

Morobe & Madang Provinces



If you have just rolled down the pot-holed roads of the Highlands on an arse-spanking PMV, Morobe and Madang, with their beaches and bays, will be as welcome as a shot of quinine after a bout of malaria.

Geographically speaking they are similar – both rise from pristine beaches and bays of Papua New Guinea’s northern coast into a series of thickly forested hills, imposing mountain ranges and, ultimately, the Highlands.

But that is where their similarities end. Lae is the abandoned child of the 1920s and 1930s gold-rush era and she grew up hard. In the ‘40s she was invaded by the Japanese and bombed by the Allies. Today Lae is finding her feet as an important economic and industrial hub and has become the most well-connected city in PNG with road, sea and air links to just about everywhere else. WWII battlefields, war cemeteries, wrecked planes and sunken ships all attract visitors and the Morobe Province’s Black Cat Track is slowly gaining popularity with hardcore trekkers now that the Kokoda has become ‘overrun’.

Madang, situated on a small peninsula jutting into a halcyonic harbour, is Lae’s younger, prettier sister. Despite being heavily bombed in WWII, Madang has returned to her sunny, carefree self. Once here, you’ll be shifting down the mental gears in no time. For the adventurer there is plenty of scope to grab a snorkel, slap on some sunscreen and banana-boat hop your way along the coast. Madang’s northern coast, the Finschhafen area and the foreshore south of Lae all offer opportunities to stay in locally run guesthouses and soak up some rays.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Soaking up the creature comforts under the bat-packed trees of **Madang** (p140), the ‘prettiest town in the Pacific’
- Watching leatherback turtles scramble ashore at **Labu Tali Conservation Area** (p135) under a full moon
- Being one of the first to witness the beetle-bejewelled *singsings* of the isolated **Simbai** (p149) villagers high in Bismarck Range
- Suiting up to dive the wrecks and carnage of WWII or snorkelling over the psychedelic reefs north of **Madang** (p142)
- Calling into Lae to pay your respects at the **War Cemetery** (p129) and to check out the critters at the **Rainforest Habitat** (p129)



■ POPULATION: 905,000

■ AREA: 62,470 SQ KM

HISTORY

Ancient axe heads that have been found suggest people have been living in this part of PNG for about 40,000 years. Simbai settlements date back 15,000 years. Bilbil and Yabob people in Madang Province are famous for their pots, which they’ve been trading with Morobe peoples and Highlanders for eons.

The first European to spend any length of time on the PNG mainland was Russian biologist Nicolai Miklouho-Maclay. He arrived at Astrolabe Bay, south of the present site of Madang, in 1871 and stayed for 15 months before leaving to regain his health, which was badly affected by malaria. He came on two more visits. Maclay’s relations with local people were remarkably good and his studies make fascinating reading.

Arguably the most rapid change, however, began when the German New Guinea Company established a settlement at Finschhafen in 1885. It was a disaster, with malaria, boredom and alcohol all taking a heavy toll. The company moved north, first to Bogadjim on Astrolabe Bay, and then on to Madang, before finally conceding defeat to the mosquitoes and decamping for the relative comforts of New Britain. The Lutheran Mission arrived during this time and Finschhafen remains a Lutheran base.

The legendary prospector ‘Sharkey’ Park is credited with discovering gold near Wau in 1921. By the mid-1920s the gold hunters were flooding in, arriving at Salamaua and struggling for eight days up the steep and slippery Black Cat Track (p137) to Wau, a mere 50km away. Malaria, the track itself and unhappy tribesmen claimed many lives.

In 1926 a richer field was discovered at Edie Creek, high in the hills above Wau. To squeeze the most out of these gold-rich streams the miners turned to aircraft (p312) and within a few years more air freight was being lifted in PNG than the rest of the world put together. The goldfields continued to be productive until after WWII. Today, local people still work the fields but it’s nothing more than a cottage industry.

Lae was a tiny mission station before the gold rush but soon became a thriving community clustered, in true PNG fashion, around its central airstrip. It was from here that, in 1937, pioneer aviator Amelia Earhart took off on one of the final legs of a round-the-world flight and disappeared without trace.

Volcanic eruptions at Rabaul in 1937 prompted a decision to move the capital of New Guinea to Lae, but WWII intervened and instead Lae, Salamaua and Rabaul became major Japanese bases. The Japanese also took Madang.

