

Tampuan



Population	32,000
Major Religion	Animism
Language	Tampuan
Percent Christian	Less than 1%
Bible Translation	In Process



Who are the Tampuan?

The Tampuan are a people group who inhabit the hilly northeastern province of Ratanakiri. They occupy about 70 villages, mainly to the east of Banlung, the provincial capital. They speak their own language which is related to other groups in the area, such as Krung and Brao, as well as to Bahnar in Vietnam.

What are their lives like?

The Tampuan are traditionally subsistence farmers, practicing swidden agriculture. They will clear a section of forest, typically about one hectare (about 2.5 acres), which they will plant with upland rice for 3-5 years before clearing a fresh field and leaving the former field to lie fallow for 15-20 years before returning to it once more. They augment their food supply by gathering tubers in the forest, raising pigs, cattle and chickens, and hunting and trapping small forest animals.

In recent years, significant changes in their lifestyle have begun with a large migration of lowland Khmer into the province. With pressures on their traditional lands and destruction of forests, many are now turning to cash crops, particularly cashews, to secure sufficient income to meet their needs caused by declining rice yields and increasing difficulty in hunting and gathering. Their traditional dwellings are also changing, with many more wooden houses replacing their traditional thatched bamboo dwellings.

Rice wine plays a significant part of their lifestyle. Each family makes several jars each year. It is consumed freely at every celebration, with drunkenness being a common problem.

What do they believe?

The Tampuan are animistic in their religion, believing in spirits of the forest, rocks, mountains and rivers, as well as the spirits of the deceased. Animal sacrifices are still commonplace. They take place at set times of the year, such as before sowing, before harvest and when the harvest is complete, as well as at other times such as weddings, funerals or when someone is sick. The Tampuan will consult witchdoctors in order to ascertain how to deal with sicknesses (what sort of sacrifice the spirits require) and for other matters. They also believe that the spirits communicate with them in dreams to tell them what to sacrifice, to give permission to clear a section of forest or to warn them. Some still practice trials by ordeal in order to judge disputes – these involve such ordeals as pouring boiling water onto the protagonist's hands. If they are innocent they will not be harmed.

The younger generation is much less inclined to follow the animistic ways of their parents. The old rituals are being gradually abandoned.

What are their needs?

With such rapid changes and the threats to their livelihood, the Tampuan are finding their communities fragmenting and crime increasing. Health and nutrition standards remain far below national averages. Also, the Tampuan are less responsive to the Gospel than the other minority groups in the northeast. They need to be awakened to the truth of the Gospel. Of those who have believed, only a small number are playing an active role in building up the church, and few are well grounded in the truths of the Bible. A Bible translation project is under way.