



A cultural showcase to tourism drive: A trend analysis on Hornbill Festival of Nagaland since 2010

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Abstract

This study presents a longitudinal analysis of tourism growth associated with the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, an annual cultural event organized by the Department of Tourism, Government of Nagaland, from December 1 to 10. Conceived as a platform to preserve indigenous traditions while promoting tourism, the festival showcases the cultural diversity, agrarian heritage, and socio-religious values of the Naga tribes and attracts visitors from local, national, and international contexts. The study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from the official records of the Directorate of Tourism, Nagaland. Tourist arrivals were categorized into local, domestic, and foreign visitors, compiled based on tickets issued at the festival venue. Covering a fifteen-year period from 2010 to 2025, the data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and presented through tables and graphical representations. Growth rate analysis was employed to examine year-wise changes in tourist inflow. The findings reveal a substantial expansion in tourist inflow, with total arrivals increasing from 28,282 in 2010 to 214,493 in 2025, indicating nearly eightfold growth, with an average annual growth rate of about 40 percent. Local tourists showed strong participation, while domestic arrivals reflected growing national appeal. Foreign tourist arrivals, though smaller in volume, recorded a notably high growth rate, indicating rising international interest. The study is limited to tourism during the festival period and excludes off-season tourist flows. Based on the findings, the paper recommends targeted policy interventions, including selective relaxation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) norms during the festival, enhanced promotional strategies, infrastructure upgrades, improved transport and accommodation facilities, and strengthened digital tourism platforms to ensure sustainable tourism development in Nagaland.

Keywords: *Naga culture, cultural festivals, festival tourism, domestic tourism, foreign tourism*

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1. Introduction

Tourism has increasingly emerged as a strategic instrument for regional economic development, cultural preservation, and identity construction in emerging economies (Rizal & Asokan, 2013; Suriyankietkaew et al., 2025; Kostakis & Lolos, 2024; Deng et al., 2025; Liu & Kou, 2024; Amin & Budilestari, 2025). Cultural festivals, in particular, have gained prominence as catalysts for destination branding, community participation, and sustainable development (Chhabra, 2023; Ezung, 2011; Chairani et al., 2026; Suvittawat et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Lopes & Hiray, 2024; Olagoke et al., 2025; Dimaano et al., 2025). In the context of Northeast India, Nagaland presents a unique case where indigenous identity, traditional governance systems, and agrarian cultural practices intersect with contemporary tourism policies (Ezung, 2011; Sarkar & Chaudhury, 2024; Munoth et al., 2022). Nagaland, inaugurated as the 16th state of the Indian Union on 1 December 1963, is home to a mosaic of indigenous Naga tribes, each possessing distinct socio-cultural, linguistic, and ritual traditions (Horam, 2019). Historically, Naga villages functioned as autonomous socio-political units governed by customary laws, reinforcing a decentralized cultural system (Longkumer, 2013). Despite limited inter-tribal integration in the pre-colonial period, shared agricultural cycles and ritual practices provided cohesion across communities.

In response to modernization and socio-political transformation, the Government of Nagaland conceptualized the Hornbill Festival in 2000 as a unifying cultural platform. Since then, the festival has evolved beyond a cultural showcase into a strategic tourism product aimed at promoting the state at national and international levels (Keditsu, 2014, 2023). Scholars such as Bhargav (2025) and Pongen (2021) emphasize the economic and experiential dimensions of the festival, while Patton (2025) highlights its role in identity assertion and cultural negotiation. Historically, Naga society was organized around autonomous village-states governed by customary law, with social, political, and religious life deeply embedded in kinship, clan, and village institutions (Baral, 2023; Burman et al., 2007).

Against this backdrop of cultural plurality and village-centric social organization, festivals have traditionally played a central role in reinforcing social cohesion, transmitting indigenous knowledge, and regulating agrarian and ritual calendars. In the post-independence period, however, rapid socio-economic transformation, political changes, and increased external exposure posed challenges to the preservation of indigenous cultural practices (Sekhose & Mishra, 2024). It is within this context that the Hornbill Festival emerged as a

state-led initiative aimed at cultural preservation, inter-tribal integration, and tourism promotion (Liegise, 2024).

Although existing literature has examined cultural politics, identity, and tourism potential of the Hornbill Festival, there remains a significant research gap in long-term empirical trend analysis of tourist arrivals disaggregated into local, domestic, and foreign categories. Most prior studies are qualitative or perception-based, with limited quantitative longitudinal evidence. While initially conceived as a cultural showcase, the Hornbill Festival has gradually evolved into a major tourism-driven event with significant economic and developmental implications. This paper examines this transformation by analysing the growth trajectory of festival-based tourism over a fifteen-year period (2010–2025), with particular attention to patterns of local, domestic, and foreign tourist participation. Therefore, this study seeks to examine whether the Hornbill Festival has effectively transitioned from a cultural celebration into a sustained tourism driver over time.

2. Cultural Background of Nagaland

2.1. Naga Culture

Nagas traditionally lived in well-organized villages, each of which functioned under customary law as an independent village-state and has often been described as a “small republic” (Luithui, 2001). Every Naga village existed as a self-governing entity with clearly demarcated territorial boundaries separating it from neighboring villages. The inhabitants were bound together by strong social, economic, political, and ritual ties. Although each village maintained its distinct identity and autonomy, it was not isolated, as it maintained interdependent relationships with neighboring villages. Thus, the Naga village-state possessed the essential elements of population, territory, and sovereignty.

The defense of the village was accorded the highest priority, with both outer and inner lines of fortification. Village gates were strategically constructed to prevent enemies from infiltrating the settlement. Chieftainship was a defining feature of Naga polity, with each village headed by a Gaonbura, or headman, who performed both secular and religious functions. As the religious head, the Gaonbura was the first to sow seeds, plant crops, and harvest, and he presided over all religious festivals. Despite the authority of the chief, land ownership rested with the people, and each family possessed the right to hold land within the village.

The family constituted the basic unit of Naga society, and marriage was generally monogamous. Marriage within the same clan was strictly prohibited as it was considered incestuous, and violators were ostracized from the village. Respect for parents and elders was deeply ingrained in social life.

