

Pride of Nagaland

Think of this: You are going to meet the elusive Naga tribes of Nagaland, do tribal home-hopping, witness a harvest dance in one home and a warrior leap in another. In your hand is a long bamboo mug, waiting for the rice beer to be poured in, which is brewed in a local tribal home. Even as you step out to shake a leg with the tribes.

This invigorating and distinctive experience was part of our journey while visiting The Hornbill Festival in Kisama, 12 kms from Kohima, the capital of Nagaland in India. This allowed us to be a part of a world, seldom seen in today's age - a world where tribes pride on their traditions, where locals narrate their own tales, where nature surrounds and stands supreme and where happiness is elicited from simple pleasures.

Come every December and the fierce Naga warriors descend on the Kisama Heritage village to participate in Nagaland's biggest annual jamboree, the Hornbill Festival. Seeing the board, "Welcome to Nagaland!" at the entrance of Kisama, gave fruition to my long - lasting lingering longing to witness this festival. And it was special, as it was the 20th year of the Hornbill in December 2019 to which we travelled. To top this, I actually felt that we were being greeted by the tribes, only to realize a tad later that we entered Kisama, at the same instance as the honorable Minister did, who was the Guest of Honor. Nevertheless, the welcome greetings by the tribes sounded delightful, in the form of distinct 'cheers' or 'callouts', by each clan. Dressed like warriors, in flamboyant colors adorned with elaborate accessories, their faces were lit up with pride. It was evidently a significant and sacred gathering for the locals and the tribes, who partake in it with appreciation, fervour, vigor and devotion.

Melange of Displays

Hornbill Festival is arguably the most spectacular and photogenic among all festivals in the Northeast India, or so I can vouch. Aptly known as the 'Festival of Festivals,' it is organized in a massive scale and is an exuberant celebration of the heritage, culture, lifestyle and cuisine of the 16 tribes who live in the hills of Nagaland. Named after, the Indian



Celebratory Mood at the Hornbill Festival © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Window to Nagaland © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Scene inside the Kisama Village © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Dance of the Naga Warriors at the Hornbill Festival © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoI

forest bird, the Great Hornbill, seen in the folklore of most of the state's tribes, it shows off a mélange of cultural displays and lives of the tribes, held between December 1st - 10th.

Over the years it's growing popularity attracts tourists both from India and all corners of the world. Festivals are a sure way to bring together locals or families to celebrate the togetherness – and Hornbill in particular is organized exactly to do that. Its aim is to revive and protect the culture of Nagaland, to promote intercultural harmony and encourage inter-tribal interaction – and all this, impeccably conducted by the State Tourism and Art & Culture Departments. Without a doubt, it was evident that this festival is the pride of the Naga people

For visitors like me, it meant a closer understanding of the traditional cluster of all Naga tribes, a peek into the ancient tribal lives and a lifetime opportunity to cherish age-old practices through the exploration of the tribal huts set up here, dating back to primeval lifestyles. As the festival unfolded, spectators watched the tribes take centre-stage in their ethnic splendour – it was a combination of tribal cultural performances, war dances, enactments of tribal festivals and more, that represent their region.



Dont Mess with me © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoI

Furthermore, the festival had countless highlights – indigenous sports like traditional archery and Naga wrestling or contests for strength like the, chilli eating challenge and stone throwing contest. Not to forget, cuisine is a major part of the festival with each tribe serving their traditional food. In the days, I spent at the festival, there were hardly any featureless moments.

Relevance of Naga Attire

I wondered if the inhabitants of Nagaland ever tried their hands at fashion

designing? They give a lot of weightage to their costumes and feel that costumes are what identifies and separates them from the rest of the crowd. Each clan has its tribal dress, designed with a touch of class. Their headgear has carefully chosen Hornbill feathers, a very important part of their attire. They use Naga shields of many kinds, the spears and the Dao (the sword) used for varied purposes. The motifs and patterns on their clothes are woven so intricately. And an important item for all people in Nagaland are their beautiful shawls. Women wear the



Stone Throwing Competition © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Warrior with his weapon © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Daily Life Activity © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Chang Woman Tribe in her traditional attire © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Charismatic Chang Tribal Man © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL

elegant Mechala (wrap around skirt) with a shawl and so do men. Shawls, the most popular traditional dress are separately designed for every tribe and also per the role of the person.

