There is no other destination in Myanmar quite unique like Kayah State. But, as one of the country's most remote areas, Kayah is yet to get the attention it deserves. Those who give this small realm of mountainous jungle and its ethnic diversity a visit will soon understand what all the fuss is about.

Just south of Shan State and close to the Thai border, Kayah State has always been cultivating its own identity and culture. The Kayah people—formerly known as the Karen or, red Karen—the state and its capital Lawkaw still very much hold on to their ethnic heritage.

The Kayah are just one of many ethnic groups you are bound to meet when navigating through the region. Together with the Kayan, Kayaw, Manu, Geka, Geka and Yintale, they all are distinct branches of the Karen or Kayin race.

The Kayah represents one of the main ethnic cultures in Myanmar, albeit a small and often overlooked one.

In Lawkaw, the state's capital, one cannot miss the Taung Gyi Pagoda, sitting above the city's leafy and throbbing streets on limestone rocks. From the top of the pagoda, it's easy to feel hemmed in: from the distant walls of mountains stretched throughout every direction.
While Loikaw will almost certainly be your first stop in Kayah State, the surrounding countryside is full of breathtaking sights — things you won’t get to see anywhere else in Myanmar.

In the foreground are vast plains of paddy fields — enough to give any traveller the urge to push ahead with their Kayah adventure.

While Loikaw will almost certainly be your first stop, the surrounding countryside is full of breathtaking sights — things you won’t get to see anywhere else in Myanmar. The lack of other travellers gives everything an off-the-beaten-track feel, too.
Demoso, lakes, meadows and scenery

About 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Loikaw, Demoso is the second-largest town in the state and was formerly its capital. While today it seems more like a large village than a town, it’s a good place to start exploring the countryside.

If you’re lucky, you may be able to meet a woman from the Kayan tribe wearing their distinctive traditional neck-rings. However, less young people wear these brass rings, those who still do are mostly middle-aged or elderly as well as those who live in villages outside the town.

The land there is fertile and heavily farmed. Wandering the fields at sunrise is a good way to grasp the beauty of the rural area of Kayah State.

Most attractions are easy to reach from Demoso. Together with Loikaw it sits on a vast plain dotted with lakes. Expect to have regular encounters with herds of buffalos and other agricultural animals.

From the Loikaw-Demoso road a narrow dirt path takes you through the fields all the way to the Seven Stairs Lakes, at the foot of the mountains. Here, a string of seven small and intertwined lakes offers peace and freshness. Unsurprisingly given its natural beauty, Seven Stairs Lakes is a popular spot with young people who come to listen to music, sing and enjoy their free time.

Going west from Demoso, a first line of low hills stretches along the road. The most interesting summit accessible is Shwetagon, or Elephant Mountain. At the top of it, a giant elephant statue watches over nearby hills all of which possess their own religious landmarks: a Buddhist stupa for some, a Christian cross for others. From there, the view spans across the Loikaw plain to the gigantic Moe Bya dam in the south of Shan State. On the other side, the mountains culminate with the state’s highest peak, known as Lai Nam Hapa.

Working in the nearby fields.
Traditions and a touch of supernatural

The old traditional ways are still strong amongst the Kayan People. While locals normally describe themselves as either a Buddhist or a Christian, it's hard to find one who is not still attached to traditional animist beliefs. The animist poles in Kuching—which can be seen in LokKan and some surrounding villages—are standing proof of this attachment. The poles are the site of an annual New Year festival.

Satlu mountains are everywhere, so are caves. There are many in the walls of the area's limestone hills. Some low-miles east of LokKan, on the road to the well-known Santubong area is KyaChu or KyaCave. It's a must-visit not only is it incredibly deep, it also has an enigmatic history. The cave, guarded by an old monk, takes its name from the Kayan demons who are said to have once lived here. According to the local legends, the demons had the power to shrink themselves and this enabled them to live safely out of human sight.

