

## Developing Cultural Tourism Through Festivals: The Case Study of the Pangsau Pass International Festival

**Polkam Mossang**

*Assistant Professor (Economics), Rang-Frah Government College, Changlang, District Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh*

**Abstract:** Festivals have been generating a significant amount of arts travel, a form of cultural tourism for decades while attracting thousands of global tourists. The Pangsau Pass festival was started in 2009 with a purpose to promote trade and culture through Pangsau pass between India and Myanmar. However, neither the festival program of performances nor its organization and marketing were compatible with the way tourism market works. Basic requirement such as online Restricted Area Pass and other tourism services and product have never been satisfactorily integrated in the festival planning. Some specific guidelines are proposed in the paper aimed at marketing the festival and designing a program in a professional manner, that is attractive to the tourists from within and outside the country.

**Keywords:** cultural tourism, festival, tourists, Pangsau, marketing.

### INTRODUCTION

**Pangsau Pass** is located at the distance of 12 km from Nampong, an administrative circle in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It lies on the crest of the Patkai Hills on the India–Myanmar border. The pass offers one of the easiest routes into Burma from the Assam plains. It is named after the closest Burmese village, Pangsau that lies 2 km beyond the pass to the east.

During the 13th century, the Ahoms travelled through this route and reached Assam, establishing the Ahom kingdom.

The British in the late 19th century looked at the pass as a possible route from India to Myitkyina in north Burma through the Hukawng Valley, all of which were part of the British Empire at the time. In the 19th century, British railway builders had surveyed the Pangsau Pass, which is 1,136 metres (3,727 feet) high on the India-Burma border, on the Patkai crest, above Nampong, Arunachal Pradesh and Ledo in Tinsukia district, Assam. They concluded that a track could be pushed through to Burma and down

the Hukawng Valley. Although the proposal was dropped, the British prospected the Patkai Range for a road from Assam into northern Burma. British engineers had surveyed the route to build a road with a distance of 130 kilometers (80 miles).

During World War-II, the pass became famous because of the Stilwell Road (Ledo Road) connecting British India to Nationalist Chinese forces fighting the Japanese forces in China. The pass became the initial obstacle encountered by the United States General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell's forces in their effort to build a land route to supplement 'The Hump' air route (after the other land route, the Burma Road was lost to advancing Japanese forces). Slim, William (1956), *"Chapter IX: The Foundations", Defeat into Victory, London: Cassel, pp. 168–195*

The Stilwell Road starts at Ledo, Assam and passes through Tirap Gaon, Lekhapani, Tipong, Jagun, Jairampur (the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary and threshold of Inner Line), and Nampong before switch backing steeply upwards through densely forested hills to the pass, 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) away. The distance from Ledo to Pangsau Pass is 61 km (38 miles). Because of the fierce gradients and the mud, which made getting up to the pass difficult, it was nicknamed "Hell Pass" during the war.

The Indian government, under its 'Look East Policy' has initiated steps for trade relation between Myanmar and India through this pass and since then a biweekly market is held at pangsau village situated at the border of Myanmar. During the time, the pass opens for trade to people from India and Myanmar.

The Pangsau Pass Winter Festival started in the year 2007, and is a joint venture between India and Myanmar. Since, then an annual three day global village event is organized during the 3rd week of January every year in Nampong, Arunachal Pradesh to celebrate and boost the Indo-Myanmar trade relation. The event showcases diverse cultures of Northeast India and Myanmar such as folk songs, folk dances, arts, crafts, ethnic foods, and traditional sports.

In absence of the availability of data and written document about the festival, most of the information are collected through observation and interview from the tourists. Secondary data is collected from the office record of the local administration, who helped to bring this piece of work into fruition. The present study aims at the development of tourism in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh through Pangsau Pass international festival.