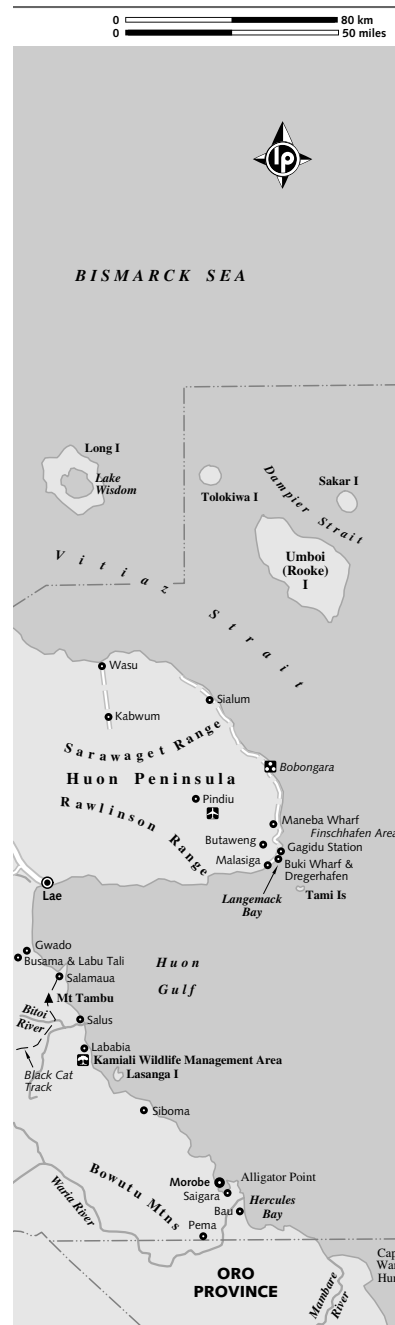
In early 1943 the Japanese, reeling from defeats at Milne Bay and the Kokoda Track, attempted to take Port Moresby by attacking towards Wau, marching over the mountains from Salamaua. The Battle of Wau was fought hand-to-hand after the ammunition ran out, with villagers watching in much the same way that foreign researchers (with an advanced knowledge of clan disputes) and voyeurs watch Highlands battles today.

In September 1943 Allied troops took Salamaua, Nadzab and finally Lae. Many Japanese escaped into the mountain wilderness of the Huon Peninsula and started on an incredible retreat that saw them fight their way over the Finisterre Range towards Madang, and eventually all the way to Wewak. Today, groups of Australian military-history buffs occasionally walk the route over Shaggy Ridge, scene of some of the most desperate fighting of the campaign. Lae, Wau, Bulolo and Salamaua were badly damaged during the war and Salamaua was never rebuilt. Madang was demolished and completely rebuilt.

Postwar, Lae became a major transport hub for goods shipped to and from the Highlands. The road between Wau and Lae had been built during the war and work on the Highlands Hwy was made a priority so it could service the fast-growing coffee and tea industries. The Highlands mineral boom of the 1980s and ‘90s, with its need for massive heavy-cargo shipments, resulted in Lae becoming the main port and industrial centre of PNG.

GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

The Huon Peninsula is the hump in the New Guinea ‘dragon’s back’, an area of steep ranges leading down to northern coastal grasslands and swamps. The Finisterre, Sarawaget and Rawlinson Ranges form a rib along the Huon Peninsula, with the lower slopes blanketed in one of the most tangled and impenetrable rainforests in PNG. Further north, Madang Province rises from the coast into the Schrader and Bismarck Range and the highest peaks in the country; Mt Wilhelm (4509m) stands near the border with Simbu Province.



Both provinces have river valleys that are important cattle and sugar-cane farming areas; in Morobe it's the valley astride the 190km-long Markham River, while Madang has the Ramu Valley. There are 45 islands off the coast of Madang Province, three of which are active volcanoes. Morobe also has a number of volcanic islands between the Huon Peninsula and New Britain.

The climate in this part of PNG can be confusing. The Lae–Finschhafen area's rainy period is from May to October and it has only a slight seasonal variation in temperature. But while it can rain every day for weeks in Lae, just a couple of hours down the coast by boat it is sunny most days. Madang is dry between June and September.

CULTURE

Even today, the Anga people from the highland areas of Morobe Province are renowned throughout PNG as fierce warriors. Traditionally they lived a nomadic existence interspersed with violent raids on lowland villages – or upon each other. Despite the bitter climate in their mountain homeland, they wore only tiny grass skirts and cloaks made of beaten bark, known as *mal*.

JK McCarthy, who made some of the first contact with these people between the wars, described in his book *Patrol Into Yesterday* the Angas' first sight of an aircraft, when men crawled beneath the plane in search of its genitals, apparently unsure whether it was male or female.

MOROBE PROVINCE

Morobe Province is the industrial heart of PNG and gateway to both the Highlands and Islands. A string of village guesthouses along the beautiful Huon Coast are a great opportunity to get off the beaten track and for those up to the challenge, the historic war time Black Cat, Bulldog and Skindiwai Tracks will challenge the most avid outdoor enthusiast.

