

# The Glorious Shwedagon

Heaven comes down out of the sky and merges with the Earth in the Shwedagon Paya. You ascend to a wholly different plane when you climb the darkened steps and emerge into the shimmering light. In this **strange conjunction** of Heaven and Earth, there is pure peace. The colours are at once softer and brighter, the statues both grander and more surreal, and the real world less consequential and engaging, so that you feel buoyed above the humdrum, somewhere way, way up at the top of the sky. People do not run or shout. They have left themselves behind and are floating smoothly around in bare feet, giving attention to every aspect of the surroundings. Everything is there for a reason and the reason is for it to be experienced. Thought is suspended. Even the air feels lighter and cooler. You hope Heaven will be like this, if there is one.

In silence I float around without my hurry, passing huge golden spires which seem to ring in silent tones, or emit strange **spiritual vibrations** into the sky. People meditate cross-legged at whitewashed grottoes, and small Buddhas give a thankful exhalation every time they are doused by the many hands of devotees.

I go traversing around and around and around the vast, cool marble platform in bare feet, inhaling all the good clear atmosphere and vibrancy, watching the different people being different people. Some in *longyis*, some in trousers, some taking photos, some with babies. Some in saris, some with bindis, some with prayer beads. Some in robes of red, purple or brown, pink, orange or white. Some with very **splendid beards**. Some with long, shiny hair. Some with *thanakha* face paint in pretty patterns, others with it slapdash across their cheeks. Some in erect meditation, some chanting loudly. Some offering, some feasting. Some sleeping, some watching others. Some reading the papers. Some in simple white clothes with garlands on red mats in the dazzling white sun, overcoming its glare and piercing the view, eyes stinging with sweat, to **drink the light**, it seems. Some who look very holy. Some who are there for the ride, most in utter reverence.

## Eternal

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Regular abcdefghijk  
*Italic abcdefghijk*  
**Bold**

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KkLlMmNnOoPpQqRrSs  
TtUuVvWwXxYyZz&?!

