

PROTECTION FOREST

* TRAM *

TAU

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT FOR A GREEN FUTURE

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Hanoi, 10/2021



FOREWORD

Tram Tau district, situated in the north-western province of Yen Bai, features a landscape that boasts wide, green valleys and mountainous terrain with summits of over 2,500 metres. Eleven communes and one town are scattered over an area of 74,300 hectares (ha), 77% of which is forest land. The majority of forest here is natural and protection forests that are home to diverse ecosystems and indigenous plant species. The area is also home to more than thirty thousand people, who live according to a traditional culture that is in harmony with the natural landscape of the region.

Over the years, Tram Tau's forests have been well protected thanks to effective government policies and the involvement of the authorities at every level. The support of local communities and the efforts of the staff at Tram Tau Protection Forest Management Board have also played an important role in forest development.

Each year, the area of protection and production forests increases significantly, and the economic benefits derived have become more important. In addition to income earned by households contracted to

manage and protect the forest, forests in the district also provide non-timber forest products, such as H'mong apples (*Docynia indicai*), bamboo shoots (*Poaceae spp.*), medicinal plants, and other products that increase incomes and improve the lives of local people. The Management Board plays a key role in managing, protecting, and using protection forest, and contributes to the overall well-being of the district. As a unit subordinate to the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Tram Tau Protection Forest was established in 1973 as Tram Tau District Afforestation Station under Decision No.155/QD-NN dated 12 March 1973 by the Nghia Lo Provincial Administration Committee. Following several transformations, in 2006 Yen Bai Provincial People's Committee established Tram Tau District Protection Forest Management Board under Decision No.654/QD-UBND dated 11 December 2006, to sustainably manage, protect, and develop the protection forest.

During the course of its long history, the Management Board has mobilised local communities to participate in protection and development activities

to ensure they receive a fair share of the benefits derived from the forest. As a consequence, the district's forest area has been expanding and has improved in value and quality. From 1999 to date, average forest coverage has increased by 1.5% to 2% each year, contributing significantly to poverty reduction, national defence and security. The forest has become a place that echoes the sentiments of John Muir: "In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."

We would like to thank German Development Cooperation GIZ and author Mzung Nguyen for taking the time to learn, experience, write passionately, design and publish this booklet. We hope that the ideas and images on the following pages help to inspire a love for nature and an appreciation for Tram Tau and its people.

Yours sincerely,



DAO CONG TRINH
Director of Tram Tau Protection Forest Management Board

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TRAM TAU MOUNTAINOUS DISTRICT



Tram Tau district was established on October 5th, 1964. The district has one town – Tram Tau town – and eleven communes: Ban Mu, Ban Cong, Hat Luu, Xa Ho, Tram Tau, Pa Hu, Pa Lau, Tuc Dan, Phinh Ho, Lang Nhi and Ta Xi Lang. Ten of the communes are home to large numbers of H’Mong people. The population of the district is over 31,000, with 5,961 households of mainly H’Mong, Thai, Kho Mu, and Kinh ethnicities. The average elevation above sea level is about 800 metres, with the highest peak reaching 2,985 metres.

Tram Tau district has a total area of 74,338 ha, of which around 62% is covered by forest. The area of protection forest totals 35,893 ha.

Tram Tau Protection Forest Management Board (Tram Tau PFMB) manages around 81.9% of the total forest area in Tram Tau district, including: 32,857 ha of protection forest, 4,526

ha of production forest and more than 9,000 ha of unused land for protection forest development.