Fortunately, for visitors, the demons are no longer anywhere to be found; they are said to have retreated deep inside the cave to areas that humans cannot reach. While exploring the cave, you will see haphazard remnants of what appear to be old coffins. Stories about the origins of the coffins abound. No one can explain their origins, but the majority believes that they once belonged to the demons.
Near Demoso, Htee Pwint Kan, or Umbrella Lake, is a small volcanic lake. The name comes from the geyser that occasionally send water shooting up through the surface, creating an umbrella-shaped shower. It is said that witnessing this shower will bring good fortune for the rest of your life. However, it seems to occur only rarely, but there are some stupas and spirit houses that are worth exploring while you wait.

Flowing all the way north to Inle Lake in Shan State, the Baluchaung, or Ogre Creek, snakes through Lokaw and the plain. Taking a boat there is a good way to observe both the area's natural beauty and its human activities, which are often situated around the water. The pace is nice and slow and the journey is particularly enchanting early in the morning or just before dawn, with fishermen and children playing in the water fronded against the mountain ranges.

For foreign travellers, it is not easy to see much more of Kayah State as most of its townships remain off limits. After a trip among the green and red hills of Lokaw, Demoso and Hpruso townships, there is still a lot to see in adjacent southern Shan State.

From Lokaw, it's only a 30-minute drive to Moe Byo and the Shan State border. There, Kayan, Shan and Pa-O families live along the banks of the manmade Moe Byo dam, the largest water body...
Just south of Shan State and close to the Thai border, the area now referred to as Kayah State has always cultivated its own identity and culture. The Kayah people – formerly known as the Karen ni, or red Karen – the state and its capital Loikaw still hold on to their ethnic heritage.

in Myanmar. The poity end of a golden stupa still emerges from the water; a remnant of the old town that was flooded in the 1960s when the dam was created.

Wherever you go in Kayah State: Interacting with locals will often be the start of a surprising adventure. Even if it's rarely on the map, the Kayah universe as singular and remote as it still is, for the open-minded traveler.

Travel Information

Air KBZ flies to Loikaw twice a week. The flight time is approximately 2 hours. For details, please check the flight schedule at our website at www.airkbz.com.
Discovering Loikaw

Tocked away in a quiet eastern corner of the country, Kayah State was until recently unknown to all but the most adventurous travellers. Due to decades of fighting between the government and the ethnic armed groups, Myanmar's smallest state was off-limits to almost all foreign visitors.

But things have started to change. Since the government and the Karen NationalProgress Party signed a ceasefire in 2012, tourists have begun rolling into the state, which borders Kayin and Shan States and Thailand. Weekly flights are now available from Yangon to Loikaw, the state capital, and buses regularly make the roughly 20-hour journey by road from the country's largest city.

Loikaw is a quiet but charming town set on the Belu Chaueng in the northern part of the state. It's home to just 150,000 people, making it one of the smallest capitals in the country. Easily its most distinguishing feature is the Taung Gwe Pagoda, where dozens of stupas sit atop craggy limestone outcrops in the centre of town. They are particularly impressive when lit up at night, and from the top offer stunning views of the surrounding plains and mountains.

But there's much more to see and do in Kayah, and a project by the International Trade Centre initiated in 2014 is aimed at boosting sustainable tourism in the state. The three-year US$1.9 million endeavour aims to use tourism to create jobs and generate livelihoods and benefit the local community.
Our goal is to build the capacity of local authorities and actors in the tourism sector to work together in a coherent and cost-effective way to draw visitors to Kayah State, which is a region of great natural beauty,” says Anders Aaeroe from ITC.

He’s not wrong. Within minutes of leaving Lokaw proper you are among rolling green hills, and pass quaint picturesque lakes and lush green paddy fields where farmers go about their work.

One popular spot, just 15 kilometres outside of Lokaw, is the Kyet Cave, an impressive structure filled with shrines and Buddha images which have been put there there by donors. Visitors can sometimes get an informal tour from a monk who lives in a small cabin close to the cave’s entrance.

A less-known site that is also worthy of a visit is the Lokaw Elephant Camp, just outside town. Home to five logging elephants – three retired and two who only work “part time” – the animals roam amongst the fields alongside buffalo. Walks through the forest on the animals can be arranged for K10,000.

There are nine recognised ethnic groups in Kayah State. The most common are the Kayan people, otherwise known as the Paduang (a Shan term) or long-necked women due to the distinctive brass coils that they wear around their necks.

