

= Ratanakiri Province =

Ratanakiri ( Khmer : ??????? IPA : [ ?re? ? ? ? ta? ?na? ki ?ri? ] " Mountain of Jewels " ) is a province ( khaet ) of Cambodia located in the remote northeast . It borders the provinces of Mondulakiri to the south and Stung Treng to the west and the countries of Laos and Vietnam to the north and east , respectively . The province extends from the mountains of the Annamite Range in the north , across a hilly plateau between the Tonle San and Tonle Srepok rivers , to tropical deciduous forests in the south . In recent years , logging and mining have scarred Ratanakiri 's environment , long known for its beauty .

For over a millennium , Ratanakiri has been occupied by the highland Khmer Loeu people , who are a minority elsewhere in Cambodia . During the region 's early history , its Khmer Loeu inhabitants were exploited as slaves by neighboring empires . The slave trade economy ended during the French colonial era , but a harsh Khmerization campaign after Cambodia 's independence again threatened Khmer Loeu ways of life . The Khmer Rouge built its headquarters in the province in the 1960s , and bombing during the Vietnam War devastated the region . Today , rapid development in the province is altering traditional ways of life .

Ratanakiri is sparsely populated ; its 150 @, @ 000 residents make up just over 1 % of the country 's total population . Residents generally live in villages of 20 to 60 families and engage in subsistence shifting agriculture . Ratanakiri is among the least developed provinces of Cambodia . Its infrastructure is poor , and the local government is weak . Health indicators in Ratanakiri are extremely poor ; men 's life expectancy is 39 years , and women 's is 43 years . Education levels are also low , with just under half of the population illiterate .

= = History = =

Present @-@ day Ratanakiri has been occupied since at least the Stone or Bronze Age , and trade between the region 's highlanders and towns along the Gulf of Thailand dates to at least the 4th century A.D. The region was invaded by Annamites , the Cham , the Khmer , and the Thai during its early history , but no empire ever brought the area under centralized control . From the 13th century or earlier until the 19th century , highland villages were often raided by Khmer , Lao , and Thai slave traders . The region was conquered by local Laotian rulers in the 18th century and then by the Thai in the 19th century . The area was incorporated into French Indochina in 1893 , and colonial rule replaced slave trading . The French built huge rubber plantations , especially in Labansiek ( present @-@ day Banlung ) ; indigenous workers were used for construction and rubber harvesting . While under French control , the land comprising present @-@ day Ratanakiri was transferred from Siam ( Thailand ) to Laos and then to Cambodia . Although highland groups initially resisted their colonial rulers , by the end of the colonial era in 1953 they had been subdued .

Ratanakiri Province was created in 1959 from land that had been the eastern area of Stung Treng Province . The name Ratanakiri ( ??????? ) is formed from the Khmer words ???? ( ratana " gem " from Sanskrit ratna ) and ???? ( kiri " mountain " from Sanskrit giri ) , describing two features for which the province is known . During the 1950s and 1960s , Norodom Sihanouk instituted a development and Khmerization campaign in northeast Cambodia that was designed to bring villages under government control , limit the influence of insurgents in the area , and " modernize " indigenous communities . Some Khmer Loeu were forcibly moved to the lowlands to be educated in Khmer language and culture , ethnic Khmer from elsewhere in Cambodia were moved into the province , and roads and large rubber plantations were built . After facing harsh working conditions and sometimes involuntary labor on the plantations , many Khmer Loeu left their traditional homes and moved farther from provincial towns . In 1968 , tensions led to an uprising by the Brao in which several Khmer were killed . The government responded harshly , torching settlements and killing hundreds of villagers .

In the 1960s , the ascendant Khmer Rouge forged an alliance with ethnic minorities in Ratanakiri , exploiting Khmer Loeu resentment of the central government . The Communist Party of Kampuchea headquarters was moved to Ratanakiri in 1966 , and hundreds of Khmer Loeu joined CPK units .

