

The Highlands



The Highlands – dramatic and beautiful, with fertile valleys, turbulent rivers and seemingly endless, saw-toothed mountains – is the most densely populated and agriculturally productive region of PNG. It's hard to imagine that only relatively recently did the outside world come face-to-face with the diverse and artistically inventive tribes that live here.

When European explorers made it into PNG's rugged interior in the 1930s, they didn't find the unbroken tangle of mountains they had expected. Instead they stumbled into broad, heavily cultivated valleys and a million-plus people. Ironically, it wasn't the imposing topography but the cultural divide that amazed the participants of this unexpected 'first contact'.

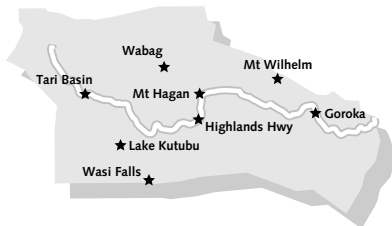
Today, the region is a dynamic part of PNG and a unique part of Melanesia. Its peoples' lives are changing quickly, but many aspects of their traditional cultures remain. Clan and tribal loyalties are still very strong. Pigs and gardening remain the two most important things in life and tribal fighting is still a popular pastime.

Highlanders wear Western *sekonhan klos* (second-hand clothes) but during the celebrated Highland shows, the feathers, shells, bark, mud quills and skins come out. Only in an anthropologist's wildest dreams could you see such a gathering of flamboyant tribes. The shows feature mud-men and snake-boys, wigmen and skeleton people, and star on tour-group itineraries.

The region's five provinces – Eastern Highlands (around Goroka), Simbu (around Kundiawa), Western Highlands (around Mt Hagen), Enga (around Wabag) and Southern Highlands (around Mendi) – have the country's most extensive road system and an ever growing economy based on coffee, tea, gold and copper.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Bouncing along the stunning **Highlands Hwy** (p155) with a truck full of locals
- Climbing **Mt Wilhelm** (p162) and seeing the north and south coasts
- Photographing the beautifully adorned performers at one of the Highland shows in **Goroka** (p158), **Wabag** (p168) or **Mt Hagen** (p166)
- Meeting **Huli wigmen** (p173) and birds of paradise in the **Tari Basin** (p173)
- Visiting magnificent **Lake Kutubu** (p172) and the **Wasi Falls** (p172), PNG's highest falls



■ POPULATION: 1.9 MILLION

■ AREA: 62,500 SQ KM

History

Kuk Swamp, in the Wahgi Valley (Western Highlands Province), has evidence of 20,000 years of human habitation. Gardening began 9000 years ago, which makes Papua New Guineans among the world's first farmers.

In 1930, after gold rushes in Wau and Bulolo, Mick Leahy and Mick Dwyer came to the Highlands searching for gold, and walked into the previously 'undiscovered' Eastern Highlands.

In 1933 Leahy returned with his brother Dan and they stumbled upon the huge, fertile and heavily populated Wahgi Valley. After aerial reconnaissance, they walked in with a large, well-supplied patrol.

The film *First Contact* includes original footage of this patrol by Mick Leahy and is a priceless record of the first interaction between Highlanders and Europeans (see p42).

Missionaries followed the Leahy brothers, and government stations were built near present-day Mt Hagen and in the Simbu Valley, near present-day Kundiawa. The first patrol built an airstrip at Mt Hagen. However, gold was never found in great quantities.

Not until the 1950s were changes felt, and even then many areas remained largely unaffected until the 1960s and '70s. The construction of the Highlands Hwy had a huge impact on the Highlands lives, as did the introduction of cash crops, particularly coffee. The

Highlanders had long been traders and skilful gardeners, and adapted to the cash economy with remarkable speed.

The dense population and cultural differences have caused some problems, however. Ritual warfare has always been an integral part of Highlands life and to this day pay-back feuds and land disputes can erupt into major conflicts – Highlanders are volatile and passionate people.

Geography & Climate

The Highlands are made up of a series of valleys and rugged intervening mountains that form the watershed for some of the world's largest rivers (the Ramu, Sepik, Strickland, Fly and Purari). The mountains are a central spine running the length of the island. Several Highlands mountains exceed 4000m in height, and Mt Wilhelm, PNG's highest, is 4509m.

Nights can be cold, particularly at altitude, but daytime temperatures are very pleasant, about 24°C to 28°C – 'perpetual springtime'. In the mountains, late-afternoon mists can drift in and billowing clouds can suddenly advance and envelope everything. The dry season is May to November for this region, and rains can be very heavy in the wet season.

Culture

Wealth is essential in establishing status, and *bigmen* (leaders) are invariably affluent. The

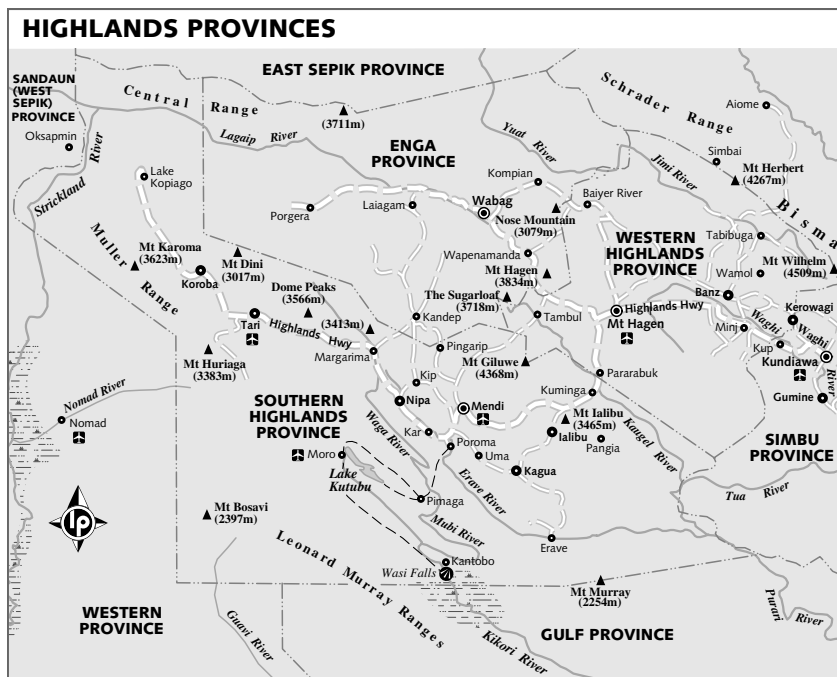
GAME ON

Land ownership, particularly in the Highlands, is highly complex and very important – disputes over land are often at the root of tribal war. People can inherit land, not just from their parents, but from any known ancestor. All descendants of a woman who planted a tree have rights to its fruit, and people have rights to widely scattered pieces of land.

Besides land-related issues, men will go to war to resolve political differences, settle grudges or avenge the death of a pig. The usual method of engagement is for both warring parties to line up opposite each other, spend several hours slinging insults back and forth until eventually one of the mock charges crosses a tipping point and an all-out battle ensues.

The conflict is always confined to the parties involved and in the days of crude clubs and steel bush knives it was possible to observe the fight as long as you remained clearly impartial. In the past, fights have even attracted TV crews and wives bearing packed lunches. However, with the advent of guns, and sniper-like tactics, the crowds are a little less inclined to get too near the action and we certainly do not recommend you attend – well not without some kind of bullet-proof armour and a crash helmet.

When peace is brokered, it's usually longstanding. It's worth scanning newspapers for information on conflicts and resolutions. A recent settlement that we read about involved K200,000, a python, several pigs, beer, two rifles and a cassowary changing hands. Also scan the countryside for the circular, fenced areas filled with green-and-purple *tanget* bushes. These are the burial places of fallen tribal warriors.



Ceremonial life in the Highlands is centred around ostentatious displays of wealth, which is part of a wide circle of exchange and inter-clan relationships, where gifts cement a relationship with the receiver, who then has obligations (see boxed text, p171).

Payback is common and disputes over women, land and pigs are often settled by financial negotiations. Payback can be levied against a clan for crimes done by an individual (the clan is responsible for its people), so a murdered man's clan may kill an otherwise innocent party in revenge. Even today when negotiations break down the clans start fighting.

Try and see a Highlands *singsing* (celebratory festival or dance); the costumes alone rival anything at Rio de Janeiro's Carnivale or Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. *Singsings* can happen for all sorts of reasons and they are always spectacular. Highlanders in traditional costume and face paint dancing in formation and playing their *kundus* (an hourglass-shaped drum with lizard skin) are really quite a sight. The Goroka Show (p158) and the Hagen Show (p166) are annual events

that bring together thousands of performers and hundreds of tourists.

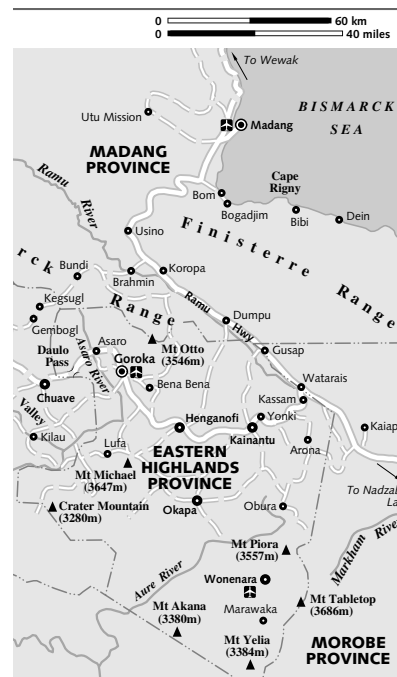
Body art and personal decoration in the Highlands are particularly refined and incredible to look at. In PNG this is called *bilas*, and while Sepik people and other Papua New Guineans developed powerful carved arts and artefact manufacture, the Highlanders turned their creative energies mostly on themselves.

Highlanders people are skilled farmers and take pride in their decorative gardens. They grow sweet potato in neat mounds about 1.5m in diameter. The mounds are fertilised with ashes and are very productive.

The Highlands is a 'dry region', and alcohol cannot be purchased outside licensed premises such as hotels, clubs and resorts. However, there's a booming black market in beer and all of PNG has a problem with wickedly strong home-brewed alcohol and violence.

Dangers & Annoyances

Parts of the PNG Highlands are genuinely high. You should give yourself a few days acclimatisation at lower altitudes before taking on any serious mountain climbing or ex-



sively physical activities if you are to avoid acute mountain sickness (see p324).