The highest proportion of Kayan women live in a small cluster of villages known as Pan Pet, a one-hour drive from Lokaw. Due to the lack of work opportunities in their home country when it was isolated from the rest of the world, for decades the women have...
been travelling to neighbouring Thailand to work there in the tourism industry. Most often they are housed in tourist sites that critics refer to as 'human zoos'.

As Myanmar's tourism industry develops, the ITC program is trying to encourage the Kayan women back to Pan Pet. To achieve this, it is providing handicraft and marketing skills to the residents.

Outside their small homes, the women sit weaving scarves or carving statues proudly displaying their wares which also include jewelry made from the brass used in the coils they wear on their neck.

Kitay Aung, a Kayah State tour guide, said the program has led to an increase in visitors to the village. As a result, more women living abroad are considering to return back home.

'But what's good about the program is that it's being managed in a sustainable manner so that we don't have a sudden influx of arrivals. Any development in Kayah State must be done so in a careful manner,' he said.

The state's remoteness has made tourism development a challenge, but things are gradually improving. The 2013 edition of the Lonely Planet travel guide relates the story of trying to travel by boat from Nyaung Shwe, the main town on Inle Lake, to Pekon, which is about an hour's drive north of Loikaw.

According to the author, he had arranged his travel permission prior to making the journey but when arriving at Pekon he
was greeted by a stern-faced immigration official who told him he would not be able to continue his journey.

The negotiations dragged on for hours and he was passed around numerous authorities in Pakokk. After almost a day of discussions, the author was finally able to continue his journey into Kayah State.

In January 2013, restrictions on travel to Loikaw and some other parts of the state were lifted. Many other remote areas still remain off limits, but the journey by boat and road from Nyaung Shwe to Loikaw is much easier. Hay Aung, the guide, said that most visitors to the state who have more time prefers to take the boat between Nyaung Shwe.
There are nine recognised ethnic groups in Kayah State. The best-known are the Kayan people, otherwise known as Padaung (a Shan term) or long-necked women due to the distinctive brass coils they wear around their necks.
The boat journey from Pakok to Nyaung Shwe takes about four hours. First, it traverses across the quiet and picturesque Pakok Lake where local fishermen are looking for their daily catch using the distinctive leg-rowing technique. The nearby Inle Lake is renowned for.

Boats then spend an hour or two traversing through narrow channels between Pakok and Inle lakes. Along the way, the local people who live on the lake’s edge greet any visitors cheerfully. The journey on the boat is pleasant but long and it’s best to break their journey along the way. Some visitors include a stop at an Inle village where they will be invited to sample the local mae pequ - something of a shock to the system.

One popular stop is the village of Inle, which is home to crumbling stupas that are nearly 1000 years old. One of the best-known stupas is Hpyuung Oo, which has carvings of mythical creatures while Shwe Inn Thein Pagoda is also worth visiting.

Boats then spend an hour or two traversing through narrow tributaries. Along the way, the local people who live on the lake’s edge greet any visitor cheerfully.
There is also a vibrant market at Inle that shouldn’t be missed. From there, it’s about a two-hour journey across Inle Lake to Nyaung Shwe.

Mainly due to its relative isolation, Kayah State still receives relatively few visitors. That will gradually change as access becomes easier, including the upgrade of a road to the hillside town of Thanlawn, in northern Kayin State, and the opening of a border crossing in southern Kayah State with Thailand – something that has been discussed but not yet confirmed.

Those wanting to explore one of Myanmar’s genuinely untouched gems are advised to visit as soon as possible.

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BRINGING THEM HOME

Isaac Mawman

Tourism is helping to draw back members of the Kayan community from Thailand— including women famed for wearing brass coils on their necks.

Mul Baw returned to Pwa, her small village in Kayah State, from Thailand four months ago. “I was happy to be back. Life was much better in Thailand,” said the mother of two.

Mul Baw is a Kayan. The group is also known as Paduang, a Shan term for the “long-necked women.” For the brass coils that they wear around their necks.

With few work opportunities in her tiny village in the quiet corner of the country, Mul Baw spent more than five years in Thailand. Close to the northeastern city of Chiang Mai, tourists in the tourism industry would come and watch her work there.
Growth in the tourism industry following economic and political reforms has prompted many of the Kayan women living in Thailand to consider returning home. Mu Baw estimates about three quarters of her village are still across the border, though.

