

# NAGA FESTIVAL

## 2004



**Naga traditional dance at New Year Festival**

Naga Festival was celebrated on January 15, 2004 at Leshi, Khamti District, Sagaing Division, exactly like all New Year Festivals held yearly. Altogether over 178 foreigners from United

States, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, New Zealand, United Kingdom, South Africa, Belgium, Japan, Thailand, Australia, Israel visited the festival. Among them, there were 80 Americans. Since about 150 foreigners visited the festival last year, the number of tourists has increased annually.

The opening of Naga Traditional Festival was on 14 January, Wednesday together with Naga Pole Erection Ceremony. On the grand day, it was an unbelievably colorful sight. All the beads, the feathers, the teeth and claws of boar, bear and tiger hung from the necks, from hats, from ears, the braids made from wild palm or orchid fibers, the dyed fur of monkey or goat, the hats made of bear fur handed down from the forefathers, as there are now few bears to be seen.



Ceremonial tails and baskets used for carrying sharpened bamboo spikes, elaborate shoulder ornaments decorated with shells, seeds and dyed goat hair add even more color to the Naga costumes. Some shoulder ornaments and baldrics (sashes) decorated with a slain enemy's teeth and passed down in families can be seen.

Women wear various colors and designs of hand-woven longyis (skirt-like nether garment) and colorful blouses or sweaters. Heavy beaded breastplates drape over their chests, or they wear layers and layers of brightly colored necklaces. Silver and brass bracelets jangle on their wrists. Loops, large disks and dangling earrings further embellish the women's costumes. These are made of brass, silver, shell and sometimes even plastic or foil.



In addition to bracelets worn below the elbow, women often wear armlets around their arms. A woman of prestige may have her arms completely covered in bracelets and armlets. One of the most striking features of the woman's appearance is her beautiful thick hair and arranged in various styles. Some wear simple ponytails that hang to their waists. Others create artistic swirls and chignons, allowing a part to swing freely from the elaborate bun or twist that encircle their heads.

Naga women also wear hand-woven blankets of the same bright colors as men, although the females' blankets are of a different design. Conch shells are prized among Naga women, some worn smooth and thin from age. They are passed down from generations, first acquired by ancestors who traded goods with coastal peoples.



After the opening ceremony, each tribe performed Naga traditional dance. Visitors also enjoyed watching the performance of Naga pan (traditional drum) and games such as putting the shots and throwing, etc. The most beautiful part was bonfire. Everybody enjoyed buffet dinner watching a series of traditional dances. “ Though there're some requirements, we enjoyed visiting nearby villages and visiting a place like this.” “We had a great chance to see their life styles and unique tradition,” said a French group.

Origins of the Nagas are believed that they are of Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman descendant. Some believe that the Nagas are related to Karen, while others think that they also have a Chin connection. There are numerous Naga tribes spread throughout northwestern hills of Myanmar, along the India border. Naga national races are mostly residing Khamti, Homalin, Leshi, Lahe and Nanyon Townships in Sagaing Division. Since they are the hilly tribe people, they used to live on the mountains, over (100,000) feet.