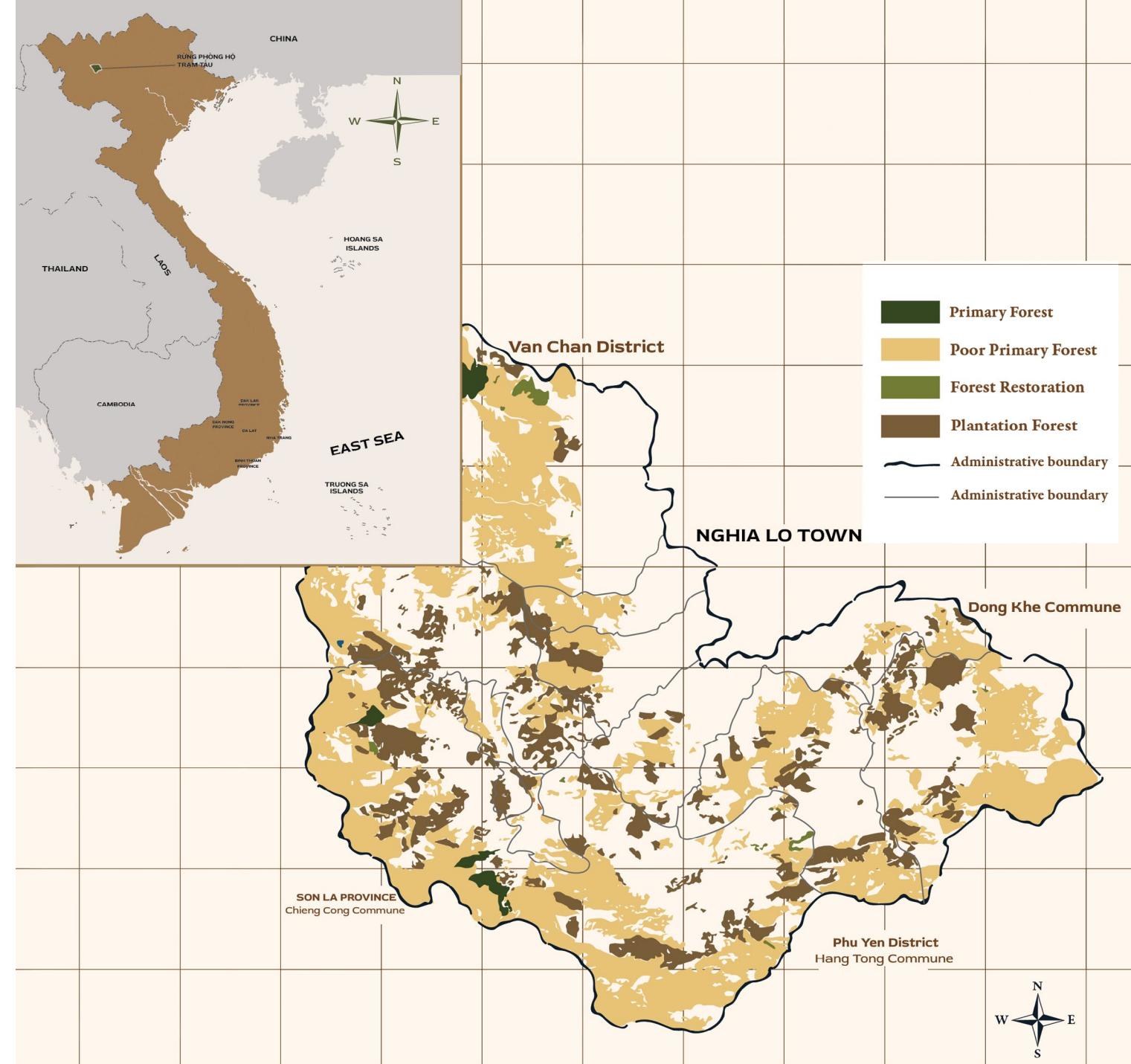
In 2020, all 35,441 ha of forest area managed by Tram Tau PFMB benefited from the policy on Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES), with a total of VND 28.3 billion expected to be paid to forest guardians.

Yen Bai province is located at the intersection of the Northeast and Northwest mountainous regions. The area’s elevation gradually rises to 600 metres and from the southeast to the northwest it is surrounded by three mountain ranges – Hoang Lien Son-Phu Luong, the ancient Con Voi (Elephant), and a limestone range located to the east. Tributaries of the Red, Chay and Lo rivers curl and meander, forming a fertile alluvial plain. The land is greened by charming mountains, rice paddies, and valleys surrounded by terraced rice fields, waterfalls and primitive forests. The ancient Red river civilization and multi-racial cultures

that existed here for centuries have left an enduring mark.

Tram Tau is one of Yen Bai’s mountainous districts. Situated at the convergence of three mountain ranges, Tram Tau shares a border with Bac Yen district to the south, Muong La district to the west, Van Chan district to the east and the north, and Mu Cang Chai district to the northwest.

Stretching from east to west, the district features increasingly high terrain with towering peaks and spectacular cliffs. The area has a small stream system weaving through the forests, valleys and villages, channels for the strong water flows that race through the mountainous terrain. In some places, beautiful waterfalls with steep slopes pour into streams to the northwest such as Ngoi Thia, Ngoi Nhi, Ngoi Mu, Nam Tung, and Huoi Sa Phin. Thanks to the richness and diversity of its terrain, the area, which has developed into a sustainable watershed protection forest system, has the potential to develop “smoke-free” industry.



**05.10
1964**



Tram Tau district was established on October 5th, 1964

62 %



Tram Tau district has a total area of 74,338 ha, of which around 62% is covered by forest. The area of protection forest totals 35,893 ha.

**11
Communes**



**1
Town**

The district has one town – Tram Tau town – and eleven communes: Ban Mu, Ban Cong, Hat Luu, Xa Ho, Tram Tau, Pa Hu, Pa Lau, Tuc Dan, Phinh Ho, Lang Nhi and Ta Xi Lang. Ten of the communes are home to large numbers of H'Mong people.

81.9 %



Tram Tau Protection Forest Management Board (Tram Tau PFMB) manages around 81.9% of the total forest area in Tram Tau district



**31,000
population**

The population of the district is over 31,000, with 5,961 households of mainly H'Mong, Thai, Kho Mu, and Kinh ethnicities.

**28.3
billion**



In 2020, all 35,441 ha of forest area managed by Tram Tau PFMB benefited from the policy on Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES), with a total of VND 28.3 billion expected to be paid to forest guardians.



II



TRAM TAU – A GRACEFUL SLEEPING BEAUTY

The steep, winding road turning and twisting through foggy, evergreen villages alongside rice paddies, leads the way to the indescribably beautiful upland district. The beauty of Tram Tau is not clustered into one accessible area, it lurks like a sleeping beauty, tempting us to search for her. Looking through the curtain-like clouds, each hill and valley hides the enduring vitality of Tram Tau's remote mountain terrain. And because the sleeping beauty has yet to awake, this place has retained its pristine landscape.

A majestic mountainous area

With an ideal year-round temperature of 18-22°C, the cool breezes, honey-like sunshine and blue skies dotted with white give every season in Tram Tau its own charm. The summer is not blisteringly hot and the winter is not freezing cold. Autumn and spring are overwhelmed with flowers blooming on the steep upland slopes. Tram Tau has an average elevation of about 800 metres, with its lowest point at 600 metres and its highest peak at 2,985 metres.

