



A Guide to Salavan

Weaving
Waterfalls
War Relics
Ethnic Diversity
Tour Circuits
Maps



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Tad Thevada Waterfall



Provincial Road Distances

Many of the roads stemming from Salavan Town are paved, as the province continues its major road upgrade project. Still, travelers may have to navigate short stretches of dirt or under-construction roadways. Please check with the Tourist Information Center, especially during the rainy season, for road conditions.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------|----------|---------|------|------------|-------|-------------|---------|--|
| Salavan | | | | | | | | |
| 48 | Laongarm | | | | | | | |
| 50 | 132 | Toumlan | | | | | | |
| 50 | 98 | 62 | Vapi | | | | | |
| 80 | 48 | 93 | 31 | Khongxedon | | | | |
| 84 | 132 | 120 | 122 | 153 | Ta-Oy | | | |
| 148 | 196 | 173 | 98 | 79 | 220 | Lakhonpheng | | |
| 160 | 192 | 80 | 182 | 115 | 80 | 280 | Samouay | |

Table of distances between District Administration Centers

Where to Stay

Some 20 guesthouses/bungalows and a few hotels offer accommodation in Salavan Province. Most are small, family-run establishments located in Salavan Town and Tad Lo, and many are quite clean and comfortable. There is also a guesthouse in Toumlan District. In-room amenities often include TVs with global channels, hot-water showers, and western-style toilets. Prices for fan rooms tend to range between LAK 60,000-80,000, while air-con rooms can run between LAK90,000-120,000. Hotel/resorts in Tad Lo charge up to USD50.

Rice milling at Toumlan District



Where to eat

Salavan Province has a few dozen restaurants / entertainment venues, mostly in the municipal center and around Tad Lo, and they tend to offer Lao, Vietnamese and Chinese selections. Menus generally feature pork, chicken, beef, duck, and vegetable dishes, and use ingredients such as limejuice, coriander, chilies, lemon grass, ginger, coconut milk, tamarind, and galangal roots to create complex flavors. *Khao niew* (sticky rice) is usually served with meals and is eaten by hand.

Scores of noodle shops in district centers and some villages on major roadways serve rice-noodle soups and light meals such as *khao poon*, a rice-vermicelli dish served cold with mixed chopped vegetables, meat, and chilies in a coconut-milk sauce. Another easily found Lao staple is *laap*, a plate of minced meat, chicken, or fish served with fresh vegetables and mint leaves. Ban Naxai Village on the way to Laongarm is known for its coconuts, and Ban Napong Village near Khongxedon Town on Lao Route 13 is a popular stop for grilled chicken (*ping kai*). For those seeking something out of the ordinary, try Vapi's "perfume" river snails.

Staying Healthy

Visitors should avoid being bitten by mosquitoes by using good quality insect repellent and wearing appropriate clothing. Seeking medical advice on whether to take malaria prevention medication before visiting is recommended. Drinking bottled beverages or boiled water and eating only well-cooked food should help prevent stomach ailments. All district centers have clinics or hospitals.





Language

The people in Salavan speak Lao and various dialects. Very little English is spoken, though in Tad Lo, some guesthouse staff can communicate in English.

Basic Vocabulary

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Hello / Sabaidee | Zero / Soun |
| Thank you / Kopchai | One / Neung |
| Yes / Chao | Two / Song |
| No / Bor | Three / Sam |
| Good bye / La kone | Four / Si |
| Hotel / Hong ham | Five / Ha |
| Toilet / Hong nam | Six / Hok |
| Hospital / Hong mor | Seven / Jet |
| Bank / Tanakhan | Eight / Baet |
| How much? / Tao dai? | Nine / Kao |
| Village / Ban | Ten / Sip |
| Dollar / Dolla | 20 - Sow |
| | 1,000 - Pan |
| | 2,000 - Song Pan |
| | 10,000 - Sip Pan |
| | 50,000 - Ha Sip Pan |
| | 100,000 - Neung Sane |
| | 500,000 - Ha Sane |
| | 1,000,000 - Neung Lan |
| | 5,000,000 - Ha Lan |

Important Numbers

Tourist Information Center: +856 (0)34 211-528

Email: Salavanh_pto@tourismlaos.org

Salavan Provincial Government Offices: +856 (0)34 211-270

Do's & Don't

Respecting the following customs and principles will help make your visit a positive experience for both you and your Lao hosts. Using your eyes and common sense will help guide you. While in Laos, try and do as the Lao do and you will be rewarded with hospitality and friendliness. Specific trekking guidelines are also provided in this guide's community-based tourism section.

Please show respect, dress neatly while in temples and when taking photos. Ask before taking close-up portraits.



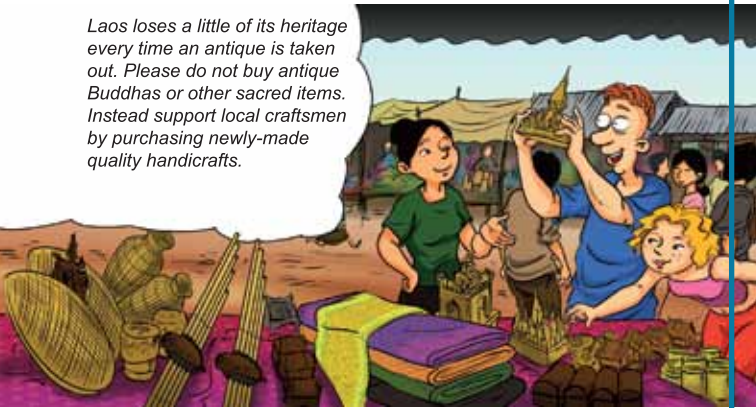
The Lao word for hello is Sabai Dee, usually said with a smile. Touching or showing affection in public will embarrass your hosts.



There are many other sacred items and sites in Laos. Please don't touch or enter these places without permission.



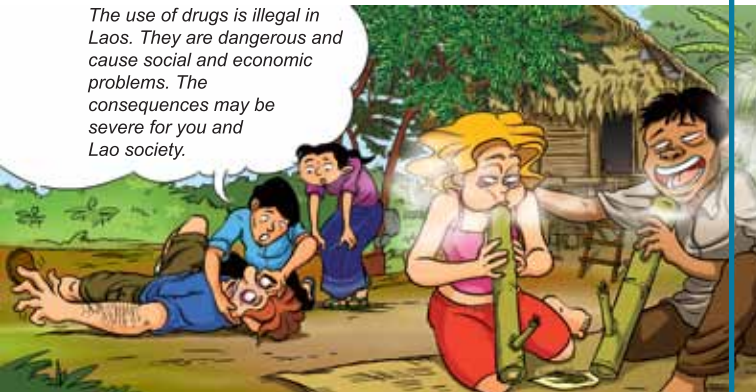
Laos loses a little of its heritage every time an antique is taken out. Please do not buy antique Buddhas or other sacred items. Instead support local craftsmen by purchasing newly-made quality handicrafts.



Support the Lao Economy by buying local food and handicrafts. Do not buy wildlife or wildlife products.



The use of drugs is illegal in Laos. They are dangerous and cause social and economic problems. The consequences may be severe for you and Lao society.



Please help to keep Laos clean and beautiful by not leaving litter. Picking up rubbish sets a good example for Lao youth.



In Laos, your head is 'high' and your feet 'low' – don't gesture with your feet or put your feet on the furniture. Also don't touch someone else's head.



