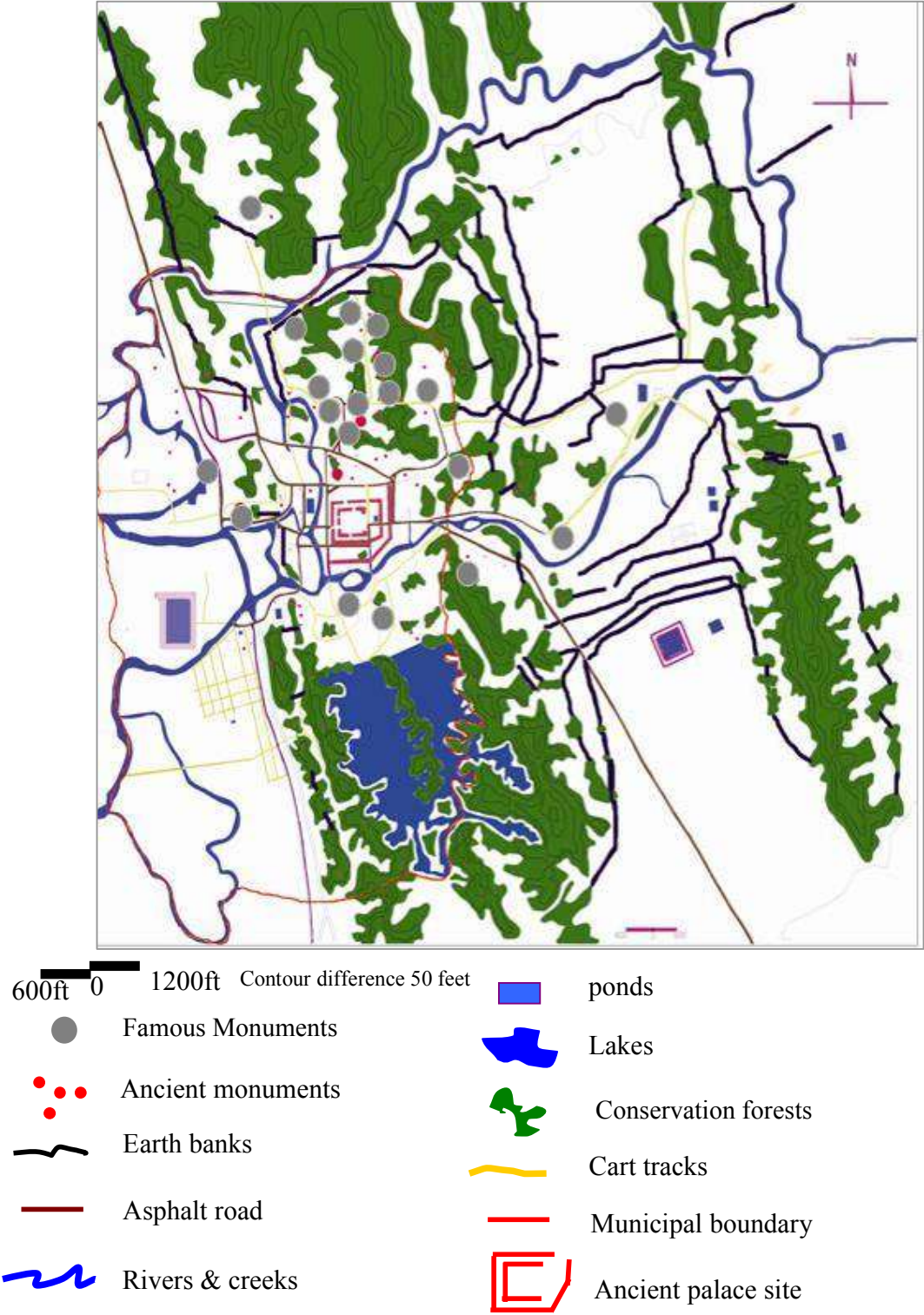


Figure 1: Location of the Most Well-Known Monuments of Mrauk-U

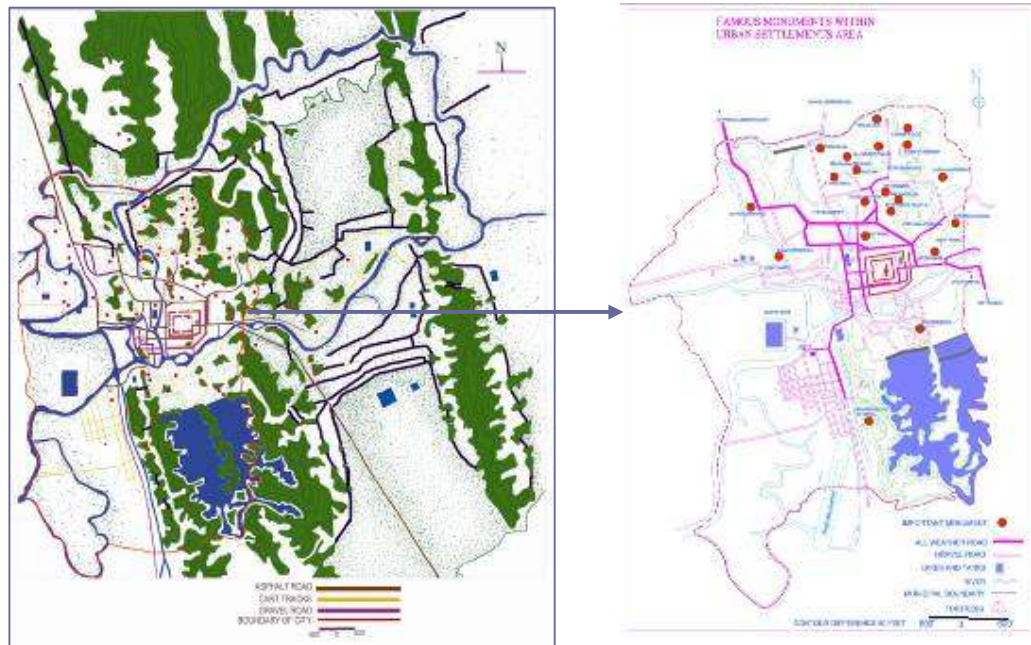


Figure 2: Location of Famous Monuments within Urban Settlement Area

Minkhaung  
Shwegu  
stupa



Ancient palace site



Laymyatnha  
temple



Lakamaung stupa



Htukkanthein  
temple



Koenawin



Shitthaung  
temple



Jinamanaung stupa



## **4. Future Tourism Development**

At present, lack of tourist facilities and transportation difficulties related to tourist arrival. It is needed to repair Sittwe-Mrauk-U transportation system (by car or by boat) and then, domestic airline to Yangon-Sittwe for FITs and PKTs should be managed in the peak season. Moreover, the inner city of Mrauk-U drainage system, roads, electricity, and communication programmes are required to be upgraded for local visitors and international tourists.

### **4.1. Outlined Tourism Policy and Strategy for Mrauk-U**

Ancient city of Mrauk-U has a very high potential for attractive tourists. At the same time the smallness of the population and socio-economic background make the area vulnerable towards a too strong tourism development. The historic city of Mrauk-U is the most important single attraction of Rakhine as well as Myanmar. The tourism development policy of Mrauk-U will have to be consistent with the overall policy.

The main objectives of the Tourism Master Plan are to develop tourism in the historic area of Mrauk-U in a controlled manner. The archaeological site of Mrauk-U is a very important factor in the marketing of tourism to Myanmar. Therefore, the protection and development of this site will be of major important for the future tourism to Mrauk-U.

The specific tourism development objectives for ancient city of Mrauk-U are as follows;

1. To protect the general physical and cultural environment of the archaeological site. The tourist amenities should not be permitted to destroy the character of ancient city scene which is the basis for successful tourism in Mrauk-U; neither should uncontrolled expansion of housing areas.
2. To develop the accessibility and attractiveness of the site to increase the number of tourists to Mrauk-U and to Myanmar.
3. To protect the rural, cultural landscape setting of the area.
4. To avoid major changes in building styles and the physical character of ancient city located close to the archaeological sites.
5. To further preserve and protect the cultural traditions (such as, performing arts, bamboo products, hand-woven handicrafts, etc).
6. To develop a tourism product and facilities which are in harmony with the previously mentioned objectives.