The area's topography of high and low peaks, valleys and low-lying areas nestled among the mountain slopes creates a green, rolling landscape. Phu Luong (Pu Luong) and Hoang Lien Son mountain ranges with their steep slopes and almost upright sections are beautifully interlaced with mountain clouds and swept by the winds. In recent years, these peaks have become must-see destinations for adventurers, travellers and mountaineers alike. For photographers, this is destination that promises breathtaking landscapes. As the number of tourists has increased, the district has improved routes to tourist attractions and resorts, adding road signs, warning signs, and elevation markers along the mountain slopes.



The way to Ta Chi Nhu mountain peak

For trekking enthusiasts, Ta Chi Nhu is a popular destination and one that receives effusive praise, partly because of the natural beauty along its roads and partly because of the challenging mountain, known locally as “the kingdom of cloud hunting journeys”.

“ *The kingdom of cloud hunting journeys*”

To explore the famous peak, you need perseverance to complete the challenging journey. From the district centre, take the winding road to Xa Ho and then continue along 8 km of steep slopes until you reach a narrow path along the edge of a cliff. The path is bumpy and slippery and layered with gravel and grainy soil that crunches at every step. Sunlight, winds, and dense clouds play out a glimmering dance along the rocky slopes of the mountain. This is a dangerous route, but astounding views do not come for free. The overlapping mountain ranges, bamboo forests,

babbling streams, and interweaving forest strips create an idyllic natural landscape.

On climbing to 2,979 metres, you will witness an ocean of white clouds. Time has no place here. Perceptions are submerged into a forest of white clouds rolled into clusters, sometimes spreading out like giant blankets.

Ta Chi Nhu is also known as Phu Song Sung by people of the Thai ethnic minority, or as Chung Chua Nha by the H'Mong. It is one of the ten highest mountains in Viet Nam, a giant of the famous Hoang Lien Son mountain range. For professional mountaineers, the climb takes two days and one night; for those who prefer a more relaxed ascent, three days and two nights will suffice. To summit the mountain, you'll need to be physically prepared, properly equipped, and engage the services of a H'Mong guide for their know-how and local knowledge.

The haunting beauty of Ta Xua mountain forest



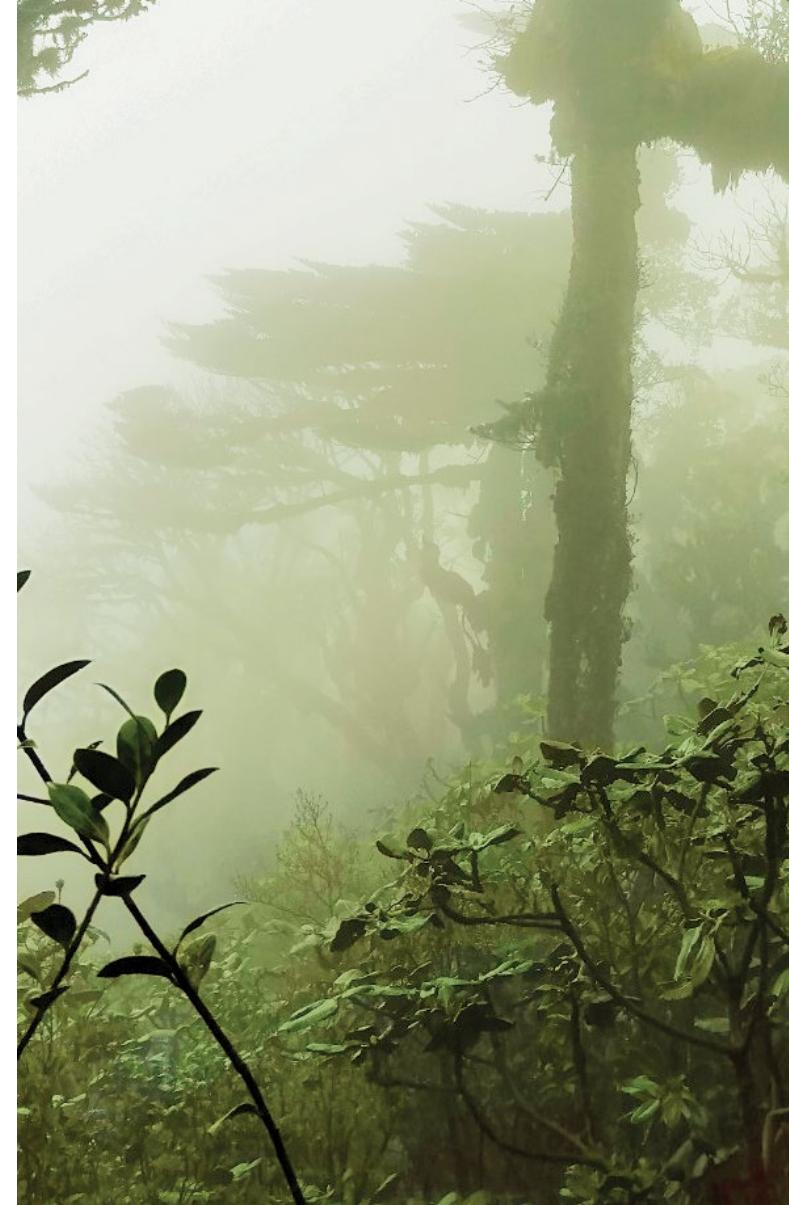
2,865 m
Highest peak

Ta Xua mountain is often compared to a giant dinosaur. Set in Ban Cong commune, its three mountain peaks combine to form a majestic spine reaching 2,865 metres at its highest peak.