The Naga jewellery is made from a variety of materials such as carnelian and glass beads, coral, boar tusks, bronze, sea shells, ivory, conch shells, cowries and more.

Pretty to the last detail, their beaded necklaces are worn by all – its popular as a show of finery but also as a portable means of displaying and carrying wealth.

Step into the Craft Bazaar and you can find these and more. Each Naga collection

is here for you to pick up and those with a trained eye can actually tell the tribal provenance of each piece of jewellery.

Welcome to our Homes

Each tribe had their Morung (the traditional community house) setup – these are bachelor dormitories mostly but also act as an educational institution, where young boys and girls acquire their first few lessons of cultural and traditional knowledge through folk music, dance, tales and oral traditions. Morungs also double up as guard - houses during the time of war.

Walking through a variety of Morungs was an experience to cherish. Inside each Morung, was a proud and soulful display of their traditional values and life – showing the gear, weapons, costumes, instruments (drums/gongs), wooden carvings and their delicacies. Taking a picture with the ever - obliging Naga men and women, beside their home was a highlight. Between performances at the central arena, each tribe came to their Morung to relax, interact with visitors and to sell their food.

These tribes whom we had never known before, were warm, courteous and their gestures made us laugh and feel at home. Some tribes playfully showed me how



Typical Morung - Sumuki Tribes © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Morung of Arju Tribes © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



Inside a Morung © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



A ferocious Naga Warrior © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL

to jump up high into the air and came down at me with their spears and heavy shields! And this is what I was seeking to experience – with a sense of being closer to these incredible people of India. To top it, the evenings were bedecked with musical concerts ensuring the festive spirit continues through the night.

It seemed I could finally tick off this festival from my must - see lists; but not really. Such a cultural mosaic of multi - ethnicity is worth revisiting. There is so much to absorb from the things happening under a single roof and for that, I will go back to this "falcon capital of the world", to meet the Naga tribes yet again. And that time, I will jump up just like them, with a callout well - rehearsed and with a spear, shield and Dao in my hand.

Fact:

Venue: Naga Heritage Village, Kisama

Festival Tickets: ₹30 for day events / Cameras - ₹50

Festival Info: Schedule handbook is available at the entry area

Necessary formalities:

- Domestic tourists need to obtain Inner Line Permit (ILP) from the local government.
- Foreign tourists are required to register at Foreigners Registration Office (FRO)
- of the residential district within a day

• Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoL



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Dr̥ṣṭi (दृष्टि) in Sanskrit language means vision. The vision in the mind of a photographer, aligned in a creative manner with what one sees around, produces an artistic image. This resonates with the spirit of YPS, which strives to promote the photographic art.

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Contents



A Moment to Cherish © Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoI

4	From The Editor's Desk	- H Satish MFIAP, MICS, ARPS, cMoI, Hon MFIP (Nature), Hon YPS
5	Spotlight: Vidyun R Hebbar	- Ananth Kamat EFIP, cMoI
6	Featured Article: Pride of Nagaland	- Hema Narayanan EFIP, AFIAP, QPSA, cMoI
10	Framing the Frame: Parasailing Ride In Golden Hour	- K S Rajaram AFIAP, Hon YPS
11	Just Grasp It: Aquarium Photography	- Ashok Kandimalla
15	YPS Milestone: New Logo Launch	- Manju Vikas Sastry V AFIP
16	Golden Jubilee Photo Challenge	- Prema Kakade EFIAP, EFIP, GPA, PESGSPC, cMoI, A.CPE
18	YPS Meet Webinars	- B V Prakash
20	Saturday Meets and Nenapugalu	- Prema Kakade EFIAP, EFIP, GPA, PESGSPC, cMoI, A.CPE
21	FIP Distinctions - 2021	- Manju Vikas Sastry V AFIP

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Inside: Featured Article: Pride of Nagaland | Aquarium Photography