

# Island Provinces



How do you say *Romancing the Stone* in Tok Pisin? Largely untamed and raw, the islands of PNG are not your classic beach paradise. Here you'll live out your Indiana Jones fantasies, blazing a trail of your own amid wild jungles. The adventure starts by climbing the volcanoes near Rabaul, looking for WWII relics on the Gazelle Peninsula, staying in villages on New Ireland's east coast, paddling through lagoons mottled with pristine reefs near Kavieng, exploring the rugged beauty of Bougainville or escaping to an island off Lavongai (New Hanover).

Be ready for a culture shock, too. These islands are home to tiny villages where people lead lives that have changed little over centuries. Nowhere else in the Pacific (except, maybe, in Vanuatu or the Solomon Islands) will the local cultures sweep you off your feet – just be sure to brush up on your Melanesian etiquette before you go. If you plan a visit in July, try to make it coincide with the authentic Warwagira Festival of masked dance.

The islands' bounty goes beneath the surface, with its unbeatable repertoire of diving adventures. Shipwrecks, fish life in abundance and thriving reefs are the rewards of diving here. Surfies rave about the uncrowded waves off New Ireland (but you didn't hear it from us).

And then, once you've run out of stamina, opt for the trusted combination of a fruit cocktail, a hammock and a good book – you've earned it.

## HIGHLIGHTS

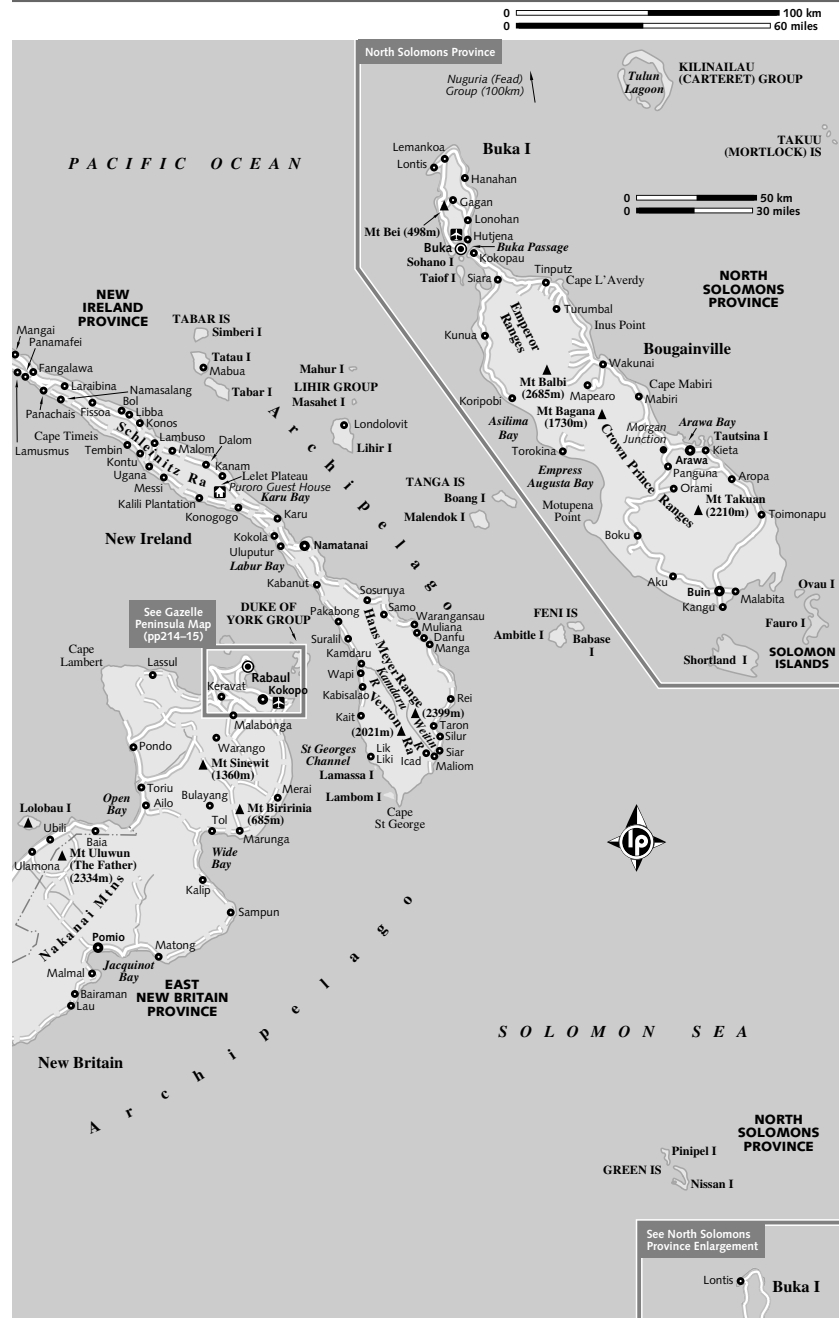
- Squeezing yourself into a wetsuit to explore underwater treasures, scuba diving among the world's most fecund reefs in **Kimbe Bay** (p59) or plunging into the wreck-strewn waters of **Simpson Harbour** (p219)
- Scaling up extinct **Kombiu** (Mt Mother, p223) and feasting your eyes on the 360 degree views of Rabaul, Gazelle Peninsula and Mt Tavorvur
- Relaxing with a book and a fresh coconut on a blow-your-mind beach off **Lavongai** (New Hanover; p234) and getting a taste of outer island lifestyle
- Earning your intrepid stripes in **Bougainville** (p243), especially if you continue as an 'end-of-the-road' traveller with a trip to more remote places nearby
- Reflecting on New Britain's turbulent WWII occupation when you visit the **East New Britain Historical & Cultural Centre** (p214) in Kokopo
- Experiencing timeless traditional village life on **New Ireland's west coast** (p237), staying in homestays and watching the ancient art of shark calling



■ POPULATION: 523,000

■ AREA: 28,450 SQ KM

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## NEW BRITAIN

New Britain is awesome. PNG's largest island, it has a bit of everything you've come to this country for – think colonial history, remarkable traditional cultures and seriously pristine wilderness (despite areas where there are logging and mining). The *pièce de résistance*? Volcanoes. The whole region is a rumbling, billowing string of cones and craters cloaked with virgin tropical rainforest. Some are dormant and harmless while others are scrappy villains that periodically flex their muscles. In September 1994 Mt Tavorvur and Mt Vulcan erupted and destroyed most of Rabaul, one of PNG's biggest and most alluring cities, in a furious rain of ash and rock (see boxed text, p222).

When the raw nature on land has finished working its magic on you, be sure to don mask and tank to explore New Britain's sensational watery surrounds. To say that Kimbe Bay offers world-class dive sites is an understatement. Rabaul's harbour and the various bays that carve out the Gazelle Peninsula also host superlative sites, such as wrecks and psychedelic coral reefs. There is one proviso, though: don't expect to find lots of secluded white-sand scimitars. Idyllic beaches are not New Britain's strong point.

New Britain is divided into two provinces; each has its distinctive feel. East New Britain (ENB) Province ends in the Gazelle Peninsula where there has been lengthy contact with Europeans, education levels are high and the people are among the most economically advantaged in the country. The other end of the island, West New Britain (WNB) Province, is sparsely populated, little developed and did not come into serious contact with Europeans until the 1960s. The migrant workers from the Highlands, the 'colonial'-flavoured expats and the dense bush give WNB the flavour that the east might have had mid-last century. It's a frontier country with many colourful, roguish Queenslanders escaping the more regulated life 'back home'.

The most easily accessible areas for travelers include the Gazelle Peninsula and Kimbe Bay. If you want to explore the rest of the Island, then you'll have to cut a path of your own, which means a lot of gumption, time and money.

### History

The Island of New Britain was settled around 30,000 years ago. The Lapita people, the world's first true ocean navigators, arrived about 4500 years ago, bringing pottery and trade with them. Several hundred years ago, the Tolai people came from southern New Ireland and invaded the Gazelle Peninsula in northernmost New Britain, driving the Baining, Sulka and Taulil people south into the mountains.

From 1874 to 1876 German traders established settlements in the Duke of York Islands and Blanche Bay. The area was renowned for cannibalism. More missionaries were eaten than heathens converted in some districts.

On 3 November 1884 a German protectorate was declared and the German New Guinea Company assumed authority, which it held until 1914 when Australian troops landed at Kabakaul.

At the end of WWI, the German planters had their plantations expropriated and were shipped back to Germany. Meanwhile Australians evacuated German residences, but not for long.

In 1937 the Vulcan and Tavorvur volcanoes erupted, killing 507 people and causing enormous damage. Before this eruption, Vulcan had been a low, flat Island hundreds of metres offshore. It had appeared from nowhere during an 1878 blast (and had been immediately planted with coconuts). When the 1937 eruptions ceased, Vulcan was a massive mountain attached to the coast.

In 1941 Rabaul was completely crushed by the advancing Japanese. At the peak of the war, 97,000 Japanese troops were stationed on the Gazelle Peninsula. But the Allies never came. More than 20,000 tons of Allied bombs rained down upon the peninsula, keeping the remaining Japanese forces underground and impotent. When the war ended, they were still there.

On 19 September 1994 Tavorvur and Vulcan re-awoke with relatively little warning, utterly destroying Rabaul (see boxed text, p222). Only two people died but 50,000 people lost their homes and one of PNG's most developed and picturesque cities was flattened again. In the following weeks, buildings creaked under the weight of the falling ash and collapsed. There was widespread looting.

Today, the region's seismic activity is measured more conscientiously than ever and the vulcanology observatory posts regular bulletins. Tavorvur's spectacular emissions

of smoke and noise are not presently considered dangerous.

### Geography & Climate

New Britain is a long, narrow, mountainous Island. The interior is harsh and rugged, split by gorges and fast-flowing rivers and blanketed in thick rainforest. The Pomio and Jacquinot Bay area receives more than 6500mm of rainfall each year, while annual rainfall in the Blanche Bay and Simpson Harbour area is about 2000mm. The dry season is between mid-April and November.

### Culture

Most of the 184,000 people in ENB are Tolai who share many cultural similarities with southern New Irelanders. Traditional enemies of the Tolai (see opposite), the seminomadic Baining people of the mountains perform fire dances, which are a spectacular event. Gigantic bark-cloth masks with emphasised eyes and features are worn by dancers who walk on, and eat, red-hot coals.

Secret male societies play an important role in village life, organising ceremonies and maintaining customary laws. Tolai ceremonies feature leaf-draped, anonymous figures topped by masks – *tumbuans* and *dukduks*, which are constructed deep in the bush under tremendous taboo. He who dances in the mask is no longer himself, but rather the collective *kastom* (custom) of the tribe's long history. The most feared spirits are the *masalais*, which are spirits of the bush and water that live in certain rock pools and *dewel pleses* (thickets).

Shell money retains its cultural significance for the Tolai and is used mostly for bride price (p36). Little shells are strung on lengths of cane and bound together in great rolls called *lolo*.

### EAST NEW BRITAIN PROVINCE

A basic network of coastal roads and two towns make this the most developed province in the New Guinea islands. With the once-beautiful city of Rabaul levelled by the volcanic eruptions of 1994, Kokopo is now the main centre. Between the two, a strip of villages hug the shore of Blanche Bay. Behind them, beyond the copra plantations and the occasional town, the Baining Mountains give way to a green expanse of bush and volcanic peaks.

### Kokopo

Kokopo is an opportunistic town. It has literally risen from ashes. Kokopo started to develop just after Rabaul was flattened by the volcanic eruptions of 1994. While you can feel a palpable melancholy in Rabaul, Kokopo reflects its optimistic view towards the future. The town emanates a sense of confidence, pride and zing. But it lacks Rabaul's mysterious aura.

At least it's serviceable, with a good range of well-organised accommodation options, banks, government services, a couple of internet cafés and lots of businesses, but there are no big-ticket sights.

If you come from mainland PNG, Kokopo is a good base to set your body clock to Island time, get your bearings and make the most of the infrastructure before heading out to rougher areas found in the New Guinea islands.

### ORIENTATION

A coastal road runs around Blanche Bay, from Tokua airport through Kokopo to Rabaul. The town is strung along this coastal road on the waterfront. At its western end are the picturesque lawns of the golf course.

### INFORMATION

**ANZ** (Williams Rd; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri)

A new building located in the centre. Has a guarded ATM (Visa, MasterCard), open from 7am to 7pm.

**Bank South Pacific** (Williams Rd; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, 9am-4pm Fri) Expect interminable queues inside. Has four guarded ATMs (Visa only), open from 6am to 7pm. Central.

**East New Britain Tourist Bureau** (☎ 982 8657; fax 983 7070; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) At ENB Historical & Cultural Centre. Pretty much useless.

**Loyrip Holdings LTD** (Williams Rd; ☎ 982 9312; per hr K42; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Internet café with CD burning and printing facilities, located beside Taklam Lodge; has the quickest connections in PNG islands (when it's not too cloudy). Two flat-screen computers only.

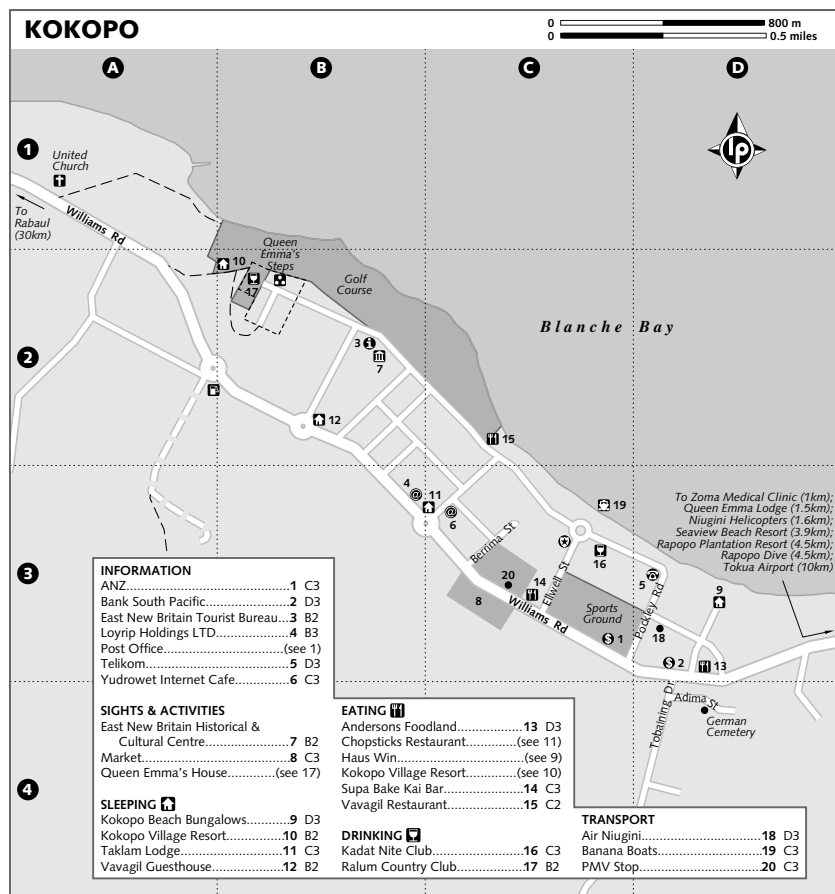
**Police** (☎ 982 8222)

**Post Office** (☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri)

**Telikom** (☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 3.30pm Fri) Sells phonecards.

**Yudrowet Internet Cafe** (per hr K25; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Near Taklam Lodge.

**Zoma Medical Clinic** (Williams Rd; ☎ 982 9356, after hr 982 9718; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Private clinic, east of the centre.



## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The rewarding **East New Britain Historical & Cultural Centre** (☎ 982 8453; admission K2; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has a tremendous collection of historical objects, photographs and many Japanese WWII relics. The Tok Pisin documents issued to Allied airmen are accompanied by translations instructing the reader to obey the white men who fell from the sky. Most poignant is the courageous role played by the locals in a war whose origins were completely alien to them.

When you're done with the museum, head to the site of **Queen Emma's house**, located right where the road terminates at the Ralum Country Club. Emma Forsayth, from Samoa, started a trading business at Mioko in the

Duke of York Islands in 1878 before extending her empire to include plantations, trade stores and ships. Don't hold your breath; there's not much to see of Gunantambu, her grand home, which was ruined in WWII.

The best place to soak up the atmosphere is the **waterfront**, where banana boats (speed boats) pull up on the east end of the beach, and their drivers wait for a fare or go fishing. These boats come and go from all over the province, the Duke of Yorks and New Ireland. The operators usually sleep through the mid-day heat under the big trees or gather in small groups, playing cards and string-band music on their salty ghetto blasters. The buzzing **Kokopo market** (Williams Rd; 🕒 closed Sun) is also well worth a stroll. It's best on Saturday. *Buai*

(betel nut) and its condiments, *daka* (mustard stick) and *cumbung* (mineral lime, which looks rather like cocaine in its little plastic wraps) account for half of the stalls, with produce, such as fruit, vegetables, smoked fish and crabs accounting for the remainder. At the rear, tobacco growers sell dried leaves; homemade cigars wrapped with sticky tape at the mouth-end sell for 30t each.