Bus travel through the Highlands is not nearly as dangerous as the expat community will lead you to believe, but there is an element of risk. Very occasionally there are hold-ups, buses are ambushed and the passengers are robbed. During times of political tension and tribal war seek advice from locals in each town before heading off to the next town in a PMV (public motor vehicle). West of Mendi (p170) can be particularly volatile.

Getting There & Around

AIR

See the relevant towns for flight details in and out of the Highlands.

ROAD TRAVEL

The most important road in PNG starts in Lae and runs up into the central Highlands. Where the highway ends depends on your definition. As a decent road, it now continues to Tari, in a rougher condition to Koroba and in still rougher condition to

Lake Kopiago. The highway is sealed as far as Mt Hagen and, in parts, between Mt Hagen, Mendi and Wabag.

The road up from Madang runs through the flat lands of Morobe before it joins the Highlands Hwy just east of Watarais. Past Goroka the road continues through the valley to Asaro, then climbs steeply to the Daulo Pass (2450m), and continues twisting and turning all the way to Mt Hagen, Kundiawa and the Wahgi Valley.

Between Mt Hagen and Mendi the road is spectacular; you skirt Mt Giluwe, PNG's second-highest mountain (4368m), and go through some beautiful valleys. After Mendi you pass ceremonial grounds, a suspension bridge over the Lai River, the stunning Poroma Valley and ultimately climb the 2900m pass overlooking the wide and fertile Tari Basin. The road deteriorates after Tari.

A fork in the road after Mt Hagen goes to Wabag, and this stretch has some incredibly jagged mountains and fierce rivers. A reasonable road runs north from Mt Hagen through the spectacular Baiyer Gorge to Baiyer River and a good road branches off the Mendi road and continues on to Wabag and Porgera.

In 2008 the long anticipated Southern Highlands Gulf Highway will connect Kikori in the Gulf Province to the Highland Highway near Mendi. Undoubtedly PMVs will soon travel these previously inaccessible lands.

Car

You can drive yourself, but you'll pay a premium for a hire car and it will have to be a 4WD. Rental firms often have restrictions on remote-area use, which particularly apply to the Highlands. The same risks apply to car travel as to bus travel – but at least in a bus you're with other people.

For more information on car hire in PNG, see p317.

PMV

PMV travel from the coast to Goroka and Mt Hagen is safe, easy and cheap. It's also incredible country to drive through. PMVs don't go anywhere unless they're packed to the brim, so expect a squeeze. They usually leave from the main market area in town, and drop you at the market area of the next town, although the driver will often take you to where you're staying if you ask politely.

EASTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

Undulating *kunai*- (grass-) covered hills and neat villages of low-walled round huts are the defining characteristics of the Eastern Highlands. Listen carefully for the secrets whispered by the tufts of grass fixed to the peaks of roofs of these houses.

The most heavily populated of all the provinces, the region has had longer contact with the West than the other Highland provinces and was the first to feel the impact of the missionaries, prospectors, mercenaries and misfits who have all visited these parts. Eastern Highlanders live at altitudes between 1500m and 2300m and are a less cohesive group than their Highland cousins.

The mountains of this province form the headwaters for two of PNG's most important river systems: the Ramu River, which runs parallel to the coast to the northwest, and the Wahgi and Aure Rivers, which run south and enter the Gulf of Papua as the Purari River. The province's highest point is Mt Michael (3647m).

GOROKA

Goroka's high altitude produces cool temperatures and warm people – both can be a welcome relief from lowland heat and Port Moresby paranoia. The town has grown from a small outpost in the mid-1950s to a major commercial centre, and it's now the main town in the Eastern Highlands Province.

Mountains encircle the town which in turn almost encircles the airport. Leafy streets, a pleasant climate and all the essential services combine to make it one of PNG's most attractive towns. More relaxed than Mt Hagen, safer than Lae, and caught between them both means there are decent roads in and out of town.

The old colonial houses with their spacious verandas on McNicholl St hark back to pre-independence days, an arguably wealthier time. Today the main cash crop is coffee and you'll see it growing under the canopies of larger trees in the hills throughout the district. At 1600m, Goroka enjoys a 'perpetual springtime' of warm days and cool nights.

DARTS

Darts is serious business in the Highlands and great fortunes are won and lost on a single throw. Men play darts at roadside 'clubs' where a dozen dartboards are fixed to posts sticking out of the ground. The rules are more or less the same as for regular darts, but you stand a lot further away – Highlands darts is something between regular darts and javelin throwing. Sometimes you can see men in traditional costume playing at village darts clubs.

Orientation

Most of Goroka's places of interest are clustered around the northern end of the airport, although there are a few places to stay, and a tiny museum, in the streets on the airport's western flank. Although the town is small enough to walk around, PMVs run up and down the stretch of main road, Edwards Rd (Highlands Hwy).

MAPS

There are some maps in the front pages of the phone book.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 732 1166, 111)

Fire (☎ 732 1111/3) Near the airport terminal.

Police (☎ 732 1222; Elizabeth St)

INTERNET ACCESS

Computer Shop (☎ 732 1944; Elizabeth St; per 15min K6.60, burn CD K22) Has the best, no make that the *only*, connections in town.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are several pharmacies in town.

Goroka Hospital (☎ 731 2100; Leigh Vial St) One of the best in the country; also houses the PNG Institute of Medical Research.

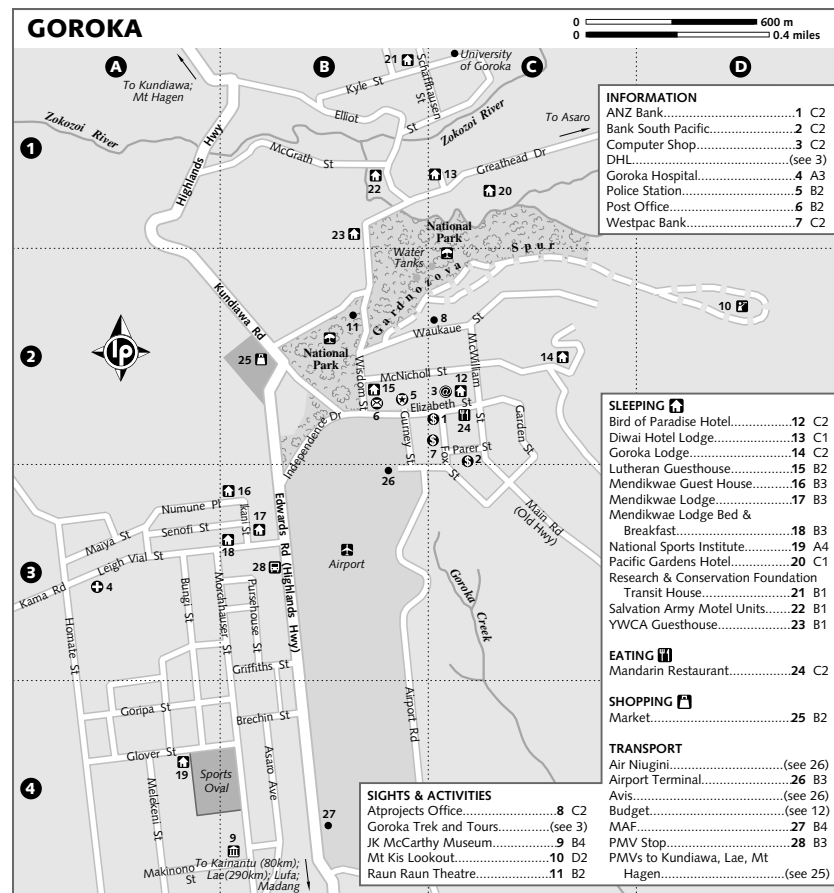
MONEY

Travellers cheques can be cashed at the bigger hotels as well as banks – compare rates. The bigger hotels accept major credit cards.

ANZ (☎ 732 2000; Elizabeth St) Has ATMs. Traveller's cheques cashed for a flat K3.

Bank South Pacific (☎ 732 1633; Parer St) There are ATMs in a booth and a foreign-exchange desk inside.

Westpac (☎ 732 1140; Fox St)



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POST

DHL (☎ 732 3555; Elizabeth St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm)

Post Office (☎ 732 2470; Elizabeth St; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11.30am Sat)

TELEPHONE

There are Telikad prepaid public phones near the post office and in hotel foyers.

Sights

RAUN RAUN THEATRE

Goroka's acclaimed theatre group, Raun Raun Theatre, has toured nationally and internationally. The **theatre** (☎ 732 1116; Wisdom St) is a superb building, which blends traditional materials and modern architecture. It's located on parkland about 500m due north of

the post office. Performances are irregular, but you might get lucky.

JK MCCARTHY MUSEUM

JK McCarthy was one of PNG's legendary patrol officers and wrote one of the classic books on New Guinea patrolling – *Patrol into Yesterday*. The **museum** (admission by donation; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 2-4pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun) is not far from the National Sports Institute, but a long walk from the town centre.

Among the exhibits are pottery, weapons, clothes and musical instruments, and even some grisly jewellery – Anga mourning necklaces of human fingers! 'Peer through the mists of time' courtesy of a fascinating collection of photos – many taken by Mick Leahy when he

first reached the area in 1933. There are also WWII relics, including a P-39 Aircobra.

MT KIS LOOKOUT

Wisdom St, beside the post office, leads to a track that climbs to an excellent lookout, Mt Kis, so-called because it's the lovers' leap of Goroka. It's a long, steep walk. There are two large water tanks halfway there, and a ladder you can climb to catch spectacular views of the distant valleys through the pine trees and the Highlands mist. It's well worth the effort.

Tours

Many of the local tour operators are one-man bands, without an office and notoriously difficult to contact. It is worth checking out the notice board next to the gift shop in the Bird of Paradise Hotel and asking the gift-shop staff for recommendations. Most operators can arrange a trip to various villages including that of the Asaro Mudmen, as well as nature walks and day treks.

Casper Guide Services (☎ 732 9355)

Goroka Trek & Tours (☎ 732 1281; mikata@png-japan.co.jp; Shop 12B, Bird of Paradise Hotel, Elizabeth St) Deals mainly with Japanese tours although it also has English-speaking guides. Advance notice is recommended.

Kuman Tours (☎ 732 2493; yahookumantours@global.pg.net)

Nokondi Holidays & Tours (☎ 732 3342)

PNG High Country Tours (☎ 732 1682; fax 732 1394) Samuel Lulu runs tours and treks around the jungles and caves of the Eastern Highlands and out towards Simbu. He offers village accommodation in the Namasaro Unggai district west of Goroka.