One of nine Kayan ethnic groups, the Kayan are known around the world for the distinctive neck rings worn by their women. In 1935 a group of Kayan women (known then by the politically incorrect term of 'giraffe neck women') toured around the United Kingdom, often forming part of circuses - a popular form of entertainment in Britain before the outbreak of World War II.

In one famous photo, the three women are standing on a street in London, being given directions by a police officer as three gentlemen behind them in matching jackets and boater hats look on, bemused.

Growth in the tourism industry following economic and political reforms has prompted many of the Kayan women living in Thailand to consider returning home. Mu Baw estimates about three quarters of her village are still across the border, though.
A US$1.9 million project, led by International Trade Centre, that was launched in 2014, and aims to promote Kayah State as a tourism destination is also helping the community.

The program has a range of elements. It trains villagers like Mu Baw to make handicrafts, such as scarves, figurines and jewellery, which can then be sold to visitors.

ITC has also introduced full-day and half-day tours to Pan Pet, which is a two hour drive from Loikaw, the Kayah State capital. The half-day tour includes a guide around the shops and a short lesson in how the women make their crafts. The full-day tour includes the same, plus a few hours' trekking through the nearby forests with a knowledgeable guide.

Mu Tha is also benefiting from the ITC program. But unlike Mu Baw, she never left to go to Thailand.

"All of my children, they have left — either working in Thailand or Yangon. But I never wanted to leave my home," said Mu Tha, whose husband died three years ago. "My children come back sometimes, but as you can see there is not much to do here."

She said she is happy with the ITC program. Her mother taught her how to weave scarves, but until the program began very few visitors came to the village so she rarely sold anything.

It's not like Pan Pet is being swamped by tourists. The ITC program aims to ensure that tourism development in Kayah State is sustainable, and Kayah State remains difficult to access.

"There has been a bit of an increase in visitors recently, but not too much," said Mu Baw. "I'm happy with the small increase."

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Myanmar Premium is a high quality golden malt lager that has been created for Myanmar consumers who have an appreciation for craft beers.
Myanmar Premium ... Specially crafted from the finest ingredient.
Kayah's ethnic kaleidoscope

It might be the smallest and least-populated region of Myanmar, but Kayah State is also among the most ethnically diverse. While some of its groups are well known even outside the country, others are barely known even amongst Myanmar people, and can consist of just a few thousand people.

The state is officially home to eight Kayah sub-groups, many of which go by multiple names. The largest is the Kayan, also known as the Karen, and the group that gives the state its name. Others include the Gheko, Ghebar, Kayan, B & Maru, Manawi, Ym Baw, and Yintale. Most have alternative names, but some are pejorative titles fostered on them by other ethnic groups.

Most, if not all, of the Kayah sub-groups are closely related to the Kayan, indeed, Karen is Red Karen. The languages and dialects spoken by ethnic groups in Kayah State are in the Sgaw Kayan language family.

When members of different ethnic groups converse with each other, they tend to use either Burmese, which is taught at state schools or Kayan, which is also widely spoken. However, in remote villages, it is possible to find people who can only speak the language of their own ethnic group.
Ethnic Kayah groups once originally had a written script, the Gleeke and Gleebar, as a Roman alphabet and have their own literature. In response to the adoption of Roman scripts, a Kayah man named Hthic Bu from the Kyatogyi area of Hmon township devised a system of characters for the Kayah language in 1952. However, 50 years on, it is still not widely used.

Of course, Kayah State is home to more than the official Kayah sub-groups. The Zayan and Paku are also indigenous to Kayah State, but are classified as Kayin, or Karen sub-groups. There are also large ethnic Burmese and Shan populations, and smaller Chinese and Indian communities, particularly in the towns.

The state capital, Lokah, is particularly diverse. It's difficult to find residents who are not the result of a marriage between a member of a Kayah ethinc group and another ethnicity. A mixed ethnic background is particularly noticeable among the business community in Lokah, many of whose members have Burmese relatives.