Fancy diving? **Rapopo Dive** (☎ 982 9901; www.rapopoplantationresort.com; Rapopo Plantation Resort) based at Rapopo Plantation Resort (p216) offers a range of day trips (one dive/two dives/open-water course K180/350/1000). Equipment rental is K175. It's an excellent centre that has professional staff. For information on diving in the area, see p58.

The beaches around Kokopo are nothing to write home about. If you're after that perfect beach or a good snorkelling spot, it's worth considering taking a day trip to the Duke of York Islands (p224).

## TOURS

Taklam Lodge (right) and Kokopo Beach Hotel (p216) conduct day tours (K400 for two people) of Rabaul that take in all the sights along the way including Mt Vulcan, the submarine base and tunnels, as well as harbour cruises.

Just outside Vunapope, **Niugini Helicopters** (☎ 982 9422; 15min flight K1200, maximum 5 people) offers helicopter flights over Mt Tavorvur and Mt Vulcan.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Warwagira Festival** (first two weeks of July) is a great occasion, in the last three days of which *dukduks* and *tumbuans* (masked forest spirits; *dukduks* are the taller ones) come out of the sea from canoes at dawn to dance. At night, Baining fire dancers perform, fire walking in huge masks, with a live snake. Call the ENB Tourist Bureau (p213) or one of the hotels to confirm the date and the exact location (it takes place either in Kokopo or in Rabaul).

## SLEEPING

**Seaview Beach Resort** (Mappp218-19; ☎ 982 8447; seaview\_bresort@global.net.pg; s K90, d K120-176; 🕒 📺 📶) Sea view? What sea view? You must have chewed a lot of betel nut if you can catch a glimpse of the sea from your room through the thick foliage. And the beach is only so-so. The real

plus is the rambling garden, frequented by humming birds, and there's lots of greenery. There's some solid value here, even if the place is out of the centre and the decorations may strike you as a little drab. Our tip: skip the meals (served upon request, K27), and enjoy a slap-up dinner at the atmospheric Rapopo Plantation Resort (p216) instead, about 500m to the east along the beach. On the road to the airport (take PMV 8). Free pick-up from the airport.

**Vavagil Guesthouse** (☎ 982 9417, 982 8883; vavagil@global.net.pg; s K94-121, d K105-165; 🕒 📺) This is what we scribbled on our notepad when we dropped by: 'pokey rooms, spongy beds, not much natural light, low ceilings, lino floors, well-scrubbed bathrooms, safe location'. It is a reliable choice for cash-conscious travellers. If you're a light sleeper, avoid the annex at Vavagil restaurant, which has five more rooms (same layout) that open onto the dining area and the bar (prepare for noise!). Free airport transfers.

**Taklam Lodge** (☎ 982 8870; www.taklam.com.pg; Williams Rd; s/d without bathroom K99/130, s with bathroom K145-195, d with bathroom K175-225, incl breakfast; 🕒 📺) This old faithful keeps going from strength to strength, with an ace location (but no views), affordable prices and efficient staff. It's a rambling place with an assortment of rooms that vary considerably in shapes and sizes, so check out a few before settling in (try to nab one at the back for quietness). Those ones upstairs are sunnier. Another plus is the excellent local information and tours. Rates include a meagre breakfast. Same management as Kokopo Beach Hotel (p216).

**Kokopo Village Resort** (☎ 982 9096; www.kokopoport.com.pg; Williams Rd; s K100-127, d K154; 🕒 📺) 'Tropical, convenient, fascinating', says the website. We'd go for 'functional, unmemorable, serviceable', despite brave attempts at introducing a few decorative touches, such as traditional masks in the reception area. It consists of a series of two-storey buildings that have red corrugated roofs, an onsite restaurant and a 'business centre'. The cheaper, boxy rooms beside the reception are best avoided; it's worth stretching the pennies for the much more appealing deluxe rooms.

**Queen Emma Lodge** (☎ 982 9206, 982 9465; queenemmalodge@daltron.com.pg; s K275-297, d K325-347; 🕒 📺) 'Overwater balcony, in the heart of Kokopo Town', says the leaflet. Truth is, most rooms face the bay, but a row of healthy coconut

trees limits the views, and it's 1km east of the centre. If you can forgive the misleading slogan, this is a reliable standby in an attractive property, and there are a range of tidy, sizeable rooms, a good restaurant and a bar. The wood-panelled Deluxe rooms are well worth the extra cost, especially rooms 20 to 22 and 26 to 28. A new wing with budget rooms was being built when we visited.

**our pick Kokopo Beach Hotel** (☎ 982 8788, 982 8789; kokopobeachbungalow@global.net.pg; r incl breakfast K330-365; 🍷 🍷) Being a little Island of subdued glamour, this well-run establishment is the closest thing Kokopo has to a boutique hotel. It's a short stagger from the rough and tumble of the centre (but it's so peaceful, you wouldn't know it). The generous-sized, sensitively furnished rooms in the new wing score high on creature comforts. The wood-carved bungalows scattered in the lush garden are equally attractive. All units are graced with sweet vistas over the bay and the beach (quiz: what colour is the sand?). There's an excellent outdoor bar-restaurant. Enjoy.

**Rapopo Plantation Resort** (Map pp218-19; ☎ 982 9944; www.rapopplantationresort.com; s/d K335/365; 🍷 🍷) Some might say that this place is going a bit overboard on the dark-wood panelling in the two pavilions (we're not in Finland), but the whole place exudes Zen tranquillity and rustic charm. It's right on the beach among fig and coconut trees and immaculate lawns. Expect trim, amply-sized rooms with all mod cons, with the added lure of sweeping views of the bay and Mt Tavorvur. The wood-carved posts on the terrace are a nice touch. Other perks include an onsite restaurant and a dive centre (see p215). It's a mellow and comfortable place to stay, but it's just a little too far from the action to call it perfect.

## EATING

And the nominees for the Oscar for the most flavoursome feeds are...

**Kokopo Market** (Williams Rd; 🍷 closed Sun) The place to head to if you want to stock up on fruit and vegetables, including big bunches of taro. You can buy meat (or plantain) and rice wrapped in a banana leaf for K1.50.

**Supa Bake** (Williams Rd; pastries 60t-K2.50; 🍷 6am-3.30pm Mon-Sat, to 9am Sun) Be sure to swing by this busy pastry shop, even if it's just to gawk at the display cabinet full of scones, cookies and buns. Let us know what the vividly-coloured 'rainbow cakes' taste like.

**Steak House** (☎ 982 9206; mains K15-40; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Carnivores, rejoice: this well-regarded eatery located at Queen Emma Lodge brims with deliciously prepared rump, eye fillet, T-Bone and sirloin steaks. If you've had your fill of animal proteins, pizzas are also available. Lunch is easier on the wallet (and on the stomach), when fish and chips, and sandwiches are on offer. The décor, enlivened with wooden floor and artefacts, creates a mildly exotic atmosphere that encourages a long, relaxed dinner.

**Chopsticks Restaurant** (☎ 982 8870; Williams Rd; mains K18-35; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place just defies logic. We still can't figure out why it has the same menu (and same prices) as the stylish Haus Win (same management). The décor is far more appealing at the Haus Win and transfers are free, so there's no point eating here. Please change the marketing director!

**Haus Win** (☎ 982 8870; mains K18-35; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Top marks for this oasis which is part of Kokopo Beach Hotel. High-quality Chinese and Western cooking, a good selection of Australian tipples and a switched-on ambience ensure plenty of regular customers among the expat community and local glitterati. There are many highlights, including a copious chow mein, prawn cutlets, Chinese omelette and a few vegetarian options. One downside: most desserts on the menu, including a tempting sago pudding, were not available the day we ate there – so frustrating. The dining area, designed with local materials, proffers lovely views over the bay.

**Kokopo Village Resort** (☎ 982 9096; Williams Rd; mains K20-45; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This restaurant is simple but offers breathtaking views of the golf course and the bay from the veranda. With inoffensive pictures showing Tavorvur volcano, blueish walls and chequered tablecloths, the dining room won't make it into the pages of *Gourmet Traveller* but the dinner menu showcases favourites such as filet mignon, lobster and grilled pork chops.

**Vavagil Restaurant** (☎ 982 9417; mains K20-45; 🍷 lunch & dinner) If you're after a cheap and filling meal, you could do a lot worse than tuck into Vavagil's sweet-and-sour pork or chicken fillet burger while gazing at the seductive coastal views from the breezy, thatched terrace. Big appetite? Hearty meat dishes are also available. On Friday, the lunch buffet (K30) is a steal. Put some wobble in your step with a chilled SP brew (K5).

**Rapopo Plantation Resort** (☎ 982 9944; mains K20-65; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The standard-bearer of Kokopo's resort restaurants remains a great venue for quality cooking with a dash of flair. The sheer novelty of finding good pasta (carbonara, bolognese, marinara) in PNG doesn't wear off fast. Lobster, mud crab, burgers, grills and daily specials round off the fun. The alluring terrace is ideal for alfresco dining.

Other worthwhile considerations:  
**Andersons Foodland** (Williams Rd; snacks K3-9; 🍷 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) This supermarket is on the pricey side, but well stocked, including a wide selection of Australian imports. It also houses a neat *kai* bar (takeaway food bar; mains K4-10) just past the entrance, which rustles up tasty toasted sandwiches and stews. Good ice creams too.

**Kadat Nite Club** (snacks K2-7; 🍷 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) This hole-in-the-wall tosses up stews, fish and chips, and gargantuan rice balls.

**Ralum Country Club** (barbecues K20; 🍷 7.30pm Wed & Fri) The Friday barbecue is a great social event in Kokopo.

**Supa Bake Kai Bar** (Williams Rd; mains K3-8; 🍷 6am-3.30pm Mon-Sat) Fill your grumbling tummy without battering the wallet in this buzzing joint. It has a wide array of chicken and beef dishes, as well as burgers and sandwiches.

## DRINKING

A thriving nightlife scene in Kokopo, oh no no! But after a stay on other islands, where nightlife is almost non-existent, the town could almost pass itself off as a city of bacchanalia, with a couple of acceptable 'hot spots'.

**Ralum Country Club** (🍷 noon-9pm Sat-Thu, to 2am Fri) Come here to soak up the atmosphere with a chilled beer in hand. The golf clubhouse has a bar, darts and snooker. If you want to enjoy a slice of Island life, don't miss the weekly Joker Draw on Friday evening. The veranda offers stupendous views of the golf course and the sea.

**Kadat Nite Club** (admission K10; 🍷 Thu-Sat) Night owls swoop on Kokopo's only real nightclub on weekends, with people dancing, or swaying, to a mix of reggae, sexy Island sounds and international hits. Male travellers, take note: ladies' night is on Thursday. It's certainly not glamorous, but a good spot to rub shoulders (and everything else) with locals.

If all you need is a cold beer and a chilled-out vibe, the bars at Queen Emma Lodge, Rapopo Plantation Resort, Kokopo Village Resort and Kokopo Beach Resort are worth investigating.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

The Kokopo-Rabaul area is serviced by Tokua airport, 10km east of Kokopo. Look out for the three murals of (from left to right) Tolai, Pomio and Baining dancers as you get off the plane. **Air Niugini** (Kokopo ☎ 982 9033; Tokua Airport ☎ 983 9325) has one to two daily flights to Port Moresby (K673, two hours) and flights to Hoskins (K330, 35 minutes, once daily). There are also flights to Kavieng (K335, 40 minutes, three weekly) and to Buka (K390, 45 minutes, four weekly).

Airlink used to fly to Kavieng via Lihir, and to Pomio and to Hoskins, but the airline was out of the picture at the time of writing. Check it out while you're there – another airline might have re-opened these routes.

### Boat

Banana boats tie up on the beach near the post office and can be hired for trips to New Ireland via the Duke of York Islands (K50, two hours). You can charter a banana boat just about anywhere (K100 plus petrol).

## GETTING AROUND

### Car

Daily 4WD hire (K240, plus K1.10 per kilometre) is costly. Add another K10 per hour for a driver (recommended). The following companies have offices at Tokua airport.

**Avis** (☎ 983 9331, 982 8179)

**Budget** (☎ 983 9391; fax 983 9392)

**Hertz** (☎ 982 9152, 983 9326; fax 982 9151)

**Travelcar** (☎ 982 9206, 983 9369; fax 982 9462)

### PMV

The main PMV stop is just across the main road from the market. PMV 9, signed 'Tokua' on the windscreen, runs to the airport (K1.20, infrequent). This bus tends to meet the larger Air Niugini flights. Guesthouses and hotels can provide transfers (K30).

PMV 1 runs along the coast road past the Karavia barge tunnel (K1.50), to Rabaul (K2.50). Take PMV 2 to Warangoi (K3). PMV 3 goes to Vunadidir (K2) and Toma (K3), offering the chance to see the inland of the Gazelle Peninsula and perhaps a glimpse of the Baining mountains. PMV 5 goes to Keravat (K4) and Kabaira Bay (K5). PMV 8 goes to Vunapope and Takubar (60t). For Bita Paka War Cemetery, take PMV 9 and ask the driver to drop you there (K1.50) The

return trip is a bit more tricky; you'll have to wait for the bus, or walk to the main coastal road. Start early.

### From Kokopo to Rabaul

A poignant site, **Bitu Paka War Cemetery** (☎ dawn-dusk) contains the graves of over 1000 Allied war dead, many of them Indian slaves. The gardens are lovely. It's 8km off the main airport road; the turn-off (signposted) is about 2km east of Rapopo Plantation Resort (p216).

The coast road goes past Raluana Point, around Karavia Bay before squeezing between Vulcan and the hills, and then around Simpson Harbour to Rabaul.

Starting from Kokopo, you'll first drive past **Blue Lagoon Lookout**, from where you can

enjoy wonderful views of Blanche Bay with Tauruvur volcano as a fantastic backdrop. Get your camera ready! About 500m to the west, you'll come across a rusty Japanese **Floating Crane**, which was bombed by the Allies.

Along this stretch of road are countless Japanese tunnels, including **Karavia Bay Tunnels**, which were used as a hospital, and nearby **Japanese Barge Tunnels** (signposted 'Japanese Tunnels, Chinese Cemetery'). These tunnels were built to hold the barges out of sight from the Allies. They were hauled to the water along rails by Indian slaves (now buried at Bika Paka cemetery) in order to load shipping cargo. The main tunnel contains five rusty barges, lined up nose to tail; bring a torch and K5

**kastom** (custom) price. You'll also find a small Chinese cemetery beside the Karavia Bay Tunnels.

The huge form of **Vulcan** rises from the roadside. The last eruption occurred in 1994. It is possible to climb up it (ask at Rabaul Hotel p221 for a guide).

The Burma (Vuruga) Rd leaves the Kokopo-Rabaul Rd and climbs to **Malmaluan Lookout** (at the Telikom tower). The views are OK, and there's an anti-aircraft gun and howitzer.

As the Burma Rd begins to dip towards the coast, it passes through the Rakunai site of **Peter ToRot's cemetery and memorial church**. Peter ToRot was a village priest who was killed by the Japanese in July 1945. His re-

mains were beatified by John Paul II in 1995. It's moving to see a multitude of families in pressed shirts, print dresses and bare feet walk many miles to Sunday church.

### Rabaul

Be prepared to fall on your knees in awe: almost the entire old town of Rabaul is buried in deep, black volcanic ash and looks like a movie set for an apocalyptic film or a Papuan version of Pompeii. Who's the bad boy responsible for this soul-stirring moonscape? Mt Tauruvur, which looms ominously to the east. On 19 September 1994 it erupted, spewing huge amounts of ash over Rabaul, and the Simpson Harbour and Karavia Bay area. It reduced the landscape to an alien prehistoric desert. It's still active; you can see it belch huge plumes of smoke into the sky.

Rabaul is not completely dead, though. There's now a bit of life that's evident a block or so inland along the whole road. East of here, Rabaul is still mostly abandoned, bar a few hotels that survived the Tauruvur eruption in 1994. Thanks to the deep water (and Kokopo's shallow water), Rabaul's port facilities keep the town alive.

It's definitely worth staying a few days in Rabaul to soak up the surreal atmosphere and let your imagination try to recreate the dramatic events that occurred here.

