



Assam

Introduction

Assam, which literally means ‘a peerless land’, is a gateway to the North East India. It is a region where nature herself has painted the vibrant landscape, hillocks, woods, brooks and streams, flora and fauna and above all the affectionate people. An abode of one horned rhino, blue rivers and red mountains, and aromatic tea gardens make Assam a special place on earth. Assam bears a testimony of rich cultural heritage through its temples, monuments, and torrential Brahmaputra River. It is a legendary state in terms of traditions and civilization.

The Land

Assam is almost separated from central India by Bangladesh. It is bounded by Nagaland, Manipur and Myanmar to the east, by West Bengal to the west, by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh to the north and to the south by Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Tripura and Mizoram. These states are connected to the rest of India via a narrow strip in West Bengal called the Siliguri Corridor or ‘Chicken’s Neck’.

Brahmaputra, one of the greatest rivers of the world (length: 2900 kms) flows through Assam valley, making it fertile for growing rice and the renowned Assam Tea.

Assam is one of the richest biodiversity zones in the world and consists of tropical rainforests, deciduous forests, riverine grasslands, bamboo orchards and numerous wetland ecosystems. Many are now protected as national parks and reserved forests. The Kaziranga, home of the rare Indian Rhinoceros, and Manas are two UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Assam.

The People

The ethnic origin of the Assamese varies from Mongoloid tribes to those of directly Indian stock. The earliest inhabitants of Assam were probably of Austric stock. They are termed as 'proto- austroloid', because they are said to have migrated from the Australian and some other islands of the Pacific Ocean to the Asiatic mainland. The Khasis and Jaintias appear to be descendents of the proto-Austroloids of ancient Assam. After the Austrics, the Mongoloids had entered into Assam. Among the Mongoloids, the Bodo tribe appeared and established over the valley of Brahmaputra early. The Kacharis also known as the Bodos were once very powerful people. At a time, they are known to have ruled over the whole of Assam.

The Culture

The culture of Assam is a rich tapestry woven with multicolour yarns of distinct heritage of all the races that inhabit this land. Often known as a land of fairs and festivals, most of the festivals celebrated in Assam have their roots in the diverse faith and belief of its inhabitants. They reflect the true spirit, tradition and life style of the people of Assam. The predominant language is Assamese.

The major festivals celebrated in Assam are Bihu-Bhogali or Magh Bihu (January), Rongali or Bohag Bihu (April), and Kongali or Kati Bihu (May) celebrated by people irrespective of caste, creed and religion throughout Assam. Other festivals are- Baishagu (celebrated by Bodo Kacharis during mid April), Ali-Ai-Ligang (festival of the Mishing tribe, February-March), Baikho (Rabha tribe, spring season), Rongker (important festival of the Karbis, April), Rajini Gabra and Harni Gabra (Dimasa tribe), Bohaggiyo Bishu (spring festival of the Deoris), Ambubashi Mela (most important festival of the Kamakhya Temple is celebrated during mid-June every year. It is a ritual of austerities celebrated with "tantric" rites) and Jonbill Mela (spectacular fair held every year during winter at Jonbeel of Jagiroad, near Guwahati) and so on.

Some of the famous dances of Assam are Bihu Dance (the most popular dance performed by young boys and girls characterized by brisk stepping, flinging and flipping of hands), Satriya Nritya, a beautiful classic dance of Assam, Bhor Tal Nritya, an extension of Sankari culture, Chah Baganar Jumur Nach (Jumur dance of tea garden), Bagurumba dance of Bodos, Mishings' Ali Ai Ligang. There are many other folk dance forms in Assam like Husari and Bihunas, Dhuliya and Bhawariya, Deodhani, Zikirs, Mohauhau or Mahkheda and Apsara-Sabah.