

# A Bangali's trip to the CHT



PHOTO: RONGRUNG CHAKMA

**MALIHA MOHSIN**

When my editor and I thought this idea up, I was half-joking. I don't really want to tell you how to be a decent Bangali during your Eid vacation to the CHT. There are way too many ways to go wrong, to be a foul visitor anyway even if we were trying our bests, simply because our individual best-selves are not much of a consolation to the political realities of the CHT. Also, full disclosure: I'm probably on an extra-steep slippery slope here because my mother's side of the family are actually Bangali settlers in Rangamati. So, yes, the irony isn't lost on me. But here I am anyway, repeating the same exercise on myself of "should I really visit the CHT?" for the umpteenth time for the sake of an audience that I only hope cares.

So, the gameplay today is simple. I'm going to battle with myself on dos and don'ts for the rest of the article as I work through the basics of planning a trip to the CHT. You'll get a window seat to the view of how I weigh the gravity of my decisions for the trip. I don't know if you'll learn anything useful. But I hope you, as a Bangali, will not add any more grievance to the sentiments

of our indigenous hosts.

Before I get to the nitty gritty, the biggest challenge is to place myself in this plan with the ultimate existential question—

Who am I?

Regardless of how much of a Bangali or a Muslim I feel or want to be, my Bangali Muslim identity puts me in the greatest advantage in this country. I'm the parallel of the white Christian in the US. If only I were a cis-man now, I'd be on top of the food chain. I'm also financially rather solvent, live in the capital, and have access to this neoliberal, globalised world first and fastest, even in spite of the traffic. And in the CHT, I'm everything the local indigenous folk are not. In fact, I'm a symbol of that very state that still insists on calling them upojati—a smaller, sub-section of the 'greater'. Whether or not I accept it, I form the majority of the nation-state that has displaced thousands from their ancestral lands in the CHT, militarised the mountains, and looted their natural resources. To add to the wound, some of my family members are permanent Bangali residents of the CHT: a reminder of how accessible this region is for Bangalis to

own and claim, while the reciprocal cannot be claimed by the indigenous folks as they struggle to live a secured, free life in their own homelands.

And now, say, despite and precisely because of all my privileges, I want to step out of this city and see the mountains, breathe some fresh air that doesn't weigh heavy with grime. So, here's another important question that I must confront—

Who is my host?

This question is actually quite redundant in my case, because I go live in my mother's family home when I visit. Beautifully perched on top of a mountain alongside other homes, it helps me drown out all that noise when I'm in difficult conversations with myself about being the granddaughter of a notable Bangali settler in Rangamati city. My uncle hosts me on those rare visits I make once or twice in a year or two. But if my uncle were my tour guide, he'd tell me to visit the latest tourist spot built by the armed forces—a reminder of violent occupation by the state. Left to my own devices,

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## The forts of Jaipur, India

Kazi Akib Bin Asad

"Jaipur may be known around the world as "The Pink City", but go around town and visit the forts and you'll probably wonder why everything is yellow. Sitting atop nearby hills is the Nahargarh Fort, connected to Jaigarh Fort in the distance by an extended wall. However, these forts dwarf in comparison to the Amber, or Amer, Fort. This architectural masterpiece is a must-visit in Jaipur. Lose yourself in the snake-like passages and staircases of the fort; it's difficult to take a photo in Jaipur that won't come out good."

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