



# Shillong: the Rock Capital of India

*...where music rules the roost*

**CONNECT** What is your favourite kind of music?

**REFLECT** Name the hill stations you have visited and those you wish to visit. Write them down in two different columns.

**IMAGINE** You want to dedicate a song to your friend. What song would you choose? Sing the song in the class.

## BEFORE YOU READ



Ranaditya Baruah (b. 1988) is an Indian journalist and freelance writer. He was born in Dibrugarh in Assam. He completed his post-graduate studies in journalism at Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. He currently works at *Indian Express* and divides his time between reading, playing guitar, flute and racquet sports.

**Shillong: the Rock Capital of India** is an essay on the capital of the Indian state, Meghalaya. In 2009, Ranaditya attended the Bob Dylan's birthday concert organised annually in Shillong, an event he mentions in his inspiring essay.



**READ**

Every town and city has an inherent identity and usually this identity is closely associated with the music that **resonates** the most with its denizens. While Kolkata has Rabindra Sangeet and Chennai has its share of Carnatic music, Shillong has rock and roll. Perhaps that's why the Scotland of the East is more popular today as the rock capital of India.

Perched at an elevation of about 1500 metres above the sea level, this tiny hill station is the capital of the beautiful state of Meghalaya, which means the abode of clouds. While Shillong's love affair with music is a long one, it received world wide attention for entering the Guinness Book of World Records with the largest guitar **ensemble** in 2007. A

**resonates:** (here) has an impact or influence

**ensemble:** a small group of musicians who perform together





total of 1,730 local guitarists gathered and played to the tunes of Bob Dylan's popular number, Knocking On Heaven's Door. This is the biggest testimony to the love that Shillongites have for music.

Shillong existed as a **nondescript** village inhabited by Khasi tribesmen for most of its history. However, when the British arrived here the beauty of Shillong's landscape reminded many Army officers of the English countryside. As a result, a **sanatorium** was established here in 1829 during the first Anglo-Burmese war.

The name 'Shillong' was adopted due to the village's location below the Shillong Peak. In 1874, it became the capital of **composite** Assam under British rule. In 1972, after the formation of Meghalaya as an independent state, Shillong became its capital.

During 1830s, many Christian missionaries were set up in Meghalaya. The arrival of the Church also brought with it choir and gospel music. That was perhaps the first exposure to Western music for the **indigenous** people. The popularity of the famed *Shillong Chamber Choir* shows how important chamber music is in Shillong even today.

Shillong's thriving music scene is a mecca for anyone looking to indulge in something more than the popular Bollywood music that's **ubiquitous** in most parts of the country. And it's not just rock. Metal, hip-hop or jazz—you name it and you'll find a



### Brainstorm

What song did the local musicians in Shillong play on their guitars?

little cafe in some part of Shillong playing that kind of music.

Local bands from Shillong have achieved success at music festivals all over the world. *Soulmate* has to be the most famous export though. This blues rock band was the first to represent India at the prestigious International Blues Challenge in Memphis in 2007. Since then they have become one of the most respected musical acts in the country.

And then there is Lou Majaw, the grand old man of Shillong's rock and roll scene. Since 1972, Majaw has been organising a birthday concert for the legendary Bob Dylan on May 24 every year. The crowds and participation

**nondescript:** having no special features or qualities

**sanatorium:** a hospital

**composite:** made of different parts

**indigenous:** belonging to a place rather than coming to it from somewhere else

**ubiquitous:** very common





have increased with each passing year. Today it's one of the biggest events in Shillong's busy music calendar. At the age of 71, Majaw continues to perform across the country even today. His child-like approach to music is a living **embodiment** of Shillong's musical spirit.

Shillong's other great passion is football. Despite being a small town cramped for space, it's packed with some of the most **picturesque** football pitches in the country. On any given day, these grounds are packed with people of all age-groups sharing the joy of the beautiful game.

Apart from Khasis, Garos and Jaintias comprise most of the local populace. Despite dissimilar cultures, these three **aboriginal** hill communities have co-existed **harmoniously** since ages. English is the official language of the state while Khasi is the predominantly spoken language in Shillong. English, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese and Nepali are also widely spoken in the city.

The most unique part of the Khasi society is its **matrilineal** nature. Mother is the head of the Khasi family. Mother's surname is passed on to the

children. After wedding the groom has to shift to the bride's house and has to assume the bride's family surname. The youngest daughter of the family inherits all the property and stays in her mother's house.

The Khasis are well known for their hospitality. Any newcomer is always welcomed with a betel nut preparation, locally known as 'Kwai' as a gesture of friendship. The traditional attire of a Khasi woman is Jainsem—two pieces of cloth pinned at the shoulder and covered with a shawl known as Tapmohkhlieh. In ancient times the indigenous Khasi men used to wear dhoti and turban. However, due to the increasing western influence locals usually dress themselves in shirts and trousers these days.

- embodiment:** a person or thing that represents an idea or a quality
- picturesque:** pretty
- aboriginal:** relating to the original people of a place
- harmoniously:** in a way that is friendly and peaceful
- matrilineal:** used to describe the relationship between mother and her children that continues in a family with each generation



### Brainstorm

Name the predominantly spoken language in Shillong.





The Khasis sing songs praising nature and use different types of musical instruments like 'duitaras', drums and other traditional instruments. Weaving of cane and cloth is an ancient craft and is practised by the natives along with the extraction of iron ore to make knives, utensils and warfare weapons. Important festivals like Christmas, Nongkrem Dance and Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem are celebrated in Shillong with

great enthusiasm. The staple food of the people of Shillong is rice which is usually accompanied with fish and meat.

It's not just the music and cultural diversity that makes Shillong a must-visit. From the pristine Umiam lake to Mawlynnong, Asia's cleanest village, to Mawsynram, the wettest place on earth, Shillong is surrounded by some of the most beautiful sights you'll ever see.

## CONSOLIDATE

### A1. Answer these questions.

1. Where is Shillong? Describe its geographical location.
2. What made Shillong receive world-wide attention?
3. Write a short note on *Soulmate*.
4. What is the other passion that Shillongites have, apart from rock music?
5. What makes Shillong a must-visit place?

### A2. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *Perhaps that's why the Scotland of the East is more popular today as the rock capital of India.*
  - a. What has been called the 'Scotland of the East'?
  - b. Why is the 'Scotland of the East' called the 'rock capital of India'?
  - c. Which other Indian cities, famous for their music, are mentioned by the writer?
2. *The most unique part of the Khasi society is its matrilineal nature.*
  - a. What do you understand by 'matrilineal'?
  - b. How is a wedding in the Khasi society so different?
  - c. What happens to the youngest daughter of the family?