Kissing and hugging in public is impolite – please be discrete.



Salavan Province is home to 14 distinct ethnic groups, many of which have small populations and unique languages and dialects. Their lifestyles, houses, beliefs, rituals, handicrafts, and ways of making a living vary, and a village visit provides excellent insight into cultures few have seen.

🌀 **Alak:** Many of southern Laos' 17,000-plus Alak live in Salavan, having migrated from Vietnam's Central Highlands. Their palm and thatch houses encircle communal/spirit houses on stilts. Several clans – named after animals considered sacred – comprise the Alak's matriarchal society, in which women once tattooed their faces. They hold annual buffalo sacrifices and festivals to honor spirits protecting their villages, and shamans examine chicken livers to determine the cause of bad luck.

🌀 **Katang:** Laos' sixth largest ethnicity, the Katang are spread throughout the country's south. Extended families live in braided-leaf longhouses, reaching 100 meters in length, as newlyweds add rooms for their families. Salavan's Katang mostly live in Toumlan District, and are known for intricate weaving. Though the tradition is fading, Katang once pierced their ears and inserted bamboo tubes.

🌀 **Katou:** A few thousand Katou inhabit Salavan's forests, and live in long rectangular houses. They often share villages with Alak, Ngae, and Ta-Oy. Like the Alak, Katou women once tattooed their faces, and though most families are monogamous, some wealthy men have more than one wife. However they must pay a dowry equal to 15 buffaloes, or live with their wives' families to work off the debt. The Katou sacrifice buffaloes to the spirits, which protect their villages, and employ shamans who are paid with chickens or silver.

Ta-Oy women





Ngae ethnic Hor Kuan ceremonial building at Ban Khiangtadsoung

☸ **Lavene:** The 9th-13th-century Khmer Empire spawned today's Lavene, who mostly live in the Bolaven Plateau. They practice modern agriculture, cultivating rice, maize, peppers, yams, vegetables, cardamom, and cinnamon. The Lavene excel in woodworking, but do not weave. They reside in thatch and wooden/bamboo stilt houses, and each has its own vegetable-and-herb garden. The Lavene practice a mix of Buddhism, ancestor worship, and animism.

☸ **Ngae:** Originally mountain people, the Ngae have migrated to the river valleys in recent years, and share villages with Souay, Lao, Alak, and Ta-Oy ethnic groups. Some are living around the Tad Lo area. Ngae infants cannot leave their houses until after a buffalo sacrifice, and the youngest child must live with his or her parents for life. Many start smoking tobacco as young as eight years of age. Shamans perform sacrifices in the communal/spirit houses and oversee spirit world contact. The Ngae hold a seven-day celebration in April to worship their ancestors.

☸ **Pako:** The Pako dwell in Salavan's mountainous Samouay District near Vietnam, and mostly subsist by slash-and-burn farming. They do not weave, and most only speak their unique language. Many have adapted metal war relics into useful tools through their blacksmithing skills. The Pako reside in ten, stilted-house clusters, and each village has a communal house. Traditional Pako songs express joys, sorrows, and their forefathers' oppressive lives, and they also have poems and proverbs about good and evil, and love. They are animists and construct spirit houses in village outskirts.



🌀 **Phuthai:** The Phuthai are animists and worship 25 distinct spirits. During their annual *Pii Tian* (Spirit of Heaven) festival, they pray and offer sacrifices to the spirits, which they believe live in the heavens. The moment they think the spirits have descended, the normally reserved Phuthai dance and jump for joy.

🌀 **Souay:** The Souay have their own language and were among Salavan's earliest inhabitants. Though never part of the Khmer civilization, they wear Khmer *khamas* (checkered cotton fabric). Once known as skilled blacksmiths, most are now rice farmers, who also raise chickens, pigs and cows as well as gather forest products. The Souay live in bamboo and thatched houses on stilts in villages away from their fields such as those around Phou Tak Khao Mountain. They believe in a mix of animism and Buddhism, and wear strings around their necks, wrists, and waists for protection against evil spirits.

🌀 **Ta-Oy:** The Ta-Oy mostly inhabit the eastern mountainous district sharing the same name, though many are migrating to the Bolaven Plateau. They practice animism and shamanism, and perform sacrificial rituals. One custom entails burying the dead in their best clothes and jewelry, and after several years, exhumed, washed, decorated, and placed in funeral houses outside their former homes.

🌀 **Tong:** Salavan's Tong live in northern Salavan District and Vapi. They are animists, and as one missionary said some 100 years ago, "They acknowledge no god, but gods many, both good and bad, more numerous and varied than those of the ancient Greeks." They blame any unusual occurrence, even if it can be explained, on upsetting evil spirits.

Ta-Oy Village





Katou ethnic textiles at Ban Houay Houn

Local Products

Most of Salavan's inhabitants are subsistence farmers, and rely on non-timber forest products for food and medicinal herbs. However, an increasing number are engaged in agriculture, with rice as the main crop. The Bolaven Plateau's climate and fertile volcanic soil produces coffee, cardomom and a variety of fruits such as rambutan. Bananas, peanuts, soybeans, chilies, cassava, maize, and sweet potatoes are grown in the lowlands. Visitors to the Tad Lo area can view many of these crops, and farmers generally allow visitors to walk through their fields for a closer look.

A growing number of cattle can be seen, and village visits present plenty of roaming pigs and chickens. In the early morning and late afternoon, fishermen take to the rivers with nets. A few larger villages produce potent lao lao rice alcohol, and Khongxedon District has a sizeable factory distilling lao lao, which is considered the country's smoothest.

Village visits provide an inside look at a variety of weaving techniques and looms, many of which can be observed in villages around Toumlan and Laongarm Districts. From Salavan and further south, weavers employ portable back-strap or lap looms, instead of large frame looms, to weave the striped patterns worn by local ethnic groups. You can see the difference watching the Katou in Ban Houay Houn (back-strap loom), where they also incorporate banana fibers, and the Katang in Toumlan (frame loom). Other techniques include mat mee, where threads are first tie-dyed to create complex designs. Bamboo products include baskets and musical instruments.



A Guide to Salavan

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Festivals & Celebrations

◉ **Boun Lapeup Ceremony**

This traditional ceremony for deceased ethnic Katang (Toumlan District) and Ngae (Laongarm District) is organized by the family at a time considered appropriate and economically feasible. During this ritual, villagers play drums and dance around ceremonial structures before sacrificing buffaloes to guide their forefathers' spirits in joining the spirit protecting their house.

◉ **Pii Mai Lao (Lao New Year)**

Celebrated over three days in mid-April, and with plenty of festive water splashing, Salavan's Lao New Year has its own distinct flair. Some families hold *baci* ceremonies and construct large arches from rice plants to show respect to the earth, sky, and land spirits, who they believe assist in bringing a good rice harvest during the coming year. They also politely splash fragrant water on others to wash away bad fortune. Salavan District and the Tad Lo area hold the largest celebrations, with thousands of people from southern Laos and even Thailand coming to make merit. Locals build and decorate small structures, and the faithful pour water on Buddha images at nine temples, which they believe will bring them good luck.

◉ **Boun Ork Phansaa (End of Buddhist Lent)**

Generally taking place in October, this two-day festival celebrates the end of the three-month Buddhist lent. Locals make merit in the morning by gathering at temples and giving alms to the monks in return for blessings. The people later play music and perform traditional dances like "Lamvong Salavan", and in the evening they gather at temples and follow monks in a three-lap parade with candles around the temples.



