



Hills on a Plate Festival Inauguration

A Culinary Extravaganza Unfolds in Meghalaya

Shillong, March 22: The Hills on a Plate Festival, an ode to Meghalaya's rich culinary heritage and cultural mosaic, kicked off its inaugural ceremony with resounding success and fervent enthusiasm. Culinary connoisseurs, cultural enthusiasts, and local community members converged to immerse themselves in a day replete with enlightening speeches, mesmerizing performances, and a delectable array of gastronomic delights.

Attendees in attendance include Chief Secretary, Shri Donald P Wahlang, IAS; Director of Tourism, Shri Cyril Darlong Diengdoh, IAS; Festival Curator Smt. Gayatri Desai; Robert Lyngdoh, CAO Meghalayan Age Limited; Indian Food Microbiologist Professor Jyoti Prakash Tamang; Founder of NESFAS, Shri Phrang Roy; Star Chef Jason White, among others.

Hon'ble Chief Secretary, Shri Donald P Wahlang, IAS, delivered the keynote address of the inaugural ceremony and highlighted that *the inauguration of the Hills on the Plate food Festival, emphasizes the celebration of Meghalaya's sumptuous and diverse local cuisine. He described the event as a culinary journey, showcasing the region's organic farming techniques and slow food tradition. Highlighting the vibrant flavours of Meghalaya and the northeast, he expressed the festival's aim to bring authentic local flavours to the forefront, encouraging appreciation for traditional farming and cooking methods.*

In his remarks, he also emphasized on the importance of organic cuisine for both health and environmental reasons. Expressing his optimism for the festival's future, he noted the potential for Meghalaya to become a renowned food destination akin to Goa.

The event was commenced with a heartfelt welcome address by **Director of Tourism, Shri Cyril Darlong Diengdoh, IAS**, setting the vision for an unforgettable celebration. *He highlighted that the Hills on a Plate food fiesta is a continuation of the effort to take Meghalaya tourism forward in terms of creating these value-added products that can become the pull for tourists to come to the state of Meghalaya.*



He remarked, "I'm sure that with this type of initiative, we can build and brand the culinary experiences of Meghalaya Tourism. And I wish that this two-day festival will really throw up many ideas and take Meghalaya tourism one notch forward, with this Hills on a Plate being a unique thing that we can put forward to the world."

Festival Curator Smt Gayatri Desai illuminated the audience with insights into the festival's significance and its overarching goals of cultural preservation and culinary exploration.

The highlight of the ceremony was the captivating discourse by **Professor Jyoti Prakash Tamang**, whose profound knowledge and expertise shed light on the culinary traditions and practices unique to the region. He mentioned, *"Examining global food cultures, we see regional variations in staple foods and fermentation practices. For instance, while Eastern cultures favour rice and fermented soybeans, Western diets revolve around wheat and dairy products". He added, "In conclusion, fermented foods embody the wisdom of our ancestors, providing not only nourishment but also promoting health and well-being. Let us cherish and preserve these culinary treasures for future generations."*

Star Chef Jason White shared his inspirations and aspirations, emphasizing the festival's role as a platform to highlight the region's culinary treasures to the world. *He said, "I wanted to completely become vulnerable in the industry of fermentation, and I wanted to just give myself to the universe and to nature once again. And the way that I felt that I could do that would be through community initiatives and community technology spotting back from traditions and ancient times. When I started this journey, I knew that I was going to travel the world, but I had no idea what I was going to see. All the things that I've ever wanted to experience in food technology, I experienced along the way in the two and a half weeks that I've been here in Meghalaya. What a precious state and what a rich cultural heritage that you can still see and touch and feel and taste. It's been a dream. It's been a magical journey."*

Reflecting on his interactions, he stated, "Whenever I asked the people at IHM about fermentation, they said that they consider it to be magic. And I would agree that fermentation is magical. It's the fingerprint of the ancient way of using biotechnology. That fingerprint is so strong and powerful that no matter how far we advance as a people, it's still relevant today."



When I was welcomed into the different communities and villages here in Meghalaya, like every step of the way, my heart just grew and became tender”

Amidst the festivities, attendees indulged in a culinary journey, fostering bonds and camaraderie amidst the diverse gathering. The afternoon session unfolded with captivating performances, highlighting the rich folklores of *Tungrymbai*, *Tungtap*, and *Bitchi*, providing a glimpse into the cultural richness of Meghalaya.

A dynamic Q&A session with Jason White and Professor Tamang allowed attendees to delve deeper into the nuances of Meghalaya's culinary heritage, enriching their understanding of the region's cultural fabric. Jason White further engaged participants with an interactive workshop, imparting practical insights and skills essential for culinary exploration and appreciation.

The culmination of the day was marked by a vibrant celebration of music, where attendees revelled in the melodic rhythms echoing the spirit of Meghalaya's cultural diversity.