During this period , there was also extensive Vietnamese activity in Ratanakiri . Vietnamese communists had operated in Ratanakiri since the 1940s ; at a June 1969 press conference , Sihanouk said that Ratanakiri was " practically North Vietnamese territory " . Between March 1969 and May 1970 , the United States undertook a massive covert bombing campaign in the region , aiming to disrupt sanctuaries for communist Vietnamese troops . Villagers were forced outside of main towns to escape the bombings , foraging for food and living on the run with the Khmer Rouge . In June 1970 , the central government withdrew its troops from Ratanakiri , abandoning the area to Khmer Rouge control . The Khmer Rouge regime , which had not initially been harsh in Ratanakiri , became increasingly oppressive . The Khmer Loeu were forbidden from speaking their native languages or practicing their traditional customs and religion , which were seen as incompatible with communism . Communal living became compulsory , and the province 's few schools were closed . Purges of ethnic minorities increased in frequency , and thousands of refugees fled to Vietnam and Laos . Preliminary studies indicate that bodies accounting for approximately 5 % of Ratanakiri 's residents were deposited in mass graves , a significantly lower rate than elsewhere in Cambodia .

After the Vietnamese defeated the Khmer Rouge in 1979 , government policy toward Ratanakiri became one of benign neglect . The Khmer Loeu were permitted to return to their traditional livelihoods , but the government provided little infrastructure in the province . Under the Vietnamese , there was little contact between the provincial government and many local communities . Long after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime , however , Khmer Rouge rebels remained in the forests of Ratanakiri . Rebels largely surrendered their arms in the 1990s , though attacks along provincial roads continued until 2002 .

Ratanakiri 's recent history has been characterized by development and attendant challenges to traditional ways of life . The national government has built roads , encouraged tourism and agriculture , and facilitated rapid immigration of lowland Khmers into Ratanakiri . Road improvements and political stability have increased land prices , and land alienation in Ratanakiri has been a major problem . Despite a 2001 law allowing indigenous communities to obtain collective title to traditional lands , some villages have been left nearly landless . The national government has granted concessions over land traditionally possessed by Ratanakiri 's indigenous peoples , and even land " sales " have often involved bribes to officials , coercion , threats , or misinformation . Following the involvement of several international non - governmental organizations ( NGOs ) , land alienation had decreased in frequency as of 2006 . In the 2000s , Ratanakiri also received hundreds of Degar ( Montagnard ) refugees fleeing unrest in neighboring Vietnam ; the Cambodian government was criticized for its forcible repatriation of many refugees .

= = Geography and climate = =

The geography of Ratanakiri Province is diverse , encompassing rolling hills , mountains , plateaus , lowland watersheds , and crater lakes . Two major rivers , Tonle San and Tonle Srepok , flow from east to west across the province . The province is known for its lush forests ; as of 1997 , 70 ? 80 % of the province was forested , either with old - growth forest or with secondary forest regrown after shifting cultivation . In the far north of the province are mountains of the Annamite Range ; the area is characterized by dense broadleaf evergreen forests , relatively poor soil , and abundant wildlife . In the highlands between Tonle San and Tonle Srepok , the home of the vast majority of Ratanakiri 's population , a hilly basalt plateau provides fertile red soils . Secondary forests dominate this region . South of the Srepok River is a flat area of tropical deciduous forests .

Like other areas of Cambodia , Ratanakiri has a monsoonal climate with a rainy season from June to October , a cool season from November to January , and a hot season from March to May . Ratanakiri tends to be cooler than elsewhere in Cambodia . The average daily high temperature in the province is 34 @. 0 ° C ( 93 @. 2 ° F ) , and the average daily low temperature is 22 @. 1 ° C ( 71 @. 8 ° F ) . Annual precipitation is approximately 2 @, 200 millimetres ( 87 in ) . Flooding often occurs during the rainy season and has been exacerbated by the recently built Yali Falls Dam .

Ratanakiri has some of the most biologically diverse lowland tropical rainforest and montane forest

ecosystems in mainland Southeast Asia . One 1996 survey of two sites in Ratanakiri and one site in neighboring Mondulakiri recorded 44 mammal species , 76 bird species , and 9 reptile species . A 2007 survey of Ratanakiri 's Virachey National Park recorded 30 ant species , 19 katydid species , 37 fish species , 35 reptile species , 26 amphibian species , and 15 mammal species , including several species never before observed . Wildlife in Ratanakiri includes Asian elephants , gaur , and monkeys . Ratanakiri is an important site for the conservation of endangered birds , including the giant ibis and the greater adjutant . The province 's forests contain a wide variety of flora ; one half @-@ hectare forest inventory identified 189 species of trees and 320 species of ground flora and saplings .