One of the most distinctive features of traditional Naga society was the practice of headhunting, which symbolized bravery and masculinity (Wilkinson, 2017). A man who failed to take a head was ridiculed, while bringing home the heads of enemies was regarded as the highest form of glory. The Morung, a bachelor dormitory system, was unique to Naga society and formed an essential institution beyond the family, serving as an important center for education and socialization. The Morung admitted boys and girls into separate dormitories upon attaining puberty. Through this institution, Naga culture, customs, and traditions were transmitted orally across generations through folk songs, dances, folktales, and other oral traditions, while skills such as wood carving and weaving were imparted to the youth. Women played vital roles as wives, mothers, child-bearers, food producers, and household managers. Although they were highly respected and enjoyed considerable freedom in many spheres, they were traditionally excluded from clan and village decision-making processes.

The Nagas were skilled craftsmen, constructing ornately carved dwellings using wood and straw, with each sub-tribe exhibiting distinctive architectural styles (Sridharan et al., 2023). Their fondness for color was reflected in their richly designed shawls and headgear, with patterns unique to each tribe. Jewelry was crafted with remarkable variety and complexity using materials such as beads, glass, shells, stone, teeth or tusks, claws or horns, metal, bone, wood, seeds, hair, and fiber. Traditional crafts included basketry, weaving, wood carving, pottery, metalwork, jewelry making, and beadwork, with the weaving of colorful woolen and cotton shawls being a central activity for women across all Naga tribes.

Folk songs and dances formed an integral part of traditional Naga culture (Konyak & Das, 2023), sustaining oral traditions through storytelling and music. These songs were both romantic and historical, often narrating the deeds of ancestors, significant events, and seasonal agricultural activities. Folk dances, usually performed during festivals and religious occasions, were executed in synchronized patterns by men and women, depending on the nature of the dance. War dances, performed mainly by men, depicted actual combat movements and were accompanied by songs and war cries.

Indigenous musical instruments included bamboo mouth organs, cup violins, bamboo flutes, trumpets, drums made of cattle skin, and large log drums. Festivals were celebrated at various stages of the agricultural cycle, reflecting the close relationship between Naga culture and agrarian life (Ngalengnam, 2024).

2.2. Naga Festivals

The tribal festivals of Nagaland vividly reflect the cultural diversity, agricultural rhythms, and socio-religious values of its various Naga communities. Each tribe celebrates distinctive festivals that mark seasonal transitions, social cohesion, and spiritual beliefs. Among the Angami Nagas, Sekrenyi (also known as Phousanyi), celebrated in February during the Angami month of Kezei, is a ten-day purification and renewal festival characterized by elaborate rituals such as Kizie, communal singing during Thekra Hie, hunting expeditions, and inter-village interactions symbolized through bridge or gate pulling, during which all agricultural activities cease.

The Ao Nagas of Mokokchung district observe Moatsu Mong from May 1–3 after sowing, a period of recreation marked by energetic songs and dances. Another important festival, Tsungrem Mong, now celebrated from August 1–3, is associated with the pre-harvest season and serves as a platform for showcasing intellectual and physical prowess.

The Chakhesang Nagas celebrate several festivals, among which Sukrenyi and Tsukhenyie are prominent. Sukrenyi, an eleven-day festival, emphasizes the ritual sanctification of youth, while Tsukhenyie, now observed on May 16, symbolizes the conclusion of leisure activities and the welcoming of a new agricultural year.

For the Chang Nagas of Tuensang district, Naknyulum is a six-day pre-harvest festival centered on the remembrance of ancestors, ritual abstinence, communal prayers for a good harvest, and the symbolic illumination of households. The Khamniungan Nagas of Kiphire district celebrate Tsokum in late October for eight days, with each day holding specific ritual significance linked to agricultural and social life.

The Konyak Nagas, one of the largest tribes, observe Aoleng Monyu in early April after the New Year. This six-day festival seeks divine blessings for agricultural prosperity and celebrates the renewal of life with the onset of spring. Among the Lotha (Kyong) Nagas, Tokhu Emong is a post-harvest festival distinguished by its emphasis on thanksgiving, reconciliation,

forgiveness of past conflicts, and the strengthening of social bonds. During this period, hunting, fishing, trading, and travel are strictly prohibited.

The Phom Nagas celebrate Monyu, their most important festival, for twelve days in April after sowing. It combines the worship of the supreme spirit with communal feasting, music, and dances, followed by community service, symbolizing renewal and the advent of the New Year. The Rengma Nagas observe Ngada in November as the “mother of all festivals,” a grand thanksgiving occasion marked by rejoicing and communal harmony.

The Sangtam Nagas of Tuensang and Kiphire districts celebrate several festivals throughout the year, of which Mongmong is the most significant. Observed over six days, it symbolizes togetherness and collective prayers for a bountiful harvest. The Sema (Sumi) Nagas of Zunheboto district celebrate Tuluni on July 8, a festival structured around specific rituals such as traditional beer brewing, gift exchange, and the reinforcement of communal harmony.

The Yimchunger Nagas of Kiphire district observe Metemneo, a five-day post-harvest festival associated with courtship, engagement rituals, and the exchange of gifts among betrothed couples. The Pochury Nagas celebrate Nazhu in late February, a festival that emphasizes emotional bonding, spiritual communion with ancestors, and the strengthening of familial and social ties.

The Zeliang Nagas observe Hega, their most important festival, reflecting community solidarity and cultural identity. In addition, non-Naga tribes such as the Kacharis and Garos residing in Nagaland celebrate Bihu and Wangala, respectively. Both festivals are closely linked to the agricultural cycle and harvest, thereby underscoring the shared agrarian ethos and cultural plurality of the state.

2.3. Hornbill Festival

The Hornbill Festival is an annual cultural event celebrated from December 1 to 10 in Nagaland and stands as one of the most significant platforms for showcasing the state’s rich tribal heritage. The first Hornbill Festival was held in 2000 and was conceptualized by the Government of Nagaland with the primary objectives of preserving indigenous traditions, promoting inter-tribal unity, and projecting a collective cultural identity. Often referred to as the “Festival of Festivals,” it aims to boost tourism in Nagaland and is organized by the State Department of Tourism in collaboration with the Department of Art and Culture to attract tourists from around the world.

The festival derives its name from the hornbill, a large and vibrant forest bird that holds a prominent place in the folklore, symbolism, and traditional attire of many Naga tribes. The Hornbill Festival is mainly held in Kohima district, with its principal venue at Kisama Heritage Village in the Southern Angami region, located approximately 12 kilometres from Kohima town.

