The Sacred Forest of Meghalaya
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Known as 'Nature's Own Museum', this forest is one of the oldest and most famous sacred groves of Meghalaya, harbouring a diversity of flowering and medicinal plants, trees, mushrooms, birds and insects. The forest is located in the village of Mawphlang – meaning 'moss-covered stone' in Khasi – which is amongst the numerous settlements named after monoliths. Spanning a land area of 193 acres, the forest is protected by members of the Lyngdoh clan. It is believed to be the abode of the Khasi deity, Labasa, who is said to protect the clan and the village from all harm. As goes the local saying: "There cannot be a kingdom without a sacred forest, and no sacred forest without a kingdom."

Sacred Spaces

A stone structure in Mawphlang sacred grove

On arrival, visitors are left awestruck by the scenic beauty of the area: beautiful green meadows stretching out far and wide, with the woods tucked away in a corner. The forest itself is divided into three sections, of which only the first and the second section can be visited. Guides are compulsory; however, you can sign up for a 20- to 30-minute half trek or a 40- to 60-minute full trek.

Things to See and Do

At the entrance to the Mawphlang Sacred Forest is the first group of monoliths: three standing stones and one seated stone. This is where village elders seek permission from the deity to carry out the sacrificial ritual inside the forest. It was believed that if a leopard appeared, it was an auspicious sign and the ritual could be conducted as planned. However, if a snake appeared, it was considered inauspicious and the ritual would be abandoned. The entrance to the forest resembles a 'green tunnel', all naturally formed by the branches of the trees. Inside the forest, the only audible sounds are the melodious calls of songbirds, the hum of crickets, the buzz of bees and dragonflies and occasionally the gurgling of forest streams.

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