### **4.2. Tourism Development Strategy for Mrauk-U**

The overall attractiveness of Mrauk-U will suffer and often discussed self-destruction of tourism might be a realistic case in Mrauk-U. The only solution to that would be to control the inflow and length of stay of the low -budget individual tourists. This control is suggested to be obtained by the following means;

1. Step-wise change of visa restrictions through this policy the overage length of stay of the standard FITs would not increased strongly.

2. Improvement of the standard of guest houses, whereby higher room rates can be required.
3. Control of the development of new guest houses.
4. Mrauk-U archaeological zone could be declared not only guests (tourists) would have to pay a fee according to the number of days stayed. The special fee for stays in the Mrauk-U archaeological area would reduce the length of stay of the low income tourists.

## **5. Details of the Outlined Master Plan for Ancient city of Mrauk-U**

The future tourism will be built on a number of key developments such as;

1. Development of the products, incl; development of programmes.
2. Protection of main attractions (the monuments and existing cultural setting)
3. Creation of further tourism facilities which fit into the tourism products and the environment.
4. Handicraft development (such as; weaving Rakhine traditional longyi (Rakhine longyi),
5. Physical control with the development of human settlements and activities;

### **5.1. Product Development**

The basis for the future tourism product of Mrauk-U will not change. It is the cultural heritage, the monuments, the handicraft and the rural setting. These key products will not need development but rather protection. There will however be a specific need for Rakhine traditional performances with a cultural stamp. It is recommended to limit such performances to what can be provided by Mrauk-U archaeological area, in order to safeguard the traditions of Rakhine culture.

### **5.2. Tour Programmes**

The present organized tourist circuits are extremely difficult by coaches and cars which from the private tourism sector. Such tour programmes cover most of the famous monuments of Mrauk-U, but, a large number of smallness monuments do not cover due to their location of the cultural landscape.

### **5.4. Protection and Development of Monuments**

The main attraction of Mrauk-U is the numerous monuments. There is no restoration and preservation work at the moment being carried out by international organization, such as Unesco/ UNDP project. At present tourists do not contribute to this effort. As however, the conservation of the monuments is a most for future tourism. It is suggested that Mrauk-U branch of Archaeology Department and HTC work closer together especially in the following areas;

1. Information to tourists about how to behave during visits to monuments.
2. Development of the archaeological area as a world heritage zone. At present, an entrance fee is equivalent to 5 US\$ per day.
3. HTC could also graduate the fee, including a smaller fee for package tourists in their package arrangements and a higher fee for FITs to be paid at the Archaeological Department of Mrauk-U. The collected fees from tourists are financially linked to the restoration of the historic monuments.

The closer co-operation between HTC and the Mrauk-U Archaeological Department would be formalized through a sub-committee. This sub-committee under the Regional Tourism Committee (Sittwe) could work on the following subjects;

1. Development of the Mrauk-U archeological zone including roads, drainage, electricity development and collection of entrance and stay fees;
2. Administration and budgets for funds created through the tourists' fees; details planning and implementation of restoration of historical monuments of special interest for tourists such as, Shittaung Temple, Htukkanthein Temple, Koethaung Temple, etc.
3. Production of informative materials for the tourist, such as maps, informative signs, etc.

## **5.5. Museums**

The new museum would be built to display programmes and to give more and higher standard information to the tourists. At present, the existing museum is very small for display for tourism purposes and its location is not quite worse for the old palace site. In order to undertake the above mentioned improvements and possibility to plan for the suggested new museum, possibility in north-west part of the ancient city.

## **6. Development of Tourist Facilities**

At present, HTC offers one two star hotel at Mrauk-U. Present tourist arrival of Mrauk-U will sufficient and more tourists arrival need a new five star hotel is planned for Mrauk-U. Mrauk-U HTC hotel is only partly fulfilled for package and individual travellers. The planned hotel will have a capacity of 100 rooms utilizing the site in full. It will be located close to the existing Vesali Resort Hotel forming a hotel zone outside municipal area of Mrauk-U. The zone for future tourism development will be located along Mrauk-U-Sittwe highway road. Hereby a new tourism development centre will be created and the pressure an inner city of Mrauk-U will be released. The new tourism zone should be development according to the tourist arrival of Mrauk-U.

