



Travelogue

Part six:
A month in
Myanmar
The final episode of the series

'Living vicariously through the adventures of our friends'

"People were willing to travel long distances, wait hours for treatment and experience rough travel to get to us. They were always gracious, kind, generous with their smiles and gratitude for relieving them of their suffering and helping them to become healthier. We, in turn, were energized, and overwhelmed by their kindnesses."

HR Acupuncturist gets as much as she gives in trip to Myanmar

BY SUSAN FROELICH
For the News

Passport — check.
Visa — check.
Letter to accept donated supplies — check.
New, crisp \$\$ to exchange for local currency — check.
Herbs to stay healthy and to treat illnesses — check.
Plane tickets — check.

Relax. Enjoy the 33 hour travel to Mandalay, Myanmar. Remember to thank Charlie once again for taking good care of our patients. Reflect on my time as a solo traveler, and as a Chinese Medical Practitioner who will be treating people of Myanmar and mentoring young Traditional Myanmar Doctors.

Rest. Feel the excitement surge upon landing. Look for your three other teammates from the U.K. (Charlotte, Naomi and Keith), whom you've never met and will be working and living alongside for the next four weeks! Smile.

My adventure begins Jan. 12, 2015, in Mandalay, Myanmar, as a volunteer of the Myanmar Acupuncture Project. This project was started 15 years ago by the Metta Dana Project, Vipassana Hawaii, in association with Sayadaw U Lakhana from Kyaswa Monastery, Sagaing, Upper Myanmar. It was started by two acupuncturists, Michael Zucker and Daniel Bruce from the United States in 2000, and has seen international Acupuncturists yearly since the beginning. This project is funded by Metta Dana, Wachat Sagaing Hills Hospital, personal donations and volunteer service donations (local as well as international).

In 2013, a designated clinic was built to serve patients twice a week for free treatments in Acupuncture and Traditional Medicine (cost of needles only). This program operates throughout the year, run by U Win Ko and volunteer doctors.

Health Care in Myanmar is grossly underfunded and tends to be centered in larger cities, although the majority of the population resides in rural areas. The average household income is about \$800 a year, with the major expenditure being food at 70 percent of income. This is a significant indicator of poverty levels, as there is little to no money for anything else, especially healthcare. Also, clean water and basic sanitation is severely lacking in rural areas, which leads to higher levels of associated diseases and higher death rates, which could be prevented.

During our time there, our small team worked alongside eight to 12 traditional Myanmar doctors, where we were able to treat about 1,200 pa-



tients in 15 days. Our team provided direct mentoring to these young doctors in Traditional Chinese Medicine, specifically acupuncture and theories of Chinese Medicine, from our experience.

Our patients were monks and nuns from the surrounding monasteries, and residents of Myanmar. Some of the patients traveled by bus for 12 hours to receive one treatment, traveled back home and repeated the travel the next day! Our team was fortunate to have interpretation provided by the doctors, and we soon learned common words like "Mingalaba" for hello and "NaLa" for pain.

Patients favorably responded to their treatments, usually showing 20-40 percent improvement after their first treatment, with no adverse side effects. Common conditions treated were musculoskeletal pain (chronic and acute), insomnia, digestive disorders, paralysis following stroke and motorbike accidents, menstrual irregularities, headaches and migraines — conditions very similar to what we see in our clinics in the USA. (The stroke and hypertension rate is much higher in Myanmar however, while cancer rates are quite low).

As Acupuncture is a relatively new treatment modality in Traditional Myanmar Medicine, the response to this form of medicine is quite amazing. People were willing to travel long distances, wait hours for treatment and experience rough travel to get to us. They were always gracious, kind, generous with their smiles and gratitude for relieving them of their suffering and help-



ing them to become healthier. We, in turn, were energized, and overwhelmed by their kindnesses.

Wachat Hospital hosted us during our stay with a simple dormitory style room on the top floor of the hospital, hot showers and slow, intermittent but usable Internet. They fed us very well with traditional Myanmar meals, consisting of soup, rice, a variety of vegetable and fish/meat dishes and fresh fruit. The spice combination between all of the dishes were delightful — savory and some spicy — garlic, cumin, turmeric, tomato, peppers and salt. Unfortunately, loads of salt and no weight loss!

All of the food was locally grown, caught and prepared, originating from the delta area on the Irrawaddy River.

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About the author

Susan Froelich is a Licensed Acupuncturist and Practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine. She owns and operates Columbia River Acupuncture with her son, Charles Cannon, with clinics in Hood River and Mosier.



A MONTH IN MYANMAR exposed Hood River acupuncturist Susan Froelich to all kinds of amazing experiences. Froelich visited the country as volunteer with the Myanmar Acupuncture Project. While in the country she worked alongside traditional Myanmar doctors to treat patients at a free clinic and teach acupuncture and theories of Chinese medicine. Pictured are (top to bottom) a view of some of the hundreds of pagoda temples in the Old Bagan, Froelich working with a patient while doctors look on, one of many delicious meals the group had during the trip and (right) the infectious smile of a monk as he paints lettering on a monastery wall.

Photos by Susan Froelich

