



Lepchakha
A Little Bhutan in India



In kind support of

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION ALIPURDUAR

Dukpa LIVING HERITAGE FESTIVAL

འབྲུག་པའི་ སྐར་སྟོལ་ དགའ་སྟོན།

Date:

15th, 16th & 17th November, 2024

Venue:

Venue: Buxa Fort Ground,
Alipurduar, West Bengal, India



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Dukpa Living Heritage Festival



Introduction – The Dukpa Living Heritage Festival is a vibrant celebration dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the rich cultural heritage of the Dukpa community. This festival aims to showcase traditional customs, arts, crafts, music, and dance, providing an immersive experience for participants and fostering a deeper appreciation of Dukpa heritage. Through a term exposé and survey with the help of experts we have realized that there

has been deterioration in the ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) of the Dukpa communities hence during the festival we look forward to bring cultural experts groups and ICH experts from Bhutan to exhibit and also teach the local Dukpa communities in the process.

Objectives -

- **Cultural Preservation** - To safeguard and promote the traditional customs, practices, and arts of the Dukpa community.
- **Community Engagement** - To bring together members of the Dukpa community and the broader public in a shared celebration of culture and heritage.
- **Sustainable Tourism Promotion** - To attract tourists and cultural & natural enthusiasts, enhancing the region's profile as a responsible tourism destination.
- **Educational Outreach** - To educate younger generations and the all the villagers about their heritage, culture & traditions ensuring its continuity.
- **Economic Development** - To provide economic opportunities for local tourism stakeholders, artisans, performers, and craftsman through increased visibility and sales.

History :- The Sinchula Treaty and the Treaty of Punakha highlight the historical tensions between Bhutan and British India during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The annual celebration of the Sinchula landscape commemorates the Sinchula Treaty, which ended prolonged hostilities marked by the Duar War



of 1864-1865. The Duar War led to Bhutan's defeat and the cession of the Assam Duars, Bengal Duars, and Dewangiri territory to British India. The Treaty of Punakha, signed on January 8, 1910, at Punakha Dzong, modified the Sinchula Treaty to reflect the evolving relationship between the newly consolidated Kingdom of Bhutan and British India. These treaties underscore the historical and geopolitical significance of the Sinchula landscape, pivotal in the trade and administrative interests of the period.

Geography :- Perched at an altitude of about 3,500 feet, Lepchakha offers panoramic views of the Bhutan hills and the surrounding Dooars plains. It is located within the Buxa Tiger Reserve, under the Alipurduar district of west Bengal, India providing a lush, forested landscape that is both serene and breathtaking.

Culture :- The cultural tapestry of Buxa hill is predominantly influenced by the Dukpa tribe, known for their unique language, folklore, and traditions. The community is deeply connected to nature, with

customs and festivals that celebrate their ancestral heritage and the natural world.

Nature :- Buxa hill is a nature lover's paradise, characterized by dense forests, diverse flora and fauna, and scenic beauty. The region is part of the Buxa Tiger Reserve, home to a variety of wildlife including tigers, elephants, and numerous bird species. Its pristine environment offers a tranquil escape from urban life.

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.



Festival Highlights :-

Cultural Performances -

- ⇒ Traditional Dukpa music and dance performances.
- ⇒ Storytelling sessions featuring folklore and myths.
- ⇒ Theatrical representations of historical events and cultural narratives.

Art and Craft Exhibitions:

- ⇒ Display and sale of traditional Dukpa handicrafts, textiles, and artwork.
- ⇒ Live demonstrations by artisans showcasing traditional techniques.

Workshops and Interactive Sessions -

- ⇒ Workshops on traditional Dukpa crafts such as weaving, pottery, and jewelry-making.
- ⇒ Interactive sessions on Dukpa language and literature.

Culinary Delights -

- ⇒ Stalls offering traditional Dukpa cuisine, allowing visitors to experience authentic flavors.
- ⇒ Cooking demonstrations and food tasting sessions.

Heritage Walks and Tours -

- ⇒ Guided tours of significant cultural and historical sites in the Dukpa region.
- ⇒ Heritage walks led by local historians and cultural experts.

Plastic-Free Festival

The Dukpa Living Heritage Festival is envisioned as a **plastic-free event** to promote sustainable and eco-friendly practices.



Administration, Chukha, and **Mr. Dawa** from the Royal Academy of Performing Arts, Thimphu.