The road towards the foot of the mountain slices through terraced rice fields on its way to a dense forest. The deeper you go into the forest, the steeper the mountain and the lower the temperature. After five hours trekking on forest paths, you reach the first resting place, Rua (Tortoise) Peak, a large tortoise shaped rock protruding from the craggy mountainside at 2,000 metres. If you stand on top of the rock and

look out into the distance, you will find yourself looking out into an immense open space, a void, with wind blowing from all directions, clouds drifting close above, and the deep valleys stretched out below.

As you travel further on, you come to the top of the dinosaur's backbone, standing proud and primitive. The mountain range curves magnificently in a sea of floating cloud. Climbing in Ta Xua forest is an experience that alters one's perspective. We become tiny creatures in an alien world, feet gliding between heaven and earth, lungs filled with wild primeval air.



Crossing steep passes and majestic mountains, you reach an altitude of 2,700 metres and become quite lost in a pristine forest. This place, known as the moss forest, is like a velvet carpet of green moss and vegetation laid across the mountainside. Moss covers the path, living in symbiosis on the trunks of ancient trees, on rotten stumps and rocks, and interspersed with ferns, grass and orchids. The tree trunks are bent to every shape. They are covered with moss and grow closely together, pointing towards the sky and then sinking into the mist. The wilderness here possesses a deafening silence as if the forest had never been touched by human hand.







Hang De Cho Waterfall

Hang De Cho, or Hang Te Cho, is located in the remote De Cho village in Lang Nhi commune, and is known as the most striking waterfall in the northwest. Lang Nhi is hidden in layers of cloud and mist throughout the year. The road to the village is so steep and rough that Hang De Cho waterfall attracts few visitors.

The rough, steep road becomes gradually more difficult as the slopes become more vertical. Covered with gravel, small rocks and boulders, both sides of the road are cliffs falling into an abyss. The surrounding mountainsides paint a magnificent scene, their immense rice fields providing a sublime backdrop to this treacherous road. When you reach the waterfall pouring white, soft silk strips and throwing foam into the air, you will be glad you made such an arduous journey. Hang Te Cho waterfall is an essential destination for those on a more adventurous journey through life.

“ *The beauty of Tram Tau is not clustered into one accessible area, it lurks like a sleeping beauty, tempting us to search for her.* ”

The mineral water here can treat a number of diseases and is particularly effective for blood circulation, the heart and cardio-vascular system, and skin conditions. Visitors can relax in the hot spring water while enjoying the beautiful natural scenery of the northwest mountains.

The ideal time to enjoy this precious gift of nature is in the early morning, soaking in the hot water with the mist gently stirring overhead.

Natural mineral hot spring

Tram Tau has a relatively abundant reserve of natural mineral water that flows continually from groundwater in the mountain at an average temperature of 43-45 degrees Celsius. Tram Tau hot spring is located about 2 km from the centre of Tram Tau town. The spring covers an area of about 600 m2 and is set in the middle of a valley surrounded by terraced rice fields and mountains.

WINDY DESTINATIONS

Cu Vai is a special village for H'mong and Thai people. Perched on top of a mountain in Xa Ho commune about 10 km from Tram Tau district centre, the village is home to just 46 households. The people have little contact with the outside world and so retain their traditional upland culture. Cu Vai village is named in the Thai language and means a strip of

cloud stretching across the sky. This is indeed a place to stop and take in the spectacular views, with clouds floating into the distance as if at heaven's gate.

Doi Thong Eo Gio (pine hill windy pass) is another great option for group activities or family picnics. On about 2 ha of the oldest pine forest

in Tram Tau district – planted in 1974 – the fresh air, tranquillity, and proximity to nature has seen Eo Gio become a popular destination for weekend getaways.



The Northwest's precious and endemic medicinal plants

The *Docinia indica*, commonly known as the H'mong apple tree, is a semi-evergreen fruit tree that usually grows on mountain slopes along streams and bushes at an altitude between 800 and 2,000 metres. The H'mong apple tree is an indigenous, multi-purpose plant well suited to the climate, site conditions and farming practices of upland peoples, especially the H'mong in Tram Tau.

The H'mong apple tree flowers in late spring. The fruits, which resemble small apples, ripen between August and October and are harvested in autumn. As the fruits ripen, they turn a whitish pink or yellow colour and produce an intoxicating aroma. The fruits, which produce large amounts of vitamin C and are sour to the taste, are usually soaked in wine to produce a drink popular with men in the northwest. For women, the fruit is used to make salted dry fruits and beverages. In traditional medicine, the H'mong apple is known to have medicinal properties that alleviate insomnia, improve digestion and cerebral blood circulation, minimise atherosclerosis, and strengthen the immune system.

It's hard to forget the way the H'mong apple forest wraps its green, flowering layers around the hills and mountainsides of Tram Tau, or the way its branches strain under a mass of fruits.



CUISINE

Tram Tau has a range of famous specialties for travellers: H'mong apples, Shan Phinh Ho tea, bamboo shoots soaked with chili, finger bamboo shoots, taro, upland glutinous rice, smoked buffalo meat, and five-colour fragrant sticky rice, to name just a few.