Nearly half of Ratanakiri has been set aside in protected areas , which include Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary and Virachey National Park . Even these protected areas , however , are subject to illegal logging , poaching , and mineral extraction . Though the province has been known for its relatively pristine environment , recent development has spawned environmental problems . The unspoiled image of the province often conflicts with the reality on the ground : visitors " expecting to find pristine forests teeming with wildlife are increasingly disappointed to find lifeless patches of freshly cut tree stumps " . Land use patterns are changing as population growth has accelerated and agriculture and logging have intensified . Soil erosion is increasing , and microclimates are being altered . Habitat loss and unsustainable hunting have contributed to the province 's decreasing biodiversity .

= = Government and administrative divisions = =

Government in Ratanakiri is weak , largely due to the province 's remoteness , ethnic diversity , and recent history of Khmer Rouge dominance . The provincial legal framework is poor , and the rule of law is even weaker in Ratanakiri than elsewhere in Cambodia . Furthermore , government services are ineffective and insufficient to meet the needs of the province . The Cambodian government has traditionally accepted substantial support from NGOs in the region .

Thon Saron is the provincial governor . Commune councils in Ratanakiri are composed of 223 members representing the CPP , 30 members representing the Sam Rainsy Party , and 7 members representing the Funcinpec Party . Political scientist Caroline Hughes has suggested that the CPP 's overwhelming dominance in rural areas such as Ratanakiri stems from the central government 's ability to suppress collective action , which in urban areas is offset by international donors and NGOs that provide support for opposition parties . Fifty @-@ one commune council members in Ratanakiri ( 20 % ) are women , and 98 % of Ratanakiri 's government staff was Khmer as of 2006 . Bou Lam , a member of the CPP , represents Ratanakiri in the National Assembly of Cambodia .

Village government in Ratanakiri has both traditional and administrative components . Traditional forms of government , namely village elders and other indigenous institutions , are dominant . Members of each village designate one or more community elders to manage village affairs , mediate conflicts , and ensure that villagers follow customary laws , particularly about land and resource use . Elders do not play an autocratic role , and are instead primarily respected advisors and consensus builders . Village elders are generally male , but women also play a role in the management of the community and its resources . A village may also have a village chief , i.e. , a local government person who is appointed by a higher governmental official . The village chief serves as a liaison between the village and outside government officials , but lacks traditional authority . The role of the village chief in village governance may be poorly defined ; in one Kreung village , residents told a researcher that they were " very unclear exactly what the work of the village chief entailed . "

The province is subdivided into nine districts , as follows :

= = Economy and transportation = =

The vast majority of workers in Ratanakiri are employed in agriculture . Most of the indigenous residents of Ratanakiri are subsistence farmers , practicing slash and burn shifting cultivation . ( See

Culture below for more information on traditional subsistence practices . ) Many families are beginning to shift production to cash crops such as cashews , mangoes , and tobacco , a trend that has accelerated in recent years . Ratanakiri villagers have traditionally had little contact with the cash economy . Barter exchange remains widespread , and Khmer Loeu villagers tended to visit markets only once per year until quite recently . As of 2005 , monetary income in the province averaged US \$ 5 per month per person ; purchased possessions such as motorcycles , televisions , and karaoke sets have become extremely desirable .

Larger @-@ scale agriculture occurs on rubber and cashew plantations . Other economic activities in the province include gem mining and commercial logging . The most abundant gem in Ratanakiri is blue zircon . Small quantities of amethyst , peridot , and black opal are also produced . Gems are generally mined using traditional methods , with individuals digging holes and tunnels and manually removing the gems ; recently , however , commercial mining operations have been moving into the province . Logging , particularly illegal logging , has been a problem both for environmental reasons and because of land alienation . This illegal logging has been undertaken by the Cambodian military and by Vietnamese loggers . In 1997 , an estimated 300 @,@ 000 cubic meters of logs were exported illegally from Ratanakiri to Vietnam , compared to a legal limit of 36 @,@ 000 cubic meters . John Dennis , a researcher for the Asian Development Bank , described the logging in Ratanakiri as a " human rights emergency " .