## DEFINING CULTURAL TOURISM

There is no widely accepted definition of the term cultural tourism. There are numerous approaches, each emphasizing a different aspect of cultural tourism. Some of the definition dealing with the subject views all tourists visiting cultural attraction as cultural tourists, without taking into consideration their purpose of travel or visit. Some of the definitions of cultural tourism are;

*"Cultural tourism encompasses all cultural activities undertaken by the visitors and the supply of product for cultural visitors during their visit. The cultural activity which may consist of attending artistic or other events as a spectator or non-professional participant, visiting museums, exhibitions etc. can be combined with other activities; nevertheless, the visit can be considered as a part of cultural tourism." cultural activities may be undertaken with any main purpose of the visit, since any purpose of travel away from the usual environment can generate cultural tourism"*

(Eurostat and European Commission 1998:36)

*“(in the narrower sense, cultural tourism includes): movement of person for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visit to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or arts and pilgrimages”*

(World Tourism Organisation 1985)

Based on the above definition we may conclude that culture is the main purpose of travel in case of the cultural tourism.

## **TOURIST ATTRACTION**

There are number of historical places and memorials in and around the border town of Nampong, most of which are the ruins and remains of the second world war.

### **Pangsau Pass Border**

Pangsau Pass, also called the ‘Hell Gate’ for its hazardous terrain and perched 3,727 feet above sea level on the historic Stilwell road of the Patkai mountain range, is the last post along the border with Myanmar in the Arunachal Pradesh sector and had played a prominent role in the Allied campaign against Japan in Burma (now Myanmar). The area occupies an important place in the annals of world history as the Patkai range was one of the most difficult terrains in the world where road construction was done by Allied forces, led by General Joseph W Stilwell while fighting the Japanese.

### **Stilwell Road**

The historic Stilwell road, named after American General Joseph Warren Stilwell, originally called the Ledo road, a 1726 km long was constructed by the allied force lead by America during the World War-II. It started from Ledo in Assam, India to Burma which connect to Kunming in China. The road passes through Lekhapani, Jagun, Jairampur, Nampong and Pangsau Pass on India-Myanmar border. The construction of road was started in 1942 and completed in 1945. The first supplies to the beleaguered Chinese Army fending off the massive onslaught of Japanese troops travelled this route in 1945, according to the records. The historical Stilwell road fell into disuse after the war. The reconstruction of the road for international trade remains. Today, the road is just a “heavily rutted muddy track” through the jungle (BBC). The historic Stilwell road has become a marvel of the past, its ruins are just a reminiscence of the sacrifices the soldiers of the Allied forces made during its construction.

### **Lake of No Return**

Lake of no return is the body of water in Myanmar near Pangsau village. The lake is 1.4 km in length and 0.8 km in width. Beneath the shimmering water of the ‘Lake of no Return’ lies the debris of several aircraft used by the Allied forces who perhaps attempted to land in a nearby helipad, but crashed into the lake and its surrounding swamps.

### **World War II Cemetery**

Another war relic is a cemetery at Jairampur (Arunachal Pradesh) on the Stilwell road with about 1000 graves of Allied soldiers, believed to be of Chinese, Indian, Kachins, British and American soldiers who died in the Second World War. It is located at Jairampur-Nampong road under Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is located at a distance of 39km from Ledo and 24 km before reaching Pangsau Pass.

## HAMILTON BRIDGE

Hamilton Bridge, the RCC steel bridge measuring about twenty-five meter was constructed during the World War-II popularly known as Hamilton Bridge. The bridge stretches on the Stilwell Road between Jairampur-Nampong road in Changlang district which connects India and Myanmar.

## PANGSAU PASS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

In the backdrop of India's 'Look East Policy' and the expectation of re-opening of border trade, in 2007, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh ideated the concept of the Pangsau Pass Festival to promote tourism and boost the economy of the region. It was a simple idea to resurrect the ebbed period of the bucolic tribes, which was lost somewhere in search of contemporary comforts. With time, the petite perception now offers international exposure to not one tribe but most of the tribes of Arunachal and tribes residing in neighboring nation, Myanmar. That's how the Pangsau Pass International Festival came into existence.

Pangsau Pass International Festival is organized biennially at Nampong, a small town with Sub Divisional Office Administrative circle of Changlang district situated in the southeastern part of Arunachal Pradesh, North East India. A small hilly town along the Indo-Myanmar border and Namchik basin, it is covered with evergreen tropical rain forest. This mountainous terrain is a pleasant surprise and amusing spectacle for the tourists. The modern civilization has made life too hectic to look back and retain the quintessence of happiness. But down here life is so laidback that everyone has time to reciprocate the smiles or answer the mundane queries. The contagious smiles cheer the heart and rejuvenate the fatigued spirit. The cumulus clouds courts with the blue rich mountain and osculate the peaks, the fog blur the visions of the quaint hillside village. The scenic beauty of this place is alluring and sublime, an ideal getaway from the hustle and bustle of the city. Earlier, it was a remote and inaccessible area, where the Allied forces fend off the Japanese Army during World War II. With the revival of Stilwell road to usher trade and culture between Indo- Myanmar, it has become a hub of tourists' delight due to Pangsau Pass International Festival.