THE CULTURAL BEAUTY OF THE NORTHWEST

The current population of Tram Tau district is over 31,000, with 5,961 households of several ethnic minority groups: the H'Mong, Thai, Kinh and Kho Mu. Each group has its unique cultural characteristics in the form of costumes, rituals and art, such as the H'Mong Pan-pipe and Lip Pan-pipe, the Thai Pi Lo and Pi Thiu flutes, and the Gong dance of the Kho Mu.

Upland cultural fairs

The upland cultural fair starts early at 5 a.m. when the forests are still covered with mist. At Tram Tau district market, people are busy selling all kinds of wares to eager buyers from across the district. H'Mong and Thai people carry produce from the mountains to the market on foot or on the back of motorbikes. At the market, upland men and women wear their traditional brocade costumes, adding their colour to this bustling cultural space. Here, they meet, exchange information, and court their future husbands and wives. In the market, one can find vegetables, corn, plums, H'mong apples, tea from old tea trees as well as goats, pigs, chickens, and delicate brocade.



5,961 households

several ethnic minority groups: the H'Mong, Thai, Kinh and Kho Mu



H'Mong colours

Yen Bai province is home to over 107,000 H'Mong people. The four main ethnic groups, the Mong Hoa (Mong Lenh), Black Mong (Mong Du), White Mong (Mong Do) and Mong Si (Red Mong) live in all of the province's 9 districts. H'Mong people live together in separate villages and hamlets and speak their own language, a member of the Mong-Dao language group (South Asian language line). Their renowned forging skills, which can be seen in locally made knives, hoes, ploughs, and jewellery, have been passed down through the generations.

Building a house is considered an important event for H'Mong people. They build from the ground up using solid interior structures and low roofs that are designed to reduce the impacts of storms in the rainy season, provide warmth in winter, and ensure a cool environment in summer. The houses often consist of three open compartments with a primary door and a secondary door, with latches made of sturdy wood to drive away ghosts and spirits. The roof is covered with thin layers of fokienia wood (*Fokienia hodginsii*) or cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) and the walls made of wooden boards or crushed bamboo. Around the house, the H'Mong grow a range of fruit trees, such as peach, plum, apple, and pear. They follow a patriarchal system with families of two generations living

together. Society is organised and functions according to close family ties, with family groups living in clusters of neighbouring villages.

In addition to worshipping their ancestors, the H'Mong also worship gods that offer protection to families, for example, the God of Wealth (Xu Cang, whose altar is located in the centre of a house's main section), Bua Dang the House Pole God, Bua Trung the Door God, the Stove God, and the Kitchen God. H'Mong people think that each person has three silhouettes (Ply) and seven souls (chua lua) (Cau chua lua – Pe Ly). The soul only exists when a person is alive, disappearing after death. There are many festivals that feature important rites and rituals dedicated to the spiritual life, such as the Nao Song festival, Gau Tao festival, New Rice festival, and the Forest Worship festival, etc. The H'Mong usually choose spring to hold their weddings, when flowers are blooming along the roads and life thrives in the cool weather. The groom's family dispels bad omens, appeals for good fortune and hosts a ceremony to join the two families. In a traditional wedding ceremony, H'Mong people play Pa Pao, sing folk songs, play pan-pipes and dance to the melodies of Than Chu and Gau Phenh.



The H'Mong are famous for their costumes and artful brocade designs. Women usually wear a four-striped blouse with a V-neck without buttons and an embroidered rectangle piece of fabric with a silver coin that jangles as it moves. The skirt is wide with many pleats and when spread out is round in shape. The fabric belt is called lang, xe is the name for the cloth covering the front of the skirt, and the leg coverings are called khu lau. The sleeves, skirt belt and head scarf are meticulously embroidered and decorated. H'Mong women often wear aprons when wearing skirts, and on indigo dresses, rectangle, square, diamond, and swirl patterns are embroidered in blue, red, black, and yellow. Boys wear black pants with very wide legs and a belt called a lang dua la.

Brocade fabric is made of natural flax materials that are highly durable. Flax is cut, sun-dried, stripped into yarns, crushed in a stone mortar, and then joined and rolled. Flax rolls are boiled until the fibres become soft and white, and then sun-dried. H'Mong women can be seen busily plaiting and joining yarns anywhere they find themselves with some free time. After the yarn is woven on looms, beeswax is used to draw patterns and the fabric is then dyed in indigo ready for tailoring.



Paddy rice civilization of the Thai ethnic group

While H'mong people choose to live high in the mountains and rely on the forests, the Thai reside in low-lying areas and farm rice. There are about 4,400 Thai people – Tay and Tay Khao who are known as White Thai, and Tay Dam who are known as Black Thai – living in neighbouring villages along the valleys of Tram Tau. Thai people in Yen Bai province represent the wet paddy rice civilization, the most famous of which are Tu Le and Muong Lo plains.

