

Central, Oro & Milne Bay Provinces



The eastern provinces of Central, Oro and Milne Bay have it all – dazzling reefs, an arsenal of WWII historic sites, jungle-clad mountains and, most endearingly, good-spirited and genuinely hospitable people. Those who love the outdoors will find plenty of it here and ample opportunity to scramble over, fall down on, dive into, and swim through it.

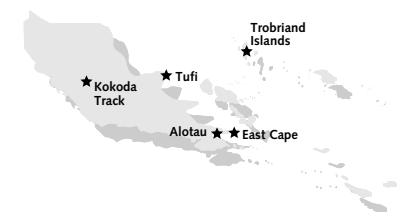
Papua New Guinea's foremost attraction, the Kokoda Track, seesaws for 96 unrelenting kilometres between the Central and Oro Provinces. But the Kokoda is far more than a mere track. Japanese and Australians fought one of WWII's bloodiest running battles along these paths and, for many Aussies, it embodies their never-say-die identity. Today, many walk in solidarity for their forefathers who fought and died in this most inhospitable but beautiful battlefield.

Further east, at Tufi and north of Alotau, some of the world's most biologically diverse reefs will have you gasping on your snorkel's mouthpiece. When you tire of marvelling at the kaleidoscopic colours of the reefs and diving the numerous WWII planes and boat wrecks, try your hand at muck diving (diving amid the critters that lurk at the sea bed and the detritus of history) under the pylons of the Samarai Island Wharf.

Turning north, across the Solomon Sea, you'll find the legendary Trobriand Islands, home to the exotic Milamala Festival of 'free' love, cricket and – above all – yams. Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province, is one of the safest and most attractive towns in the country and home to the Milne Bay Kundu & Canoe Festival, during which island warriors paddle ocean-going canoes in races guaranteed to have your heart racing.

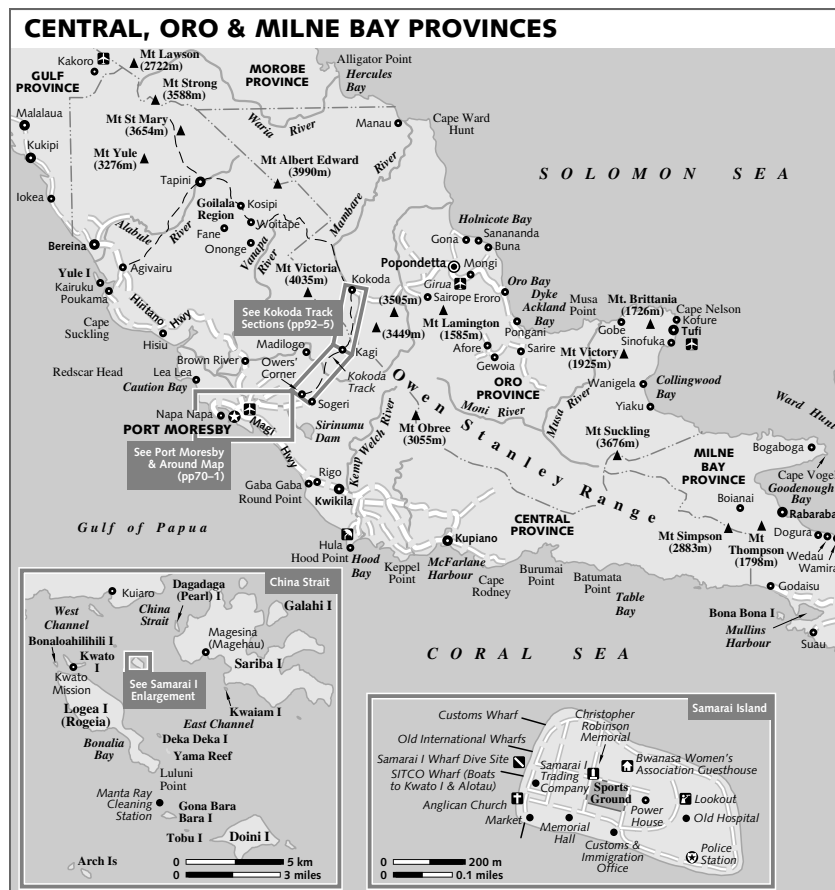
HIGHLIGHTS

- Retracing WWII battles over the rugged Owen Stanley Range on the infamous **Kokoda Track** (p91)
- Swimming through clouds of technicoloured reef fish and catching a canoe to the untouched island communities off **East Cape** (p113)
- Playing cricket on **Trobriand Islands** (p120) and immersing yourself in the islands' unique culture.
- Staying in a seaside village among the amazing volcanic *rias* (fjords) of **Tufi** (p107)
- Cheering alongside locals for your favourite canoe in the **Milne Bay Kundu & Canoe Festival** (p111) in Alotau



■ POPULATION: 527,000

■ AREA: 67,940 SQ KM



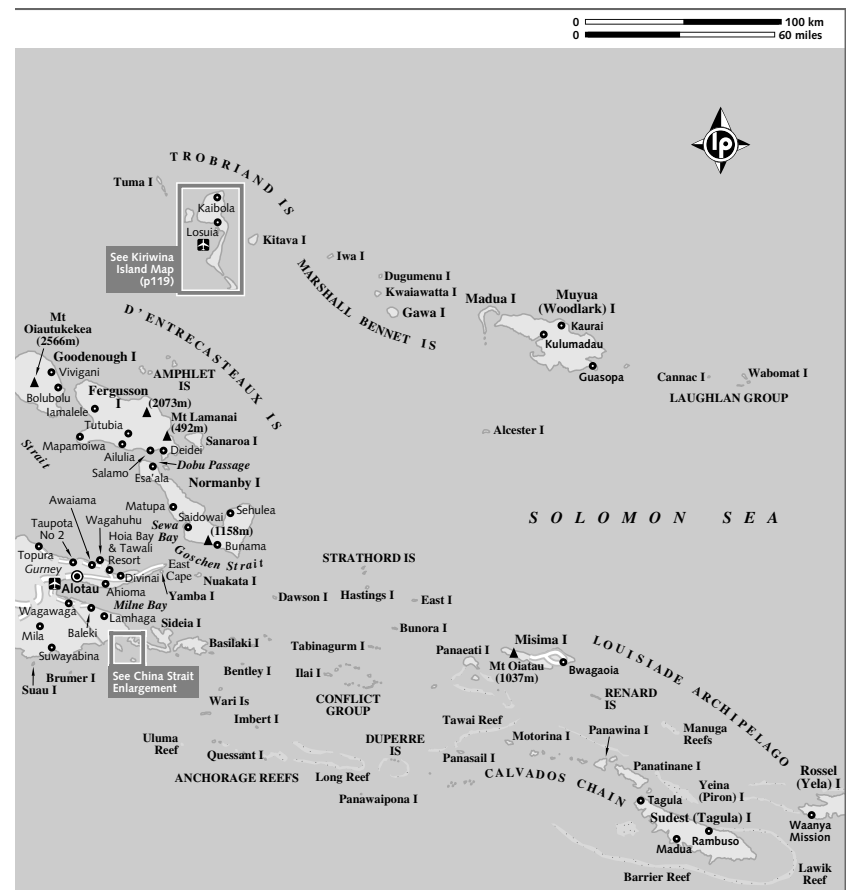
History

The coastal people and islanders of this region have traded for centuries in extensive barter networks, the most famous of which was the *kula* ring (see p117). The *hiri* trade between Motuans in Central Province and villages further around the gulf was conducted in huge two-masted *lakatois* (sailing boats).

In 1606 Spanish mariner Luis Vaéz de Torres, after whom the Louisiades were named, abducted 14 children and took them to Manila in the Philippines to be baptised. He was followed by an array of explorers, including the famous Frenchman Antoine d'Entrecasteaux, who left his name on a large group of islands. But it wasn't until 1847 that Europeans sought to settle the region. In that year, Marist mis-

sionaries arrived on Muyua (Woodlark) Island, but the locals, it seems, were unenthusiastic about Christianity and the Marists were gone within eight years. Apparently undeterred, the London Missionary Society (LMS), Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and finally the Seventh-Day Adventists opened for business between the 1870s and 1908. Most notable among them was Reverend Charles W Abel, a dissident member of the LMS, who in 1891 founded the Kwato Extension Association on Kwato Island, near Samarai in the China Strait. This was the first church to provide skills training to the indigenous people of Milne Bay.

Apart from men of God, the region attracted a less savoury crew of opportunist



who forcibly removed local men to work in northern Australian sugar plantations. This loathsome practice was known as 'blackbirding' and continued well into the 20th century. Errol Flynn, who spent his formative years ducking and diving around New Guinea from 1927 to 1933, later wrote of the 'confidence' required to persuade local elders to allow their men to be carted off.

On the north coast early European contacts with the Orokaiva people were relatively peaceful, but when gold was discovered at Yodda and Kokoda in 1895, violence soon followed. A government station was established after an altercation between locals and miners, but the first government officer was killed shortly after he arrived. Eventually things qui-

etened down and the mines were worked out. Then came the war (see boxed text, p88).

Milne Bay became a huge Allied naval base and a few American landing craft and several memorials can still be seen. The gardens and plantations inland from Buna and Gona had barely recovered from the war when Mt Lamington's 1951 eruption wiped out Higaturu, the district headquarters, and almost 3000 people. The new headquarters town of Popondetta was established at a safer distance from the volcano.

Geography & Climate

The region stretches down the 'dragon's tail' at the eastern end of mainland PNG and out into the Coral and Solomon seas,

BETWEEN THE SEA AND A HARD PLACE: THE BATTLE OF MILNE BAY

In 1942, at 11.30pm on 25 August, the Japanese Imperial Army started invading Milne Bay. In just two landings a few days apart, the Japanese established a 2400-strong army near Ahioma. Unlike Kokoda, the battle of Milne Bay was not to be a protracted affair; it would be over in just 12 days.

The Japanese fought skirmishes with the Allies and their base suffered early casualties under a fierce RAAF aircraft-led barrage. On the moonlit nights of 26 and 27 August the Japanese attacked, forcing the Australian battalions to withdraw to the Gama River. Pressing their advantage the Japanese attacked again the next night, this time pushing the Allies backwards to the converted No 3 airstrip, amid furious fighting.

Three times the Japanese charged wildly across the open before a hail of fire, and they were repulsed each time. The tide of the battle had turned, the Australians had been reinforced and the attackers became the defenders. The Australians launched counter attacks and the Japanese sent warships to help their embattled troops. A week later the Japanese Navy called their invasion off and started evacuating troops. It is estimated that 750 Japanese and 161 Australians were killed at Milne Bay; many more were wounded.

In the broad canvas of the Pacific war, it was not a major victory. Its significance as the first Allied land victory in the Pacific boosted morale far beyond Milne Bay's bloodied shores.

See www.diggerhistory.info/pages-battles/ww2/milne_bay.htm for more details on the battle.

taking in the hundreds of islands and atolls of Milne Bay Province. On the south coast Port Moresby is built around one of several natural harbours and sits in the centre of a large area of dry grasslands; swamps and tidal flats can be found elsewhere on the coast.

The mainland is divided by the Owen Stanley Range, which rises rapidly from the northern and southern coasts to peaks of 3500m to 4000m. Not surprisingly, major roads are few: the Magi and Hiritano Hwys extend from Port Moresby, while in Oro Province the only road of any length runs from the capital, Popondetta, to Kokoda, from where it's all about leg power.

Mt Lamington, near Popondetta, remains a mildly active volcano and further east there are volcanoes near Tufi. The section of coast around Cape Nelson has unique tropical 'fjords', or *rias*; their origin is volcanic rather than glacial. Much of this northern coast is made up of coral limestone.

The islands of Milne Bay Province are divided into six main groups: the Samarai group; D'Entrecasteaux group; the Trobriand Islands; Muyua (Woodlark) Island; the Conflict and Engineer groups; and the 300km-long Louisiade Archipelago. They range from tiny dots to mountainous islands like Fergusson, Normanby and Goodenough which, while only 26km wide, soars to 2566m at the summit of Mt Oiautukeke, mak-

ing it one of the most steeply sided islands on earth.

Weather patterns are unpredictable, particularly in the east where rainstorms can be spontaneous and heavy. In Milne Bay Province, November to January has the optimum and most consistent weather, and March to June is the least windy period. From December to March, the cyclone season in northern Australia and the Coral Sea can trigger high seas and big winds, although Milne Bay itself is usually calm.

CENTRAL PROVINCE

Stretching for more than 500km either side of Port Moresby, Central Province lives in the shadow of the national capital. Overlooked by tourists and long ignored by politicians, infrastructure is, even by local standards, *bagarap* (buggered up).

Things, however, may soon change. In 2008 the opening of the long-awaited Southern Highlands Gulf Hwy will connect Kikori in the Gulf Province to the Highland Hwy near Mendi. The pothole in that plan to connect Port Moresby and Lae is the poorly maintained Hiritano Hwy. As it stands today the waterways between Kikori and Kerema and the impassable road between Kerema and Malalaua still render overland travel

impossible between the country's two biggest cities. Once these gaps are filled, the Central Province stands to reap the rewards from passing traffic and become a far easier place to visit.

HIRITANO HIGHWAY

The now impressively pot-holed Hiritano Hwy once connected Port Moresby with Kerema, far to the west in Gulf Province. Locals now abandon the road at Malalaua for dinghies which ferry them the last 70km. If you do consider driving the whole highway, only do so in the dry season and bring an extra 4WD with a winch to pull free your first vehicle from the waist-high mud. There is talk of road repairs but in these parts talk is cheap, and road repairs are expensive.

This area is home to the Mekeo people, who are noted for their colourful, dancing costumes and face painting. On ceremonial occasions the men paint their faces in striking geometric designs.

