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Assam: A brief introduction

Assam, nestled in the northeastern region of India, is one of the most vibrant states of the country. Covering a total land area of 78,438 sq. kms, geographically and politically Assam finds itself in the embrace of the North-East Indian states of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal. On the international front, the state shares its borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh. Encompassing a geographically diverse terrain consisting of river valleys and garlanded by the neighbouring hills, which entitles it to being called 'the land of the Blue Hills and Red Rivers'—Assam is blessed with rich biodiversity and natural resources including oil, coal and natural-gas. Tea plantations form a prominent aspect of Assam's verdant landscape. Historically, the state formation process in the region started around the 3rd



century CE when the early Kamrupa state covered large parts of modern-day Assam, including adjacent areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal. One of the most enduring political formations in the region was carved under the Ahom dynasty in the 13th century CE. Established by Sukaphaa in 1228 CE and lasting for about 600 years, the Ahoms were instrumental in establishing an stable political framework for the region as well as in endowing to it a dynamic ethno-cultural composition, which endures to this day.

Assam is home to myriad ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, giving the region a dynamic and composite cultural milieu. This cultural and ethnic dynamism translates into a rich tapestry of festivals which are

hosted in the state throughout the year. The festival of Bihu, being one of the important occasions celebrated by people throughout the state.

There are three occasions when Bihu is celebrated across the state. Bohag Bihu or Rongali Bihu is celebrated during the month of April on the occasion of the Assamese New Year, it also marks the beginning of the spring sowing season. Celebrated over a period of seven days, namely: Goru Bihu, Manuh Bihu, Gosain Bihu, Tator Bihu, Nangolor Bihu, Senehi Bihu and Sera Bihu– Bohag Bihu marks an important occasion of festivity and celebration across the state. Kongali or Kati Bihu falls in the



middle of October. Kongali Bihu is marked by lighting earthen lamps at sundown near tulsi plants and paddy fields, this Bihu (unlike the other two occasions) marks a sombre occasion associated with prayers for a good harvest and crop-protection. Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu is celebrated in the month of January, it marks the end of the seasonal harvesting cycle. The ritual associated with the occasion of Magh Bihu involves, setting flame to a tiered structure made of wood and hay called the meji alongside offerings of newly harvested grains to the fire. Besides Bihu, there are several prominent festivals of the state such as Ali Aye Ligang of the Mishings, Baishagu of the Bodos among others.

Dibrugarh

Dibrugarh is one of the most prominent districts of Upper Assam and is also known as the 'Tea City of



India'. It is known for its rich heritage and beautiful landscapes dotted with lush green tea gardens. Some of the important ecological attractions in and around Dibrugarh include the Jokai Botanical Garden cum Germplasm Center and the Jeypore Rainforest. Dibrugarh also hosts a number of prominent religious places which attract people from far and near, these include- Radha Krishna Temple located adjacent to Assam Medical College and Hospital (the first medical college to be established in North-Eastern India) and

the temple of Lord Jagannath (a replica of the Lord Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa) located near the leisure and recreational complex of Khanikar Park. Other historical attractions include the Sarumechlow and Bormechow Maidams which are the gravesites of two queens of the Ahom Dynasty and the Dehing Satra which holds ruins belonging to Ahom Dynasty.



Apart from the above mentioned points of interest, another important site around Dibrugarh which holds considerable cultural significance is the Namphake Village. The populace of the village consists of the Tai Phake community who are followers of Buddhism. The village houses a beautiful Buddhist monastery which is also considered as a meditation center. The monastery here is also home to an Ashokan Pillar from the Mauryan times alongside a Buddhist Pagoda within the monastery complex. The monastery is known for its statue of Lord Buddha which is carved in gold and a holy water tank named mucalinda tank.