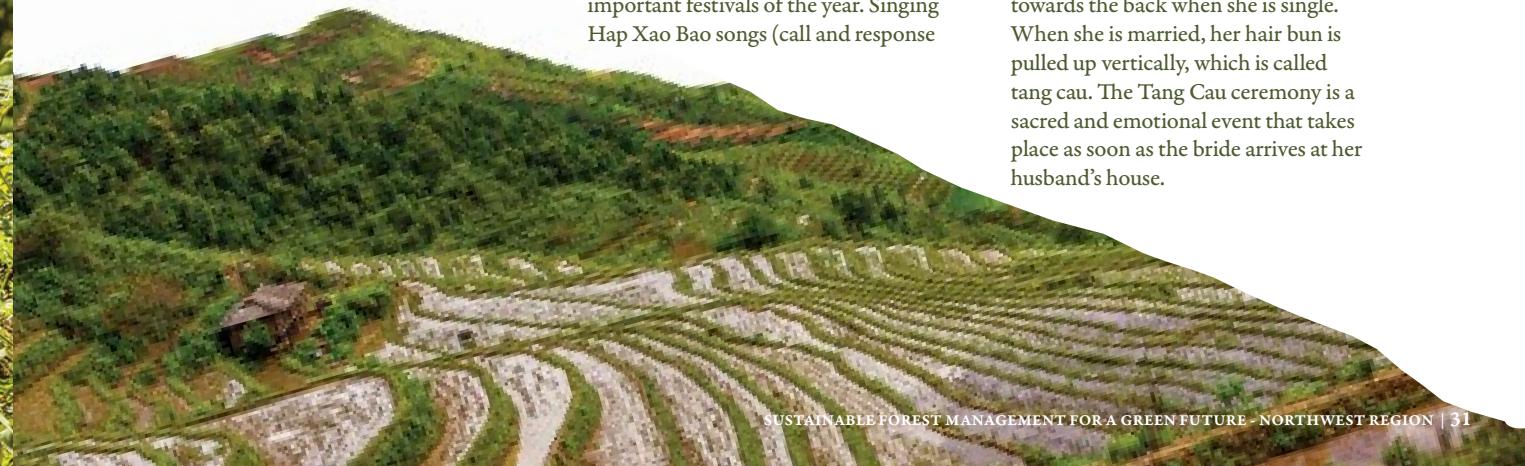
Black Thai people here are famous for farming techniques including “leading water to irrigate the field” using a system of ditches and canals; muong – phai – la – lin, in which the water wheel was a great invention, taking advantage of water power to bring water from low-lying to high areas; and the Hoa – Canh – Thuy – Nau technique to burn rice straw for agricultural production. Thai people live in stilt houses, roofed

with bamboo and pine panels, and which are usually shared by three generations of the same family. In addition to worshipping their ancestors and house ghosts (phi huon), the Thai also worship their villages, fields, and the Then God of the clans that comprises the Then ghosts. People here think that dying means continuing to live on in the afterlife, so a funeral is a ceremony to see the dead off to Muong Troi (heaven).

Thai people celebrate numerous festivals throughout the year. Several include ceremonies worshipping the gods (Xen Lau No, Xe Then) and the forest god (Xen Dong), and several worship the spirits of village founders (Xen Ban, Xen Muong). During these annual festivals, villagers pray to the gods for favourable weather. The festivals worshipping ancestors (Tam Khuon and Tam Te Na), buffaloes (Tam Khuon Quai), and the full moon festival (Xip Xi) in July are the most important festivals of the year. Singing Hap Xao Bao songs (call and response

songs), Then songs (prayer songs) and playing games such as Con (fabric ball) throwing, Yen (shuttlecock) hitting, Tó má k l ẹ (or To Ma Le - throwing Le fruit) are all part of the festivities. Unique musical instruments, such as pan-pipes and seven kinds of Pi (flute), are common at festivals held in spring, such as Xoe, Ms. Han and Han Khuong, and at weddings, funerals, and community occasions.

The traditional Thai wedding ceremony and the practice of the groom living in the bride's house are unique Thai customs. Preparations for wedding ceremonies take place over several months. The groom's family prepares wedding gifts and the bride's family prepares 3 blanket sets for the bride to bring to the groom's house on the day of the wedding. The groom then stays at his wife's house until they have children, at which time they return to the husband's house. A Black Thai girl will wear her hair bun towards the back when she is single. When she is married, her hair bun is pulled up vertically, which is called tang cau. The Tang Cau ceremony is a sacred and emotional event that takes place as soon as the bride arrives at her husband's house.

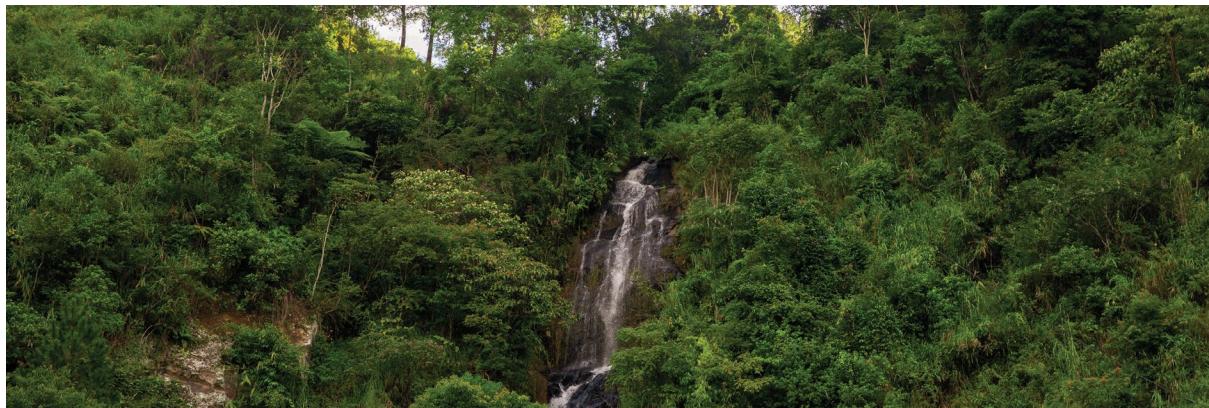




IV

TRAM TAU SACRED FORESTS





The Thai, Ha Nhi, Dao, Muong, Nung, and H'Mong ethnic groups have been living with nature since ancient times. They believe that their lives and deaths are dependent on the forest because their food sources and shelter rely on hunting and gathering. Today, forests remain an indispensable part of their lives, sacred places that protect their living environment, their houses and property. They are also a source of water, prevent erosion and alleviate the impacts of storms and floods. Ethnic people consider the forest as a god, a divinity of long life. Because of the spiritual life that the people have inherited from ancient times and because of the customs that govern the way they treat the forests, Tram Tau district has retained a large area of primary forest.