Intense WWII fighting has bequeathed a legacy of battlefield relics from submerged shipwrecks to downed aircrafts. Culturally, the region boasts 171 distinctive languages and hosts the spectacular Morobe Show in late October.

LAE

Lae is PNG's second-largest city and, despite having a sizable industrial base, it is vastly more attractive than Port Moresby. Like other PNG cities the streets are filled with people and it can be hard to imagine what all the crowds are doing. No one seems to be in a rush; happy to chat with friends and amble around town – until about 4pm when all hell breaks loose as everyone tries to catch a PMV simultaneously.

Despite its hard-nosed reputation, don't be afraid to stash your valuables back in the hotel and do some ambling about town yourself. The locals don't bite.

On its outskirts Lae boasts the wonderful Rainforest Habitat, probably the best place in PNG for seeing the country's fantastic wildlife without having to mount a months-long expedition to do so.

Orientation

Lae is built on a flat-topped headland that ironically gets almost no benefit of a view over the beautiful Huon Gulf. The city is laid out around the Botanical Gardens just like Manhattan and Central Park – OK, that may be a slight exaggeration.

Huon Rd is the main through street, running in from the Highlands Hwy, past the Eriku PMV stop and through to the city centre (known as Top Town). It connects with Markham Rd, another major thoroughfare, which leads down past the old airport and Voco Point.

Most shops can be found in either of the two commercial mini-centres – Top Town and Eriku. There are also a few stores down

the hill in China Town; named after the Chinese community who once lived here.

The old airstrip lies at the foot of the steep hill to the west and runs up beside the Botanical Gardens. It was, for many years, Lae's main airport, but today the city is served by Nadzab Airport, the war-time airstrip 40km northwest of Lae.

Most passenger boats, from banana boats to passenger ships, leave from Voco Point, southeast of the town centre. Another wharf, off Bumbu Rd beside Lae's main container terminal, deals with banana boats heading south to Labu villages and is the Rabaul Shipping terminal.

MAPS

Recent city maps are available in the front of the local phone book. Otherwise, contact the **Department of Surveying & Land Studies** (☎ 473 4951; enquiries@survey.unitech.ac.pg; Unitech).

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 479 1068, 479 1111)

Fire (☎ 472 4333, 472 4818)

Police (☎ 479 1068; Coronation Dr)

INTERNET ACCESS

Central Court Internet Cafe (7th St; per min K0.40;

☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat) Tucked inside a white and red building on the ground floor with reasonable connections. It burns CDs (K10) and has telecard telephones.

Destiny Internet Cafe (☎ 479 3193; 4th St; per hr K25;

☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat) On the ground floor of the big blue building; prepare for a slow connection and gospel background music. CDs can be burnt for K5.

AMELIA EARHART

Amelia Earhart became many things to many people during her short life – best-selling author, a women's-rights advocate, an international celebrity and even a fashion icon, but the world best remembers her as a spirited aviation pioneer and the first woman to fly solo, nonstop across the Atlantic.

Her first flight was off a ramp on the roof of her family's toolshed in what was meant to be a homemade rollercoaster. Her last was from Lae on her second attempt to be the first woman to circumnavigate the globe in a plane.

Having successfully completely 35,000km of a journey that had taken her from America to New Guinea via South America, Africa, India and Southeast Asia, Earhart had only to cross the Pacific to successfully complete her goal. Her disappearance has spawned many theories but all that is known for certain is that on 2 July 1937, Earhart left Lae bound for Howland Island and was never seen again.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Chemcare (☎ 472 6590; 4th St; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 2.30pm Sat, 9am–1pm Sun) One of several pharmacies.

Masalahan Medical Services (☎ 479 1222; 7th St; ☎ 8am–5pm) In the same building as the Central Court Internet Cafe.

Tusa Private Hospital (☎ 472 4688; 13th St; ☎ 24hr) For emergencies.

MONEY

ANZ (☎ 180 4444; ANZ Haus, Central Ave) ATMs with security guards.

Bank South Pacific (BSP; ☎ 472 2244; cnr Central Ave & 6th St) Credit-card advances over the counter. Charges 1% commission on travellers cheques and is the agent for Western Union.

Westpac (☎ 472 1066; cnr Central Ave & 6th St) Also charges a 1% commission to cash travellers cheques and has an ATM.

POST

DHL (☎ 472 1256; Milford Haven Rd) Opposite the Coca Cola factory.

Post office (cnr 2nd & 3rd Sts; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri, to 11.30am Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Morobe Tourism Bureau (☎ 472 7823; www.tourism morobe.org.pg; Professionals Real Estate Bldg, 5th St;

☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) Opposite the ANZ. One of the better-resourced information offices in PNG; staff here are helpful and have some handy local and regional contacts. They should be able to advise on walking the Black Cat and arrange accommodation in Wau.