### INFORMATION

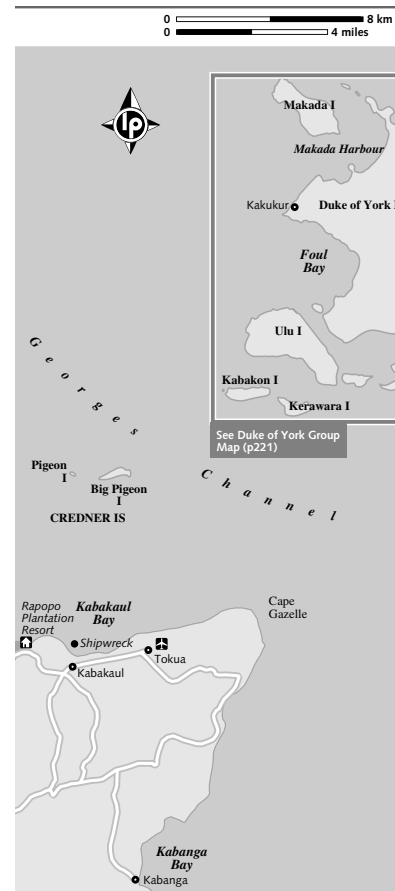
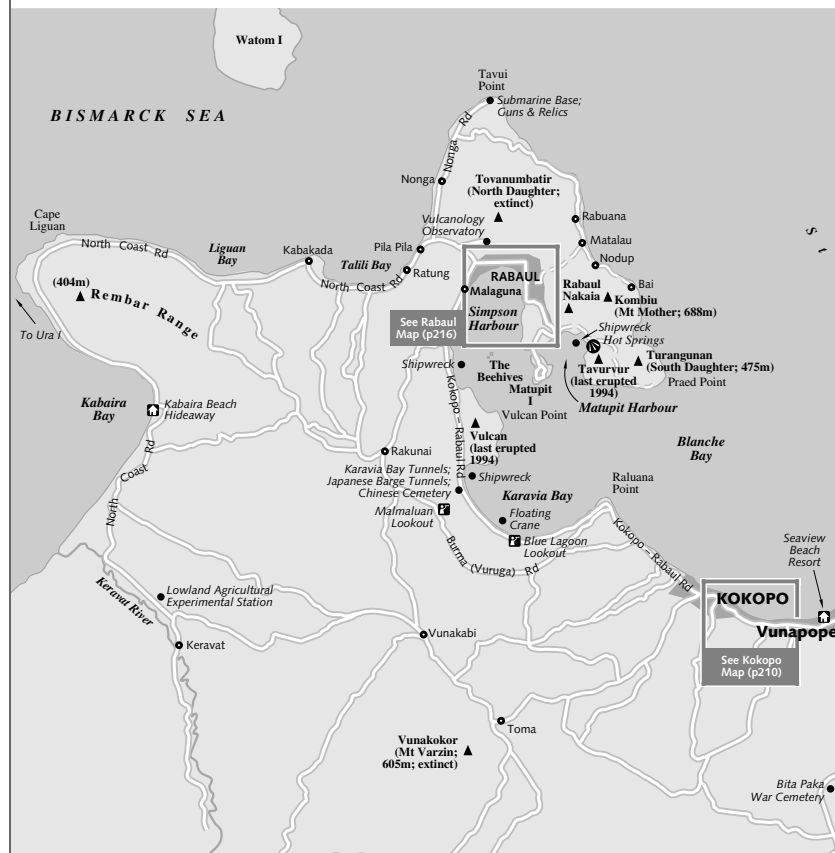
The **Bank South Pacific** (☎ 982 1744; ☎ 8.45am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri) changes cash and travellers cheques and can do cash advances on your credit card. The post office is in Top Kai supermarket. If you want to log on to the internet, ask at your hotel.

### SIGHTS

First things first: **Simpson Harbour** – once crusted with pumice – is still magnificent, and the anchored ships lie quietly in the still water. The Beehives, the tiny craggy islands in its middle, look striking from any angle.

There are tunnels and caverns in the hillsides around Rabaul. **Admiral Yamamoto's Bunker** (locked) is interesting though austere, and the placards near it are informative. There's a map on the ceiling for plotting world domination. Just next door is **New Guinea Club & Rabaul Museum** (admission K5). Established in 1933, this club was a businessmen's club with strict guidelines for membership. It was destroyed

## GAZELLE PENINSULA



in WWII and rebuilt in the 1950s to its former glory only to be destroyed again by fire in 1994. It has been partly restored and is now home to a small museum. Ask at the Rabaul Hotel (opposite) for the key.

Another worthwhile site is the **Vulcanology Observatory**, about 900m off Tunnel Hill Rd, from where you can enjoy million-dollar views from the bay and the volcanoes.

**Namanula Road** was the road that directly connected the northern coast to Rabaul, rising over the great caldera's rim. It runs east out of Rabaul off Mango Ave and used to meet the north coast road near Matalau. It's sometimes impassable now further up. The **Japanese Peace Memorial**, the main Japanese memorial in the Pacific, is dignified and testament to

the forgiveness of the local people. There's a smashing view from here.

### ACTIVITIES

It's almost too good to be true: Simpson Harbour offers several first-class **wreck dives**, while the reefs off the western tip of Gazelle Peninsula are totally unspoiled and positively festooned with healthy, hard and soft corals, sponges, gorgonians and a dizzying array of tropical fish: a perfect combination. See p58 for more information on diving.

Run by the capable Stephen Woolcott, **Kabaira Dive Rabaul** (☎ 983 9266; www.kabairadive.com.pg; 1/2 dives with tanks & weights A\$75/120, with full equipment A\$120/165) is based at Kabaira Beach Hideaway (p224), a few finstrokes from splen-

did reefs. The main drawback is the location; if you're based in Rabaul, you'll have to fork out A\$40 for transfers, or take a PMV (40 minutes). If you're a keen diver, it's best to base yourself at the Kabaira Beach Hideaway.

There's another professional dive centre, Rapopo Dive (see p215), in Kokopo.

Good **snorkelling** areas include Submarine Base, the Pigeons, the Beehives and Duke of York Islands. Taklam Lodge (p215) and Rabaul Hotel (right) can arrange snorkelling trips.

For land lubbers, there are various **hiking** options around Rabaul (p223).

### TOURS

Rabaul Hotel (right) offers great and affordable possibilities including local WWII heritage trips, hot-spring dips, village stays, river-rafting trips, canoe/walking trips to see the megapode colonies on Matupit Island (K20) and Indiana Jones-style multiday jungle treks across the Baining Mountains, through one of the most biodiverse forests on earth. The route follows the retreat of the Australians as they fled the Japanese.

Other reputable outfits:

**Kabaira Beach Hideaway** (☎ 983 9266; www.kabaira.com; Kabaira Bay) Offers fishing trips, bushwalking in the Baining Mountains, village visits and 'survival-type' camping trips on offshore islands.

**Paivu Tours** (☎ 982 1059; paivu@daltron.com.pg; Malaguna Rd)

**Rabaul Adventure & Historical Tours** (☎ 982 2206; rabauladventure@global.net.pg) Based at Travelodge (right).

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For details on the **Warwagira Festival**, see p215. Its location alternates between Kokopo and Rabaul.

### SLEEPING

This is ground zero; staying here rather than Kokopo gives you that 'I was there' feeling.

**Barike Lodge** (☎ 982 1034; Malaguna Rd; s without bathroom K60-80, d without bathroom K80-100; ☎) Head here if you're seriously strapped for cash and want to be right in the thick of things – it's a betel nut's throw from the market. Rooms are cramped, bedding is rudimentary and the shared bathrooms... well, suffice it to say, prepare to wear thongs (flip-flops). But it's tolerable and safe, and location is everything. There's a quirky bar at the back; the frescoed walls alone are worth a gander. Food service on request.

**our pick Rabaul Hotel** (☎ 982 1999; www.rabaulhotel.com.pg; Mango Ave; d K72-308; ☎ ☎ ☎) Hands-down, this is the best-value option on the Gazelle Peninsula. It's run by Australians Bruce and Susie, who have an eye on everything and ensure the place is kept shipshape. For starters, it has a wide array of prices, from very simple, boxy yet economical rooms to very comfy, large units with all the mod cons – take your pick. Other strong points include the wide array of tours on offer, quality meals at the onsite restaurant, a convivial bar and a buzzing disco. One minus: the pool, covered with ash, is a sad joke. A winner, and it accepts credit cards.

**Travelodge** (☎ 982 1002; rtravelodge@online.net.pg; Namanuh Rd; r K85-121; ☎) This motel-like venture has as much character as a newly paved footpath. The furnishings are somewhat dated and the rooms are plain but roomy (request a 'presidential'). Some have a mildewy smell; if you have a sharp nose, sniff out a few before deciding. Never mind, it's serviceable and at these prices, it would be churlish to complain.

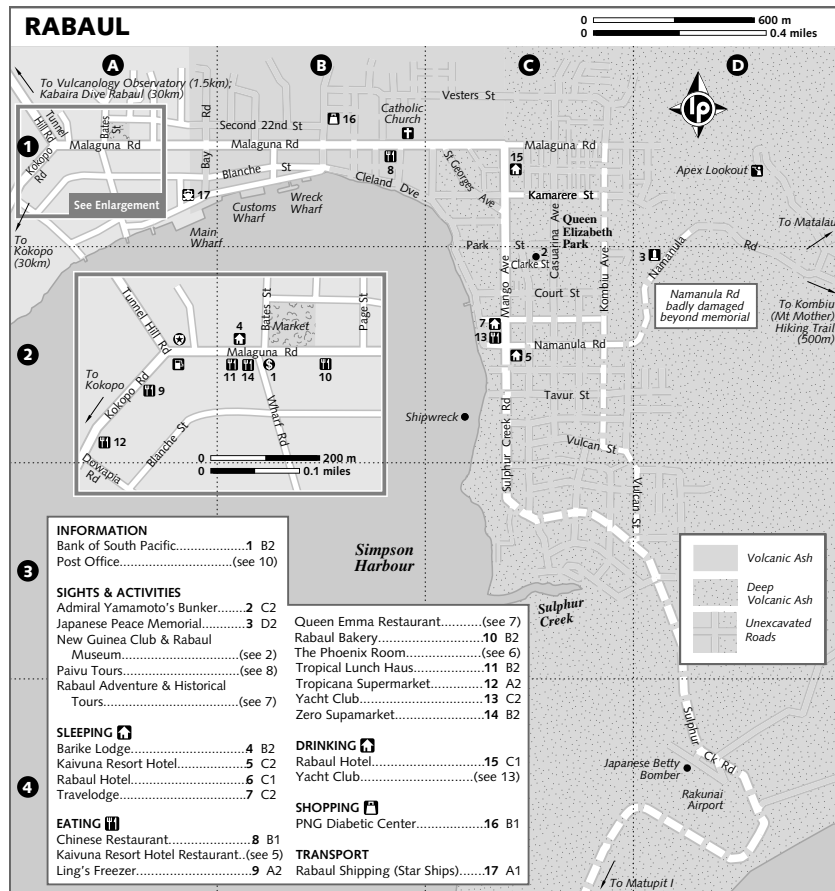
**Kaivuna Resort Hotel** (☎ 982 1860; kaivunahotel@global.net.pg; Mango Ave; r K110-310; ☎ ☎) A good second fiddle to the Rabaul Hotel (above), this squarish building is nothing flash, but it's calm, tidy and well managed. Rooms are ordinary but bright and well furnished. Funkadelic murals add a splash of gaiety in the corridors. Rooms 17, 18, 20, 21 and 22 have the best views. The *pièce de résistance*, though, is the well-tended swimming pool – the perfect salve after a long day sightseeing or walking. Other perks include a restaurant and a bar. Accepts credit cards.

### EATING

Rabaul doesn't exactly suffer from an embarrassment of riches when it comes to dining options, which are pretty much confined to hotel restaurants and a few *kai* bars. There are also several well-stocked supermarkets, open Monday to Saturday and some on Sunday morning. They include Tropicana Supermarket and Zero Supermarket.

**Yacht Club** (Mango Ave; mains K10-20; ☎) lunch & dinner Fri, lunch Sat & Sun) Has burgers, pork chops, chicken and beef dishes. Vast, airy surrounds.

**Chinese Restaurant** (☎ 982 2777; Malaguna Rd; mains K10-25; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Not really a place to lift your spirits. The building is depressing, the dining room is oppressing



## DEAD TOWN

Pre-1990s, Rabaul had a hustle and bustle, but it was a laid-back kind of place that was very friendly. It had the biggest market in the South Pacific, an orchid park, playgrounds and swimming pools.

There was a great music scene in Rabaul and PNG's thriving local music industry originated there. Rabaul's Pacific Gold Studios was the South Pacific's first recording studio. Now Rabaul is flattened – in 1994 it collapsed under the weight of 1m to 2m of Tavurur's volcanic load.

For several days after the eruption, there were severe earthquakes as Tavurur and Vulcan went at it, and Rabaul was evacuated. The dead of night would be broken by the sound of a building groaning as it eventually succumbed to the weight of ash on its roof.

However, the Rabaul Hotel is standing proof that most of the town could have been saved. Over several days, the staff made a joint effort to clear the flat roof of the piling ash. Rabaul was never swamped by lava, only by slowly piling ash that weighed as much as concrete. Rabaul might have been dusted off without being very damaged with a round-the-clock shovelling effort and a bit of protection from the hundreds of looters who paraded around with new clothes and stereos immediately after the blast.

Look a few degrees higher and you can see the rim of the old caldera with its five volcanoes, one still occasionally smoking, and remember where you are. Beneath the earth, under your feet, is the old town.

(think bare, peeling walls and neon lighting) and the Chinese specialities are just average, judging by the braised chicken. But it's the only independent restaurant in town.

**Phoenix Room** (☎ 982 1999; Rabaul Hotel, Mango Ave; mains K20-50; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) When it comes to Asian cooking, chef Solis knows his stuff. Chinese specialities are served with absolute proficiency – the fluffiest *foo yongs* (omelette) in PNG, guaranteed! The sweet-and-sour pork is another hot favourite. Western dishes, such as pork chops or beef stroganoff, also feature on the menu. There is a good choice of vegetarian options too; rare in PNG. If the service is longish, you can always gaze at some risqué oriental paintings on the walls or at the huge *tambu* (sacred) wheel hanging from the ceilings.

**Queen Emma Restaurant** (☎ 982 1002; Travelodge, Namanuh Rd; mains K25-29; ☺ lunch & dinner) Don't let the swinging '70s frilly curtains and neon lighting bring you down. This good honest restaurant serves good honest meals. If you need to assuage carnivorous cravings, try the well-presented and tasty black pepper steak.

**Kaivuna Resort Hotel restaurant** (☎ 982 1860; Mango Ave; mains K32-45; ☺ lunch & dinner) This serves up unambitious but tasty dishes. Chicken, fish and pork are just some of the menu items.

Other options:

**Ling's Freezer** (Kokopo Rd; mains K3-7; ☺ lunch Mon-Sat) This *kai* bar was recommended to us by locals in the know.

**Rabaul Bakery** (Malaguna Rd; ☺ 6am-6pm Mon-Sat)

The place to head to in case of hypoglycaemia, although you have to get your timing right (early morning) to find pastries.

**Tropical Lunch Haus** (Malaguna Rd; mains K3-7;

☺ lunch Mon-Sat) Another busy *kai* bar.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The bar at Rabaul Hotel (p221) is the most popular watering hole in town. A mixed crowd of locals, sailors, businesspeople, tourists and expats gather in this convivial rumpus room of a bar to play pool, or just lubricate their gullet with a beer. On weekends Rabaul Hotel's aptly named Dark Room is packed to the rafters with revellers who tear it up on the dance floor (K15). Also worth investigating is the **Yacht Club** (☺ 11am-10pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat). The Jag The Joker on Friday evening is very popular and can be fun – be generous if you hit the jackpot! And if you don't want to miss a game of your favourite Rugby League team, this is the place to go. During the week it's usually pretty tame. You can also slake your thirst at the bars at Travelodge and Kaivuna Resort Hotel.

## SHOPPING

The reception areas of the hotels and guesthouses sometimes sell *bilums* (string bags) and small carvings.

Laugh all your want, but **PNG Diabetic Centre** (☎ 982 1026; ☺ 8am-6pm) is a treasure trove for artefact-hunters, with masks, necklaces, shells, carvings and other souvenirs aplenty. It's run

by Paul Schwartz, who also works as a 'diabetes councillor', policeman and, should you need to boost your morale, a psychotherapist.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rabaul is serviced by Tokua airport (p217).

For information about banana-boat travel around New Britain and through the nearby islands, see p217.

**Rabaul Shipping** (Star Ships; Kokopo ☎ 982 9480, Rabaul 982 1070/9480; ☺ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) has passenger boats sailing from Rabaul to Lae (K220 to K300, two weekly) via Kimbe (K110 to K200). It sails to Buka (K130 to K250) on Wednesday and Kavieng (K100 to K180) on Tuesday. It also has infrequent services to Pomio in Jacquinot Bay. In Kokopo, the office is next door to Zoma Medical Clinic (p213).

## GETTING AROUND

Tokua airport is about 40km from the town. PMVs run out to Tokua and the better hotels and guesthouses can provide transfers for K30.

