

# Chapter 15

## Exploring Lepcha Fairs, Festivals, and Events for Enriching Travel Experiences

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter talks in depth about the Lepcha people's festivals, events, and traditional background in the Eastern Himalayas. The Lepchas, who were among the first people to settle in the area, are known for their ecological wisdom, spirituality, and cultural identity, which they exhibit via vivid rituals that honor the elements of Mother Earth. Chyu Rum Faat, Pang Lhabsol, and Tendong Lho Rum Faat are examples of festivals that have changed from animistic rituals to important parts of society. Travelers introduced native practices to the region, while foreign practices such as Tibetan Buddhism, British colonialism, and modern state governance created a fascinating combination. Modern festivals support the assertion of Lepcha heritage and provide a one-of-a-kind opportunity for cultural tourists to learn about Lepcha traditions and mythology. Lepcha festivals keep their traditional identity while changing with the times in terms of history and politics. The chapter also investigates the manner in which visitors perceive these events, as well as their engagement and enjoyment.*

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## INTRODUCTION

“Earlier the Lepcha used to have such magical powers, now they are weak and **vanishing**”---**Jenny Bentley (University of Zürich)**

Fairs and festivals are not only occasions for celebration, but they also serve as a means for the Lepcha community to demonstrate its spiritual, culturally aware, and environmentally conscious nature. The Lepchas are the earliest inhabitants of the Eastern Himalayas, and they refer to it as *Rong* (Verma, 2013). Overtime, the Lepcha community developed fairs and festivals as their cultural practice and heritage underpinned by their philosophical orientation of their spirituality and the environment they live in, including, rivers, mountains and forests (Verma, 2013). This culture exhibits a high ecological awareness and a symbiotic relationship with their environment. Festivals speak of resilience and flexibility as they have absorbed outside cultural influences from Tibetan Buddhism, British colonialism, and modern state governance without losing their identity.

Basnet et al., (2017) highlighted that lepcha festivals like *Chyu Rum Faat* (Worship of the Peak) and *Pang Lhabsol* (Worship of Mount Kanchenjunga) originated as propitiatory rituals to nature spirits but later transformed into major forms of appeal to those powers for the well-being, prosperity, and security of the community from Social Calamities. Example are Loss of Traditional Lands and Resources, Cultural Erosion due to Modernization, Natural Disasters, Social Disintegration due to Political Conflicts. The socio-political landscape of the region, particularly with British colonialism and the merger of Sikkim with India, further drew the shape of these festivals. While some of the practices declined under the influence of colonialism and modernity, there has been a resurgence of interest in preserving and promoting indigenous culture over the last few decades. Celebrated in honour of Mount Tendong for its mythical role in saving the Lepchas from a great flood (Vandenhelsken, 2011).

Vandenhelsken (2011) stated that to tourists, these festivals represent opportunities to engage with an ancient culture that remains dynamically relevant in a modern context. The tourists get an opportunity to experience ways in which the Lepcha community depicts and exchange their indigenous knowledge and beliefs through rituals, traditional dances, communal feasts, storytelling sessions, guide nature, walks, and many more (Das, 2024). The chapter focusses on the Lepcha fairs, festivals, and events that have travel experiences attached to them. The chapter explores the Lepcha’s fairs and festivals are double-edged-sword. On one hand, are primarily used to live in the world not to conquer it. They give them a sense identity and a sense of belonging. Understanding the cultural and ecological underpinnings of the festivals emphasizes their importance not only for the Lepcha community but also for fostering broader cultural awareness and respect among the visitors (Basnet et al., 2017).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To provide a detailed description of Lepcha festivals.
- To explore the tourist experience of Lepcha festivals.
- To identify key elements for enhancing festival experiences.

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