If you fancy munching on a marsupial watch for the Vanuamai people selling roasted wallaby (K10 for a set of ribs) along the roadside. They taste pretty good – the wallabies that is, not the Vanuamai people; no one has been eaten around here for decades.

Yule Island

For such an inconsequential speck on the map, Yule Island certainly has a lot of history. Recent fortunes have waned and locals give the impression that they're just waiting for someone, anyone, to come in and kick-start the economy. It has happened before.

In 1885 Catholic missionaries, who were some of the first European visitors to reach the Papuan coast, held PNG's first mass here on 4 July. Today the location, **Centennial Hill**, boasts a small memorial decorated with mosaics and a painted bronze (yes – someone painted over the bronze) statue. They also brought with them 14 Filipino lay missionaries (the first Philippine visitors to PNG) to teach catechism and generally help evangelise the country. Besides Catholicism, the Filipinos also help account for the Hispanic surnames that you may encounter.

It's worth poking around the **cemetery** amid the recently restored headstones for the grave of M Bourgade, one of France's top WWI aces, who died here of Malaria while working as a mission worker.

Later, the island became a government headquarters and base for explorations. Today the district local government headquarters is on the mainland at Bereina and the island has been in serious economic decline since. An airstrip that is more bush than strip and derelict buildings are the only reminders that at one stage Siria village once boasted a fisheries industry, wharfs, a bank and guesthouse.

In 1972 local 17-year-old schoolgirl Susan Karike (now Mrs Huhume) surprised everyone and won the nationwide competition to design the national flag.

The most recent addition to the landscape is the remains of a whale that washed up here in 2006. Many of the vertebrae can be seen around the village being used as stools and the skull still juts out from the sand. By all accounts things got a bit whiffy around town while the carcass rotted.

There are several palm-fringed beaches around the island but the pick of the bunch is **Paradise Beach**, a hot half-day walk to the island's far tip. Arrange for a local guide or charter a dinghy.

SLEEPING & EATING

The island's sole remaining guesthouse, Carmelite convent, is now beyond repair, home only to termites and snakes. Try **Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart** (OLSH Convent; s incl meals K50). There are no phones on the island and it is a hit-and-miss affair arranging accommodation. The **Diocese of Bereina** (☎ 325 6102) office in Port Moresby or **Sister Rosaleen O'Brien** (☎ 325 4124) may offer some advice. The few remaining nuns here are great company and, if they take pity on you, can put you up in comfortable, mosquito-proof rooms with clean ensuite bathrooms and generated electricity. Students and missionaries get discounts. Act pious.

Fledgling operators Camillus Aisi Koe and Michael Koe both indicated to us that they would happily provide homestays for K25 per night and three meals for an additional K35 in Siria village. Conditions are very basic without either electricity or running water. BYO sleeping sheets, mosquito net and a sense of adventure.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

PMVs leave Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from Port Moresby's Erima PMV stop for Poukama (K13, four hours)

and connect with the waiting dinghies which will run you to the island for K5. Poukama is little more than a car park and barter market located down a dirt road 38km past Agivairu and about 160km from Moresby.

To continue towards Kerema you have to catch a Port Moresby-bound PMV back to Agivairu and transfer there (at Anna Pino's store) onto a Malalaua-bound vehicle. If they are all full and this proves impossible, it is safer to continue all the way to Port Moresby and retrace your steps the following day as the Hiritano has experienced recent *raskol* (bandit) activity.

MAGI HIGHWAY

This highway runs east from Port Moresby, circling round Bootless Bay to the small marina (Tahira Boating Centre) from which the ferry crosses to Loloata Island, the main attraction on this route. It continues in varying states of disrepair past many fine beaches, the pick of them being **Hula Beach**, about 100km from the capital. Hula has some great surf breaks that get the seasonal June-to-September swell. There's also good windsurfing and a basic church guesthouse. The road has seen a lot of *raskol* activity in recent years and is best undertaken in a group. Ditto for Hula Beach.

Loloata Island

About 20km east of Port Moresby, Loloata Island, in Bootless Bay, is a popular weekend escape – midweek is even better.

our pick **Loloata Island Resort** (☎ 325 8590; www.loloata.com; s/d incl all meals A\$210/360; 🍷) is the attraction here, where snorkelling, fishing, kayaking, sailboarding and diving equipment are for hire. After the hurly-burly of Port Moresby, Loloata is the perfect tonic. There are dozens of dive sites (click on www.loloata.com/divesites), including a Boston A20 bomber, but many people come simply to do nothing for a few days. Loloata is popular with day-trippers from Port Moresby; weekends can get busy here. A day trip, including return transfers, from Port Moresby, lunch and a diving/snorkelling trip to the reefs around nearby Lion Island costs K100 for adults and K50 for kids aged 2 to 13. Accommodation is provided in large, comfortable beachfront bungalows that have panoramic views northeast across Bootless Bay and the Owen Stanley Range on the mainland. The island has many semi-tame wallabies that

graze along the walking paths, and there are tree kangaroos and parrots in an enclosure. Diving costs A\$60 for one or A\$150 for three dives (including equipment), and a four-day PADI certification course costs A\$500.

Loloata offers a range of tours (such as Varirata National Park, Sogeri, Owers' Corner) as well as massages on the premises. To get there, drive out on the Rigo Rd (which meets the airport road in Six Mile) to the Tahira Boating Centre on Bootless Bay. The resort's boats make regular trips to the island. Alternatively, call ahead and the resort bus will collect you from the airport or your hotel.

GOILALA REGION

If you want to look at the high country behind the coastal strip, experience heart-in-mouth airstrips or try lesser-known but interesting walks, the mountain villages of the Goilala region are well worth a visit. The hiking up here is wonderful, with steep mountains, often covered in bush, and the pretty villages of **Woitape**, **Tapini**, **Ononge** and **Fane**, ranging from about 930m to 1764m high.

The Catholic fathers bequeathed the area an excellent network of well-graded tracks that once took mule trains. June to October are the walking months; June to August are best.

Sleeping & Eating

There is a government station at Tapini and Catholic missions at Fane, Ononge, Kosipi and Woitape, and if you turn up, you'll find a bed, a village meal and a guide without a problem. Prices are negotiable, but low. Alternatively, the comfortable **Woitape Lodge** (☎ 325 2011 in Port Moresby; s/nd meals K200), run by Airlines PNG, is a great place to end a long day's trekking. Enjoy its open fire, bar and rustic atmosphere. Staff can arrange guides and cook up some tasty food, but you need to let them know that you're coming. The lodge is a great staging post for assaults on Mt Albert.

Getting There & Away

Airlines PNG flies from Port Moresby on Wednesdays and Saturdays to Woitape (K265), Tapini (K298), Fane (K266) and Ononge (K248), but you'll need to book ahead and check right up until the last minute. All flights are short, but how long it takes reach your destination depends on how many stops there are along the way.

There is no road access.

A WING AND A PRAYER

The Goilala airstrips are some of the most exhilarating in PNG, and that's saying something. All of them are white-knuckle, jaw-clenching rides on incredibly short runways. Move over Disneyland.

At Tapini the strip is carved into a hillside and because it runs steeply uphill and ends in a sheer face, pilots only dare come in one way. It gets worse: Ononge's ridgetop airstrip has a dogleg halfway down, forcing the pilot to make a 10-degree turn mid-landing! Fane is another rough strip along the spine of a mountain; when the plane takes off, over the cliff edge, you're either falling or flying – most definitely praying. Woitape is slippery when wet and, being built in a swampy area, it's often wet. It's so wet and cloudy that our pilot called out during an abrupt descent, 'We should be there by now; keep your eyes open for an airstrip!'

KOKODA TRACK

Halfway through the trek you may wonder why you ever came to walk the Kokoda. Your blistered feet will hurt, your clothes will be wet with sweat and by the end of the day you'll undoubtedly be tired and hungry. But what your pictures won't show (assuming you muster the energy to take a few) is your growing sense of awe. For over every steep, slippery step on this 96km natural rollercoaster, Australians, Americans and Japanese fought for their lives; against each other and against the terrain. In 1942 there were no guesthouses, no porters and no relief from dysentery and the constant fear of ambush. To read a synopsis of the Kokoda campaign, see p98.

Crossing the Owen Stanley Range has become a pilgrimage for many Australians, a chance to pay their respects by sharing some of the men's trials who fought and died here. And what started as a trickle is turning into a tide. In 2006 there were 4000 trekkers (95% of them Australian) who gritted their teeth and tackled the mountains. The majority walk as part of an organised group; only the most experienced trekkers could consider walking this track independently (see boxed text, p95). Masochists could always run it – just enter the Kokoda 24-hour race (p101).

Apart from the wartime history, relationships built with today's residents of the track, and particularly the guides and carriers who trek with you, are mutually rewarding. They serve as a reminder that the Kokoda Track is about people; not just a distant, heroic military campaign.

This section should be used as a guide to planning, but not walking, the track. For full details, Clive Baker's *The Kokoda Trek* is a must; see p93.

PLANNING

Most people walk the track with a company specialising in organised treks (p93) and all the logistical arrangements will be dealt with by them. The first decision when considering walking the Kokoda Track is whether you prefer a hassle-free, albeit more expensive, guided trek or a cheaper, locally arranged walk. The following advice is a starting point for all walkers.

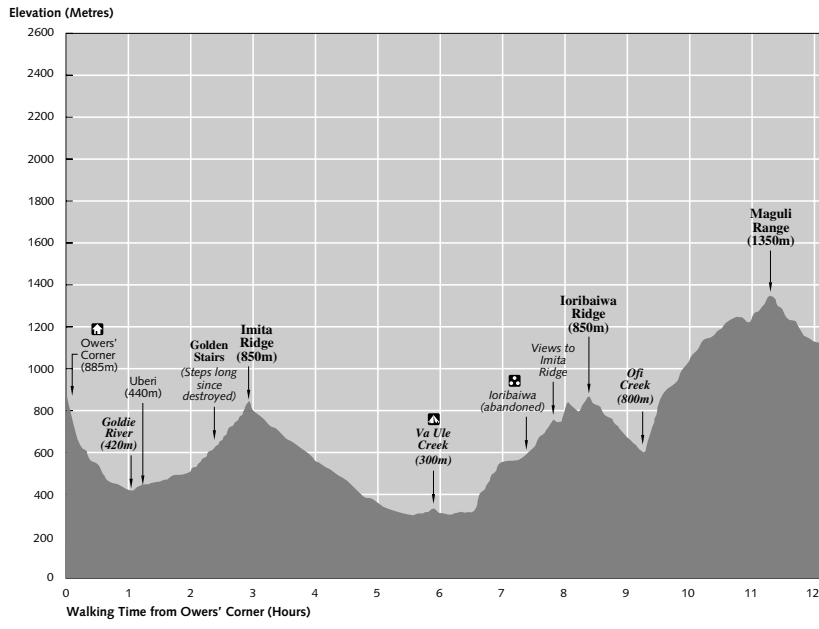
All trekkers (but not porters and guides) must pay a K200 trekking fee and obtain a permit from the **Kokoda Track Authority** (KTA; ☎ 323 6165, 685 7685; kokodatrackauthority@global.net.pg, 1st fl, Brian Bell Bldg, Boroko, Port Moresby) or at the KTA Agency office in Kokoda before starting the trip; you cannot pay this fee at Owers' Corner. The KTA in Port Moresby is also a great place to 'bump' into guides and porters (p92) who often hang around here.

There are basic 'resthouses' in most villages plus various shelters and campsites along the track. Some of the **resthouses** (per person with/without porter K25/20; cash only) and **camp sites** (per person up to K15; cash only) are small, so if you meet another party you might have to camp in the village or move on to the next village.

Most porters are very resourceful and able to find accommodation with *wantoks*. However, ultimately it is your responsibility to bring all the equipment, including tents and utensils, which your party will need. The same is also true for food; your guide will take only the clothes he is wearing.

Organised treks supply the bulk of your food, which accompanies you on the backs of local carriers. It's replenished about halfway along via a chartered flight; there are no trade stores on the track (only at Sogeri and Kokoda). Bring any comfort food yourself and keep it light. And don't forget sachets of

KOKODA TRACK – SOUTH



rehydration salts – maintaining your fluid and carbohydrate levels is critical (see p325).

Whether you are on an organised trek or walking with locals, ensure that you have comprehensive individual medical insurance.

Guides & Carriers

If you're trekking independently, don't do it without a good guide. A personal recommendation is best – the Kokoda Track Authority in Port Moresby is a good place to start. You could also try asking other trekkers on the www.kokodatrail.com.pg/forums web forum. There are dozens of guides and carriers working on the track and most of them are freelancers.

It is also possible to hire carriers at Kokoda and at Variatta National Park near Sogeri, although you can't just expect them to be able to drop everything at a moment's notice and head off. The maximum that a carrier can carry (and is permitted to do so under KTA rules) is 15kg.

On your own or in a group, having a carrier might mean the difference between finishing

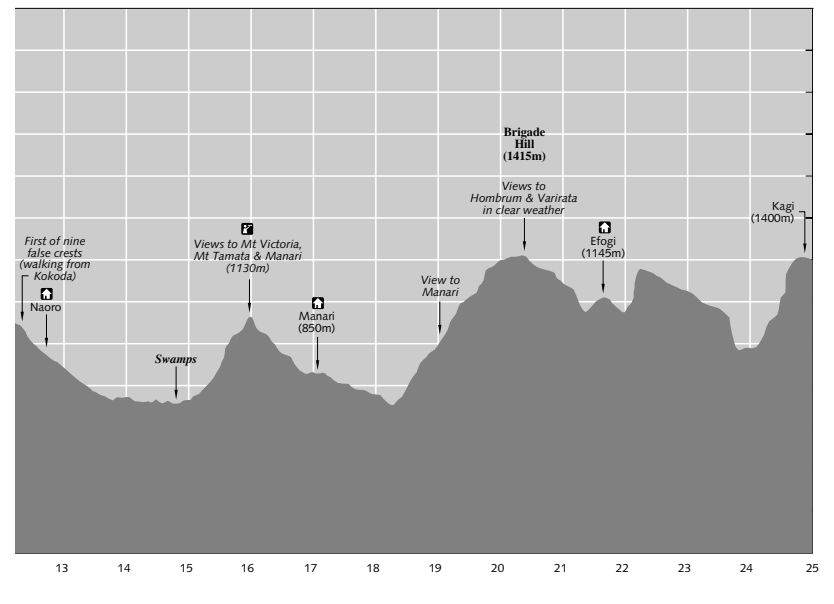
the trek or giving up along the way. One carrier between two or three is a good idea. If the weight becomes too much, you can employ a carrier in most villages along the track, but they are getting busier as the route becomes more popular. Pay guides about K80 per day and carriers about K60 per day, plus K20 per day for food and lodgings; you'll also need to pay their airfares back home.