Village Development Trust (VDT; ☎ 472 1666; vdt@global.net.pg; Trist Ave, Eriku) These guys help manage a series of village guesthouses along the Huon Gulf coast which are a must-see if you're heading that way.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Lae International Travel Agency (☎ 472 1000; darkie@global.net.pg; Lae International Hotel, 4th St)

Avoid the queues at Air Niugini and purchase your tickets in comfort here for the same price.

UNIVERSITIES

Unitech (☎ 473 4999; www.unitech.ac.pg; Independence Dr, Taraka) About 8km out of town and located in some nicely landscaped parks and gardens. The Matheson Library is impressive, as are Duncanson Hall's 36 Sepik-style carved pillars. From the city centre, take PMV 11A or 11B.

Dangers & Annoyances

Lae has a reputation for danger and it pays to be more cautious than normal while you're here.

Having said that, there's no reason why you can't walk around most parts of town during the day, though keep valuables on your person to a minimum and as inconspicuous as possible (see also p291). The quiet Botanical Gardens, however, are not suitable for lone travellers and the settlement area east of Voco Point should be avoided, including the beach.

The road to Nadzab Airport has been resealed and hold-ups have declined dramatically; it's a lot tougher to stop a vehicle travelling at 130km/h (drivers don't spare the horses) than one slowing to 10km/h to negotiate potholes. PMVs are quite safe during the day.

Sights

RAINFOREST HABITAT

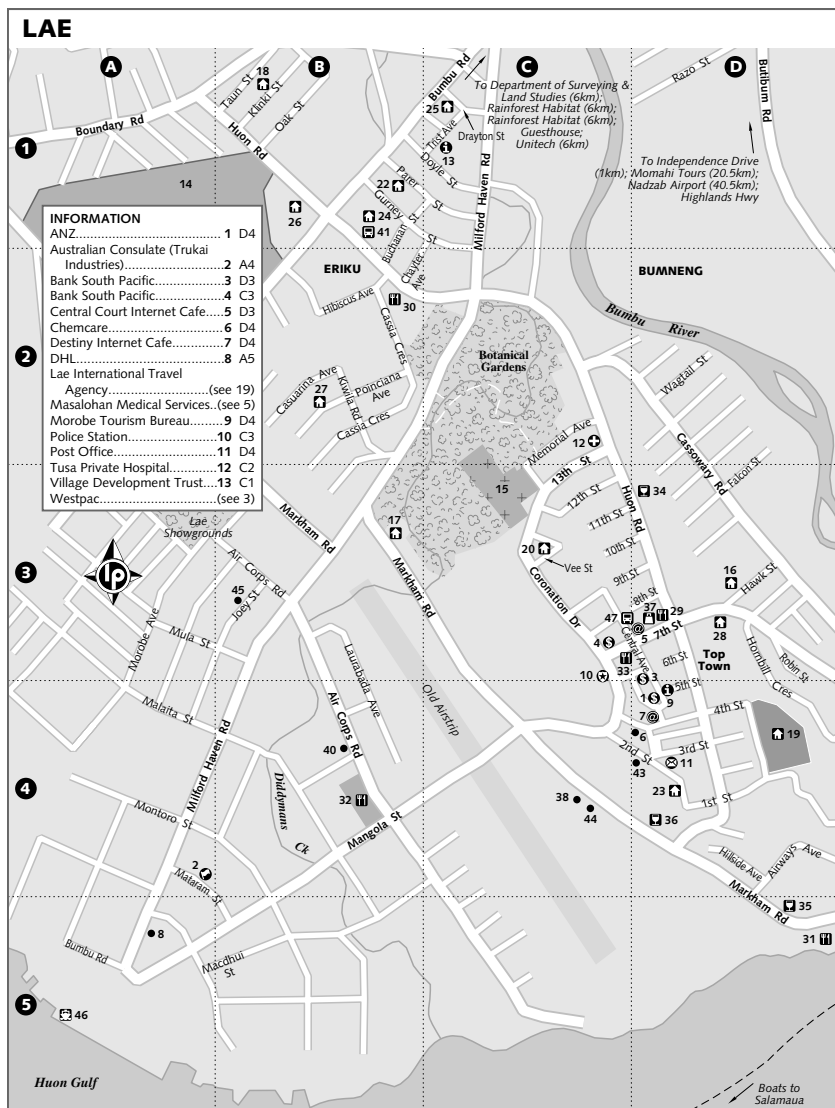
Visiting the **Rainforest Habitat** (☎ 475 7839; www.habitat.org.pg; adult/child K10/5; ☎ 10am–4pm) is like stepping into a microcosm of PNG's most exotic flora and fauna. It comprises about 3000 sq metres of reconstructed rainforest inside a covered shade house. It incorporates a lake, raised walkways and an abundance of plants and birds. Planting began in 1994 when 10,000, mostly native, plants were placed into the habitat. Most people come to see the bird of paradise collection and orchid garden although the real star is 'Argo', the huge and largely inactive saltwater crocodile. Outside is a mini zoo with cuscus, tree kangaroos and cassowaries. There are simple accommodation facilities in the nearby Rainforest Habitat Guesthouse (p132). To get there, take PMV 11B or 11C from Top Town or Eriku and ask to be let off at Unitech Gate 2, not the main gate.