The major attractions of the festival include exhibitions of traditional Naga Morungs, displays and sales of indigenous arts and crafts, food and herbal medicine stalls, flower shows, cultural performances, fashion shows, the Miss Nagaland beauty pageant, traditional archery, Naga wrestling, indigenous games, and contemporary musical concerts. Through its vibrant blend of rituals, performances, sports, fairs, and ceremonial activities, the Hornbill Festival not only reinforces Nagaland's unique cultural identity within India's federal framework but also facilitates cultural interaction and assimilation among different Naga communities.

Furthermore, the festival has played a crucial role in strengthening the state's tourism profile by providing visitors with valuable insights into the Nagas' ethnic diversity, traditional architecture, and distinctive cuisine, thereby contributing significantly to cultural awareness and sustainable tourism development. This paper explores the response received from around the world since 2010 and examines the trends in domestic and international tourist participation.

Despite widespread recognition of the Hornbill Festival as a major cultural event, there is insufficient empirical evidence examining its long-term tourism growth trajectory and structural composition of visitors. Hence, this study aims to answer the following:

1. What has been the overall growth trend of tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival from 2010 to 2025?
2. How have local, domestic, and foreign tourist segments contributed to total growth?
3. What patterns of volatility, recovery, and stabilization are observable across the study period?
4. Has the festival demonstrated resilience against external shocks?

3. Literature Review

The existing literature on the Hornbill Festival and tourism in Nagaland reflects an evolving scholarly engagement with the festival's cultural, political, and economic

dimensions. Early studies primarily examined the festival as a site of cultural representation and identity negotiation. Scholars such as Longkumer (2013) and Kreditsu (2014) critically analyzed the performative aspects of the festival, highlighting how state-sponsored cultural displays mediate power, modernity, and indigenous identity. These works argue that the festival functions not merely as a celebration of tradition but also as a space where cultural meanings are selectively constructed and politicized.

Subsequent scholarship expanded this perspective by situating the festival within broader frameworks of cultural recovery and tourism-led development. The existing literature highlights the evolving role of the Hornbill Festival, from a cultural expression to a strategic instrument for tourism development, identity assertion, and socio-economic transformation. However, early scholarly works on the festival remain limited.

The literature on the Hornbill Festival may be classified into three thematic strands:

Cultural politics and identity construction. Longkumer (2013) and Kreditsu (2014) argue that the festival is a state-mediated cultural performance in which identity is negotiated. While Longkumer emphasizes the politics of cultural performance, Kreditsu focuses on identity reconstruction during the prohibition era. Both scholars converge on the argument that the festival redefines Naga identity within a modern political framework.

Tourism and economic development perspective. Ezung (2011) and Esakki (2015) examine the rural tourism potential and employment generation associated with the festival. These studies position the Hornbill Festival as a catalyst for development. However, they rely largely on descriptive and potential-based arguments rather than empirical measurements of tourism growth (Esakki, 2015; Sinclair, 1998).

Contemporary global and creative economy perspective. Bhargav (2025) and Kumar et al. (2022) emphasize the festival's economic and creative industry implications, while Patton (2025) expands the discussion toward identity assertion within global cultural markets.

The literature establishes the Hornbill Festival as a dynamic intersection of culture and tourism, thereby justifying the present study's focus on its longitudinal growth trajectory and tourism-driven transformation (Jessymol, 2023; Shepherd, 2002). Although qualitative and conceptual discussions dominate the existing literature, longitudinal quantitative trend analyses of segmented tourist growth remain underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by providing a fifteen-year empirical trend analysis.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical longitudinal research design based entirely on secondary quantitative data. The purpose of this design is to examine temporal trends in tourism growth associated with the Hornbill Festival over a fifteen-year period. By focusing on year-wise changes in tourist arrivals, the study provides a systematic assessment of how the festival has evolved from a cultural showcase into a tourism-driven development platform.

The study relies on secondary data obtained from official records maintained by the Directorate of Tourism and the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland. These official records ensure a high level of reliability and authenticity. The dataset covers a fifteen-year period from 2010 to 2025, enabling a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of tourism trends during the Hornbill Festival.

Tourist arrival data were recorded through ticket issuance at the Kisama Heritage Village, the main venue of the Hornbill Festival, during the festival period from December 1 to 10 each year. Visitors were classified into three categories based on their place of origin: Local tourists – visitors from within Nagaland; Domestic tourists – visitors from other states of India; Foreign tourists – visitors from countries outside India. Since the dataset includes all ticket-based entries recorded during the festival period, the study follows a complete enumeration (census-type approach) rather than a sampling technique.

The collected data were processed and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The results were presented through tables and graphical representations to enhance clarity and interpretability. To examine tourism growth and trends associated with the Hornbill Festival, the following analytical techniques were employed: Year-on-Year Growth Rate Analysis; Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR); Trend Line Analysis; and Linear Regression Analysis (R^2 interpretation). These techniques were used to evaluate the growth dynamics and structural composition of tourist inflows across local, domestic, and foreign segments.

The Growth Rate formula used in the analysis is expressed as: $\text{Growth Rate} = \frac{\text{Current Value} - \text{Previous Value}}{\text{Previous Value}} \times 100$. This formula is widely used in economic studies, tourism analysis, population studies, and financial research to measure year-to-year or period-wise growth.

5. Findings

Festivals constitute a common and significant cultural feature among the Naga tribes. With the objective of safeguarding the land rights and interests of indigenous communities, the British administration introduced the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to regulate the entry of outsiders into Naga-inhabited areas. This system continues to remain in force today. Any individual from outside Nagaland who intends to visit the state is required to obtain an ILP, which is issued by the Deputy Commissioner of the respective district. Accordingly, the data used in this study are derived from the ILPs issued to visitors who entered the state specifically for tourism purposes and not for commercial or other financial activities.