Ratanakiri 's tourist industry has rapidly expanded in recent years : visits to the province increased from 6 @,@ 000 in 2002 to 105 @,@ 000 in 2008 and 118 @,@ 000 in 2011 . The region 's tourism development strategy focuses on encouraging ecotourism . Increasing tourism in Ratanakiri has been problematic because local communities receive very little income from tourism and because guides sometimes bring tourists to villages without residents ' consent , disrupting traditional ways of life . A few initiatives have sought to address these issues : a provincial tourism steering committee aims to ensure that tourism is non @-@ destructive , and some programs provide English and tourism skills to indigenous people .

Ox @-@ cart and motorcycle are common means of transportation in Ratanakiri . The provincial road system is better than in some parts of the country , but remains in somewhat bad condition . National Road 78 between Banlung and the Vietnam border was built between 2007 and 2010 ; the road was expected to increase trade between Cambodia and Vietnam . There is a small airport in Banlung , but commercial flights to Ratanakiri have long been discontinued .

## == Demographics and towns ==

As of 2013 , Ratanakiri Province had a population of approximately 184 @,@ 000 . Its population nearly doubled between 1998 and 2013 , largely due to internal migration . In 2013 , Ratanakiri made up 1 @.@ 3 % of Cambodia 's total population ; its population density of 17 @.@ 0 residents per square kilometer was just over one fifth the national average . About 70 % of the province 's population lives in the highlands ; of the other 30 % , approximately half live in more urbanized towns , and half live along rivers and in the lowlands , where they practice wetland rice cultivation and engage in market activities . Banlung , the provincial capital located in the central highlands , is by far the province 's largest town , with a population of approximately 25 @,@ 000 . Other significant towns include Veun Sai in the north and Lomphat in the south , with populations of 2 @,@ 000 and 3 @,@ 000 respectively .

In 2013 , 37 % of Ratanakiri residents were under age 15 , 52 % were age 15 to 49 , 7 % were age 50 to 64 , and 3 % were aged 65 or older ; 49 @.@ 7 % of residents were male , and 50 @.@ 3 % were female . Each household had an average of 4 @.@ 9 members , and most households ( 85 @.@ 6 % ) were headed by men .

While highland peoples have inhabited Ratanakiri for well over a millennium , lowland peoples have migrated to the province in the last 200 years . As of 2013 , various highland groups collectively called Khmer Loeu made up approximately half of Ratanakiri 's population , ethnic Khmers made up 36 % , and ethnic Lao made up 10 % . Within the Khmer Loeu population , 35 % were Tampuan as of 1998 , 24 % were Jarai , 23 % were Kreung , 11 % were Brou , 3 % were Kachok , and 3 % were

Kavet , with other groups making up the remaining one percent . There are also very small Vietnamese , Cham , and Chinese minorities . Though the official language of Ratanakiri ( like all of Cambodia ) is Khmer , each indigenous group speaks its own language . Less than 10 % of Ratanakiri 's indigenous population can speak Khmer fluently .

= = Health , education , and development = =

Health indicators in Ratanakiri are the worst in Cambodia . Life expectancy is 39 years for men and 43 years for women . Malaria , tuberculosis , intestinal parasites , cholera , diarrhea , and vaccine @-@ preventable diseases are endemic . Ratanakiri has very high rates of maternal and child mortality ; in Ratanakiri and neighboring Mondulakiri ( whose figures were combined in the most recent survey ) , over 10 % of children die before the age of five . Ratanakiri also has the country 's highest rates of severe malnutrition . Ratanakiri residents ' poor health can be attributed to a variety of factors , including poverty , remoteness of villages , poor quality medical services , and language and cultural barriers that prevent Khmer Loeu from obtaining medical care . The province has one referral hospital , 10 health centers , and 17 health posts . Medical equipment and supplies are minimal , and most health facilities are staffed by nurses or midwives , who are often poorly trained and irregularly paid .

As of 1998 , Ratanakiri had 76 primary schools , one junior high school , and one high school . Education levels , particularly among Khmer Loeu , are very low . A 2002 survey of residents in six villages found that fewer than 10 % of respondents had attended any primary school . Access to education is limited because of the expense of books , distance to schools , children 's need to contribute to their families ' livelihood , frequent absence of teachers , and instruction that is culturally inappropriate and in a language foreign to most students . Only 55 % of Ratanakiri adults were literate as of 2013 ( compared to 80 % in Cambodia overall ) . Bilingual education initiatives , in which students begin instruction in native languages and gradually transition to instruction in Khmer , began in Ratanakiri in 2002 and appear to have been successful . The programs aim to make education more accessible to speakers of indigenous languages , as well as to give Khmer Loeu access to national political and economic affairs by providing Khmer language skills .