BOTANICAL GARDENS

The **Botanical Gardens** (☎ 472 4188; Milford Haven Rd; admission K3; ☎ 6am–7pm Sat & Sun) offer a pleasant stroll through a small patch of rainforest and grassland in the centre of Lae. The huge, vine-covered trees host colourful birds and butterflies, and the gardens have an exotic orchid collection. Officially, it's closed on weekdays but the guards at either the main northern gate (near the RAAF DC-3) or the southern gate (near Lae War Cemetery) usually let you in. Try to avoid coming here alone or phone ahead for a guide from the Forest Research Institute.

LAE WAR CEMETERY

The **Lae War Cemetery** (Memorial Ave; ☎ 7am–4pm), just south of the Botanical Gardens, is

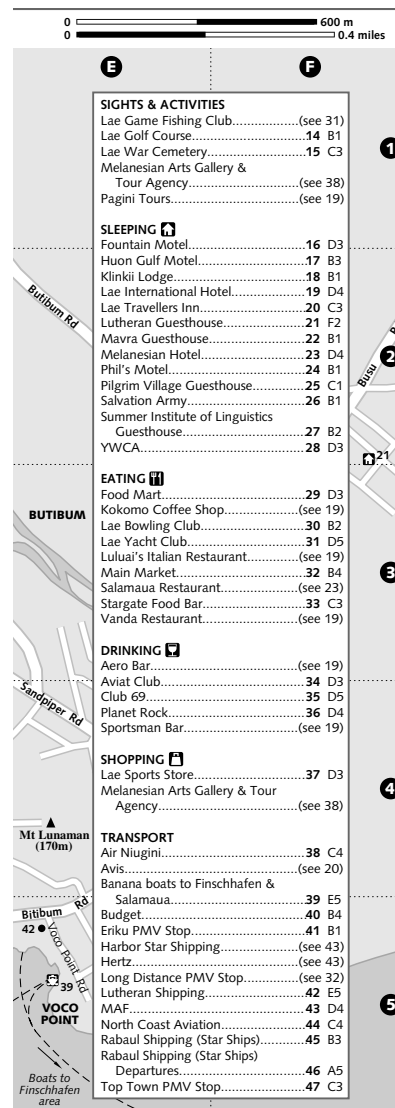


meticulously maintained by the Australian Government. There are 2808 graves here, 2363 of which are Australian and most of the rest are Indian, New Zealand and British. An Anzac (Australian New Zealand Army Corp) Day dawn service is held here every year commemorating those who lost their lives during WWII. If the war seems rather

distant and unreal, pay a visit and read some of the headstones; the tributes can be quite moving. There are security guards and it's quite safe to visit.

MT LUNAMAN

To the southeast of town **Mt Lunaman** or, more correctly, Lo' Wamung (First Hill), was used



by the Germans and Japanese as a lookout point. The Japanese riddled it with caves and tunnels, though none of these are open today. Don't go here alone.

Activities

If golf is your game, the **Lae Golf Course** (☎ 472 1353; Bumbu Rd) is one of the best in PNG and has

a fine clubhouse. Clubs can be rented for K25 from the SIL Guesthouse (p132).

Keen to hook a blue marlin or yellow-finned tuna? Your best bet is to contact the **Lae Game Fishing Club** (www.laegamefishing.org.pg), based at the Lae Yacht Club (p133). Although it doesn't officially run charters, it may put you in touch with locals who do.

Tours

Karen Quinn, at **Melanesian Arts Gallery & Tour Agency** (☎ 472 1604; melanesian.arts@global.net.pg; Markham Rd), is a woman with her finger on Morobe's pulse. If you want to walk the Black Cat or just around town, Karen can arrange someone willing to guide you and something capable of transporting you.

Expat Fred Cook runs a one-man operation, **Pagini Tours** (☎ 472 1071; www.pagintours.com.pg, Lae International Hotel, 4th St) out of the Lae International Hotel. He specialises in small-group day trips around Lae and can, with advance notice, arrange game-fishing charters.

Momahi Tours (☎ 475 1366; tropicalniuginiwoods@global.net.pg; 12 mile, Okuk Hwy), based in a guesthouse outside of town on the way to the airport, is a locally owned operation offering tours to nearby crocodile farms, and Potsie and Gabensis villages. It also runs picnic trips to Erap River.