Boun Suang Heua - longboat competitions

At the parade's conclusion, groups place *lay huapi* (longboats made with bamboo and banana trees) decorated with flowers, colored candles, cakes and other foods in the rivers, while individuals set much smaller but similar *kathong* afloat to wish for a brighter future and cast off bad luck.

🌀 **Boun Suang Heua (Boat Racing Festival)**

Usually coinciding *Boun Ork Phansaa* during October's full moon, several Salavan districts hold their annual longboat competitions among villages at different times. However, most take place on the Xe Don River to make merit to the waterway that supports many locals' lives. Salavan District holds its event over five days in early September, and villages from throughout the province come to compete, with only the winners advancing to the next day. Vapi District's races come several weeks later, and Khongxedon District's competition follows shortly after.

🌀 **The Baci Ceremony**

Lao villagers perform this ritual to welcome visitors or send them off, and during weddings. This sacred ceremony, in which blessings are symbolically tied to one's wrist with strings, is also a reconciliation gesture, and the faithful believe it can help cure many illnesses

For exact festival dates and locations, contact the Salavan Provincial Tourism Department: Tel: +856 (0)34 211-528, Email: Salavanh_pto@tourism Laos.org, or visit Lao National Tourism Administration's websites: www.tourism Laos.org and www.ecotourism Laos.com.





National Protected Areas

Laos has 21 National Protected Areas (NPAs) covering some 15% of the country. Salavan is home to substantial parts of three diverse NPAs: Phou Xieng Thong, Xe Bang Nouan, and Xe Sap.

Phou Xieng Thong NPA

Located between Lao National Highway 13 and the Mekong, the 2,100-km² Phou Xieng Thong NPA features rocky lowlands and flat-topped hills reaching 715 meters at Phou Nangam Mountain along with steep sandstone cliffs, caves, and curious-looking, wind-carved rock formations. Semi-evergreen forest covers most of the NPA, especially in the north.

Phou Xieng Thong's past stretches back 1,000 years when ethnic Katang began moving into the river valley. From 1965-1975, the US operated an airbase on the reserve's southern plateau, and insurgent activity continued until the late 1980s. In 1993, today's NPA was declared a National Reserve Forest.

Researchers have uncovered evidence of notable mammals in Phou Xieng Thong including endangered tigers, Asian elephants, and banteng, along with threatened long-tailed macaques and sunda pangolins, and vulnerable pigtail macaques. Threatened birds including the rufous-winged buzzard, bar-bellied pitta, Swinhoe's minivet, and gray-faced tit babblers have also been spotted, as have vulnerable red-collared woodpeckers.

Access: A few roads and old logging trails from Lao National Route 13 cut into the NPA, and only local Mekong boat traffic stops at its shore. However, permission is needed to enter the NPA, and there are currently no treks available.



Xe Bang Nouan

The 1,260-km² Xe Bang Nouan NPA sits mostly in Salavan's northwest, but overlaps into Savannakhet Province's southwest. Rocky flats, grass and shrub characterize the NPA's west as the Xe Bang Nouan River heads to the Mekong, while gently rolling terrain and small hills mark its northern and southern borders. The river breaks through steep hills in the central area, and to the east, the NPA stretches into a wide valley rimmed by 1,000-meter mountains.

Evergreen and mixed deciduous forests dominate some 65% of the NPA, with other natural forest covering the rest. Most of the lowland evergreens have been logged. Some 65 villages sit within 3 km of the boundary, and use its non-timber forest products especially dammar oil, fish, sticlac, and medicinal plants. Three enclaves of these villages mainly subsist on the sale of dammar oil, livestock and shifting cultivation.

Surveys of the NPA reveal endangered mammals such as douc langurs (a leaf monkey known for its red legs and porcelain face), tigers, and Asian elephants. Other threatened or vulnerable species include rhesus macaques, silvered langurs, southern serows, and East Asian porcupines. Threatened birds include brown hornbills, coral-billed ground cuckoos, rufous-winged buzzards, and white-rumped falcons.

Access: Access is possible on rough all-weather roads to within 1-15 km of the NPA's boundary. Seasonal branch roads provide closer access, and one leads to Ban Nalan Village in the NPA's heart. Permission is needed to enter the NPA, and currently there are no organized treks. Contact the Salavan Tourist Information Center for more information or visit www.ecotourismlaos.com.





Xe Sap

Situated in Salavan Province's east along the mountainous Vietnam border, the 1,498 km² Xe Sap NPA sits south of the road from Ta-Oy to Samouay, and on to the national border crossing at Dane Dalai. Its southern boundary is in Xekong Province, while mountain slopes shape its western and northern periphery.

The NPA's mostly steep terrain with plateaus, rising to about 1,400 meters, form part of the southern Annamite Mountains, and its peaks rise to over 2,000 meters, with Dong Be being the tallest at 2,066 meters.

Ethnic Pako, Ta-Oy, Katang, Katu, and Ngae villages are located inside the NPA and/or around its periphery, as is a section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and its war relics. Many practice Lao Theung culture with strong spiritual ties to the land, and thus the NPA has many funeral and sacred forests. Each ethnic group speaks a different Lao Theung dialect, of which one is known to be in danger of extinction.

Xe Sap NPA's climate is notable for its extensive low pressure region called an Inter-tropical Convergence Zone and the Monsoon Trough, which is caused by the sun heating the land mass during the summer (May – August). Warm southwest winds then carry moisture from the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand to this part of the trough, where the vertical convection triggers large amounts of rainfall.

Access: The main access points are along the Salavan-Ta-Oy-Samouay road, which is mostly unpaved and currently undergoing an upgrade, making it impassable during the rainy season, except for the most ardent motorbike riders. From this road, small access tracks lead to villages on the NPA's northern frontier.

Contact the Salavan Tourist Information Center for more information or visit www.ecotourismlaos.com.

Salavan Tour Circuits

To better explore Salavan Province, base your stay in easy-to reach Salavan Town. From here, you can embark on several simple one-day tour circuits, most of which follow paved and gravel roads, and a few of which require brief treks. The circuits scour Salavan Town's attractions, venture to Toumlan's Katang weaving villages and longhouses, and explore Laongarm's waterfalls, ethnic villages, and magnificent Bolaven Plateau viewpoints.

Self-transportation by bicycle or motorcycle is currently required for most circuits in this pristine province (see "Getting Around").

Salavan Town Biking Tour

A sense of newness envelops visitors stepping into Salavan Town, as it appears construction was completed the day before they arrived, and to some extent this is true. The provincial municipal center was completely leveled in 1971-1972 during the Indochina War, but a carefully designed urban development plan gave it a new life.

However, remnants of its war-torn past can still be seen on a short biking tour, including the source of the carnage at the UXO Lao Office, which houses scores of defused unexploded ordinances (UXOs). Tourists can also inspect the skeletons of two bombed temples and admire a stupa built with small rocks to honor a local national hero. Though many sites can be reached by foot or *tuk-tuk*, having a bicycle opens up all the attractions, and makes for a pleasant day tour.



Salavan Market



:: UXO Lao Office

A 2-meter-tall, 3,000-pound bomb stands as a pillar to Salavan Province's past at the entrance to the UXO Lao's office compound, and presents just a hint of the defused unexploded ordinances (UXOs) on display inside. Two more large bombshells straddle the flagpole in front of the office's front door, but even before stepping inside, there is plenty to see.