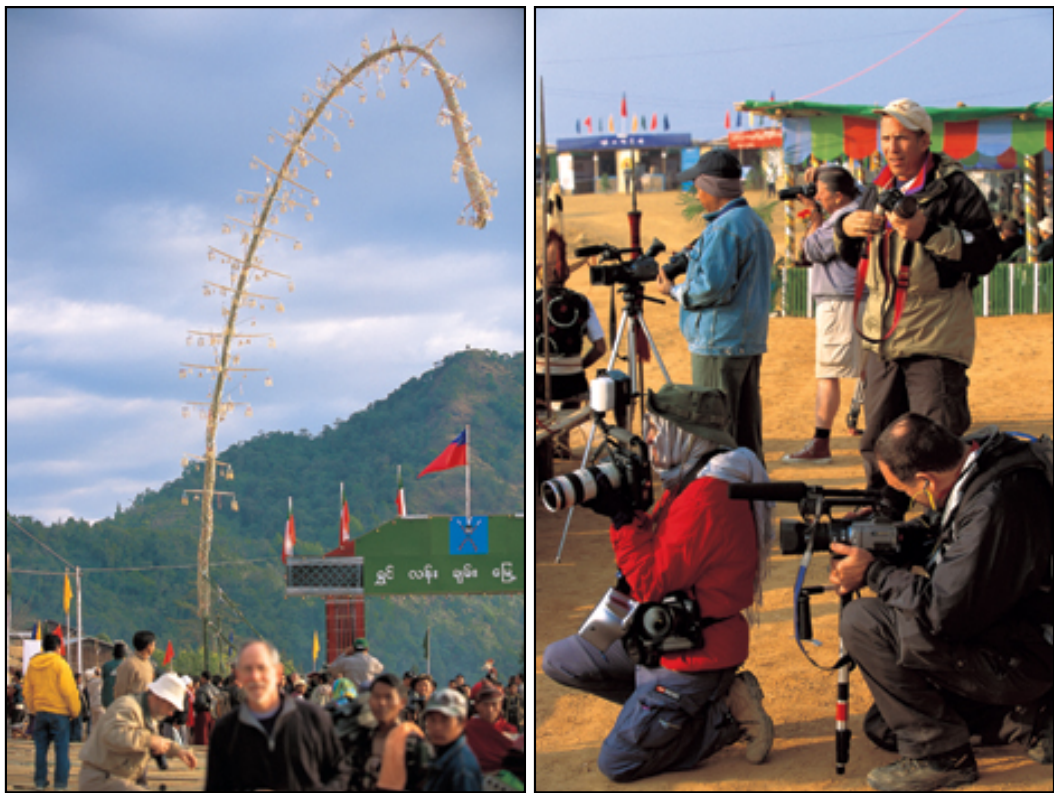
Though each tribe possesses unique and certain aspects of tribal culture, they share many common beliefs and practices. The famous traditional festivals for Nagas are New Year Festival, New Harvest Festival and Pounding Festival. The most popular is the annual Naga New Year Festival. In the past, the traditional festivals were held in separate places as Naga national races live in different places. Under the guidance of the State, the Naga Traditional Cultural Committee was formed in 1989. Starting from 15 January 1992, the festival was held at a place, attended by the representatives from various Naga regions.

Although the celebration centers around January 15, the festivities start as soon as the first tribe arrives at the Festival site, which is often several days before the official New Year date. Tribes throughout Nagaland-both from the India borderline and from Myanmar-come together to celebrate this event. Dressed in their colorful best, tribesmen and women parade into the hosting village with an enthusiasm and swagger that draws all who witness it to join the fun. Food, bedding, supplies, utensils, adornments-everything they use is carried on their backs. Distant tribes march a week or more to attend the Festival.



**Young Generation of Naga**

Since it is the adventure tour, foreigners really enjoyed the trip. The way to Naga festival is not all that smooth as way to Ngapali or Bagan. The whole trip is the combination of air, river and road transport. “ We have arranged 6 months in advance such as arrangement of aircrafts, motor cars and river cruise, construction of traditional huts, catering and lodging for visitors” said sales



**Visitors taking photos, at the festival**

The trip to Naga Festival is arranged by Phoenix Travel since last year, an authorized agent, of most special places such as Mogkok (the ruby land), Phakhant (the land of jade), and Naga land. Ministries concerned have been provided necessary assistance including telecommunication; security and medical care services during the festival. “ Oh, the way to Naga Land is tough but it is beautiful and secure” a comment from a Japanese. “ I feel like being here again probably next year with my family” from a young American.

The Naga festival dedicates visitors an opportunity to witness how people live in a simple life and still adhere to their customs and traditions born of their soil. This is part of their culture and will continue to preserve with all the pride of men living close to nature.