When to Trek

Most trekking companies operate between March and October, but the coolest, driest and best months to trek are from May to September. It could rain at any time of year. Most companies don't operate between November and February when it is too wet, too dangerous and too uncomfortable.

What to Bring

You can't go without a comfortable pair of boots or running shoes with good grip. You'll also need a tent with fly (some tour companies provide these); a water bottle or a water bladder, to be refilled from streams as you go; a light sleeping bag; and wet-weather gear



(even in the dry season). A poncho is a good, multipurpose option. Prepare yourself with a comprehensive medical kit (see p320). The total weight of your pack should not exceed 15kg. Local fruits and vegetables are available in villages, but you or your carriers will need to carry the rest.

Information Sources

Apart from the books mentioned below, the **forum** (www.kokodatrail.com.au/forums) has a section devoted to personal accounts and articles from people who have walked the trek. Trekking operators' websites and the PNG Tourism Authority **website** (www.png-tourism.com) also have good advice and the latter has an up-to-date price list for permits.

There is an ever-growing number of books about the Kokoda campaign, though only one that is worth carrying with you. Clive Baker's *The Kokoda Trek* has a full description of the trek. Baker's book, and almost any other on the subject, can be bought from the on-line **mail order shop** (www.warbooks.com.au). It also has plans for a Kokoda news item page for the latest stories that emerge.

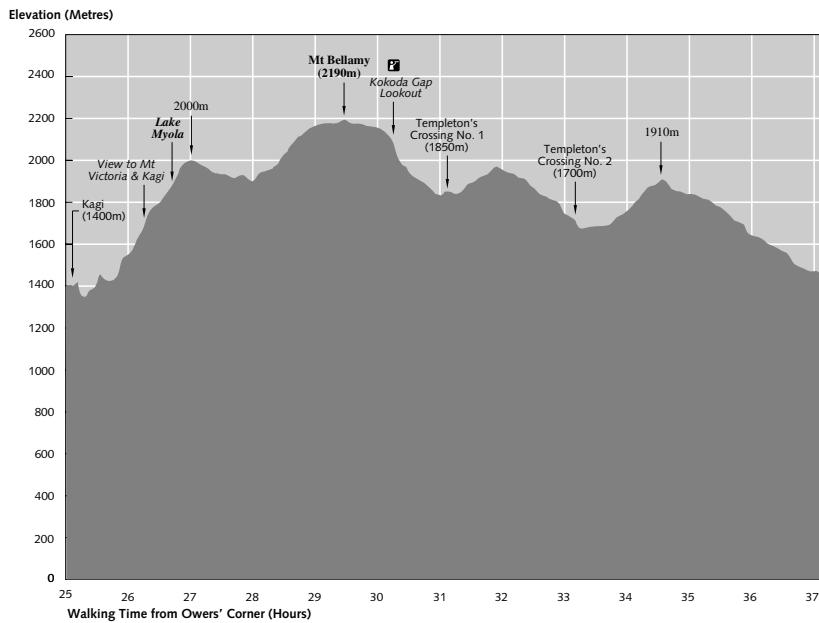
Be sure to bring zip-lock bags for any papers and maps, lest you sweat them to death.

Maps of varying vintage are available in Port Moresby from the **National Mapping Bureau** (NMB; ☎ 327 6223; natmap@datec.com.pg; Melanesian Way, Waigani), though they're more interesting than necessary. The *Longitudinal Cross-Section of the Kokoda Trail* (1995) has useful descriptive notes and detailed sections of tricky areas. See p103 for book recommendations.

Organised Treks

You can choose to walk the track with one of dozens of companies, which takes most of the hassle out of the preparation, leaving you to focus on getting fit. Your choice will depend on your budget, interest in the military campaign, the company's safety record and how it deals with emergencies, and what sort of relationship you want with the carriers. Costs depend on the length of the trek, whether it includes airfares from Australia, what equipment is provided and whether you employ a carrier or not. See the websites for full details and make sure you are comparing like with like.

KOKODA TRACK – NORTH



In 2001 the Kokoda Track Authority issued permits for 76 walkers. In 2006 it issued 3747 permits and numbers for 2007 were expected to exceed even these! For information about rules, fees and operators see www.pngtourism.org.pg/ActivitiesEvents/kokodatrail.htm. Some of the main players in this increasingly lucrative space include the following.

Adventure Kokoda (www.kokodatreks.com; A\$4895)

This high-profile company is led by Charlie Lynn, son of a WWII Kokoda digger. This company has featured on many TV programmes. One of the best operators.

Ecotourism Melanesia (☎ 323 4518; www.em.com.pg) Perhaps the largest locally owned inbound tour operator in PNG. Its tours are not cheap, but it lives up to an excellent reputation.

Executive Excellence (www.executiveexcellence.com.au; A\$6250) Known by some as the 'men in tights', this Brisbane-based operation employs ex-soldiers and includes a full pre-departure training programme.

Kokoda Trekking (www.kokodatrekking.com.au; with/without porter A\$2360/1850) This PNG-owned company has no expert guides, which makes their trips cheaper and often encourages greater interaction with local guides and carriers. Good feedback, but historical knowledge is limited. Kokoda Trekking put more walkers on the Track than any

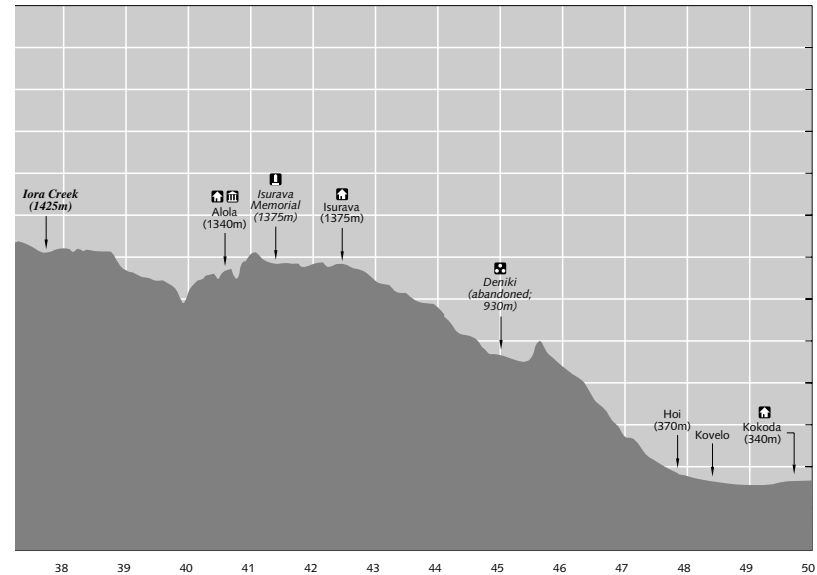
other each year between 2004 and 2007. This company sponsors the Kokoda Track Challenge foot race (see p101). **Kokoda Treks & Tours** (www.kokoda.com.au; A\$2700) When it comes to knowledge of the campaign, Frank Taylor is hard to beat. Treks are organised with military precision and include a trip to Buna and Gona. Fair value.

PNG Trekking Adventures (www.pngtrekkingadventures.com) Highly regarded trekking company operated by long-time Australian expats based in Port Moresby. These tours are limited to 12 to 15 walkers at a time.

Several of PNG's larger tour operators also run treks, including **South Pacific Tours** (spt@global.net.pg) and **Niugini Tours** (www.nghols.com).

It's quite possible to walk the Kokoda Track if you're already on the ground in PNG. Be sure to ask whether your guides have insurance and what their evacuation plans are (if you break an ankle). Of the many local Kokoda trekking operators, the Kokoda Track Authority's recommendations include the following:

Fuzzy Wuzzy Expeditions (contact KTA; ☎ 323 6165; kokodatrackauthority@global.net.pg) Defol Orere is an experienced tour leader who also works with the Kokoda Track Authority.



Koiari Treks & Tours (☎ 689 3621; koiaritreks@global.net.pg) Narai Billy has led many Kokoda expeditions.

Kokoda Holidays (☎ 683 2758; kokodaholidays@daltron.com.pg) This small operation is run by David Soru.

Kokoda Trail Legend Guided Tours (☎ 323 6165; fax 323 6020; mkaso-06@yahoo.com) Max Kaso has been guiding Kokoda walkers for years.

GETTING TO & FROM THE TREK

The Kokoda Track runs between Owers' Corner in Central Province and Kokoda in Oro Province. At the southern end you'll need

a 4WD to reach Owers' Corner, taking the turn-off just before Sogeri – look for a white-painted stone war memorial. At McDonald's Corner there is a strange metal sculpture of a soldier; this is where the road once ended and the track started, but the actual track now starts further on at Owers' Corner. PMVs run from Gordons Market in Port Moresby to Sogeri early in the morning. From there, you'll need to wait and hope for a lift to Owers' Corner or start walking the 16km. The Kokoda Track Authority (p91) can help arrange transport. Note: due to the rutty and

WARNING

The Kokoda Track is not PNG's most difficult trek, but it's no walk in the park either. As [galahad_at_large](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist) on www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist put it – 'practice by climbing the stairs in an office tower at home. For realism, cover yourself in mud, carry a sack of onions on your back and wear slippery shoes'.

Aim to do it in nine days, not six. Take advantage of the services of local carriers and never walk with fewer than four people. If there is an accident, two can get help and one can stay with the injured. Robberies and conflicts among traditional landowners have led to the track's closure in the past, but in recent years the situation has been fairly calm. Still, it's worth keeping an ear open.

slippery surface, the road is often impassable, so be prepared to walk at least part of it if required. See also Shortcuts, right.

THE TREK

Depending on how fit you are, it takes between six and 11 days to traverse the track. The itinerary shown here starts at Owers' Corner, but just as many people walk the other way, which involves about 550m more climbing. By taking a longer trip, you have more time for side-trips, exploring the battlefields and experiencing village life. The average trekker walks about 50 hours from beginning to end. No itinerary is set in stone; this one is indicative only.

Day 1: Owers' Corner–Va Ule Creek campsites

(10km, six hours) The campsites are about one to 1½ hours past Imita Ridge. Watch for the extensive weapon pits on the northern face of Imita Ridge, where the Australians made their last stand in 1942.

Day 2: Va Ule Creek campsites–Naoro (17km, eight hours) The track follows the original wartime route over Ioribaiva Ridge. A memorial is being installed on the ridge and on the slopes there are many interesting weapon pits, bunkers and relics. Naoro has spectacular 270-degree views over the valley and there is a large resthouse.

Day 3: Naoro–Efogi (19km, seven hours) About halfway between these points there are three resthouses in Manari village. After the long climb up Brigade Hill you suddenly come into the open and have a wide panorama down the 1942 battlefield, across to Kagi and Mt Bellamy in the distance and Efogi, just below you. On a clear day you can see all the way back to Hombrum and Varirata, near Soger.

There are about three resthouses in Efogi – the biggest village on the track.

Day 4: Efogi–Kagi–Mt Bellamy (12km, seven hours) An hour of climbing and descending past Efogi is Kagi, another spectacular village site. From here, the track climbs to its highest point at Mt Bellamy. You can side-trip to Myola in three to four hours return. Along the way, and just off the track, is the huge crater where a WWII bomber blew up and scattered aircraft parts in all directions. Your guide/carrier should know the place.

Day 5: Mt Bellamy–Alola (17km, 11 hours) After a long down and up section, the track passes Templeton's Crossing, followed by another up, down and up to Alola – quite a tiring section.

Day 6: Alola–Kokoda (19km, 10 hours) When you reach the Isurava Memorial, allow yourself at least an hour at the old battle site. It's a most impressive and moving place. After the memorial there is an optional two-hour detour to a wrecked Japanese aircraft with its paintwork still clearly visible. It is a steep climb and you will need a guide.

Shortcuts

Not everybody is up for the full trek – there are ways of having the Kokoda experience without taking on the full challenge.

You could take a PMV from Port Moresby to the village of Madilogo, which avoids two hard days' walk from Owers' Corner to Naoro. It takes about two hours to reach the track from Madilogo; from there it's one to 1½ hours to Naoro.

(Continued on page 105)

(Continued from page 96)

If you want a little taste of the track, you can walk down to the Goldie River from Owers' Corner in just an hour or so. If you have the energy, struggle up what was once the Golden Staircase to Imita Ridge.

Another option would be to fly in to Kagi, Efogi or Manari, walk a section and fly out. Flying to Kagi and walking to Manari (one day) would be interesting. All these strips are serviced by only expensive charter flights.

A cheaper option is to get to Kokoda and walk to the Isurava Memorial and back. Allow two full days of trekking, overnighing in the Isurava Memorial trekkers hut.

KOKODA

The Owen Stanley Range rises almost sheer as a cliff face behind the Oro Province village of Kokoda, where the northern end of the track terminates. It's a sleepy place and the grassed area in the centre of town houses a small museum that has photos and descriptions of the campaign. Ask around to have it opened. **Grace Eroro** (☎ 329 7536) is the postal agent and Airlines PNG representative in Kokoda, and she is a great source of information. Opposite the post office is a branch of Kokoda Track Authority where trekking permits can be bought if you haven't already done so in Port Moresby. Trekkers finishing the trail should also report here to be officially stamped off the trail.

