



Lepchakha
A Little Bhutan In India



Dukpa

LIVING HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Date:

15th, 16th & 17th November, 2024

Venue:

Lepchakah, BTR, Alipurduar
West Bengal India



Scan & join the community

www.lepchakha.com



Dukpa

Living Heritage festival





The Sinchula Landscape

The Sinchula Treaty and the Treaty of Punakha are key historical agreements that highlight the strained relations between Bhutan and British India during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The annual celebration of the Sinchula landscape between India and Bhutan underscores the historical significance of the area, particularly in reference to the Sinchula Treaty. This treaty marked the end of prolonged tension between the two nations, tensions that culminated in the Duar War. The Duar War, which lasted for five months between 1864 and 1865, resulted in Bhutan's defeat and subsequent loss of sovereignty over certain territories. Under the terms of the Treaty of Sinchula, signed on November 11, 1865, Bhutan ceded the Assam Duars and Bengal Duars, as well as the Dewangiri territory in southeastern Bhutan,

The Treaty of Punakha, signed on January 8, 1910, at Punakha Dzong, represents a significant modification of the earlier Treaty of



Sinchula. This agreement was made between the newly consolidated Kingdom of Bhutan and British India. The Treaty of Punakha is not an independent document but builds upon the framework established by the Treaty of Sinchula. These treaties reflect the historical and geopolitical dynamics of the region, showcasing the importance of the Sinchula landscape and its role in the trade and administrative interests of the time. (Source Internet)

Lepchakha :-



The tiny village Lepchakha is situated district of Alipurduar in the northern part of West Bengal, under the Buxa Tiger Reserve, Dooars. Surrounded by its stunning naturalistic views at the hill top of BTR, the area is a storehouse of culture, which is a continuity from Bhutan. It is a place where nature rules, casting its spell over visitors with cascading waterfalls, emerald-green meadows and dense forests filled with life. The locals, predominantly the members of the Dukpa tribe, welcome you with their warm smiles and wide open hearts.



LIM' (Flute)



Chhurpi

Enchanting Heritage of Dukpa Tribe in Lepchakha

This Dukpa village is close to Indo- Bhutan border and situated in Buxa Tiger Reserve. There are several more villages around Lepchakha. The Dukpas, often referred to as Bhutanese, are known for their exquisite craftsmanship, creating intricate artifacts that reflect their deep reverence for nature. Being skilled weavers, their garments, adorned with vibrant patterns and motifs, tell stories of their heritage and the landscapes that have shaped their existence.

Music and dance are an integral part of Dukpa culture, merging rhythm and melody to celebrate life's joys and navigate its sorrows. The Chaam Dance, which is mostly connected to their Buddhist belief is a form of mask dance.

Culinary Delights and Masterful Artistry

The Dukpa tribe savors a delectable array of culinary delights, embracing a diverse selection of cereals and meats. Among their favoured grains are rice, maize, and the cherished buckwheat pancakes. In the realm of culinary expertise, the Dukpas proudly present their signature dish, Emadhachi, a culinary masterpiece that harmoniously blends the earthiness of potatoes, the richness of mushrooms, the fiery essence of big chillies, and the unique touch of 'churpi,' a type of cheese. However, cheese and chilly are the main constituents, used in vegetables and meats.

Quenching their thirst the Dukpas partake in a range of indigenous beverages. Among their favorites is a buttered and salted tea, a comforting elixir that warms both body and soul.

Within the realm of the Dupka tribe, an exquisite inventory of tools are employed to



masterfully process hides and intricately sew clothing. Besides hew, lalli and sima are used for crushing and filtering food items they also use Needles, Double-Awl, End Scraper and many among others.

The folklore of Lepchakha weaves a captivating tapestry of mythical tales and legends. Stories of deities, spirits, and mythical creatures are passed down through generations, preserving the oral traditions of the region. One of the most important part of their performing arts are the music and dance. Based on Dukpa's traditions there are religious and traditional folk music. Combining trumpets, conch shells, symbols, gong, flutes and drums the religious music is normally played during religious festivals and celebrations. The traditional folk music is again a combination of 'DAM-NGEY' (Guitar), 'PHIWAN' (Violin) and 'LIM' (Flute), also played during festivals and special occasions.