The close links with the Shan state back centuries, when the area now known as Kayah State comprised several small semi-autonomous states ruled by saigyas, or hereditary princes. Traditionally, there were five states; four were of the Thanlaw (Salween) River, and one to the east.
The state is officially home to eight Kayah sub-groups, many of which go by multiple names. The largest is the Kayah, also known as the Karen, and the group that gives the state its name. Others include the Gheko, Ghebar, Kayan, Bre, Manu Manaw, Yin Baw, and Yintale. Most have alternative names, but some are pejorative titles foisted on them by other ethnic groups.

Later, as the modern Kayan State came under central government control, Bamar began to migrate to the area, and now dominate the business community. More recently Bamar migrants have arrived from central Myanmar to work as labourers on government construction projects, and live in remote communities on the edge of Lokhaw. But in more remote townships, such as Shayan Battale and Haasaung, it’s rare to see any ethnic Bamar – one of the few places in the country where this is still the case.

Although the Kayah are the majority, they are not the most well-known ethnic group from the state. That mantle undoubtedly goes to the Kayan, who are also sometimes referred to as the Paduang (a Shan term). Because of the distinctive brass coils that Kayan women traditionally wore around their necks, they became known internationally as “long-necked women” and (in less politically correct times) “giraffe women.”

There are a number of Kayan villages around Lokhaw that can be easily accessed, but it’s advisable to go with a guide who can speak the local language. A community-based tourism project supported by the International Trade Centre has led to the creation of tours to the village of Pan Pot, where Kayan residents have been trained to make traditional handcrafts.

Meeting members of some of the smaller ethnic groups can be much more difficult requiring slow journeys to far-flung corners of the state. The Yintale, for instance, are found in just three villages in Bawtepe township, about 80 kilometres south of Lokhaw. The villages range in size from 100 to 750 residents. Frontier Myanmar reported in a recent article, but not all residents are Yintale. The largest Yintale village, War Aung, is the only community where the ethnic group’s cultural traditions are being retained, it said. Although residents are Buddhist, they also hold regular animist festivals throughout the year, some of which include animal sacrifices.

Like the Yintale, many other ethnic minorities in rural areas of Kayah State still wear their traditional dress and practice customs that have been passed down from generation to generation for centuries.
churches are focused on the Lekaw and Khwee areas.

According to the ITC, many people in Kayah State take beliefs and superstitions 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.

Tourism is still relatively new in Kayah State—most of the state was off limits to foreigners until January 2013—so many people are not used to interacting with foreigners. This makes it particularly important to travel with a guide as they can check with villagers about tabooed or forbidden areas, sacred objects that should not be touched and so on.

Kayah State is truly a gem but one that needs to be handled carefully. While its geography and political history have caused poverty and a lack of development, it has also enabled communities to maintain their traditions and autonomy.

is central to their way of life. While Buddhism and Christianity are today widely followed, many people also worship animist spirits as their ancestors once did. Animist ceremonies, including harvest and New Year festivals, take place at what is known as kacooabu—an open space featuring totem poles and a hall, where they make offerings of animals and food to appease the spirits.

The 2014 census highlights the strong uptake of mainstream religions in recent years. Just 1.9 percent of the state's population identified as animist (still the second-highest percentage nationally), in contrast to Buddhist (49.9 percent) and Christian (45.8 percent). Buddhism is particularly prevalent in the townships of Lekaw, Bawlai, Hpaasaung and Mese. Catholicism is strong in Lekaw, Shadaw, Hpauso and Demoso townships while Baptism and other protestant
Song and dance, Shan style

By Zon Ponn Pwint
One of the most well-known Shan musical instruments is the long wooden drum known as the *htone* – or Shan *azi* in Myanmar language – which serves an important role in ceremonies and celebrations, including ordination and full-moon festivals.

The hollow frame of the *htone* is typically made of panaraw wood, which is soft enough to carve. Its appearance is distinctive among all other instruments in Myanmar; it looks like a long stalk that widens at the top like an opening. Here, goatskin is stretched tightly across the end, which is about one foot wide. In length, a *htone* can be as tall as an adult.

While synonymous with the Shan, the *htone* is also used by other ethnic groups in southern Shan State, including the Palaung, Danu Intha and Pa-O. Each group has a slightly different name for the instrument, but with the exception of the Pa-O, they all play it in a similar way: fast. The sound seems to encourage people to dance.