Sleeping & Eating

There are a couple of resthouses in Kokoda and all of them allow you to pitch your tent on their camping grounds. The Kokoda Mountain View Lodge, behind the trade store that sells beer (you'll soon find it), has a couple of huts. The Kokoda Memorial Hospital has some dormitories with toilets, showers, gas stoves and kitchen utensils. Money goes towards much-needed medical supplies.

About 2.5km along the road to Popondetta is **Rusty's Place** (☎ 325 4423, 323 6650; per person incl meals K60), run by Russell Eroro (who operates Kokoda Trekking Tours, the on-the-ground part of the www.kokodatrail.com.pg operation) and his extended family. It's a friendly place, the food is good and there's a small *stoa* (store). Accommodation is simple (but there are showers!) or you can camp on their lawn and swim in the river. Near Rusty's is

Grace Eroro's Guesthouse, and travellers have reported that it's good value.

Limited food and, mercifully, beer is usually available from Kokoda's trade stores; send a runner ahead to organise ice.

Getting There & Away

Most people fly into or out of Kokoda on a flight chartered by their tour company. Airlines PNG flies to and from Port Moresby (K244) every Wednesday. If you miss that flight, catch a PMV down to Popondetta which has daily Air Niugini connections to the capital.

PMVs (K15, 3½ hours) leave Kokoda for Popondetta at 1pm and sometimes at the ungodly hours of midnight to 2am (so that locals can get at the front of the bank queue). Rusty's Place (left) has its own colourful PMV which is possible to charter.

ORO PROVINCE

Oro Province (often called Northern Province) is sandwiched between the Solomon Sea and the Owen Stanley Range. It's physically beautiful but an uninspiring capital and poor transport connections mean few travellers make it.

Oro Province is the home of the world's largest butterfly, the Queen Alexandra's Birdwing. You might think that you've seen some big butterflies in PNG, but these are monsters, with wingspans of nearly 30cm. The first specimen collected by a European was brought down by a shotgun! That butterfly, a little damaged, is still in the British Museum. The Queen Alexandra's Birdwing is now a threatened species. It lays its eggs on a particular species of vine which is poisonous to most birds and animals; the butterfly is poisonous as well.

POPONDETTA

Popondetta, which is the provincial capital, is spread along the Oro Bay Hwy a few kilometres from the old administrative capital of Higaturu. Popondetta exists because the previous two provincial headquarters were ill-fated: the one on the coast was invaded by the Japanese and destroyed, and the other – moved safely inland after the war – was destroyed by the eruption of Mt Lamington.

BEFORE YOU BOOK

Price may be one of the main determining factors when selecting a trekking company but there are other considerations that are just as important. It's worth asking a few questions before handing over a fist full of kina.

- If you are particularly keen on the military history of the trail, then a company with knowledgeable guides is a must. Ask specific questions such as: What sites will you be shown? What level of information can you expect from your guide?
- Most trekking companies carry a satellite phone or a two-way radio; if they don't have one and there's a problem, no-one will hear the screams.
- How is their safety record? Besides your own insurance, which is essential, what additional insurances do they carry and what does it cover?
- Ask about their equipment; if they are supplying tents it may be possible to inspect them.
- While agony loves company, it's a trail, not a highway. Ask how many people form your group.
- What is their code of ethics? Do they pay guides and porters reasonable wages? Besides your Kokoda Track Authority fee, does the company contribute to local communities in any meaningful way? And does it carry out accumulated rubbish or dump it behind a tree?

It's not a pretty place, with dust, litter and idle people seeming to predominate. Most of those who come here do so to see the area's WWII history – Buna and Gona are an easy day trip – or as part of a slow boat trip along the coast. It's also a good base for visiting Mt Lamington.

Popondetta itself has an Australian war memorial with an interesting map of nearby battle sites and an adjoining memorial to the victims of the Mt Lamington eruption.

Popondetta is not a place to be wandering around alone at night.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 329 7066)

Fire (☎ 329 7172, 329 7144)

Police (☎ 329 7333)

MONEY

Bank South Pacific (☎ 329 7171)

Sights & Activities

The 1585m peak of **Mt Lamington** is clearly visible from Popondetta (there's a good view on the road to the airport). The mountain still shakes and puffs a little and local residents paid no attention to a slight increase in activity in 1951. However when the mountainside suddenly blew out and a cloud of super-heated gases rushed down, about 3000 people died and 8000 were left homeless. It is estimated the temperature stood near 200°C for about 90 seconds, and the gas cloud rolled down at over 300km/h.

Mt Lamington has been fairly calm since and keen bushwalkers can climb it today. The Oro Guesthouse and Birdwing Butterfly Lodge can provide information and arrange guides, and **Ecotourism Melanesia** (www.em.com.pg) has trekking tours around Mt Lamington.

The villages of **Buna** and **Gona** became Japanese bases during WWII and were the scene of some of the most desperate fighting of the war. At Giropa Plantation, on the Buna Rd, a Japanese plaque commemorates the country's dead.

Most of what remains of the bases is covered with overgrowth and a guide is necessary to work out what went on where. Basil Tindeba, from Buna, knows his way around the area pretty well; ask for him at the Oro Guesthouse and try to give a few days' notice. Another recommended guide is Maclaren Hiari MBE, who runs the **Kokoda**

Buna Historical Foundation (☎ 329 7627). He lives two doors east of the Oro Guesthouse. These guys charge about K100 for their guiding and will generally arrange to take you by PMV and boat to both sites, which is important because without a boat you can't get from one to the other without returning to Popondetta. You could go by PMV to Gona for K3. Another good option is Pol Toki at the Birdwing Butterfly Lodge, who supplies a truck and also takes in **Seremi village**, the scene of George Silk's famous photograph of fuzzy wuzzy angel Raphael Oimbari leading blinded Australian soldier Dick Whittington.

Sleeping & Eating

Oro Guesthouse (☎ 329 7127; fax 329 7246; r incl 2 meals K148-172) There is a range of rooms and prices here that need some decoding. Ask about discounted prices for students with ID, backpackers and those who've walked the Kokoda Track (K105). The rooms are simple, and those with shared bathrooms are cheaper (twin including two meals K175). The food includes plenty of local vegetables. Alcohol is banned. It's only a 10 minute walk from town but Kokoda PMVs will drop you here if you ask.

Lamington Lodge (☎ 329 7222; www.coralseahotels.com.pg; s/tw K225/286; ☺) Part of the Coral Sea chain, this is the best hotel in town but easily the worst in the chain. Lack of competition means it's overpriced, but it does have the only bar and restaurant (meals K35, open for lunch and dinner) in town; the dishes, including steak, pasta, curries and fish, are reasonably good. The staff here can find local guides to visit Buna and Gona.

Birdwing Butterfly Lodge (☎ 329 7477; birdwing@daltron.com.pg; r with/without 2 meals K245/190) This friendly place, 1.5km northeast of town on the road to Gona, has simple, clean rooms with shared kitchens. Owner Pol Toki is a good guy who can arrange stays in Seremi village.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Girua airport is 15km from town and one of several wartime strips in the area. From the air, you'll notice the area around the airstrip is scattered with horseshoe mounds – the remains of WWII gun emplacements. **Air Niugini** (☎ 329 7022), next to the post office, has flights to and from Port Moresby (K295, 40 minutes, daily). Airlines PNG had

a milk run that began in Port Moresby on Sunday and stopped at Popondetta, Tufi and Alotau before running back to Moresby on Monday. This suspended flight may yet be resumed.

BOAT

All boats leave from Oro Bay; see below.

PMV

PMVs for Buna (K5, 45 minutes, about 9am) and Kokoda (K15, 3½ hours, about 11am) leave from beneath the large trees outside Oro Motors in the centre of town. PMVs for Oro Bay (K5, 40 minutes) and the airport leave from one block south. Ask at your hotel for times, which vary, but PMV runs are usually in the morning.

Getting Around

Popondetta is small enough to walk around. PMVs on the Oro Bay to Popondetta Hwy pass the airport, though they're not that frequent, especially on Sunday. Your best bet is to get a lift with a local or one of your fellow passengers. Otherwise, use Lamington Lodge's airport shuttle or, if you're on the early flight, a lift with the Air Niugini staff from behind their town office – be there about 5.30am.

ORO BAY

Oro Bay is the province's main port. It became a major American base after the Japanese had been prised out of Buna and Gona, though the bustle of those days is long gone. Today it's a quiet place with occasional banana-boat traffic up and down the coast, and two larger boats travelling weekly to Lae.

If your ship doesn't come in, it's not a bad place to hang out. The **Oro Bay Guesthouse** (s incl meals K80) is on the water's edge near the wharf, but it's a 30-minute walk around the bay to the PMV boats.

The **Edna Resort Centre** (s incl meals K100) has a few simple two-room bungalows. Contact the Birdwing Butterfly Lodge (opposite) for bookings.

Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships) has a weekly boat to Lae (18 hours) and another to Alotau (K120, economy class only) calling at all ports in between including Tufi (K105). Banana boats to Tufi (K50) run if the winds aren't too high and usually leave mid-morning.

TUFI

Carefree and far away from the world, Tufi is one of PNG's best-kept secrets. On the stunningly beautiful Cape Nelson, where steepsided *rias* penetrate the land like the fingers of a grasping hand, this picturesque spot has a more relaxed atmosphere than any city in the country. Once home to fishing and rubber industries, now the settlement heavily relies on tourists drawn to the excellent Tufi Dive Resort.

The area, however, is much more than the resort. Several villages within two hours of Tufi welcome guests to their bush-material guesthouses, some of them set under swaying palm trees beside sandy beaches, which is a truly idyllic way to spend a few days. If you're around for the Queen's Birthday weekend in June you might catch the Tufi Cultural Show (admission K175 for three days), a relatively intimate *singsing* (celebratory dance/festival) with groups mainly from Oro Province. Check www.tufidive.com for dates.

The cape was formed by ancient eruptions of its three volcanoes and the lava which flowed down into the sea creating the *rias*, for which the cape is now famous.

Sights & Activities

Diving is one of Tufi's great attractions; there is consistent 30m-plus visibility and one diver we met said 'there are more fish than water out there'. Maloway, Cyclone Reef and Marion Reef are memorable, and the muck diving under Tufi wharf is exceptional. Nearby are some WWII ships easily accessible in shallow water, while the famous B17 'Black Jack' bomber is down the coast. For a full list of dives, with pictures, see www.tufidive.com/diving.html. Tufi Dive Resort (p108) has dive boats and a fully equipped dive shop. The dive season is from September to May. From June to August, high winds make diving difficult.

Local villages can provide outrigger canoes (the standard form of transport) if you want to go fishing, and the dive resort's dive boat also does fishing trips.

There is a network of tracks in the area ideal for trekking. Many follow the *ria* around the coast. Other tracks can be quite difficult; you must be fit. Tufi Dive Resort can arrange a guide and village stays, or you could take your chances and ask around

THE PT BOATS OF TUFU

Tufi wharf, just in front of the resort, was used as a forward base for American PT boats, two of which now rest about 40m down, at the bottom of the *ria* (fjord). It was a widely held view that these boats had been sunk by Japanese bombs, but Russ Hamachek, who served as a PT boat captain at Tufi, wrote to Lonely Planet with the real story: 'Two of our boats were refuelling at the dock and the red flag of Baker was properly hoisted to warn passers-by of the need for caution. That took care of the US personnel, but was meaningless to a curious native. He was a smoker and unknowingly tossed a lighted cigarette butt into the adjacent water, which had just been the recipient of a 100-octane gasoline spill, resulting in the loss of two highly valuable PTs.'

Divers can still see torpedoes and a machine gun on the bottom, and other relics are around the bar at the Tufi Dive Resort. *Hot, Straight & True* is Hamachek's novel about PT boat operations in New Guinea.

yourself. The villages and the resort can arrange boats to pick you up at various locations at the end of your walk.

Orchids, birds and butterflies can also be seen in the surrounding jungles and again, Tufi Dive Resort can arrange guides to view these.

Sleeping & Eating

Tufi Dive Resort (☎ 323 3462 in Port Moresby, 275 3200 in Tufi; www.tufidive.com; s incl meals K290-330) Located a short distance from the grassy airstrip, this upmarket resort is wonderfully appropriate to the area. It's quiet, has comfortable chairs, a friendly bar and a very relaxed atmosphere. There is a broad-ranging library, video collection and a great cliffside barbecue area with spectacular views across the *ria*. The rooms are all comfortable, but if you're in the budget range ask for Room 3. The food is delicious. Diving is the main attraction and reliable equipment (half/full day K50/100) is available. An outer-reef trip (K145 per dive) entices most people to go for a two-day outing. Open-water certification costs K950 and there are plans to bring in a live-aboard boat to access sites further afield. There is a fun *ria* tour by boat and kayak, and fishing, windsurfing and trekking can be arranged. The resort encourages people to get into the local villages and can connect you with whichever you choose; see Around Tufi, right.

Getting There & Around

Airlines PNG flies to and from Port Moresby (K447) on Mondays and Fridays.

See p107 for information on small boats to and from Oro Bay. Between Tufi and

Wanigela you can hire a banana boat (K90, 30 minutes). Getting to the villages around Tufi is usually done on foot or by outrigger canoe; you'll be expected to help with the paddling.

Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships) boats from Alotau stop here on their weekly run between Alotau and Oro Bay.

AROUND TUFU

There are **village guesthouses** (s K90) that dot the coastline either side of Tufi and you could spend weeks wending your way along the coast in this way. The accommodation is basic, with mosquito nets and local food (the seafood is tasty). Boat transfers cost extra. The guesthouses can also arrange fishing and snorkelling; bring your own gear. It's best, though not essential, to contact them ahead, and this is done through the Tufi Dive Resort (left).