GHO



KIRA

'GHO' is the traditional attire for men, which resembles the Scottish kilt. The women wear a long robe called 'KIRA' wrapped around the body covering the neck from the down to the back and 'bokhu,' a scarf decorated with several designs. The festivals celebrated with happiness and prosperity and they are the descending day of Lord Buddha from heaven, the blessed rainy day and the birth of Guru Padmasabhava, who is popularly known as Guru Rimpoche and Losar is one of the most

popular festivals to happen every February when they play archery (Da Dhanu) with Khuru (darts).

The monastery situated in Lepchakha, built in 1954 and in Tashigaon are very popular ones.

The traditional sports of the Dukpas are "DATSEY" (archery) and "DEGO" (a game of stones normally played by monks who had to refrain from playing archery, other games include "SOSOM"(Javelin), "PUNGDO" (Shot-put), "THONJU" (Long jump) and "KESHEY"(Wrestling),

The members of the Dukpa tribe are present in villages like Phulbari, Paanbari, Adma, Shergaon, Phukhuri Chunabhati, Tashigaon, Lalbangla, Sadarbazar, Daragaon, Buxa, Khattaline, Lepchakha and Ochulung. As we strive to safeguard the essence of this enchanting destination, it becomes paramount to preserve its Dzonkha language, culture, folklore, and transmit its rich heritage to future generations.

The torchbearers of Lepchakha's cultural heritage recognize the importance of transmitting their knowledge to future generations. Efforts are underway to involve young community members in cultural activities, providing them with opportunities to learn traditional practices, engage in folklore storytelling, and participate in cultural festivals.

There are homestays residing at the peaceful ambiance stuffed with the purity of nature, serving its visitors with wonder, happens to be their only source of livelihood.





Mission

We are fortunate to have these rich cultural and natural assets in our district. Tourism stands as the sole viable means of generating income, given the absence of alternative employment opportunities. Due to limited local job prospects, many young people are compelled to leave the village in search of employment in Bhutan and other parts of India, leading to a gradual erosion of their cultural heritage.



Our mission is to preserve and promote this rich cultural, traditional, and natural heritage, ensuring that it remains vibrant and intact. By fostering responsible tourism, we aim to provide a sustainable livelihood for the local community. This approach not only safeguards their traditions but also empowers them economically, enabling them to stay connected with their roots while participating in a sustainable economic model. Through this endeavor, we hope to create a harmonious balance between cultural preservation and economic development, ultimately enriching the lives of the local populace.



Vision

We are dedicated to developing a model village for responsible tourism in Asia. Our goal is to create a sustainable tourism framework that not only preserves the cultural and natural heritage of the region but also promotes economic stability for the local community.

By implementing best practices in responsible tourism, we aim to set a benchmark for other villages and regions across Asia. This involves fostering community involvement, ensuring environmental conservation, and promoting cultural authenticity. We strive to create an immersive and enriching experience for visitors, allowing them to engage with the local culture in a meaningful way while contributing to the well-being of the host community.