5.1. Overall Growth

The official data on tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival for the period from 2010 to 2025 have been collected from the records of Directorate of Tourism Nagaland and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Tourist arrived at the Hornbill Festival

| Year | Foreign | Domestic | Local Tourist | Total |
|------|---------|----------|---------------|--------|
| 2010 | 284 | 4969 | 23029 | 28282 |
| 2011 | 610 | 6829 | 98862 | 106301 |
| 2012 | 808 | 19440 | 107000 | 127248 |
| 2013 | 1457 | 23387 | 147000 | 171844 |
| 2014 | 1360 | 17044 | 154000 | 172404 |
| 2015 | 1144 | 19969 | 213000 | 234113 |
| 2016 | 1646 | 14962 | 95996 | 112604 |
| 2017 | 2401 | 38700 | 202113 | 243214 |
| 2018 | 2702 | 37397 | 211602 | 251701 |
| 2019 | 3015 | 55584 | 224212 | 282811 |
| 2020 | | | Covid19 | |
| 2021 | 54 | 14538 | 41764 | 56356 |
| 2022 | 1026 | 48413 | 41764 | 140299 |
| 2023 | 2108 | 37089 | 90860 | 154057 |
| 2024 | 2527 | 56217 | 147224 | 205968 |
| 2025 | 2528 | 56431 | 155534 | 214493 |

Source: Directorate of Tourism Nagaland

As detailed in Table 1, the dataset disaggregates tourist arrivals into three categories: foreign, domestic, and local. The period from 2010 to 2025 witnessed a substantial expansion in the overall attendance of tourists at the Hornbill Festival. In 2010, tourist arrivals were

recorded at approximately 28,282. By 2025, this figure had increased to 214,493, representing nearly eightfold growth over the 15-year period. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) and year-on-year growth percentages for this trend are presented in the accompanying table.

Table 2

Overall growth of tourism in relation to the Hornbill Festival

| Year | Tourist | Rate of Growth (%) |
|------|---------|--------------------|
| 2010 | 28282 | |
| 2011 | 106301 | 275.8609716 |
| 2012 | 127248 | 19.70536495 |
| 2013 | 171844 | 35.04652332 |
| 2014 | 172404 | 0.325876958 |
| 2015 | 234113 | 35.79325306 |
| 2016 | 112604 | -51.90185936 |
| 2017 | 243214 | 115.990551 |
| 2018 | 251701 | 3.489519518 |
| 2019 | 282811 | 12.35990322 |
| 2021 | 56356 | -80.07291088 |
| 2022 | 140299 | 148.9513095 |
| 2023 | 154057 | 9.806199617 |
| 2024 | 205968 | 33.69596967 |
| 2025 | 214493 | 4.138992465 |

Source: Calculated by author

Table 2 presents the overall growth pattern of tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival from 2010 to 2025. The data reveal significant fluctuations in both the volume of tourists and the rate of growth over the study period. In 2010, tourist arrivals stood at 28,282, which increased sharply to 106,301 in 2011, recording an exceptionally high growth rate of 275.86%. This upward trend continued in 2012 and 2013, with growth rates of 19.71% and 35.05%, respectively, indicating the increasing popularity of the festival as a major tourism event.

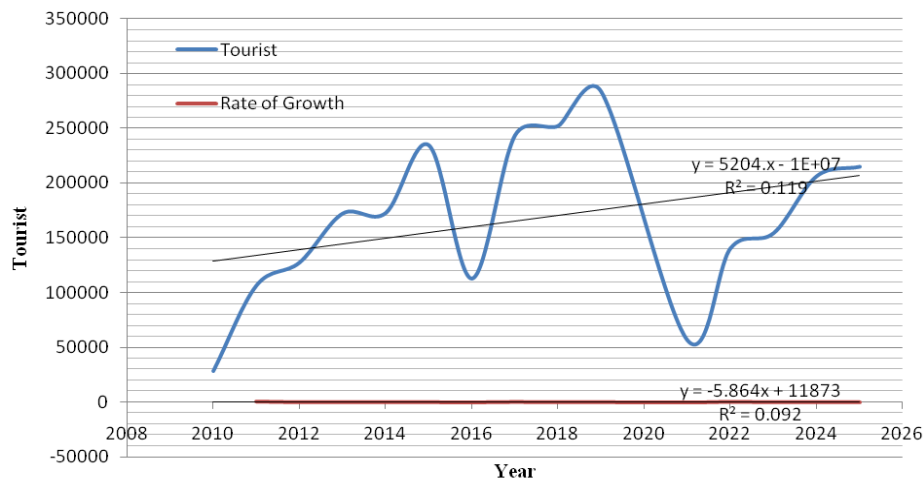
In 2014, the growth rate declined drastically to 0.33%, reflecting a phase of stagnation. This was followed by a renewed increase in 2015, when the growth rate rose to 35.79%. A sharp decline was observed in 2016, when tourist arrivals fell to 112,604, resulting in a negative growth rate of -51.90%. However, the sector recovered strongly in 2017, registering a growth rate of 115.99%, and continued to grow moderately in 2018 and 2019, with growth rates of 3.49% and 12.36%, respectively. The year 2021 shows a severe contraction in tourist arrivals, with a decline of 80.07%, largely reflecting external disruptions. Subsequently, a strong revival became evident from 2022 onwards, with tourist arrivals increasing by 148.95% in 2022,

followed by steady growth in 2023 and 2024 at 9.81% and 33.70%, respectively. By 2025, tourist arrivals reached 214,493, with a moderate growth rate of 4.14%, indicating a phase of stabilization after recovery.

The table highlights the dynamic nature of tourism growth at the Hornbill Festival, characterized by periods of rapid expansion, sharp decline, and subsequent recovery. This overall growth trend is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Rate of tourism growth at the Hornbill Festival



Source: Compiled by author

Figure 1 illustrates the trend of tourist arrivals and the corresponding rate of tourism growth at the Hornbill Festival over the study period. The tourist arrival curve shows a generally upward long-term trend, despite pronounced year-to-year fluctuations. From the initial years, tourist inflows increased steadily, reflecting the growing recognition of the Hornbill Festival as a major cultural tourism event.

Periodic declines are evident, particularly during the mid-2010s and again in the early 2020s, indicating phases of disruption and instability in tourism activity. However, these downturns were followed by strong recoveries, demonstrating the resilience of festival-based tourism in the region.

The growth rate line highlights substantial volatility throughout the period, with sharp positive spikes during years of rapid expansion and steep negative values during periods of decline. The negative growth observed in certain years signifies external shocks and constraints

affecting tourist movement, while the subsequent positive growth rates reflect revival and renewed interest.

The fitted linear trend line for tourist arrivals indicates a positive slope, suggesting an overall increase in the number of visitors over time. However, the relatively low R^2 value implies that growth has not been uniform and is influenced by multiple intervening factors. Similarly, the linear trend for the growth rate shows a slight declining tendency, reflecting the fluctuating and inconsistent nature of annual growth rates.