PNG Highland Tours (☎ 732 1602; png.gold@global.net.pg) In addition to tours, it can arrange billeted accommodation during the show for around K90.

Festivals & Events

The **Goroka Show** (www.gorokashow.com; adult per day/3 days K100/200, child aged 10-16 K50/100, child aged under 10 free), is held over the Independence Day weekend (mid-September) at the National Sports Institute. It attracts more *singsing* groups than the Mt Hagen show and there are also bands and other cultural activities, as well as some elements of an agricultural show. The show is the glamour event on the social calendar for many performers and it is extraordinary how many feathers one person can squeeze onto a headdress. Performers all receive a payment from the proceeds and you are neither expected nor encouraged to tip individuals.

Make accommodation arrangements early as many places (especially top-end hotels) are booked out months in advance. Prices, like a Highland headdress, go sky-high.

The **PNG Coffee Festival** (www.easternhighlands.com.pg; adult/child K4/2) is usually held over the first weekend in May at the Raun Raun Theatre (p157). It features *singsing* groups, contemporary music, art exhibitions, a trade fair and formal coffee ball.

Sleeping & Eating

There's a good range of accommodation options, from budget rooms to high-end suites. Besides *kai* bars (cheap, takeaway food bars), eating options outside the hotels are few. The market sells an array of fresh fruit and vegetables, peanuts and probably a cuscus or two.

National Sports Institute (☎ 732 2391; natspoin@daltron.com.pg; Glover St; s/d K44/88) If you don't mind being this far from the town centre, this is a good budget option. Bathroom and kitchen facilities are shared and it's a lot like a university dorm with segregated buildings for men and women. The spacious grounds are fairly quiet except when the Goroka show is on next door. There is a gym, conference facilities and cafeteria (meals from K10 to K27, open 6am to 7pm). Rates are cheaper for sporting groups, church affiliates, students and volunteers.

Lutheran Guesthouse (☎ 732 1516; McNicholl St; dm incl breakfast K50) Right in the centre of town behind the post office. Clean and straight, the two-storey house has shared rooms and facilities.

Research & Conservation Foundation Transit House (RCF; ☎ 732 1320; Kyle St; dm incl breakfast K50) Recently built, this good-value, dorm-style accommodation has two bunks per room, free laundry, a shared kitchen and a TV in the common room. Profits go to support the community development within the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area (p160) and staff can help you plan a trip there. Catch town bus 3 and get off near the university.

Mendikwae Guest House (☎ 732 2495; Numene Pl; s/d K66/88) Run by the same crowd as the Mendikwae Lodge, this place is little more than a bed in a box. It's in West Goroka.

Salvation Army Motel Units (☎ 732 1218; McGrath St; s/d K90/110) Another option where the grounds are prettier than the accommodation. Good for self-caterers because the units come with a kitchenette including a stove and fridge. The bigger rooms sleep four.

Diwai Hotel Lodge (☎ 732 3840; Greathead Dr; s K125, d & tw K140) Opened in 2007, the Diwai has a pleasant outlook over the Zokozoi River but is a good 10 minutes' walk from the town centre. Rooms are comfortable if plain, have tea- and coffee-making facilities and breakfast is included in the rate.

Mendikwae Lodge Bed & Breakfast (☎ 732 3466; Leigh Vial St; tw K165) Run by the same people that run the Mendikwae Lodge. Rooms share the large communal lounge and kitchen.

Pacific Gardens Hotel (☎ 732 3418; pacifichotel@datec.net.pg; Mokara St; d K195-300, ste K395; ☑) In the grounds of an expats' residential estate, this hotel has recently been upgraded and is all the better for it. The vast, hilly property has an eco-lodge vibe with its lovely lawns and adjacent river. There are also meals-inclusive packages and airport transfers available. The restaurant (meals K20 to K35, open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is a great place to relax with a good book.

Mendikwae Lodge (☎ 732 3466; Ikani St; unit for up to 4 people K220) These self-contained units have two rooms – a double bed in one, two singles in the other – a kitchen with utensils and TV. Good choice for a group or family.

Bird of Paradise Hotel (☎ 731 3100; thebird@coral-seahotels.com.pg; Elizabeth St; s & d K253-363, ste K462; ☑) 'The Bird' is getting a bit tatty around the edges but otherwise aging gracefully. The rooms are large, comfortable and the ones facing the garden are better than those facing the street. Facilities include a poolside bar, gym and squash court. In conjunction with Budget, an accommodation and car-hire package is available for K390 per night. The terrace bar and restaurant (☎ 731 1144, meals K30 to K45, open 6.30am to midnight) is the place to rendezvous and central to the social life of Goroka's well-heeled. The lunchtime salad buffet is particularly good value.

Mandarin Restaurant (☎ 732 2999; Elizabeth St; meals K30-50; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5.30-9pm) Opposite the Bird, the Mandarin serves good Chinese food.

Also recommended should everything be booked out during the Goroka show: **Goroka Lodge** (☎ 732 2411; McNicholl St; s K80-147, d K107-173) This place hasn't been redecorated since independence. Meals available.

YWCA Guesthouse (☎ 732 2867; Wisdom St; dm K60) Women only. Shared facilities and a communal kitchen.

Shopping

There are several supermarkets and stores clustered between the post office and the Bird of Paradise Hotel. Souvenir sellers camp outside the Bird, stringing up their *bilums* (string bags), hats, spears, bows, masks, Buka-ware and jewellery on the wrought-iron fences of the provisional government building. Some mild haggling is acceptable here.

The open-air **market** (☎ closed Sun) is interesting to walk through. It's very busy on Saturday, but colourful any day and you'll see piles of potatoes and exotic leafy greens as well as more familiar tomatoes, capsicums and avocados. *Bilums* and Highland hats are sold, as are spools of intensely colourful twines and strings used in *bilum* manufacture. Watch out for pickpockets.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Between Airlines PNG pulling out of Goroka in 2007 and the demise of Airlink, poor old Goroka has been left at the whim of **Air Niugini** (☎ 732 1444). Unfortunately Air Niugini's whim is that all flights are routed via Port Moresby (K507).

MAF (☎ 732 1080; Edwards Rd) flies to Lae (K260), Mt Hagen (K240), Tari (K540) and a host of highland airstrips.

CAR & PMV

Goroka is well served by PMVs and the Highland Hwy; it's an easy trip to Mt Hagen (K20, four hours) in the west or down to the coastal cities of Lae (K30, four hours) and Madang (K30, four to five hours) in the east.

PMVs heading west gather at the market area early in the morning, but more leave as the day wears on.

Hire cars are available from **Budget** (☎ 731 3100; Bird of Paradise Hotel, Elizabeth St) and **Avis** (☎ 732 1084; Goroka airport), but you'll pay between K175 and K230 per day for the car, K1 per kilometre and K50 per day for insurance.

AROUND GOROKA

Asaro

Asaro village, northwest of Goroka, is famous for its **mud men** – warriors who traditionally covered themselves in grey mud and wore huge mud masks before heading off on raids. It's a very striking image, and the Asaro men re-create the scene for tourists. The number of mud men is in direct proportion to the

number of kina-paying tourists. Mud-men tours can be arranged by tour operators in Goroka (p158).

Mt Gahavisuka Provincial Park

This 80-hectare area is set in beautiful mountain surrounds. Eleven kilometres from Goroka and 1000m higher, the **park** (per adult K2, plus vehicle K5) is reached by 4WD and includes a botanical sanctuary, walking tracks and a lookout at 2450m with incredible views.

A half-hour walk downhill brings you to the **PNG National Appropriate Technology Centre** (ATprojects; ☎ 732-3278; atproj@online.net.pg; dm incl meals K77). Part experiment in sustainable living (check out the windmill, solar panels and hydro energy sources) and part social initiative (particularly those focused on community-based rural development), the dormitory-type accommodation can sleep 23 people in an environment that is safe and quiet. The 'bush-material' shower uses hot water from the wood-fired heater, one of the sustainable technologies being promoted. ATprojects provides transport to and from Goroka and short-term volunteer opportunities for people wishing to participate in its rural development projects.

Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area

In the tri-border area, where the Eastern Highlands, Simbu and Gulf provincial borders meet, is the Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area. This is one of the best places in PNG to experience the spectacular countryside, wildlife and village culture.

The area encompasses 2700 sq km, ranging from lowland tropical rainforests on the Purari River to alpine grasses on the slopes of Crater Mountain. You can hike between

the various villages, but it's serious trekking. There are three villages (Haia, Herowana and Maimafu) with basic **guesthouses** (c/- Research & Conservation Foundation, Goroka; ☎ 732 1320; www.rcf.org.pg; per person K20) which provide beds (bring your own linen) and kerosene stoves (bring your own food). The Research & Conservation Foundation Transit House in Goroka (p158) can radio each village and help make your flight arrangements with **MAF** (☎ 732 1080) or **Pacific Helicopters** (☎ 732 1833). Flight costs vary depending on routes and number of passengers. Guides can be hired for K30 per day.

Daulo Pass

The road out to Mt Hagen is fairly flat through Asaro, but it then hairpins its way up to 2450m to the Daulo Pass. The pass is cold and damp, but the views are spectacular.

KAINANTU

Kainantu, the major town between Lae and Goroka, is strung along the highway at 1600m and is an important cattle- and coffee-producing area. In late 2007, the Kainantu Gold Mine was acquired by the world's largest gold producer, Barrick Gold Corp, who also brought exploration licenses for the surrounding 2900 sq km.

There's a **cultural centre** (Highlands Hwy; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) with a small museum worth visiting. It sells traditional pottery, hand-woven rugs, silk-screen prints and flutes.

Kainantu Lodge (☎ 737 1020; mobilekbb@global.net.pg; s with shared facilities K100, s & d K140-240; 🍷 🍴) is on a hill overlooking town. A 20-minute walk from the PMV stop, the lodge is signposted and a very nice place to stay with a bar, à la carte restaurant (meals K30 to K40),

KURU

Kuru was a disease unique to the Fore area southwest of Kainantu. Attacking the central nervous system, the disease persisted in the body for a year before causing death. Dubbed 'the laughing disease', its victims died with a peculiar smile on their faces. It only affected one language group and was limited to women and children. It is known to have existed since the early 1900s, but reached epidemic proportions in the 1950s when more than 200 cases were reported. Years of epidemiological research by Goroka's PNG Institute of Medical Research finally solved the riddle of the disease's cause.

