

SALES MANUAL FOR TOUR OPERATORS

KAYAH STATE (MYANMAR)



“Calling for pioneers”

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What is this manual?

During the past decade, the diverse political and ethnic groups of Kayah State have moved away from conflict towards greater trust, cooperation and peace.

As a result, Kayah has recently opened its doors to visitors, including international tourists. Tourism is initially being developed in North-western Kayah, around Loikaw, Demawso and Pruso townships. These areas offer wonderful experiences for tourists, who are interested in culture, people, nature and outdoor activities.

Welcoming and friendly people, diverse arts and cultures, distinctive, rustic cuisine, and an easy going pace of life make Kayah a simply charming destination.

This manual provides information about tourism services and activities in and around Loikaw, Kayah State, Myanmar. This includes hotels, restaurants, local tour operators and tour guides, and creative and cultural tour programs.

Who is this manual for?

This manual has been prepared principally as a B2B resource for national (Myanmar) and international tour operators, which are considering developing new itineraries and sending clients to Kayah, and need more information.

The manual presents the facts about services and activities in Kayah, along with contact details for service providers. Kayah is a new destination. Services are gradually improving and professionalising. Kayah will impress visitors who are looking for ‘fascinating local experiences with some comforts’, rather than luxury.

Nevertheless, Loikaw does offer enough good quality services to ensure a great holiday for visitors, who are excited to visit a new, local destination. Kayah has fascinating cultures, welcoming people and impressive natural scenery. A range of exciting, new cultural tourism experiences have been developed. If your clients are interested to get off the beaten track, then Kayah will not disappoint.

About Kayah

Why is Kayah special?

Closed for over half a century, recently opened to visitors, and finally accessible by air and road; Kayah is packed with diversity and potential for inspiring, '*off the beaten track*' experiences. Kayah's nine ethnic groups weave a colourful tapestry of beliefs, cuisines, dress and decoration, languages and livelihoods. Kayah's tranquil capital, Loikaw, is usually the base for tourists. A short drive from the state capital, local villages offer many opportunities to experience local life, including a range of newly developed, community-based, cultural tours.

Visitors will find Kayah's undulating landscapes and weave of cultures visually enchanting. However, what truly sets Kayah apart is the endearing warmth of the people, their sense of humour, and passion to share their rituals, arts, crafts and music. Visitors who are interested in culture can visit animist temples, meet local musicians playing unique bamboo instruments, and try on a local costume! Active visitors can enjoy forest trekking accompanied by local forest guides. Food fans will enjoy tasting 'Kayah barbecue' or sipping millet wine from an earthen pot!



Where is Kayah?

Situated in the hilly, eastern part of Myanmar, Kayah is Myanmar's smallest state.

Kayah is bounded to the north by Phekhn, Siseng and Mawkme townships of Shan State; to the east by Thailand; to the south by the Papun township of Kayin/Karen State; and to the west by Thandaung township of Kayin State. The state capital, Loikaw is located approximately 500 km from Yangon and 250 km from the capital of Nay Pyi Taw. Kayah State has an area of 11,670 sq. km / 4,506 sq. miles. Kayah has a sparse population, of just over 350,000 people.

Map showing the location of Kayah State, in Myanmar



How to get to Kayah?

Newly opened to tourists, most visitors arrive in Loikaw, the state capital by air from Yangon, by boat or road from Inle Lake, or by road from Heho airport.

By air: Flights from Yangon to Loikaw take approximately one hour. Loikaw is now served almost every day by Air KBZ (www.airkbz.com) and Myanmar National Airlines (www.flymna.com). Please check the websites for up to date schedules.

By boat: visitors can travel from Nyaungshwe / Inle Lake to Pekong boat pier, and then take a transfer by taxi or minivan to Loikaw (approximately 45 minutes).

By car: The journey from Nyaungshwe to Loikaw by private vehicle takes about 5 hours (up to 7 hours by public transport). One can also travel to Liokaw by road from Yangon. The journey takes approximately 18 hours. It is not recommended.