In his 2011 article "Pa-O traditional instruments" Khun Htoo Taw related a famous folk tale about the *htone*. There was once a prince named *Ba Ya Kone Mar* in Ban Yin, Hsipaw township. Giant bees that dwells 10 kilometres (6 miles) north of Taunggyi would fly to Ban Yin, where it would then eat a man and a woman in turn. The prince ordered villagers to carve a *htone* with a small hole – one just wide enough for an arrow to travel through. Four men were then hidden inside the *htone*; one man who was faster than an ant, another who was cooler than water, a third who was saltier than salt and a fourth who was hotter than fire. The *htone* was then stained with cow’s blood.
The *htone* is just one of a number of instruments that make up a traditional Shan music band, together with a gong player and seven to eight cymbal players. But this drum takes centre stage in most Shan cultural performances, including Kein-nari and Kein-nara, toenayar and sword dances, as well as other traditional Shan dances.

One day, the bees arrived at the village and carried the *htone* in their mouths as if it was a man. When they arrived back at their village, they tried to eat it. Unexpectedly, arrows from inside the *htone* hit the bees and killed them. The four men then jumped from the *htone*. The man who was faster than air held the *htone*, while the man who was cooler than water touched it. As soon as he did, the *htone* filled with water. The man who was saltier than salt made the water salty, while the man who was hotter than fire boiled the salty water. The bees were added and then cooked.

The *htone* is just one of a number of instruments that make up a traditional Shan music band, together with a gong player and seven to eight cymbal players. But this drum takes centre stage in most Shan cultural performances, including Kein-nari and Kein-nara, toenayar and sword dances, as well as other traditional Shan dances.

Kein-nari and Kein-nara is a duet dance inspired by the unwavering loyalty to their spouses that these the half-bird, half-human creatures are renowned for. The Kein-nari is the female creature and the Kein-nara the mate. The dancers dress in giant costumes featuring large wings. What makes the dance remarkable is their skill in moving the bulky, yet elegant, despite the restricted movement of the costume.
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Kein-nari and Kein-nara:
symbols of exceptional love

By Zon Petru Phyo

In this book Myanmar Culture, Traditions and Scenery, U Than Pe describes one legend for the origin of the mythological creatures Kein-nari and Kein-nara.

In Sanskrit, kein means “what kind?” and nari and nara mean female and male respectively. By this logic, the names Kein-nari and Kein-nara actually derive from the question “What kind of female is it?” and “What kind of male is it?”

Given their strange appearance — half-human and half-bird, they feature a horse-like face, with large wings and claws — this question is not unreasonable. No doubt many still ask today what kind of creature they are.

There are many legends associated with Kein-nari and Kein-nara. According to U Than Pe, archaeologists have found 2000-year-old Kein-nari and Kein-nara figures at Sanchi Stupa in India’s Madhya Pradesh. The legend later spread from India throughout Southeast Asia and today sculptures and paintings portraying these mythical creatures can be seen across Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia.

Kein-nari and Kein-nara are considered angels who protect humans against potential hazards. They are known to be tender, benevolent and happy.

They are also known for their devotion to each other. In one common tale, the pair were separated for a night because of a flood. The flood left Kein-nari stranded on one side of a ravine and Kein-nara on the other side. This one night of separation caused them to cry for the next 700 years. A different account says that Kein-nari died of a broken heart after losing her mate.

Their love and loyalty are often featured in songs. They appear in a number of tales and plays, normally in tragic circumstances.
Artists and sculptors portray Kein-nara and Kein-nara in imaginative ways.

The story is particularly popular amongst the ethnic Shan people, who live in eastern Myanmar. They have adopted a Kein-nara and Kein-nara dance as their classic dance. The dancers wear large costumes with wings and it requires great skill to perform it with elegance. The dance is performed to celebrate Shan State Day and other secular and religious ceremonies.

On top of all that, Kein-nara is highly valued for its feminine beauty - something that inspired Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation instructor U Myint Soe when designing a trophy for the Myanmar Motion Picture Academy Awards. Myanmar's peak film prize. The trophy he created portrays a Kein-nara stretching out her hands to reach a star.