The figure demonstrates that while tourism associated with the Hornbill Festival has expanded over the long term, its growth pattern has been uneven, characterized by phases of rapid growth, sharp decline, and gradual recovery.

5.2. Local Tourism and Its Growth

Local tourism refers to the movement of people within the state of Nagaland to the Hornbill Festival site for tourism purposes, excluding any form of financial or commercial activity. The number of local visitors and their corresponding growth rates are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Growth of local tourism

| Year | Local Tourist | Growth Rate (%) |
|-------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 2010 | 23029 | |
| 2011 | 98862 | 329.2934995 |
| 2012 | 107000 | 8.231676478 |
| 2013 | 147000 | 37.38317757 |
| 2014 | 154000 | 4.761904762 |
| 2015 | 213000 | 38.31168831 |
| 2016 | 95996 | -54.9314554 |
| 2017 | 202113 | 110.5431476 |
| 2018 | 211602 | 4.694898398 |
| 2019 | 224212 | 5.959300952 |
| 2021 | 41764 | -81.3729863 |
| 2022 | 41764 | 0 |
| 2023 | 90860 | 117.5557897 |
| 2024 | 147224 | 62.03389831 |
| 2025 | 155534 | 5.644460142 |

Source: Compiled by author

Table 3 depicts the growth pattern of local tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival from 2010 to 2025, along with the corresponding annual growth rates. In 2010, the number of local

tourists stood at 23,029, which increased sharply to 98,862 in 2011, registering a very high growth rate of 329.29%. This substantial increase indicates growing awareness and acceptance of the Hornbill Festival among the local population.

The upward trend continued in 2012 and 2013, with growth rates of 8.23% and 37.38%, respectively, reflecting a steady expansion in local participation. In 2014, growth moderated to 4.76%, followed by a renewed surge in 2015 with a growth rate of 38.31%. A significant decline was observed in 2016, when local tourist arrivals dropped to 95,996, resulting in a negative growth rate of -54.93%. This decline was followed by a strong recovery in 2017, with local tourist numbers rising sharply and recording a growth rate of 110.54%.

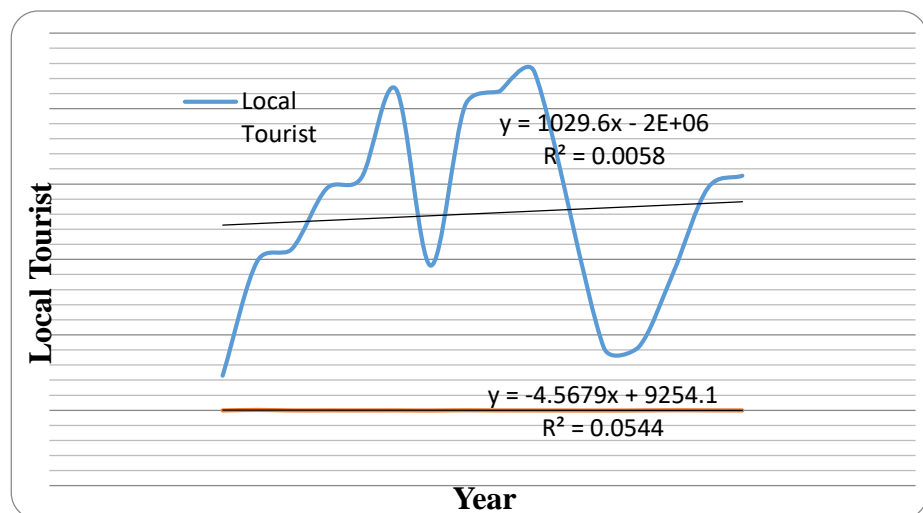
During 2018 and 2019, local tourism continued to increase at a modest and stable pace, with growth rates of 4.69% and 5.96%, respectively. The year 2021 witnessed a drastic fall in local tourist arrivals to 41,764, leading to a sharp negative growth rate of -81.37%, indicating a major disruption in local travel.

In 2022, the number of local tourists remained unchanged, resulting in a zero growth rate. A strong revival became evident in 2023, with a growth rate of 117.56%, followed by a substantial increase in 2024 at 62.03%. By 2025, local tourist arrivals reached 155,534, with a moderate growth rate of 5.64%, suggesting a phase of stabilization after recovery.

The table highlights that local tourism at the Hornbill Festival has experienced sharp fluctuations, characterized by periods of rapid growth, significant decline, and subsequent recovery during the study period. This trend in local tourism growth is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Growth of local tourism



Source: Compiled by author

Figure 2 depicts the trend in local tourist arrivals and the corresponding growth rate at the Hornbill Festival over the study period. The line representing local tourist inflows shows an overall increasing tendency in the long run, although it is marked by sharp fluctuations across different years. From 2010 onwards, local tourist participation increased steadily, indicating rising interest and engagement among residents of Nagaland in the festival. This growth was interrupted by noticeable declines, particularly during the mid-2010s and again in the early 2020s, reflecting periods of disruption in local travel and participation. The growth rate curve highlights considerable volatility, with sharp positive spikes during years of rapid expansion and steep negative values during years of decline.

The pronounced downturn observed around 2021 reflects a significant contraction in local tourism, followed by a strong recovery in subsequent years. The linear trend line for local tourist arrivals exhibits a positive slope, suggesting gradual long-term growth in local participation. However, the very low R^2 value indicates that the increase has been inconsistent and influenced by external factors. Similarly, the linear trend for the growth rate shows a slight downward inclination, underscoring the irregular and unstable nature of annual growth. Overall, the figure demonstrates that while local tourism associated with the Hornbill Festival has expanded over time, its growth pattern has been uneven, characterized by periods of rapid increase, sharp decline, and subsequent recovery.

5.3. Domestic Tourism and Its Growth

Domestic tourism refers to the movement of people from within the country, India, to the Hornbill Festival site for tourism purposes, excluding any form of financial or commercial activity. The number of visitors from other Indian states and their corresponding growth rates are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 presents the trend in domestic tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival from 2010 to 2025, along with their annual growth rates. In 2010, domestic tourist arrivals were recorded at 4,969. This number increased to 6,829 in 2011, registering a growth rate of 37.43%. A remarkable surge occurred in 2012, when arrivals rose sharply to 19,440, reflecting a high growth rate of 184.67%, indicating the increased national visibility of the festival.