There aren't many PMVs on Sunday. PMV 1 goes from Rabaul to Kokopo (K2.50) and back. PMV 6 goes to the vulcanology observatory (inform the driver), submarine base and Nonga Hospital. PMV 5 goes to Rakunai (Peter ToRot's memorial church) and PMV 4 goes to Malmaluan Lookout.

## Around Rabaul

The easiest way to visit the sights around Rabaul if you're pressed for time is to take a day tour. Your hotel can arrange a vehicle and a guide.

## SIGHTS

The September 1994 eruptions should have destroyed little **Matupit Island** (Map pp218-19) but the prevailing winds brought Tavurur's load over Rabaul and left this island almost unscathed thanks, villagers say, to the local *dukduks*. The thousand-strong village community still chooses to reside right underneath the belching monster. You can hire a canoeist to get you around to see Tavurur's southern slopes (which have giant lava flows) from the water. It's like a peek at a newborn planet. The megapode-egg hunters are here, burrowing almost 2m into the black sand to retrieve the eggs. In the same area, there's quite a smattering of Japanese aircraft wreckage scattered among the palm trees and now

semi-buried in earth, including a **Japanese Betty Bomber** (Map p220) and a helicopter. They are close to the **Old Rakunai Airport** (Map p220). The airport was completely destroyed during the 1994 eruption. *Kastom* fee is K5. From there, you can easily reach the **hot springs** (Map pp218-19) – an impressive sight amid an eerie landscape that's reminiscent of the film *Mad Max*.

Can you see the two rocky pinnacles rising from the centre of Simpson Harbour? They are called the **Beehives** (Map pp218-19), or Dawapia Rocks, and are said to be the hard core of the original old volcano. You can visit them by boat and there is some good diving and swimming. When Captain Blanche first visited Rabaul in 1882 these islands were much larger; the bigger one had a village of 200 people. Taklam Lodge (p215) and Rabaul Hotel (p221) can organise harbour cruises that take in the Beehives.

For a picnic spot, nothing can beat the **Submarine Base** (Map pp218-19; admission K15) at Tavui Point. The Japanese used to provision submarines here during the war. There are tunnel and rail track remnants below and **guns and relics** (Map pp218-19) in the hills above, but it was a 'base' in so far as the Japanese pulled their submarines up to the vertical wall and then surfaced allowing soldiers to walk off over the reef. This site also makes for a wonderful snorkelling spot; the coral bed is flat and almost horizontal until it drops down a 75m vertical reef wall. As you swim over this drop, your heart races and it feels like you're leaping off a skyscraper. Bring your snorkelling gear! To get there, catch PMV 6 from the central PMV stop opposite Rabaul's new market on Malaguna Rd.

Between Rabaul and the Duke of York Group are the two **Pigeons** (Map pp218-19) or Credner islands. Small Pigeon is uninhabited. Either island would make a pleasant excursion for a picnic or snorkel.

## ACTIVITIES

For the energetic, **hiking** up the volcanoes can be fun and thrilling (though we don't recommend climbing the smouldering **Tavurur** as it *might* blow up on you); they're all tracked, but there's often a good chance of getting lost – your best bet is to take a guide from Rabaul Hotel (from K20). If you want a recommendation, go for the 688m **Kombiu** (Mt Mother; Map p220). You'll be up and down in 2½ hours



if you're reasonably fit. The views from the top are truly heart-stopping. Don't forget your camera. Another must-do is the **Rabaul Nakaia**, which features the shortest climb (about 30 minutes from the base of the volcano); beware once you've reached the narrow rim of the caldera – it's easy to feel dizzy and lose your balance. The slopes of **Vulcan** (Map pp218–19) are a bit trickier; they are scored with deep cracks from mud-ash drying and contracting, which can be 4m to 5m deep. They can be hard to spot now they're vegetated.

There are excellent **walking** routes around Rabaul, and you can spend hours just walking around the town overawed by its complete annihilation.

You can hike down to Matupit Island (p223) and back (although someone will probably offer you a lift) and the views from the vulcanology observatory (Map pp218–19) also make it a rewarding walk.

If you're fit you can climb Namanula Rd to meet the north coast road near Matalau. From here you can head north along the coast road, which rises over a pass and meets the Nonga–Submarine Base Rd. PMV 6 runs regularly to Nonga hospital and sometimes beyond. Or you could walk the whole loop over Tunnel Hill Rd and take in the vulcanology observatory along the way. This would take about a day.

Rabaul Hotel (p221) offers **white-water rafting** trips on the scenic Warangoi River amid spectacular jungle scenery – you'll feel teletransported to the Amazon. No need to be sporty – you'll paddle at approximately 5km/h on an inflatable, a canoe, a tyre tube or man-made bamboo rafts, and there are no graded rapids. A full-day trip will set you back K200.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Kabaira Beach Hideaway** (Map pp218–19; ☎ 983 9266; www.kabairadive.com.pg; Kabaira Bay; s with 3 meals A\$90; ☑) Entering the property, you feel you've stumbled onto the set of *Little House on the Prairie*. Run by an Australian man, Stephen, this quaint resort radiates a ramshackle air, and combines friendly informality and a splendid setting. The accommodation is on the beachfront in a simple, five-room house. The plain, shoebox-sized rooms could do with a little freshening up and the lack of private facilities might not be to everyone's taste, but you probably won't be inside much

anyway – there's excellent swimming and snorkelling on the house reef and fantastic diving a 10-minute boat ride from the guesthouse. Three stand-alone bungalows were in the process of being built at the time of writing. Food is fresh and tasty. There's an onsite dive centre (p220), and a host of activities can be arranged, including Robinson Crusoe-style picnics on nearby islands. Payment is by cash only. It's about 40 minutes from Rabaul on PMV 5.

### Jacquinot Bay

This ruggedly beautiful, little-developed region on the south coast of New Britain is the place to go if you want to lose yourself in virtually unexplored terrain. There are enormous caves and underwater lakes that are just crying out to be discovered. Should you manage to get to this remote area, you can park your grungy backpack at **Pisia Guesthouse** (☎ 982 9279 in Rabaul; Manginum; s incl 3 meals K35) or at **Koki Women's Guesthouse** (☎ 981 9366 in Rabaul; Palmalmal; s incl 3 meals K100).

You can get there by flying to Pomio from Hoskins (K330, 30 minutes). Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships; p223) may have services from Hoskins to Pomio.

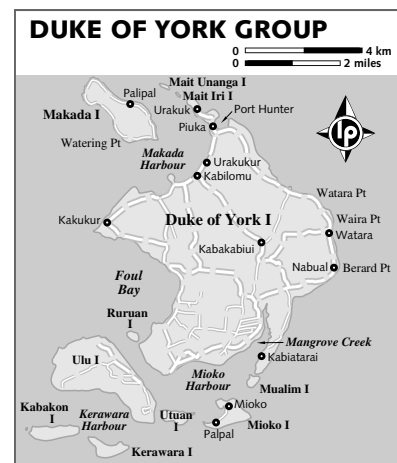
### Duke of York Group

This is the *tambu* (forbidden or sacred) cockpit between New Ireland and the Gazelle Peninsula Tolais, a place of secret men's business, *dukduks* and *tumbuans*.

These islands are beautiful and accessible, but they are little developed. There are no vehicles on any of the islands except Duke of York Island. **Mioko Island** is the best one to visit, with a smattering of sights, including good beaches, two open-pit **caves** on the Island's eastern flank and a coastwatcher's lookout cut into the cliff top nearby on the easternmost point.

For many years during the war, hundreds of people hid in these caves to avoid being press-ganged by the Japanese. Nearby, a tiny tunnel runs between the two cliff faces of the Island's eastern tip. You can crawl between (it's rough going) for two views of the open sea and sky, and the cruel cliff below you. If you want to snorkel, try the southern coast, but it's only good in calm conditions.

There is a rudimentary homestay on Mioko and a guesthouse on Ulu. Bring along some food.



### GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you're lucky, you'll share the fare with locals, but otherwise, a (very splashy) 50-minute trip to the Duke of York Islands from Rabaul costs K30, and the two-hour trip to the west coast of New Ireland costs K50. Only go on a calm day; there have been deaths in these waters when high seas have rolled banana boats.

Organised tours are the easiest and most convenient way of exploring the archipelago and, if you happen upon a nice group, make for a wonderful day. Check with Taklam Lodge (p215).

### WEST NEW BRITAIN PROVINCE

If you read this section, there's a great chance that you're a diver heading to Kimbe Bay. Kimbe Bay has become a byword for underwater action, with an amazing array of marine life and sensational reefs brushing the surface. However, there is life above the water as well, with some spectacular volcanoes brooding in the background and a handful of WWII relics. WNB has the country's greatest proliferation of volcanoes – five active and 16 dormant – and you can literally smell the sulphur in the air. It's also PNG's highest timber and palm-oil exporter with consequent tension between the province's villagers and settlers.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Air** Hoskins airport is well serviced by the first- and second-level airlines, but beyond here you

must either spend a lot of money flying to tiny airstrips or catch banana boats and trade boats along the coast and stay in villages.

From Port Moresby, **Air Niugini** (☎ 983 5287) flies to and from Hoskins (K518, once daily) and Kokopo (K373) and three to Lae (K436).

Airlink used to fly to Rabaul and Lae, but the airline was not operating at the time of writing. Check it out while you're there – another airline might have re-opened these routes.

### Boat

**Rabaul Shipping** (Star Ships; ☎ 983 5365) sails to Lae (K120 to K200, overnight, daily) and Rabaul (K110 to K200, twice weekly). Book at the wharf.

### GETTING AROUND

There are a few 4WD logging roads (in the dry season) leading towards the rugged and virtually unexplored mountains of the interior. Public transport is limited to PMVs between Hoskins and Kimbe (K7, 40 minutes).

### Hoskins

The picturesquely located 'major' airport of WNB is 40km east of Kimbe. There are a number of forested volcanoes surrounding town, including the active Mt Pago. Located a short distance inland, at Koimumu, there's an active geyser field.

### Kimbe

Kimbe is the provincial headquarters and a major centre for palm-oil production. Although it has a seafront, it's a fairly unassuming town with no real interest for travellers. But there's Kimbe Bay. Ah, Kimbe Bay. With its unique seamounts capped with coral towers reaching the surface, it has earned its celebrity status among divers and snorkellers around the world.

The marine biodiversity is stunning, with more than 350 types of hard coral and 860 species of fish vying for your attention. Drift along the reefs and enjoy the ultimate underwater drama.

### INFORMATION

The Bank South Pacific and Westpac banks are one block south (inland) of Kmart supermarket. Both are equipped with ATMs

(Visa and MasterCard). East of here is the post office and daily market.

### SLEEPING & EATING

If you intend to do a lot of diving, it makes more sense to base yourself at Walindi Plantation Resort (opposite) or Queen's Head (right). But if you have to be in Kimbe itself...

**Liamo Reef Resort** (☎ 983 4366; liamoresort@global.net.pg; s K165-400, d K300-400; 📶 📺 📺) Situated on the beach at the eastern end of town, this is a good deal if you're after some cossetting in a serene environment. Liamo offers a range of accommodation from functional, spick-and-span rooms in a concrete building to larger stand-alone bungalows. The most appealing feature is probably the verdant setting; the owner is a keen gardener, and it shows. Pity about the aviary, though – release those captive eagles! The beach is only average, but there's good swimming. The restaurant (mains K20 to K45, open breakfast, lunch and dinner) has garnered high praise for its Chinese specialities. Vehicle hire can be organised and credit cards are accepted. Liamo also has a fishing lodge in far-off Baia (opposite).

**Kimbe Bay Hotel** (☎ 983 5001; www.kimbabayhotel.com; r K195-240; 📶 📺 📺) Kimbe's most comfortable, central hotel is really nothing amazing, but it's fine for a snooze before an early boat. It's just opposite the container terminal, so forgo dreamy views. Rooms are commodious, well appointed and come equipped with satellite TV but score zero on our charm metre. Surprise: the restaurant (mains K16 to K30; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) serves up good Indian dishes (the owner is of Indian descent). Credit cards are accepted. Airport transfers are K35 (one-way).

**San Remo Club** (☎ 983 4600; mains K10-20; 🍷) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) We love this place – it feels so anachronistic. It's the most 'happening' spot in town, not far from Liam Reef Resort. Chat with old expats who are almost a fixture here, catch the breeze from the terrace, sip a cold beer while gazing on smouldering Mt Garbuna in the distance, or enjoy a well-prepared chicken schnitzel.

### SHOPPING

It's worth stopping at **Le Riche Colours** (☎ 983 4990, 983 4136; www.picturetrail.com/leriche; Kimbe) if you are after some original souvenirs. Artist Nathalie Le Riche has very colourful hand-painted T-shirts, tribal stickers,

gifts cards, placemats and other gifts that feature tribal portraits, market scenes and underwater compositions.

### Talasea, Kimbe Bay & the Willaumez Peninsula

As public transport is virtually non-existent, your best bet to visit Talasea and the Willaumez Peninsula is to arrange a tour through the Walindi Plantation Resort (opposite).

Talasea is an active volcanic region set in a dramatic landscape. Lake Dakataua, at the tip, was formed in a colossal eruption in 1884. It's definitely worth seeing two **WWII plane wrecks** that lie partially disintegrated in the jungle near Talasea. There's a Mitchell B-25 Bomber and a Lockheed Vega Ventura – an impressive sight.

If you need to relax, it's well worth dipping your toes in the **Garu Hot River**. Waters are comfortably warm and there's a mini-waterfall. Outdoorsy types might consider **trekking** up the active Mt Garbuna. The area also offers excellent **bird-watching** possibilities.

Everything you need to know about Kimbe Bay's marine environment and coral reef habitats should become clear at the **Mahonia Na Dari Conservation Centre** (☎ 983 4241; Kimbe Bay; www.mahonia.org; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), next door to the Walindi Plantation Resort. This marine research centre is open to the public.

Apart from the superb natural surroundings and rare birds, the main attraction here is the unsurpassable **diving** in Kimbe Bay. You might see anything from a tiny glass shrimp, to a pod of killer whales. The Walindi Plantation Resort has a very professional **dive centre** (☎ 983 5441; www.walindi.com). Expect to pay US\$70 for a single dive, US\$130 for two dives and US\$170 for three dives. See p59 for more information on diving.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Queen's Head** (☎ 983 4566; s incl breakfast K70) Is this the most bizarre lodging option in PNG? Peter Prior is British, and it shows. His mock-Tudor tavern ought to be in an English village, but has been enchanted onto a jungle-encroached beach. It's simple but clean, has four rooms and a share kitchen, and...horse brasses. See it to believe it. It appeals to backpackers and divers on a budget. It's 2km east of Walindi Plantation Resort. Call direct or contact Walindi Plantation Resort.

**Walindi Plantation Resort** (☎ 983 5441; www.walindi.com; s/d US\$140/214, s/d bungalow incl 3 meals US\$225/330; 📶 📺 📺) This well-established resort run by Max and Cecile Benjamin is highly recommended for divers because of its full-service onsite dive centre and great location, and its easy access to famous dive sites in Kimbe Bay. Things are very tasteful here, but almost unbelievably casual as well, reflected in the individual, beautifully attired, traditional-style bungalows hidden among the junglelike foliage. There are also four cheaper, more utilitarian rooms in a separate building. The service is of high standard and the food is copious, varied and excellent. The beach is only so-so, but there's an alluring pool. Evening entertainment is low-key, consisting mainly of a few beers at the delightful poolside bar, and an early night in preparation for the next day's diving activity. Bird watchers and honeymooners will also feel welcome here. Various tours in the area can be arranged.

### Around West New Britain Province

A *terra incognita* for travellers, the southwestern part of the Island is hard to reach. At the time of research, there was no regular public transport available beyond Hoskins. Airlink used to service Kandrian but had gone bust at the time of writing. Another airline might have stepped in by the time you read this – check it out while in PNG. Also check with Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships; p223).

**Mt Langila**, on Cape Gloucester at the southwestern end of the Island, is still active and hiccups and rumbles every few months.

**Sportfishing** enthusiasts should make a beeline for **Baia Sportfishing Lodge** (☎ 983 5567; www.baiafishingpng.com; 6-night package per person from A\$3542), a reputable, high-standard fishing lodge in remote Baia that attracts Ernest Hemingway fans. It's run by Liamo Reef Resort (opposite) in Kimbe. The numerous river systems are home to the infamous black bass and spot tail bass, and the neighbouring coral reefs are a playpen for reef and pelagic species, including tuna, wahoo, giant trevally, marlin and sailfish among the prime catches. There's a minimum stay of four nights. Prices include fishing gear, boat and guide, as well as transfers to Hoskins airport (about 4½ hours by boat).

## NEW IRELAND PROVINCE

Forget the 21st century in New Ireland. It really isn't important whether your friends believe that you re-enacted your Swiss Family Robinson fantasies on a remote island, discussed the fine art of carving with a master carver, acquainted yourself with the intriguing traditions of Malagan, stayed in a traditional guesthouse amid a landscape that belongs to the dinosaur age, and witnessed a shark-calling ceremony. It's just important that you savour the uplifting experiences.