According to Nwamart Khin Phyu by Maung Maung Gyi (Tokkoton) legend has it that these mythical birds lived in jungles near the Himalayas and they have a lifespan of 1000 years. They are known for their singing, but can speak like humans if necessary.

The Ajae Hmau encyclopedia relates another story: A man saw a Kein-nara and Kein-nara in the jungle while hunting. He caught the pair and brought them to a king, telling the monarch that they could sing very well. But when the king urged them to sing and dance, they maintained a stern silence.

Finally, the king asked his chef to cook the Kein-nara for lunch and Kein-nara for dinner. Kein-nara suddenly broke the silence by saying that she had kept silent because she was afraid that she would commit a faux pas, as she didn't understand the court etiquette.

The king felt pity for the Kein-nara and freed her. Kein-nara then broke his silence too by saying that if the king had freed his mate, he should release him too as he wouldn't be able to endure their separation. Eventually, the king freed both. For this devoted couple, their ordeal in captivity ended happily.

Shan people have adopted a Kein-nara and Kein-nara dance as their classic dance. The dancers wear large costumes with wings, and it requires great skill to perform it with elegance. The dance is performed to celebrate Shan State Day, and other secular and religious ceremonies.

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Finally, the king asked his chef to cook the Kein-nara for lunch and Kein-nara for dinner. Kein-nara suddenly broke the silence by saying that she had kept silent because she was afraid that she would commit a faux pas, as she didn't understand the court etiquette.

The king felt pity for the Kein-nara and freed her. Kein-nara then broke his silence too by saying that if the king had freed his mate, he should release him too as he wouldn't be able to endure their separation. Eventually, the king freed both. For this devoted couple, their ordeal in captivity ended happily.

Shan people have adopted a Kein-nara and Kein-nara dance as their classic dance. The dancers wear large costumes with wings, and it requires great skill to perform it with elegance. The dance is performed to celebrate Shan State Day, and other secular and religious ceremonies.

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Those in Yangon seeking to try ethnic minority food are blessed for options. Prawn Shan noodles, Rakine seafood, and Kachin shat jam to Chin and even Wa dishes. It seems like everything is now out there waiting to be sampled and savoured. The regional variations in Bamar food are also getting some much-deserved attention most recently with the opening of Anya Ahtar.

Pretty much every state and region is covered. Except for little Kayah State that is. For now, those hoping to taste Kayah's cuisine still have to do it the old-fashioned way, by going there in person.
The most popular Kayah dishes are fish or pork-based. One is *hin htoke*, a delicious steamed dumpling filled with pork and spring onion and wrapped in a banana leaf. One popular store offering this dish is Mingalar Hin Htoke, but it can be found throughout Loikaw.

Even then, it’s not that easy. Most restaurants in the state capital, Loikaw, offer Myanmar, Shan and Chinese food rather than the local ethnic cuisine. However, there are a few options for the more adventurous.

Sat at a small roadside restaurant in the town, Ko Kyaw Oo, a native of the town, wolfed down three of the dumplings in quick succession. “I have this almost every day. It’s delicious. Any visitor to Kayah State must try it,” he said.

Other local dishes include stuffed fish, minced fish salad, pork ribs and rice porridge. But perhaps the most famous of all is pork sausage, which is made using the pepper from the Demoso and Pan Pot areas. The sausage is made in a wheel shape and after cooking is cut into small slices and eaten on its own, often dipped in a sauce.
While rice wine is also produced in Kayah communities, *khaung yar* – a low-alcohol, brownish-pink-coloured alcohol – is more highly regarded among locals.

Demoso market is a great place to buy fresh sausages, but there are also many restaurants in Loksaw where you can try the dish, including Kenmyar Handaw, which is also a good place to taste beef jerky. Another option is the informal Sunday Club, where you can sit on a plastic stool and rub shoulders with locals as you wolf down these spicy sausages.

You'll quickly work out that it goes down well with another Kayah specialty, *khaung yar* or millet wine.
While rice wine is also produced in Kayah communities, Khawng Say - a low alcohol, brownish-pink-coloured alcohol - is more highly regarded among locals. It is an essential part of the local culture, drunk at major celebrations (and many other times as well). In Kayah homes, it is not uncommon for it to be glazed through a bamboo pipe directly from the pot in which it was brewed.