All the above hotel developments should follow basic guidelines;

1. The hotel should be built in a traditional design using local construction materials of Rakhine, Mrauk-U,
2. The hotel should blend into the surrounding and should not be a landmark within the archaeological zone.

### **6.1. Private Guest Houses**

The existing eight guest houses will be sufficient to cover the demand for bed nights up to 2008-2010. It is recommended that the number of further guest houses at Mrauk-U archaeological area be restricted and that the total number of guest houses be not allowed above eight. These eight guest houses should cover the need for low-budget FITs bed nights up to 2010. Private guest houses for tourists should not be allowed near ancient palace site. The need for further beds for FITs, beyond 2010, should be covered through the establishment of a second tourism development zone along the Mrauk-U-Sittwe road (near Damaraza Quarter).

### **6.2. Revival of performing arts and traditional crafts**

The presentation of the Rakhine traditional dance performance should be made to develop in Mrauk-U for overseas visitors. At the historic temple of Htukkanthein Temple, outdoor performances could be organized during the peak season. Further opportunities to enhance the presentation of the Rakhine cultural heritage could include a well known “Kyin” a Rakhine wrestling ceremonies.

Rakhine region was well known for its production of good quality of cotton textiles weaving “Rakhine longyi”. The market for traditional crafts will increase with the development of cultural tourism in Mrauk-U. The efforts to revive traditional craft making involves two important elements.

The recommendation for improvements covers the following items;

1. Information for tourists about product quality and how it is recognized.
2. Encouragement of high-quality production.

## **7. Physical Aspects of the Development Plan**

The physical development plan of Mrauk-U area contains the following components;

1. the urban settlement
2. the archaeological area with villages and agricultural production
3. the tourism development zones

The population of Mrauk-U within municipal area is about 28142 nos. There are 49 groups of villages in Mrauk-U township and urban and rural population is about 244396, according to (2006-2007) urban registered population. Ancient city of Mrauk-U is a living city between living settlements. The boundary of Mrauk-U municipal area is about 2.428 sq-miles (1554 acres).

The population in the urban area is concentrated within the municipal of Mrauk-U, where population growth seems to be regaining some momentum due to trade and job opportunities created by the tourist trade. At the present condition, ancient palace site is located in the heart of the city and many living settlements are near the palace wall. It should be related them. The highway bus station is situated in the north of the ancient palace site and it impossible to see the whole wall structure of palace from a distance.

Small villages within archaeological area have sufficient room for expansion assuming low future growth rates. However, all of the villages is limited by archaeological sites and should not be allowed to expand its area.

As tourism is a significant factor in town growth, it is felt that future tourist hotels should not be placed within or nearby the archaeological area, but that a development zone should be established to the north-west of ancient city( along Mrauk-U- Sittwe Road) and south-east of ancient city (along Yangon-Sittwe highway road).

Many stupas and temples lies at the foot of the hills and on the slope and top of the hills. The visual obstruction in this ancient city consists of unsightly jungle growth, a number of poorly constructed houses at the foot of the hills. The ancient ponds which are scattered all around the ancient sites provided the main source of water supply at present. Not like the Pagan, many hills are found and Harritaung Hill in which Haritaung pagoda near the palace site, can view the whole of Mrauk-U city and another one is Shwetaung Hill.

The nature conservationists of Mrauk-U landscape are farmers and, when cultivated, the hills, the fields and trees are the best possible background for the monuments. Access to some monuments can be improved by maintaining footpaths, and trees can be planted along some roads as windbreaks and at selected sites for shade.

The potential threats to the natural environment of Mrauk-U can be counteracted through;

1. aiming marketing efforts at cultural and special interest tourists
2. banning hunting and collection activities that could threaten the environment;
3. controlling modernization in agricultural practices, and the expansion of forestry;
4. hindering the expansion of modern industry and the growth of residential areas within the important archaeological zones.