Racks of inert bombs, a mortar, cluster bomb (bombie) casings, and an airplane Gatling gun – relics of a bygone military era – line the front walls. Another row of even larger projectiles and other war relics flank the office along its left face, many so dated and bizarre, they hardly seem genuine.

The office is home to some 130 staff including 11 women who play a role in the seemingly unending task of scouring the province's remote rural areas for UXOs. Salavan was the second-most bombed province in Laos after Xieng Khouang, and the painstaking job of finding and dismantling or destroying these live remnants still turns up UXOs in non-tourist areas (see "Salavan's Bomb Busters" below).

A display case along the entry's wall holds a surreal collection of clumsy-looking but deadly land mines, miniature rockets, and an assortment of homemade devices made of jars and cans as well as little origami birds used as fuses. Inside the "Big Bomb Meeting Room", posters show photos of bombies on the ground, how they were deployed, and the actual explosions upon impact. Visit: www.uxolao.gov.la.

Location: The UXO Lao Office is on the main road between the Tourist Information Center and the bus station.



Salavan City Map



Salavan's Explosive Past

Laos holds the unfortunate title of being the most densely bombed country on earth, with Salavan ranked second behind Xieng Khouang in provincial barrages. After the French retreated from Laos in the 1950s, the Indochina War continued in Salavan as American pilots – many taking off and landing at a 2-km-long landing strip hidden in present-day Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area – sought to quash Laos' independence movement.

Many of the bombs dropped on Salavan over 15-some years never exploded, especially so-called bombies, tennis-ball-size cluster bombs unleashed by the hundreds via larger casings. To this day, UXOs plague the country's remote rural development.

The Lao government established UXO Lao in the 1990s to remove these impediments to prosperity, and it remains the nation's largest bomb-clearing operator. UXO Lao found and dismantled their first UXO in Salavan on 17 July 1997, and through June 2010 they have combed some 2,186 hectares of the province, uncovering and rendering useless a whopping 133,377 UXOs: 54,049 bombies, 714 large bombs, 1,068 mines, and 77,546 "other ordinance".

Salavan's Bomb Busters

Suppose you're a Salavan farmer living in a distant village, and while plowing, you stumble across a bombie resting on the ground ahead. Who are you going to call? UXO Lao, and they will dispatch a member of the "roving team" to remove or destroy it.

Meanwhile, community awareness (CA) teams conduct village activities so locals know what to look for and what to do when they see it. CA teams also help in noting locations of the UXOs the villagers pinpoint, and CA village volunteers carry out awareness activities in more remote areas.

"Survey teams" produce detailed maps and provide information on UXO locations and active sites, where "clearance teams" are searching with metal detectors to locate UXOs. Roving team members, all of who have undergone extensive bomb clearance training at UXO Lao's Vientiane center, then arrive on the scene to remove or destroy the uncovered UXOs. If the job is too complex, he or she calls in a "Senior Explosive Ordinance Disposal Expert". All UXO Lao team members attend annual courses in Salavan to continue fine-tuning their skills, and some return to Vientiane to take more extensive courses.

Is the job dangerous? Of course. But these specialists take every safety precaution to lessen the risk, and in all these years, no one from UXO Lao in Salavan has ever been seriously injured. So as you travel to the province's many tourist attractions, remember, you can do so with a greatly reduced risk thanks to Salavan's Bomb Busters.

Simple rules to follow regarding UXOs:

- Keep to well-used paths.
- Follow the directions of locals.
- If you see anything that looks like a UXO, don't touch it, and notify UXO Lao of its location.



Vat Simongkhoun

:: Vat Simongkhoun

Built over 200-years ago, bombers destroyed the original Vat Simongkhoun on the Xe Don River in 1972. Remnants of this temple and its stupa can still be seen in the town's northeast, though vines and shrubs try to hide it. Novice monks sometimes rest in the temple's sala on the river bank near the warehouse storing longboats used during the annual boat racing festival. However, a new temple has risen across the street, and an even larger one is under construction next to it.

Location: The temple is situated in the northeastern part of Salavan Town.

:: Ong Keo Stone Stupa

This one-of-a-kind stupa commemorates Ong Keo, one of Laos' first revolutionaries to fight against the French colonialists. He played a major role in encouraging Salavan residents to fight for independence at a time when they were frightened and forced into labor.

Though the date remains elusive, Salavan's elders place the local hero's death in the late 1960s or early 1970s. To honor Ong Keo, villagers around Salavan Town decided to build a stupa during the war, and they did so in a most unusual way.

They constructed a short, square stone wall, but lacking cement, they simply began placing rocks inside. The pile turned into a pyramid, and locals returned over the years to place rocks on the ad-hoc stupa to make merit while paying respects to Ong Keo.

Location: The stupa is located in Salavan Town's northeast next to the hospital.



A Message from the Provincial Tourism Department

On behalf of the Salavan Provincial Tourism Department (PTD) and Lao National Tourism Administration, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our province and its warm, friendly people, and invite you to explore our many historic, cultural and natural attractions.

Traveling to Salavan Town is quick and easy, as the provincial center is only two hours from neighboring Champasak Province's Pakse International Airport and 2.75 hours from the Vang Tao immigration checkpoint with Thailand. You can also experience several of Salavan's sites in a single day by basing your stay in Salavan Town.

A new and expanding infrastructure has transformed Salavan Town into a growing modern urban center with comfortable accommodation, restaurants serving delicious Lao and regional dishes, nighttime entertainment venues offering local music and dancing, and a growing number of banks and other services.

An expanding network of paved roads quickly delivers visitors to nearby attractions and ethnic villages, many of which are less than 50 km from the municipal center. To facilitate travelers, this guidebook presents three one-day tour programs from Salavan Town and a multi-day stopover at the popular Tad Lo Waterfalls area.

A biking tour around Salavan Town reveals two temples destroyed by bombing raids during the Indochina War, a unique stone stupa dedicated to a revolutionary hero, and the UXO Lao office's impressive collection of decades-old unexploded ordinances (UXOs) and weapons. UXO Lao has been at the forefront of clearing leftover bombs and explosives, thus playing a prominent role in making Salavan a safe place to travel.



Nearby Attractions

A **temple's skeleton** sits under a tree in a field in front of white, one-storey buildings. Upon closer inspection, visitors can see holes blasted in the walls by bullets and larger ordinance.

The **Salavan Market**, located across from the Post Office, has become the province's commercial hub, where locals purchase manufactured products, clothes, and textiles from Laos, China, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as locally grown vegetables. To enjoy the market's bustle, come around sunrise when much of the action takes place.

A new **handicraft center** sits near to the Phongsavanh Bank and sells a variety of products including woven fabrics, *sins* (traditional Lao skirts), shoulder bags, baskets, bamboo and rattan goods and more.

:: Nong Boua (Crocodile Lake) Extension

For those seeking a longer adventure, cycle across a Xe Don River fjord in the town's far northeast, and continue some 16 km along rough dirt paths to Nong Boua (Crocodile Lake). Known for its spirits and crocodile ghosts, which villagers believe reside near the Xe Don, the lake is home to three known crocodiles and other wildlife including several bird species.

Along the way, you may find locals asking, "*Pay Sai*" (Where are you going?) Answer with, "*Pay Nong Bua*" (I'm going to Nong Bua lake). To be sure you are heading the right way, add "bor" at the end to turn it into a question.