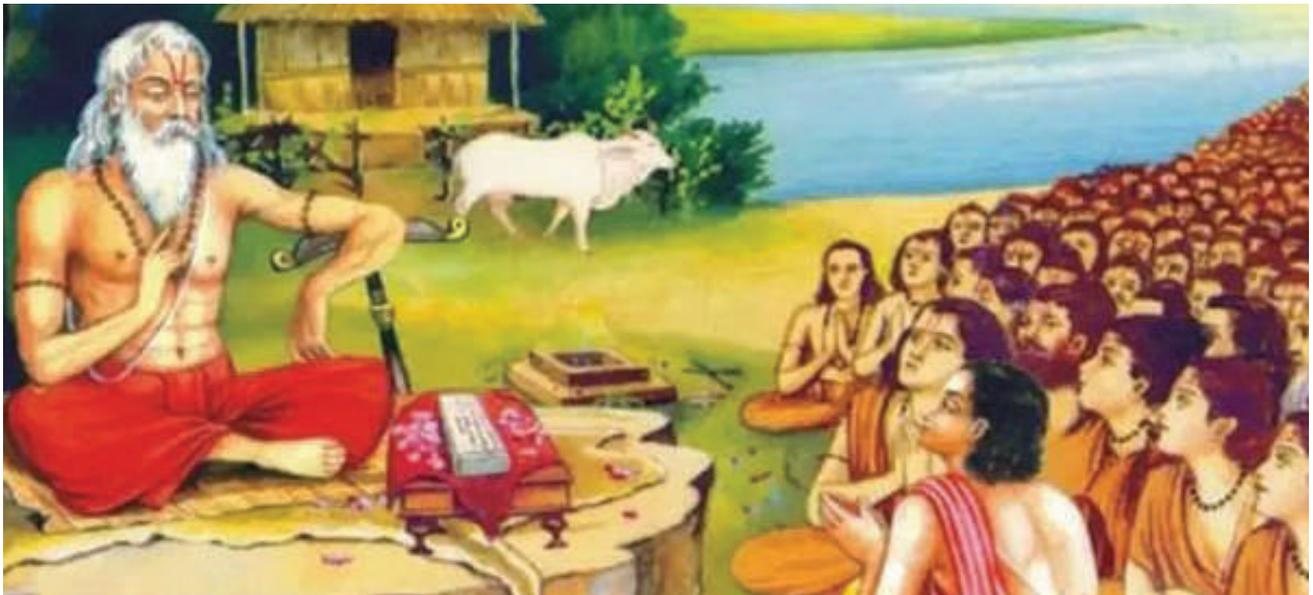
Through this initiative, we are committed to demonstrating that tourism can be a powerful tool for sustainable development, fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and environmental stewardship. By achieving this vision, we hope to inspire similar efforts in other parts of Asia, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and equitable tourism industry.



Modern Gurubas



ANCIENT GURUKUL



Gurubas

Since 2021 we have initiated "Lepchakha Gurubas" in Alipurduar District as one of the three Gurubas Destinations, the others being Tinkitam Gurubas in South Sikkim and Shantiniketan Gurubas in Birbhum District. The action includes documentation, inventory making, awareness and sensitization, expert advice through field visit and promotion at global travel marts.

The Concept :- Gurubas, meaning 'Guru's family,' embodies the history of India's education system focused on holistic development. Historically, Gurubas aimed to educate students in a natural setting, fostering brotherhood, humanity, love, and discipline, enhancing their intelligence, critical thinking, personality, and confidence. Today, Gurubas is a movement by the Association for Conservation & Tourism (ACT) promoting sustainable village development through tourism. It identifies local experts in traditional practices like organic farming, handicrafts, and heritage preservation as Gurus, who teach sustainable living to tourists/visitors. This movement encourages tourists to learn and practice ancient sustainable methods, connecting with authentic local culture and reducing reliance on industrial products. By reviving traditional skills, the movement aims to create a resilient community of like-minded individuals focused on sustainable living and rural tourism.



1st Initiative -

August 2021 - A team of the Association For Conservation & Tourism (ACT), led by Sri Raj Basu, organized a two-day Gurubas implementation workshop at Lepchakha, focusing on promoting responsible tourism and preserving the culture and heritage of the Dukpa people. The workshop aimed to convince villagers that Gurubas is the most effective way to implement responsible tourism. The first day involved presentations, discussions, and case studies highlighting the principles of responsible tourism and successful Gurubas implementations. On the second day, ACT members provided hands-on training in waste management, including waste segregation, recycling techniques, composting, and a community clean-up drive. The workshop successfully increased awareness, reinforced cultural preservation, developed waste management skills, and fostered community engagement, marking a significant step towards sustainable tourism in the region.