Few other places in PNG can boast such an interesting and accessible pick 'n' mix of nature, culture and landscapes. Sure, New Ireland doesn't offer the thrill of puffing volcanoes (in this respect, New Britain steals the show), but it boasts broad white-sand beaches and rivers of clear water tumbling down from the thickly forested central Schleinitz Range and a clutch of secluded islands off the 'mainland'.

For fans of traditional cultures, New Ireland is an unmissable destination. In the rugged south is the spiritual home of Tumbuan culture. The north is home to Malagan, while Kabai culture dominates in the central areas.

And there's the wonderfully down-to-earth, unfussy atmosphere. New Ireland is far less developed than New Britain. Once you cross St Georges Channel, which separates the islands, you'll notice the laid-back vibe, the more sedate pace of life and a greater emphasis on the old ways. Outside Kavieng and Namatanai, the only towns of consequence, there are coastal communities on each side of the Island but no real settlements bigger than a trade store or two.

The good thing is that you can mix slow-paced sun-and-sand holidays with action-packed experiences. For outdoorsy types, the pursuit of choice is scuba diving, on an equal footing with surfing. Kayaking, sport fishing, snorkelling and even cycling (yes!) are available.

### History

The remains of rock shelters found near Namatanai suggest that New Ireland was inhabited 30,000 years ago. Missionaries began arriving in 1875 along with blackbirders who forcibly removed many New Irelanders to

work on the plantations and cane fields of Queensland (Australia) and Fiji.

A villainous crew, blackbirders often posed as missionaries to coax men aboard, killing them offhand if they revolted. One slaver even impersonated the bishop of Melanesia; the real incumbent, believed to be an imposter, was later killed in vengeance! Meanwhile, the shortage of males devastated village life in places.

Cannibalism and head-hunting were rife. Even a death from disease was often attributed, from certain 'signs', as the fault of another tribe which might be mercilessly attacked in revenge. In some communities, relatives smeared themselves with the blood of their deceased loved ones as part of the funeral rites.

During the German reign, large copra plantations made New Ireland one of the most profitable parts of the colony. The tyrannical Baron Boluminski became district officer of Kavieng in 1910 and built the highway that bears his name by forcing each village along the coast to construct and maintain a section. He made villagers push his carriage over any deteriorated sections.

New Ireland fell to the Japanese in 1942 and Kavieng was developed into a major Japanese military base. Most of the Australians in Kavieng managed to escape, but some chose to stay behind as coastwatchers (spies).

The Allies made no attempt to retake New Ireland but rather bombed it into oblivion. The Japanese surrendered in Namatanai on 19 September 1945.

## Geography & Climate

New Ireland is mountainous and riddled with huge, flooded caves. Midway down the Island, the Lelet Plateau rises to 1481m and further south, near Taron, the Hans Meyer Range reaches 2399m. A faultline provides passage for the Weitin and Kamdaru rivers.

The area between Namatanai and Kavieng receives about 3m of annual rainfall and has a dry season between May and November. December to March is the cyclone season and can bring high seas.

## Culture

The people of New Ireland are Melanesian and speak 19 local languages. The north embodies the complex system of spiritual traditions of Malagan cultures. 'Malangan' also refers to the northern New Irelanders' carvings (see boxed text, below).

In the Island's south are the Tumbuan traditions. The people from the south invaded the Gazelle Peninsula and settled the Duke of York Group several hundred years ago. *Dukduks* and *tumbuans* are common to all three cultures. Around Namatanai and central New Ireland are the Kabai traditions, which are not yet as well understood.

As in most PNG islands, traditional clan power is wielded by chiefs or *big-men* (important men or leaders), but clan rites and land claims are passed on in a matrilineal system.

### MALAGAN DEATH RITES

For centuries, it has been *kastom* for the Malagan to carve wooden masks and sacred figures for their mortuary rites. There are a few dedicated regular carvers on Tabar Island and Libba village near Konos; otherwise, carvings are done only by secret men's societies for mortuary ceremonies or rites of passage in the villages.

Different clans have different funerary traditions, including interment, cremation and burial at sea. The *tatanu* or *tanuatu* (soul) remains close to the body after death and it cannot go to the ancestors' world until the mortuary rites are performed. The spirit of a dead person enters the ancestors' world through the places that *masalais* (spirits of the bush and water) inhabit.

Feasts are often performed for more than one person as they are terribly expensive. Those deceased long ago can be included in the rite, which includes chanting, masked dancing, clouds of lime and a huge feast.

Masks may depict the totem animal of a specific tribe in stages of metamorphosis. Such was the fearful power of the mask that, in the past, they were burned after the ceremony. Designs are strictly 'patented' according to clan rites, and a complex ritual payment must be made to pass a design on to another carver. The problem is, there are simply not enough young apprentices.

## Getting Around

There are about six cross-Island routes, but most of them are in a very bad shape for lack of proper maintenance. The most useful ones for travellers are the Namatanai (east coast) to Rasirik (for Uluputur) on the west coast, as well as the Fangalawa (east coast) to Lamusweg (west coast, for Tembin and Kontu) leg.

## KAVIENG

Being the capital of New Ireland, Kavieng is the only town of any size in the province, but we're hardly talking Shanghai – the tallest construction is the telecommunication tower, and the busiest shops operate very much on Melanesian time. If you proceed from Rabaul or Kokopo, you'll find it remarkably low-key and quiet, with virtually no cars in the streets. The seaside ambience, with its fisheries and tranquil wharf, and the bustling market in the shade of huge trees, create a dash of real life.

Kavieng itself won't fulfil all your fantasies of a tropical paradise, but it's optimally situated as a springboard to neighbouring islands, including Nusa Lik Island and Lavongai (New Hanover), and for explorations of the mystifying east and west coasts. There's good snorkelling and kayaking offshore and there's plenty of great diving in the area – not to mention excellent surf-breaks that issue a siren's call to surfers.

## Orientation

The town is spread out. Coronation Rd connects the airport road (Stanfield St) and the Boluminski Hwy with the waterfront. Just across from the beach are Nusa and Nusa Lik islands.

## Information

Kavieng is the only place on the Island where you can change money – stash cash if you plan to explore the east or west coasts.

**Bank South Pacific** (☎ 984 2066; Coronation Rd; ☎ 8.45am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8.45am-4pm Fri) Changes cash and travellers cheques, and offers Visa cash advances.

**Bisi Electrical & Stationary** (Lavogai St; per hr K30; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Internet café. One computer only; slow connections.

**KPE Stationary** (per hr K48; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Internet café. One computer only; slow connections.

**New Ireland Tourism Bureau** (☎ 984 2441; www.newirelandtourism.org.pg; Tanga St; ☎ 7.45am-4pm)

Has erratic opening hours. Can arrange bookings for village stays by radio (or any other means).

**Police** (☎ 984 2044, 984 2054)

**Post office** (Coronation Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat)

**Telikom** (Coronation Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri) Sells phonecards and mobile prepaid cards. Card-operated phones outside (removed after hours).

**Visitors Information Centre** (airport) A small counter at the airport. Well-informed staff. It's open to meet arriving flights.

**Westpac** (☎ 984 2030; Coronation Rd; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri) Changes cash and travellers cheques, and can do cash advances on your credit card (MasterCard or Visa).

## Sights

Pickings for sightseers are quite slim in Kavieng.

The **golf course** is a pleasant spot for a stroll, while the northern end of **Nusa Pde** provides the setting for a lovely waterfront walk; the huge fig trees almost meet overhead. If you keep heading north of the Malagan Beach Resort, you will reach the intimate surrounds of **Patailu village**.

The southern section of Nusa Parade continues past the **market** and further along on the left are the **provincial government buildings**, built on the site of Baron Boluminski's residence.

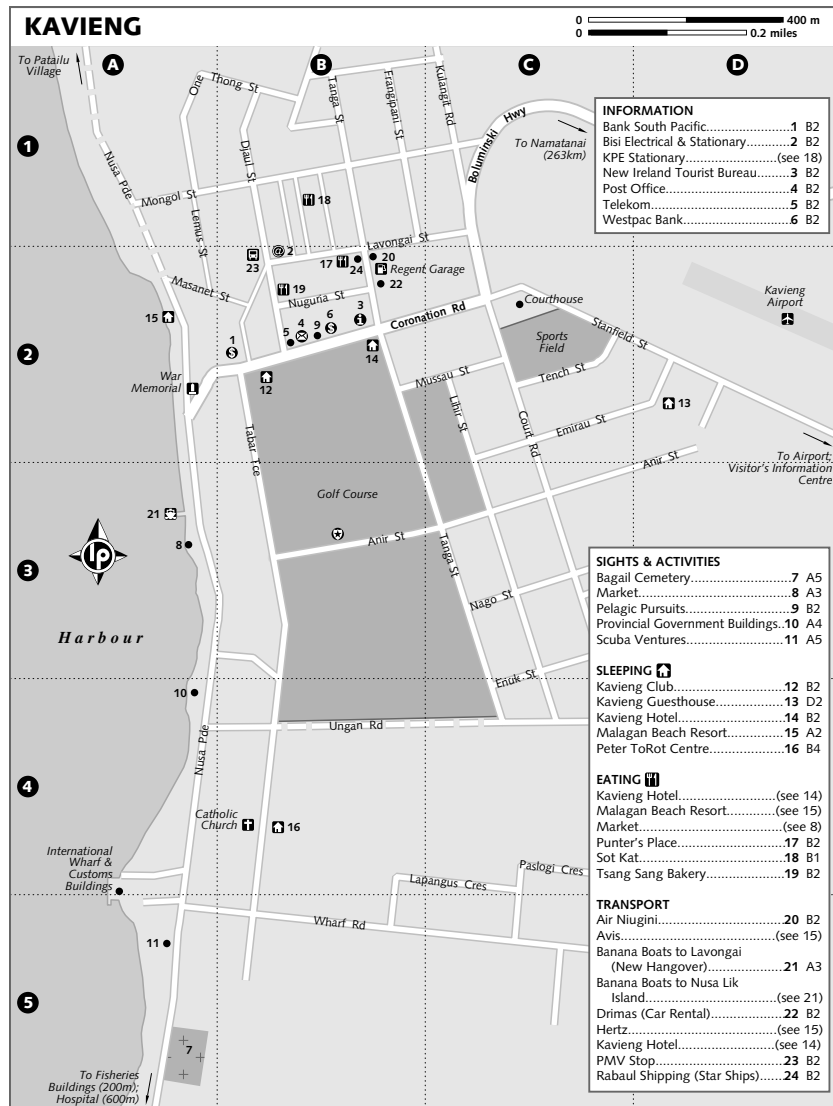
The closest thing Kavieng has to a regular 'sight' is the **Bagail Cemetery**, where Boluminski was buried. The tough guy's grave is right before you as you enter the cemetery.

Kavieng has a large and beautiful **harbour**. You can go down to the waterfront and catch a banana boat out to one of the many islands. **New Sulaman** makes for a good picnic and snorkel. You can negotiate a 'drop me off, pick me up later' trip. The cost is about K30 each way for the whole boat.

## Activities

Good news for the skittish: Kavieng is rife with outdoor activities.

Calling all surfers! Kavieng has an up-and-coming **surf scene** (luckily it's still a fairly secret surfing Nirvana), with a good range of reef-breaks, both lefts and rights, that are easily accessible. They vary in difficulty, depending on the size and direction of the swell. From November to late April, swells of up to 2.4m are not unheard of. What makes surfing here so unique is the lack of crowds – utter bliss if you come from, say, Bali. Even



if it's growing in popularity, the **Kavieng Surf Club** ([kaviengsurfclub@global.net.pg](mailto:kaviengsurfclub@global.net.pg)) ensures that the number of surfers is kept at a sustainable level thanks to a surf quota system (see opposite). Among the most thrilling spots are Pikinini, Karanas, Nago Island, Edmago Island, Long Longs and Rai Island. For more information, contact the guys at Nusa Island Retreat (they

are surf specialists and can arrange surf packages) and the Kavieng Surf Club. Operated by a dynamic couple, **Adventure in Paradise Yacht Charters** (☎ 984 1301; [www.adventureinparadise.com.pg](http://www.adventureinparadise.com.pg); Nusa Lik Island), next door to Nusa Island Retreat, offers 'surfaris' in the area.

No less impressive is **diving**, with a wide array of high-voltage sites. Expect drift dives

in action-packed passages and thriving reefs. **Lissenung Island Resort** (☎ 984 2526; [www.lissenung.com](http://www.lissenung.com); 1 boat/2-tank dive A\$55/100, equipment hire A\$20; Lissenung Island) has a full-service dive shop. Free pick-ups can be arranged from Kavieng. Dorian and Cara run **Scuba Ventures** (☎ 984 1244; [www.scubakavieng.com](http://www.scubakavieng.com); Nusa Pde), an excellent dive shop on the waterfront. A single boat dive will set you back A\$65 (A\$125 for a two-tank dive). An open-water certification costs A\$660. For more information on diving, see p59.

Kavieng has terrific **sportfishing**. Now is your chance to tackle marlin, tuna, trevally, jack and sailfish. Run by Peter McEwan, **Pelagic Pursuits** (☎ 984 2349; [pmcewan@global.net.pg](mailto:pmcewan@global.net.pg); Coronation Rd), located inside the Zen 48 store in Kavieng, offers charter fishing trips. The best area extends off the northern tip of Lavongai (New Hanover). Price starts at K2500 per day for four anglers.

Another good way to reach secluded, idyllic spots off Kavieng is by **sailing**. Adventure in Paradise Yacht Charters (opposite) can take you on anything from a half-day

sail to a week-long charter trip around Lavongai archipelago.

Other sporting opportunities include **canoeing** and **kayaking**. You can hire a canoe from Nusa Island Retreat (p232) and paddle around Nusa Lik Island. Tailored guided kayaking trips in the Lavongai (New Hanover) area are also available.

For cycling trips, see p236.

## Tours

Nusa Island Retreat (p232) and Adventure in Paradise – Yacht Charters (see opposite) have a variety of tours, including snorkelling and surfing trips, and can arrange land tours. **Imajica** ([www.theimajicaexperience.com](http://www.theimajicaexperience.com)) offers high standard, week-long cruises off New Ireland aboard a splendid 25m schooner, as well as surfaris and diving trips.

## Festivals & Events

The week-long **Malagan festival** is usually held in July or September and includes dances and feasting. Contact the Visitors Information Centre in Kavieng (p229) for details.

## VOICES: KEITH JAMES, SURFER

Keith, an Australian in his 50s, is married to a Papua New Guinean woman, and has been living in New Ireland since 1980. A member of the Kavieng Surf Club, and a surfer himself, John fervently promotes Kavieng's surfing potential and the advantages of the Surf Management Plan.

**What's special about surfing in the Kavieng area?** Our waves are not world-class by international surfing standards, but we have what other countries, such as Indonesia or Fiji, don't have any more: uncrowded waves. It's an absolute treat for surfers to ride an almost virgin wave, without the pressure of other surf boats, and surfers can get this buzz here. We just want to keep that. This is why we introduced a Surf Management Plan in 2004.

**What's the principle of the Surf Management Plan?** It's a quota system. The maximum number of visiting surfers allowed to surf within the Kavieng Surf Management Area on any given day is set at 20. Each individual surfer has to ensure that he or she is booked into the quota prior to arrival in New Ireland by contacting the Kavieng Surf Club or any surf operator. There's a daily fee of A\$10. Thus we can guarantee uncrowded waves to visiting surfers. It's very well received by the surfing community.

**What's the impact on local communities?** We have established excellent relations with all the communities involved. Part of the fees paid by surfers go to traditional landowners, who own the surfing-break areas. This ensures that there's no local harassment. It's vital that local people get a cut of the pie and get a tangible benefit. We're planning to extend the system to New Ireland's east coast and Lavongai (New Hanover), and we run an education program with villagers and guesthouse owners who live near the surfing spots. It's an integrated approach and a trade-off. By improving their standards, guesthouse owners will get more surfers, who in turn will be able to catch a glimpse of local life. For female surfers, this also means opportunities to interact with local women in the villages. It's a win-win situation.

## Sleeping IN KAVIENG

**Peter ToRot Centre** (☎ 984 2684; Tabar Terrace; dm K20, d without bathroom K80) Though part of the church compound, this rather depressing abode resembling a warehouse is no epiphany for travellers. The long corridor of windowless rooms will make you feel like an extra in a prison drama, and you'd have to be somewhat masochistic to spend more than one night in the cell-like four-bed dorms. Try to nab one of the four doubles, which are more attractive and get more natural light.

**Kavieng Club** (☎ 984 2224; kaviengclub@global.net.pg; Coronation Rd; s K77-154, d K88-198; ♿) A reliable budget stalwart, right in the centre. The rooms, some fan-cooled, some with air-con, fit the bill, even if the plumbing in the bathrooms leaves something to be desired. Wood floors and an oddly mismatched colour scheme (bathrooms painted in blue, yellowish walls and apple green furniture) in some rooms add a touch of quirkiness. Room 1 is the best. There's a bar and a garden area, snooker tables and TV lounge area.