Their arrival marked the beginning of the preparatory phase for the Dukpa Living Heritage Festival. The evening was dedicated to an interactive session between the Bhutanese delegates and the villagers of Buxa Fort area. This informal interaction served as an excellent platform for cultural exchange and building rapport. The delegation also collaborated with the villagers to finalize the route map and logistics for the upcoming three-day festival. This planning session focused on ensuring a seamless execution of the event while highlighting the cultural and heritage aspects of the Dukpa community.

The villagers expressed their enthusiasm and hospitality, showcasing their eagerness to contribute to the festival preparations. The evening ended with a sense of camaraderie and mutual commitment to preserving and celebrating the shared heritage of the Dukpa community.

Key steps implemented:

- **Stalls & Gate :** The stalls and gate made by bamboo and local resources not an use a single plastic of the event.
- **Ban on single-use plastics:** Use of alternatives like biodegradable plates, cups, and packaging.
- **Encouraging reusable options:** Attendees were urged to bring their own bottles and bags.
- **Waste segregation stations:** Dedicated stations for compostable, recyclable, and non-recyclable waste.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Informational signage and announcements to highlight the importance of reducing plastic use.

13th November Wednesday

The first delegation team from Bhutan arrived today, led by **Dasho Thinley Dorji**, General Secretary of **Bhutan India Friendship Association (BIFA)**, along with **Mr. Sangay Dorji**, Culture Officer, Dzongkhag

14th November Thursday – Preparatory Day

The second day of preparation began early, with a full-day training and practice session led by two resource persons from the Bhutanese delegation. These experts worked closely with the local villagers to ensure they were well-prepared for the festival.

The training included dance rehearsals, singing practices, and other cultural performances that would be showcased during the event. The resource persons guided the participants on perfecting traditional movements, rhythms, and chants to maintain the authenticity of the performances.

Villagers actively participated, embracing the opportunity to refine their skills and deepen their understanding of their cultural heritage. The collaborative environment fostered a sense of unity and pride among the participants.

Additionally, the Bhutanese delegates shared insights into the traditional attire, musical instruments, and rituals that would be featured in the festival, enhancing the villagers' knowledge and appreciation for their own traditions.

The day concluded with a review session, where the resource persons provided constructive feedback and encouragement to the participants. With the foundation laid and spirits high, the stage was set for a vibrant celebration of the Dukpa Living Heritage Festival.

15th November Friday - Inaugural Day

The Festival commenced with a traditional **Lama Puja**, symbolizing the spiritual blessings for the event. The **Guest of Honor, Dasho Thinley Dorjee**, General Secretary of the Bhutan India Friendship Association (BIFA), led the inauguration ceremony.



The day began with the official start of **archery and Khuru (traditional Bhutanese dart) tournaments**, drawing excitement and participation from locals and visitors alike. Guests were received in a traditional manner, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the Dukpa community.

The opening speech was delivered by Sri **Pinch Dukpa**, who emphasized the significance of the festival. He articulated that this three-day event serves as a crucial step toward preserving and conserving the Dukpa culture and traditions in the

Buxa Hills, which are at risk of fading over time.

Following this, the Guest of Honor, **Dasho Thinley Dorjee**, expressed his gratitude to the organizers and the local community. He specifically acknowledged **Raj Basu** and **Oshan Lepcha** from ACT (Association for Conservation & Tourism) for initiating this festival. In his address, he emphasized the importance of safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Dukpa community and encouraged the villagers to make this festival an annual tradition.

The inaugural ceremony was graced by the presence of several dignitaries, including:

- **Honorable Gram Panchayat Pradhan, Madam Sonam Zangmo Dukpa**

- **Members of BIFA:**
 - **Mr. Pema Wangchen**, Executive Member
 - **Mr. Kelden Jamtsho**, Executive Member
 - **Mr. Dorji Letho**, Executive Member
 - **Mr. Kuenzang Dorji**, Executive Member