Kuru was linked to diet and feasting behaviour; specifically it was caused by the ritualised cannibalism of the brain tissue of dead clan members by women and children. Kuru is said to be linked to mad cow disease.

Due to changed dietary and ritual behaviour, there's only been a handful of cases in recent years, the last reported in 1997.

and a crackling log fire at night. It's peaceful and pleasant, and offers a free shuttle to/from Goroka airport (two hours).

PMVs from Lae to Kainantu cost K25 and take three hours; from Kainantu to Goroka they cost K10 and take about two hours.

AROUND KAINANTU

Ukarumpa

Ukarumpa is the PNG headquarters of the American-founded Summer Institute of Linguistics (see boxed text, opposite). It's in the Aiyura Valley, about 30 minutes by PMV from Kainantu and is worth visiting to see 'little America' in the midst of PNG.

Yonki & the Upper Ramu Project

Yonki, 23km from Kainantu, is the support town for the Upper Ramu hydroelectric project. Commissioned in 1979, the project was financed by a K23 million World Bank loan and powers Lae, Madang and the Highlands.

SIMBU PROVINCE

West of Goroka, Simbu's mountains are much more rugged and steep, and the valleys are smaller and less accessible. Some of PNG's highest mountains are in this region, including Mt Wilhelm (4509m) the highest of them all. There are vast limestone caves near Kundiawa and Chuave.

Simbu (pronounced *chim-bu*, and sometimes spelt that way) derived its name when the first patrol officers gave steel axes and knives to the tribespeople, who replied *simbu* – very pleased. Despite its rugged ter-

rain, it's the second most heavily populated region in PNG. The people have turned their steep country into a patchwork of gardens spreading up every available hillside. Population pressures are pushing them to even higher ground, threatening remaining forests and bird of paradise habitats. Most people in the province speak a similar language – Simbu dialects make up PNG's second-largest language group.

Simbus are said to be avid capitalists who watch their coffee profits, and strong believers in payback – minor warfare is still common around Simbu and there's a pervading eye-for-an-eye ethos. Kundiawa has a painted signboard at the police station that depicts a tribal battle.

KUNDIAWA

Kundiawa was the site of the Highlands first government station, but has been left behind by Goroka and Mt Hagen. Although it's the provincial capital, Kundiawa is pretty small. There's a bank, post office, limited shopping, and that's about it. Most people go straight through to Mt Wilhelm, Goroka or Mt Hagen.

There's spectacular rafting on the Wahgi River near Kundiawa, but no operators are currently offering it, due, as usual, to land disputes. The scenery is excellent – the river goes through deep chasms, under rope bridges and there are rapids and waterfalls.

Caves around Kundiawa were used as burial places. At the time of research, it wasn't clear whether a local guide could take you there. Don't visit the caves without consulting local advice as it might be *tambu* (forbidden or sacred; taboo). There are other large caves,

SPEAKING IN TONGUES: THE SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS (SIL)

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is a missionary organisation that aims to translate the Bible into every language in the world. Given the extraordinary number of languages in PNG – 820 distinct languages at last count – SIL has a lot of work to do here.

Whatever the motive, the fact is that SIL has made an incredible record of PNG languages, their distribution, numbers of speakers and the like. This is particularly important, as some languages are dying out.

SIL's translator-missionaries, who are usually husband-and-wife teams, typically spend 15 to 20 years in a remote village, learning the language, developing a written alphabet and translating the Bible. The institute is working on 185 languages and has completed translations for 94.

SIL publishes *Ethnologue* (www.ethnologue.com) which is a comprehensive worldwide languages standard.

suitable for caving, close to Kundiawa, while the **Keu Caves** are very close to the main road near Chuave. Has the **Nambaiyufa Amphitheatre**, near Chuave, has rock paintings.

Kundiawa Hotel (☎ 735 1399; fax 735 1103; r K198) doesn't have much competition. It is a bit run-down, although the tariff includes breakfast and dinner, free laundry and airport transfers.

Haus Kai Bilong ol Meri is the best place for lunch – it has good food and a shady place to sit. There is a small supermarket in Kundiawa and travellers recommend the bakery behind it for the cream buns.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is quite spectacular, on a sloping ridge surrounded by mountains. **Air Niugini** (☎ 735 1273) has flights to/from Port Moresby (K420) on Tuesday and Saturday.

PMV

There are PMVs to Goroka (K10, about two hours) and Mt Hagen (K10, about two hours). The trip to Kegsugl (for Mt Wilhelm) takes 3½ hours and costs K30. PMVs for Kegsugl leave from the Shell station, others stop on the highway near the police station.

MT WILHELM

For many, climbing to the 4509m summit of Mt Wilhelm is the highlight of a Highlands trip. On a clear day, you can see both the north and south coasts of PNG. Even if you don't intend to tackle the summit, the region around the base offers fantastic walking and dramatic landscapes. European fruits and vegetables – including strawberries, cabbages, cauliflower and broccoli – grow year-round in the constant spring conditions.

Nigluma and **Gembogl**, both traditional high-altitude villages, are worth visiting – you can walk to Gembogl from Kegsugl in a couple of hours and, on the way, you pass through half-a-dozen villages, including Nigluma.

Climbing the Mountain

PLANNING

While not technically difficult, this popular climb is hard work. Preparation is important and the dangers should not be underestimated. Climbers in this region have died. Don't try to climb the mountain on your own no matter how fit you are – a guide is essential. The final

ascent starts in the black of early morning so that climbers get to see the dawn and both coasts before the clouds roll in.

If the weather is fine, the climb takes three or four days, but frequently the weather causes delays; take a book to read in the huts. The dry season (April to October) is the best time to climb and there are several ways to do it. **PNG Highland Tours** (☎ 732 1602; png.gold@global.net.pg; Goroka) and **Trans Niugini Tours** (☎ 542 1438; www.pngtours.com; Kongin St, Mt Hagen) can organise guides, porters, equipment and food. Or it is just as easy to hire your own guide in Kegsugl for K50 to K80. Porters are cheaper at K40 to K60.

If you've just come up from the coast, allow yourself time to acclimatise to the altitude before climbing to avoid altitude sickness (see p324).

It can get very cold on the mountain (and may even snow), and can easily become fog-bound. Sunburn and hypothermia are hazards. You need sufficient food, equipment, warm clothing, water containers (there's no water past the lakes), a torch, gloves and candles. Cooking gear might be useful – check in Kegsugl whether there are still utensils at the lake huts.

THE CLIMB

There is a K10 charge levied by the local landowner to climb the mountain. The climb goes up to the Pindaunde Lakes from the high school and disused airstrip at Kegsugl. The lakes sit at 3500m and the views are incredible. The National Parks Board huts (see opposite) are a four- to five-hour walk from Kegsugl. It is customary to spend at least one night here before tackling the summit the next morning. Some say it's better to spend another day acclimatising and exploring the area before the final push.

From the Pindaunde Lakes, it's a long, hard walk to the summit – anything from five to eight hours. It can get cold, wet, windy and foggy at the top, so bring warm clothes and a change of socks as your legs will be wet from rain or just brushing past wet plants. Clouds roll in after dawn so summit climbers start out as early as 1am. The summit isn't visible until you are only 30 minutes from it and, if you are to make it (most don't), go slow!

The descent back to the huts takes about four hours, but some people go all the way back to Kegsugl, a further 3½ hours downhill.

Sleeping

East Kegsugl Guesthouse (per person K40) Across the road from the airstrip and next to the high school, this guesthouse is a great option. The hosts, Josephine and Arnold (Rambo to his friends) make guests feel welcome with small touches such as strawberries from their garden. There are three rooms with two beds in each and enough blankets to keep an Eskimo warm in a blizzard. Meals with home-grown veggies are an extra K10. Guides can also be arranged here – read the guest book for recommendations.

National Parks Board Huts (Lake Lodge; K50) Halfway up Mt Wilhelm from Kegsugl are two fairly basic huts which are used to overnight in. Bring your own sleeping bag (or borrow some blankets from the guesthouses in Kegsugl) and food. There is no electricity, but you can cook over the bottled-gas stove provided. Guides and porters stay free, although some in Kegsugl will tell you otherwise.

Betty's Place (☎ /fax 545 1567; betty_higgins_lodges@yahoo.com; s with 2 meals K150) This lovely place, about 1km from Kegsugl and near the start of the trail, is situated on a ridge with superb views out over the valley. Electricity is provided by generator and it's surprisingly comfortable, with hot showers and amazing surrounds. There's a trout farm and commercial vegetable gardens, and the meals at Betty's are splendid. Betty can also arrange guides and porters for your summit assault. If you are interested in walking to Madang ask about her 'Ramu Sky to Sea' four-day trek (K1500 including guides and village accommodation).

Getting There & Away

Kegsugl is 57km northeast from Kundiawa along a razorback road that has to be seen to be believed. PMVs to Kegsugl (K30, 3½ hours) leave Kundiawa from the Shell service station. If you leave Goroka or Mt Hagen early in the morning, you can reach Pindaunde Lakes or at least Kegsugl in one day. There's an airstrip at Kegsugl, although it regularly falls into disrepair. It can only cater for smaller charter aircraft such as the MAF fleet.

WALKING TO MADANG

You can walk to Madang from the Highlands, but it's unwise to go without a guide. The turn-off for the Bundi road and the trek to Brahmin (and Madang) is between Gembogl and Kegsugl. You can walk right down to

Madang – but most people catch a PMV at Brahmin. A relatively easy route goes through Pandamba and Bundikara to Bundi, where you'll find bungalow accommodation at the Mt Sinai Centre (p149). From Bundi the route goes to the Brahmin Mission, from where a PMV to Madang costs K10 and takes 1½ hours. The whole route takes three or four days.

The following can arrange a guide for the walk:

Betty Higgins (Betty's Place; ☎ /fax 545 1567; betty_higgins_lodges@yahoo.com; Kegsugl)

PNG Highland Tours (☎ 732 1602; png.gold@global.net.pg; Goroka)

Trans Niugini Tours (☎ 542 1438; www.pngtours.com; Kongin St, Mt Hagen)

WESTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

The capital of the Western Highlands, Mt Hagen stands at the frontier of a group of wild and undeveloped regions further to its west. The people throughout the province are fiercely proud, with strong tribal loyalties and complicated clan affiliations.