Unfortunately, Khawng Say doesn’t travel or store well, so you’re unlikely to find a good chance of it in Yangon. However, if you’re looking for a small taste of the Kayah cuisine, you should head to Taung Yin Than restaurant, which does a very good Kayah cuisine - at least, good enough to bring you over until the next time you’re in Loikaw.
Most people were speechless when I told them that I went to Kayah State for my honeymoon. Some even gave me a mock smile. A few managed to ask, “What’s there to see in Kayah State?” It doesn’t matter, though. They just don’t know how beautiful a place it really is.

It’s human nature that, after a good trip, you want to share it with other people. Kayah has lots of history, heritage and natural beauty. I believe that we travelers have a responsibility to tell the world about these hidden treasures.

The first thing I want to mention is where we stayed: Kayah Resort. Your trip won’t be perfect if you don’t stay at this friendly hotel when you visit Loikaw, the state capital. They’ll pick you up at the airport or you can get to the hotel in comfort and don’t need to worry about arranging transportation.

The hotel has bungalow-type rooms that are built on a slope so guests get nice views and fresh air. (For those like me, coming from pollution-filled Yangon, the air is like a healing tonic.) The rooms are built in a traditional style, emphasizing the need to maintain the state’s heritage.

The compound is pleasant and quiet, and those in need of a break from city life will have no trouble relaxing. Lying down on a reclining chair beside the very clear swimming pool is the perfect way to spend an afternoon before you head into downtown Loikaw or explore further afield."

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Next to the hotel is the Kayah
State Museum, which has
hundreds of objects used by the
state’s ethnic groups, including
bronze drums, weapons and
musical instruments. The golf
course is another another
attraction located near the hotel.
But if you venture out of Lokaw,
you’ll find that Kayah State has
many other attractions – and you
don’t even need to travel very far.

Kan Khunit Sint
(Seven Steps Lake)
Just 13 miles from Lokaw, Kan
Khunit Sint is also known by
locals as Nat Tharm Khunt Phaw
(Seven Faries Lake) because,
according to legend, there are
seven fairies who regularly bathe
there. Anyone who visits will
soon understand the reference to
“seven steps”. There are actually
seven descending lakes. Nearby,
you can find restaurants selling
barbequed local fish, known as
Na Gy Dokkha.

Htee Pwint Kan
(Umbrella Lake)
Why is this lake called Htee
Pwint? To start with, it’s actually
a mud volcano rather than a
lake. When the volcano erupts,
it spouts mud and water into the
air in the shape of an umbrella. These eruptions don’t
happen every day, and locals
say they are most likely to occur
on a full moon or new moon day
– but it really just depends on the
luck of the visitor.
**Kyet Cave**

Your trip to Kayah State won’t be complete unless you have visited this place which is about 10 miles from Lokaw. A natural cave, it is long and the lack of electricity means it’s not possible to travel all the way to the end. The cave has an interesting story to go along with it inside you’ll notice many wooden coffins according to legend the cave is inhabited by Kayet, a type of ghost. Local people come to make offerings for food to their deceased grandparents. Some also heap the small stones on the cave floor into a pile and then make a wish.

There are a number of other sites around Lokaw including the Ta Khun Dang, Lawpat and Ngwe Taung dams, Demoso market, Lwe Tamu cave and Htoo Sti waterfall. Locals are friendly as they tend to be all over the country.

Kayah is a beautiful and unique place and there are many things to see and do. You can swim and relax you can visit pagodas, and you can explore sites of great natural beauty. In short, you can find it all there.

So what are you waiting for? For your next holiday, grab the chance to go to Kayah State.

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**Pan Pet Village**

This village, about 25 miles west of Lokaw is becoming very popular with tourists. The village is inhabited by ethnic Kayan (also known as Paduang), whose women traditionally wear bronze coils around their necks. While it’s not that common among younger women at Pan Pet you can still see some Kayan women wearing bronze coils. You can also learn about other aspects of their lifestyle and culture. Many residents produce and sell handicrafts to generate some extra income.

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