Festivals & Events

The Morobe Tourism Bureau (p129) publishes exact festival dates on its **website** (www.tourismmoro.org.pg).

The **Morobe Show** (www.morobeshow.org.pg; admission adult/child K4/3) has become arguably the best-organised cultural show in PNG. It's usually on the full-moon weekend in late October (18 to 19 October 2008, 31 October to 1 November 2009). There are no tourist prices here, though photographers can gain access to the performance field (and the shaded members' stands) by purchasing a 'gold' pass for K40. Saturday is devoted to agricultural displays and the *singsing* (celebratory festival/dance) is held on the Sunday.

The **National Theatre Festival** is held in conjunction with the Morobe show and is another opportunity to take way too many photos of people in traditional garb. Arts and crafts are also on sale here.

The **Biang Ngayam Cultural Festival** (admission adult/child K3/2) is held biannually (on even-numbered years) and celebrates the diversity of

traditions and cultures of the nine districts of Morobe Province.

The **Unitech Show** (admission K4) is also a bi-annual event and is held at the university grounds. The traditional *singsing* participants are principally students from around the country. It's next scheduled for 2008 although check for exact dates first.

Sleeping

Most sleeping options are in Top Town or Eriku, and the majority can provide dinner, meaning you don't have to venture out after dark. Some midrange options also have budget rooms.

BUDGET

YWCA (☎ 472 4191; 7th St; dm K35) The cheapest place around in a town where you get what you pay for. It's noisy and run down and thankfully no longer takes many foreigners as most of the rooms are full with long-term residents. Try asking for a transit room.

our pick Lutheran Guesthouse (☎ 472 2556; wells@online.net.pg; Busu Rd, Ampo; dm incl breakfast K65) Set in lush, tropical grounds on the outskirts of town, this homely, colonial-style guesthouse is 200m off the main road. It's a great budget option, and while rooms are shared you can often end up with a room to yourself. The gates close from 11pm to 5am and a hearty home-cooked dinner (K20) is served at 6pm. It's too far to walk; take the 13A PMV to Butibum in Ampo (pronounced 'umpo') for K0.50.

Fountain Motel (☎ 472 2268; Hawk St; budget s/d K66/88, self-contained s/d K110/132; 🚽) Close to town and with tight security, the rooms are largely airless boxes although the upstairs rooms have larger windows. The self-contained rooms have air-con, the budget rooms, a fan.

Mavra Guesthouse (☎ 472 5912; fax 472 8994; Parer St, Eriku; d K77-110, tw K165; 🚽) The rooms are fairly small and very average. The manger, however, has contacts in the Siassi Islands and is planning a guesthouse there.

Summer Institute of Linguistics Guesthouse (SIL; ☎ 472 2939; rc-laeguesthouse@sil.org.pg; Poinciana Ave, Eriku; s K80-100, d K100-120, air-con K25, extra person K20; 🚽 📺) This is a great option for families and groups with self-contained rooms that have several beds and a clean bathroom and kitchen. Budget rooms are similarly clean and share a communal lounge, kitchen and bathroom. The staff are a great source of information. Recommended.

Pilgrim Village Guesthouse (☎ /fax 472 8076; Drayton St; s/d/tr incl breakfast K80/150/180) Set around a courtyard, this place is good value, especially the huge and comfortable four-bedroom suite with its old-fashioned and well-worn décor.

Rainforest Habitat Guesthouse (☎ /fax 475 7839; Unitech; s/tw K85/121) Bunk beds, shared bathrooms and kitchen will appeal to those wanting to be near to nature, and far from everything else. Ring first.

Klinkii Lodge (☎ 472 6040; Klinkii St, Eriku; tw/tr K90/110) Everything about Klinkii is pretty basic, but it's cheap and cheery. Rooms have shared bathroom, except two that also have air-con (K110). Local-style meals cost K15.

MIDRANGE

Lae Travellers Inn (☎ 479 0411; laetravellersinn@global.net.pg; Vee St; backpackers s/tw K66/94, d/tw K165/176; 🚽) Clean, quiet, professional and centrally located, this is the pick of Lae's midrange options. Standard rooms have satellite TV and kettle, while the backpacker rooms have fan and share a bathroom. The connected Peaches Coffee Shop (meals K17 to K30, open 6am to 9.30pm) serves tasty, no-fuss mains and simple breakfasts (K10).

Salvation Army (☎ 472 2487; Huon Rd, Eriku; tw/tr K110/145; 🚽) Set in sprawling grounds near the shops and PMVs at Eriku. The self-contained, motel-style units have kitchenettes and are clean, if a little aged. The staff are very friendly.