2nd Initiative –

Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH): In September 2021 ACT, in collaboration with Bangla Natok Dot Com, undertook an important initiative to document and preserve ICH. They sent two experts from their exclusive team: Mr. Kishore Mandal, a documentary photographer and videographer, and Mr. Ayon Joardar, a theatre director. Both experts stayed for four days, meticulously documenting various aspects of ICH. Their work included capturing visual and audio records of traditional practices, interviews with local practitioners, and detailed notes on the cultural significance of these traditions. This documentation effort aims to create a comprehensive archive that can be used for educational and preservation purposes, ensuring that these intangible cultural treasures are safeguarded for future generations. Bangla Natok Dot Com is a world-renowned social enterprise dedicated



Mr. Kishor Mandal



Mr. Ayon Joardar

to safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Focused primarily on India culture, this Kolkata-based organization works tirelessly to preserve and promote traditional arts, crafts, music, dance, and theater. Through a combination of documentation, education, and community engagement, Bangla Natok

Dot Com ensures that these cultural practices are not only maintained but also adapted and appreciated in contemporary contexts. Their initiatives include organizing workshops, festivals, and performances that celebrate and transmit traditional knowledge and skills to younger

generations. Additionally, the organization collaborates with local and international partners to raise awareness about the importance of ICH and to advocate for policies that support its preservation. Their work has made a significant impact on the cultural landscape, earning them global recognition as leaders in the field of cultural heritage preservation.



3rd Initiative :-

February 2022 - The entire Gurubas documentation was carried out by a group of postgraduate students from Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University in Pusa, Bihar. The team consisted of Mr Anil Anand, Mr. Somprakash Tiwari, Mr. Saurav Kumar, Miss Shivani Raj, Mr. Uday Kumar, and Miss Sudha Sinha. They undertook this project during their internship with the Association for Conservation & Tourism (ACT). Their work included creating comprehensive

and active participation in village life, allowing the students to gain a more intimate understanding of the community's dynamics. Beyond their academic responsibilities, the team immersed themselves in the culture and traditions of the Dukpa people. By living among the villagers, they were able to experience everyday activities, traditional ceremonies, and the distinct cultural practices that define Dukpa life. This immersion allowed them to appreciate the rich heritage and traditions that have been preserved over generations, and provided them with



documentation of the Gurubas, which involved collecting and organizing data, raising awareness, and participating in field visits to ensure accurate and thorough records.

Over the course of their 45-day fieldwork, the team undertook an intensive schedule, visiting numerous Dukpa villages such as Tashigaon, Aadma, Chunavati, Lalbanglow, Panbari, Ochulung, and several others. Their work required them to interact deeply with the local villagers, ensuring the collection of accurate and nuanced data. These engagements weren't just brief encounters—they involved lengthy discussions, interviews,

invaluable insights that could not have been obtained through brief visits or external observation alone.

Their comprehensive documentation effort involved not only collecting quantitative data but also capturing the stories, folklore, and oral histories passed down by the Dukpa elders. The students' commitment to the project was evident in their approach, as they carefully cataloged the information, organizing it in a way that could be accessible for future reference. Their participation in village life enabled them to form genuine connections with the community, building trust, and facilitating a richer exchange of knowledge.





Dr. Anu K Lama



Madam Sunayna Basnet

4th Initiative

Field Visit by Team ICIMOD: In April 2022, a team from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) conducted a field visit to Lepchakha. The team included Dr. Anu Kumari Lama, a Tourism Specialist in Resilient Mountain Economies and Landscapes, and Madam Sunayna Basnet, a Livelihoods Associate in the same field. Both experts traveled from Kathmandu, Nepal, and stayed in Lepchakha for three days. During their visit, they interacted extensively with the villagers, discussing ways to develop the livelihoods of the simple Dukpa people. They explored the potential for implementing rural and responsible tourism in the region, aiming to create sustainable economic opportunities while preserving the unique cultural and natural heritage of Lepchakha. Their insights and recommendations are expected to contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the community, promoting resilience and sustainability.





