

Suggestions for those intending to travel for Rohingya Relief Mission to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Passport and Visa

The passport should be valid and cover the entire duration of stay. US Passport holders are required to have a visa which can be granted before proceeding to Bangladesh or on arrival. The website gives some information. <http://www.bdembassyusa.org/index.php?page=requirement-visa>

The writer of this guide found using a visa service to be worth its value as they routinely process such visas. They check for errors and other requirements. This writer used <https://www.visahq.com/>. This is not an endorsement of their suitability for individual volunteers who may use other services or obtain directly from the Bangladesh Embassy. When using any service, for mailing services use overnight delivery as delays could be caused by number of reasons. It is better that one should have a visa before departure. One volunteer known to this writer preferred to get it on spot on arrival at Dhaka Airport.

Turkish Visa

if you have a layover in Istanbul, you may not be able to get out of the airport if you do not have a Turkish visa ahead of time. Authorities informed this writer that US citizens cannot get it on spot despite presence of many machines to issue such visas on spot. This means no matter what the departing ticket counters tell you that the airlines will put you up for a hotel and include meals. In reality without the visa you will not be able to leave the Istanbul airport no matter how long the layover. There is a resting area though with only bed facilities and nothing else inside the airport for Turkish Air. They do have a rest station which is a room with cot style beds. No privacy or WC facilities there in that room. Lockers which will **not** take in a carryon bag are available with self-locking numeric code protection.

Vaccinations

Information on vaccinations is given at the following website of CDC.

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/bangladesh>

Plan on vaccinations at least 6 weeks in advance as Japanese Encephalitis requires two doses 4 weeks apart. This writer was not advised to get cholera as the Florida Health Department did not advise it for those over 65 years of age.

If all vaccinations and medications are included the cost at a State Government facility could run \$ 1000 per traveler. Most of us have Hepatitis B as well as the influenza vaccines already taken. DPT boosters are advised.

Carry antidiarrheal and antibiotics as one would do when travelling to Pakistan.

MEDICINES

Pack two weeks' worth and keep it with your personal bag. You never know where and when you may be stranded.

Airline Tickets

There is a great deal of variation in air fares. A recent fare for Turkish Airlines for Miami- Dhaka return was \$ 808 in round numbers. Flights between Dhaka and Cox's Bazaar are also quite variable. This writer

was able to get a Dhaka-Cox's Bazar return for \$ 100 (BDT 8400). For booking tickets within Bangladesh Booking.com may be one web site that one could check out.

Hotels

These are unlikely to cost more than \$ 100 per night. This writer was able to stay at a less star rating hotel for 4 nights for \$ 165. Read reviews if you find them helpful.

Currency Exchanges

Change currency at the Dhaka Airport upon exiting from the immigration. Cox Bazar Airport has no such service. Additionally except for a \$ 100 bill, smaller notes of \$ 50 or \$ 20 are unlikely to be exchanged even outside of Dhaka, if the \$ 20 notes total \$ 100 or more. In Cox's Bazar this could present with some difficulty.

Credit Cards

Inform your credit card service that you intend to be in Bangladesh and give them the dates. This writer had to call his credit card company three times on three different days to get the foreign transactions block lifted. This was necessary if one is booking tickets from airlines in Bangladesh directly from US on websites.

Cellphones

Despite purchasing AT&T's Passport, telephone connections were very unpredictable and did not work most of the time. This could make it difficult to contact your hotel from the airport or your contacts in Cox's Bazaar etc. In Wi-Fi areas texting becomes better. There is a cellular tower in one of OBAT's Rohingya Camp Clinic area and this writer did receive two calls from USA in the remoteness of the camp areas. Some people advise purchasing SIM cards at the Dhaka Airport and this is supposed to make connections in local phones easier. Some have advised just another local phone in addition for the duration. You may need help in dialing numbers as the full numbers often include city codes.

Insect Repellents

There are repellants for clothes also as well as personal applications and sprays. Use both.

Shoes and Sunglasses

Hiking shoes would be ideal as OBAT camps are not by the roadside and require some walking and some height climbing. Since one would have several minutes of walk to the clinic one would be in the sun, sunglasses are therefore advised possibly caps also.

Weather

This is easily available on popular websites in USA e.g. weather.com. Essentially the weather is like Miami though the rain situation is different.

POWERPACKS AND CHARGERS

This is a necessity. Numerous ones are available. Out in the field you may not find a way to charge your dead phone. Even in Dhaka departure lounge there are no sockets to charge the phone and even if they were there you would need a converter of voltage from 220 V to 120 V. You may therefore need to have two small convertors for phone charging. It is easier to carry a power pack which you can charge daily at your hotel.

POWER CONVERTERS

Some excellent ones are available. This writer used the one from Bestak and it worked wonderfully.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01E140XWA/ref=oh_aui_detailpage_o04_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1

You can plug other chargers for your camera, flash and other batteries too as well as several USB devices.

Please note adapters are not voltage converters.

FOOD

Avoid any cold preps e.g. salads, chutneys, fruit juices at the hotel. Use only bottled water even for rinsing the tooth brush. Carry some salt packs as they will become your oral rehydration kit. Bottled water is available in Cox's Bazar.

LAUNDRY

Carry a small amount of laundry detergent to wash any clothes if you run out of them. You can have tremendous amount of perspiration out in the field where there are no fans or air conditioned premises, just huts, heat and humidity despite December weather. Of course high end hotels may offer that but it is not a certainty.

CHARITY IN CAMPS

The Rohingya do not surround you asking for money. Not even the children. They do not bother you. I would **not** advise handing out anything money etc. while in the camps. All of them get their rations from BD Army. Other things such as medical care is being provided. They children may say hello or other English phrases. They are used to foreign visitors coming and going. Women are not bothered. This is just the experience of the OBAT and MedGlobal workers.

EXTRA CLOTHES

If possible have an extra pair of clothes in your carryon bag. You may have a long stay at IST. Remember you have taken the flight out of CXB to DAC and then DAC to IST. It is a long journey. Say you started on Friday Dec 1st from CXB and you have one day's delay at IST, you will arrive late at night on Saturday Dec 2nd. You have to add 11 hours to this picture. There is a mosque in the IST and one can wash one's feet and perform ablution. But bathing is impossible. You could go to TAV hotel within the IST airport but it is extremely expensive (\$ 250+ per person per day)