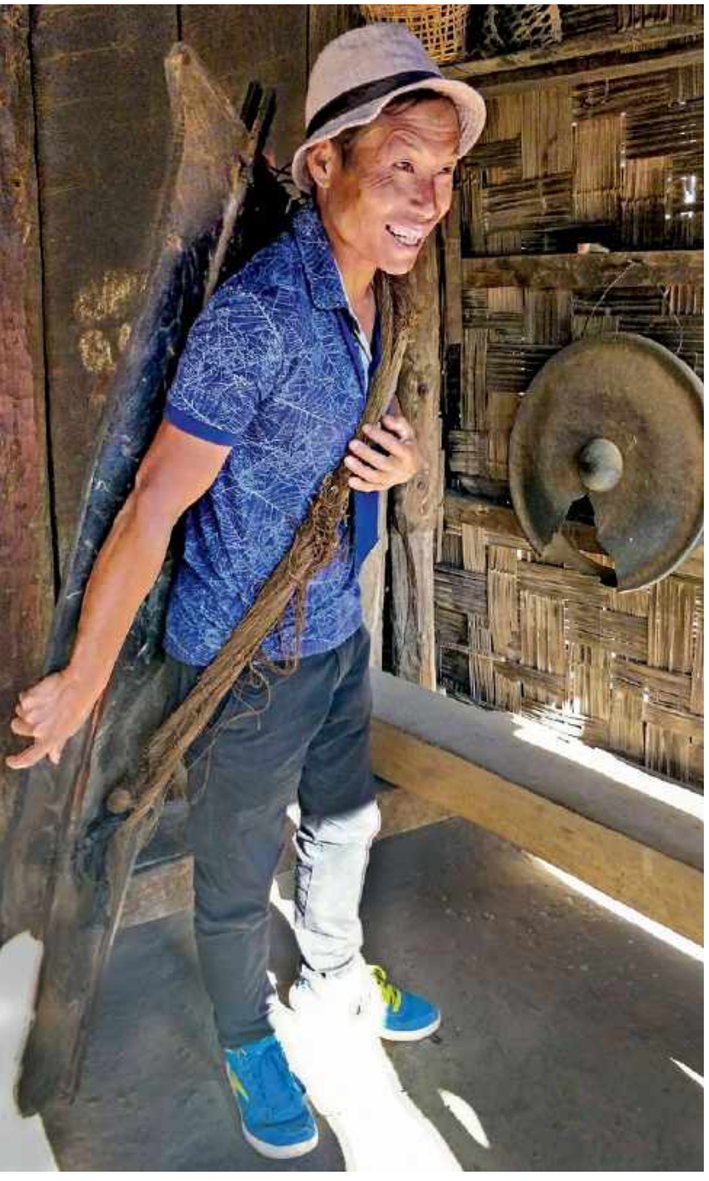
Knights *of the* Forest

Soak up views of Nagaland's **Khonoma**, famously known as the 'first green village of Asia', where hunting is banned and the warrior tribe of Angami is committed to protecting nature. Photographs & text by **HEMA NARAYANAN**



From left: Inside a *morung*, or dormitory, in Khonoma, a local guide named Vicko explains that the structure served as a school for learning various skills like woodcraft, martial arts, and farming in ancient times; villagers rely heavily on cultivating paddy and garlic, and the terraced paddy fields here have become emblematic of the region.

Clockwise from top left: A woman weaves the traditional Angami shawl, known as *lohe*. These shawls are a style statement in Khonoma; an ornamental sign announces one's entry into Nagaland; locals are friendly and readily pose for the camera; the *morungs* of today exhibit Angami Naga handicrafts, old utensils, traditional arms, and musical instruments; Dovipie Inn is a great place to retire for a cuppa after a walk in the village. It wears a festive look during the Hornbill Festival.

The circular public space in the middle of the village is where people gather for everyday chats and festivities.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport to Khonoma is Dimapur, which is connected to major Indian cities. Get a cab from Dimapur to Kohima (70 km). Khonoma is 20 kilometres from here. Taxis charge USD7/₹500 to take tourists to Khonoma.