Huon Gulf Motel (☎ 472 4844; www.coralseahotels.com.pg; Markham Rd; d K152-264; 🚽 📺) Not the jewel in the Coral Sea Hotels' crown. Rooms in the newer wing are better (and more expensive). The 'wantok's pizza' – the super supreme of Papuan pizza – is the in-house speciality of the restaurant here.

Phil's Motel (☎ 472 4781; philsmotel@datec.com.pg; Huon Rd, Eriku; r K176-242) Formerly a nightclub; there's still a bar with pokies in the members bar upstairs. There isn't a significant difference between the cheaper standard rooms and the overpriced deluxe rooms; both sleep up to three. The basement restaurant is rather gloomy and deserted by locals and staff alike.

TOP END

Melanesian Hotel (☎ 472 3744; www.coralseahotels.com.pg; 2nd St; d K253-363, ste K462; 🚽 📺 📺) The 'Mello' has three grades of rooms, all the same size but with varying degrees of comfort. Rooms

are slightly discounted from the rates above on weekends.

Lae International Hotel (☎ 472 2000; www.laehotel.com.pg; 4th St; d K325-357, ste K460-693; 🚽 📺 📺) Self-described as 'an oasis of luxury' and indeed the International has the lot – spacious rooms, tennis courts, a pool, travel agency (p129), a business centre, tropical gardens, three restaurants (below), a sports bar and a couple of tree kangaroos thrown in for good measure. What more could you want?

Eating

The best restaurants are in the top hotels. The inverse is also true.

RESTAURANTS

Lae Yacht Club (☎ 472 4091; Butibum Rd; meals K20-32; 🍷 8am-midnight) The airy, informal 'Yachty' is in a prime position on the harbour and is good for both drinking and eating. Its Tuesday- and Friday-night barbecues are excellent value (your choice of steak plus chips and myriad salads for K28 to K32). The clientele is largely (but not solely) drawn from the dwindling expat community. It's a great place to meet people even if at times the conversation can seem rather divorced from PNG realities.

Luluai's Italian Restaurant (☎ 472 2000; Lae International Hotel, 4th St; meals K20-60; 🍷 6am-11pm) Possibly the best pizzas in PNG. Can't say the same for the pasta. The menu is also shared with the Kokomo Coffee Shop next door, which makes the cakes they both serve.

Salamaua Restaurant (☎ 472 3744; Melanesian Hotel, 2nd St; meals K40-60; 🍷 6-10pm) Wednesday's curry night (K45) is the only place in town to get Indian food.

our pick Vanda Restaurant (☎ 472 2000; Lae International Hotel, 4th St; meals K50-75; 🍷 6.30-10pm Mon-Sat) A classy seafood buffet (K45) is served on Friday evenings and an equally scrumptious brunch buffet (10am to 2pm) on Sunday. Otherwise the mix of well-prepared international dishes includes crocodile satay, Mt Wilhelm trout and white-chocolate cheesecake.

QUICK EATS

Stargate Food Bar (☎ 472 0101; 7th St; meals K7-12; 🍷 11am-7pm) One of the more popular *kai bars* (cheap takeaway food bar) around town with a few tables and chairs. A greasy plate of *kaukau* (sweet potato) and *aibika* (greens) creamed with

coconut and chicken comes heaped with a lot of local conversation.

Lae Bowling Club (☎ 472 0823; Hibiscus Ave, Eriku; meals K10; 🍷 8am-9pm) Filipina Nana serves a few cheap, tasty dishes in informal surrounds.

SELF-CATERING

You will think you have died and gone to supermarket heaven at **Food Mart** (☎ 479 3288; 7th St; 🍷 7am-7.30pm), especially if you have just come in from the bush. Otherwise the **main market** (Air Corps Rd; 🍷 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) is a lot more fun and the vegetables a lot fresher.

Drinking

Lae has a small but vibrant nightlife. Lone women should find a friend before heading to a nightclub and generally travellers need to exercise judgement before embarking on a blinder in a public forum.

Aero Bar (☎ 472 2000; Lae International Hotel, 4th St; 🍷 6pm-10pm Mon-Sat) A quiet bar overlooking the foyer of the hotel and kitted out with WWII photography and aviation memorabilia. Collared shirts are mandatory. Downstairs the casual Sportsman Bar (open 9am till late) has a large-screen TV and slightly cheaper beer.

Aviat Club (☎ 472 3565; Huon Rd; 🍷 11am-2am Mon-Fri, 6pm-10pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) Serves the cheapest beer and reasonable Chinese; it's a very local scene with snooker tables, pokies and a band most Wednesdays. The main bar is members-only but the nightclub is not and considerably rougher.

Club 69 (☎ 472 1866; 2nd fl, Stadium, Markham Rd; 🍷 8pm-4am Wed-Sat) This is currently the club of choice with locals and expats alike. Security is top notch, which means you should be able to shake your booty to an eclectic mix of local reggae, R&B, hip-hop and pop on the packed dance floor in safety. There's no street sign; watch for the queue outside the stadium.