Another important ecological destination in the vicinity of Dibrugarh is the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary located within the larger Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve. The wildlife sanctuary stretches across the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia and is home to a host of rare flora and fauna. These include the Chinese pangolin, flying fox, wild pig, sambar, barking deer, gaur, serow and Malayan giant squirrels. It happens to be the only sanctuary in India where seven different species of wild cats- tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, leopard cat, golden cat, jungle cat and marbled cat- can be found. The Assamese macaque, which is a primate found in the forest is one of the critically endangered species listed on the Red List of Near Threatened species. The wildlife sanctuary also provides refuge and habitat to the highest concentration of the rare endangered White Winged Wood Duck.



Two of the recent marvels of transport and communication infrastructure which have found acclaim in the list of the longest bridges dotting the region are situated in the vicinity of Dibrugarh. These marvels of engineering have been instrumental in revolutionising transport and communication between the North Bank and South Bank of the river Brahmaputra in the region as well as for propelling the neighbourhood areas of Assam and Arunachal into the tourist itineraries. The Bogibeel

bridge on the outskirts of Dibrugarh town is the longest road-cum-rail bridge in the country covering a distance of 4.94 kms over the Brahmaputra River connecting Dibrugarh district

with Dhemaji district. While the Dhola-Sadiya Bridge, also known as the Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Setu, which is acclaimed to be the longest bridge in India, is located in the nearby Tinsukia district. This bridge over the vast



expanse of the Brahmaputra has opened up much of Eastern sections of Arunachal Pradesh to the existing road networks and facilitates easy access of goods and people to the remote corners of Arunachal Pradesh.

There are several fascinating tourist places around Dibrugarh district as well. One of the important ecological attractions nearby is the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. Straddling an area of 340 sq. km within

Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park is home to the feral horse, the gangetic dolphins and several species of mammals and birds.



Dibrugarh's neighbouring district of Tinsukia also boasts several important destinations. The fabled 'Oil City' of Assam- Digboi and its associated lore of "Dig boy, dig", is located in the Tinsukia district. Digboi is the homestead of the Digboi Refinery, which was commissioned on 11th December 1901. It carries the legacy of being India's oldest operating refinery and one of the oldest operating

refineries in the world. Digboi is also home to an Oil Museum and a Second World War cemetery maintained by the UK-based Commonwealth and War Graves Commission. Tinsukia district also has the Ledo Airfield and the Zero Point which marks the starting point of the famous 1700 km Ledo or Stilwell Road, constructed during the Second World War, through dangerous and hostile jungle tracts stretching over territories of modern -day India, Burma and China.

Dibrugarh's neighbouring district of Sivasagar is the home-ground for the capitals and core



of the polity established by the Ahoms. Sivasagar is well known for its Shiva Temple, Ahom palaces, monuments and bridges; huge tracts of tea gardens tracing their roots to the earliest efforts at commercial tea plantations dot the district and it also hosts several important undertakings in the oil industry.

The historic Talatal Ghar is an important Ahom monument located in Sivasagar. It is a seven-storey royal palace constructed with bricks and cemented using locally available organic ingredients. The palace has two secret tunnels said to have been used by the

royals as escape routes during enemy raids and sieges. The 18th century Rang Ghar, which is also Asia's first amphitheatre, is also located in Sivasagar. The Kareng Ghar is yet another architectural marvel located in Sivasagar. The landscape of Sivasagar is dotted with ingenious man-made water conserving structures built in the form of medieval tanks, these were constructed using indigenous technology to help maintain adequate water level even during dry seasons. In the adjacent district of Charaideo there are several maidams or pyramid-like royal vaults. These maidam's have a domed superstructure covered by a hemispherical earthen mound and served as burial grounds for the Ahom royalty.