- **Mr. Nagendra Pandey**, Executive Member
- **Mr. Sangay Dorji**, Culture Officer, Dzongkhag Administration, Chhukha
- **Mr. Dawa**, Royal Academy of Performing Arts, Thimphu
- **Mr. Sangay Thinley**, Chief Economic Development and Marketing Officer, Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock, Thimphu
- **Lekey Wangdi**, Program Advisor, Helvetas Swiss Interoperation
- **Karma Zangmo**, Chairman, Entrepreneurs of Chhukha
- **Tshering Dorji**, Chairman, Aggregator Network of Chhukha
- **Nado**, Chairman, Pachu Community Tourism Group
- **Wangchuk Dorji**, Chairman, Jigmechu Ecotourism Group
- **Tshewang Zangmo**, General Secretary, Entrepreneurs of Chhukha
- **Gongto**, General Secretary, Jigmechu Ecotourism Group
- **Sharop Sherpa**, District Officer, Government of West Bengal
- **Sudhan Moktan**, DMDC, Government of West Bengal

After the inauguration, Dasho Thinley Dorjee visited the various stalls showcasing traditional crafts, foods, and cultural artifacts. This was followed by captivating performances of traditional **dance and music**, which highlighted the cultural vibrancy of the Dukpa community.

The first day concluded with a celebratory atmosphere and a sense of pride, setting the tone for the rest of the festival.

16th November Saturday – 2nd Day



The day began with the continuation of the traditional **archery** and **Khuru tournaments**, which are integral to Dukpa culture. Archery, a revered sport in Bhutan and the Dukpa community, drew skilled participants who demonstrated their precision and expertise, while Khuru (a dart-throwing game) offered a fun and interactive experience for players and spectators alike. Both tournaments symbolized the community's commitment to keeping their traditions alive and provided a platform for cultural exchange and camaraderie.

The second day of the Dukpa Living Heritage Festival was a vibrant celebration of culture, tradition, and heritage. Set against the scenic backdrop of the Buxa Hills, the day began with the continuation of the **archery and Khuru tournaments**, which have become a hallmark of the festival. Participants from local and neighboring communities showcased their skills, keeping alive the age-old traditions of the Dukpa culture.

The day was marked by the presence of distinguished guests and dignitaries from India and Bhutan, reflecting the deep cultural and diplomatic ties between the two nations. The **Chief Guest, Smt. Vimla Ranganathan**, District Magistrate of Alipurduar, along with **Special Guests** and other notable attendees, graced the occasion with their inspiring words and active participation.

The day was graced by the presence of several esteemed dignitaries, including:

- **Chief Guest: Smt. Vimla Ranganathan**, District Magistrate, Alipurduar
- **Special Guests:**
 - **Shri G. Ajith Kumar**, Consul General of India, Phuentsholing
 - **Vijay Singh**, Commandant, 53 Battalion, Falakata

Other dignitaries included:

- **Dasho Thinley Dorjee**, General Secretary, Bhutan India Friendship Association
- **Dasho Donkpa**, Phuentsholing
- **Dasho Trompao**
- **Dasho Uttar Kumar Rai**, Thrompon, Phuentsholing
- **Jigmi Norbu**, Phuentsholing
- **Sri Passang Bhutia**, OC Tourism, Alipurduar, Govt. of West Bengal
- **ADM(LR) Nripendra Singh**, Alipurduar, Govt. of West Bengal
- **Additional S.P. Ashim Khan**, Alipurduar, Govt. of West Bengal
- **Lam Jigme Dorji**, Tumdra Ami Nye (Mahakal Dam)
- **Dasho Karma Jurmi**, Deputy Governor, Phuentsholing
- **Col. Sonam Tshering**, SSP, Div-III, RBP,

Phuentsholing

- **Shri Kelzang**, Regional Secretary, BCCI, Phuentsholing

The traditional reception of the dignitaries demonstrated the hospitality and cultural richness of the Dukpa community. The event's focus was not only to celebrate but also to raise awareness about the importance of preserving this endangered cultural heritage for future generations.

Address by Chief Guest, Smt. Vimla Ranganathan

Smt. Ranganathan expressed her happiness in witnessing this significant initiative. She assured the support of the Alipurduar district administration for similar efforts in the future. She commended ACT for its dedication to preserving the cultural heritage of the Dukpa community and thanked the villagers for their enthusiastic participation. She emphasized how festivals like these strengthen the relationship between India and Bhutan, fostering deeper cultural and people-to-people connections.

Speech by Dasho Thinley Dorjee

Dasho Dorjee expressed his gratitude to Smt. Vimla Ranganathan and praised her support for the festival. He highlighted the importance of this platform in strengthening bilateral relations and promoting cross-border cultural ties.

Remarks by ADLR Nripendra Singh

Mr. Singh thanked ACT for organizing the festival and reiterated the administration's commitment to supporting such initiatives. He acknowledged the efforts of the villagers and encouraged them to continue organizing the festival annually.