***Note:** Please respect the local culture and obey elders, who should be asked to accompany you (see "Do's & Don'ts").

Ong Keo Stone Stupa





A stand on the Coconut Road

The Salavan-Laongarm Route

The 48-km section of Lao Route 20 connecting Salavan Town and Laongarm, before continuing to Pakse, stops near several attractions: popular Tad Lo, a village overflowing in coconuts, towering waterfalls, cave complex, Bolaven Plateau viewpoints, and ethnic villagers playing folk music and weaving on lap looms. You can start and finish in Salavan Town, begin in Salavan Town and end in Tad Lo, or start with a Tad Lo Stayover (See page 38), before heading to Salavan Town.

:: Coconut Road

Coconut lovers and the curious must stop at Ban Naxai, a simple village that evolved into a coconut capital with stand after stand selling this massive hard-shell fruit. Word spread of the village's bounty, placing "Coconut Road" on Lao travelers' itineraries as a pause for a refreshing drink, and to buy a bunch to take home. Today, vendors from Xekong Province and Pakse Town purchase this treat by the truckload.

The dry season presents the largest choice of coconuts, which come in two types: the brown variety is grown in a specific area outside the village with a small number of trees, thus slightly more expensive than the KIP5,000 green coconuts.

The younger brown coconuts are somewhat sour, while riper ones taste sweet, and are said to bring fevers down. The larger green coconuts also taste sweet, and many consider it a hangover cure. But hangover or not, Coconut Road is a must stop to ponder the endless piles, and purchase a few to drink, while coconut connoisseurs can compare the tastes.

Location: Naxai is located on Route 20 about 25 km southwest of Salavan Town.



:: Coconut Road Lao Lao

At the end of Coconut Road sits a home “factory” producing powerful *lao lao* rice alcohol using a slightly more advanced system than other village distilleries. A plumbed water system allows one person to oversee several production vats, and their fermentation process takes only one day rather than the week required in other methods.

This village’s process begins by mixing mashed rice with water, and steaming it in a basket to create a paste, which is placed in one of 50-some plastic buckets occupying the bulk of the small workshop’s floor. The distiller then stirs in malt flour, and lets the concoction sit for a day until it smells sweet.

The brewer then boils about 20 cm of water topped by a strainer in one of four waist-high metal barrels over a fire. The paste comes next, over which they set tray-like funnels leading to the exit pipes. A bowl of constantly changed water arrives from the water supply system, rather than by hand, before the top is tightly resealed. A plastic jug sits under the pipes, waiting for the hot whisky to begin its trickling flow. Sample some hot from the vat, and see if you can distinguish the sweet taste from the high alcohol content.

Location: The *lao lao* production workshop is about 1 km southwest of Ban Naxai’s Coconut Road on Route 20.

Distilling lao lao





Tad Soung Waterfall

:: Tad Soung Waterfall

When many people think of a river's direction, they assume it flows from north to south. However the Xe Set River originates in the Bolaven Plateau's north and continues in the same direction to the highland's edge before plummeting 90 meters off a totally vertical cliff at Tad Soung Waterfall.

Reaching the head of the falls is quite easy; a walk of less than 1 km from Saneum Nai leads to a set of natural stairs descending to Tad Soung. French colonials built a series of ladders along a similar route, but a rockslide destroyed them decades ago.

Though much of the Xe Set's volume is diverted into turbines to feed power to hydroelectric plants, Tad Soung remains quite spectacular, as does its dramatic yet relaxing perch. A pavilion used by locals sits near the Xe Set's banks as the river eases down boulders into small pools before reaching a wide, flat rocky floor and Tad Soung's precipitous edge.

The dazzling valley panorama and mountains beyond is well worth the walk, and though maneuvering to view the waterfall can be tricky, each angle presents a different scene. Stand a few meters upriver, and the water vanishes into a great void. Move to the right, and watch the quiet flow transform into turbulent foam as it jumps from the cliff. Look straight down, and the rocky river gives no signs that it acts as a basin for a towering flume.

***Note:** Please use caution when on top of Tad Soung, as there are no safety rails or observation decks (under development).

Location: From Tad Lo follow Route 20 towards Laongarm. Five km past the Xe Set Bridge, turn left onto a sealed road at Ban Sanone. Stay right at the fork in Ban Saneum Nork and continue to Ban Saneum Nai, where a trail leads to the stone and earthen stairs heading down to Tad Soung.



Nearby Attractions

Huge **stone caskets** (Long Sop Saen Kham) from an early civilization sit in a cave on Phou Saen Kham Mountain. From Tadlo, go to Ban Senvang Noi, then follow the trail on the right of the road and walk for 5 km to the caskets.

Stop at **Ban Saneum Nai**, an ethnic Souay Village with a community house on stilts, and observe an old weaving method using compact laptop looms. Some villagers at Ban Saneum Nai and nearby Katou and Lao Loum communities are also seasoned musicians, who occasionally gather to play old folk songs on traditional instruments. Kindly ask the village elders if a brief performance is possible.

The **Green Earth Centre** on Route 20 near Laongarm Town presents agro-forestry and fish breeding ponds. A short climb up a hill on stairs leads to a small temple. Visit: www.villagefocus.org.

Katou weavers in **Ban Houay Houn**, about 10 km southwest of Laongarm Town on Route 20 and exactly half way between Salavan Town and Pakse), use the *mat mee* method employing laptop looms held taut by the feet to transform tie-dyed cotton threads into intricate fabric designs. If no one is working the looms during your visit, kindly ask a villager to find someone to show you. The village also has a small shop to buy the finished products such as handbags.

Salavan Music

Salavan musicians perform their own style of folk music such as Lam Salavan, Lam Kaleuy, and Lam Lalemone, which has become extremely popular throughout the country. The lead instrument is the *khaen*, a long wind instrument with two rows of bamboo-like reeds sealed by beeswax in a hardwood box. Accompanying the *khaen* are a *saw* (a small string-and-bow instrument that resembles a mini-violin), wooden drum, and sometimes a *ranyaht* (wooden xylophone).

Katou weavers using laptop looms





View from Phou Tak Khao Mountain

:: Phou Tak Khao Viewpoint & Nine-Holes Cave

A 20-minute walk on a trail from Ban Thongkharm Village, known for its peanuts, leads to the Phou Tak Khao Viewpoint, and a Bolaven Plateau vista of a mountain-backed, forested valley. There is hardly a village in sight, but a small green clearing stands out, and though it is a rice field, the patch appears as a nine-hole golf course.

However, the only nine holes are in a nearby cave complex accessed by continuing along a short trail after the viewpoint. A steep set of precarious wooden stairs climbs to the nine-entry maze, but amateur spelunkers beware. The openings turn into a bizarre labyrinth of distinct routes breaking off into more branches, making it easy to get lost.

Elders say the caves sheltered Buddha images, when the French destroyed the viewpoint's temple more than 60 years ago. On the way back from the caves, visit the make-shift temple that locals built to house three life-size Buddha images, including one of stone over 100 years old, and other smaller religious objects.

Location: From Route 20, turn near the Laongarm Market onto the westbound dirt road, which terminates at Ban Thongkharm and the trail to the viewpoint and cave.