The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a regional intergovernmental learning and knowledge-sharing center based in Kathmandu, Nepal. It serves the eight countries of the Hindu Kush Himalayas: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICIMOD's mission is to improve the lives and livelihoods of mountain people and protect the environment and culture of mountain regions. The organization focuses on areas such as climate change, natural resource management, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development. Through research, capacity building, and policy advocacy, ICIMOD works to foster resilient mountain communities and ecosystems, addressing both local and regional challenges. Their initiatives include collaboration with local partners, governments, and international organizations to promote knowledge sharing and innovative solutions for sustainable mountain development.



5th Initiative -

In May 2023, Madam Sushmita Ghosh, a renowned travel journalist, along with her dedicated team, embarked on a mission to Lepchakha. Their objective was to archive the lost intangible cultural heritage of the region through comprehensive write-ups and audio-visual documentation. The team stayed in Lepchakha for four days, during which they visited significant locations such as Tashigaon, Lalbanglow, and Chunavtai. Throughout their stay, they actively engaged with the local community, seeking to understand and document the unique

cultural practices, traditions, and daily lives of the residents. By interacting with the people, Madam Ghosh and her team delved into the community's rich heritage and uncovered the challenges they face in preserving their cultural identity amidst modernization and changing times. The team's efforts aimed not only to preserve and showcase Lepchakha's cultural richness to a broader audience but also to highlight the resilience and spirit of its people. This documentation is expected

to serve as a valuable resource for future generations and to bring attention to the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage in the face of global cultural homogenization.



6th Initiative – TTF Kolkata - Lepchakha little Bhutan in India & Visit

Dooars :-

In July 2022, ACT launched the "Lepchakha: A Little Bhutan in India" initiative at the Travel & Tourism Fair (TTF) in Kolkata. This rural and responsible tourism destination, located in the Dooars region of West Bengal, was introduced to promote sustainable travel and cultural immersion. The event was graced by the presence of the Honorable Tourism Minister of West Bengal, Sri Babul Supriyo, and Sanjeev Agarwal, Founder & Chairman of Fairest Media Pvt. Ltd. The TTF Kolkata, recognized as India's leading travel and tourism exhibition, provided a prominent platform for showcasing Lepchakha, highlighting its unique blend of natural beauty and Bhutanese cultural influences. This initiative aims to offer travelers an authentic experience while supporting local communities and preserving the region's rich heritage. Lepchakha is a key component of the "Visit Dooars" initiative, which aims to showcase the diverse offerings of this picturesque region in West Bengal. Through this initiative, we highlight not only the rich cultural and historical heritage of the area but also its remarkable natural beauty. The region is renowned for its vibrant flora and fauna, offering unique experiences such as birdwatching, butterfly spotting, and trekking. Visitors can immerse themselves in the lush landscapes, observe diverse wildlife, and engage in various outdoor activities that celebrate the region's natural splendor. By promoting responsible tourism, the Visit Dooars initiative seeks to provide travelers with an authentic and enriching experience while supporting the local communities and preserving the environmental integrity of the Dooars region.





7th initiative –

North Bengal Bird Festival - The 4th edition of the North Bengal Bird Festival, held in Lepchakha, marked a significant highlight in the celebration of avian biodiversity. This year's festival included an extensive bird survey conducted by a team of 25 experienced bird watchers from the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) countries. Over a three-day field visit, participants recorded sightings of several rare and elusive bird species in Lepchakha and its surrounding areas. The survey not only provided valuable data for conservation efforts but also offered participants a unique opportunity to engage with the local culture. The bird watchers were captivated by the region's rich cultural heritage and vibrant community life, which complemented their scientific pursuits and enhanced their overall experience.



Initiative By



Association For Conservation & Tourism (ACT)

Sustainability partner



Gurubas

Mentor

Indo-Bhutan Friendship Association (IBFA)

Community Partner



Heaven Of Doors & BHTA