Most of the villages offer treks, bird-watching, snorkelling, fishing and participation in *singsings*. Some of the better options include the following:

Bauwame Guesthouse (30min dinghy ride to south of Tufi) Standing on a coral reef, it offers great access to impressive sites for snorkelling and bird-watching.

Jebo Guesthouse (1hr dinghy ride to south of Tufi) Located on a white-sand beach in Sinofuka village. Sinofuka literally means 'pig and dog!' There's a waterfall where you can swim, and birds of paradise can be seen.

Kamoa Beach Guesthouse (15min outrigger canoe ride to the mouth of Tufi *ria*) Pretty beach.

Kofure Guesthouse (30min outrigger canoe ride to north of Tufi) White sands, palm trees and the best food of any of the villages.

MILNE BAY PROVINCE

At the eastern end of mainland PNG, the Owen Stanley Range plunges into the sea and islands are scattered across the ocean for hundreds of kilometres further out. This is the start of the Pacific proper – tiny atolls, coral reefs, volcanic islands, swaying palms and white beaches. It's safe, secluded and unfailingly friendly.

More than 435 islands give the province 2120km of coastline, but poor transport infrastructure and limited arable land have hindered the region's development.

To many Australians, Milne Bay is synonymous with the 1942 WWII battles fought here between Japanese and Australian forces (see boxed text, p88). Today the only bombs falling from above are likely to be coconuts.

The far-flung Trobriand Islands are proving to be culturally resilient and as exotic a destination as the father of modern anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, first described them to be.

Culture

Milne Bay is home to large numbers of Polynesians or Motuans who have successfully grafted traditional beliefs onto contemporary church teachings, which can be confusing for the uninitiated. Witchcraft is widely respected and still practised, especially on the islands. Contract killings can still be arranged with local witch doctors, who sometimes employ the spiritual powers of cyanide from disused mining operations.

In most island societies landownership falls under matrilineal lore; family rights are passed down through the mother. Clan leaders and the paramount chief are still men, but behind the scenes women wield considerable power.

In many of the region's cultures, people were traditionally buried standing up with their heads poking out of the ground. Their heads were then covered over by clay pots.

When the heads eventually separated from the bodies, the pots were removed and the skulls were then placed in a skull cave.

These caves are common in the area and clay pots are a traditional (and popular) regional artefact.

ALOTAU

Alotau is a sleepy little town built on the hill-sides of the northern shore of Milne Bay. It became the provincial capital in 1968 when administrators were moved from overcrowded Samarai Island.

Alotau and the coastal strip either side played a pivotal role in the WWII Battle of Milne Bay (see p88) and there are several memorials and relics here. The market, harbour and a lookout near the hospital might soak up some time, after which you can just soak up the atmosphere in what is one of the most laid-back, secure and enjoyable towns in the country. Spend a night drinking with locals, nationals and expats alike, and you'll soon know what's going on and who's going where.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 641 1200)

Fire (☎ 641 1055, 641 1014)

Police (☎ 641 1391; Charles Abel Hwy)

INTERNET ACCESS

Besides the Alotau International Hotel (available to nonguests), there is only one other option.

Bayside Internet Cafe (☎ 641 1490; Masurina Business Centre, Charles Abel Hwy; per hr K26; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

MONEY

Bank South Pacific (☎ 641 1284; ☎ 6am-6pm) Has two ATMs; charges K50 for cashing travellers cheques.

Westpac (☎ 641 1003) Has an ATM; charges K20 for cashing travellers cheques. Currency exchange for euros, and Australian, New Zealand and US dollars.

POST

Post Office (☎ 641 1207; in the town centre)

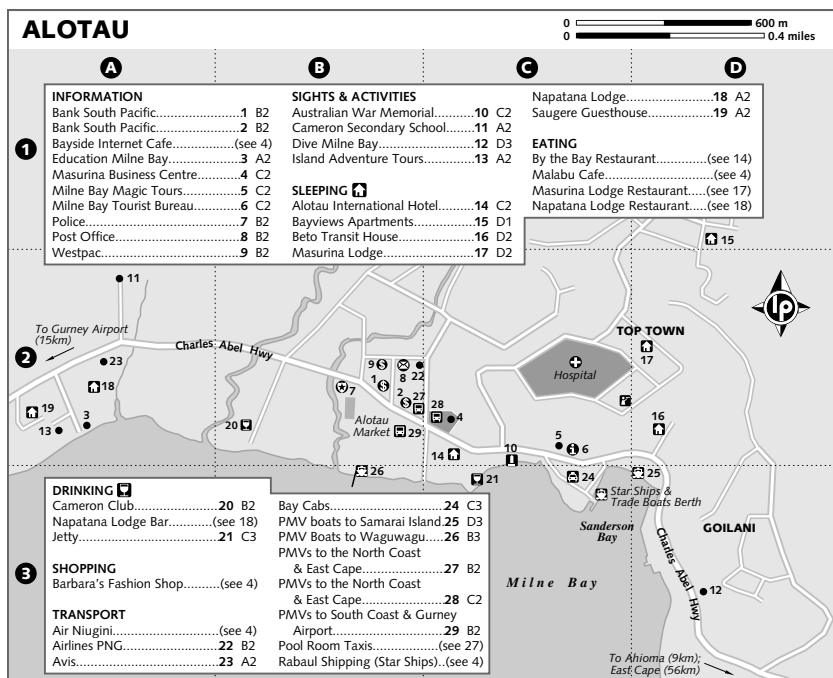
TOURIST INFORMATION

Education Milne Bay (☎ 6410146; emb@online

.net.pg) Local and international groups contact these former schoolteachers to organise outdoor and cultural programmes. Generally such tours focus on environmental and community development utilising their impressive Wanigilli centre.

Gretta Kwasnicka-Todurawai (Napatana Lodge, p112)

Gretta is a veteran traveller and knows what independent travellers need. She has produced a folder detailing all kinds of excursions around Milne Bay. Gretta is very honest – she'll call a spade a fucking shovel – and a great PNG character.



Malabu Cafe (☎ 641 0900; malabu@online.net.pg; Masurina Business Centre; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1.30pm Sat) This *kai* bar is run by Rod and Serah Clark who have affiliations with Butia Lodge on the Trobriand Islands. They are a good source of information for the islands but in their eagerness to get guests may promise non-existent Milamala festivities.

Milne Bay Tourist Bureau (☎ 641 1503; www.milnebaytourism.gov.pg; Charles Abel Hwy; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Hopelessly under-resourced centre, but the friendly women here do a fantastic job in pointing travellers in the right direction. They will answer your emails, book accommodation, arrange village-stays, advise on transport and keep you informed on the province's festivals.

Sights & Activities

The **harbour** is the most colourful part of town and it's worth exploring. There are one-man canoes, brightly painted island boats, work tugs and passenger vessels. The busy harbour activity attests to it being the province's main cargo hub. For a bird's-eye view of the harbour, walk up the steps in town to the hospital, take the right fork and keep going for a couple of hundred metres.

Back on the foreshore, the recently commissioned **Australian War Memorial** has a detailed description of the Battle of Milne Bay. There's a service here on 26 August every year, commemorating the beginning of the Battle of Milne Bay.

At the other end of town, **Cameron Secondary School** welcomes visitors to its cultural village in the afternoon between 2.30pm and 3.30pm when students have finished their studies and are free to show guests around. Donations should be made to the school library and not to the students themselves.

There are several good **black-sand swimming beaches** to the east of town towards Ahioima, although they're not obvious from the road. PMVs run past and it's dead easy to hitch a ride along this stretch of road, though obviously women should be more cautious. It's possible to ride horses through the oil palm plantations on the outskirts of town; contact **Ken Fitzgerald** (☎ 686 5882) if you are keen, although he can be notoriously difficult to get hold of. Otherwise, ask the staff at either the tourist bureau or at Napatana Lodge if they can help.

DIVING

Alotau has some incredible diving – along the north coast, within the bay and around the islands. Unfortunately there are no longer any diving operators based in Alotau itself (the last one returned to Japan after he became bent). Until another tender starts up, the only way to see some of these incredible seascapes is to travel to Tawali Resort (p114), 1½ hours up the coast. Day trips to Tawali Resort can be arranged through Napatana Lodge (p112), the Milne Bay Tourist Bureau (opposite) or with the resort directly.

Dive Milne Bay (☎ 641 1421; divemb@online.net.pg; Charles Abel Hwy) no longer runs dive trips but it still fills tanks (K15) and hires scuba equipment (full kit K130).

From time to time, dive charter boats are based here including the 10-berth **Telita** (www.telitadive.com), the **MV Golden Dawn** (www.goldendawn.com) and the **Marlin 1** (www.marlin1charters.com.au), a 50ft vessel specialising in research and hydrographic survey charters.

For more on diving see p58.

FISHING

For the sports fisherman, Milne Bay has a number of game fish worth trolling, jigging and casting for – giant marlin, sailfish, wahoo, dogtooth tuna, mackerel, barramundi and the Papuan black bass. If you bring your own tackle you could talk to local boat handlers and arrange to hire your own dinghy for around K200 per day plus fuel.

The well-organised **Milne Bay Game Fishing Club** (☎ 641 0496; iwilliams@global.net.pg) can advise on boats and is happy to find some gear for you, particularly during one of the regular competitions or the annual Milne Bay Classic, which takes place on the first weekend of December.

The other option is to clamber aboard a **Driftwood** (☎ 641 1346, 641 0136; http://driftwoodpng.com; half-/full-day fishing safari for 2 adults A\$225/400) charter. Operating from a newly built boutique hotel (p112), Driftwood offers both saltwater and freshwater fishing safaris using quality Shimano equipment in a variety of boats at a range of prices.

Organised Tours

Florah Todurawai (☎ 698 0738 or through Napatana Lodge p112; s exd travel costs per day 10K) is an excellent local guide. She accompanies tourists to any of the destinations described here for next to

nothing. She takes the hassle out of catching PMVs and, if you stay overnight, she'll usually stay with friends (but offer to cover her accommodation if need be).

Milne Bay Magic Tours (☎ 641 0711; milnebaymagic.tours@global.com.pg; Charles Abel Hwy) offers a range of tours including a WWII tour of the Battle of Milne Bay and a creek bed filled with abandoned Japanese landing craft. There are also tours of local bat caves and trips to Samarai and Kwato Islands. Snorkelling gear can be rented here for K10.

Island Adventure Tours (☎ 641 1358; islandtours@datec.net.pg) operates a glass-bottomed boat and a basic guesthouse east of Alotau at Divinai village. Its office is based in the mustard-coloured house near Education Milne Bay.

Festivals & Events

The **Milne Bay Kundu & Canoe Festival** (first full weekend in November) made a successful debut in 2004 and is definitely worth seeing. Ocean-going barges bring canoes from as far away as Daru to compete for pride and price money. Dozens of canoes, some with 40-plus warriors, adorned in traditional dress and paddling to the beat of island drums, leaves a powerful impression. The races are held amidst much rivalry and celebrated with equally as much revelry. For details see www.milnebaytourism.gov.pg.

The colourful **Cameron Cultural Show** (biennially on even numbered years) is held on the first weekend of the third term of school. Parents travel to the high school's cultural village to decorate their children and instruct them on the finer techniques of traditional dance. Local art exhibitions and a beauty pageant are also held. The **Hagita Cultural Show** (also biennially on even numbered years) is a similar deal and held near the airport for the Catholic high school students.

Sleeping & Eating

Apart from the *kai* bars in the centre of town, with their usual fare of fried chicken, local veggies and greasy chips, the hotels and guesthouses are the only food and drink options around. **Mabewa**, a fruit indigenous to Milne Bay, is sometimes sold at the town market.

Saugere Guesthouse (☎ /fax 641 0165; per person with/without 3 meals K120/50) Located on the waterfront west of Napatana, this is the cheapest place in town and has a casual and hospitable

atmosphere. There are two beds per room and there are shared bathrooms.

Beto Transit House (☎ 641 9110; s/d/f K60/75/90) The rooms here are comfortably tired – a bit tatty around the edges with a lived-in feel. It's popular with locals from the islands who like to congregate around the small canteen. There is a shared kitchen and bathroom.

Bayviews Apartments (☎ 641 0401; bayviewspng@daltron.com.pg; budget r K90, s K120-140, d K180; 🍽️) Expect a warm welcome, but cold water. The budget rooms are in a self-contained house while the other rooms are larger, lighter and airier, but still fairly basic. A toast-and-tea breakfast and airport transfers are included in the tariff. Meals (K20) are available and, if you can arrange a group of 20, they will put on a *mumu* (per person K25). Self-caterers appreciate the large kitchen.

Education Milne Bay (☎ 641 0146; emb@online.net.pg; s incl 2 meals K115-160; 🍽️) Although primarily geared towards groups on community development courses, solo travellers can stay in one of the 12 connecting rooms or stand-alone bungalows if there's room.

our pick Napatana Lodge (☎ 641 0588; www.napanalodge.com; Charles Abel Hwy; flashpackers s/d K80/160, bungalows s/d/tr K200/240/260; 🍽️) Napatana is the pick of Alotau's accommodation, and now that the 'flashpackers' have opened there is something in most people's budget. The flashpackers are...well, flash. The rooms have their own bathroom, cable TV, porch and tea-/coffee-making facilities. The bungalows are even more comfortable, with private balconies and crisp, clean bedding. A huge drawcard is the amount of information on hand and the staff can help arrange any number of day or overnight trips. Upstairs, the Napatana bar (meals K25 to K45, open 7am to late) is the place to rub shoulders with expats and nationals alike. There is always something going on – a pub quiz, some kind of raffle, a joker night or sport on the open air TV. Friday night's fish n' chips (K22), Saturday night's seafood buffet (K45, and the crab is sublime) and the Sunday roasts (K45) are all excellent. Meal packages and weekend rates are available.

