

Explore this land where folklore is an essential part of life, where age-old traditions still come alive during festivals. Nagaland is perfect to get lost in if you are disappearing alone



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Naga weaves at Hornbill festival

Tribal motifs, colourful shawls and headgear

What: Whether it's making baskets or colourful hand-woven shawls, the Nagas have magic in their hands when it comes to craft. Most of the women take this up after cultivation, so there are no major centres to see this. From basketry and weaving, to woodcarving, pottery and metal work, you can find a little of all in most of the Naga villages. The best place to see this under one roof would be at the annual Hornbill Festival held in the first week of December.

Why: A plethora of colour unfolds when you visit the Naga villages; colourful shawls, jewellery, headgear, bags and jackets with bright colours and tribal motifs are quite a sight to behold. The solo traveller can trail through the districts in search of the most beautiful designs. Explore the stalls at the Hornbill Festival or the Diezephe Craft village in Dimapur. The micro-financed workshop cum store gives an insight into these local skills. There are plenty of souvenir options that are alluring enough to take home as presents.

How: Fly into Dimapur and visit **The Diezephe Craft Village (www.dimapur.nic.in)**, 13 km outside the city. If you are planning on attending the Hornbill festival, then book ahead to stay near the venue at **Kisama Heritage Village**, off Kohima.



Home stay hopping in villages

Of kitchen fires to beat the cold and endless stories

What: Nothing exceeds the soothing experience of huddling around a kitchen fire, with cold meat pieces sizzling slowly above it and the resident cat having monopolised your lap, while listening to local Naga gossip. The best part of Naga homes is the large kitchens, where friends and family congregate in the evenings to beat the cold around the kitchen fire and catch up on the day. If a 'local' experience is what you are looking for as a solo traveller, home stay-hopping across the villages is your best bet.

Why: One can hop from Kohima, Khonoma, Tuophema, Mopongchuket to Mon, to experience the local hospitality in Naga homes.

The journey is long and arduous but one that will be filled with adventure and insightful conversations about local culture. Bring along small gifts for your hosts which will be highly welcomed.

How: Contact The India Trail, a boutique travel company offering a treasure trove of local experiences and opportunities to explore the unexplored (**rohan.abraham@indiatrail.org**; **www.indiatrail.org**)



BHARAT AGGARWAL/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM




Kohima museums

Visit local museums to learn about its history and don't miss Tuophema village

What: From Kohima State Museum's invaluable treasures to Tuophema's priceless souvenirs at the Tourist Village, the story of Nagaland's tribal people is best understood at the museums and monuments of the state. Also visit the tower that commemorates the illustrious love story of Jina and Etiben, in Mopongchuket.

Why: At the museums, one can travel back in time when Naga valour was represented in the number of feathers in a headdress or hunted scalps were worn as a necklace. Apart from the imbued history of strife between the tribes, also view the traditional costumes, utensils and objects of daily use.

How: You can enter through Jorhat in Assam, making your way to Mopongchuket and then heading south towards Tuophema and then Kohima. October to March is the best time to visit Nagaland when there is a chill in the air. Use public transport or get in touch with **www.aldertourstravels.com**; **Tel: (0) 94360 11266** to help organise personal transportation.



Wild Northeast

Experience unique tribal customs and traditions

What: Visit the land of the Konyaks in the Mon district, to submerge yourself in the remote villages of the easternmost edge of Nagaland. The elusive former head hunters have safeguarded their culture so well that it is not uncommon to see tattooed faces in traditional attire. Amongst other sightseeing options at Mon, visit the largest village, Longwa, which is situated right on the Myanmar border. In fact, the border bisects the chief's house longitudinally, each half in India and Myanmar.

Why: Traditional learning centres called Morungs, the Aoleong Monyu festival in April, trophies of animal and human skeletons and roaming through tea estates are some of the experiences you can expect here. If you love the outdoors, then each village has a short trail to hike around.

How: You can access Mon through Jorhat in Assam and from Kohima. Hiring a cab is the best way to get around as the local buses take extremely long due to untarred roads. The best season to visit Mon is between October to April. An Inner Line Permit is required for all travellers.

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SECRET

ADRENALINE RUSH

Just 25 km from Kohima, the Dzoukou Valley in Nagaland is close to divinity for outdoor enthusiasts. Situated at the height of 2,462 m, the low hills of the valley are carpeted in white and red flowers at the end of winter and spring season. October and March are the two windows when this inexplicably beautiful sight is available to see.



INDIA PICTURE

Konyak Naga warrior in traditional dress in aggressive mode