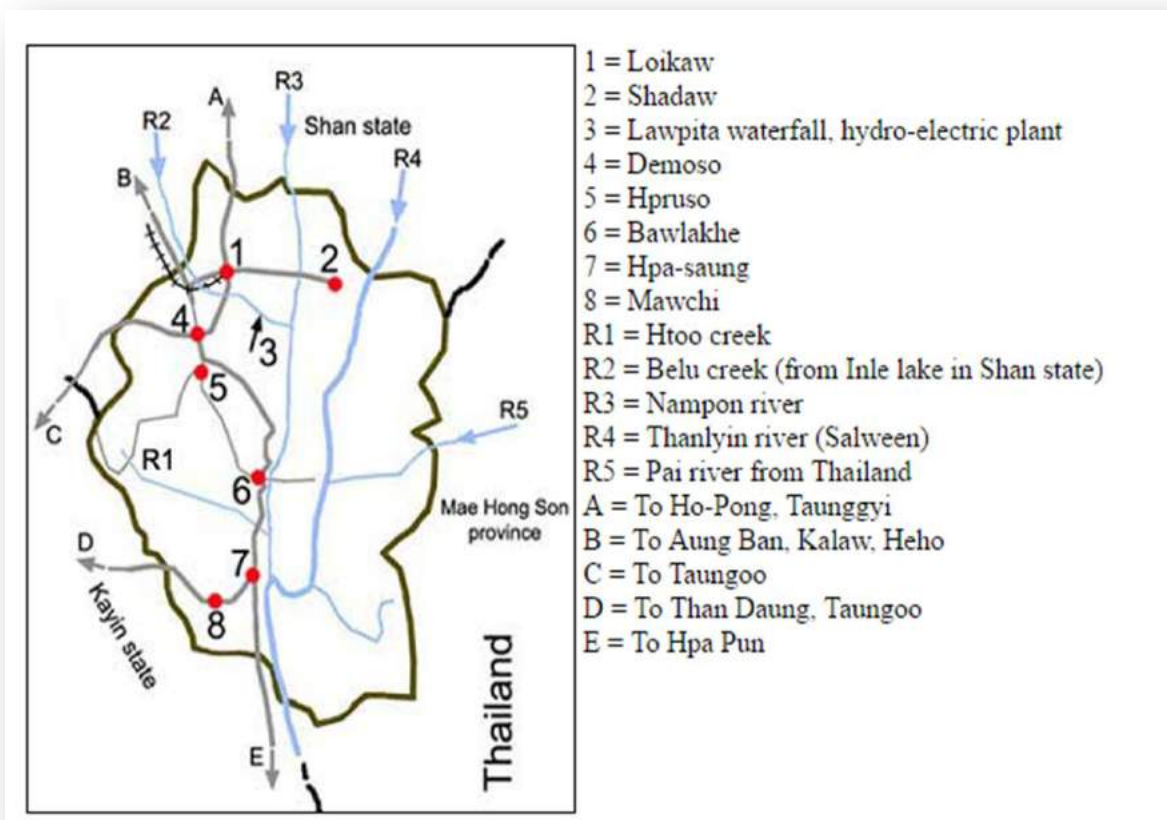
A popular way to arrive in Kayah is a scenic boat trip from Inle Lake to Pekong



Transportation routes to and from Kayah

Transportation is improving, with an expansion of roads and bridge building. However, not all transport routes are currently open for foreign travellers.

Map showing major roads and transport routes into Kayah State, Myanmar



Source: www.asterism.info/states/10/map.html

Currently, the following routes are permitted for foreign tourists:

- ✓ Major routes: Loikaw (1), Demoso (4) and Hpruso (5)
- ✓ B routes: Aung Ban, Kalaw, Heho

Other routes and areas of Kayah are also peaceful. However, these areas are nevertheless considered too sensitive to develop as tourism destinations.

Kayah in brief: politics and history

Kayah was known as Karenni State until the late 1950's, when it was renamed Kayah State. Despite being Myanmar's smallest state, Kayah is rich with history and political intrigue. Due to intense conflict between political and ethnic groups, Kayah was closed to the outside world for many decades. Now, Kayah is moving out of isolation, gradually opening up to Myanmar and the rest of the world.

The Karenni as a whole were recognized with an independent state by the British, in a treaty signed after the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. After Myanmar's independence in 1948, the state became the focal point for both pro and anti-independence movements. Modern day nationalist and ideologist politics started with the formation of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) in late 1950s.

Subsequently, six different, armed groups took control of territories in Kayah State. At the heart of these conflicts were issues of governance, natural resource development, and recognition of the unique characteristics and rights of the state's ethnic minorities. As a result of these conflicts, nearly 15,000 people sought refuge in Thailand. Many have resided in Thai camps since the mid-1990s.

Following the 2010 elections, relations between the Union Government and ethnic armed groups throughout Myanmar began improving. In March 2012, the government commenced ceasefire talks with the KNPP. This led to many joint statements and agreements. The ceasefire also provided the opportunity for NGOs, INGOs, donors, and business interests to become more active in Kayah.

Various organisations, including the government, have worked in good faith, trying to find solutions to many challenges. The KNPP was able to open liaison offices in Loikaw, Hpasaung and Shadaw townships. Community-based Organisations were able to actively educate and rally people across diverse issues.