It was during the 18th century, the Tangsas migrated from erstwhile Burma to India. In Myanmar they are called as Tangshang. The Tangsas share the same historical and cultural background with their Myanmar counterpart, the Tangshang and some other ethnic tribes of Myanmar. The Pangsau Pass International Festival not only brings the two nations together but it is also a confluence of culture and history. The notorious pangsau pass, though remains as one of the central attention of the festival. During the Pangsau pass International festival, it turns into a global village with exuberating ethnic cultural display.

In the year 2009, the Department of Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh took over the responsibility to organize Pangsau Pass International Festival. Since then, the festival is organized biennially from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> January. During the festival they exhibit their traditional art and culture like folk songs, folkdances, ethnic food, war dance etc. Huts are set up in the border town of Nampong and at Pangsau village at the border to avail food and crafts. Tangsa food is generally considered highly hygienic and organic. To facilitate the tourists for accommodation during their visit, the local people set up home stay with the cooperation of the organizing committee. Further, people from both side of the border participate and compete in the 'fashion show' with a purpose to propagate brotherhood and cultural tolerance. Recently, there's been an inclusion of events such as Pangsau Pass expedition, sightseeing, eco-trekking, traditional sports, boating on the Rima & Namchik river, Burmese culture, as

well as visits to the World War-II Cemetery, the Border bazaar, The Lake of No Return & The Hell Gate etc.

During the Pangsau pass International festival in the year 2020, the total estimated number of tourists was 2864 including 238 Myanmar nationals.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR ATTRACTING TOURISTS TO THE PANGSAU PASS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL**

1. Arunachal Pradesh falls under India's restricted area. So, the tourist especially foreigners have to obtain a Restricted Area Permit (RAP) and Indian nationals from other states also need an authorization in the form of Inner Line Permit (ILP) to visit Pangsau pass International Festival. The organizers should arrange instant ILP during festival to all tourists made available at the entry point at Jairampur Police Check Gate. Further, to minimize the workload of officials and to save time for the tourists, the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) for foreigner's and Inner line Permit (ILP) for the citizens of other state should be issued online prior to advancement of the festival.
2. Timely Planning and announcement of the festival programme is needed to include tour operators, brochures, publicity by the press etc. It is difficult to market the festival effectively when the programme is announced within a short period of time.
3. The Home stays set up by the local people are not sufficient enough to meet the requirements of the tourists. So, there is a need for development of Hotel and Restaurant for fooding and lodging of the visitors.
4. Tour operators and travel agencies need to be functional for the tourists to book tickets in advance. This gives them sufficient time to include the tour package.

### **CONCLUSION**

It must be acknowledged that Pangsau Pass International festival has a significant role in elevating the economy and culture of the tribal people along the Pangsau pass in India and Myanmar. The festival also significantly boosted tourism in the district and the state. In order to achieve greater heights, the tourism department, organizers of the festival and the local business community need to work in cohesive manner to make the festival accessible and convenient to all the tourists. Travel agencies have to be established in the area with a purpose to provide tour packages to national and foreign visitors in and around the historic pass. The festival is a means to attract tourists in the international art travel market. The remote location of the festival destination also makes it a great disadvantage in attracting the tourists, as there is lack of decent transportation like air and railway services.

### **REFERANCE**

1. Centre of South Asian Studies - Mackrell Collection - Film 12 Archived 2012-07-12 at archive.today
2. *Gazetteer of north-east India*, Govt. of India
3. Donovan Webster, *The Burma Road*
4. Pangsau Pass Winter Festival: Going beyond the Frontier, Northeast Now, 7 December 2018.
5. "To Hell and Back: The greatest manhunt of WW-II" (2008)

6. "A profile of Changlang District; The place of interest" NIC 2003.
7. Koutoulus Dr. Dimitris,' Developing culture tourism through festivals: A case study of Anthens Festivals
8. "Amazing Arunachal: Transcending Boundaries"