Masurina Lodge (☎ 641 1212; www.masurina.com; incl breakfasts K105-255, d K210-330; 🍽️ 🍷 📺) The large, ageing rooms and apartments are comfortable enough and have a distinct feel of Australia c 1973. Some of the apartments sleep five and are ideal for families. Rates include laundry and airport transfers. Its restaurant (meals

K35, open 7am to 8.30am, noon to 1.30pm and 7pm to 9pm) serves a mix of tasty dishes and every second Friday the barbecue buffet (K25) located by the poolside bar is excellent value. Meal packages and weekend discounts are available.

Alotau International Hotel (☎ 641 0300; www.alotauinternationalhotel.com.pg; Charles Abel Hwy; r K330; 🍽️ 🍷 📺) For size and facilities these rooms, each with a balcony and bay view, are pretty good. They are, however, more comfortable than characterful. Babysitters can be arranged, and there's internet access (per 15 minutes K8). The By the Bay Restaurant (meals K15 to K50, open 6pm to 10pm) has a tasty if somewhat eclectic mix of Western and Asian dishes as well as pizza (K15 to K33).

Driftwood (☎ 641 1346, 641 0136; http://driftwoodpng.com; s A\$240-300, d A\$260-320) This boutique hotel was still being built when we visited but will be opened soon. Five minutes from town, and having its own wharf and game-fishing boats, Driftwood aims to cater to anglers keen to hook into some of the bay's marlin and sailfish. There will be three beach and five garden bungalows as well as an upmarket Fisherman's Wharf Restaurant jutting over the water.

Drinking

Most travellers prefer to drink at their hotel although there are two other places within staggering distance of town.

Cameron Club (☎ 641 1088; 🍷 4-10pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) Located near the waterfront west of the centre is the local drinking hole. It's a large, cavernous space reminiscent of a rugby clubhouse. There are some large snooker tables in the corner and you can borrow racquets for the squash or tennis courts (per 30 minutes K8) from the bar.

Jetty (Alotau International Hotel; 🍷 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat) Although it's built on a wharf, its pretty location can at times be marred by the sound of locals smashing their bottles against the side of the building.

Shopping

Trobriand Islanders come to Alotau to sell their carvings and they'll find you around town. **Dive Milne Bay** (☎ 641 1421; divemb@online.net.pg; Charles Abel Hwy) has the town's best collection of Trobriand lime pots, walking sticks and bowls; all reasonably priced. There are small handicraft shops at the top hotels.

Getting There & Away

AIR

As has been the case for years now, there are rumours of an international flight between Cairns (Australia) and Alotau. **Air Niugini** (☎ 641 1031; Masurina Business Centre, Charles Abel Hwy) has one or two flights between Port Moresby and Gurney (K458, 50 minutes, daily). The morning flights are more reliable and have better onward connections in Port Moresby.

Airlines PNG (☎ 641 1591 in Alotau, 641 0013 in Gurney) flies on Monday and Friday from Gurney to Misima (K410), then returns to Gurney, then flies to Losuia (K441) and then to Port Moresby (K441).

BOAT

The prices listed here are for adults, one-way. Children travel for half-price, students get a 20% discount and families are entitled to special fares. Apart from the Star Ships, work boats service the trade stores on the islands and offer uncomfortable, slow and irregular trips to anywhere with a *stoa* (store). Getting a ride can mean waiting around wharves, asking about destinations and usually adding a few hours to the alleged departure times. But once you are on the open water, sitting atop a load of SP Lager, Kundu Crackers and margarine, you will be feeling the province's charm – until you start feeling very uncomfortable.

D'Entrecasteaux & Trobriand Islands Has weekly departures for Salamo (K60), Budoya (K60), Wailagi (K65), Mapamoiwa (K60), Kalokalo (K70), Boyama (K75), Watuluma (K80) and Losuia (K105). It offers economy class only.

North Coast The *Samarai Queen* travels north calling at all ports to Oro Bay (for Popondetta, K120) including Dogura (K75), Rabaraba (K75), Cape Vogel (K80) and Tufi (K105). Economy class only.

Port Moresby & China Strait The *Morobe Queen* runs to Port Moresby (economy/1st class/tourist K150/300/350, overnight, Sundays) Travels via Samarai Island. It returns on Tuesday, arriving Wednesday.

Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships; ☎ 641 0012; mona@pngbd.com; Masurina Business Centre, Charles Abel Hwy, Gurney) Provides scheduled services throughout Milne Bay Province, but inclement weather can cause long delays and frequent disruptions.

PMV

PMVs run along the coast to East Cape (K7, from 9am) and on to the north coast.

Getting Around

Alotau's airport is at Gurney, 15km from town, and was named after Bob Gurney, an Australian who began flying for Guinea Airways in 1929 and was killed in action with the RAAF in 1942.

Taxis travelling to town cost K35, but most hotels provide transfers for K20 to K25, or for free. PMVs run to town from the nearby main road (K3), but they're infrequent. PMVs to the airport leave from near the Bank South Pacific. The best way into town is by simply asking someone for a lift. Remember that although hitching a ride from the airport is commonplace, foreigners (especially women) should exercise careful judgment about from whom they accept a ride.

Alotau is well-served by taxis. **Bay Cabs** (☎ 641 1093) is the main taxi company and sometimes provides car hire. Others include **Pool Room Taxis** (☎ 698 0920; Chase Corp Bldg, Charles Abel Hwy, Gurney); **Gramp's Taxi** (☎ 641 1557) and **HT Taxis** (☎ 641 9087).

Avis (☎ 641 1273; Charles Abel Hwy) has opened an office next door to Napatana Lodge.

AROUND ALOTAU East Cape

East Cape is at the very eastern end of mainland New Guinea. It's a quiet but picturesque village, where banana boats come and go for Normanby Island (K25) and others, including nearby Yamba Island with its famous 13-trunk coconut palm (photo fee K20). There's terrific snorkelling and diving in this area and a skull cave (K5), which is an hour's walk away. Guesthouses usually send a boy to show the way.

Many people come here as a day trip from Alotau. The first East Cape-bound PMV (K7) departs Alotau around 10am and the last one returns around 3pm, Monday to Saturday. It's about 1½ hours each way along a metal road that passes many pretty villages and black-sand beaches

If you are planning on snorkelling some of the reefs, hire your gear and buy your own *zoom* (petrol; buy 12 litres) in Alotau (where it's cheaper). Banana boats (dinghies) can be hired (K30) at the water's edge to motor you to secluded beaches and reefs.

There are plans to make Nuakata Island, a biodiversity 'hot spot', Milne Bay's first protected marine area. Two independent marine reef surveys recorded 429 species of

reef coral; more than the variety found in the entire Great Barrier Reef.

Opposite the Dulia Stoa, **Bernhard's Guesthouse** (s K25), is a simple beachside hut that has a pleasant veranda. A little further down the road, near the market, is the rustic **Oima Guesthouse** (s K30), which has a couple of very basic rooms. Both places can supply sheets and simple meals (K10), but generally it's BYO all the way.

Wagawaga

On the southern shore of Milne Bay, this tiny settlement in a cove often called Discovery Bay sits below the steeply rising mountains of the southern peninsula. It's a popular day trip for divers and snorkellers, who swim around the mostly submerged *Muscoota*, a WWII coal transport ship that sprang a leak and sank here in 1946.

At the western end of the beach is a stream where local women wash their dishes. The freshwater **eels** here have grown horribly huge on the scraps and for K5 to K10, the women will allow you to pick up these monsters. Make sure you bring fresh fish to attract them from their lairs.

There are a number of **waterfalls** but some of these, depending on the landowner's disposition, may be off-limits. Warren Dipole from Ulumani Lodge (see below) can arrange guides as well as canoe trips up **Dawadawa River**, which come highly recommended.

From Wagawaga there is a steep one-hour walk to Moon Rock (Da'a Nawalahi), which bears markings thought to have been made by Europeans as a navigational aid. On the way up you'll pass a skull reputed to greet you with a grin; one, two or even a full set of teeth depending on how much it likes you. Take a guide for the trip.

Enjoy the stunning panoramic views from **Ulumani Treetops Lodge** (☎/fax 641 0916; www.pngbackpacker.com; s K80-180) that span over the jungle and beyond to Milne Bay. If Warren knows you are coming he'll collect you from the beach in his 4WD. Otherwise it's a very steep 30-minute (if you take the shortcuts) walk to the lodge. Accommodation is in two buildings: the upper is in the treetops, sleeps eight (four comfortably), and has a great balcony for bird-watchers. Down the hill is a traditional-style building with its own balcony but simpler rooms (single K80) and piping-hot, communal showers. Mosquito nets are

provided which is just as well, as there are *planti* mosquitoes in the wet. The meals (K10 to K20) are delicious and they are served on the verandas. Warren has masks and snorkels and can organise tours to all of the sights mentioned previously.

PMV boats motor across the bay from the market wharf (K5, 45 minutes, daily except Sundays). They depart when everyone has finished their day's shopping between 3pm and 4.30pm. Returning, they leave Wagawaga around 7am.

You can drive from Alotau in about an hour and Warren collects his guests from the airport for K100 each way.

NORTH COAST

The north coast is a string of villages, beaches and reefs that reward those who leave the beaten track. There are several good walks, and with time you could quite easily travel by foot, PMV and dinghy all the way from East Cape to Tufi. A growing number of villages have simple accommodation, including, from east to west: Boianai, Wagahuhu, Awaiama (Mahimahi Plantation Guesthouse; just outside the village), Wedau and Bogaboga at Cape Vogel.

You can walk from Rabaraba or Wedau to Alotau partly on the coast road that takes PMVs depending on the season. There are many villages enroute so finding a bed is easy. Rabaraba to Wedau takes two days, and from Wedau to the tiny Taupota No 2 settlement takes three easy days or two longer ones. Then you can reach Alotau in a day by going south across a low range, but it's best to take a local village guide. There are some other good routes across the range. For an account of the walk from Alotau to Wamira (near Wedau), see www.michie.net/pnginfo/wamira.html. Speak with Greta at Napatana Lodge (p112) or the Milne Bay Tourist Bureau (p110) to contact the villages and any guides required.

PMVs operate from Alotau as far as Topura, from where you need to walk or take dinghies if you want to go further west.

Tawali Resort

On a coral fringed headland overlooking Hoiya Bay, **Tawali Resort** (☎ 641 1167 in Alotau, 641 0922 in Tawali; www.tawali.com; s/d incl dive & meals US\$380/590; 🍷) is one of the best in PNG. The whole resort lives and breaths diving and most guests come here on diving packages (although there are cheaper options for non-divers).

The resort is completely hidden from the sea, but the views from the main building and rooms are exceptional. A series of covered boardwalks through tropical rainforest connect the 15 bungalows. All of this solitude comes at a price, and Australians booking through tawali@bigpond.com sometimes get better rates than Americans booking through reservations@tawali.com.

DIVING

The **Tawali Resort dive shop** (☎ 641 1167 in Alotau, 641 0922 in Tawali; coastal 2-tank dive US\$80, outer-reef 3-tank dive US\$150) is excellent and the staff very professional. Dive courses are not offered here (yet) although they do hire equipment and have several dive boats, including two charters, at their disposal. There are some impressive wall drop-offs, overhangs and caverns along the limestone coastline within a 20-minute boat ride from Tawali. Most sites have abundant soft and hard corals, sponges and masses of reef fish. There are also a couple of muck-dive sites nearby but arguably the best dive spots are out on the open-water pinnacles with their impressive pelagic action.

Occasionally (around August) there are stingers in the water whose long, near invisible, threads are impossible to avoid and leave all exposed flesh red and welted. If your wallet won't quite stretch to staying the night, it is possible to visit Tawali as a day trip from Alotau. As Tawali is not accessible by road, you will need to let the resort know you are coming so the staff can send a car to bring you to its wharf (1½ hours) and a boat to ferry you to the resort (10 minutes). The transfer is K50 return per person.

Tawali Resort prefers to provide a buffet lunch for its day-trippers. This is usually a hot BBQ, but on the day we visited only a cold buffet was served, which at K50 wasn't exceptional value.

Tawali also operates two charter dive boats:

MV Chertan (www.chertan.com; per person per day US\$250) Sleeps 10 passengers and is popular with professional photographers and biologists who charter it for four months annually.

MY Spirit of Niugini (www.spiritofniugini.com; per person per day US\$320-345) A well-appointed dive catamaran with large rooms and private bathrooms. Because the catamaran can handle rough seas, it is possible to go as far as the outer-reef chains of the Conflicts and Engineer Groups. For more on diving see p58.

SAMARAI ISLAND

Samarai is a speck of an island at the southern tip of the Milne Bay mainland. Just 24 hectares in the China Strait (so named by Captain John Moresby because he thought it would be the most direct route from the east coast of Australia to China), Samarai has seen better times. In its colonial heyday it was said to be one of the most beautiful places in the Pacific and although no-one is saying that now, it's still a pretty place. It's much like an overgrown and untended garden that still retains a legacy of its former, ordered beauty. The island predates Port Moresby and was the provincial headquarters until 1968, when local government realised it had outgrown the tiny island and left for greener pastures. Two years later the international wharf closed and the town's been going to seed ever since.

Before WWII it was the second-largest town in PNG, but in 1942 the Australian administration destroyed almost every building in anticipation of a Japanese invasion that never came (whoops). Its postwar reincarnation was built in Australian country-town style. A path encircles the island and you can stroll around it in half an hour.

Unfortunately there is little in the way of organised trade since the last trade store closed in early 2005; be sure to pack enough food, water and beer for the duration of your stay.

Wallace Andrew, in the house southwest of the Christopher Robinson memorial, is a good source of local information. He's a Kwato Island old boy, grandson of a cannibal, local identity and fascinating character to listen to (you won't do much talking).