**Kavieng Hotel** (☎ 984 2199; kavienghotel@daltron.com.pg; Coronation Rd; s K90-365, d K105-400; ♿) This longstanding favourite also has a split personality. The very mundane, fan-cooled budget rooms could use some TLC and the shared bathrooms could do with an Air-Wick session while the Deluxe and Standard rooms that occupy the rear building are much more comfortable – good beds, private bathrooms, air-con. There's an onsite restaurant and bar.

**Kavieng Guesthouse** (☎/fax 984 1165; Emirau St; s/d incl breakfast K128/178; ♿) This family-run B&B in a peaceful neighbourhood gets good marks for cleanliness and offers seven unpretentious but cosy rooms, some with private bathrooms. Shame that some beds are so saggy. Meals are available on request (from K40). Good value if you can handle a sore back.

**Malagan Beach Resort** (☎ 984 2344; www.malaganresort.com; Nusa Pde; s/d K360/410; ♿) The Australian-run Malagan has a bit of an identity problem; it bills itself as a tourist resort but it mostly attracts businesspeople, government officials, visiting workers and expats. The functional two-storey, barracks-style building features 16 serviceable units facing the sea. They come equipped with the requisite mod cons, including air-con and satellite TV, but feel a bit sombre due to dark-wood furniture. The grounds include a shady strip

of beach (nothing outstanding) overlooking Nusa Island as well as a nice little pool and a restaurant.

## AROUND KAVIENG

**Nusa Island Retreat** (☎ 984 2247; www.nusaislandretreat.com.pg; Nusa Lik Island; s A\$110-140, d A\$120-155, daily meals per person A\$50) This tropical haven has a heavy focus on surfers (owner Sean is a dedicated surfer himself and a mine of information), but families, couples and those who just want to flake out in a serene setting are all welcome. It's as relaxed as its sand-floor bar-restaurant suggests, and has lots of thoroughly unpretentious charm. Its traditional-style beachfront bungalows, some over water, are well maintained. There's lots of cheeky birds too. There's a good restaurant and the staff arranges a host of activities including surfing (the core activity), kayaking, cycling, snorkelling and diving. There are surf-breaks close by. During the surfing season (November to April), there's shared accommodation (A\$65 per person). It's on Nusa Lik Island, just 200m across from the international wharf. Transfers are easily arranged to Kavieng. Recommended.

**Lissenung Island Resort** (☎ 984 2526; www.lissenung.com; Lissenung Island; s with 3 meals A\$120-160, d with 3 meals A\$210-250) After the hardships of travelling New Ireland's west coast, you might want to rejuvenate mind and body in this stress-melting resort. The ethos here is one of pampering and relaxation. And diving (see p231). It's a winning combination. There's excellent swimming too; the Island is partially ringed by a ribbon of white sand lapped by topaz waters. Snorkelling opportunities abound on the nearby reefs. Food here is a definite plus; there are refined dishes on offer, including vegetarian options. Accommodation-wise, there are only seven traditional-style bungalows, which ensures intimacy. Four of them have private bathrooms. Although they're not the height of luxury, they are fan-cooled, spacious, well spaced from each other and comfortable.

## Eating IN KAVIENG

**Tsang Sang Bakery** (Djaul St; ☎ 6.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) The only bakery in town has fresh bread and sweet cakes available from about 7am. There's not much left after 3pm. It's pretty basic and super cheap.

**Punter's Palace** (Lavongai St; mains K3-6; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) A very friendly *kai* bar which is packed with locals at lunchtime. Dig into budget savouries such as stews, fried fish or chicken and chips, and you'll leave patting your tummy contently. The food is fresh and hygienically prepared. Copious pizzas are also available (K30) but you'll have to order them a couple of hours in advance.

**Sot Kat** (mains K3-7; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) Another buzzing *kai* bar that is off the radar for most visitors but comes recommended by savvy locals. It's a good-value stomach filler for those in need of some honestly prepared stews, and fish and chips at puny prices. Good roast chicken, too.

**Kavieng Hotel** (☎ 984 2199; kavienghotel@daltron.com.pg; Coronation Rd; mains K30-40; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This is a fixture among travellers, well-heeled locals and expats and so it is a good place to meet them. The dining area is nothing glam but the eclectic menu, such as burgers, steaks, omelettes, pork and lamb chops, should please most palates. For a splurge, dive face first into its memorable Friday-night seafood buffet with crab, oysters, chicken, lobster, fish and vegetables (K55); you'll walk out belly first. Words of wisdom: come at 6.30pm sharp.

**Malagan Beach Resort** (☎ 984 2344; Nusa Pde; mains K30-50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This has the most pleasant setting, with a breezy terrace facing the sea. Food-wise, there's a little of everything for everyone, from satisfying breakfasts to burgers, and meat dishes and seafood. Make a beeline for the Sunday night barbecue (K40) and Saturday lunch pizzas.

The bustling **market** (Nusa Pde; ☎ Mon-Sat) has a good range of fresh fruit and vegetables including the giant, yellow hand grenade-like pandanus fruit. You'll also find several well-stocked supermarkets in town.

## AROUND KAVIENG

**Nusa Island Retreat** (☎ 984 2247; Nusa Lik Island; mains K15-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Gourmand non-guests are welcome at Nusa Island Retreat (call ahead to arrange transfers). Indeed, it would be a shame to miss out on their dinner buffet (K50; by reservation). Or you could tuck into a copious burger at lunchtime and take a dip once you've digested your meal. This is the life! The toes-in-the-sand dining area is adorable.

## Drinking

Kavieng's nightlife is not exactly thrilling, although there are a few options. Not to worry, after a few SP beers, all of it will seem amazingly exciting.

**Nusa Island Retreat** (☎ 984 2247; Nusa Lik Island) The bar here is a cool place. Sean, the ebullient owner, prides himself on his very well-stocked bar that has plenty of Australian tipples, spirits and about 30 devilish cocktails (K10 to K45). Boost your libido with the 'Orgasm' mixture (we don't guarantee the effects), while listening to mellow tunes. Free transfers from the Malagan Beach Resort – just call ahead.

The bar at Kavieng Club (opposite is a bit rowdy). The bars at Kavieng Hotel (opposite) and Malagan Beach Resort (opposite) are more sedate.

## Shopping

There are Malagan artefact collections at the Kavieng Hotel (opposite) and Malagan Beach Resort (opposite). However, items are cheaper from the carver in Libba village (p236).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

If travelling to either Kokopo or Rabaul, **Air Niugini** (☎ 984 2135; Lavongai St; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) has flights to Tokua airport (K335, 35 minutes, three weekly), where you can also connect to Hoskins (K373) and Port Moresby. It also offers flights to Manus (K410, twice weekly).

Airlink used to fly to Tokua but had gone bust at the time of writing. Another airline might have stepped in by the time you read this – check it out while in PNG.

### BOAT

Banana boats and work boats run to the nearby islands. There are about two boats each week to Lavongai Island (passenger K40 to K50).

**Rabaul Shipping** (Star Ships; ☎ 984 2755; Tanga St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) sails to Rabaul usually on Thursday or Friday (K120, from nine to 15 hours, once weekly) and travels onto Kimbe (K220).

### CAR & PMV

There are PMVs leaving Kavieng for Namatanai (K50, six to seven hours, six weekly) every day except Sunday. There are also passenger trucks and PMVs which

head some or all the way to Namatanai, or elsewhere, every day but Sunday. Services to the west coast, including Kontu and Tembin (K30), are irregular. Ask around in town.

There are a few car-hire companies in town. You'll definitely need a 4WD if you plan to go as far as Namatanai and beyond. Count on K250 per day plus K1.10 per kilometre. If you're going to the west coast, it's not a bad idea to hire a driver (about K10 per hour of driving).

**Avis** (☎ 984 1190; Malagan Beach Resort) See p232.

**Drimas** (☎ 984 1792; Tanga St)

**Hertz** (☎ 984 2374; Malagan Beach Resort) See p232.

**Kavieng Hotel** (☎ 984 2199; kavienghotel@daltron.com.pg; Coronation Rd) Also rents 4WDs.

### Getting Around

PMVs around town cost 50t. The airport is very close to town; most places to stay offer free transfers.

## LAVONGAI (NEW HANOVER) & EAST ISLANDS

Is this the province's best-kept secret? Hop on a banana boat in Kavieng and check it out yourself. Volcanic, ruggedly beautiful Lavongai Island, as well as the string of islands that lie scattered to the east, are the kind of places that seem to emit a magnetic force. If you're searching for paradise in its raw form, void of luxurious trappings (not a TV or a radio in sight), then look no further than this fascinating archipelago. Lavongai is a truly wild island, complete with dense rainforest, mountains, waterfalls and rivers. With just a handful of modest, homespun guesthouses, tourism in Lavongai and East Islands remains on a refreshingly humble scale.

Such potential couldn't remain ignored forever, though. Some investors hope to make this archipelago one of the shining stars in the province's tourism firmament. There were plans to build a few resorts on Lavongai and East Islands when we visited. The time to go is now, before this haven of serenity is let out of the bag.

### Sleeping & Eating

There is no formal accommodation on Lavongai. The following guesthouses are on East Islands, from where you can easily access Lavongai by dinghy. There's no phone, no electricity (except the odd generator, if you're lucky) and no shops (but you wanted

a Robinson Crusoe experience, right?). Bookings can be arranged through the tourist office in Kavieng.

**Tsoi Lik Lagoon Guesthouse** (Tsoi Island; s incl 3 meals K120) A good place to kick off your shoes for a few days. This little morsel of paradise is owned by the provincial administrator and has a lovely beachfront location. The two rooms and the ablution block are in good nick. One proviso: there's not much shade on the property (don't forget your sunblock).

**Island Escapades** (Tunung Island; s incl 3 meals K150) Flake out on a little sandy beach, snorkel in the shallow, clear blue sea, play soccer with locals, or visit an elementary school. It's a tough life here. This guesthouse offers three simple but charming bungalows made from woven sago leaves, and a clean ablution block, amid a neat property that overlooks the beach. Not only is Clement, the young owner, well clued up, but he's also a dedicated surfer (and can take surfers to nearby spots). Guided hikes on Lavongai can also be arranged (from K100 per day). Feeling mushy? Ask for a candlelit dinner. From Kavieng, it's the furthest guesthouse of the lot, on Tunung.

**Mansava Adventure Lodge** (Tsoi Boto Island; s incl 3 meals K155) Ever dreamt of being a castaway, but with a few comforts and a friendly family to look after you? Well, this little guesthouse right on the beach fits the bill and offers an authentic slice of Island life. Digs are in two ramshackle bungalows on stilts, but that's part of the charm. Each room comes with a mosquito net and good bedding (by local standards), and the ablution block won't make your squirm. The kitchen cooks up tasty meals, with such organic ingredients as megapode eggs (a delicious omelette!), lobster, fish, sweet potatoes and taro. There's excellent swimming and snorkelling offshore. To top it off, Boston Tusikai, the owner, is a lot of fun...and a dedicated betel-nut chewer.

### Getting There & Away

Truth is, it is not that easy to get to these islands. There are usually banana boats from Kavieng, but they run on an infrequent basis. It takes about 1½ hours to get to Tsoi Island (shared ride K40) and three hours to Tunung (shared ride K100). Consider sailing here with Adventures In Paradise Yacht Charters (p230) or Imajica (p231). Charters cost about A\$490 for a full-day sail (one or two people,

### LIFE IN A (NEW) IRISH VILLAGE

You'll attract a lot of attention when you show up, but it'll trail off; there's a quiet respect for your privacy in most villages. Take something (preferably lasting and useful) for the kids if you can, but give it to the local school or *bigman* (leader) to redistribute. A football (there's no describing the joy), swimming goggles (you can carry quite a few and they're functional) and pens are all good gifts. Salt, sugar and tea will be appreciated by your hosts in the more remote places, but don't worry about this if you're on the tarmac road. If you're way off the beaten track, BYO rice or you'll eat your hosts out of house and home.

A torch (flashlight), sleeping sheet, mosquito net, hammock, thongs (flip-flops; coral is sharp), book and toilet-paper roll are useful items to take along. Most villages have pit-toilets these days, but if not, ask about the customary spot in the river or sea.

If you can, stay for Sunday. Whether you're religious or not, you can't fail to be moved by the whole community dressing up and heading off to church, then returning to discuss the sermon.

including lunch, snacks, *kastom* fees, mask and snorkel, crew and skipper).

### EAST COAST

Outside Kavieng, the plunge into a more traditional world is immediate. Though the east coast feels more 'developed' than the west, with the Boluminski Hwy running most of its length, it still retains a rough diamond-type of rural edge to make it special. It has lots of aesthetic appeal, shown in its numerous beaches, limestone pinnacles jutting out of the ocean and lagoons of surpassing beauty.

Adventure and nature may stir your blood, but what will really sweep you off your feet are the stimulating people that live here. The coast is liberally sprinkled with communities where locals haven't moved away from subsistence traditions. It's a great idea to ditch your guidebook, remain for a few days and experience a village stay. Digs are in basic bush-material huts, with no electricity and no running water. Meals are simple but nourishing (we hope you like taro). Otherwise there are small trade stores around but they sell mostly *tinpis* (tinned fish) and rice.

Now it's your turn to delve in, but take your time: you won't get to more than one, maybe two, places a day by public transport, and none on Sunday.

### Boluminski Highway

Yes, New Ireland has a highway, which runs the 270km from Kavieng to Namatanai, making exploration easy along the east coast. It is surfaced from Kavieng to shortly before

Malom, 180km away. Further south, it's a gravel road in more or less good shape (depending on the rains). It was the first real road in PNG, constructed by the Germans when they developed lucrative copra plantations. There are a number of villages along the way where you can break up your journey.

Leaving Kavieng, the first major settlement is **Matanasoi** (or Liga) village, about 5km along the highway from Kavieng airport. There's a limestone cave filled with crystal-clear water. The Japanese used this grotto for drinking water.

Twenty-three kilometres further is **Putput** and the trippy **Treehouse Village Resort** (☎ 984 2666; www.treehouse.com.pg; bungalow s/d A\$105/130, daily meals per person A\$55), which has a series of traditional-style, fan-cooled bungalows on stilts overlooking the beach, where you can re-enact your own Swiss Family Robinson fantasies. Two units are perched up a 200-year-old *Calophyllum* tree, above the dining room. A host of tours can be arranged, including village visits, rainforest walks, canoe trips in the mangroves and snorkelling excursions. This quirky venture is owned by Alun Beck, a New Zealander, who has become a local chief. Overall, it's rustic and a tad overpriced (try to get a discount), but amusing.

About 40km from Kavieng is **Lossuk Guesthouse** (s incl 3 meals K80), an acceptable place to stay with one beachfront bungalow. At the 90km mark it's worth pulling over to see **Cathy Hiob's Eels at Laraibina** (ask for Munawai village). Cathy handfeeds some huge eels in the river, which slither right past your hands. Bring a tin of fish and K5.

Fancy a dip? Dunk yourself in a crystal-clear, natural swimming pool upstream from the bridge at **Fissoa**, in the grounds of the Fissoa Vocational Centre.

It's not a bad idea to pause in the large and attractive village of **Bol**, about 120km from Kavieng. Here you can bunk down in the spacious **Panatalis Dodor Beach Peles** (Bol's Guesthouse; s incl 3 meals K150), which is a good place to see community life. It's run by Demas Kavavu, who's an interesting character who knows anything and everything on Malagan culture. The three rooms are very simple but overlook the beach, with Tabar Island looming on the horizon. The weak points are the toilets (pit) and the showers (non-existent; prepare to bathe in the river). There's a nice wave here in surf season (November to March). Another option in Bol is **Panafilla Village Guesthouse** (s incl 3 meals K100), which is marginally better than Panatalis.

Located 4km south of Bol, **Libba** village is a great place to look at **Malagan art** and stock up on handicrafts. The village is home to master carver Ben Sisia. Ben charges K5 to see the Malagan house where a piece might sell for the K100 mark – be very respectful. Even the village church is carved in the local style.

In **Konos** you can arrange for a boat to take you to Tabar Island (p238). There are a few good beaches near the village.

In **Malom** village, 25km south of Konos (and 181km from Kavieng), the well-run **Malom Guesthouse** (s incl 3 meals K120) is a good place to rest your head. The setting is enchanting, with lots of greenery, and it's a short stagger from the beach. Your gracious host, Cathy Benson, is a good cook too.

The turn-off to Lelet Plateau (opposite) is just after Malom. There's a village **guesthouse** (s incl 3 meals K80) further down at **Dalom**. A seri-

ous contender for the title of best place to stay on the east coast, it boasts a modernish abluion block (flush toilets, hooray!) and four tidy rooms (think decent mattresses and mosquito nets). We fell for the setting, right on a gorgeous beach by a turquoise stream. Surfers take note: this is a good surfing spot. Try not to turn up on Saturday (the Adventists' Sabbath).