Vote of Thanks

The vote of thanks was delivered by **Sri Tendu Dukpa**, the festival treasurer, who expressed heartfelt gratitude to all the dignitaries, participants, and organizers.

Felicitation Ceremony

The felicitation ceremony was a significant part of the day's proceedings, honouring individuals and families for their remarkable contributions to the community and the nation.



1. Recognition of National Contributors

The Alipurduar district administration honoured three families from remote villages whose members have made outstanding contributions by serving the nation:

Facilitated the mothers of those who serve in the Indian Army.



- Smt Sila Thapa - M/O- Sudash Thapa
- Smt Phubpem Dukpa - M/O- Bhaichung Dukpa
- Smt Sunita Thapa - M/O- Abhishek Thapa

This gesture highlighted the community's pride in its members who have upheld the values of service and dedication.

2. Acknowledgment of Traditional Craftswomen

In an effort to promote and sustain local craftsmanship, the district administration felicitated three talented artisans who have preserved the traditional weaving and craft practices of the Dukpa community:

- Lahmu Chhiri Dukpa - Chunabhati, Buxaduar,
- Nam Dukpa - Chunabhati, Buxaduar,
- Nasim Bhutia - Chunabhati, Buxaduar,
- Rinachailam Dupaka - Chunabhati, Buxaduar,

These individuals were celebrated for their resilience and dedication to safeguarding the artistic heritage of the region. The felicitation served as

encouragement for younger generations to take pride in their cultural roots.

Cultural Program

The cultural program was the highlight of the day, featuring performances that showcased the vibrant traditions and artistic excellence of the Dukpa community.

1. **Traditional Dances and Songs** :- The venue came alive with mesmerizing performances by local artists. The traditional **folk dances**, accompanied by rhythmic music, depicted stories of love, spirituality, and the harmony between humans and nature. The dancers, adorned in colorful traditional attire, brought the culture of the Dukpa community to life, captivating the audience.



2. **Community Participation** :- Villagers of all ages participated in the singing performances, presenting age-old **folk songs** that resonated with the values and emotions of the Dukpa heritage. The collective effort of the community reflected the festival's theme of unity and preservation.
3. **Guest Engagement** :- Many dignitaries special guests and tourists joined in the festivities, experiencing first hand the warmth and inclusivity of the Dukpa culture. Their active participation symbolized the strong ties between the local communities and the honoured attendees.

The cultural program was not just a celebration but also a platform to educate and inspire younger generations about their heritage. The performances emphasized the importance of preserving cultural identity while fostering a sense of pride among the community members.

Visit to Buxa Fort :-

Post-lunch, the dignitaries and guests visited **Buxa Fort**, a historic site that stands as a testament to the region's rich history. The visit allowed the guests to connect with the heritage of the Buxa Hills, while the community members shared stories of their ancestors and the fort's significance.

Conclusion of the Day

The second day of the Dukpa Living Heritage Festival concluded on a high note, leaving participants, dignitaries, and attendees deeply enriched by the experience. The day celebrated the spirit of togetherness, cultural preservation, and cross-border friendship.

From the early morning tournaments of archery and Khuru to the vibrant cultural performances and inspiring speeches, the day's events not only highlighted the rich traditions of the Dukpa community but also emphasized the importance of their preservation in the face of modern challenges. The felicitation ceremony honored individuals for their contributions to the nation and the community, reflecting the values of pride and gratitude that underpin the Dukpa culture.

The active participation of dignitaries from India and Bhutan, along with their words of

encouragement, strengthened the bonds between the two nations and underscored the importance of cultural exchange. The visit to the historic Buxa Fort added a layer of historical significance to the day, reminding everyone of the rich legacy of the region.

The evening concluded with heartfelt appreciation for the efforts of the organizers, villagers, and participants. As the sun set over the scenic Buxa Hills, the spirit of celebration lingered, promising an equally memorable day of the festival.

17th November Sunday – The Final Day

The final day of the Dukpa Living Heritage Festival was a culmination of three days of celebration, camaraderie, and cultural preservation. It was marked by thrilling competitions, colorful displays of ethnic pride, and heartfelt expressions of gratitude, leaving an unforgettable impression on all attendees.

Morning Activities and Final Rounds of Tournaments

The day commenced with the much-anticipated **final rounds of the Archery and Khuru Tournaments**, where participants from various villages showcased their skill and determination. The crowd eagerly cheered for their local champions, creating a vibrant and competitive atmosphere that reflected the community's passion for these traditional games.

