FIRST YEAR IN AMERICA CHECKLIST

A practical newcomer checklist for Burmese immigrants - based on BurmaHeaven's First Year in America guide.

How to use this: Check items as you complete or understand them. Not every family will finish everything on the same timeline. Use this as a guide, not a deadline.

FIRST WEEK / FIRST 30 DAYS

- [ ] **Protect important documents**
  Keep passport, immigrant visa, Green Card, Social Security card, birth/marriage certificates, immigration notices, vaccination records, school records and copies of immigration paperwork in a safe place.
- [ ] **Make secure digital copies**
  Keep secure online or emailed copies so one lost bag does not erase your records.
- [ ] **Confirm Green Card processing**
  If you entered with an immigrant visa, make sure the USCIS Immigrant Fee was paid and keep track of the physical Green Card.
- [ ] **Get or track your Social Security number**
  If you requested an SSN during the immigrant visa process, wait for it. If not, follow Social Security instructions to apply.
- [ ] **Protect your Social Security number**
  Ask why it is needed before giving it out. Do not share it casually.
- [ ] **Get a state ID or driver's license**
  Check your state DMV requirements for identity, immigration status, residency and SSN documentation.
- [ ] **Understand car-insurance requirements**
  If you drive, confirm your state's insurance / financial-responsibility rules.
- [ ] **Open a bank or credit-union account**
  Compare monthly fees, minimum balances, ATM fees, overdraft fees, direct deposit and fraud protection.
- [ ] **Get a phone and reliable contact information**
  Make sure schools, employers, doctors and immigration agencies can reach you.
- [ ] **Arrange healthcare coverage**
  Learn your options before an emergency. Understand premium, deductible, copay, primary care, urgent care and emergency room.
- [ ] **Enroll children in school**
  Ask about grade placement, accepted credits, English Learner support, IEP/504 services, vaccinations and graduation requirements.
- [ ] **Figure out transportation**
  Learn local driving, public transportation, school transportation and work commute options.
- [ ] **Begin your employment search**
  Your first job can be a starting point - income, U.S. work experience, English practice and time to learn the system.

FIRST 3 MONTHS

- [ ] **Learn how to read your paycheck**
  Check gross pay, net pay, hours, hourly rate, overtime and deductions.
- [ ] **Understand basic taxes**
  Keep W-2s, 1099s, pay stubs and other tax documents. Do not assume your employer is handling everything correctly.
- [ ] **Know whether you are W-2 or 1099**
  Employee and independent-contractor classifications affect taxes, payroll withholding, overtime and other rights.
- [ ] **Learn basic workplace rights**
  Keep your own hours, schedules, pay stubs, texts about shifts and records of cash payments.
- [ ] **Learn U.S. work culture without accepting abuse**
  Ask questions when pay, overtime, deductions or treatment do not make sense.

- ☐ **Understand debit vs. credit**
  Debit usually spends your own bank money; credit is borrowed money that must be repaid.
- ☐ **Start building credit carefully**
  No U.S. credit history is not the same as bad credit. Do not borrow simply to build a score.
- ☐ **Learn how the healthcare system works**
  Know where to go for routine care, urgent problems and true emergencies.
- ☐ **Learn how to communicate with your child's school**
  Ask for policies, explanations, interpreters and written information when needed.
- ☐ **Learn your neighborhood and local services**
  Know grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors, schools, libraries, transit and community resources.
- ☐ **Find Burmese community connections**
  Community can help with jobs, housing, doctors, translation and local resources - but learn the system yourself too.
- ☐ **Look for English-learning resources**
  Libraries, adult schools, community colleges and community groups may offer English classes.

FIRST 6 MONTHS

- ☐ **Review your job situation**
  Ask whether your current job is good for you and whether better pay or opportunity is available.
- ☐ **Consider training or education**
  Think about English improvement, certificates, college, vocational training or career advancement.
- ☐ **Review your credit habits**
  Are you paying bills on time and avoiding unnecessary debt?
- ☐ **Understand your health insurance**
  Know what is covered, your deductible, copays and where you should seek care.
- ☐ **Check how your children are doing in school**
  Review grades, credits, attendance, language support and any needed services.
- ☐ **Understand your household budget**
  Track rent, utilities, food, transportation, insurance, debt and savings.
- ☐ **Review housing costs**
  Understand your lease, utilities, renters insurance and whether your housing is sustainable.
- ☐ **Build independence**
  Practice making your own appointments, calling your bank, talking to school staff and understanding government letters.

ONGOING SAFETY & EVERYDAY LIFE

- ☐ **Protect yourself from scams**
  Be suspicious of threats demanding immediate payment by gift card, cryptocurrency, wire transfer, Zelle or cash.
- ☐ **Keep control of your accounts**
  Know the passwords to your own USCIS, email, bank, healthcare and school accounts.
- ☐ **Verify rental listings before sending money**
  Do not pay for a property you cannot verify. Read the lease and ask what utilities are included.
- ☐ **Learn emergency numbers**
  911 for serious police/fire/medical emergencies; 211 may connect you to local services. Learn other local numbers you may need.
- ☐ **Do not depend on your children as permanent interpreters**
  Build your own ability to communicate with schools, doctors, banks and government offices.
- ☐ **Stay connected to Myanmar and Burmese culture**
  Language, food, family history, holidays and community can remain part of your family life.
- ☐ **Ask questions and verify important information**
  When something matters, ask “Why?”, “Where is that written?”, “Can I have a copy?” and verify through official sources when possible.

BY THE END OF YOUR FIRST YEAR

- ☐ **I know where my immigration and identity documents are stored.**
- ☐ **I understand the basics of my Green Card and Social Security records.**
- ☐ **I can use my bank account and understand basic credit.**
- ☐ **I know how to get routine medical care and what to do in an emergency.**
- ☐ **I understand my paycheck and keep my work and tax records.**
- ☐ **I know how to communicate with my child's school or local school district.**
- ☐ **I understand the basics of my lease, utilities and housing costs.**
- ☐ **I know how to look up official information instead of relying on one person.**
- ☐ **I know where to ask for language help or an interpreter when appropriate.**
- ☐ **I have started building a life that works for my family - not just surviving the first week.**