The growth momentum continued in 2013 with a moderate increase of 20.30%. However, a decline was observed in 2014, when domestic tourist numbers fell to 17,044, resulting in a negative growth rate of -27.12%. In 2015, arrivals recovered moderately with a

growth rate of 17.16%, followed by another decline in 2016, which recorded a negative growth rate of -25.07%.

Table 4

Domestic tourism and its growth

| Year | Domestic | Growth Rate (%) |
|-------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 2010 | 4969 | |
| 2011 | 6829 | 37.43207889 |
| 2012 | 19440 | 184.6683263 |
| 2013 | 23387 | 20.30349794 |
| 2014 | 17044 | -27.12190533 |
| 2015 | 19969 | 17.16146444 |
| 2016 | 14962 | -25.07386449 |
| 2017 | 38700 | 158.65526 |
| 2018 | 37397 | -3.366925065 |
| 2019 | 55584 | 48.63224323 |
| 2021 | 14538 | -73.84499136 |
| 2022 | 48413 | 233.0100426 |
| 2023 | 37089 | -23.39041167 |
| 2024 | 56217 | 51.57324274 |
| 2025 | 56431 | 0.38066777 |

Source: Compiled by author

A significant revival occurred in 2017, with domestic tourist arrivals rising sharply to 38,700 and registering a high growth rate of 158.66%. The year 2018 experienced a marginal decline of -3.37%, while 2019 witnessed a substantial increase of 48.63%, reflecting renewed domestic interest in the festival.

In 2021, domestic tourism experienced a severe contraction, with arrivals dropping to 14,538 and a negative growth rate of -73.84%, indicating major disruptions to travel. A strong rebound became evident in 2022, when domestic tourist arrivals increased to 48,413, recording an exceptionally high growth rate of 233.01%. This was followed by a decline in 2023, with a negative growth rate of -23.39%.

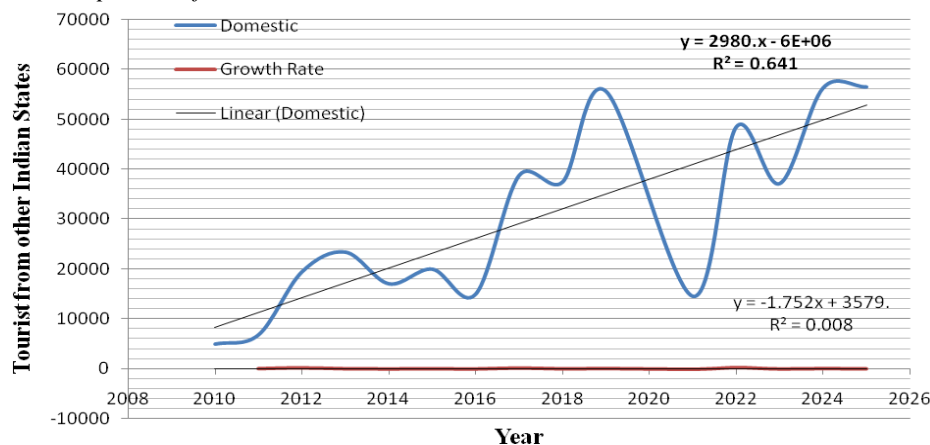
In 2024, domestic tourism showed renewed growth of 51.57%, and by 2025, arrivals stabilized at 56,431 with a marginal growth rate of 0.38%. Overall, the table highlights that domestic tourism at the Hornbill Festival has experienced considerable fluctuations, characterized by phases of rapid growth, decline, and recovery over the study period.

Figure 3 illustrates the trend in domestic tourist arrivals and the corresponding growth rate at the Hornbill Festival over the study period. The curve representing domestic tourist

inflows indicates a clear long-term upward trend, despite noticeable year-to-year fluctuations. From the early years of the study period, domestic tourist numbers show gradual growth, reflecting increasing national awareness and the growing appeal of the Hornbill Festival.

Figure 3

Growth pattern of domestic tourism



Source: Compiled by author

This upward movement is intermittently interrupted by sharp declines, particularly during certain years marked by adverse conditions affecting travel. The growth rate line reveals considerable volatility, with periods of positive expansion followed by negative growth in some years, indicating instability in domestic tourist participation.

However, the fitted linear trend line for domestic tourist arrivals demonstrates a strong positive slope, supported by a relatively high coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.641$). This suggests a consistent and significant long-term increase in domestic tourism over time. In contrast, the linear trend for the growth rate is nearly flat, with a very low R^2 value, indicating that annual growth rates have been highly irregular and not strongly explained by time alone.

The figure highlights that domestic tourism at the Hornbill Festival has expanded substantially over the long term, even though the annual rate of growth has remained uneven and subject to fluctuations.

5.4. Foreign Tourism and Its Growth

Foreign tourism refers to the movement of people from other countries to the Hornbill Festival site for tourism purposes, excluding any form of financial or commercial activity. The

number of visitors from other countries and their corresponding growth rates are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Growth rate of foreign tourism

| Year | Foreign | Growth Rate (%) |
|-------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 2010 | 284 | |
| 2011 | 610 | 114.78873 |
| 2012 | 808 | 32.459016 |
| 2013 | 1457 | 80.321782 |
| 2014 | 1360 | -6.6575154 |
| 2015 | 1144 | -15.882353 |
| 2016 | 1646 | 43.881119 |
| 2017 | 2401 | 45.868773 |
| 2018 | 2702 | 12.536443 |
| 2019 | 3015 | 11.584012 |
| 2021 | 54 | -98.208955 |
| 2022 | 1026 | 1800 |
| 2023 | 2108 | 105.45809 |
| 2024 | 2527 | 19.87666 |
| 2025 | 2528 | 0.0395726 |

Source: Compiled by author

Table 5 presents the trend in foreign tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival from 2010 to 2025, along with their annual growth rates. In 2010, the number of foreign tourists was relatively small at 284, reflecting the limited international exposure of the festival during the initial period. A substantial increase is observed in 2011, when arrivals more than doubled to 610, registering a high growth rate of 114.79%. This upward trend continued in 2012 and 2013, with growth rates of 32.46% and 80.32%, respectively, indicating growing international interest in the festival.

In 2014 and 2015, foreign tourist arrivals declined, recording negative growth rates of -6.66% and -15.88%, suggesting a temporary slowdown in international inflow. The situation improved in 2016 and 2017, with arrivals increasing to 1,646 and 2,401, respectively, and growth rates exceeding 43% in both years. Moderate but steady growth continued during 2018 and 2019, with arrivals reaching 3,015 in 2019.