Special Guests and Events

The presence of **Block Development Officer Mr. Anik Roy** and his team added a formal yet celebratory tone to the day. Following the tournaments, the festivities continued with a charming **Kids' Ethnic Fashion Show**, where young





participants dressed in traditional attire walked the stage, proudly representing the heritage of their community. Their vibrant costumes and confident performances captivated the audience and added a delightful touch to the festival's final day.

Prize Distribution Ceremony

The highlight of the day was the **Prize Distribution Ceremony**, where the winners of the tournaments and fashion show were recognized for their outstanding performances:

- **Archery Tournament:**

TEAM ADMA (WINNER)

- Lobja Dukpa

- Jeko Dukpa
- Jigme Dukpa
- Chendo Wangdi Dukpa
- Duba Dukpa
- Hotey Dukpa
- Demtenzi Dukpa
- Yanka Dorji Dukpa
- Kama Chhiri Dukpa
- Nado Dukpa

TEAM POKHRI (RUNNER)

- Daniel Dukpa
- Honak Dukpa
- Lhabdorji Dukpa
- Penjo Dukpa
- Daub Kinley Dukpa
- Thinley Dorji Dukpa
- Pasadorji Dukpa
- Gato Dukpa
- Wangdi Dukpa

- **Khuru Tournament:**

TEAM LAPCHAKHA (WINNER)

- Passang Dorjee Dukpa
- Nim Dorji Dukpa





- Tshering Norbu Dukpa
- Keza Jacho Dukpa
- Kinza Thinley Dukpa
- Dowa Tshering Dukpa
- Tashi Dukpa
- Chida Dukpa

TEAM LAL BANGLA (RUNNER)

- Dema Thinley Dukpa
- Jamtsho Dukpa
- Nim Dorji Dukpa
- Sonam Dorji Dukpa
- Ugyen Thinley Dukpa
- Chenda Phuba Dukpa
- Tshering Phuentsho Dukpa
- Nofey Dukpa

• **Kids’ Ethnic Fashion Show:**

- ⇒ **1st Prize:** Chayen Dukpa – D/O- Kezajacho Dukpa
- ⇒ **2nd Prize:** Ngawang Lhaki Dukpa - D/O- Lhapdorji Dukpa
- ⇒ **3rd Prize:** Sonam Deki Dukpa - D/O- Lhapdorji Dukpa

The winners were greeted with enthusiastic applause and awarded prizes to honour their achievements. The ceremonies highlighted the spirit of healthy competition and cultural pride, integral to

the festival’s success.

Speeches and Acknowledgements :-

Mr. Anik Roy’s Address:

In his speech, Mr. Anik Roy expressed heartfelt gratitude to the villagers for their hard work and dedication, which ensured the festival’s grand success. He praised the festival as a remarkable initiative for preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the Dukpa community. He also encouraged the villagers to continue this tradition in the years to come, pledging his support for future editions of the festival.

Mr. Mithu Sarkar’s Remarks:

As a guest attendee, Mr. Mithu Sarkar shared his admiration for the extraordinary event. He commended the organizers for executing such a grand festival in the challenging terrain of the Buxa Hills and emphasized the importance of such initiatives in fostering cultural pride and unity.

Closing Moments -

The final day concluded on a high note, with the winners and participants celebrating their achievements and the attendees reveling in the spirit of unity and cultural pride. The event officially came to a close with heartfelt thanks from the organizers, who expressed their gratitude to the villagers, dignitaries, and participants for making the festival a

grand success.

The Dukpa Living Heritage Festival 2024 ended as a beacon of hope and determination for preserving the cultural identity of the Dukpa community. The resounding success of the event has set a strong foundation for future celebrations, inspiring everyone to carry forward the rich traditions of the Dukpa people.

The **Dukpa Living Heritage Festival** has contributed to the achievement of several **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** both directly and indirectly, through its focus on cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development. Here's an analysis of the SDGs addressed:

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

- By preserving and promoting the unique cultural heritage of the Dukpa community, the festival strengthens community identity and ensures cultural traditions are passed down to future generations.



- Encouraging traditional crafts, local rituals, and ethnic events aligns with creating inclusive and sustainable communities.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- The festival generated economic opportunities for local artisans, craftsmen, and food vendors by showcasing their products.

