

NAMPHAKE VILLAGE AND CULTURE OF TAI PHAKES

Among the different communities residing in Assam, the Tai Phakes are a culturally very rich community. The Tai Phakes, who came to Assam in about AD 1775, are an attraction to anthropologists, scholars, tourists and social scientists for their unique style of living. We find an exclusive specialty in their traditional housing systems, language, literature, food, festivals, dress etc. Their exclusive culture and social aspects have attracted people from far and near to their village since long.

Location

The Tai Phakes mainly live in villages in the Districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia in Assam (India). These villages are Namphake and Tipam Phake- near Naharkatia in Dibrugarh District; Borphake, Long Phake and Man Mow near Margherita; MOUNGLANG near Ledo, Ninggam near Tirap, and Jagun Faneng Village in Tinsukia District. Tai Phake population in these villages is not more than 2000. Among these villages, the most important in all aspects, is the Namphake Village. There are about 80 houses in this village and the population is around 600.

How to go there

Namphake village is about 60 Km from Dibrugarh Town. If we drive from Dibrugarh to Naharkatia and from there, 4 km in the north-east direction, we reach Namphake Village. It is also easily accessible from Mohanbari Airport near Dibrugarh. Moreover, the nearest railway station is at Naharkatia.

What will you get to see in Namphake

- a) *Buddhist Temple (Monastery) and different Buddhist monuments:* Built in AD 1850, the Buddhist Monastery at Namphake village is the largest in Assam. Construction of the present structure started in 1981. There is a collection of many ancient Buddhist religio-cultural treasure, artifacts and articles in this monastery. Moreover, within its campus, we find the **Masalinda** Lake, pagodas (or **Cong Moo**), **Dhamma Cheti** – religious building to house ancient scrolls, **Kithing** – a structure to hold religious ceremonies, **Kyang Fra** – a religious building where statues of The Buddha are brought during special occasions, **Puthi** – a Banyan tree, grown from the branch of the **Buddhi Tree** at Buddha Gaya, besides a large collection of many other ancient religious and cultural artifacts and **Sang Opuk, Mung Chin Tra, Ashoka Pillar, Pancha Borgia etc.** It is rare, in entire Assam, to find so many rare Buddhist cultural collections in a single place.
- b) *Cultural Heritage:* The Tai Phake people living in the Namphake village use the Tai language as a mode expression. People wear traditional dresses at all times. The men folk wear a multicolored dress known as 'Faa'. Married women wear the 'Nangwat', a wrap-dress worn over the breasts. Young girls wear 'Faa Fouk', a sheet of pure white cloth, intricately embroidered at the edges. Elders, both men and women wear turbans, called 'Faa Ho'.

- c) *Housing*: The Tai Phakes live in houses built on stilts called *Houn Hang*. These homes are built after observation of various traditional rites and rituals to be bestowed with blessings and prosperity of the family and household. The house, which is built about 6 feet above the ground, have separate guest room, dining room (*kannock*), bedroom (*kan noon*), kitchen (*houn oun*) and prayer room (*khock tang chom*).
- d) *Festivals and rituals*: The main festivals of the Buddhist Tai Phakes are *Poy Sang Ken* (in April, during the Assamese *Bohag Bihu* festival), *Mai Ka Sum Fai* (*Maaghi* full moon night in January-February), *Poi Ok Wa* (*Kaati* full moon night in October-November), *Poy Jayanti* (during Buddha Jayanti in May), *Poy Kham Chang* (traditional and religious ceremony, equivalent of Baptism, when young boys are initiated to become Buddhist monks), *Poy Leng* (special funeral for monks), *Poy Kanta* (a religious festival held each year at different Buddhist Monasteries of the Northeast during November), *Poy Noun Chi* (a religious festival held during March on a full moon night) and many others.
- e) *Food and Food habits*: Meals mainly consist of steamed rice wrapped in banana, *Tara* (*Alpania allughus*) or *Kou* (*Phrynium pubinerve*) leaves, known as *Khow boo*, served with boiled vegetables. Moreover, a large number of local wild, leafy vegetables such as '*Panit*', '*Nan Hum*', '*Khi kai*' etc. including bamboo shoots and various roots are also included in their diet. Some other traditional foods are '*Pa soum*' – a spicy sour garnish/chutney made of fermented fish, '*Na Se*' – grated tangy fermented bamboo shoots, '*Naw heu*' (dried bamboo shoots), etc.

Conclusion:

This Namphake village, a potential tourism destination, can be transformed into a 'Heritage Village' or be featured in the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India's National Policy for Promotion of Tourism as an "Ethnic Village", attracting cultural- and eco-tourists because of its rich cultural heritage and unique lifestyle and treasures of its people.