On the 8th November, 2015, the National League for Democracy won a landslide victory, ending 50 years of military rule. Currently the new government is reaching out to Kayah's armed groups for further cooperation. Tourism is considered to be an important socio-economic development activity in Kayah. However, stakeholders are also concerned to limit any negative impacts of tourism on Kayah's local cultures, communities and precious natural resources.

Peoples, cultures and faiths:

Kayah State is mainly populated by the Kayah ethnic group (also known as the Red Karen), the Kayan (Padaung), Kayin (white Karen), Kayaw, Geba, Manu-Manaw, Yintale and Pa-O. Other ethnic groups residing in Kayah State include Burman (Bama), Intha and Shan, with small populations of Indian and Chinese people.

Many tribes people still dress in traditional costumes and practice indigenous customs, which have been passed between generations for centuries.

The people of Kayah were traditionally animists. They paid respect to spirits, through sophisticated ceremonies, often known as '*kaetoebu*.' Villagers offered animals and food in return for protection, and to appease spirits in the event of misfortune. Nowadays, it is more common for families to follow faiths like Catholicism, Baptism and Buddhism. Kayah's religious diversity means that tourists can observe many local, spiritual and religious festivals. These include Animist harvest festivals, Christmas, Easter, and also Buddhist New Year and Lent.

Religion is core to identity and way of life for many people, both within individual religions and among them. Whatever religion people profess in, most of the believers and religious leaders tend to be conservative or traditionalist in attitude.

Religious communities, especially Christian churches, have a great influence over the majority of villagers in Kayah State. The Catholic church has particularly strong influence over villagers in Loikaw, Shadaw and Hpruso and Demoso townships, where the majority of Catholics live. Baptists and other protestant churches have strong influences in Loikaw and Mawchi townships. Buddhist communities have a strong influence over people in Loikaw, Bawlake, Hpasaung and Mese townships.

Despite the advances of modern technology, many people in Kayah State take many types of beliefs and superstitions literally and very seriously. Visitors should always make an effort to understand local beliefs and superstitions, and behave respectfully towards all situations, places and people linked to local beliefs.

Villagers do often inform visitors of taboos in advance. However, as tourism is still quite a new activity, local people do not always think to advise visitors. Therefore, it is highly recommended that visitors should always ask guides to inform them about taboos, forbidden areas, sacred objects which should not be touched, etc. Women are forbidden from entering certain areas of '*Kaetoebu*', animist shrines.

Below: a traditional, animist Kaetoebu totem and hall, Hta Nee La Leh, Kayah



Livelihoods

Agriculture remains the main source of livelihood for most households in Kayah. It is mostly small-scale, with shifting cultivation still predominant in the highlands. Major crops are rice, maize, sesame and groundnuts. Kayah's political and geographic isolation have enabled local, ethnic communities to conserve many aspects of their traditional ways of life and decision making processes. However, this remoteness has also contributed to slow and limited infrastructure development; with limited access to health, education and even water resources. Improving these basic services is a key priority for local community members. Logging and deforestation also have made it increasingly difficult for villagers to supplement their needs with wild foods and other forest products. Hopefully, this will improve following the 2015 election, with new governance by the NLD.

Major festivals and celebrations

There are two kinds of traditional kayah festivals: some are social feasts, while others are related to spirituality. The most important festival is '**Kaetoebo Tagundaing**', held annually in April. On this occasion, offerings are made to the spirit guardian, to request "*peace for the region, fair weather and successful, bountiful harvest, free from dangers.*" In October, the '**Kawhyin Htoke**' (glutinous rice wrapping) festival takes place. Other important festivals and events are held at various times throughout the year, for hunting, house warming, and funerals.

Kayah State Day is held on January 15th, every year.



State economy and resources

Kayah's economy is based on agriculture, mining and forestry, placing a heavy burden on natural resources. Kayah used to be the primary producer of electricity for the whole of Myanmar, from the Lawpita hydroelectricity plant, and still produces electricity for main areas of the country (about 30% of national production). Tourism is a new industry. Recent opening of the state has brought the first arrivals of tourists and contacts between local people and foreigners.

In post-conflict situations, the emphasis usually shifts towards promoting the exploitation of natural resources as an engine for development. As Kayah State gradually opens up, many stakeholders are concerned that Kayah State should not sacrifice its' pristine environment in a rush for development. Sustainably managed tourism is an alternative to the unrestrained exploitation of natural resources.