- Tourism from the festival provided a boost to the local economy, supporting sustainable livelihoods.

SDG 4: Quality Education

- Through workshops, cultural practices, and performances, the festival provided informal education to both children and adults about their traditions and history, ensuring the transfer of knowledge about cultural heritage.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- The collaboration between local communities, governmental bodies, and cross-border representatives from Bhutan demonstrated strong partnerships aimed at cultural and community development.

SDG 1: No Poverty

- By providing income-generating opportunities through tourism, local crafts, and activities, the festival indirectly supported poverty alleviation for families involved in these sectors.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

- Traditional games like archery and Khuru promote physical activity, and the collective celebration contributed to emotional and social well-being within the community.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

- The active participation of women in the festival, including the ethnic fashion show and handicrafts displays, indirectly promoted gender equality by showcasing their roles in cultural preservation and the economy.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

- The festival brought together



diverse stakeholders, bridging social, economic, and regional divides, and promoting inclusivity across communities and nations.

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

- Showcasing traditional crafts and eco-friendly practices indirectly encouraged sustainable production methods and reduced reliance on mass-produced goods.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

- By fostering cross-border cultural ties with Bhutan and strengthening people-to-people relationships, the festival indirectly promoted peace and mutual understanding between neighbouring nations.

The **Dukpa Living Heritage Festival** has yielded numerous positive outcomes for the community, the region, and cross-border cultural relations. Below are the key positive impacts:

- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

- Revived traditional Dukpa games (archery, Khuru), music, dance, and rituals.
- Promoted ethnic crafts and weaving practices.
- Facilitated intergenerational learning to pass down traditions.

- **Economic Empowerment**

- Generated income for local artisans, craftsmen, and food vendors.
- Stimulated local tourism, benefitting homestays and businesses.
- Highlighted future economic opportunities through sustainable tourism.

- **Strengthened Community Bonds**

- Fostered collaboration among villagers.
- Enhanced pride in local identity and traditions.
- Unified communities across villages

and borders.

- **Cross-Border Relations**
 - Strengthened cultural and diplomatic ties between India and Bhutan.
 - Built people-to-people connections between neighboring countries.
- **Youth Engagement and Education**
 - Involved children and youth in activities like the ethnic fashion show.
 - Educated the community on cultural preservation and sustainability.
- **Gender Empowerment**
 - Highlighted the role of women in traditional crafts and customs.
 - Encouraged women's active participation through stalls and performances.
- **Promoted Sustainable Development**
 - Showcased eco-friendly crafts and traditional livelihoods.
 - Promoted heritage tourism as a sustainable economic model.
- **Recognition of Local Talent and Contributions**
 - Honored community members for their service and contributions.
 - Encouraged local pride and participation through felicitations.
- **Strengthened Institutional Support**
 - Secured commitments from local and regional authorities for future events.
 - Garnered institutional support for long-term initiatives.

- **Increased Visibility for the Region**
 - Positioned Buxa Hills as a cultural and tourism hotspot.
 - Attracted attention for future investments in cultural and eco-tourism initiatives.

Creating Dark Destinations: A New Chapter in Astro-Tourism in North Bengal

The journey toward blending sustainable tourism with night sky exploration has taken a significant leap with the initiative spearheaded by **Debashish Chacroorty**, the renowned founder of **SWAN (Sky Watchers Association of North Bengal)**. Globally recognized for his expertise and contributions



in the field of astronomy, Mr. Chacroorty has inspired a groundbreaking project to establish “**Dark Destinations**” in naturally rich and isolated locations across North Bengal, where visitors can experience the mesmerizing beauty of the night sky in its purest form.

Lepchakha: The First Dark Destination in West Bengal

The seeds of this visionary initiative were sown during the **Dukpa Living Heritage Festival (DLHF)**, marking the start of a transformative journey in the region. The picturesque village of **Lepchakha**, nestled amidst the serene Buxa Hills of West Bengal, has been identified as the first destination to be developed under this unique concept. Known for its pristine environment and minimal light pollution, Lepchakha is the perfect canvas to showcase the

wonders of astronomy while promoting eco-tourism.

Visitors to Lepchakha will soon have the opportunity to engage in **night sky-watching activities**, observing celestial phenomena, constellations, and meteor showers, creating a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Such activities will not only enhance tourism in the area but will also educate people about the importance of preserving the natural environment for future generations.