It wasn't that many years ago that farmers could be seen proudly strutting through Hagen's market in traditional clothing. The men favoured wide belts of beaten bark with a drape of strings in front and a rear covered by a bunch of leaves attached to a belt (known collectively as a *tanket* or *arse gras*). Women wore string skirts and hung cuscus fur 'scarfs' around their necks. Such attire is now reserved for *singsings* and political rallies but the proud swagger lives on. *Singsings* are still an integral part of life and a great opportunity to witness the Highlanders' singular sense of style – make every effort to see one.

The Wahgi Valley is one of the most productive agricultural areas in the country and forests only remain on the steepest slopes, while the valleys and lower hills are grassland – bare from slash-and-burn cultivation. Gardens and stands of casuarinas are scattered through the hills and large coffee plantations dominate the most fertile valley floors.

The provinces topography seesaws between the swamps in the lower Jimi Valley (370m) and high peaks, including those of Mt Hagen (3834m).

MT HAGEN

Despite its environs, Mt Hagen is not nearly as attractive as Goroka. It's PNG's third biggest city, and lies 445km from Lae and 115km from Goroka. 'Hagen', as it's often called, was a patrol station before WWII, and has boomed in the last 30 years as Enga and the Southern Highlands have opened up. Now it's an unruly city with major squatter settlements and many itinerant people. As in Lae and Port Moresby, Hagen's streets are packed with people.

The city's ambience can vary from the usual PNG relaxed vibe to periods of heavy tension during elections or interclan disputes.

Mt Hagen's main blocks are built around three parallel streets: Moka Pl, Hagen Dr and Wahgi Pde.

Maps

The phone directory has an excellent Mt Hagen map in its front pages. The **Department of Lands & Surveys** (Kuri St) can supply town maps and some regional maps.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 542 1166)

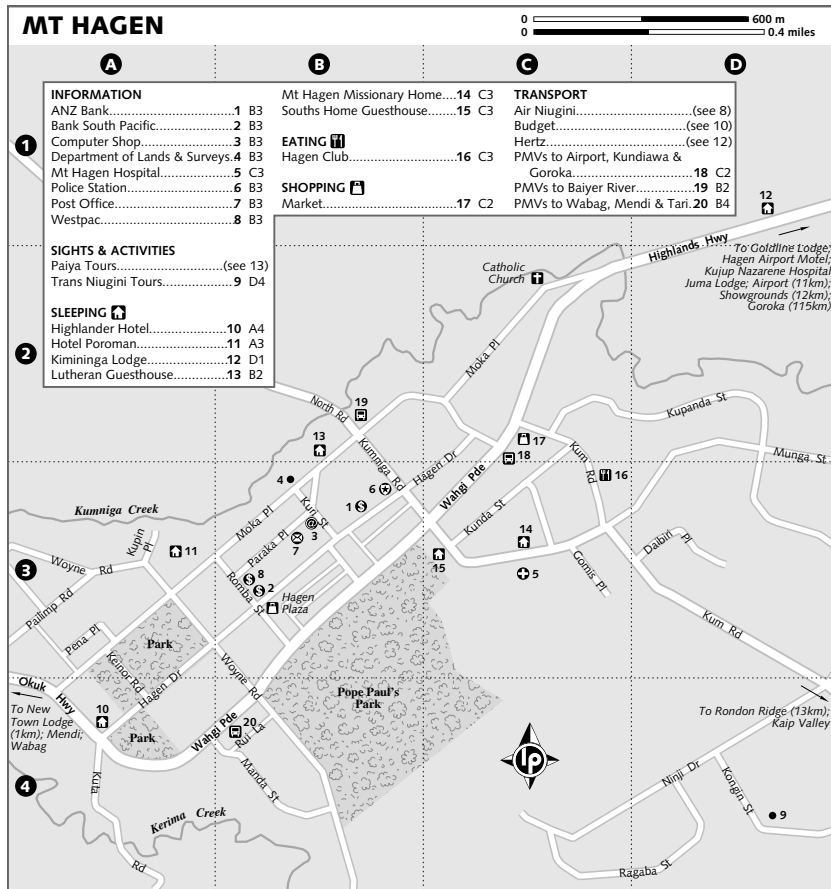
Fire (☎ 542 1311/5)

Police (☎ 542 1222; Kumniga St)

INTERNET ACCESS

Major hotels have internet access for about K30 per 30 minutes.

Computer Shop (☎ 542 1354; ground fl, Komkui Bldg, Kuri St; per 15min K4.50) Snappy connections.



INTERVIEW WITH A RASKOL

Dean Starnes

I hadn't notice Alex until he was right in front me which, in itself, was kind of weird. For unlike most men in these parts, Alex was a tall, thin and wiry Rastafarian. I had arrived in a deserted market at a village too small to be marked on most maps by mistake, and, having missed the last PMV, I was stranded.

'Yu olraet? Yo go we?'

'Nowhere,' I replied. 'I'm staying here the night – with the mosquitoes and raskols,' and I grinned my best 'I'm-really-tough-even-though-I-look-shit-scared' grin.

He handed me a cigarette. 'The mosquitoes are on their way, and the raskols, well...' And that was how I met Alex, former raskol, all-round trouble maker and charming host. I didn't tell him that I didn't smoke.

Back at his house he told me how he had become a raskol; how he and other young men had drifted to Lae, on to Moresby and into crime. His story could have been that of any number of disenfranchised youths from any number of cities around the world. Without jobs and without prospects, the allure of the bright lights and the chance of something better – more money, a car or even just a little excitement – proved too strong. He said he knew that he should have returned to his village and his land, that a better life waited for him there, but he hadn't. Instead he spent his days drinking, smoking and sometimes robbing. He told me how his gang would watch a business for days, finding patterns in their comings and goings, working out schedules, figuring out who had money. He told me of his beatings at the hands of the police, of how they struck your knees with sticks to break your legs, and he showed me his scars caused by cigarette burns.

However, becoming a raskol isn't necessarily for life. Alex saw it as a young man's game, almost as a lifestyle option you grew out of and he, along with the friends he had joined with, left to start families of their own.

MEDICAL SERVICES

There are several pharmacies in town.

Kujup Nazarene Hospital (☎ 546 2341, 546 2228;

Kujup) Located 45 minutes east on the Highlands Hwy, Dr Jim Radcliff comes recommended by the local missionaries.

Mt Hagen Hospital (☎ 542 1166; Kumniga Rd) The *haus sik* (hospital) borders Pope Paul's Park near the town centre.

MONEY

ANZ (☎ 542 1622; Hagen Dr) Has an ATM lobby and cashes travellers cheques for a low K3.

Bank South Pacific (☎ 542 1877; Romba St) Changes travellers cheques for a K50 flat fee. It has an ATM lobby across the street behind Hagen Plaza.

Westpac (☎ 542 1056; Romba St) One ATM and the shortest queues. Travellers cheques cashed for K10.

POST

Post office (☎ 542 1270; Paraka Pl)

Dangers & Annoyances

Aside from *raskols* (bandits), tribal warfare can break out over coffee production, land disputes, pigs or gardens. Clan warfare never embroils outsiders, confining itself to the protagonists, but it can make things

unstable and unpredictable. During the day, Mt Hagen is perfectly safe. Nobody hassles or asks for money, but the town is thronged with security guards and dogs around banks and shops. Don't approach the dogs – they are not accustomed to white people. Walking the streets and exploring the shops is quite safe.

It's not, however, safe at night and the market area is rife with cons and pickpockets. Although the Highlands is a 'dry' region, home-brew alcohol is increasingly a problem.

Tours

The best parts of Mt Hagen are its surrounds, and the Hagen-based tour companies and local hotels offer half- and full-day tours.

Paiya Tours (☎ 542 2137; paiyatours@datec.net.pg; Moka Pl) Locally run from the Lutheran Guesthouse (p132).

PNG Eco-Adventure Tours (☎ 686 2439; www.geo.cities.com/skyfidn; Paraka St) Another Hagen-based operation (locally owned) that offers tours to remote rural villages including Lake Kutubu. It can also organise Sepik expeditions.

Trans Niugini Tours (☎ 542 1438; Kongin St; www.pngtours.com) One of the main inbound tour companies

in PNG, organising tours and activities across the country. It's well organised, professional and rather expensive. Its packages include meals and activities and guests are ferried to its six eco-lodges by private aircraft and stay in absolute luxury. The lodges are Tari's Ambua Lodge (p174); the Sepik's Karawari Lodge (p199) and its boat the *Sepik Spirit* (p193); Malolo Plantation Lodge (p148) north of Madang; Bensbach Wildlife Lodge (p208) in the Western Province; and Mt Hagen's very own Rondon Ridge (opposite).

Festivals & Events

It's not as big as the Goroka Show, but the **Mt Hagen Show** (general admission K4, adult 2-day pass K300) is definitely a must-see. It's held annually, on the third weekend of August. The cheap 'general admission' won't allow you access to the *singsing* groups until 11am, and then, only from the surrounding banks.

The two-day pass allows you to arrive early (around 8am) and see the groups dressing and donning their feathered head-dresses. Vigorous impromptu performances at this time can often be more powerful, even ribald, compared with the formal stuff dished up in the arena. Contrary to what you might be fearful of, there's no general bird of paradise slaughter just before show time – the feather headdresses and costumes are extremely valuable and rarefied heirlooms.

The performers are happy to pose for photographs (they don't charge) but at times it feels like a photographic free-for-all. There are some quality artefacts on sale outside the showgrounds and *mild* bartering here won't offend local sensibilities. Locals prefer the live bands and contemporary music on stage in a natural bowl just outside the showgrounds – follow your ears and watch your camera in the crowds.

Tickets can be brought from Trans Niugini Tours (p165) and major hotels prior to the show.

Sleeping & Eating

Mt Hagen has lots of places to stay suitable for all budgets. Keep in mind that air-con is not imperative in this cooler climate. Eating options are largely confined to the hotels and guesthouses.

New Town Lodge (☎ 542 2872; Highlands Hwy; s K55-75) Slightly out of town towards Mendi; about 1km past the Highlander Hotel. There are large, self-contained rooms, shared kitchen

facilities (additional charge) and the pretty grounds have pleasant views. There is a local bus stop at the betel nut market nearby.

Lutheran Guesthouse (☎ 542 2137; paiyatours@datec.net.pg, Moka Pl; s/d/f K70/80/100) Right in the middle of town, this is a good option. The rooms are quite old but all are self-contained. There is a laundry and the meals (breakfast K10, dinner K25) include a soft drink. Paiya Tours (p165) operate from here.