:: Phou Tak Khao Trekking

Plans are underway to develop a two-day trek from Ban Sanone on Route 20, where visitors can taste robusta and arabica coffee, before walking about 6 km and past four waterfalls to Ban Khanouan, a Souay Village of expert crossbow archers. After overnighing in Ban Khanouan, trek up steep Phou Tak Khao Mountain to a small temple established by forest monks. From here, a challenging odyssey leads to "Destiny Tree" with its naturally shaped Buddha image.



Pilgrims who can hit the tree-trunk image, about 20 meters away, with a stone are granted wishes made prior to the throw. The trail returns to Ban Sanone passing Ban Thongkham Village and Tiger Cave, and through pristine woodlands and fields of various tropical fruits. Enquire at the Tourist Information Center in Salavan Town or Tad Lo.

Nearby Attractions

Stop and inspect the lush cardamom shrubs in fields along Route 20 between Sanone and Tad Lo. The green cardamom grown in this region of Laos differs from other species found around the world due to the medicinal qualities complimenting this high-demand spice.

Crash Course in Cardamom

Salavan farmers are increasingly turning to *mak naeng*, or cardamom, as a cash crop, due to rising demand in the province's harvest, which is distinct from South Asia's predominant green cardamom, though all species of this spice hold medicinal value.

Cardamom is used in a variety of Asian medicines to prevent and treat tooth and gum infections, sore throats, congested lungs, tuberculosis, and digestive disorders. Pharmacists also mix it into medicines for breaking up kidney and gall stones, and as an antidote for venomous snakebites and scorpion stings. Cardamom belongs to the *Amomum* genus, and two species are only grown in China, Laos, and Vietnam. The most widespread, *Amomum villosum*, is indigenous to Laos and internationally known as "bastard cardamom", an ingredient for medicines used to treat digestive tract ailments such as stomachaches, constipation, and dysentery. Farmers grow it on the Bolaven Plateau's upper and lower slopes, and export most of it to China, where it is highly valued for its curing properties.

Nine-Holes Cave





:: Khongxedon Extension

Well-healed travelers may want to tackle the loop running from Salavan Town west for 80 km on Route 15B to Napong. Turn south on Route 13 to Khongxedon Town, before heading 50 km southeast on the Naxe (pronounced Na Sae) to Hokong Nai at the Route 20 junction. Turn left on Route 20 and travel 20 km to Tad Lo and another 30 km to Salavan Town.

Along the way, you can stop in Vapi to sample their “perfumed river snails, before reaching Ban Napong just north of Khongxedon Town to sample what many consider the best grilled chicken (*ping kai*) in the country. You will pass a large lao lao distillery and bottler in Khongxedon Town, before the challenging road to Route 20, which provides an insight into Salavan’s rural life few get to see.





Laongarm to Salavan Map

Tad Lo Stayover

Tad Lo, Salavan Province's main attraction, is located on the northwestern edge of the Bolaven Plateau, some 30 km south of Salavan Town and 90 km northeast of Pakse, or about 1.5-2 hours by motor vehicle.

Though Tad Lo is the name of a waterfall on the Xe Set River, which forms the border between Salavan (east) and Laongarm Districts (west), the term generally refers to the surrounding area and its villages. The Tad Lo environs are also at the core of "The Salavan-Laongarm Trail" (page 31).

Tad Lo's accommodation, restaurants and other services for tourists center on Ban Senvang and Ban Muangkhai on the Salavan side of the Xe Set River, and straddle Route 20 connecting Salavan Town with Laongarm and Pakse. Salavan Province is constructing a Tourist Information Center in Tad Lo, and a few guesthouses in the vicinity rent bicycles and offer internet, a book exchange, and trekking guide service. The Tad Lo Lodge presents short elephant treks that cross the river and head to outlying ethnic villages.

Ban Senvang and Ban Muangkhai also offer easy walking access to the Tad Hang and Tad Lo Waterfalls. The greater Tad Lo area also presents several other attractions including temples, ethnic villages with community/spirit houses, and a conservation area, all of which are within easy reach by bicycle.



Tad Lo Waterfall

:: Tad Hang & Tad Lo Waterfalls

Imagine waking up, stepping outside your room, walking a few steps, and finding yourself facing a 30-meter-wide, tree-lined waterfall crashing over a 10-meter, tiered-rock wall into a series of rapids before settling into a calmly flowing river. This vision turns into reality when staying in Tad Lo.

A handful of guesthouses and resorts on the Xe Set River just below Tad Hang offer exactly that, and for those staying in the Ban Senvang tourist enclave, a bridge spanning the Xe Set River offers a direct view of the falls and rapids that follow. And knowing that the more dramatic Tad Lo Waterfall is around 500 meters upriver beckons visitors to hike closer to Tad Hang and beyond.

The guesthouses and resorts on the paths to Tad Hang offer benches and viewing platforms for a closer, more relaxing look, but the trail doesn't stop there. A maze of foot paths through trees and plants heading upriver on both sides to the Xe Set leads to Tad Lo Waterfall.

Trees along the trail hide Tad Lo for much of the way, but small openings offer glimpses the closer you get. On the Xe Set's eastern bank, a rickety set of stairs leads to the river's shore for a great angle looking straight at the semi-horseshoe-shaped Tad Lo, which is slightly taller than Tad Hang. The drop-off is split by a jutting rock protrusion, as the river crashes over the cliff, and lands in a cloudy mist.





Katang Textile weaving at Koum Ban Toumlan

The Tad Lo Waterfall has long been on the tourist map, but now many nearby attractions have been developed to provide tourists with access to more waterfalls, incredible viewpoints, mysterious caves, diverse ethnic villages with weavers and communal spirit houses, peaceful conservation areas, and new tracts of farmland. Cycling and motorbike circuits in the Tad Lo area present visitors with an unblemished picture of Salavan's rural life.

A short excursion to Toumlan District unveils an enclave of ethnic Katang weaving villages, with a variety of complex looms to create cotton and silk fabrics with elaborate designs. The Katang are also known for their longhouses, some of which have stretched to 100 meters, and though today's structures tend to be shorter, they remain impressive.

The Katang are among a dozen distinct ethnic groups populating Salavan, and many can be visited on the tour circuits. Their lifestyles vary, as do their houses and beliefs, and visiting their villages presents a truly authentic cultural experience.

To ensure a rewarding visit to Salavan, we respectfully request you observe Lao customs, and while the locals warmly welcome visitors, they kindly ask that you make an effort to be culturally sensitive.

We cordially invite you to discover Salavan Province and wish you a safe and enjoyable journey.

Mr Bounthom Phomavongsy
Director, Salavan Provincial Tourism Department



View of Tad Hang in Tad Lo Area

Nearby Attractions

Two small temples are within easy walking distance from the tourist accommodation area. The main temple sits on the eastern banks of the Xe Set, some 500 meters downstream from the Xe Set Bridge, and across from the conservation area. The second can be found on the western bank along the trail between Tad Hang and Ta Lo.

The **conservation area** is spread along the western bank, and can be reached by foot or bicycle along a dirt road. Located within the peaceful reserve is a fish farm with six ponds and a sizeable holding lake that can be crossed by a walking bridge. The area is a popular gathering place for locals during the Lao New Year's celebration, while visitors will find it quiet, relaxing, and a peaceful escape from the tourist hub. Within the Tad Lo area, communities of four ethnic groups sharing three villages – Ban Kiang Tanglae, Ban Nanong, and Ban Kiang Tadsoung – center on large, domed community/spirit houses, where they conduct religious ceremonies, annual festivals and special events. These small villages of ethnic Souay, Alak, Katou, and Ngae are easy to reach by bicycle, motorbike, foot, and even elephant-back.