Sights & Activities

The main thing to do on Samarai is just wander around soaking up the faded-glory. From the wharf, head toward the hill and, at the northeast corner of the sportsground, you'll pass the **memorial to Christopher Robinson**, the one-time administrator who committed suicide in 1904. The inscription notes he was 'as well meaning as he was unfortunate and as kindly as he was courageous' and that 'his aim was to make New Guinea a good place for white men.' Near the southeast corner of the grounds, a road leads up to the abandoned hospital and, just north of here, a small hill with great views of the island and China Strait. Near the sportsground, and south of

the wharf, is Samarai's oldest-surviving building, the Anglican church.

Even if you don't climb the hill, you simply must go snorkelling or diving around the rotting piers of the **Samarai Island Wharf**, which has become a world-famous muck-diving site. The marine life is incredible and as you drift carefully between the piers you'll be surrounded by schools of brightly coloured fish. Below them, pipefish and various odd nudibranchs can be seen. The bottom is also littered with the detritus of history, but don't be tempted to 'rescue' anything more than the rubbish. Be sure to bring a snorkel and mask.

Sleeping & Eating

If you don't fancy your chances of making friends with the locals, there is only one place to stay on Samarai Island. At the top of the stairs leading up from the north side of the sports ground, **Bwanasa Women's Association Guesthouse** (☎ 642 1042; 1 per person K70; meals K12-16) is rapidly approaching 'run down' but the staff here are fantastically friendly. The rooms are simple and the shared bathrooms have only cold water; all of this is in keeping with the derelict and abandoned atmosphere of the island itself. If there's no-one around when you arrive, ask in the neighbouring houses and they'll rouse someone up.

Getting There & Away

The easiest way to get to the island is to jump aboard one of the public dinghies at Sanderson's Bay (K25, 1½ hours, daily except Saturday). The boats depart Alotau around 3pm and return between 7am to 8am the next morning.

NEAR SAMARAI ISLAND

China Strait and the surrounding islands have a reputation for witchcraft and, despite the influence of missionaries, superstitions linger. Strange lights, ghost ships and sirens (the singing kind) all crop up.

Just 3km west of Samarai, **Kwato Island** was once an educational centre and home to a thriving boat-building industry. The remnants of the old machinery lie where they were discarded in the tall grass and today the island can be eerily quiet.

The Reverend Charles Abel and his wife, Beatrice, founded a non-hierarchical church in 1891. Even though they 'belted' the Bible pretty hard, it wasn't until the 1930s

that the last of the nearby cannibal tribes was 'saved'.

If you follow the old tree-lined road until it clears the forest, you'll come to a stonewalled church that was built in 1937 from materials brought from Scotland. The Kwato Church suffered a decline in the 1970s and stands today as a testimony to the missionary of a bygone era.

Boats to Kwato can be caught from Samarai Island Wharf.

At **Doini Island**, a privately owned and stunningly beautiful place about 10km southeast of Samarai, it's possible for overnight stays with Milne Bay Magic Tours (p111).

Not far west of Doini Island is Gona Bara Island, and just off the northwest shore is a dive site known as the **Manta Ray Cleaning Station**. Just a few metres below the surface, there is an isolated bommie (a natural spire, covered in coral, rising from the sea floor). Around the bommie giant, graceful mantas (some with wing spans of up to 5m) are cleaned by tiny wrasses; it is one of the best places on earth to see this happening. Snorkelling is also possible, though high winds make it (and diving) difficult between June and September. Unfortunately only dive charters are visiting here although it may be possible to arrange a snorkelling trip with local boat operators in Samarai Island.

Galahi Island, just off Sariba Island, has seen a small trickle of travellers who visit the pretty seaside village here. **Galahi Village Stay** offers accommodation, meals, fishing, swimming, snorkelling, trekking and bird-watching opportunities around the island. Contact Jeff Kinch through Napatana Lodge (p112) in Alotau. It should be possible to stay in other villages on many of the islands in the area, including Logea Island (Rogeia) and Sariba.

D'ENTRECASTEAUX ISLANDS

Scattered across a narrow strait from the PNG mainland, the D'Entrecasteaux group was named by French explorer Antoine d'Entrecasteaux, who sailed through in 1793 while searching for his missing compatriot, La Pérouse. The three principal islands, from northwest to southeast, are Goodenough (Nidula), Fergusson (Moratau), and Normanby (Duau). The islands are extremely mountainous, covered by dense jungle and contain a number of active geothermal fields. Sanarua and Dobu are the most significant of the

KULA RING

Extending around the islands of Milne Bay Province is an invisible circle, or *kula* ring, that binds the islands together in a system of ritual exchange. The ring encompasses the Trobriand, Muyua (Woodlark), Louisiade, Samarai and D'Entrecasteaux islands. Things have changed now, but in the past, the *kula* ring involved the trade of red-shell necklaces, called *bagi* or *soulava*, in a clockwise direction and white shell armbands, *mwali*, in an anticlockwise direction. Each trader had a *kula* partner on their nearest neighbouring island in each direction. Once a year, the trader and a delegation from his clan journeyed to the island of his *kula* partner to receive gifts in elaborate public ceremonies. On a separate significant date he would be visited by another *kula* partner who would be presented with the prized gifts. Accompanying these voyages were other ceremonial objects and surplus fish and yams to be exchanged with neighbouring islands. Since the *bagis* and *mwalis* rarely left the circle, this system ensured a distribution of wealth among the islanders.

The exchange mostly occurred between traditional families of high status and thus helped to reinforce clan-based hierarchies. Today some people are required to journey to the island home of a traditional *kula* partner bearing ritual gifts in a banana boat rather than the traditional sailing canoe.

smaller islands but there are numerous reefs, shoals and atolls.

D'Entrecasteaux islanders are still largely subsistence horticulturalists, living in small, traditional villages and fishing the coastal waters. People of this area participated in the *kula* ring of exchange (see above) and travelled widely to other islands in their sea-going sailing canoes.

The whole archipelago is off-the-beaten-track travel at its best. It can be difficult to contact anyone on the islands because the phones rarely work. Try the Milne Bay Tourist Bureau (p110) instead. If you are happy with basic island accommodation, you could spend weeks exploring coastal villages, sleeping with families on sleeping mats and sharing their food. To mount such an expedition, hire one of the dinghies at East Cape (K150 per day, including crew), stock it with a couple of drums of petrol (brought in Alotau where it's cheaper), some 1kg bags of rice and tinned fish and follow the whales, dolphins or dugongs which live here.

Getting There & Away

Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships, p107) has a weekly service to all three principal islands which includes port of calls at Salamo on Fergusson and Esa'ala on Normanby. Easier to organise are the dinghies that run early afternoons from East Cape across to Sewa Bay, Normanby Island. Let the captain know about your intended destination as these public boats travel to many destinations other than Saidowai. It is also possible to travel

between Doidoi on Goodenough Island and Cape Vogel on the mainland's north coast. If the seas are rough, consider your options carefully as boats have been swamped and their passengers drowned.

Airlines PNG no longer flies to these islands.

Normanby Island

Esa'ala, the district headquarters, is at the entrance to the spectacular Dobu Passage. It's a tiny place, with a couple of stores, a market and a trade store. A reef just offshore offers excellent snorkelling.

The friendly **Esa'ala Guesthouse** (call the district office ☎ 641 1217; s ind meals K85) is on the beach near the main wharf, and **Tom Inman B&B Esa'ala** (☎ 641 1209) is a pleasant place run by Tom's son David. Ask for either place and you'll soon be pointed in the right direction.

One of the most accessible and picturesque bays in the region is **Sewa Bay**, a 45-minute boat ride (K25) from East Cape. During WWII the Allies based warships here among seven tiny islands in the harbour. The beautiful Goldie's bird of paradise is endemic to the island and can be seen at the Buyeti display site (a three-hour walk from Sibana), but you'll need a guide to show you where it's located. Snorkelling around the tiny islands of Emanalo, Autoyou and Touwe is particularly rewarding because of the extremely high biodiversity found in these waters. There is a guesthouse at Bunama village that provides dinghies and canoe trips to the reefs that surround the village.

In **Saidowai village**, in the northern corner of the bay, local activist Mombi Onesimo is encouraging tourism as an alternative to Malaysian rosewood logging. His **Saidowai Guesthouse** (contact Napatana Lodge ☎ 641 0588; dm/s/d K30/80/100) is an excellent place to base yourself as Mombi arranges guides to local attractions, snorkelling trips, canoe-fishing expeditions and treks to see Goldie's bird of paradise and the Bwasiaiai hot springs. The guesthouse is constructed from traditional materials of Sago Palm roofing and thatched palm walls and meals are provided (K5 to K30).

It's possible to walk to Esa'ala from Saidowai overnighting in a series of guesthouses along the way. Ask Mombi for details, but there are guesthouses at Sibanai, Welala, Bwakera, Poponawai and Ulowai Beach. All of these guesthouses are within a day's walk from one another and provide meals, however you will need to bring bedding, a mosquito net and torch.

Fergusson Island

Fergusson is the largest island in the group and the highest peak is 2073m, with two other lower ranges from which the island's many rivers and streams flow. It is notable for its hot springs, bubbling mud pools, spouting geysers and extinct volcanoes.

The hike from Warluma to the caldera of **Mt Lamanai** takes about 1½ hours and affords fantastic views over an immense crater. Take a local guide (ask around to arrange for one). Particularly active thermal springs can be found at Deidei, opposite the main town of **Salamo**.

The **Salamo United Church Women's Guesthouse** (contact Wesley High School ☎ 641 1715; s incl meals K90) has been renovated recently. If staff don't know you're coming, bring some supplies.

Boats cross the beautiful Dobu Passage between Esa'ala and Salamo daily and cost K5.

Goodenough Island

The most northwesterly of the group, Goodenough is one of the most steeply sided islands on earth, with Mt Oiautukekea reaching 2566m at the summit. There are fertile coastal plains flanking the mountain range and a road runs around the northeast coast through **Vivigani**, site of the major airstrip in the group. **Bolubolu** is the main settlement, about 10km south of Vivigani. In the centre

of the island there is a large stone, covered in mysterious black-and-white paintings, which is said to have power over the yam crops. The Bolubolu Guesthouse charges K90 per person with meals.

TROBRIAND ISLANDS

In 1914 a young anthropologist called Bronislaw Malinowski set sail for the impossibly remote Trobriand archipelago. When WWI broke out, he suddenly found himself cut off from the outside world and, being an Austrian Pole in a British controlled area, unable to leave. The story goes that not being sure which side he was on (or even wanted to be on), he spent the next three years immersed in his fieldwork. On his eventual return, that fieldwork bore fruit as one of the most famous and influential books in anthropology, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

Despite the dozens of anthropologists, missionaries, TV crews and tourists who have since followed Malinowski, the Trobriands remain one of the most culturally intact places you could possibly find. Although an understanding of reproduction and modern medicines is common, islanders still maintain a world view that includes the belief that in order for a woman to become pregnant, she must first be infused with the spirit of a departed ancestor. A strict matrilineal social system, enormous and highly decorated yam houses, exquisite carvings and the colourful festivals of clan prestige will keep your head turning.

Known locally as the Trobes, the people take their name from Denis de Trobriand, an officer on D'Entrecasteaux's expedition. The Trobriands are low-lying coral islands, in contrast to their mountainous southern neighbours. Trobriand Islanders have a distinct Polynesian appearance and there are scattered remains of stone temples that resemble those of Polynesia. Trade between the islands had strong cultural and economic importance, and the pre-European traders crossed vast distances of open sea in canoes, exchanging fish, vegetables, pigs, stone axes, a rare jadelike stone from Muyua (Woodlark) Island and volcanic glass from Fergusson Island. The *kula* ring (p117) is the most famous of these trade routes.

It's good manners to let the paramount chief know you have arrived. If you are there for reasons other than tourism, you should request an audience with him to explain why

you've come. It's enough to ask almost anyone to pass on the message to the chief; it will reach him.

Festivals

Mention to any mainlander that you are off to see the **Milamala Festival** and you'll be greeted with raised eyebrows, queasy smirks and any number of puns along the lines of exactly whose yams are ripe for harvesting. Ever since Malinowski published his provocatively titled *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929), the West has been fascinated with (some say, fantasising about) the thought of free love with sex-starved, bare-breasted maidens in a tropical paradise.

However on the island it's more about the yams and the celebration of a bountiful crop. Yams are harvested and stored between June and August. The crop yield (along with the chief's whim and, increasingly, monetary incentives from the government) dictate whether or not there will even be a Milamala. For exact dates see www.milnebaytourism.gov.pg, but treat even this information as unreliable. In 2007, despite widely published programmes, no festival was held.

When it is held, the Milamala may culminate in a week or two of canoe racing, cricket matches, ribald dancing and, yes, free love. Before you get too excited, it's worth noting that visitors with boiling loins usually have to make their own entertainment because, while yams are considered objects of great beauty, *dim dims* (white people) are not.

Kiriwina Island

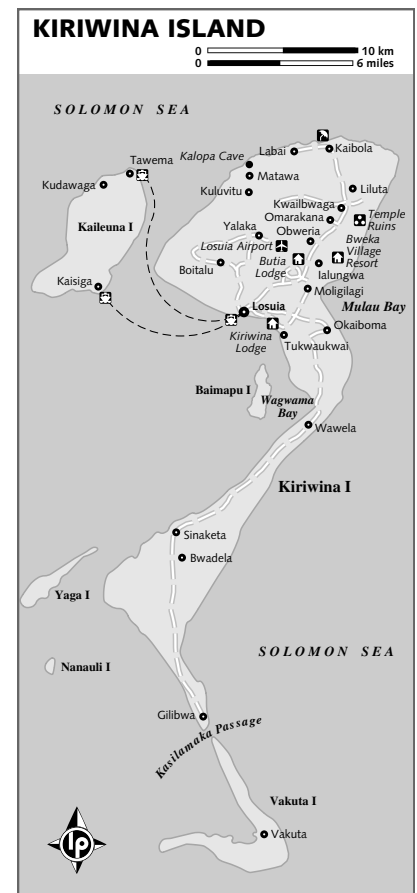
The largest of the Trobriand Islands is Kiriwina, which is home to the district capital of **Losuia** and the airstrip. Kiriwina is relatively flat, although there is a rim of low hills (uplifted coral reefs) along the eastern shore. The central plain is intensely cultivated and, with the island's population growing fast, there are concerns that cutting trees to plant gardens will devastate the island.