The black Ha Nhi people believe that after death, their souls enter forest trees for shelter, so there are forests where people are forbidden to enter. People may only enter when villages carry

out Ga Tu, an offering ceremony to worship their ancestors, the God of the Forest, and the God of Water in the forbidden forest, located at the head of the village. Muong people do not cut down trees or cultivate land in the forest in deference to hill ghosts. They conduct rituals to close the forest so that the hill ghosts can celebrate the lunar new year (Tet) in peace. The forests are opened after Tet so that people can continue to cultivate land on the mountains and gather forest products.

In the sowing season, Dao people prepare offerings to bring to the field to thank the forest ghost for allowing them to cultivate the land, and to pray for a bumper crop in the coming harvest. The Nung people worship the "father and mother trees", where two old trees grow close to each other. Thai people in Hat Luu commune choose certain places as sacred (dong cam), where people are forbidden to collect forest products. They express the following statement:

“ Keeping forests for people to thrive
Keeping forests for water to continuously flow
The ones who know this will become virtuous people ”

After the lunar new year, the Thai organise the Xen Dong ceremony to worship the forest with a black and a white buffalo as an offering. Mong people's Nao Song festival is held at the beginning of the year on a high mountain peak to worship the god that lives in a big tree. People pray to keep the community and their livestock safe, and to prevent wild animals from destroying their crops.

Living by the principles of respecting nature, considering all living things sacred, and forest conservation, the people of Tram Tau have ensured that wherever there are people, the forests remain.





V

**TRAM TAU FOREST
DEVELOPMENT**



Tram Tau Protection Forest

Tram Tau district is assigned with the task of protecting watershed forests in the west of Yen Bai province, which have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of ethnic people in Tram Tau, Muong Lo plains, Van Chan district and Nghia Lo town.

Tram Tau Protection Forest Management Board (PFMB) was established in 2006 by Yen Bai Provincial People's

Committee, replacing the Tram Tau Forest Enterprise. The PFMB was assigned the tasks of managing, protecting and developing protection and production forests, including forested and non-forested areas in Tram Tau district; developing newly planted forests using the agroforestry model; enriching protection forests; producing and selling forest tree seedlings; and exploiting timber and non-timber forest products.



In 2009, Yen Bai Provincial People's Committee assigned Tram Tau PFMB to manage 49,304 ha of land, of which 35,397 ha is forest and more than 10,000 ha unused land, on which to develop protection forests in the district's 12 communes.

Currently, the PFMB has 38 staff, including 28 public service officers, one contracted employee under Decree 68/2000/ND-CP and on the state payroll, and nine employees paid by the PFMB.



49,304.1 ha

Tram Tau PFMB to manage of land

Efforts to plant protection forest

To protect the ecological environment, increase forest coverage and create jobs, Tram Tau PFMB has implemented a number of projects: the Planting of Five Million Hectares of Forest (Project No.661); the Investment Project on Afforestation for the Period 2011-2015 in Tram Tau district; the Project on Planting and Developing the H'mong apple tree (*Docynia indicia*) in Tram Tau district in 2016-2020; and the One Million and One Tree Planting Program funded by DHL and implemented by German Development Cooperation GIZ. The locations of the projects include Hat Luu, Ban Mu, Ban Cong, Xa Ho, Tram Tau, Pa Hu, Pa Lau, Phinh Ho, Lang Nhi, and Ta Xi Lang communes as well as Tram Tau town. The total forest area managed and protected on a contractual basis by the Management Board is 35,397 ha.

After several years, the projects to plant forests on bare land and hills have resulted in protection forests with functions such as water source protection; drought, flood and erosion prevention; and an improvement of soil fertility, all of which contribute to improving the ecological environment, create jobs, and promote economic development.

The restructuring of agroforestry crops in the district has enabled local people to enjoy forest by-products, such as timber (through the thinning of planted forests) pine resin, and non-timber forest and medicinal forest products. Through afforestation projects, 9,500 ha of forests have been planted with horsetail pines (*Pinus massoniana*), Voi thuoc (*Schima wallichii*), To hap

(*Altingia* spp.) and H'mong apple (*Docynia indicia*). Afforestation projects have also helped remove opium fields (*Papaver somniferum L.*) and halted slash and burn cultivation, which has in turn minimised forest fires. There is other complementary work underway; for example, nursery gardens to produce seedlings for reforestation, fire breaks, forest management and protection stations,



and fire watch towers, all of which have improved the efficiency of forest management and protection. The H'mong apple tree has been recognised as an indigenous specialty tree, taking its place in the group of 50 Vietnamese specialty fruits. Taking advantage of the benefits of this native tree, Tram Tau PFMB has been implementing the Project on Planting and Developing the H'mong apple tree (*Docinia Indica*) in Tram Tau district since 2016, with the target of planting 4,570 ha by 2020. The H'mong apple brings many benefits. It has the potential to create jobs, increase incomes for local people, enhance responsibility for forest management and protection, limit forest fires, and maintain water resources for the Red River basin.

