

Myanmar: The Golden Leaves

Club Vankiep Chronicles - Sangano (Torino –Italy)

At the beginning of this year we made a beautiful trip to Myanmar.

Myanmar is an extraordinary place, a country rich in history and spirituality, kindness, and simplicity. It is also rich in natural resources: gold, gemstones, hard stones, and a generous ground that gives fruits and vegetables of many kinds.

There have been a lot of things that struck us and we were curious about, and we gladly wish to share some of our experiences with all our friends that want to read about them.

One of these is the application of gold leaves to sacred images. This ancient country tradition is a gesture of offering and prayer: gold leaves are applied to statues and other cult objects in temples and pagodas. Nowadays, it has also been taken up by visiting tourists, that do it as a sign of respect and gratitude for the chance to see and experience this country, difficult to reach up to a few years ago.

The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon (Fig. 3) is one of the many examples of this form of devotion, with its dome covered in 27 tons of golden leaves, the great emerald at the top of the dome, and its 3000 tinkle bells decorated with almost 5000 diamonds. Another example is the great golden rock (Fig. 2) of Kyaikhtiyo, made famous by its precarious position, also covered with golden leaves; or the Mahamuni Pagoda of Mandalay, with its great Buddha (Fig. 1) and devotees applying the leaves to it.

We went and visit one of the many factories where these gold leaves are made in Mandalay, and what struck us the most there, was to see how young boys with big hammers were banging all day on a packet of 200 gold nuggets, separated by bamboo paper sheets -themselves made following a long and complicated process- and wrapped in goat skin.

In the two videos you can see:

- 1) how the gold leaves are made: <https://youtu.be/53dueFVBNYM>
- 2) the results of the production: <https://youtu.be/DBL85DLrvCs>

I hope this brief account has raised the interest in some of you. I think I will add to this in the future, with more interesting and curious peculiarities of Myanmar.

Thank you

Sangano, February 12, 2017

Iva – Tue Y





Fig. 1: Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay - Applying the golden leaves



Fig.2:
Goden Rock - - Applying the golden leaves





Fig. 3: Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon



Fig 4: making the golden leaves



Fig 5: resting between shifts



Fig. 6: a packet of freshly made golden leaves



Fig 7-8: workers cover different objects with the golden leaves

Fig. 9: making sets of golden leaves for sale



Fig. 10: old man selling gold leaves in Phaung Daw U pagoda



Fig.11: set of 5 golden leaves we bought