### Namatanai

This is the second-largest town on New Ireland; it has a hotel, supermarket and a few stores (but no bank). Namatanai was an important station in the days of German occupation. Now it's just a transit point on a pretty bay. You'll get electricity only from 6pm to 10pm, despite the local hydro project. The **Namatanai Hotel** (☎/fax 984 3057; s K80-150, d K130-200) is right on the site of the old German station house by the waterfront. The six fusty rooms will suffice at a stretch. Meals are available for about K30. A much more welcoming option is **Boluminski Guesthouse** (☎ 984 3077; s/d without bathroom K85/120), a B&B-like venture run by Robert and Sandy, who will adopt you. The four fan-cooled rooms are simple but there's not a speck of dirt to be found. The bathrooms are tip top and the mattresses are thick. Knowledgeable Robert is happy to guide you to various sites worthy of interest in the area, including waterfalls and WWII relics (from K40). Meals cost from K20. It's in a verdant property about 3km from the centre. Recommended for solo women travellers.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

PMVs for Kavieng leave here at 9am to 10am and arrive from Kavieng at about 5pm (K45).

### BOLUMINSKI HIGHWAY FROM THE SADDLE

Feel like enjoying the scenery and atmosphere from the saddle instead of a seat in a car or PMV? **Cycling** is an ecofriendly and cheap way to discover New Ireland's east coast along cycle-friendly Boluminski Hwy. You can choose your own pace and become intimate with local communities. Boluminski Hwy seems to have been purpose-built for cycling, with very little traffic, no pollution, a surfaced road that's perfectly flat, and a number of guesthouses conveniently located along the way. You can cover the whole stretch in four to five days.

Guided cycling tours around Kavieng and down the Boluminski Hwy can be organised through **Tabo Meli's Rainbow Tours** (New Ireland Tourist Bureau ☎ 984 2441; www.newirelandtourism.org.pg; Tanga St; daily bicycle hire K100; ☎ 7.45am-4pm) and **Nusa Island Retreat** (☎ 984 2247; www.nusastrandretreat.com.pg; Nusa Lik island; daily bicycle hire K105).

### SHARK CALLING

Along the coast of New Ireland, especially the west coast between Konogogo and Kontu, the ancient art of shark calling is practised. A loop-shaped rattle made of coconut shells splashing in the water beguiles the shark into a handheld noose. The noose has a propeller-like wooden piece fitted to it to cause drag and 'lift' in the water as the shark fights and tries to dive. The buoyancy eventually exhausts the shark. The less artful bit comes next when the caller bludgeons the shark into some submission.

It's believed that the shark won't come if the caller is impure or does not respect the shark; shark and caller are connected. Shark callers 'own' certain sharks and theirs will come only to them.

Unfortunately these days, the brutal and unsustainable practice of shark finning by commercial vessels is decimating the population of sharks.

Banana boats travel between New Britain and New Ireland. From Namatanai, get a truck from the waterfront in the afternoon to any of a number of villages near Uluputur on the west coast (K10). Kabanut is a common destination and has a good guesthouse. Stay the night (often at the truck driver's place, K20) then catch a speedboat (K50) to Kokopo in New Britain in the morning.

### WEST COAST

With its limited infrastructure and lack of regular public transport, the west coast poses a few travel challenges. To those willing to accept, the rewards are many. The region's prime draw is its ancient traditions; between Kontu and Konogogo (Kono) the fascinating tradition of **shark calling** is practised (see boxed text, above), especially in Kontu and Tembin.

The beautiful, lonely, potholed west coast road is all unsealed with a stretch either side of Kontu that will challenge the toughest 4WD. In the wet season even a 4WD won't manage some river crossings.

There are just a few 'formal' places to stay along this coast, but visitors are so rare that there should be no trouble staying elsewhere. Most villages have a traditional *boihaus* (basically a guesthouse) and you may be invited to stay, although women might have trouble if there's a man staying already (which is unlikely). Always leave a gift of about K40, plus about K15 a meal or some food. Bring emergency supplies of food, including rice and sugar. Women travellers should try and get in touch with local women in the villages.

The main gateway to the west coast is Namatanai (opposite) on the east coast. From

Namatanai, you can take a PMV to **Uluputur** (K10), and on to **Konogogo** (Kono) if you're lucky. Further northwest is friendly **Messi** village, under a jungle-covered limestone escarpment (there are climbing paths up if you wish to seek a view).

Between Messi and Kontu there are many rivers; in the wet they can be impassable (particularly the Ungana). The road gets very rough here even in dry weather. You might get lucky and catch a lift with a 4WD utility. Otherwise, you can arrange a boat (charter K120) to reach **Kontu**, which has a guesthouse. The fascinating and ancient art of shark calling can be arranged for K45, but you'll be paying K45 more if a shark is actually caught. Five or so kilometres north of Kontu at **Tembin**, you'll find another welcoming guesthouse.

To reach Kontu and Tembin, there's an alternative, shorter route from Kavieng via Fangalawa (east coast) and Lamusum (west coast). You may find a PMV that plies this route from Kavieng (chances are slim; ask at the tourist bureau, p229).

From the west coast, it's possible to catch a boat to New Britain (opposite).

### LELET PLATEAU

The 1200m plateau is cool enough to grow vegetables. There are no rivers; perhaps that's why rain magic is practised. There's an enormously deep cave, as yet unfathomed, as well as some bat caves near Mongop. You can stay at the **Puroro Guest House** (s incl 3 meals K100).

There's a road leading up from the Boluminski Hwy just after Malom village. Catch a passenger or cargo truck heading across from Kavieng market (p229) on Wednesday or Saturday afternoon.

## THE SOUTH

The southern 'bulge' of the Island is the birthplace of Tambuan culture. For foreigners, this is the holy grail in adventure travel. This area has no real history of tourism and therefore visits will often prove to be an expedition.

There are high-altitude lakes, deep valleys, mighty rivers, a huge number of rare orchids, frogs and, it's suspected, creatures that are still unknown to science. Who knows, you might even come across a fractious gathering of *Tyrannosaurus Rex*. Send us the picture.

Given the lack of infrastructure and public transport, this area lends itself to a DIY approach. Prepare well for a freestyle trip into the unknown. From Namatanai, it's possible to walk, canoe and boat right around the Island's southern tip. You'll come across hamlets with such exotic names as Samo, Rei, Siar, Maliom... You'll need plenty of time because it's easy to get stranded.

Once you approach Kabanut on the western side, you'll find transport back to Namatanai. After several days (weeks?) in isolated wilderness, chances are you'll be hardly recognisable.

## EASTERN ISLAND GROUPS

There are five Island groups strung off the east coast of New Ireland – Tabar, Lihir, Tanga, Green and Feni. They are only 30km to 50km offshore.

Apart from Tabar, none of these has any formal lodging, and Lihir has the only regular transport. Air Niugini flies there daily from Port Moresby. A boat from Namatanai will cost K60. The locations are all lovely, but rather impractical to visit.

Lihir Island has an enormous open-face gold mine that looks like a Mayan temple (the gold seems to fly straight to Port Moresby). Feni, Tanga and Green islands are covered in dense, steamy jungle and are almost untouched.

Tabar Island is a stronghold of Malagan culture. Carvers Edward Sale, Leppan and Maris Memenga came from Tabar and their works (located on Tatau Island) are regarded as masterpieces. There's lodging and large meals available at **Andi's Guesthouse** (r K50). You can get to Tatau from Konos or adjacent villages (passenger rides/charter rides K50/500, 2½ hours).

# MANUS PROVINCE

Very few travellers make it to remote Manus Province, which consists of Manus itself plus a scattering of tiny islands, and it's no wonder: New Britain and New Ireland boast more in-your-face attractions. Despite a wonderful marine environment, Manus Province is considered less attractive and the infrastructure is not as diverse as in the neighbouring provinces. On the plus side, there are plenty of DIY opportunities. Take a short trip inland or a market boat to one of the islands and you'll find yourself in another century.

## History

The tiny Western Islands and Wuvulu Island are peopled by the descendants of Micronesian settlers from the north. Their fishing methods included fish traps and kite fishing.

German colonists arrived in 1911 and missionaries landed a while later, though they found it harsh and dangerous, and the locals found them rather appetising.

The Japanese invaded in 1942 and were later evicted by the Allies who constructed a huge naval base and airstrip (at Momote) from which to invade the Philippines.

## Geography & Climate

Eastern Manus and Los Negros are uplifted coral formations while Southwest Bay is a flooded caldera. There are large limestone caves in the central area of the Island. Other islands, Rambutoy, Lou, Baluan and M'Buke, are spent volcanoes.

Manus Province's daily temperatures are a moderate 24°C to 30°C. It's a rainy place with drier months from September through December. There are cyclones (and surfing opportunities) from November to March.

## Culture

The people of Manus Province are predominantly Melanesian; Micronesians dominate in the Western Islands. The atoll-dwellers have no arable land, and they trade fish and lime for fruit and vegetables.

The Manus people (sometimes referred to as Titans) occupy the south and southwest islands and share a common language: Titan. They depend entirely on fishing. The Matangol live to the south, east and north,

depending on fish and some agriculture. The Usiai are inland people who are exclusively gardeners and hunters.

Carving has virtually died out in the province, although the people of Bipi Island still do some. Examples can be viewed in the Lorengau council office. Spears decorated with shark's teeth were produced in the Western Islands.

## MANUS & LOS NEGROS ISLANDS

Bad luck for Manus Island: it was a hot spot for keen divers for many years – the marine environment is world-class – but the local dive shop closed down in 2007. Since then, the number of visitors has dropped. Expensive air fares don't help. If you want to have an idea of what you've missed out on, log on to [www.divepngmanus.com](http://www.divepngmanus.com).

While divers may whine, twitchers and nature lovers will jubilate: one of the first things you'll notice about Manus and Los Negros islands is the distinctive call of the *chauca* bird. These birds are unique to the region, as is a variety of sea snail that has a vivid green shell. Another local you'll hear is a *rokrok* (frog) whose bizarre croak sounds like a distant person nailing down a tin roof! There are lots of crocodiles here too.

The provincial capital, **Lorengau**, is the only town, which is stretched along Seeadler Harbour. This very casual place livens up on weekends when 'baptism of fire' sermons are preached to an enthusiastic crowd. It has a Bank South Pacific, a post office and a hospital.

If you head to Los Negros Island, east of Lorengau, check out the remains of the **US airbase** at Lombrum. There's a fine anti-aircraft gun as you enter, and rows of old hangers. General MacArthur's headquarters is still in use by the PNG Navy. The former Australian refugee detention centre, where asylum seekers who were arriving in Australia were processed during Australia's 'Pacific Solution' days, is located here too. Near Loniu Passage is **Loniu Cave** (admission K5), where people hid during the war. Take a torch, dodge the bats and don't slip.

You can swim with kids on both sides of the bridge or take a boat to Salamei Beach on **Rarah Island**, about 2km from Lorengau. A waterfall and swimming hole is in the **Lorengau River**, 5km upstream from town.

For daredevil **surfing** fiends, there are wicked waves to catch all through the islands. The

best season runs from November to March. The merciless reef off **Ahus Island** is terrific. It gets up to 3.6m at times, so take care.

Lorengau is famous for its high-quality basketware. Look for the souvenirs of your dreams in the main stores on the main drag.

## Sleeping & Eating

If you want to dine out, there are a few modest *kai* bars in town.

**Lorengau Kohai Lodge** (☎ 470 9004; fax 470 9263; Lorengau Rd; s/d K100/120; ♿) Situated to the east of the bay, this is a simple spot, with a cosy communal living room and an onsite restaurant.

**Lorengau Harbourside Hotel** (☎ 470 9262; fax 470 9392; Teyota Pl; s K200, d K220-260; ♿) This is the best-equipped venue in town. All rooms have a fridge, phone, TV and a veranda, and you can pay by Visa and MasterCard here. It has an enchanting setting too, with its coconut trees and lots of flowers. Food is available, and the bar closes at 10pm. Although it's a solid option, it's on the pricey side.

The place to head to for a chilled beer in the evening is **Ron Knight's bar** (☎ daily), which floats on a couple of old ammunition barges that Ron hauled up manually from deep under the harbour.

## Getting There & Away

Momote airport, 35km east of Lorengau, on Los Negros Island, is linked to the capital Lorengau, on Manus Island, by 30km of sealed road. A bridge crosses the narrow Loniu Passage in between.

**Air Niugini** (☎ 470 9092) flies to Kavieng from Manus Island on Sunday and Monday, returning on Wednesday and Friday (K410), to Lae from Manus Island on Wednesday, returning on Monday (K488), and to Port Moresby from Manus Island on Friday, return via Lae on Monday (K681).

There's usually one weekly boat operating between Lae and Manus. Ask at your hotel for more information on schedules.

## Getting Around

You can charter speedboats at the waterfront (daily hire excluding petrol K100). The best way is to go as a passenger when the boats head back from the market late in the morning.

You can catch PMVs between Lorengau and Lombrum, but that's all. You'll have



to hitch in from the airport (easy) or book ahead and get picked up. Airport transfers cost K30.

## OTHER ISLANDS

Manus Province comprises a handful of very remote offshore islands, including **Wuvulu Island**, which was made famous by Jean-Michel Cousteau when he conducted several Project Ocean Search expeditions in the 1970s. Other islands worthy of note are **Hermit** and **Ninigo**, about 240km to the north-northeast of Wewak.

Due to their far-flung location, these spots rarely see foreign visitors, bar a few divers on live-aboards (starting from Wewak). Mouse-click your way on [www.mvgolden dawn.com](http://www.mvgolden dawn.com) for more information.

# NORTH SOLOMONS PROVINCE

Welcome to what is possibly the most special province in the country. In many ways, the islands that comprise the North Solomons (Buka, Bougainville and a scattering of smaller atolls) feel different, and the influence of the PNG mainland is a distant memory. Look at a map, and you'll see why: the North Solomons are closer to the neighbouring Solomon Islands than they are to PNG. The international border between the two countries passes just a few kilometres south of Bougainville Island. The Shortland and Choiseul islanders in the Solomons are very close to Bougainvilleans, culturally and ethnically – both have jet-black skin. Around PNG, Bougainvilleans are known as 'blackskins' or 'bukas', and often the whole North Solomons region is referred to as Bougainville.

This province is best known for its tumultuous history. Until the secessionist rebellion, it had the most productive economy, best education and the most well-run government. Between 1972 and its 1989 closure, the Panguna mine made 45% of PNG's export earnings. But 'the Crisis' shattered all progress and much infrastructure was devastated.

After 10 years of conflict, life has largely returned to normal. There is no longer any fighting and most of the province is safe to explore. Once-forbidden routes are opening up. Gone is the rather sullen, oppressed atmos-

phere that prevailed several years ago, even if the civil war still looms large in the psyche of many islanders. The province is now poised for a great regeneration, thanks to a wealth of natural resources, including gold and cocoa, and its status within PNG – it has brokered a special autonomy status to control its own destiny. There's huge potential for ecotourism, diving, surfing, trekking, caving, cycling, kayaking, bird-watching and fishing, but there's little in the way of infrastructure and organised activities (for now).

Wherever you go in this province, you're unlikely to cross paths with other travellers. All the better for you: this less visited part of the country remains something of a 'secret', which adds to the sense of adventure. Go now.

## History

There's evidence that humans settled on Bougainville at least 28,000 years ago.

Spanish mariner Luis Vaez de Torres passed through in 1606, but Bougainville acquired its name from French explorer Captain Louis-Antoine de Bougainville who sailed up the east coast in 1768.

European settlements were established as the German New Guinea Company began trading in the late 1890s. Bougainville and Buka were considered part of the Solomons group, a British possession, until 1898 when they were traded to Germany. Australia seized the North Solomons, with the rest of New Guinea, at the start of WWI.

The Japanese arrived in 1942, swiftly defeating the Australians and holding most of the Island until the end of the war. Buka became an important air base, and Buin, at the southern tip of Bougainville, was a base for ground troops. In 1943 American troops captured the port of Torokina and Australian forces were fighting their way south towards Buin. Of 80,000 Japanese troops only 23,000 were taken prisoner; 20,000 are thought to have been killed in action and the remaining 37,000 died of disease and starvation in the jungles. There's a moving monument to the Japanese dead atop Sohano Island's cliff.

In 1964 a major copper discovery was made at Panguna and more than K400 million was invested in a mine and its ancillary operations. A new town, roads, a power station and a port were constructed, and thousands of workers descended.

## SECESSION, WAR & PEACE

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the North Solomons began a push to break away from Australian colonial control, climaxing in land disputes over the proposed Panguna mine.

Before PNG independence, Bougainville pushed for an independent grouping of the Bismarck Archipelago. In 1974 secessionist movements sprang up.