Mt Hagen Missionary Home (☎ 542 1041; mhmh@daltron.com.pg, Kumniga Rd; s incl breakfast K77) The pick of the budget bunch. Each room has four bunk beds and its own bathroom. It's friendly, secure, very clean and central. For an additional K17 you'll get a hearty dinner. Airport transfers are K20 per group.

Hotel Poroman (☎ 542 3558; www.hausporoman.com.pg; Moka Pl; s K125-225, d K135-260, tr K182-286; 📺) The price ranges here reflect the various room options – budget, standard and deluxe. There isn't a hell of a lot of difference between the budget and standard rooms other than the number of TV channels. There's a bar and excellent restaurant (meals K20 to K40, open 7am to 9am, 11am to 2pm, and 5pm to 9pm), and tariffs include airport transfers.

Kimininga Lodge (☎ 542 2399; www.wampnga.com.pg/kimininga; Highlands Hwy; s K170-210, d K200-240) Run by the local government, Kimininga Lodge is towards the airport and comfortable, if a little plain. In addition to the 37 self-contained rooms there is an apartment capable of sleeping four. Airport and town transfers are included in the price. There's a licensed restaurant (meals K15 to K35, open 6pm to 10pm) that serves pizza and Indian, and a Friday-night buffet.

Hagen Airport Motel (☎ 545 1647; mmakap@online.net.pg; Highlands Hwy; s & d K172) This motel, near the airport, has 20 rooms all with en suite and TV. It's clean and friendly although nothing out of the ordinary. The restaurant (meals K25 to K40) and hotel are 'alcohol-free zones'. You can grab a lift on its truck, which travels into town daily.

Highlander Hotel (☎ 542 1355; highlanderhotel@coral.seahotels.com.pg; Okuk Hwy; s & d K253-462; 📺 📺 📺) The Highlander, part of the Coral Sea chain, has all the amenities you'd expect from a first-class hotel, including pool-side restaurants, bars, tennis and volleyball courts and 24-hour foreign-exchange desk. The 60 rooms are self-contained and a little soulless. The Palmuri Restaurant (meals K35 to K50, open 6pm to

9.20pm) offers delectable delicacies such as Mt Wilhelm trout and triple-stacked pancakes. An Asian style buffet (K40) is served every Saturday.

Rondon Ridge (☎ 542 1438; www.pngtours.com; per person all-inclusive s/d US\$499/402) Rondon Ridge is the newest of Trans Niugini Tours' luxury lodges, located at 2164m on Kum Mountain, 13km southeast from Hagen. There are magnificent views of the Hagen Range and the Wahgi Valley from each of the 12 units. Up here it's comfort all the way – modern bathrooms, electric blankets, continental quilts and a cosy fireplace in the common lounge.

Hagen Club (☎ 542 1537; Kum Rd; mains K28-40; 📺 11am-2pm & 5pm-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-9.30pm Sat) Serves cold beer and good pub-style light meals during lunch, and cold beer and European dishes during dinner. The Mt Hagen Ball is held here to coincide with the show. Bring your tux, dancing shoes and see the manager for a ticket (double K250, including dinner).

During the Mt Hagen Show, accommodation can be scarce and the following hotels may be your only option, however they aren't the best in town. Those with bars often get unruly.

Goldline Lodge (☎ 542 3333; fax 542 1883; Highlands Hwy; s/d incl breakfast K110/185) On the way to the airport. This hotel has a restaurant and bar with pokies. The more expensive self-contained rooms are comfortable, with TV and minibar.

Juma Lodge (☎ 545 1310; fax 545 1368; Highlands Hwy; s K55, d K77-110) Rooms here are large, tired and hungover – much like the clientele.

Souths Home Guesthouse (☎ 542 2338; Kumniga Rd; s/d K60/80) Central and popular with drunks, the shared showers are filthy and the mattresses thin and tired.

Shopping

The Hagen market is one of PNG's biggest and most varied (Saturday is the big day). It's the best place to buy *bilums* and Highland hats. There's also a vast range of fresh produce on sale and if you're lucky you may also see cuscus, pigs and birds trussed up on poles or in enclosures.

It's busy each day and thieves work the crowd. They're mostly kids working in tandem – one might distract you while another snatches a bag or wallet. The atmosphere in the market can be edgy, and the best way to make friends is to buy stuff.

There are artefacts for sale at the Hotel Poroman gift shop and outside the showgrounds during the Mt Hagen Show.

Getting There & Around

AIR

The airport is at Kagamuga, about 10km from town. Minibuses frequently run from the small market next to the airport to the main market in town (K1). For an additional K1 the driver will often drop you at your hotel. Major hotels provide transfers.

Air Niugini (☎ 542 1039; Romba St) has flights twice daily to Port Moresby (K498) while **Airlines PNG** (☎ 545 1407, 542 1039; hgu@apng.com; airport) has flights that connect Mt Hagen to Port Moresby (K498) and Lae (K300) every day but Sunday. There are also Airlines PNG flights on Monday and Saturday to Tabubil (K640) and Kiunga (K624), and flights south to Moro (K400), Kikori (K385), Kerema (K541) and Daru (K1380).

MAF (☎ 545 1477; herebe_udaga@MAF.org.au; airport) offers interesting connections from Mt Hagen to all sorts of remote destinations including Tari (K300, Thursday), Wewak (K390, Monday) and Simbai (K210, Friday).

CAR

There is one taxi in Mt Hagen – **City Cab** (☎ 542 3013, 690 4431).

Avis (☎ 545 1350; fax 545 1525; airport) Hires a double-cab Hilux for K215 per day plus K1 per kilometre.

Budget (☎ 542 1818; reservations@budget.com.pg; Highlander Hotel)

Hertz (trading as Eagle Hire; ☎ 542 3544) Based at the Kimininga Lodge (opposite).

PMV

Roads heading west from Mt Hagen towards Mendi and Wabag have been prone to ambushes in the past and it is worth seeking advice from your place of accommodation before jumping on a west-bound PMV to Mendi (K15, 3½ hours) or Wabag (K15, four hours). The asphalt disintegrates into metal and then dirt, before it is resurrected 45 minutes before Mendi. It is possible to reach Tari (K45, 11 hours) in one day if you start early.

In the other direction there are buses to Kundiawa (K10, two hours) and Goroka (K20, four hours).

PMVs going east, to Kundiawa and Goroka, leave from the market. PMVs going

west, to Wabag, Mendi and Tari, leave from the highway near the Dunlop building.

WAHGI VALLEY

Thirty thousand years ago, the Wahgi Valley had some of the most advanced farming practices, and social and political organisations on earth. Today, descendants of those early farmers still rely on technologies developed by their forefathers. If you are interested in why, despite their apparent head start, the farmers of the Wahgi Valley don't rule the world read Jared Diamond's critically acclaimed *Guns, Germs and Steel* that untangles the thorny issues (none of them race related) that enabled only some cultures to produce mighty civilisations. There are numerous references to these Highland farmers throughout the book.

Wamol village is a great place to experience an age-old way of life. Here you can see the pig and cassowary huts, the sugar-cane gardens and witness *karim leg* – a traditional courtship song of the Wamol people. The only place to stay is at the **Wahgi Guesthouse** (☎ 689 39543; per person K60; meals K15-20), 1½ hours east from Mt Hagen; contact Lawrence Walep. The guesthouse is built on a ridge and is (all things considered) rather comfortable, although the toilets are of the pit variety and the shower is courtesy of a bucket.

From Hagen catch a PMV to Wahgi Bridge Junction (K6, one hour) and change to a Nondugul Station-bound PMV but get off at Wamol (K5, 30 minutes). From here it is a 20-minute walk. Alternatively phone the guesthouse for transport.

ENGA PROVINCE

Enga is the highest and most rugged of all PNG's provinces, and even other Highlanders refer to Engas as 'mountain people'. The provincial capital of Wabag is more of an outlying town to Mt Hagen than a major centre. The two other main centres are Wapenamanda and Laiagam.

Enga is unique in that it has only one major linguistic and ethnic group, and the shared ethnicity of the Enga speakers overshadows the province's minority tribes such as the Ipili speakers (around Porgera) and Nete speakers.

Porgera, the giant gold and copper mine in the far west, has brought about rapid change for some, but most people still grow cash crops – coffee, pyrethrum and cool-weather European vegetables – in their steep mountain gardens. Porgera is all but spent, but other nearby mineral finds mean that the mining town will be there a long while yet.

As late as 1960s, Enga was still largely independent of government control and tribal warfare still occurs today (see boxed text, p153). Engas are well respected for their diplomacy and skill in the art of negotiation, but the provincial government also has the dubious distinction of having had its power suspended three times by the national government due to concerns over corruption and accountability.

Alcohol is prohibited in Enga and can't even be bought in hotels. Vehicles coming from Mt Hagen are often stopped and searched by police for alcohol and firearms.

WABAG

People tend to sit around a lot in Wabag – outside houses, by the road, wherever. Life in general is slow in PNG but it is even slower in Wabag. The stores have all the main necessities, but the cost of transport makes things a little expensive.

The town itself has little to attract tourists, except a cultural centre and the mighty Lai River barrelling through town, but the hills around Wabag are stunning – jagged mountains, gushing rivers and picturesque villages nestled in the mountains.

At the large **cultural centre** (☎ 547 1128; ☎ 8am-4pm theoretically), art gallery, museum and workshop, you'll see young artists making sand paintings – the principal work on display. The museum has shields, wigs and masks from many parts of PNG, including Enga Province.

The annual **Enga Festival**, a smaller version of the Mt Hagen and Goroka Shows, is held in August at the sports ground.

Wabag's water and electricity supplies are erratic.

Sleeping

Wabag Guesthouse (☎ 547 1210; s/d K100/130) The guesthouse has several single and double rooms with shared facilities. The kitchen is clean and well equipped.

Dae Won Wabag Hotel (☎ 547 1140; fax 547 1033; Highlands Hwy; s K124-180, d K124-240) Wabag's only formal hotel. It's on the Mt Hagen side of town and there's a communal lounge area and kitchen, as well as a restaurant.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Although the Wabag airstrip is closed, **Air Niugini** (☎ 547 1274) flies to Wapenamanda (an hour's drive away on the highway towards Mt Hagen via PMV) from Port Moresby on Tuesday and Thursday for K412.