Walking trails about 1.5-km long follow both banks of the Xe Set to **Ban Kiang Tanglae**, though the eastern path leads to a bridge crossing before the village. This mini-trek makes a nice circuit, showing life and nature on either side of the river. Bikers and cyclists get a broader view of the surrounding landscape by following Route 20 south from Tad Lo's tourist center, and then turning right onto a dirt road that leads to Ban Kiang Tanglae. Ban Kiang Tanglae hosts a few small restaurants, but as a Ngae village with a spirit house, it is taboo to shout in the vicinity.

Ban Nanong and **Ban Kiang Tadsoung** are a bit further south, but a cycling/motorcycle trip presents an even wider overview of the rural setting and quiet, slow pace of life, along with local farms and sacred forests. East of the Xe Set, Ban Nanong is accessed by a sealed road around 100 meters from the walking bridge in the tourist center. Travel about 2 km south to the second dirt road on the left, and follow it to Ban Nanong.

To reach Ban Kiang Tadsoung, head southwest from the Xe Set Bridge on Route 20 for 5 km to the sealed road turning east, and continue for 1 km to Ban Saneum Nork. Bear left at the fork, and continue for 4-5 km to the village.



Shuttle of a loom

Toumlan Weaving Trail

Weaving fans can find distinctive ethnic Katang methods and looms 52 km north of Salavan Town on Route 23 at a cluster of villages called Koum-Ban Toumlan. Nearby in Ban Heuan Nyao, visit a longhouse in which all the inhabitants are cousins! Also on the trail is Khoua Ban Darn, a bombed out bridge crossing the Xe Don River. Guesthouse accommodation and restaurants are available in Ban Nakan, Toumlan's administrative center.

:: Katang Weaving in Koum-Ban Toumlan

Toumlan District's cluster of ethnic Katang villages – Koum-Ban Toumlan – is located 8 km east of the Ban Nakan Toumlan's administrative center, and reveals distinct weaving methods and designs found only there. The techniques have been handed down through generations of these tight-knit communities, and are rarely practiced elsewhere.

Visitors who have viewed weavers in other villagers will quickly notice the difference in the looms used by Toumlan's Katang. Several span the width of a house on stilts, with the main mechanisms hanging from the rafters.

Unlike most looms, on which weavers shuttle threads parallel to the ground, a few turn the threads vertically towards the floor for the actual weaving. Some looms only require a few simple guides to feed the silk or cotton strands, while others call for several complex components. However each needs careful attention, which necessitates incredible skills.



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
|  | Provincial Capital |  | Village |
|  | District Capital |  | International Border |
|  | Main Road |  | Waterfall |
|  | Secondary Road |  | Mountain |
|  | All Vehicles |  | Attraction |
|  | Motorbikes (cars dry season only) |  | NPA National Protected Area |



Toumlan Trail map



Silk Worms

Producing significant lengths of the same-color fabric with a few simple designs can be a relatively quick and straightforward process. However, much more goes into the complicated *mat mee* method employed to create extremely intricate designs on *tin sin* (narrow bottom borders on traditional *sin* skirts), which can also incorporate silver and gold threads. A *tin sin* takes two days to weave and costs around KIP50,000, a considerable sum for locals, who often sell these decorative textiles in Salavan Town's market and shops.

Two days may seem like a long time to churn out a small piece, but consider that it takes up to a month to prepare the tie-dyed cotton strands, to ensure the color breaks in the threads are properly aligned.

***Note:** To visit a weaving village, please contact the Tourist Information Center in Salavan or Toumlan District's Office of Information and Culture in Ban Nakan (Toumlan Town) to arrange a guide and ensure you get to see the weavers in action.

From Moth to Cloth

Toumlan village weavers also raise silk worms by using what they call the "Round Method", named after the shape of the rattan trays they use to grow them. One tray houses hundreds of the squirmy adults who devour the mulberry leaves fed to them. They eventually form yellow cocoons the size of small bird eggs. Once the moth emerges, the cocoons are boiled, unraveled, and spun into threads, before undergoing the dyeing process using a combination of leaves and insects to create different colors. Meanwhile, the moths lay eggs, which give birth to what looks like a dark green clump of mud, but is actually a pile of baby worms.



Mr Lue's Longhouse

:: Katang Cousin Community

Several generations ago, a Katang man named Mr Lue had seven wives, and he built a longhouse in Ban Heuan Nyao (Longhouse Village) for his families, apportioning five meters for each plus a common room, kitchen and veranda. His wives had several children, who intermarried, and the newlyweds added five more meters. Cousins continued marrying, having children, and extending the longhouse.

Mr Lue's extended family eventually reached 103 households, an astronomic figure for a longhouse, prompting the construction of 17-family longhouses from 85-100 meters long. In 1982, families began seeking privacy, and started disassembling the longhouse and reconstructing them as single homes.

Today's longhouse stretches some 40 meters, which still presents an impressive structure, and the common room holds several relics, including shields used during sword fights. The current village chief, selected because he looks most like family founder Mr Lue, is quite proud of his fate even though he has but three wives.

Aside from the diminished size of the longhouse, life in Ban Heuan Nyao remains much the same as in Mr Lue's day. There is no electricity, and young girls still mill rice with a giant log hammer attached to a fulcrum that allows the heavy head to drop with force. Unshelled rice is placed in a hollowed out tree trunk, and the girls control the hammer by foot, releasing it to drop on the rice in a show witnessed mostly by wandering pigs, chicken and geese, which eat the rice husks.



Khoua Ban Darn Bridge

The village remains mostly self-sufficient, growing their own rice and raising livestock and poultry. They also make a bit of income from selling rice, geese, and some of their woven goods.

Location: From Koum-Ban Toumlan, turn south for 2 km to reach Ban Heuan Nyao.

:: The Khoua Ban Darn Broken Bridge

Designed by Prince Souphanouvong – Laos’ first president – and built in 1942, the Khua Ban Darn Bridge spanned the Xe Don River to connect Salavan Town to Toumlan Town. The bridge was destroyed by American bombers in 1968 in an attempt to cut off an offshoot supply route of the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the Indochina War. Visitors can examine the bridge’s remains, which protrude from the Xe Don River’s northern bank.

Location: Located 25 km from Salavan Town, travel on the road to Vapi/Toumlan Districts to the Ban Nakhuang turnoff. Turn right and continue along route 23 to Ban Darn Nyai Village. From here, a barge crosses the Xe Don River close to the bridge’s remains.

An alternative road from Salavan town for those traveling by motor vehicle heads along route 15A towards Ta-Oy to a causeway crossing. Turn left at Ban Katao, about 25km from Salavan, and then continue to Toumlan.

***Note:** The road to Ta-Oy District after the Ban Katao turnoff is under construction, and travel to this remote locale is currently not recommended, except for the most ardent motocross or mountain bike riders, who may have to campout along the way. There are very few shops and food stalls on the rough route, which when completed will offer easy access to this once remote Salavan outpost.















