



# DZOKOU VALLY

## A heaven with lush green, rolling hills



locals. The other, which we opted for, is favoured by trekkers due to its easier terrain, commencing from Viswema village. The Zakahama trail is roughly 10 km long while the Viswema trail is 13 km long. It took us roughly an hour to reach the entry point at Viswema. We paid INR 200 per head for the entry formalities. Thankfully, we crossed paths with a group from Assam embarking on the same trail

resumed our hike, this time along a mountain trail. The scenery on this trail was unlike anything we had seen before. It was not the monsoon, and yet vibrant flowers blanketed the mountains. It made sense why Dzukou Valley is called "the valley of flowers". Each step unveiled breathtaking vistas, overwhelming our senses with beauty. After around two and a half hours of walking, we reached the valley's designated campsite. The accommodation consisted of two large dormitory rooms and an option for setting up tents in the courtyard.

After a brief rest, we decided to immerse ourselves in the serenity of the valley. The sun had already set, and nature had grown still. A trail leading to the valley lay just beside the dormitory, and after some descent and ascent, we reached a helipad that appeared as if a sharp knife had sliced the mountaintop flat. It served as an excellent viewpoint. At a distance, we could spot a white cross which, we were told, marks the boundary of Manipur. Travellers were not allowed to step onto the Manipur side. No precious lens is enough to capture the beauty that the eyes

people chatted, sang, and even played the guitar. The atmosphere was indeed festive. By 10 o'clock, things began to quiet down, and we headed to bed for some rest. Laying on the bed, I could hear the sounds of raindrops falling heavily on the roof. The rain persisted when we awoke early the following morning, an unexpected weather event in the middle of October. We hoped in vain for the rain to subside, but luck was not on our side. It continued unabated, and we had to start our hike back with the grim realisation that we would be completely soaked in the frigid weather. A few groups had already left despite the rain, and we, unprepared for the weather, embarked on our hike without any rain protection. All I could do was pack my belongings in a large plastic bag inside my backpack to protect my camera and clothes. Nevertheless, I ended up completely drenched.

Despite the challenging conditions, we somehow managed to descend to the Jeep pick-up point in about two and a half hours. Although heading directly back to Kohima would have been easier, our hearts could not bear to miss a visit to Kisama village, known for preserving its Naga heritage. Fortunately, a group of travellers from West Bengal shared a jeep with us to Zakahama village, from where they took another jeep to Kohima. Within an hour, we arrived in Kisama village, completely drenched and shivering from the cold. Unfortunately, the rain persisted.

Kisama village is renowned for its famous Hornbill Festival, held annually from December 1st to the 10th. The festival showcases the Naga culture, traditions, rituals, songs, games, folktales, and more, attracting tourists from around the world. Accommodation and transportation reservations for the festival typically begin in early September, and by late November, there's hardly anything left to book. We roamed around the village to explore the traditional houses and everyday items that offered a glimpse into the Naga heritage. Extreme weather forced us to bid adieu to Kisama village early. Luckily, a local resident offered us a ride back to Kohima.

From Kohima, we took a taxi to Dimapur, a transport hub near the Assam border, and then a train to Guwahati. As planned, we caught a flight to Agartala from Guwahati, which, despite being more expensive, saved us a significant amount of time and energy.

And so, our exploration of Nagaland came to an end, filled with unforgettable experiences and dream-like memories.



to the valley, and we shared a jeep to reach the starting point. While this shared ride cost us INR 200 each. Had we not been fortunate, we might have had to cough up a hefty INR 1500 for a private ride. The journey through the rocky hilly path was quite an ordeal. Our hike began right where the jeep dropped us off. Soon, we found ourselves ascending rocky staircases, which proved challenging, especially for me as I had been on a hiking hiatus. However, my body quickly adapted, and we left others behind. After an hour's climb, we reached a magnificent viewpoint and decided to take a break. A little later, the Assamese group also arrived. That gave us the opportunity to exchange pleasantries. After resting a while, we

A wooden platform provided an ideal spot for taking photographs with the undulating green hills of Dzukou Valley, which I have only seen in the pictures, as a backdrop. However, it was constantly occupied by awe-struck visitors. How can you blame them? A small reception area, which doubled as a shop selling snacks and noodles, was also present. Visitors could rent tents, pillows, blankets, and mattresses for the night. We opted to rent a mattress and a blanket from a helpful young man at the shop. Our air pillows saved us a few rupees, though. In contrast to us, our Assamese trekking companions had lugged their own tents to the valley. We secured our accommodation quickly as numerous travellers from various states of India began to arrive. While we had to pre-book dinner, we finished our lunch in a simple but effective way -- instant noodles we had brought along.

see. Chatting, and laughter by other travellers added vibrancy to the place. Some even set up a barbecue beside a stream. After some time, we came back to the campsite area accompanied by our Assamese friends. I had contemplated staying a little more at the helipad, but the rain had other plans. In the mountains, night falls early, and by 6 o'clock, enveloping the surroundings in darkness. Dinner had been prepared, a simple affair of rice, dal, and potato fry, priced at INR 250, a reasonable sum given the challenges of bringing supply to such a remote location. Some groups had brought their own stoves and cooked their meals. Unfortunately, the chilly and windy weather discouraged us from staying outside for too long. A few groups braved the elements, and some even attempted to launch lanterns into the sky. After having a hot coffee, we retreated to our shared room, where

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PHOTO: FARID FARABI



Kisama village

However, the popular and easier route to this majestic valley is from the Nagaland side. At the break of dawn, we bid farewell to our cosy hotel, but the holiday rush (it was the Holi festival time in India) made it harder to find a shared jeep. Reluctantly, we had to reserve a vehicle to reach Viswema with INR 800. The 110-km journey proved to be far from pleasant as the road was in a pretty sorry state. The driver told us that the road goes to Imphal, the capital of Manipur. Two distinct trekking routes lead to Dzukou Valley. One is a tougher and steeper, yet shorter trail which starts from Zakahama village. This route is commonly used by the



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