### **7.1. Zoning and land Use Planning**

The planning area is divided into the following zones;

1. Urban settlement of Mrauk-U
2. Archaeological zone with agricultural activities and villages
3. Tourism development zones

### **7.2. Urban Settlement**

In the anticipated development special attention should be given to the existing town of Mrauk-U within municipal area. The inner city of Mrauk-U was composed with palace and buildings for the royal court in ancient times. At present, there are many residential buildings near the royal palace site. The palace site was situated in the heart of the city. The moats had been made by damming the small streams. The inner city of the palace site was made up of three terraces. It would greatly add to the tourists' experience of

Mrauk-U, if the inner town could again be clearly distinguished from its surroundings which in historical times were the common people quarters and which today constitute a unique open landscape with numerous monuments.

Today there is a reasonable balance inside the town between historical monuments and residential buildings. Any uncontrolled development will have a detrimental effect. For the inner part of the town, a detailed town plan should be worked out. The inner town plan should respect the fields of archaeological interest (to be defined in cooperation with the Department of Archaeology). While these areas await excavation and archaeological research, they should be laid out as a national park. The land use and traffic proposals should be supplemented by a three-dimensional urban design to obtain the desired visual qualities. An important part of the town plan is the layout of surroundings of temples and pagodas. Careful planning of access roads and public spaces could result in new urban qualities where the temples and pagodas stand out as landmarks.

These monuments are seen and appreciated in relation to their surroundings and they take an added importance when they contrast with their background. This was most probably the situation in the great days of Mrauk-U, when ordinary houses and even palaces were built of wood and religious monuments of brick or stone.

The existing general character of Mrauk-U and its traditional building style should be preserved and the mixed character of tourism and the traditional Rakhine village should if possible, retain. Industrial development within the inner part of the city should not be allowed. Also street furniture must be part of the total design. This includes kiosks, signs, posts, display boards, litter bins, fencing, benches, etc. As a rule these facilities should complement and harmonize with their surroundings. For the anticipated future growth of population there is still land available within the existing municipal area boundary. An unbuilt area in the south-western part of the town could be developed for new housing construction.

### **7.3. Villages within the Archaeological Area**

These villages should impose restrictions on the type of buildings and construction materials used, and the developments should only be allowed the village limit.

The protected archaeological area outside the town and villages consists of monuments surrounded by cultivated fields with trees and shrubs lining the roads or free standing. Our recommendation is to change as little as possible in this area. Without land use regulations, there will be a danger of new building activities along the roads, blocking the view of the landscape and the historical buildings.

### **7.4. Tourism Zones**

Ancient city of Mrauk-U is a mixed zone of tourism and urban settlement. Existing tourism zone is north of the palace site and another zone is along on Yangon-Mrauk-U highway road. Tourism within the municipal area is planned

to have reached a suggested maximum with one HTC hotel and nine guest houses. Further tourism development should be avoided in order to preserve the character of ancient city. Tourism zones along on Mrauk-U-Yangon highway road with a capacity of only 20 rooms are the first priority for tourism development. Because of the location of the site near the Shwetaung Hill and close to the historic monuments, the hotel development at the site will have to comply with strict regulations as concerns construction materials and building heights. Nearby the ancient palace site of Mrauk-U, control and restrictions should be improved in order to avoid over- development. In brief, tourist promotion facilities and development programmes should be carried out as follows;

1. Providing basic tourist facilities such as cafeteria, recreation area, car park, etc.
2. Reviving annual festivals such as Lighting-Candles and Firework displays.
3. Building tourist information centers.
4. Promoting an open-air theatre for Rakhine traditional performing arts.
5. Enforcing security services
6. Promoting the private sector's interest in building first class hotels.
7. Upgrading of guest houses in tourism development area.
8. Formalization of a close co-operation between HTC and the Department of Archaeology. This co-operation could be established through a sub-committee for tourism development of the Regional Tourism Committee.
9. Strengthening of the handicraft sector through steps to improve the quality level and reintroduction of traditional skills.
10. Construction of the inner tourism routes system.