In 1987 the Panguna Landowners Association was formed, led by Pepetua Sereo and Francis Ona. It demanded better environmental protection, huge back-payments of profits from the mine and US\$10 billion in compensation. These demands were not met and in 1988 the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), an offshoot of the landowners' association, began to sabotage the mine. Relations between the locals and police sent to protect the mine deteriorated sharply. The BRA's numbers were bolstered by sympathisers from other parts of the country and even a religious cult.

Increasing attacks on mine workers resulted in the mine's closure in 1989 – an enormous blow to the PNG economy. A state of emergency was declared, the PNG army moved in and the conflict spread to the rest of the island. Whole villages were moved into 'care centres', areas outside BRA control. To ensure that the people moved, the army burned their villages and stories about rape and murder flooded out of Bougainville. The Panguna issue became a civil war – at the height of the conflict, there were 60,000 people displaced.

In 1990 the PNG government withdrew its forces and instituted a blockade, which led to great hardship for the Bougainvilleans. The BRA declared independence, forming the Republic of Meekamui on 17 May. Bougainville slipped back into primitivism. The BRA brought over supplies from the nearby Solomon Islands and the PNG army, in retaliation, caused international tension by raiding suspected BRA bases in the Solomon Islands, killing innocent people.

In February 1997 the Sandline Affair hit the headlines. In a highly secret operation then-prime minister Julius Chan contracted a mercenary company to put down the rebels. The plan was exposed and there was an international outcry. Days of heavy tension in Port Moresby saw rioting and looting in the streets with people calling for Chan to stand down. He did and the mercenaries – South Africans mostly – were deported. This act of lunacy hastened efforts to find a peaceful outcome for Bougainville.

In March 2002 PNG Parliament passed legislation to give legal effect to the autonomy arrangements contained in a peace agreement, which includes a referendum for an independent Bougainville state by 2020. The PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) withdrew for the last time in April 2003. Weapons were surrendered to the UN, and certain amnesties and pardons were granted. In mid-2004 the first divisions of local police graduated their training. Francis Ona, leader of the BRA, died in 2006.

At the time of writing the situation had stabilised except in the 'no-go zone' near Panguna (see p29 for the latest developments).

## Geography & Climate

Bougainville is volcanic, about 200km long and covered in jungle. The Crown Prince, Emperor and Deuro ranges make up the central spine and Mt Bagana frequently erupts. Mt Balbi, the Island's highest point at 2685m, is a dormant volcano; Benua Cave is perhaps the world's largest at 4.5 million cubic metres. The Island has many natural harbours, and large swamps on its western edge.

Buka Island is formed almost entirely of raised coral. It's separated from Bougainville Island by Buka Passage, a tidal channel only 300m wide and a kilometre long. Buka Island is generally low-lying, apart from a southern

hilly region. Another 166 islands spread over 450,000 sq km of sea. It's the most earthquake-prone area of the country.

The province is hot and wet, with some areas getting more than 5m of annual rainfall. The drier period on Buka Island is between May and October.

## Culture

Intricately woven Buka baskets are made all over the country except here, it seems, where they originated. The baskets are made from jungle vine, and the variation in colour is achieved by scraping the skin off the vine. They can be simple drink coasters or

giant laundry baskets, and they're the most skilfully made, solid and durable baskets in the Pacific. They were originally made by the Siwai and Telei people of southwest Buka Island.

There are 23 languages in the North Solomons; Tok Pisin is the second main language but most people speak English well. The people of Takuu (Mortlock) and Nukumani islands are Polynesian.

North Solomon Islanders have a matrilineal system of clan membership and inheritance rights. Most still live in bush-material housing in villages and grow cash crops.

## BUKA ISLAND

Buka Island is mostly covered with copra plantations. To the southern tip of the Island, Buka is the centre of activity in the province and the main gateway to the islands.

### Buka

An ambitious town, Buka used to be a tiny place but it has boomed in the last 15 years, during the war and afterwards, and now has many new buildings and residents. Although tourist sights are as scarce as hen's teeth, it's worth spending a day or two soaking up the atmosphere and chatting with the locals. It feels so exotic to be the only foreigner wandering in the streets, and people are genuinely interested in talking with a 'real' tourist. Most of the shops and services are on, or just off, the main waterfront strip of Buka.

Buka remains an important port for copra and cocoa; but for travellers, it serves primarily as a point of departure to Bougainville.

### INFORMATION

**Bank South Pacific** (☎ 973 9752; 🕒 8.45am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri) Changes cash and can do cash advances on your Visa card; be prepared for long queues. Has an ATM (open 6am to 7pm daily; Visa only). Travellers cheques are difficult to change and involves calling Australia; it's a lengthy process.

**Post office** (☎ 973 9703; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Beside the bank.

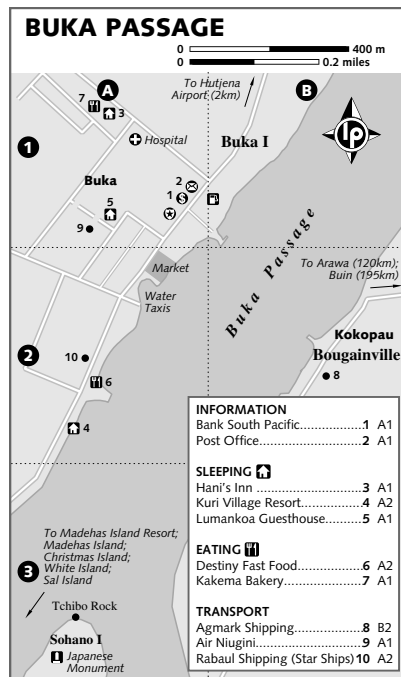
### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A particular highlight in Buka is the **passage**, which refers to the channel that separates Buka Island from Bougainville Island. The water runs at about 6 knots when the tide is fast, making deep undulations on the

water's surface. Riding in a banana boat in Buka Passage is a buzz. Banana boats congregate near the animated **market** (🕒 Tue-Sat) and the passage is abuzz with these small crafts plying between the town and Kokopau village (opposite Buka on Bougainville Island).

You can also take a boat ride to explore the idyllic islands near the southern mouth of the passage and beyond. Good swimming spots are on these islands. The most easily accessible is **Sohano Island**, a few minutes by boat from Buka. It was the provincial capital from WWII until 1960. It's a beautiful place with lawns and gardens, a **Japanese monument** and war relics, steep craggy cliffs and panoramic views over town, the passage and Bougainville Island. There are some colonial-period buildings. The weird **Tchibo Rock** stands just offshore from Sohano's northernmost point and figures in many local legends. It's said to have magical properties. The banana-boat fare to Sohano Island is K2.

Further south, **Madehas Island**, **Christmas Island**, **White Island** and **Sal Island**, blessed with lovely reefs and gorgeous beaches, are well worth the 20- to 30-minute boat ride from



Buka (from K10). If you want to snorkel, seek permission first from the locals. Tours can be arranged with Kuri Village Resort (see below).

A word of warning: avoid snorkelling in Buka Passage; you could wind up lost at sea because of the current, and the boat traffic on the surface is pretty intense.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Buka's lodging options are nothing to crow about. The hotel clientele is mostly business workers and NGOs. Prices include airport transfers.

**Lumankoa Guesthouse** (☎ 973 9779, 973 9097; fax 973 9806; Buka; s and 3 meals K120-170) Nothing fancy happens at this weatherboard house, but it's the cheapest accommodation in town. Bring a straightjacket: the bare-bones rooms are cramped enough to frustrate a sardine. Luckily, there's an agreeable garden where you can breathe easier. Bathrooms are shared. Beware the appalling sandwiches served at lunch.

**Hani's Inn** (☎ 973 9930, 973 9066; hanisinn@daltron.com.pg; Buka; s/d K154/176; 🕒 📺) Don't judge a book by its cover. The appealing turquoise façade gives the impression that you're entering a doll's house. Inside, it's much less eye candy, with itty-bitty rooms, joyless greyish walls, lino floors and average beds. Otherwise it's a safe-bet pad, with good facilities, including a bar and a restaurant, and functional bathrooms. If you ask, you can get fresh seafood meals. Credit cards are accepted but there's a 5% commission. Internet is available if you ask nicely (K20 per hour).

**Kuri Village Resort** (☎ 973 9155, 973 9151; fax 973 9161; Buka; s K198-242, d K237-249; 🕒) Run by Laurens, a local politician, this resort is as 'upscale' as this Island goes and it's something of an institution in the province. Many reconciliation agreements between rival factions were signed in the restaurant after 'the Crisis' (see boxed text, p241). It's hard to say what is the bigger drawback: the clean-smelling rooms occupying a renovated warehouse at the back of the property (upstairs rooms are better, especially rooms 318 to 323); the freestanding, bamboo-style bungalows scattered in the garden; or the bar-restaurant with a wide deck overlooking the Buka passage. Credit cards are accepted.

**Madehas Island Resort** (☎ 973 9063; Madehas Island) Providing evidence that locals believe in the tourist potential of Bougainville, this

resort has been developed by the MacNabs, an Australian family that settled in here a few decades ago. Due to open in 2008, it deserves credit for breathing much-needed life (and comfort) into the hotel scene. Still a building site when we visited, with only one bungalow completed, it looked promising (50 rooms are planned). The resort's central concept is aimed at surfies, couples, friends and backpackers, with a wide range of prices. It's hard not to be charmed by the location, under the canopy of coconut trees (it's a copra plantation) and right by an expansive lagoon. A wide range of activities will be available, including surfing, diving, snorkelling and fishing. Watch this space.

**Destiny Fast Food** (Buka; mains K7; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat) If you're looking for a quick bite, this popular institution dishes up a variety of well-prepared stews.

**Kakema Bakery** (Buka; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 6am-4pm Sat, 2-7pm Sun) Come early morning for fresh bread and belt-busting cakes.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

**Air Niugini** (☎ 973 9655; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) flies in via Rabaul four times a week. One-way full fares include Rabaul K390 and Port Moresby K837.

**Rabaul Shipping** (Star Ships; ☎ 982 1070; Rabaul) sails once a week to Rabaul (K130 to K250). Rabaul is also serviced by **Agmark Shipping** (☎ 973 9654; Kokopau) but the schedule is erratic; check while you're there.

Water taxis are the way to get around the Buka Passage area (K1). PMVs, Landcruiser Troop Carriers, ferry people down the coast road of Bougainville to Arawa (and on to Buin, K100), five hours away, for a steep K60. You have to go to Kokopau across the passage and then book a seat by 9am, even though the vehicles leave at 11am or noon (no services on Sunday).

## BOUGAINVILLE

The name 'Bougainville' might put a few worry lines on loved ones' faces, but the reality is a lot tamer than spring break parties at Daytona Beach (when we visited, at least). Now the most turbulent aspect of the Island is its volcanic landscape.

Bougainville Island is the main Island: green, rugged and little-developed. The topography is grandiose, with thick forests,

### VOICES: MOSES KOLIWAN, CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF BOUGAINVILLE INTERIM TOURISM BOARD

Bougainville is hell-bent on consigning its association with civil war and insecurity to history's dustbin. Who better than 49-year-old Moses, an ex-teacher on Bougainville, to tell us about the current situation and the future of this island?

**Is it safe to travel around Bougainville?** Bougainville is now opened up for travel. Safety is no longer a concern, except a residual and occasional roadblock to the south, but we're working on this. Travellers can easily check out the situation when they arrive in Buka.

**Are travellers made to feel welcome?** Outsiders may find that Bougainvilleans don't smile a lot, but that doesn't mean they don't like you; they just need some time and confidence to express their feelings. Many people are still traumatised. Despite the sad times they went through, Bougainvilleans are very friendly and hospitable. And they are surprised to see foreigners for it's been such a long time since real tourists last visited the island.

**What are the island's main drawcards?** There's a lot to see and do, but nobody knows. We have superb trekking options across the island. Mt Balbi and Balbi Lake are definite must-sees, as is Mt Bagana, an active volcano. There's also fantastic potential for water-based activities, including kayaking, snorkelling and diving. Our reefs are absolutely pristine and marine life is exceptional. Picnic trips on offshore islands can also be arranged. And, of course, there's the culture. Travellers can experience a real off-the-beaten-track experience staying in villages and living with the community.

**What are the plans for the future?** Infrastructures are sorely lacking. The next stage is to build capacity, with a few coastal and mountain resorts, well, small units, such as ecolodges, as well as community-based guesthouses on the island. We also aim to create a consistent travel route within PNG that would take in Bougainville, and link it better to the Shortlands in the Solomon Islands. In this respect, we need to have a proper border post at Buin. And maybe we could extend the airstrip so that we could get international flights from neighbouring countries. But we need time!

towering volcanoes, tumbling rivers, azure lagoons, plunging waterfalls, giant caves and impenetrable valleys that slithers into the mountains. More often than not, swirling banks of cloud add a touch of the bizarre. For now, visitors can have the Island pretty much to themselves. There's huge potential for small-scale tourism, but still nothing in the way of organised activities; it's DIY travel.

Starting from **Kokopau**, you'll head due south and traverse several coastal communities where time seems to have stood still. Why not pull over in picturesque **Tinputz**, a one-hour drive to the south? There's a friendly guesthouse (see p243).

A good base, **Wakunai** is where you can arrange a three-day trek to **Mt Balbi** (2685m), or follow the Nooma Nooma track that crosses the Island to Torokina, on the west coast (count on a three-day minimum). From Mt Balbi, you can see the active Mt Bagana

(1730m). In **Wakunai**, your best source of information is **Suzie Akoitai**.

Continuing further south, you'll drive past the infamous **Morgan Junction**, where you can catch a glimpse of the roadblock that blocks access to the 'no-go zone' and **Panguna** (still off-limits at the time of writing). High in the centre of the Island, the dormant mine of Panguna is one of the world's largest artificial holes. Bougainville Copper Limited was the operator of the open-cut mine. Copper was discovered at Panguna in 1964 (see boxed text, p241). There are talks of re-opening the mine once the situation is fully stabilised. Stay tuned.

About 10km south of Morgan Junction, you'll reach **Arawa** and **Kieta**, which are virtually contiguous. Both were severely damaged during the conflict (see boxed text, p241). Whole neighbourhoods have been abandoned. Four kilometres northwest of Arawa is **Loloho** on Arawa Bay, the port to which the copper

concentrate was piped down from Panguna, the site of the power station and home to many of the mine workers. There's a palpable feel of nostalgia in Arawa. The old buildings and the workers' quarters, still visible, testify to a prosperous past. Some people still conjure up this glorious past, 'when Arawa was the richest town in PNG'.

The Arawa-Buin section (about three hours by vehicle) was still a bit tricky when we visited, due to the odd checkpoint controlled by so-called Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) diehards (locals prefer to call them *raskols*) south of Aropa. They sometimes turn foreigners back or ask them for whatever money they need. Don't panic: this 'checkpoint' is apparently very occasional, and by the time you read this, there should be no more checkpoints or roadblocks on the Island. Monitor the news when you arrive in Buka.

About 260km south of Buka, **Buin** really feels like the end of the line. It suffered less damage than Kieta and Arawa during the conflict. During WWII, Buin hosted a large Japanese army base and the area has many rusting relics. The Japanese had plans to resettle a huge number of civilian Japanese at an area called Little Tokyo.

**Admiral Yamamoto's aircraft wreck** is the area's most historically interesting wreck. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who planned the attack on Pearl Harbour, left Rabaul in a 'Betty Bomber' on 18 April 1943 with a protective group of Zeros, not realising that US fighters were waiting for him near Buin. The wreckage of the bomber still lies in the jungle a few kilometres off the Panguna-Buin road. It's signposted, near Aku, 24km before Buin. From Buin it's a skip and a hop to **Kangu Beach**, the obvious launching pad to

the Shortlands in the Solomon Islands (see boxed text, p314).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Taga Guest Haus** (Tinputz; s incl 2 meals K75) Facilities are rudimentary (no fan, no electricity, shared bathrooms, no mosquito nets but window screens), but Gladys and Paul, your hosts, will go out of their way to make you feel at home. Paul is the leader of the Sinamo community based in Namatoa, way up in the mountains, and can arrange a hike to Namatoa Crater Lake.

**Arawa Women's Training Centre** (☎ 279 9927; Arawa; s incl 2 meals K100-110) This is a good place to recharge the batteries. It's safe (even for solo women travellers) and very well maintained, reflected in its tidy rooms and crisply dressed beds. Bathrooms are shared, and electricity runs from 8am to 2pm and from 5pm to 10pm. Good, copious meals can be prepared on request (K18) but no alcohol is served.

Buin has a few basic places to stay, including Kepa Guest House.

### Getting There & Around

The most convenient way to get around Bougainville Island is by PMV. There's only one main gravel road, running down the east coast to Arawa and Kieta, and on to Buin to the south. It's in good condition but not all of the rivers are bridged and the road fords several of them. Some sections might be impassable for a few hours, even days, after heavy rains; take this into consideration on your way back to Buka if you fly out.

Regular PMVs ply the route between Kokopau and Buin via Arawa (you might have to stay overnight in Arawa). It costs K60 to Arawa (five hours) and K100 to Buin (eight to nine hours).

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