Nature and geography

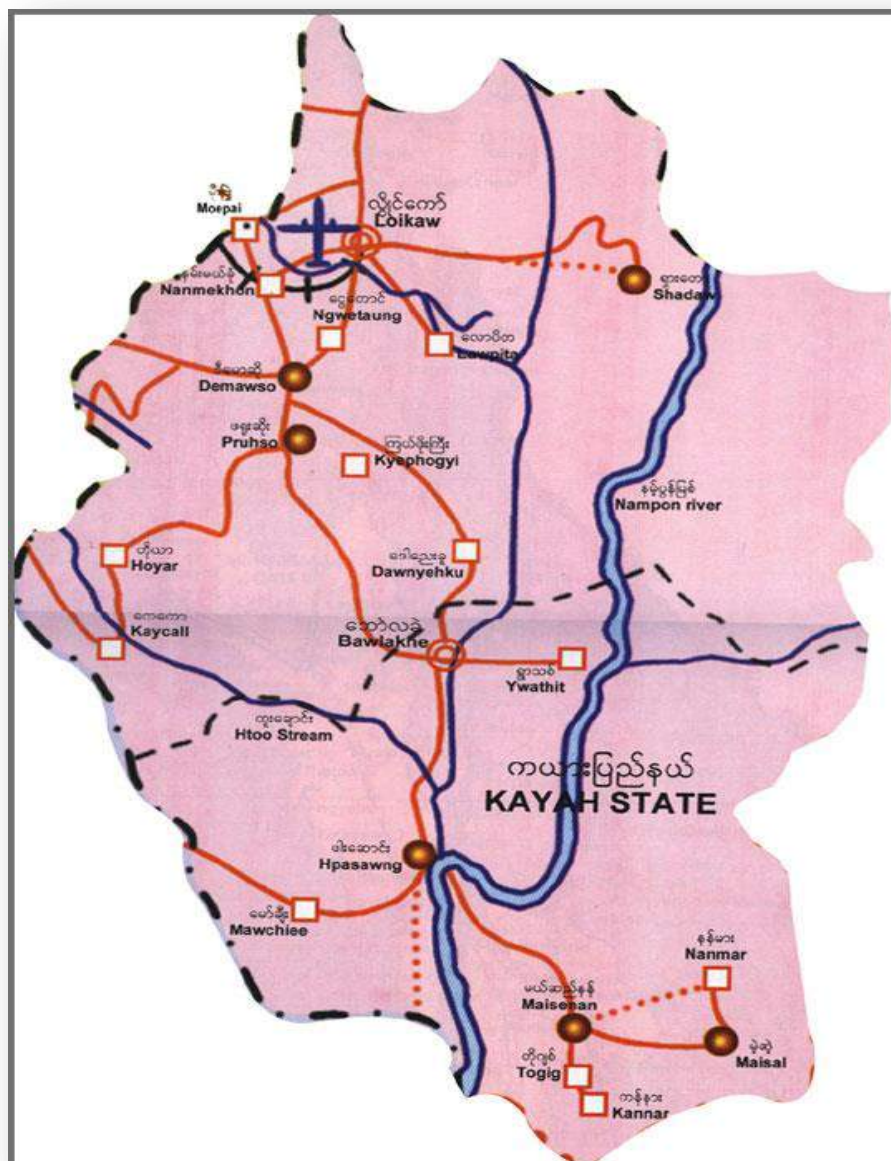
Kayah is a forested and mountainous state, rich in teak and other hardwoods and bamboos, with breath-taking landscapes, especially in the south. The great Salween/Than Lwin River divides the state into two different parts. It is joined by the Pai River in the east near Ywathit, and the Pawn in the west near Hpasaung. Visitors can enjoy soft-adventure trekking, accompanied by local guides who have lived with the forest since childhood. Their deep knowledge of wild foods, natural dyes, herbal medicines and local legends helps to bring the relationships between nature and local people alive: adding insight to adventure. Kayah also has many scenic lakes, waterfalls and caves. Permissions are usually required to visit.



Restricted areas and permissions

Kayah State is being opened to tourism gradually.

The areas permitted to international tourists without prior authorization are Loikaw, Demawso and Pruhsa townships (see map below). Visits to villages outside these townships requires government permission. This must be obtained at least 3 days in advance. Permissions can be organised on your clients' behalf by local ground handlers, based in Loikaw (please see page 49 for details).



Food

Kayah's cuisine is simple, fresh and healthy. Visitors can try a variety of local dishes and snacks in fresh markets and local restaurants. The Kayah kitchen includes some regional specialities, of which Kayah Sausage is the most famous. These tasty, meat sausages are seasoned with Kayah pepper, which is harvested in the surroundings of De Maw Soe and Pan Pet villages. The pepper imbues the sausages with a distinctive flavour. '*Hin Htoke*' is another delicious, local snack, enjoyed by people in Kayah. '*Hin Htoke*' are steamed rice cakes, usually mixed with chicken or pork, or vegetarian. Local rice and millet wines are also popular.

Local 'Kayah sausage' and rice cakes called 'Hin Htoke' are popular local dishes