The airport is in the north, where the US Air Force had two bases during WWII. South of here, on the west coast, Losuia is the only real town and is generally known as 'the station'. It has a wharf, police station, health centre and two trade stores. It's more like a sprawling village than a town. Electricity is rumoured to be coming soon

but if it does, it will probably be as reliable as the temperamental telephone network.

INFORMATION

The **Konki Enterprises** (☎ 643 9000) and **Digogwa Trading** (☎ 643 9001) stores in Losuia are your best sources of information. Ask at these places about any cricket matches, weddings, mortuary feasts or any other festivities that it may be possible to visit. Rebecca Young from Digogwa is particularly helpful and can arrange *singsing* groups and a 'mini-milamala' with her village contacts. There are no banks here, but both stores change Australian and US dollars at poor rates. Konki has connections to Butia Lodge and Digogwa is owned by the same family who run Kiriwina Lodge.



YAMS, SEX & CRICKET

Bronislaw Malinowski's celebrated books, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* and *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, were published after WWI, and revealed much about the intricate trading rituals (p117), yam cults and sexual practices of the Trobriand Islands. Malinowski found a matrilineal society, in which the chief's sons belong to his wife's clan and he is succeeded by one of his oldest sister's sons. The society is strictly hierarchical, with distinctions between hereditary classes and demarcations in the kind of work each person can perform.

Yams

Yams are far more than a staple food in the Trobriands – they're a sign of prestige and expertise, and a tie between villages and clans. The quality and size of your yams is important. Many hours are spent discussing yam cultivation, and to be known as a *tokwaibagula* (good gardener) is a mark of great prestige.

The yam cult climaxes at the harvest time, which is usually July or August. The yams are first dug up in the gardens then displayed, studied and admired. At the appropriate time, the men carry the yams back to the village, with the women guarding the procession.

In the villages, the yams are again displayed before being packed into the highly decorated yam houses. Each man has a yam house for each of his wives and it is his brother-in-law's responsibility (in other words, his wife's clan's obligation) to fill his yam house. The chief's yam house is always the biggest, most elaborate and first to be filled.

Sex

Malinowski's tomes on the Trobriand Islanders' customs led to Kiriwina Island being given the misleading title of the 'Island of Love'. It is not surprising that such a label was applied by inhibited Europeans when they first met Trobriand women, with their free-and-easy manners, good

AROUND THE ISLAND

Going north from Losuia is 'inland' to the locals. This area has most of the island's roads and villages. **Omarakana**, about halfway between Losuia and Kaibola, is where the island's paramount chief resides. You'll know you're there by the large, intricate, painted yam house and the couple of cars outside his Western-style bungalow built on stilts. He can often be found sitting on a chair under his house, surrounded by his clansmen. The paramount chief presides over the island's oral traditions and magic and strictly maintains his political and economic power. He also oversees the important yam festival and *kula* rituals. As a sign of respect, keep your head lower than his and consider bearing a gift of betel nut or cigarettes.

Megaliths made of a coral composite have linked the Trobriands to possible early Polynesian migrations. You can see them, but not without a guide – speak with Bweka Village Resort (opposite) or Butia Lodge (opposite).

At **Kaibola village**, at the northern tip of Kiriwina, you can swim and snorkel at the picture-postcard beach, though much coral

has died recently. About 1½ hours' walk from Kaibola is **Kalopa Cave**, near Matawa village. There are several deep limestone caves housing burial antiquities and skeletal remains. Stories are told of Dokanikani, a giant whose bones are said to be buried with those of his victims in one of the caves. PMVs run from Losuia to Kaibola (K3, one hour, several times daily).

The road south of Losuia is dotted with villages but seldom sees motorised transport. **Wawela** is on a beautiful, curving sand beach edging a cool, deep, protected lagoon. On a falling tide, beware of the channel out to sea from the bay: the current can be very strong. To get here you'll need to rent a bike from Butia Lodge or charter a PMV for a few hours.

War relics, including the scattered remains of a couple of planes, can be seen near Butia Lodge (opposite); ask the gatekeeper to show you around.

Of the islands off Kiriwina, **Kaileuna Island** is the easiest and cheapest to access as boats carrying *buai* (betel nut) travel from Losuia most days. The villages of **Kaisiga**, in the south,

looks and short grass skirts, but it led to the inaccurate idea that the Trobriands were some sort of sexual paradise. The sexual customs are different to many other places, but are not without their own complicated social strictures.

Teenagers are encouraged to have as many sexual partners as they choose until marriage, when they settle down with the partner who is chosen as suitable and compatible. Males leave home when they reach puberty and move into the village *bukumatula* (bachelor house). Here, they are free to bring their partners back at any time, although they usually opt for somewhere more private. Even married couples, subject to mutual agreement, are allowed to have a fling or two when the celebrations for the yam harvest are in full swing.

Aside from all this activity, it's said that few children are born to women without permanent partners. The people do not believe there is a connection between intercourse and pregnancy – a child's spirit, which floats through the air or on top of the sea, chooses to enter a woman, often through her head.

All this apparent freedom has negligible impact on visitors. Freedom of choice is the bedrock of Trobriand Islands life, so why would any islander choose some unattractive, pale *dim dims* who can't speak like a civilised human, doesn't understand the most fundamental laws and will probably be gone tomorrow?

Cricket

Trobriands Islands cricket developed after missionaries introduced cricket as a way of taking the islanders' minds off less-healthy activities. It's since developed its own style, which is quite unlike anything the Melbourne Cricket Club ever had in mind. There is no limit to the number of players, meaning you can wait days for a bat. Trobriand cricket is played with much dancing, singing and whistle blowing, making it rather difficult to concentrate on line and length. When asked what the song meant it was translated to us as 'I don't know why we are dancing, the fool is already out!' If there's a game scheduled while you're there, don't miss it!

and **Tawema** to the north have beautiful white-sand beaches and predictably relaxed locals. Ask around the wharf from about 10am to see if a boat is going.

The offshore islands are worth visiting if you are lucky enough to find a boat full of people going that way. **Labi Island** is particularly nice for swimming, as is the larger **Kitava Island**. If you wish to hire a boat ask around the wharf although as fuel prices are sky high it won't be cheap.

SLEEPING & EATING

Village Birth Attendant Centre (VBA; call the district office ☎ 641 1501; sK30) It would be difficult to find more basic accommodation than these five single rooms that are a five-minute walk from Losuia. All rooms are ultrabasic and, without a fan, can be pretty warm. On the plus side, your money supports the whole community. Meals are an additional K20.

Bweka Village Resort (contact Angela in Port Moresby ☎ 323 5088, fax 323 5079; jk.bweka@gmail.com; s/d incl 3 meals K80/120) The owner, John Kasaipwalova, is the chief of Bweka and, consequently, has access to a large local network. He is an eloquent

conversationalist, explaining local protocols and is skilled at dovetailing his tours into village festivals. There is no electricity here and washing is in a sacred cave of crystal-clear water. The cavernous dining area could seat 40, but he has only enough mattresses for a few guests.

Cindarella's (contact Losuia District Treasury Office, ☎ 275 6114; s incl meals K90) Opposite the cricket field (to the west), big-smiling widow Cindy and her daughter Janet have opened their home to visitors. The small house has two bedrooms, sleeps three or four, and is the heart of her extended family's compound. There is always a 'boy' on hand to show you around and the home-cooked meals are a treat!

Kiriwina Lodge (☎ 643 9009; s/d incl 2 meals K150/210; 🍷) When we visited, the rooms were being given a lick of paint but still seemed overpriced, decaying and uninviting. However the lodge does have its own double cab truck and is a better position than most to transport you around the island.

Butia Lodge (☎ 641 0900 in Alotau, 643 9020 in Losuia; malabu@online.net.pg; s/d incl 2 meals K175/255) Located near the airport, on either side of an

abandoned WWII-era airstrip, Butia Lodge is the cleanest and most comfortable accommodation on the island. The staff are friendly although their apathy can be frustrating if they are unable to organise the tours that they promise. Guests sometimes complain that they end up stranded far from town while staying here. The lodge has its own van but at the time of research this was waiting on parts. The restaurant and bar (meals K20, open breakfast, lunch and dinner) are in an attractive, open-sided building supported by 18 posts, each carved with a Trobriand legend. The food is superb, mixing traditional vegetables (yes, yams), fish and masses of mouth-watering mud crabs.

Village Stays

Most visitors opt to stay at least one night in a village and find it a fantastic experience. Certainly you must be prepared to pay for what you use (hardly a shocking concept for good, capitalist tourists), but be sure to establish what you're (not) paying for in advance with the village chief.

Butia Lodge (p121) arranges village stays at Kaibola and Mweuya for about K60 per night, including basic food, and will transport you to and from the village. The transport and having an English-language speaker is an advantage here.

You could arrange it yourself by speaking with the chief of the village that you'd like to stay in. Friendly Emanuel Tosieru runs three **traditional-style rooms** (sind meals K60) on stilts at Kaibola Beach. Contact K Nimrod Tutumla at Okaiboma to spend the night in one of the basic **beach huts** (sind meals K80) there. Almost any other village will take you – just ask.

For more on staying in villages, see p284.

SHOPPING

Trobriand Islands carvings are famous throughout PNG. Certain villages specialise in certain styles, ranging from bowls and stools to elaborately carved walking sticks. The best carvings are made from ebony, and much of what you see will be decorated with pearl-shell inlays. Ebony is an extremely hard and brittle timber, and difficult to work.

A master carver is a position of high prestige in the Trobriands and, like dancers, singers and many other roles, is a role bestowed upon people at birth. A carver cannot fell his

own timber, as this role belongs to another, and must purchase it from the landowner where it is grown.

Obweria village specialises in intricately carved walking sticks and bowls. A good walking stick might cost K200 to K300 or more. **Bwetalu village** produces particularly fine stools although these can be quite bulky and difficult to transport.

Yalaka village sells striking lime pots that are small and easy to carry. These gourds are decorated with a distinctive black pattern that runs around the girth of the gourd and are fitted with a boar's tusk stopper. Most pots are around K10, depending on size and quality, and a must for the discerning betel nut chewer.

Other than carvings and lime pots, you can get shell money and *doba* (banana leaf money incised with patterns); still used by some women as negotiable currency.

Artisans meet arriving planes hoping to sell their wares and sometimes beautiful bowls can be found here. Butia Lodge has a small range of high-quality carvings, and they're all priced fairly.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Airlines PNG flies between both Losuia and Gurney (from Alotau, K431) and Port Moresby (K657) on Mondays and Fridays. These flights are often late or cancelled.

Weather permitting, Star Ships sails the *Samarai Queen* from Alotau to Losuia (K105, 19 hours) and back every weekend. The boat departs Alotau 9am on Friday and arrives at Losuia midday on Saturday. It returns to Alotau on Sunday morning.

The two main trade stores in Losuia run work boats to Alotau every fortnight or so. They charge about K60 for the trip, which takes two days (stopping in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands for the night) and you'll need to bring your own food and water. Ask at **Konki Enterprises** (☎ 643 9000) or at **Digogwa Trading** (☎ 643 9001), which are also the agents for Airlines PNG.

GETTING AROUND

Although the island's few PMVs meet all arriving flights, they are otherwise infrequent. Getting out to the various villages can be a considerable problem if your accommodation is unable to arrange transport. Groups may be advantaged by hiring a vehicle on a daily

basis (K200) – talk to the trade store about this possibility. Almost all private vehicles (there aren't many) operate as de facto PMVs.

Most of Kiriwina's main roads are in fairly good condition and, if Butia Lodge (p121) have got their bikes sorted, cycling is a great way to see the island.

LOUISADE ARCHIPELAGO

This archipelago received its name after Louis Vaéz de Torres' 1606 visit, but was probably known to Chinese and Malay sailors much earlier. **Rossel (Yela) Island** is the most westerly inhabited island. The **Calvados chain** and **Conflict group** are a long chain of islets and reefs between **Sudest** and the mainland and make navigation through the province an exacting and often dangerous operation.

Misima Island

Mountainous **Misima Island** is the most important in the group, with the district headquarters at Bwagoia. Not many travellers make it to Misima although those who do report of unfailingly friendly people and several accommodation options. The local

economy is feeling the pinch with the decommissioning of a major gold and silver mine in 2004.

Local sights include a cliff-top skull cave, which is a 20-minute drive from Bwagoia, and bushwalks to the waterfall near Bwagabwaga. Contact Joyce Fifita at Misima Island Resort (below), who can arrange visits to a local school and boys to show you around Bagilina village. The snorkelling near the offshore islands is superb, although you will need to bring your own equipment.

In Alotau, Gretta at Napatana Lodge (p112) is a good source of information about these islands and some of her staff (including Mickee) have contacts there.

Misima Island Resort (contact Joyce Fifita ☎ 643 7052) is a 15-minute walk from town and has clean, bungalow-style accommodation. In Bwagoia try **Misima Guesthouse** (contact Elivda Killia ☎ 643 7443; s K90), which has tidy, fan-cooled rooms and home-cooked meals (K10 to K12), or **Jeb's Guesthouse** (contact Ellice Brome ☎ 643 7059).

Airlines PNG flies to and from Port Moresby (three hours) via Gurney (K410, 40 minutes) on Monday and Fridays.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'