Ratanakiri is one of the least developed provinces in Cambodia . As of 2013 , the average home had 1 @.@ 9 rooms , and only 14 @.@ 9 % of buildings in the province had permanent roofs , walls , and flooring . Relatively few households ( 27 @.@ 8 % ) had toilet facilities . The largest share of households ( 38 @.@ 0 % ) obtained water from springs , streams , ponds , or rain ; much of the remainder obtained water from protected ( 23 @.@ 9 % ) or unprotected ( 15 @.@ 1 % ) dug wells . Only 21 @.@ 6 % of Ratanakiri residents obtained water from sources that are considered safe ( purchased water , piped water , or tube / piped wells ) . Household water sources were within the home for 28 @.@ 0 % of households , near the home for 39 @.@ 1 % , and away from the home for 32 @.@ 9 % . The most common source of light was battery power ( 39 @.@ 5 % ) , followed by government @-@ provided power ( 25 @.@ 5 % ) , and kerosene ( 16 @.@ 5 % ) . Most households ( 85 % ) used firewood as the main fuel for cooking . A variety of NGOs , including Oxfam and Health Unlimited , work to improve health and living conditions in the province .

= = Culture = =

Khmer Loeu typically practice subsistence slash and burn shifting cultivation in small villages of between 20 and 60 nuclear families . Each village collectively owns and governs a forest territory whose boundaries are known though not marked . Within this land , each family is allocated , on average , 1 ? 2 hectares ( 2 @.@ 5 ? 5 acres ) of actively cultivated land and 5 ? 6 hectares ( 12 @.@ 5 ? 15 acres ) of fallow land . The ecologically sustainable cultivation cycle practiced by the Khmer Loeu generally lasts 10 to 15 years . Villagers supplement their agricultural livelihood with low @-@ intensity hunting , fishing , and gathering over a large area .

Khmer Loeu diets in Ratanakiri are largely dictated by the food that is available for harvesting or gathering . Numerous food taboos also limit food choice , particularly among pregnant women ,

children , and the sick . The primary staple grain is rice , though most families experience rice shortages during the six months before harvest time . Some families have begun to plant maize to alleviate this problem ; other sources of grain include potatoes , cassava , and taro . Most Khmer Loeu diets are low in protein , which is limited in availability . Wild game and fish are major protein sources , and smaller animals such as rats , wild chickens , and insects are also sometimes eaten . Domestic animals such as pigs , cows , and buffaloes are only eaten when sacrifices are made . In the rainy season , many varieties of vegetables and leaves are gathered from the forest . ( Vegetables are generally not cultivated . ) Commonly eaten fruits include bananas , jackfruit , papayas , and mangoes .

Houses in rural Ratanakiri are made from bamboo , rattan , wood , saek , and kanma leaves , all of which are collected from nearby forests ; they typically last for around three years . Village spatial organization varies by ethnic group . Kreung villages are constructed in a circular manner , with houses facing inwards toward a central meeting house . In Jarai villages , vast longhouses are inhabited by all extended families , with the inner house divided into smaller compartments . Tampuan villages may follow either pattern .

Nearly all Khmer Loeu are animist , and their cosmologies are intertwined with the natural world . Some forests are believed to be inhabited by local spirits , and local taboos forbid cutting in those areas . Within spirit forests , certain natural features such as rock formations , waterfalls , pools , and vegetation are sacred . Major sacrificial festivals in Ratanakiri occur during March and April , when fields are selected and prepared for the new planting season . Christian missionaries are present in the province , and some Khmer Loeu have converted to Christianity . The region 's ethnic Khmer are Buddhist . There is also a small Muslim community , consisting mainly of ethnic Cham .

Because of the province 's high prevalence of malaria and its distance from regional centers , Ratanakiri was isolated from Western influences until the late 20th century . Major cultural shifts have occurred in recent years however , particularly in villages near roads and district towns ; these changes have been attributed to contact with internal immigrants , government officials , and NGO workers . Clothing and diets are becoming more standardized , and traditional music is being displaced by Khmer music . Many villagers have also observed a loss of respect for elders and a growing divide between the young and the old . Young people have begun to refuse to abide by traditional rules and have stopped believing in spirits .