STAY

Niraamaya Retreats Aradura offers a countryside escape amid some of the most beautiful scenery in the region *(starts from USD67/₹5,000; niraamaya.com)*. **Hillfoot Camp & Homestay** in Jakhama offers a choice of cosy rooms and camps *(starts from USD13/₹1,000; airbnb.co.in)*

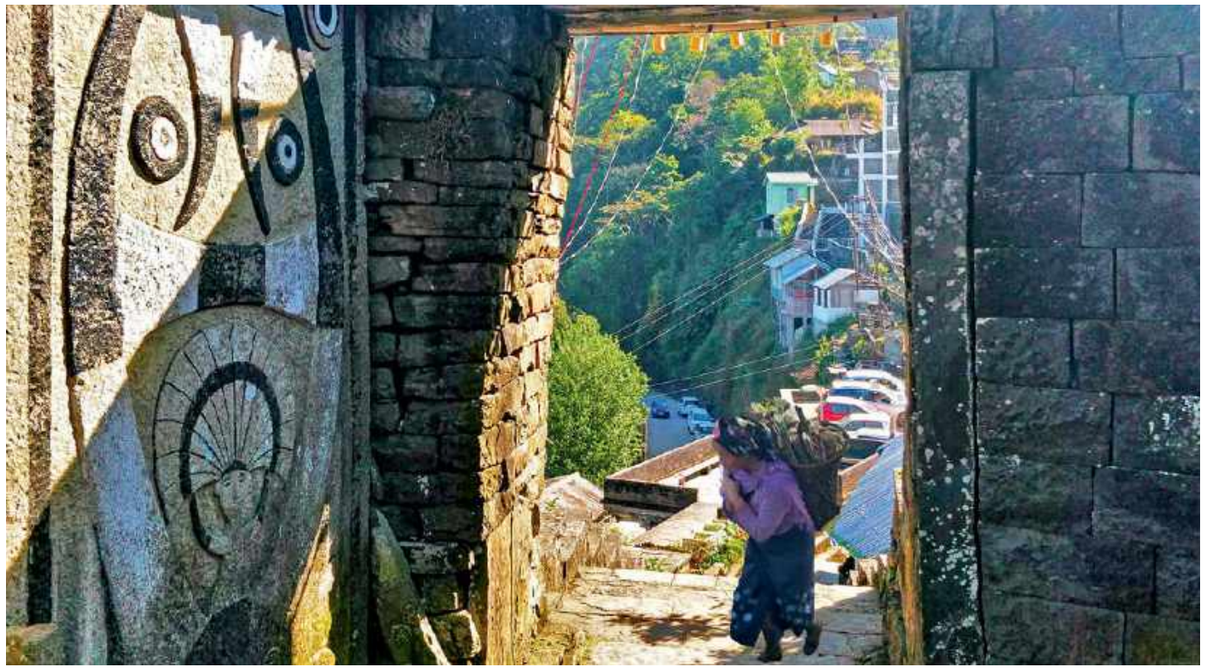
WHEN

The ideal time to explore Nagaland is from November to February.

IDEAL FOR

Photographers, nature lovers, trekkers, and adventure seekers.

DISCOVER

- Pay your respects at the Kohima War Cemetery—a memorial for the British and Indian Army soldiers who died in World War II.
- Trek to Dzukou Valley, known as the 'Valley of Flowers of the Northeast', and Japfu Peak (3,048 metres) for great views.
- If you can visit in the first week of December, you can experience the Hornbill Festival (*hornbillfestival.com*)—an annual gathering of 16 Naga tribes.

Clockwise from left: Fruit sellers on the road leading to Khonoma, 20 kilometres west of Kohima; a Baptist Church in the valley; the *khopi* basket is characteristic of the Angami tribe; a tribal symbol engraved on the wooden gate of Khonoma. The circular symbols are considered as 'guarding eyes' by the villagers.