Back-strap loom in Ban Houay Houn

Provincial map

LEGEND

-  Provincial Capital
-  District Capital
-  Main Road
-  Secondary Road
-  Village
-  International Border
-  Waterfall
-  Mountain
-  Attraction
-  N P A National Protected Area



VIETNAM

SAVANNAKHET

Samouay

Khesap NPA

Toumlan

Ta-Oy

Ta-Oy

Xe Bang Nouan Vapi NPA

Lakhonpheng

Salavan

SEKONG

THAILAND

Salavan

Khongxedon

Laongarm

CHAMPASAK

Introduction to Salavan

Salavan Information

Geography

Located in southern Laos, Salavan is bordered by Savannakhet Province to the north, Vietnam to the east, Sekong Province to the southeast, Champasak Province to the south, and the Mekong River and Thailand to the west. Salavan municipality sits in the province's heart, about 115 km from Pakse, the region's largest urban center. Salavan is divided into eight districts: Salavan, Khongxedon, Toumlan, Lakhonpheng, Laongarm, Samouay, Ta-Oy, and Vapi.

Flat, fertile terrain with rich volcanic soil covers some 40% of the province in its western Mekong River Valley, while the Bolaven Plateau's northern tip rises to 1,000 meters and higher in Salavan's southwest Laongarm District. The Annamite Mountains climb higher than 2,000 meters in the east near the Vietnam border, and scores of rivers and streams crisscross the province's 10,691-km², including the Xe Don, Xe Set, Xe Lanong, and Xe Kang Rivers. Salavan is also home to three National Protected Areas (NPAs): Phou Xieng Thong, Xe Bang Nouan, and Xe Sap.

Climate

Salavan's climate varies among its river valley, plateau and mountain zones, but can be divided into two basic seasons. Though Salavan's easternmost Samouay District receives rain from Vietnam during February and March, the dry period generally lasts from November to March, during which temperatures range from cool to warm, though they start rising in March. The rainy season begins in late April, with daily downpours picking up from July to October, especially in the mountains, before easing in November. The lowlands tend to be more humid and hotter, while the plateau and mountains are somewhat cooler.



Looking across Salavan plain from Phou Tak Khao Mountain



Khoua Ban Darn Broken Bridge, remains after bombing during Second Indochinese War

History

Though Salavan's forests hide prehistoric sites including stone caskets and cave paintings, little is known about the province's history except its wartime past. Historians suggest the area was an outpost of the Champasak Kingdom in the early 19th century. Newspaper reports from 1940 discuss Thai troops clashing with "Indochinese" forces in Salavan, including bombing raids by French planes.

From then until Laos' liberation in 1975, the province was caught up in a tug-of-war between Western-backed forces and Lao independence fighters, and the renowned Ho Chi Minh Trail passed through Salavan's eastern mountains, attracting some of the most intensive bombing the world has ever seen.

Western news archives expose America's "Secret War" in Laos was not well kept. In 1959, Laos' colonial government leveled charges that Vietnamese-trained revolutionaries were active in Salavan, and in 1962, a Royal Lao Military spokesman claimed pro-independence troops were operating in Salavan Town.

Reports in 1967 mention an American reconnaissance jet "disappeared" over Salavan Province, and in 1968, Lao revolutionaries clashed with the Royal Lao Army in remote pockets of Salavan. The following year, a US fighter jet was shot down about 20 miles northeast of Salavan Town, and in June 1970, *The New York Times* reported that Pathet Lao troops took Salavan Town, but Western-backed forces arrived to find it deserted.

1971 newspapers tell of US Air Force and Navy jets openly bombarding the province, and several were shot down. Battles in Salavan continued to rage in 1972, resulting in the razing of Salavan Town.



Tad Soung Waterfall, Tad Lo area

Currency and Banking

Currency and Banking

Laos' official currency is the kip (LAK), which comes in 500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 and 50,000 notes, but it is best to carry small denominations of kip in rural areas. Major currencies and Thai baht can be exchanged in Salavan Town's four banks, and an ATM at the Phongsavanh Bank next to the Tourist Information Center accepts major international bank and credit cards.

Post and Communications

Salavan Town's General Post Office sits across from the market, and offers faxing and international telephone services. Phone cards and Lao SIM cards are also available in town, and a few establishments in Tad Lo offer internet.

Business Hours

Government offices are open weekdays from 08:00-12:00 and 13:00-16:00, and banks are open from 08:30-15:30, except the Phongsavanh Bank which stays open until 17:00. All are closed on weekends.

Visas

To enter Laos, visitors need a passport with at least six months validity. Thirty-day visas are available from Lao embassies and consulates abroad, Lao international airports, and many border checkpoints. The fee varies by nationality. Visa extensions are available for US\$2 per day at Vientiane's Immigration Office and from some tour agents in major tourist destinations including Pakse. Those overstaying their visas are fined US\$10 per day.



There are no international border checkpoints in Salavan Province, though nearby Pakse International Airport offers visas on arrival, as do overland crossings with Thailand at Champasak Province's Vang Tao checkpoint and Savannakhet's Friendship Bridge. The Veun Kham crossing between Cambodia and Champasak requires travelers to have visas in advance, which are available at Lao embassies and consulates in Phnom Penh, Bangkok, and Ho Chi Minh City as well as abroad. Visa information is available on the Lao National Tourism Administration's websites:

www.tourismlaos.org and www.ecotourismlaos.com.

Getting There & Away

Bus 🚌

As Salavan Town has no active airport, most visitors arrive via Pakse, about 115 km away. However, three busses to Salavan Town depart daily from Vientiane's Southern Bus Terminal at 16:30 (LAK120,000), 19:30 (1st class: LAK150,000), and 20:30 (VIP: LAK180,000), and arrive about 12 hours later. A VIP sleeper bus departs Vientiane for Pakse at 20:30 (LAK300,000), and arrives at 06:30. Return busses depart at 08:30, 14:00, 16:30, and 20:30 respectively.

From Pakse, public buses depart for the 2.5 hour drive to Salavan at 07:00, 10:30, and 14:30, and van transportation is available to Tad Lo. Motorbikes and cars can be rented in Pakse, as Salavan has limited inner-provincial transportation and no motor vehicle rental services. For those departing from Savannakhet, a bus leaves at 13:30 (LAK60,000) for the half-day ride and two busses return at 06:30 and 08:30.



Air 

Lao Airlines offers direct daily flights to Pakse International Airport departing Vientiane at 06:30 for the 75-minute trip. A second flight takes off on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays at 07:30, and a lone Monday flight leaves at 06:15. Return flights depart daily at 11:45; Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays at 16:25; Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 07:00 and 14:15; and on Mondays at 08:10.

Direct flights leave Luang Prabang for Pakse on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 10:50 and 16:40 for the journey of around two hours. Pakse also welcomes daily one-hour flights departing Siem Reap, Cambodia at 10:05. A second weekly flight leaves Siem Reap on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 15:00. Return flights depart Pakse daily at 08:25, and on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 13:20.

Planes from Bangkok take off on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays at 13:10 and arrive at 15:45. Return flights depart Pakse on the same days at 09:25, and land at 12:10.

*Note Please check the latest schedules as departures, frequencies, and prices may vary. Visit:

www.laoairlines.com/flights

Getting Around

Heading to Salavan's districts and attractions without transportation rented in Pakse can be challenging, as only Tad Lo currently offers bicycle rentals. *Tuk-tuks* are available for traveling around Salavan Town's sites, but *song thaews* (covered pickup trucks with benches) to the outlying districts are limited. Check with guesthouses or the Salavan Tourist Information Center for departure times or to arrange a private *song thaew*.





LNTA - ADB

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project



www.tourismlaos.org
www.ecotourismlaos.com