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The Ineh Festival of Asaba: *A Vibrant Celebration of Igbo Heritage and Unity*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Asagba of Asaba, Prof. Epiphany
Azinge (OON).**

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Asaba Ineh Festival 2024 Best Costumier.

Imagine the streets of Asaba, Delta State's lively capital, bursting with energy as September draws to a close. The air rings with the beat of drums, the sharp clang of ogene gongs, and the laughter of a community coming together. This is the Ineh Festival, a five-day celebration that lights up this Igbo town every year. Picture warriors reenacting ancient battles, dancers swaying in colorful costumes, and families sharing plates of yam and stew under the warm sun. Held in late September or early October, this festival is a joyful tribute to Asaba's past—a mix of war, peace, and the unbreakable spirit of its people.

01

A Tradition Born in History

The Ineh Festival—sometimes spelled “Inne”—is a cornerstone of Anioma culture, the Igbo subgroup that calls Delta State home. Its roots stretch back centuries, tied to the days when Asaba was a small settlement on the Niger River's western bank. Back then, it was a rite to honor warriors and celebrate peace after battles, a way to remember the strength that built this community. Oral tales say it grew from the need to unite Asaba's five quarters—Umuezei, Ugbomanta, Umuagu, Umuaji, and Umuonaje, after years of struggle, including the dark days of the slave trade and the 1967 Asaba massacre during the Nigerian Civil War.

Today, it's a cultural explosion. The festival's name, “Ineh,” hints at “looking back” or “reflection” in Igbo, a nod to remembering the past while embracing the present. Under the watch of the Asagba of Asaba—currently Obi Prof. Epiphany Azinge (OON), it's become a yearly highlight, drawing locals, the diaspora, and curious visitors to the city's heart. It's a time when Asaba says, “This is who we are,” with pride and a big smile.

02

Getting Ready for the Fun

Preparations kick off weeks ahead. In each of Asaba's five quarters, families sweep their compounds and stock up on yams, rice, and fish—foods that'll star in the feast. Young men dig out old clothes and paint, crafting wild costumes for the parades. Some dress as warriors, others as spirits, their faces smeared with chalk or charcoal for that extra flair. Women tie their best wrappers and string beads, ready to dance and sing.

The palace gets busy too. The Asagba's council plans the schedule, while drummers tune their instruments—ekwe, udu, and those sharp ogene gongs that cut through the noise. Kids buzz around, practicing war dance steps they've seen their big brothers do. By the last week of September—say, September 27 to October 1, like in recent years—Asaba's set to roll, every corner alive with excitement.

03

Five Days of Pure Joy

The Ineh Festival unfolds over five days, each one a blast. Day one starts with a bang—drums roll, and out come the war dancers, stomping and leaping in a mock battle that echoes Asaba's warrior past. They march through the streets, from Cable Point to Nnebisi Road, their moves sharp and fierce. The crowd cheers, kids mimicking the steps behind them.

Day two brings the masquerades—tall figures in raffia and feathers, their masks grinning wide. They're spirits of the ancestors, here to bless the town, and people toss coins at their feet for luck. Day three's a history lesson, elders and actors reenact old battles, like the

Ekumeku resistance against the British, with swords clashing and voices roaring. It's a thrill that pulls you right into Asaba's story.



An Instagram reel showcasing key moments from the INEH festival in Asaba, focusing on the roles of the Odogwu and Iyase.

Day four is for the women—maiden dances light up the squares, their wrappers swirling as they sing about peace and family. Then, day five wraps it up with a huge feast at the Asagba's palace. The king cuts the first yam, a sacred nod to the harvest, and everyone digs in pounded yam, fish stew, rice, and palm wine flowing free. Music plays late, and tales of Asaba's past fill the night air.

04

A Festival with Soul

The Ineh Festival is more than fun, it's a heartbeat of Igbo culture. Those war dances and masquerades? They're straight out of Anioma

traditions, linking Asaba to its roots across the Niger River. It's a time to ur the past warriors who fought, ancestors who endured and to heal old wounds, like the Civil War scars that still linger. Everyone's welcome—men, women, kids—making it a true community hug.

It's a magnet too. The diaspora floods back from Lagos, London, or the U.S., suitcases packed with love for home. Tourists come for the show, snapping photos and tasting Delta's spicy flavors. Leaders like Governor Ifeanyi Okowa have praised it, seeing its power to unite and boost Asaba's name. It's even tied to the broader Anioma Cultural Festival, showing off Delta's Igbo pride on a bigger stage.

05

Asaba: The River City

Asaba sits on the Niger's western bank, Delta State's capital and a trade hub since the Royal Niger Company days in 1884. With over half a million people, it's a mix of old Igbo quarters and new city vibes, think busy markets and quiet riversides. The Ineh Festival taps into that history, from its founding by Nnebisi to its role in Nigeria's story. It's near Onitsha, linked by the Niger Bridge, and a short hop from Owerri or Warri.



The final events of the Asaba Community INEH Festival, featuring cultural performances and community gatherings.

Visitors love it here, the river views, the food, the festival's raw energy. It's a chance to see Anioma life up close, a slice of Igbo soul in Delta's heart. For Asaba, it's a way to shine, drawing eyes to a city that's both ancient and alive.

06

A Celebration That Stays

When the drums fade and the costumes come off, the Ineh Festival leaves Asaba warm and proud. It's a look back, a step forward, and a big party all at once. In a world that's always moving, this festival stands firm, a five-day love letter to Igbo heritage. Next September, the gongs will ring again, the dancers will march, and Asaba will welcome you with open arms. If you're ever in Delta State, chase the beat, you'll find a celebration that's pure magic.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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