PMV

PMVs travel between Mt Hagen and Wabag (K20, four hours). The road to Porgera and the mine is in good service, but PMVs rarely go there. A few PMVs go to Mendi via Laiagam and Kandep over a very rough road with frequently washed-out bridges.

AROUND WABAG

Kaip Village

High in the hills behind Wabag is the spectacular **Kaip Village Lifestyle Model** (☎ 542 1303), with villages and gardens on steep slopes that seem suitable only for mountain goats. Villagers offer *singsing* performances and cultural treks around their village and gardens. The road to Kaip is in bad shape but hardy PMVs still travel here from Wabag.

Kaipai Orchid Lodge (☎ 547 1281) was once a fantastic place, positioned on a razorback ridge, but is now very run down and often closed.

Laiagam & Rau

Laiagam has a **botanic garden** with a huge range of orchids and a research centre. **Lake Rau** is a crater lake at nearly 3000m in Enga Province's centre. It's a day's walk from Pumas, above Laiagam, and you will need a guide, which you can arrange in Mt Hagen.

Kumul Lodge

Located 40 minutes from Mt Hagen, and closer to Hagen or Wapenamanda airstrip than to Wabag, **Kumul Lodge** (☎ 542 1615; www.kumulodge.com.pg; s K140-165, d K145-185) is geared towards bird-watchers, and you can see birds of paradise in the grounds of the lodge. The bungalows, built from bush materials, are comfortable, self-contained and have large windows and balconies overlooking the surrounding forest. It's at the base of Mt Hagen

and offers guided walks up the mountain for birders, and to nearby caves. There are transfers from Hagen (K65) or Wabag (K78). The restaurant (meals K20 to K38, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner) serves steak, chicken and fish dishes.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

Southern Highlands Province is made up of lush, high valleys between towering limestone peaks. This region is particularly beautiful and traditional cultures thrive, especially in the Tari Basin where many people retain their traditional ways and whose men are famous for their intricately decorated wigs (p173). The headwaters of some mighty rivers, including the Kikori, Erave and Strickland, cross the province and Mt Giluwe (4368m), the second-highest mountain in PNG, sits on the province's northeastern border.

The most remote province of the Highlands, the Southern Highlands is still relatively undeveloped, although the establishment of oilfields near Lake Kutubu and an alluvial gold mine at Mt Kare are rapidly opening up the region.

In pre-European times the province was at the end of the trade route from the Gulf of Papua into the Highlands.

The Mendi area is the most developed region of the Southern Highlands (although Tari has more attractions and services for travellers), but it was not explored by Europeans until 1935. It was 1950 when the first airstrip was constructed and 1952 before tribal warfare was prohibited. The Mendi tribes then focused their attention on attacking government patrols and were still fighting them in the mid-1950s. The 'discovery' of the beautiful Lavani Valley in 1954 triggered newspaper journalists to write elaborate stories about the discovery of a lost Shangri-la.

The limestone hills and high rainfall are ideal for the formation of caves. Some caves of enormous depth and length have already been explored and it is a distinct possibility that some of the deepest caves in the world are still awaiting discovery in this region.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS CULTURE

The Huli are one of the biggest clans and their homelands are among PNG's most remote and undeveloped regions. Most Huli have had little more than a single generation of contact with the outside world. Though not typical of all Highlanders, the Huli make an interesting case study (for more information, see p173).

Black Brides

Mendi brides wear black for their wedding – they're rubbed down in black *tigaso* tree oil and soot, and they wear this body colouring for a month after the wedding. The *tigaso* tree oil is very valuable. It comes from Lake Kutubu and is traded all over the area. During this time neither bride nor groom work, nor is the marriage consummated. This gives the bride time to become acquainted with her husband's family and for the groom to learn 'anti-woman' spells to protect himself from his wife.

Throughout the Highlands, women are traditionally distrusted by men, who go to extraordinary lengths to protect themselves and maintain their status. Sexual relations are not undertaken lightly – contact with women is believed to cause sickness and men usually live in separate houses and prefer to cook their own food. Boys can be removed from their mothers' houses at a very young age. Women travellers should bear these customs in mind because in many places they are still strictly upheld.

Blue Widows

A dead man's wife, daughters, mother, sisters and sisters-in-law coat themselves with bluish-grey clay while in mourning. The wife carries vast numbers of strings of the seeds known as 'Job's tears'. One string a day is removed until eventually, with the removal of the last string, the widow can wash herself of her clay coating and remarry – about nine months after her husband's death.

Long Houses

Long houses, known as *haus lains*, are built along the sides of Mendi ceremonial grounds and used as guesthouses at *singsings* and pig kills. They can be up to 150m long, although 70m is the usual length, and they are built beside stone-filled pits where the pigs are cooked.

Dangers & Annoyances

Historically the Southern Highlands were beset with lawlessness and tribal fighting. Mendi's hospital closed, the banks pulled out and it was easy to fall prey to the sensationalist stories that the international media love so much.

These days many of the clans have sorted out their differences and the region is enjoying relative security. Nonetheless, because the area is unpredictable and potentially dangerous it would be foolhardy to rely solely on any advice given here; instead we recommend that you ask the locals about the current status quo and be prepared to curtail your travel plans if the situation warrants it.

The road between Nipa and Tari is particularly volatile as the Nipa villagers are still nursing a grudge and vowed vengeance for the fatal car crash that killed their 2002 election-winning politician. Witchcraft was suspected.

Tari is much quieter and the resorts there are secure and safe.

MENDI

Despite being the provincial capital, Mendi is a relatively small town, built around an airport. It shelters in a long green valley, surrounded by beautiful limestone peaks. There is not much to keep you hanging around in Mendi – it's really just the starting point for a trip into the Tari Basin or Lake Kutubu.

Mendi isn't as volatile as it was a few years back and recently, even during the 2007 elections, it has been relatively well behaved. Nonetheless the general vibe is that it's only a few stiff drinks away from sliding back to its warring ways. If a war is on, it will most likely be fought near town (at the fields at the end of the runway) and be confined to the aggrieved parties.

There's an artefacts shop near Mendi Motors that sells hand-loomed products, baskets and

weapons. Mendi dolls make a good buy, although they are now rarely in the traditional designs, which had religious significance.

Information

Mendi's **police station** (☎ 549 1333) and **post office** (☎ 549 1016) are in the middle of town. The **Mendi Hospital** (☎ 549 1166) and Bank South Pacific have both recently re-opened due to the town's relative tranquillity. There are a number of good *kai* bars and stores in town, although no large supermarkets.

Sleeping & Eating

The most visible place to stay is the large, sky-blue hotel, and in previous reincarnations this was *the* place to stay in Mendi. Unfortunately it now attracts an unsavoury crowd who like to drink, fight and piss in the hallways (although not necessarily in that order) and we recommend you try elsewhere.

Pentecostal Guesthouse (☎ 549 1651, 692 6778; s K20) There are five twin rooms and a five-bed bunk room in the Pentecostal Guesthouse, not far from the airport. The rooms are small but clean and there are cooking facilities and solar-heated hot showers.

Kubula Guesthouse (☎ 549 1114; s/d K40/80, kitchen use K5) Opposite the post office and up the stairs behind a small trade store, this place is rather dirty. The bed sheets are close to getting up and walking around on

their own, but the staff and local guests are genuinely friendly.

UCWF Guesthouse (☎ 549 1062; s/tw K40/80) The United Church Women's Fellowship has a guesthouse 30 minutes' walk from town. The twin room has an attached bathroom. To get there, walk out onto the old Mt Hagen road past Mendi Motors, take the left fork after the bridge, pass the turn-off to the large Menduli Trade Store and it's further up the hill on your right, near the hospital.

Kibur Lodge (☎ 549 1077; fax 549 1350; r K110-220) Kibur, the pick of the Mendi bunch, is a few kilometres south of town on the Highlands Hwy, just beyond the turn-off into Mendi. It has six chalets with 12 rooms in a quasi-traditional style set in pleasant grounds surrounding a large, hand-dug, waterlily-filled pond. The staff can contact Frank Pape who guides trips to see local avian fauna and the nearby caves. The octagonal restaurant (set meals K20 to K35, snacks K7.50; open 6.30am to 9.30am, 11.30am to 1.30pm, and 6.30pm to 9.30pm) encompasses a pot-bellied stove.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The Mendi airstrip is often unserviceable, mostly in the mornings, because of fog. **Air Niugini** (☎ 549 1233) has three flights a week to/from Port Moresby (K630).

South West Air (☎ 549 1065; gregbill@online.net.pg) is principally a charter-only company but it does have occasional spare seats on its Port Moresby flights.

PMV

PMV trucks and buses run back and forth between Mt Hagen and Mendi (K15, 3½ hours) with reasonable regularity. The buses are more comfortable than the trucks. The road to Tari goes via Nipa and is a spectacular six- to eight-hour drive (K25). There's a road to Pimaga and on to Moro.

When the Southern Highlands Gulf Highway opens in 2008, it is reasonable to expect that PMVs will connect Mendi with Kikori.

IALIBU

Halfway between Mendi and Mt Hagen, Ialibu is the home of the Imbong'u people who, like the Huli, also wear wigs. It is a major area for the production of sawn timber, and basket-making is a common

MOGAS

The most vivid demonstrations of wealth and status are the *moga* ceremonies near Mendi (*tee* ceremonies in Enga Province). *Mogas* are movable feasts – during some, hundreds of pigs are slaughtered and cooked. Each clan attempts to surpass its neighbours by feasting on as many pigs as possible. A big pig is worth K500 to K1000.

These ceremonies flow from village to village, with one group displaying its wealth and handing the *moga* ceremony on to the next village. Even enemies are invited.

There are ceremonial grounds where these feasts are held along the road past Mendi – fenced quadrangles, sometimes covering half a hectare, surrounded by long houses (guest quarters) and long pits in straight lines filled with cooking stones.

village industry. Nearby is Mt Ialibu (3465m). The local people have built a cultural centre and museum made of river stones and local timber, with exposed posts and beams, and woven walls. There are good walking trails nearby and the Catholic Mission station runs a guesthouse.

LAKE KUTUBU

The Lake Kutubu area has one of just five national parks in PNG. According to legend, the lake was formed when a fig tree was cut down by a woman looking for water. The story goes that whatever the tree touched turned to water – hence the lake.

The lake is beautiful, and the surrounding country is home to friendly people living a largely traditional life. Butterflies and birds of paradise are common. You can swim in the lake – women should wear a *laplap* (sarong) – and visit local villages where people still live in sex-segregated buildings.

