

Activities

Tour programs

Depending on your interests and time availability, you can choose either of these two programs, which are led by village guides:

Program 1 - Ban Nakout and Nakhang / Airbase (Lima Site 36) – approx. 3 hours

Program 2 – Same as Program 1 + Thang Viet and Tad Lom Waterfall – approx. 6 hours



Please note that using a guide to visit Nakhang is mandatory. Your village guide will know the paths that are cleared from UXO and can show you the location of the various points of interest.

Lunch

Ban Nakout villagers can arrange a simple village lunch. Please indicate whether you would like to have lunch in the village, as well as any special

requirements you may have, when you book your program.

Village lodging

The villagers of Ban Nakout have constructed a simple but comfortable village lodge, allowing visitors to stay overnight at the site (charged separately, including a dinner and optional breakfast). Sanitary facilities include a basic squat toilets and bucket baths. Depending on your arrival time, you can first do your preferred tour program, stay overnight and return to Viengthong Town the next morning, or the other way around. Indicate your preference when you book your program.

Please respect local culture and customs. When invited inside someone's house, do not enter private areas or touch objects without prior consent from your host.

Getting there

Ban Nakout is accessed from Houaphanh Province's Viengthong Town, along Laos' Northern Heritage Route, which connects Houaphanh Province on a thematic route including Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang Houaphanh and Sayabouly provinces.

From the roundabout at the southern end of Viengthong Town, follow the signs as you head south for 7 km and turn left at Ban Pong Hai. Follow this unsealed road for 15 km and take a left at the Y-junction. After another 5 km you will reach Ban Nakout.

Please note that during the wet season the unsealed section of the access road may only be navigable using a four-wheel drive vehicle or off-road motorbike.



For more information, please contact the Provincial Tourism Department in Xam Neua.
Phone: 064-312567 (Mon-Fri, 08.30-12.00 & 13.00-16.00),
email: hp_pto@yahoo.com.

www.ecotourismlaos.com
www.tourismlaos.org



Nakhang – Nakout Historical Landscape

Indochina War Airbase (Lima Site 36)
Nakout “Tin Drum” Village and Lodge
Tai Phuan Ethnic Culture

Houaphanh Province, Birthplace of Lao PDR

Nakhang Indochina War Airbase (Lima Site 36)



The French first used the long and wide Nakhang valley to construct an airstrip during the First Indochina War, but it was during the Second Indochina War (aka Vietnam War) that the site saw most of the action when it functioned as an important support center and forward operating location for the Royal Lao Government (RLG) supported

–covertly- by the USA and Hmong paramilitaries (also referred to as the Secret Army) to attack Pathet Lao (Lao communist liberation movement) controlled areas in the northern provinces, particularly Houaphanh. The base was known by the Americans as Lima Site (or LS) 36.

Covert military action

Air America was an airline covertly owned and operated by the CIA and supplied and supported U.S. covert operations during the Second Indochina War. In Laos, it inserted and extracted U.S. personnel, provided



logistical support to the Royal Lao Army (RLA) and Hmong paramilitaries and transported refugees. Air America flew to Nakhang as early as June 1965. In late 1965, USAF HH-3E “Jolly Green Giants” also appeared at the site for Search and Rescue duties.

The Ravens, which were fighter pilots in another covert CIA operation, had their main base in Long Tieng, located just south of the Plain of Jars. However, Ravens were also stationed at Nakhang from where they directed air strikes, primarily in Houaphanh province.

Incidents and accidents



U.S. records of air incidents list several involving Air America and U.S. Air Force aircrafts, including hits, crashes and mechanical problems, at, near or en-route to or from Nakhang in the period 1965-1969. In his book *The Ravens: pilots of the secret war in Laos*, Christopher Robbins describes a crash at Nakhang of a USAF U-17 modified to carry smoke rockets used by the Ravens.

The fall of Nakhang (LS 36)

Nakhang was overrun twice by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces. The first time was in 1966. In retreat, the base was bombed using T-28s and completely destroyed to keep any assets there from being used by the Pathet Lao. The site was recaptured the same year.

Following the loss of nearby Phou Pha Thi mountain (aka “The Rock” or Lima Site 85), where equipment was installed to direct and control attacking jet fighters and bombers to their targets (including Hanoi) and provide them with precise bomb release points, Nakhang became the northernmost site with similar capabilities, and, as a consequence, the focal point of attacks by communist forces.

Significant resources were allocated to attack Nakhang. To bring in heavy artillery close enough to be able to shell the airbase, a road (aka *Thang Viet*, or Vietnamese Road) was constructed under the cover of darkness, zigzagging down a slope, crossing a stream and winding up again reaching as close as 3km to the site.

After continuous attacks during February 1969 which weakened defenses, North Vietnamese forces approached the base from a completely unanticipated direction that caught the defenders by surprise, and on 1 March 1969, the base was captured for the second and final time, causing heavy casualties including the military commander and the governor. Again, the base was destroyed by the retreating army (including 4,000 Hmong) to prevent equipment from falling in communist hands and US personnel were airlifted out.



Nakhang today

Evidence of the former military base can still be found in the Nakhang area. The airstrip is still clearly visible, and around it there are three 10,000 liter fuel tanks and the remains of road work equipment brought in to improve and extend

the airstrip. Further north, hidden in the overgrowth, a shell launcher is located. *Thang Viet* is also still discernable.

The area is highly contaminated with UXO, including land mines, stocks of ammunition that were not destroyed by the fleeing troops and unexploded ordnance left over from the shelling of the site and ground battles.



Nakout “Tin Drum” Village



Ban Nakout is located in the same valley as Nakhang, approx. 2 km to the southwest. It was established in 1865 when seven families moved there from Xieng Khouang. The village is 100% Tai Phuan and practices Buddhism. It now comprises of just short of 100 households. Aside from rice cultivation, some households are involved in raising livestock and the production of handicraft, such a sericulture, silk and cotton dyeing, using natural dyes and weaving, blacksmithing and bamboo basketry.

In 1964, when the Nakhang area became an important military base for the RLG and the “Secret Army”, Nakout villagers abandoned their homes and hid in the forest where they remained until 1969 when the Nakhang base was firmly under Pathet Lao control.

When the people of Ban Nakout returned to their village, they rebuilt it using left-overs from the war from the Nakhang area. Flattened oil drums were used as wall and roofing material for their



houses and rice stores and to construct garden fences. Bomb shells were used as posts. And the steps to the village temple were made using shell cases. Villagers have also ingeniously reused airplane parts, ammunition cases, shell cases, bomb shells and other small objects to make household tools and agricultural equipment, storage containers etc. Much of this can still be found in the village today.



The villages of Ban Nakout now supplement their incomes through community based tourism programs, including guided tours and a community lodge. Some of the income derived from this is allocated for the conservation of the Nakhang – Nakout Historical Landscape.