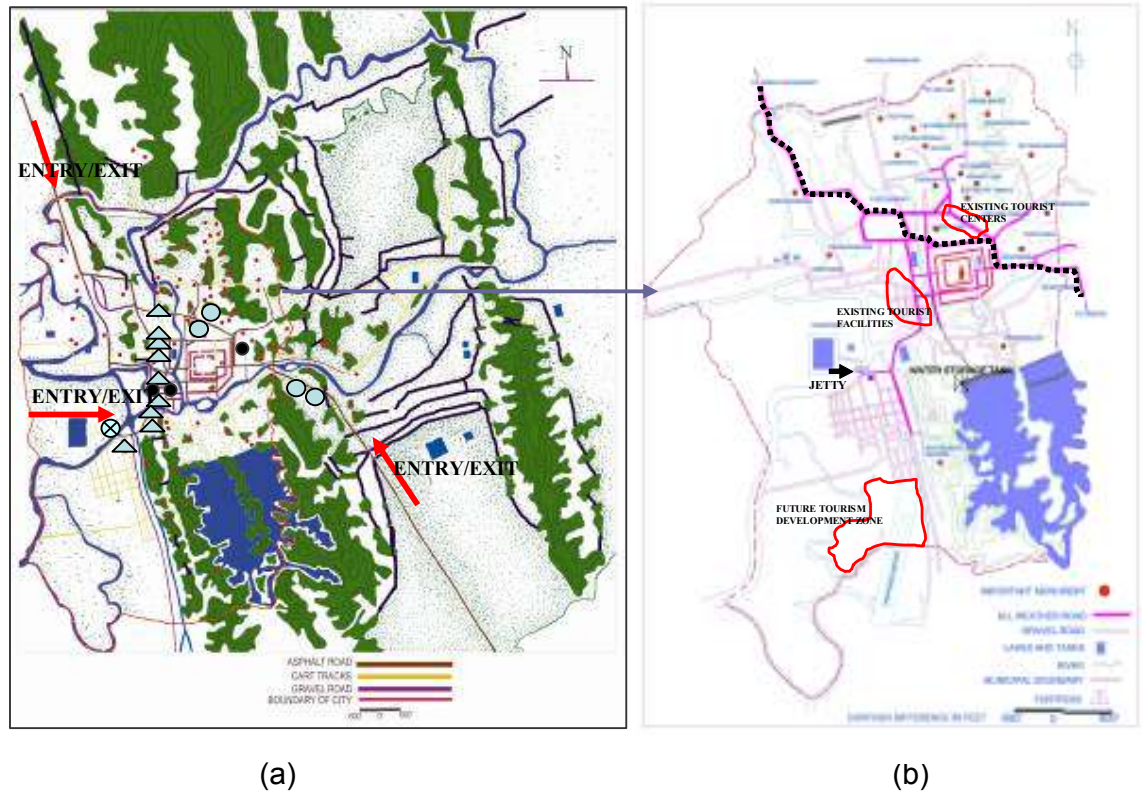


Figure 3: (a) Existing Tourist Entry or Exit Points, (b) Tourist Facilities Zones within Municipal boundary

## Conclusion

Ancient city of Mrauk-U has a very high potential for attractive tourists. At the same time the smallness of the population and socio-economic background make the area vulnerable towards a too strong tourism development. The historic city of Mrauk-U is the most important single attraction of Rakhine as well as Myanmar. The tourism development policy of Mrauk-U will have to be consistent with the overall policy. The main objectives of the Tourism Master Plan are to develop tourism in the historic area of Mrauk-U in a controlled manner. The archaeological site of Mrauk-U is a very important factor in the marketing of tourism to Myanmar. Therefore, the protection and development of this site will be of major important for the future tourism to Mrauk-U. The tourist amenities should not be permitted to destroy the character of ancient city scene which is the basis for successful tourism in Mrauk-U; neither should uncontrolled expansion of housing areas. The stone Buddhist monuments in ancient city of Mrauk-U are the most attractive tourist destination. However, if planned, it could lead to controlled development

which would quickly degrade the archaeological monuments, the natural resources and the cultural fabric of Mrauk-U. The monuments in Mrauk-U are the focal point of interest in developing the Rakhine State as well as Myanmar.

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