The Role of SWAN and ACT in this Initiative

The creation of Dark Destinations is a collaborative effort between **SWAN** and **ACT (Association for Conservation and Tourism)**. With ACT's established commitment to sustainable tourism and community development, the initiative aims to ensure that local communities benefit economically and socially from the project.



ACT's Vision for the Initiative:

- To promote **astro-tourism** as an alternative and sustainable tourism model.
- To raise awareness about reducing light pollution to preserve natural nightscapes.
- To provide training and capacity-building for local guides and residents, enabling them to facilitate night sky-watching experiences.
- To integrate astro-tourism with the region's cultural heritage, offering visitors a holistic travel experience.

Key Objectives of Dark Destinations

1. Preservation of the Night Sky:

- Protecting isolated areas from light pollution to ensure a clear view of celestial phenomena.
- Educating communities and visitors about the importance of conserving dark skies.

2. Economic Empowerment of Local Communities:

- Generating income for residents through homestays, guided tours, and allied services.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship in astro tourism-related ventures.

3. Promotion of Eco-Tourism:

- Highlighting the region's unique biodiversity alongside its star-studded skies.
- Creating eco-friendly facilities for visitors to ensure minimal environmental impact.

4. Encouraging Scientific Awareness:

- Popularizing astronomy as an engaging and educational activity.
- Inspiring interest in science and environmental conservation among students and visitors.

Looking Ahead: A Stellar Future

The establishment of Lepchakha as a Dark Destination is just the beginning. SWAN and ACT envision replicating this model across other remote and ecologically rich locations in North Bengal and beyond. The initiative has the potential to make North Bengal a global hub for astro-tourism, attracting astronomy enthusiasts, researchers, and travelers seeking unique experiences.

By merging astronomy with sustainable tourism, this project not only showcases the natural beauty of the region but also advocates for a balanced relationship between humans and nature. It represents a harmonious approach to development,

celebrating the stars above while nurturing the communities below.

The **Dukpa Living Heritage Festival** has thus become a launchpad for this groundbreaking initiative, setting a precedent for how cultural festivals can be a catalyst for innovative and sustainable ventures.



With the dedication of visionaries like Debashish Chacroorty and the support of organizations like ACT, the skies over Lepchakha are not just dark—they're full of promise.

Gratitude to the Office of the Field Director BTR :-

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Office of the Field Director, Buxa Tiger Reserve, for their continued support and cooperation in making the Dukpa Living Heritage Festival a success. Their unwavering commitment to preserving the cultural and natural heritage of this region has been instrumental in facilitating this unique celebration. Their guidance and assistance have empowered us to showcase the vibrant traditions, customs, and lifestyle of the Dukpa community while promoting sustainable tourism and conservation efforts. This partnership truly exemplifies the harmony between heritage preservation and nature conservation, creating a platform to celebrate the rich legacy of Buxa.

Conclusion of the Report

The **Dukpa Living Heritage Festival (DLHF)** has successfully achieved its objectives, emerging as a beacon of cultural preservation, sustainable tourism, and community empowerment. Over three days of vibrant activities, the festival celebrated the rich heritage of the Dukpa community, while fostering economic opportunities, environmental awareness, and cross-border relationships between India and

Bhutan.

Key highlights, such as the traditional **archery and Khuru tournaments, cultural performances, ethnic fashion shows, and the felicitation of local talents, & Sky watching** underscored the festival's commitment to honoring tradition and encouraging participation from all sections of the community. The festival also set the stage for groundbreaking initiatives like the establishment of **Dark Destinations**, starting with Lepchakha, which promises to elevate the region as a hub for eco-friendly astro-tourism.

This collaborative effort, supported by organizations like **ACT** and **SWAN**, alongside the unwavering dedication of local villagers, reflects the power of collective action. The festival not only rekindled pride in the Dukpa heritage but also showcased the region's potential for sustainable development, making it a model for other communities.

As the festival concluded, it left behind a legacy of cultural pride, economic opportunities, and a strengthened commitment to preserving the unique identity of the Buxa Hills. It is hoped that this annual celebration will continue to grow, uniting communities and creating lasting impacts for generations to come.





Initiative By



Association For Conservation & Tourism (ACT)

Sustainability partner



Gurubas

Mentor



Bhutan-India Friendship Association (BIFA)
Indo-Bhutan Friendship Association (IBFA)

Festival Partner



Implementation By



Community Partner



Heaven Of Doors & BHTA