It is also possible to visit the **skull caves** of Bebere and Kosame, where traditional burial rites are still observed. Custom dictates that the bodies of dead relatives are placed into the hull of a canoe and interred in a cave until the flesh has rotted from the bones. The skeletons are then removed, cleaned and displayed on the walls of the caves.

Kutubu is the Highlands' second-largest lake, and, at 800m above sea level, PNG's highest substantial body of water (although the Mt Wilhelm crater lakes are higher). It has a remarkable level of fish endemicity – 10 of the 14 species of fish are found only in this lake.

The big oil project near Lake Kutubu has changed the Mendi area, and local people are used to dealing with oil workers with fat wallets and expense accounts. Prices asked to cross a bridge or walk across land can be outrageous.

Oil began flowing through the pipeline down to the Gulf of Papua in 1992. Chevron Niugini has a good reputation, fulfilling its agreements with the local landowners, the Foi and Fasu people. There's a road from Mendi to Pimaga and on to Moro and the company headquarters near the northwest end of Lake Kutubu.

Sleeping

Inu Sawmill Guesthouse (contact Bai Waiba, Bais Camp, Inu Sawmill; s K15) If you are forced to overnight

in Inu, this is your only option. It also helps with boats across to Tubo.

Tubo Eco-Tourism Lodge (☎ 327 3286; s K60) Tubo is based on a peninsula – access is by canoe and a 300-step climb. It's community owned and run, built from bush materials and affords commanding views across the magnificent lake. The grounds have butterflies, orchids and birds of paradise. The remoteness of the area adds to the experience but makes it difficult, if not impossible, to contact.

Getting There & Away

In addition to the occasional MAF flight, Airlines PNG flies into Moro three times a week (K400) from Mt Hagen. Otherwise catch a Moro-bound PMV from Mendi and get dropped off at Tubaka village as Moro itself is an hour's walk from the west end of Lake Kutubu. Ask locals to direct you to Inu High School and ask around here for a boat to the lodge. It is also possible to catch boats to the lodge from the village below Tugiri crossing.

If you plan to walk into the Lake Kutubu region, take a guide such as those provided by **Trans Niugini Tours** (☎ 542 1438; Mt Hagen) or **Steven Wari** (☎ 691 2063; Tari).

KANTOBO

Kantobo village is on the banks of the Mubi River, near the eastern end of Lake Kutubu. It is home to the Muti clan of the Foimeana people. This is virgin rainforest, rich in bird and animal life. A 700-hectare wildlife management area has been created around the nearby **Wasi Falls** with the help of the WWF. Wasi Falls is the local name for a series of waterfalls that includes the Bisi Falls, the largest in PNG, which plummet over 100m into a limestone basin. Also in the management area are the Maskimu Falls and Geagosusu Falls.

There are many caves in this area, including some that were used for ancient burials, and some with a unique blind cave-fish species.

MT BOSAVI

This area has only recently been visited by a few intrepid travellers. You need to take a guide, and be prepared to sleep in long houses (both men and women) with up to 60 other people, eating sago, insects and other rainforest food. Steven Wari from Warili Lodge (p174) has contacts in this area and can organise a guide, and advises us that it would be possible to walk to a number of villages in four

A GREAT HAIR DAY

The Huli are the largest ethnic group in the Southern Highlands, with a population of around 55,000 and territory exceeding 2500 sq km. Huli don't live in villages, but in scattered homesteads dispersed through immaculately and intensively cultivated valleys. The gardens are delineated by trenches and mud walls up to 3m high, broken by brightly painted gateways made of stakes. These trenches mark boundaries, control the movement of pigs and also hide troops of warriors in times of war. As usual, the women do most of the work, while men concentrate on displaying their finery, plotting war and growing their hair.

Traditional Huli culture is highly developed and strikingly executed in dress and personal decoration. Huli men wear decorative woven wigs of human hair. The hair is the wigman's own, grown over many months by unmarried men living together in isolation from the rest of their community. Under the tutelage and guidance of a master wigman, spells are cast, diets are proscribed and rituals adhered to – all to ensure a healthy head of hair. Many Huli wigmen have more than one wig, but all wigs must be grown before the man marries. Designs are indicative of a wigman's tribe. The Huli cultivate yellow, everlasting daisies that are used to decorate their wigs; they also use feathers and cuscus fur for decoration.

The Huli men wear a band of snakeskin across the forehead, and usually a cassowary quill through the nasal septa. Their faces are decorated with yellow and red ochre. Kina shells are worn around the neck, a decorative belt and *bilum* cloth cover the privates, and the is rear covered by a bunch of leaves attached to a belt (known collectively as a *tanket* or *arse gap*).

to six days. The down side is that you'll have to charter a MAF flight to get there.

TARI

Tari is one of the few towns in PNG where some people still wear traditional dress, and the Huli wigmen (above) and their distinctive clothing are a must see. Most of the wig schools are some distance from the town itself and difficult to find, so you will need to organise transport with your guesthouse or join a tour. Often some of the bachelor boys supplement their income by travelling to town to demonstrate how they grow and care for their hair.

Before photographing anyone, traditionally dressed or not, ask permission. Locals are usually happy to be snapped and do not ask for payment (although this doesn't apply to the wigmen). Still, make your thanks known and if you offer to send copies of the pictures, do. The main market day is Saturday and this is a particularly good time to meet locals in their finery.

The town itself is little more than an airfield and a handful of buildings. There is a post office, **police station** (☎ 540 8022), a few large but basic stores and a hospital.

Sights & Activities

There's a tiny museum in a stockaded compound and most of the items in the small

display are for sale. The place is a sort of old men's home and a couple of older fellows show you around and accept your donation. The covered structure in the compound is the grave of a former provincial premier, and you'll see similar (but usually smaller) structures all around the Tari area.

The **Tari Basin** and the **Tari Gap** are world renowned birding spots, and because the altitude ranges from 1700m to 2800m through a variety of habitats there is a high diversity of species. Tari is a particularly blessed with birds of paradise including the King of Saxony and the Blue bird of paradise. Sir David Attenborough visited the area when making his documentary *Attenborough in Paradise* (1996) and really put the place on the maps of twitchers.

The best of the birds can be seen between July and October when their plumage is at its zenith.

Tours

Ambua Lodge (p174) and Warili Lodge (p174) run tours into the surrounding countryside, although Ambua Lodge does not really cater to casual drop-ins.

Birding tours take in the Tari Gap from the road and a few trails in the rainforest. Depending on which trees you visit, local landowners will expect K20 to K30 compensation per site. Guides cost between K30 and

K80, and vehicle hire can be anything from K350 to K500 per day.

Cultural tours are far more varied and depend largely on your budget and what you want to see. Besides visiting the wigmen, tours may include visits to the widow village, *sing-sings*, spirit and sun dances, and initiation and courtship ceremony re-enactments. Warili Lodge charges K100 for one to three people plus car hire. A *mumu* (feast cooked in underground pit) costs K300 and includes the pig.

Sleeping & Eating

Despite the small size of the town, the Tari area boasts some excellent accommodation.

Tari Women's Guesthouse (contact Jacinta Haiyape, PO Box 81, Tari; dm K20) Near the airport, this locally run guesthouse offers spartan rooms, each with four bunk beds. Men are welcome and while meals aren't provided, there are shared cooking facilities. The manager can also give you directions to other women's guesthouses in the area, including ones at Hoiyabia, Paikela and Tigibi.

Parakua Adventure Lodge (☎ 686 7891; s/d K30/50) This guesthouse is a 30-minute walk uphill from the police station, and is owned by the manager of the small, green store you pass on the way up. Each room has a couple of beds and little else. Bring all your own food.

Warili Lodge (☎ 691 2063; www.papua-warili-lodge.com; PO Box 159, Tari; per person K60) This lodge is an excellent place to stay, with comfortable rooms made from bush materials. The three-course dinners (K25) are delicious, and served in a large, thatched room with an atmospheric open fire. The lodge is a 45-minute drive from the town and owner Steven usually collects his guests if he knows they are coming. If arriving by PMV, jump out when you see his sign. Tours are also offered.

Ambua Lodge (☎ 542 1438; www.pngtours.com; per person all-inclusive s/tw US\$499/402) The showpiece of the Trans Niugini Tours operation, the lodge offers commanding views across the Tari Basin and Huli homelands. In 2001 it was listed as one of the 10 best eco-tourism facilities worldwide by *National Geographic Adventure* magazine. At 2100m, the lodge enjoys a refreshing mountain climate and attracts many bird-watchers and orchid enthusiasts. Guests are accommodated in individual, luxury, bush-material huts. The huts

have a great 180-degree view and are surrounded by flower gardens with a backdrop of mossy forest. Grand opulence in such rugged circumstances is certainly impressive. Ambua is beyond the means of many travellers and most guests come as part of a Trans Niugini package on its private plane.

Other guesthouses in the area include Lakwanda Lodge, an hour past Tari and accessible by PMV and Karida Guesthouse, a five-hour walk from the Tokia bridge junction. Since clan warfare subsided in 2006, these areas surrounding Tari are now safe to visit although it would be prudent to check first.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Niugini (☎ 540 8023) flies from Port Moresby to Tari on Monday, Friday and Sunday. **MAF** (☎ 540 8014) has Thursday flights to Tabubil (K440), Kiunga (KK410), Telefomin (K350) and Mt Hagen (K300). If telephone lines are down in Tari, book through its Mt Hagen office.

PMV

PMVs leave Tari from the market early each morning (excluding Sunday) and pass Warili Lodge on their way to Mt Hagen (K45, 11 hours) via Mendi (K25, six hours). PMVs also run from Tari to Koroba for around K10.

KOPIAGO TO OKSAPMIN

From Lake Kopiago, you can walk to Oksapmin in West Sepik Province in four or five days. There's no official guesthouse at Kopiago but it would be worth asking at the Catholic Church, 1km from the airstrip. A further 3km on from the Kopiago station is the Apostolic Church run by Pastor Hagini who may also be able to help with accommodation.

Talk to **MAF** (☎ 545 1477) in Mt Hagen for possible flights, or catch a PMV from Tari to Koroba (K10) from where it's *only* a day's walk.

Kopiago to Oksapmin is a hard and potentially dangerous walk, so don't undertake it unless you are pretty fit and you've hired a guide. If you are really keen, you can continue walking to Tekin, Bak, Bimin and down to Olsobip in Western Province, or to Telefomin.

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