Another important site of historical and cultural importance, easily accessible from Dibrugarh, is the largest riverine island of Majuli. Home to the Neo-Vaishnavite culture, promoted by the Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva in the 16th century, the island of Majuli, is the home ground of many Satras (monasteries) which serve as religious institutions and cultural centres. Aankia naat, bhaona, raas, borgeet and other performing arts are some of the local performing art-forms prevalent in Majuli. Kamalabari Satra, Auniati Satra, Dakhinpat Satra are few of the prominent satras of Majuli. The people of Majuli are also renowned for their expertise in the craft of

mask-making. Elaborate masks, depicting various gods, are made by hand— some of which are used in theatrical performances. Pottery is another craft which finds its expertise in Majuli. The kumar people of Majuli are adept at creating handcrafted pots from river clay. Majuli being a river island, the gradual river erosion of the island, has been a major problem for Majuli and its populace. This has resulted in severe setbacks and disruptions to their life and culture. The proportions of this problem for the people of Majuli can be gleaned from the fact that the island shrank by more than 60%, from over 1,000 km² to barely 400 km², over the last century.



Another significant tourist spot in Assam is the Kaziranga National Park which is also 'A World Heritage' site. Covering an area of 430 sq. kms, the sanctuary was demarcated in 1908 and is located within the districts of present-day Golaghat and Nagaon. It is home to about 2/3rd of the total world population of the one-horned rhinoceros. Other species of animals inhabiting the sanctuary include tigers, elephants, wild water buffalos and swamp deers. Birds such as the Lesser White-fronted Goose, Ferruginous duck, Baer's Pochard Duck, Lesser Adjutant, Greater Adjutant, Black-necked

Stork, and Asian Openbill Stork migrate to the region during the winter season. The Great Indian Hornbill and Old-World Babblers are some of the other bird species found here.

Arunachal Pradesh which neighbours Assam, has several important attractions which are located at an ideal distance from Dibrugarh. Namsai in Arunachal Pradesh is a culturally rich historical town where one can find Buddhist relics like the Chongkham monastery and more recent attractions like the Golden Pagoda at Tengapani. Pasighat is another important urban center in Arunachal Pradesh, situated on the banks of the Siang River. Pasighat forms the



Gateway to many parts of the lesser explored Eastern Arunachal Pradesh and is rapidly emerging as an

important tourist destination. Travel time and ease of access to Pasighat from Dibrugarh has been significantly reduced with the construction of the Bogibeel Bridge.

The rich and diverse social geography of Dibrugarh and its neighborhood makes for a harmonious and conducive environment for intellectual engagement and research pursuits— for students as well as the faculties of Dibrugarh University and other institutions of higher learning.

Dibrugarh University

Dibrugarh University of Assam, located in Dibrugarh, was established in 1965 based on the provisions of the Dibrugarh University Act of 1965. The campus, at Rajabheta, covering an expanse of 550 acres is located five kilometres south of Dibrugarh town. It is a leading teaching and research driven University of North East



India aiming to provide holistic education. Dibrugarh University encourages research in multi-disciplinary fields through numerous theoretical perspectives. It offers a dynamic educational experience with an aim to

prepare the youth to lead and contribute to the society. The University aims to uphold diverse knowledge systems and become a platform for exchange of cross-cultural dialogue and ideas. It intends to serve as an educational hub for the region and beyond.

Primarily a research and teaching institute, the University has seven Faculties of Studies:

- ❖ Faculty of Humanities and Law
- ❖ Faculty of Social Sciences
- ❖ Faculty of Education
- ❖ Faculty of Science and Engineering
- ❖ Faculty of Commerce and Management Science
- ❖ Faculty of Biological Sciences
- ❖ Faculty of Earth Sciences and Energy

Within these Faculties of Studies there are 17 departments, 17 centers and 1 Institute of Engineering and Technology. It is well equipped with several hostels, a health centre, a guest house, a library and sports facilities. The University also hosts 177 affiliated colleges and institutes across several districts of Upper Assam.

The university has grown as a host for students belonging to different parts of the world. Currently, the university hosts a good number of students and research scholars from various African countries as well as from the countries in South-East Asia. The University community welcomes and encourages a cooperative intellectual and cultural learning process among its huge and varied community of scholars and researchers.