

Showcase Portfolio

Holger Hoffmann: *Naga Villages in Burma*



Typical village of the Lainong tribe winding up the slope in the Burmese Naga Hills.

I first visited the Naga people in 2007 on the India side. Years later, I saw on Google Earth that there are numerous intact villages on the Burmese side of the Naga Hills, which can compare in their originality with the most beautiful in India. They are mostly located on a ridge of the 4,500 to 5,500 feet high hills and consist of 100 to 250 longhouses covered with palm leaves. It took several years of intense effort before we received permission from the Burmese government to visit these villages. Thus, we are often the first Western visitors and are given a correspondingly warm welcome.

The only way to reach the Naga villages of the Layong and Konyak people in Burma is by motorcycle. Often the wooden supporting logs of the house entrances are decorated with carved animals such as stylized tigers and hornbills, sometimes skulls or abstract symbols.

A roof is re-covered every five years with dried palm leaves in several layers. Inside, hung like hunting trophies, are the skulls of the animals eaten by the families, especially mithun (a semi-domesticated species of buffalo), game of all kinds, but also corn-on-the-cob for drying. Racks full of baskets and other kitchen utensils, blackened by the smoke, hang above the fireplaces. Most of the elder villagers still have their faces decorated with the typical facial tattoos.

Shortly after sunrise, women and men, often together with the smaller children, leave for their fields. On the burn-cleared steep slopes, rice, corn, millet, taro, cassava, various types of beans, pumpkin and leafy vegetables are cultivated. Meat or fruits rarely complement the daily menu. Only shortly before sunset do the workers return to the villages, the collected firewood and crops loaded in large woven baskets.

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Villages in the Burmese Naga Hills are only accessible by foot or by moto bike.



First thing in the morning the fire is lit in the longhouses, which causes the clouds of smoke over the village.



The day is still young and fog rises from the valley.



Fetching firewood and water is the task of women.



New fields are created by slash and burn.



Young women bring palm leaves to the village to cover the roofs of the longhouses.



In the villages of the Konyak tribe the fronts of the houses are decorated with skulls of the Mithun cattle and the killed game.



Growing opium for personal use is legal.



It is dark in the longhouses since they have no windows.



At the fireplace in the longhouse.

A thunderstorm moves in over the Naga Hills.





Preparing the palm leaves for covering the roof.

Holger Hoffmann sees himself as a travel photographer. So far, he has visited more than 60 countries outside Europe. The longer he travels, the more he is fascinated by the customs and the daily life of indigenous peoples who have preserved their traditional culture. In his photo essays he tries to capture that. He has visited the Naga people three times.