

# PONG DAM

Dear Reader,

The Sair Festival celebrates the vibrant culture and traditions of the region, featuring colorful processions, traditional music, and dance performances that engage the community. Renowned for its exquisite fish cuisine, Pong Dam offers a culinary delight with fresh catches prepared in authentic local styles. Together, the festival and delectable dishes create a unique and memorable experience for visitors exploring the beauty of Pong Dam.

**-Hemraj Bairwa, IAS**

DC-Kangra & Chairman, Destination Management Committee, Pong Dam, Swadesh Darshan 2.0

## SAIR FESTIVAL: HARVEST FESTIVAL OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Himachal Pradesh is well-known for its abundant history, rich culture, and numerous fairs, festivals, and festivities. These celebrations not only help us stay in touch with our loved ones but also produce jobs for the people of Himachal Pradesh.

One of the most notable festivals is the Sankranti celebrated nearly every month - known as "Sajji or Saja," and marked with unique names and festivities.

In Himachal Pradesh, celebrations of several festivals are held every Sankranti, signifying the harmony between the culture in the hills and the old Indian civilization, or the indigenous calendar. The Sair or Sayar festival, also known as the Himachal Sayar Festival is held with great fanfare in Kangra, Mandi, Hamirpur, Bilaspur, Solan, and a few other districts on September 16, which is also known as the Sankranti of Ashwin month.



There is a different tradition of celebrating Sair in Kangra, Hamirpur and Bilaspur. Preparations for the Sair Puja are started a day in advance and the Puja Thali is decorated at night itself. A portion of the crops of every season is decorated in the Puja Thali.

For this, wheat is spread on a plate and seasonal fruits like corn, paddy ears, cucumber, guava, galgal, etc. are kept on it. It is considered auspicious to keep the leaves of every fruit along with it in the puja.

Six to seven dishes are prepared in a day which definitely include Patrode, Pakoda and Bhatura. Apart from this, dishes like Kheer, Gulgule, Chiladu, etc. are also prepared. These dishes are decorated in a plate and distributed among the neighbours and relatives and dishes are also taken from their house. The next day, Galgal is thrown in the paddy fields and prayers are offered for a good harvest next year.



### Significance of Sair Festival

On the solstice of Ashwin month, people celebrate Saira festival, also known as Sair festival. This holiday is observed to mark the end of rainy season and the beginning of winter season. This celebration is an expression of gratitude to God since it is the harvest season and the Kharif crops are in the process of ripening. Harvesting of Kharif crops occurs only after 'Saira'.

On the occasion, people donate some of their harvests and seasonal fruits to "Sairi Mata/Sair Devata." They also remove the Rakhis that individuals wear during the Raksha Bandhan holiday and offer them to Saira Mata or Sair Devata.

In preparation of winter, people store firewood and grains. As winter begins to cool the hills down a host of festivities begin with fasts and festivities that are observed from Diwali through the season. Legend is that the Sair festival was also observed by those who survived the heavy rainy season (people are prone to illnesses and natural disasters during the rainy season), as a matter of joy that they are able to move into winter with good health.



The worship of grains and the buying and selling of oxen are well-known aspects of the Sair festival. Both in rural and urban regions, this agricultural event is observed with tremendous fanfare. Only after the Sair celebration can farmers and cattle breeders prepare for the ripening of crops in the fields and winter fodder after the rainy season.

# FAMOUS FISH CUISINE AT KHATIYAR

Khatiyar and Pong Dam are well-known for their diverse fish cuisines. Kangra has a reputation for being the home of the powerful Golden Mahseer, which is supported with evidence available in diaries of various fishermen who have been captivated by this massive fish. In addition to Mahseer, other species or types of fish that are caught here include God Shingara (Catfish), Malhi, Soal, Bachwa, and more. Although there are several rivers and streams in Himachal Pradesh where one can find Golden Mahseer, River Beas, which is around 40 km long, and Pong Dam Lake, which is spread over 402 sq km, are thought to be the best for catching Mahseer.



# WORLD TOURISM WEEK

**Celebrated from 18th Sept to 27th Sept in Dharamshala Degree College**

World Tourism Week ("Tourzimo Trigarth") has been celebrated in Dharamshala since 2019. This year's event was celebrated at Govt. Degree College, Dharamshala, in collaboration with Himachal Pradesh Tourism and the District Tourism Development Office, Kangra. The festival took place from September 18 to September 27, featuring a variety of competitions and activities aimed at promoting tourism as a viable career path.



The event included the following activities:

- September 18: Clay Modeling, Painting, Photography, and Slogan Making.
- September 19: Poster Making.
- September 21: Rangoli Competition, English Declamation, Bhashan Pratiyogita, Sanskrit Bhashan, Essay Writing, Wealth from Waste, Itinerary Preparation, World Map Competition, Customer Handling, Model Making, and Video Making.



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- September 23: Nukkad Natak, Traditional Food, and a Plantation Drive.
- September 24: Cleanliness Drive and “We the People of India” initiative.
- September 25: Singing Competition, Dance Competition, and Ethnic Ramp.
- September 26: Valedictory Ceremony.
- September 27: "Athi Devo Bhava" at the airport, welcoming international tourists at McLeod Ganj.

Additionally, World Tourism Day was celebrated by the Central University at Dharamshala, further highlighting the region's commitment to promoting tourism.



## SWADESH DARSHAN 2.0 UPDATES

A public consultation on Iteration -2 was held on September 11, 2024, at the Panchayat Office in Khatiyar, where local residents expressed strong support for the development plan. Key discussions included promoting sustainable tourism, enhancing local business opportunities, and addressing concerns about drug abuse. The Deputy Director (Tourism) proposed measures such as banning plastic, improving waste management, and developing value-added fishing products to benefit the community.

