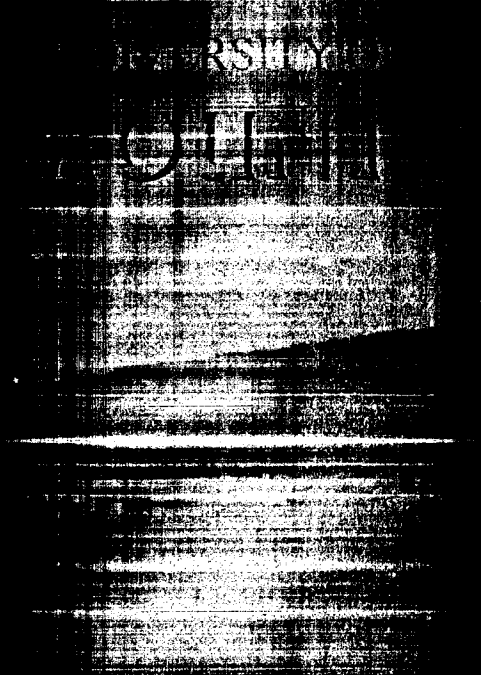




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Yin Yin Kyi

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

Of the numerous species that grow in the Union of Myanmar, some 7050 species in 285 families are recorded in the "List of Trees, Shrubs, Herbs and Principal Climbers" published and revised by the Forest Department in 1986. However, many more still remain un-identified throughout the country.

Because of its length from north to south, Myanmar traverses many climatic zones from temperate through arid to tropical and consequently, the components of the flora are many and varied.

The Myanmar Forest Department has endeavored to develop National Parks and Protected Areas in addition to the existing Wildlife sanctuaries. Since the early 1980s, it has succeeded in establishing three National Parks including Hlawga wildlife Park, Popa Mountain Park and Alaungdaw Kathapa National Park. Of the three parks, the one at Popa in central Myanmar was the first to be established and contains a rich flora, especially of medicinal plants.









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and found abundantly. Some notable medicinal plants are listed below

Khan-dauk	<i>Thalictrum foliolosum</i>
Selet-wa	<i>Schefflera venulosa</i>
Sewa gyi	<i>Beiberis asiatica</i>
Mayann	<i>Pittosporum nepaulensis</i>
Eikthaya-m	<i>Aristolochia roxburghiana</i>
Theyan-m	<i>Stem roxburghianus</i>
Taungtan-gyi	<i>Pienna integrifolia</i>
Mahaga-kyansit	<i>Polygonum tomentosum</i>
Lettok-gyi	<i>Holarthra anthysenterica</i>
Mur-koka	<i>Argyrea barbiger</i>
Shweku-thar	<i>Desmodium spp</i>
Akyaw/Tawkhan pin	<i>Carissa spinanum</i>

Shops in the Popa village area usually sell the roots and stem cuttings of some medicinal plant in a bundle with accompanying leaflets, describing the medicinal values of these plants and the prescription for use.

The major forest types of the centre of the dry zone include the Dry Forest, Than-Dahat Forest and Thorn Forest. In addition, Mount Popa also supports hill forest, dry upper mixed deciduous forest, indaing low forest and grassland on the summit

1	 Tree	112 species
2	 Small tree	67 species
3	 Herbs	30 species
4	 Shrubs	43 species
5	 Climbers/ Straggling shrub	47 species
6	 Bamboo	1 species

**Total number of species 300 species**

The lowest slope and foothill is composed of Kyun (*Tectona grandis* L.f.), Pyinkado (*Xylia dolabriformis* Benth.), Dahat (*Tectona hamiltoniana* Wall.), Than (*Terminalia oliveri* Brandis.), Thitya (*Shorea obtusa* Wall.), Ingein (*Shorea siamensis* Miq), Taukkyan (*Terminalia crenulata* (Heyne Roth), Panga (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), etc. Above 4000 feet, it is covered with grassland and few hardy herbs.

### TOURIST ATTRACTION

Mount Popa is still famous for her fragrant Sagawa flowers and some people used to call Mount Popa as Sagawa Myay or Sagawa-land. Mount Popa is an extremely wellknown and a very interesting landmark in Myanmar. It is a very pleasant place for recreation and to study the differing luxuriant plant communities within a small area. A pleasant night-lodge, at about 2600 feet above sea level, with full facilities including range riding is provided by the Forest Department for tourists who wish to discover and enjoy the beauty of Mount Popa in all its splendour.

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Panorama of Mount Popa - an extinct volcano. (PHOTO BY AUNG DIN)

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## MOUNT POPA

Mount Popa is the only prominent volcano in Myanmar, which rises out of the plains of the Kyaukpadaung township in the middle of the dry zone. It is one of the few manifestations of an extinct volcanic activity in Myanmar and an outstanding physical landmark.

Mount Popa is located about 34 miles south east of Pagan, an ancient capital of Myanmar on the bank of the Ayeawaddy. Even though it is in the dry zone area, it is almost evergreen, due to its elevation of 4981 feet above sea level and its fertile soil conditions. Mount Popa, which is the core and crater of the extinct volcano exhibits a rich biodiversity with an unusual array of vegetations of many types.

Even though Mount Popa is

situated in the most arid part of the central Myanmar, various kinds of flowers, plants and trees have cropped up and it is now known as an oasis of the dry zone. Within an area of 49.63 sq. miles (12854.39 ha), various types of forest such as Dry Than-Dahat Forest, Thorn Forest, Dry Mixed Deciduous Forest, Scrub Indaing Forest, Dry Hill Forest and Hill Grassland can be studied. The remnants of the original Semi-evergreen Flora such as sweet scented yellow, white and green blooms of the Sagawa trees (*Michelia champaca* L.), Sagayyu trees (*Michelia doltsopa* Buch-Han), Sagascia trees (*Cananga odorata* (Lamk) Hk. f. & T) and Kanyin trees (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) are abundant. It is a place where religious and cultural heritage are being well preserved and maintained.

## THE LEGEND

Many Buddhists believe that Mount Popa is the home of nats and spirits. They also believe that once upon a time, beautiful ogresses lived on flowers and played hide and seek in the groves of Mount Popa and that on its slopes, there wandered magicians and alchemists in search of potent herbs and roots.

In ancient times, the slopes of the hill were wholly covered with many flowering plants and trees and thus the hill was given the name of 'POPA' which in Sanskrit, "Puppha" means flowers. Thus, to the early Myanmar people, it was recognized as the mountain of flowers.

According to the ancient legend, the famous hero, "Ko Byatta" had to collect flowers at Mount Popa and offer these to the Royal Palace at Pagan daily. He thus met the belle of Popa, called "Mai-Wunna" and got married. The couple had two brave sons "Shwebyin-yinaung" who were well-known in the history of Myanmar.

## FLORA

The Myanmar Forest Department has endeavoured to develop Mount Popa as a protected area and has established it as Popa Mountain Park in 1982.

The Park is one of the richest in flora due to its range of elevation, its location and its fertility of soil. Medicinal plants from

Mount Popa are very famous and well-known. Many species of medicinal plants have been found around Mount Popa.

Traditionally, Myanmar people believed that medicinal plants from Mount Popa are more potent as traditional medicine than plants from other places, even though they may belong to the same species. Most of them are used locally. Among the medicinal plants of Mount Popa, *Thungtan-gyi*, *Thetyin-gyi*, *Sewa-gyi*, *Saw-gyi* and *Sawo* are very common