The tree, which is especially suitable to the site conditions in Tram Tau, can also provide water for domestic use and production in the region, and help preserve the heritage of the area's terraced rice fields.

The project's stakeholders include households and communities participating in protecting natural protection forests. Households receive H'mong apple seedlings along with payments for planting and tending to the trees in the forest. They are also entitled to enjoy all the fruits of their work (and of the trees). The households also receive payments for forest protection and participate in training on new agroforestry technologies. To date, Tram Tau district has planted 4,389 of the 4,570

ha available under the project. With 851 ha of fruiting trees, including 200 ha of mixed forests with stable annual fruiting and 651 ha of newly planted forests since 2008, the average annual output has reached 160-200 tons of fruit per year.

There is a saying: "The best is Thanh, the second is Lo, the third is Than, the fourth is Tac", which means that in the vast northwest, the largest plain is in Muong Thanh (Dien Bien province), the second largest is in Muong Lo (Yen Bai province), followed by Muong Than (Lai Chau province) and Muong Tac (Son La province). Muong Lo plain is located near Nghia Lo town on the road from Tram Tau district to Yen Bai. Tram Tau protection forests ensure that water is available to irrigate the lush Muong Lo plain.

When H'mong women plant forests

While Tram Tau is home to 26,885 people from 4,776 households, the district has a low population density of around 30 people per km². Although local people are traditionally industrious, they live scattered across high mountains and farm small areas of rice paddy on sloping land using shifting cultivation practices. In recent years, afforestation projects have increasingly involved non-state actors, attracting local people to the forestry sector; more than 5,000 households have been contracted to perform afforestation services. Both men and women are contracted and paid directly and benefit from state policies on forest protection. The income received from participating in the projects has played a significant role in reducing poverty. Local people have gradually become more aware of the roles and value of the forests, and have learned to invest their own money and time to plant forests with native tree species, such as the H'mong apple (*Docinia Indica*) and fokienia (*Fokienia hodginsii*). H'mong women make a notable contribution to forest development. They are members of Women's Unions in Phinh Ho, Ban Mu, and Tuc Dan villages and are diligent in their afforestation work, carefully tending and harvesting H'mong apple trees. They also bring a great deal of enthusiasm when they participate in learning activities, taking the opportunity to improve their knowledge and contribute ideas on forest protection.



851 ha
of H'mong apple trees

5,000
households have been contracted to perform afforestation services



PAYMENT FOR FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



The concept of Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES) is still quite new to most ethnic minority communities. This model for implementing the state's forestry policies ensures benefits for forest environmental service providers, such as the PFMB and local people involved in afforestation and protection (also known as forest owners), and has been expanded since its introduction in 2008. Accordingly, forest environmental service users (hydropower plants, freshwater users, tourism facilities, industrial producers, aquaculture producers, as well as business activities causing large greenhouse gas emissions) have to pay forest environmental service providers for the use of forest resources.

There are several different interpretations of forest environmental

services. In short, it can be understood that forest environmental services are the values that forest environmental service providers create (watershed protection, landscape protection, biodiversity conservation, and forest carbon sequestration and storage), which bring direct or indirect benefits for the production and business activities of forest environmental service users. For example, afforestation activities of the PFMB and local people help to protect the soil, prevent erosion, and stop the build-up of sedimentation in the beds of rivers and lakes. In the last example, hydropower plants are obliged to pay for this service. About 98% of revenue from forest environmental services in Tram Tau comes from the hundreds of large and small hydropower plants operating across the province. The remaining revenue comes from

clean water businesses.

Tram Tau district has the highest level of PFES in the country (VND 800,000 per hectare). The forest area generating payments in 2019 totalled more than 35,000 ha. Since the policy on PFES entered into force, more than 60% of H'Mong and Thai households in Tram Tau have taken the opportunity to participate in afforestation. This allows them to contribute to forest protection while increasing their incomes.

35,000 ha 

The forest area generating payments

60 % 

households to participate in afforestation

DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE FOREST DEVELOPMENT PLAN (SFMP) FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

From 2021 to 2030, Tram Tau PFMB will prioritise the development of a sustainable forest management plan to protect the existing forest area, improve forest coverage, and increase watershed protection. At the same time, the PFMB aims to improve socio-economic development by building close relationships with the communities living in and around forest areas, improving people's lives and livelihoods, and reducing

impacts on forest resources.

To develop the SFMP, the PFMB is currently updating its knowledge resources on the natural and socio-economic conditions of protection forest areas in Tram Tau. The review of the current status of land use, forest resources, and biodiversity resources will help identify threats and evaluate the potential for eco-tourism and livelihood development.

Located at the gateway to the Northwest, Tram Tau is a place where possibilities converge for sustainable tourism and forest conservation; a place where visitors become one with nature, taking in the mountain views, the crisp air, and walking in the footsteps of the gods.



CONCLUSION

Tram Tau Protection Forest, which is a charming land with many potentials in terms of sustainable tourism and benefits from forest resources, is located at the gateway to the northwest region. It is also the perfect destination for tourists to immerse themselves in nature, enjoy the fresh air, and have more valuable experiences.



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