A sharp contraction is evident in 2021, when foreign tourist arrivals dropped drastically to just 54, resulting in an extreme negative growth rate of -98.21%, reflecting severe disruptions to international travel. A strong recovery followed in 2022, with arrivals rising

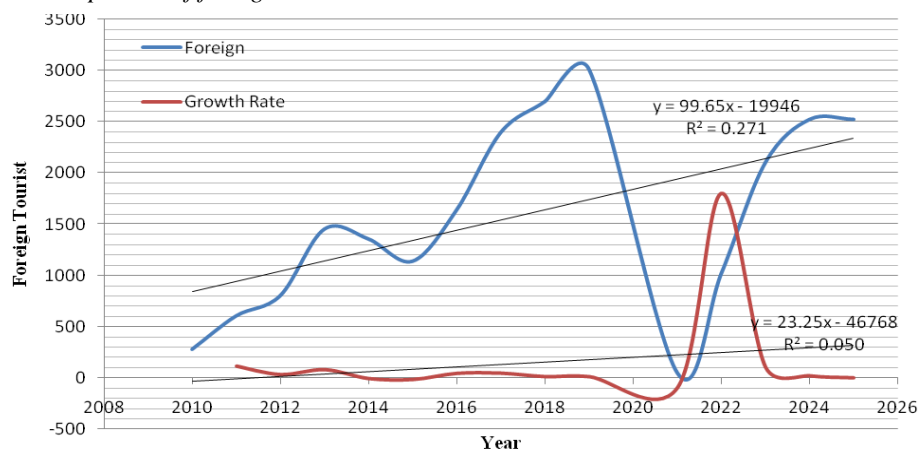
sharply to 1,026 and recording an exceptionally high growth rate of 1,800%, largely due to the very low base of the previous year.

The recovery momentum continued in 2023 and 2024, with growth rates of 105.46% and 19.88%, respectively. By 2025, foreign tourist arrivals stabilized at 2,528, with a marginal growth rate of 0.04%. Overall, the table demonstrates that foreign tourism at the Hornbill Festival has grown substantially over the long term, despite periods of sharp decline and volatility, particularly during years of global travel disruption.

Figure 4 illustrates the trend in foreign tourist arrivals and the corresponding growth rate at the Hornbill Festival over the study period. The foreign tourist arrival curve shows a general upward movement over time, indicating increasing international interest in the festival, although the trend is marked by notable year-to-year fluctuations. From the initial years, foreign tourist inflow rose steadily, reaching a peak around the late 2010s, reflecting improved global visibility of the Hornbill Festival as a cultural tourism destination. This growth phase was interrupted by a sharp and unprecedented decline around 2020–2021, when foreign tourist arrivals dropped drastically, highlighting the severe impact of global travel disruptions.

Figure 4

Growth pattern of foreign tourism



Source: Compiled by author

The growth rate curve further emphasizes the volatility of foreign tourism, with moderate positive growth during most years, followed by an extreme negative spike during the period of contraction. The sharp positive spike in the subsequent year reflects a strong rebound effect, largely influenced by the very low base of the previous year.

The linear trend line for foreign tourist arrivals shows a positive slope, suggesting a long-term increase in foreign tourism. However, the moderate R^2 value indicates that growth has not been consistent and is influenced by external factors. In contrast, the linear trend for the growth rate exhibits very low explanatory power, underlining the irregular and unstable nature of annual growth rates.

The figure demonstrates that while foreign tourism associated with the Hornbill Festival has expanded over the long term, it remains highly sensitive to external shocks, resulting in sharp declines followed by rapid recovery phases.

6. Discussion

The analysis reveals a strong upward trajectory in overall tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival over the study period, despite considerable year-to-year fluctuations. Total arrivals increased nearly eightfold, from 28,282 in 2010 to 214,493 in 2025, highlighting the transformation of the festival from a primarily cultural event into a significant tourism driver. The disaggregated analysis further demonstrates the dominant role of local tourists, reflecting strong community engagement and internal cultural mobilization. Domestic tourist arrivals indicate growing national visibility and appeal, while foreign tourist arrivals, although smaller in absolute numbers, show the highest growth rates, suggesting increasing international interest.

Periods of sharp decline observed during the mid-2010s and the early 2020s reflect the vulnerability of festival-based tourism to external shocks and systemic disruptions. However, the rapid recovery phases that followed these downturns illustrate the resilience of the Hornbill Festival as a tourism product. The volatility in annual growth rates across all visitor categories also suggests the influence of infrastructural constraints, policy frameworks, and broader socio-economic conditions (De, 2013; Chopra & Pandey, 2025; Pandiya, 2024). The findings reinforce the argument that cultural festivals, when strategically supported, can serve as effective instruments for tourism development, regional branding, and socio-economic transformation.

The substantial long-term increase in tourist arrivals confirms the structural transition of the Hornbill Festival from a cultural celebration into a tourism-driven economic platform. This empirical trend supports the argument advanced by Ezung (2011), who identified Nagaland's rural and cultural tourism potential as significantly underutilized yet capable of

long-term expansion. Similarly, Bhargav (2025) emphasizes the festival's growing contribution to state branding and revenue generation, a claim that is quantitatively validated by the near eightfold increase observed in this study.

The volatility in annual growth rates, particularly the sharp declines in 2016 and 2021, reflects the vulnerability of festival-based tourism to external disruptions. Nevertheless, the rapid recovery phases observed in 2017 and after 2022 align with Patton's (2025) argument that the Hornbill Festival functions not merely as an event but as a resilient cultural institution capable of regenerating tourist interest even after major setbacks. This resilience strengthens the argument that identity-based cultural tourism possesses strong adaptive capacity.

Local tourists constituted the largest share of visitors throughout the study period, indicating strong community ownership and internal cultural consolidation. This finding resonates with Kreditsu's (2014) observation that the Hornbill Festival functions as a state-mediated platform for cultural reaffirmation among Naga communities. The exceptionally high growth rate recorded in 2011 (329.29%) suggests increased internal mobilization and acceptance of the festival as a unified cultural symbol. Moreover, the strong post-disruption recovery observed in 2023 and 2024 demonstrates the embeddedness of the festival within local socio-cultural consciousness. Unlike externally dependent tourism sectors, locally driven festival participation tends to recover more rapidly after disruptions. This observation supports Longkumer's (2013) argument that cultural performance spaces such as the Hornbill Festival are closely linked to collective identity rather than purely economic incentives. Thus, the growth of local tourism reflects not only visitor participation but also the strengthening of cultural cohesion.

