

Hornbill Festival of 2017

Nagaland's Festival of Festivals

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



Performers from the Yimchungru tribe gather outside their morung (young men's dormitory)



In the old days, the 'tail' seen in the attire of the Khiamniungan tribe, would have been the hair of a woman whose head was taken by that warrior



Men from the Ao tribe perform the Arpu Tsungang (War Dance)

Picture a land of stunning natural beauty, with hills shrouded in mist and carpeted by lush green forests, and where feared headhunting tribes once roamed. Such is the allure of the Indian state of Nagaland, tucked away in the northeastern corner of the country, flanked by Myanmar on its eastern side. The state is home to 16 major tribes, each with its own distinct set of customs and traditions, festivals, cuisine, attire, even their own language.

Till a century ago, the mutually unintelligible languages of the Naga tribes meant that they could not communicate with each other. Hence, in the past, most inter-tribal contact was hostile. More recently, a creole language known as 'Nagamese' has evolved, thus allowing for peaceful interaction amongst the tribes.

In 2000, the government of Nagaland started the Hornbill Festival as a means of preserving and showcasing Nagaland's rich (yet quickly disappearing) tribal culture. It was also an opportunity for all the major tribes to come together, interact and experience each other's culture. Several traditions such as headhunting are no longer practised, but ceremonial dances remain an integral part of the lives of Naga tribespeople.

Held from the first to 10 December every year, the Hornbill Festival is billed as Nagaland's "Festival of Festivals". For visitors to Nagaland, the festival is the best introduction one can get to the rich and diverse tribal culture of the state.



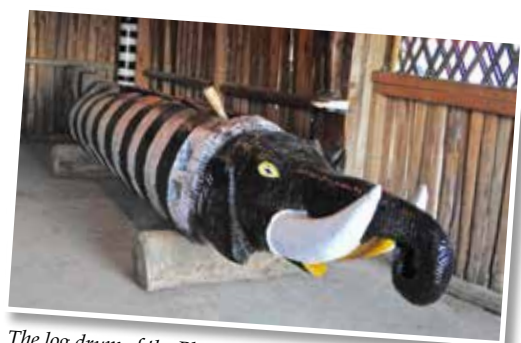
Close-up of a woman from the Phom tribe



A woman from the royal household of the Konyak tribe, posing with her beaded necklace and headband



An elder from the Chang tribe stands guard as members of his tribe prepare to beat the log drum



The log drum of the Phom tribe, carved out of a single, huge tree trunk



Performers from the Sangtam tribe