The steady expansion in domestic tourist arrivals indicates increasing national recognition of the Hornbill Festival. Significant growth spikes in 2012 and 2017 suggest that the festival has successfully penetrated the national tourism market, transforming Nagaland from a peripheral destination into a recognized cultural tourism hub. This finding supports Chhabra's (2023) assertion that festivals play an important role as cultural attractors within India's domestic tourism framework. However, fluctuations in domestic tourism also reflect broader structural challenges such as accessibility, promotional outreach, and regulatory mechanisms including the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system. As noted by Esakki (2015), policy and infrastructural conditions significantly influence tourism mobility. The stabilization

observed during 2024–2025 suggests gradual institutional maturity and improved integration of the festival within India’s domestic tourism network.

Although foreign tourist arrivals remain comparatively modest in absolute terms, their long-term upward trajectory reflects the growing international visibility of the Hornbill Festival. Significant growth spikes in 2011 and the strong recovery observed after 2022 indicate responsiveness to international promotional initiatives and global cultural curiosity. This pattern aligns with Keditsu’s (2023) conceptualization of the festival as a site of cultural recovery positioned within global tourism circuits. The volatility observed in foreign tourism, particularly the sharp contraction during periods of global travel disruption, highlights the sensitivity of international travel to macro-level shocks. Nevertheless, the subsequent rebound demonstrates the enduring global appeal of indigenous cultural tourism when supported by strong branding and digital promotion. Consequently, foreign tourist growth, although smaller in scale, signals the gradual internationalization of Nagaland’s cultural identity.

A comparative assessment of local, domestic, and foreign visitor segments reveals a hierarchical tourism structure dominated by local participation, followed by domestic and then foreign tourists. This layered pattern suggests that the Hornbill Festival’s tourism model is internally consolidated before expanding outward to national and international markets. Such a structure is consistent with sustainable tourism theory, which emphasizes the importance of strong community-based foundations prior to extensive global expansion. The findings indicate that while international recognition of the festival is increasing, its long-term sustainability primarily depends on robust local engagement and expanding domestic participation. This internal–external balance enhances the resilience of the festival’s tourism model and reduces dependence on the more volatile foreign tourism market.

7. Recommendations for Future Research

While the present study provides a fifteen-year longitudinal trend analysis of tourist arrivals at the Hornbill Festival, several avenues remain open for further scholarly exploration.

Future researchers may apply advanced econometric models, such as time-series analysis (ARIMA), regression forecasting, and panel data modeling, to predict long-term tourism growth and identify causal relationships between promotional expenditure, policy changes, and tourist inflows. Such approaches would deepen the understanding of structural determinants influencing festival-based tourism.

The present study focuses primarily on tourist numbers rather than economic value. Future studies may estimate the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of the Hornbill Festival using input–output models or tourism satellite accounts. Such analyses would help quantify income generation, employment creation, and sectoral spillover effects within Nagaland’s economy. Researchers may also examine visitor expenditure patterns across local, domestic, and foreign tourist segments. A comparative analysis of per capita spending could reveal the economic quality of tourism growth beyond mere numerical expansion.

Comparative research between the Hornbill Festival and other major cultural festivals in Northeast India, such as the Sangai Festival of Manipur or the Ziro Festival of Arunachal Pradesh, could provide broader regional insights into festival-based tourism models. In addition, since the present study relies exclusively on secondary data, future research incorporating primary surveys, interviews, and mixed-method approaches would provide deeper insights into visitor motivations, satisfaction levels, and experiential quality.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland has evolved from a cultural celebration into a sustained tourism-driven development platform over the period 2010–2025. The findings provided clear empirical evidence that the festival has undergone significant quantitative expansion and structural transformation. The analysis demonstrated a substantial long-term increase in total tourist arrivals from 28,282 in 2010 to 214,493 in 2025, representing nearly eightfold growth. Despite periods of volatility and temporary contraction, particularly during global disruptions, the overall trajectory indicates sustained expansion and institutional consolidation of the festival as a major tourism event.

The findings also revealed a layered growth structure. Local tourism constitutes the largest share and reflects strong community participation and internal cultural consolidation. Domestic tourism shows marked expansion over time, indicating increasing national visibility and integration within India’s tourism network. Foreign tourism, although smaller in absolute volume, exhibits high percentage growth over the long term, suggesting the gradual internationalization of the festival and expanding global recognition of Naga cultural heritage.

The data revealed significant year-to-year fluctuations influenced by external conditions. However, recovery phases were consistently strong following periods of decline.

This cyclical pattern indicates that while festival-based tourism is sensitive to external shocks, it also demonstrates considerable adaptive resilience. The post-disruption rebounds observed particularly after 2016 and 2021 confirmed the festival's institutional strength and sustained demand. The rapid recovery in subsequent years highlights the Hornbill Festival's capacity to re-attract visitors and maintain its tourism relevance.

The study demonstrates that the Hornbill Festival has played a significant role in stimulating tourism growth in Nagaland over the past fifteen years. The sustained increase in local, domestic, and foreign tourist arrivals highlights the festival's success as both a cultural preservation initiative and a tourism-driven development strategy. While local participation remains the backbone of festival attendance, the rising inflow of domestic and foreign tourists reflects expanding visibility and appeal beyond the state.

Despite its positive impact, the study is limited to tourism during the festival period and does not account for off-season tourist flows. To maximize the festival's developmental potential, the paper recommends selective relaxation of ILP norms during the festival period, intensified promotional campaigns, improved transport and accommodation infrastructure, the establishment of tourist information centres, and the strengthening of digital tourism platforms. These measures would not only enhance festival-based tourism but also contribute to sustainable and inclusive tourism development in Nagaland.

The study confirms that the Hornbill Festival has successfully transitioned from a state-sponsored cultural exhibition into a structured tourism growth engine contributing to destination branding, socio-cultural consolidation, and regional economic potential. However, the growth pattern remains uneven and sensitive to regulatory, infrastructural, and global mobility factors.

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AI Declaration

The authors declare the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in writing this paper. In particular, the authors used ChatGPT, Grammarly and Plagiarism Checker X in searching appropriate literature, summarizing key points and paraphrasing ideas at minimum level. The author takes full responsibility in ensuring proper review and editing of contents generated using AI.

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