Planet Rock (Markham Rd; 🍷 7pm-3am) A big nightclub opposite the old airfield where the music is deafening and security both inside and out is necessarily tight. There's no extra charge for fighting.

Shopping

Located beside the old airstrip, the **Melanesian Arts Gallery & Tour Agency** (☎ 472 1604; www.melanesianarts.com.pg; Markham Rd) is crammed from floor to rafter with an excellent array of artefacts. Beside the obligatory penis gourds you can pick up items from all over PNG including

Sepik masks, Highland shields and Tami Island bowls. Prices are reasonable and shipping can be arranged.

Footpaths in the city centre, especially outside Chemcare, are a good place to look for baskets and especially *bilums* (string bags). Masks, flippers, snorkels and T-shirts can be bought in **Lae Sports Store** (☎ 472 1396; 7th St).

Getting There & Away

Lae is the best-connected city in PNG.

AIR

Several airlines fly out of Lae's Nadzab Airport, and most have offices at the airport and in town. Only Air Niugini offers discounts on return tickets (see p313). Airlink was a major player in these parts and left quite a gap after its closure in 2007. It may be reborn under a new identity. Airlines flying into Lae include:

Air Niugini Town (☎ 472 1892; Markham Rd) Nadzab (☎ 475 3055)

Airlines PNG Nadzab (☎ 475 3147)

MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship; Town ☎ 472 1555; INI Bldg, 2nd St; Nadzab ☎ 472 3104) Flies to remote Highland stations and small airstrips west of Lae.

North Coast Aviation Town (☎ 472 1755; norco@global.com.pg; Markham Rd) Nadzab (☎ 475 3006) Mainly services the Morobe, Gulf and West New Britain Provinces.

Air Niugini has direct flights from Lae to Port Moresby (K380, 45 minutes) several times daily, and to Madang (K293, 35 minutes) and onto Wewak (K548) every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. To the islands, it flies to Manus (K494, one hour, Monday) and Hoskins (for Kimbe, K442, 55 minutes), Rabaul (K597, two hours), Kavieng (K716, three hours) and Bougainville (K889) every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. For all other destinations you'll have to go to Port Moresby first.

Airlines PNG has daily (except Sunday) services to Port Moresby (K380, 50 minutes), and flights to Mt Hagen (K349) and Tabubil (K872) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

See the relevant towns later in this chapter for details on MAF and North Coast Aviation routes.

BOAT

As the busiest port in the country, Lae is the best place in PNG from which to sail off into the sunset. **Banana boats** (speed boats) run northeast as far as Finschhafen (K50) and

occasionally as far south as Popondetta: this trip takes two days, overnighing in Morobe Station. All banana boats leave Lae from Aigris Market (not wharf) at Voco Point.

Virtually all the Madang-bound boats call at Finschhafen but the most reliable passenger service is operated by **Harbor Star Shipping** (☎ 472 2993; IPI Bldg, 2nd St). See p139 for details.

Lutheran Shipping (Luship; ☎ 472 2066; fax 472 5806; Butibum Rd, Voco Point) has three boats servicing the Morobe Coast. Some of the villages frequented by these vessels are Buki, Maneba, Lablab, Gassam and Wasu. Luship publishes a largely fictitious schedule at the beginning of each month.

A Luship boat sails to Lorengau (deck/cabin class K140/250, 48 hours) once a week (often on Friday), and there should be one boat a week to Madang (24 hours). The *Mamose Express* makes a weekly run to Kimbe (deck/cabin class K110/185, 24 hours).

Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships; ☎ 472 5699; Joey St) sails to Rabaul (deck/cabin class K220/300, 40 hours) via Kimbe on Mondays and Fridays. It also runs an on-again, off-again boat to Popondetta.

PMV

The most reliable place to catch PMVs out of town is the **long-distance PMV stop** (main market). PMVs for Goroka (K20, four hours) and Madang (K40, four hours) leave between 8am and 9am daily. There are fewer on weekends. Alternatively Highland-bound PMVs can be caught opposite the Salvation Army in **Eriku**.

There are now PMVs travelling in convoy at night. They are intended for those wishing to reach Mt Hagen (K50, 12 hours) or further without overnighing in Goroka. Buses depart Lae at 6pm, hooking up with the Madang buses at Watarais and arriving in Mt Hagen at 6am.

The road to Wau is not sealed but is generally good, with spectacular scenery as the road skirts the Bulolo River. Vehicles to Bulolo (K10, two to three hours) and Wau (K12, three to four hours) leave between about 1pm and 2pm from Top Town.

If you're heading for Madang, the PMV trip costs about the same as a transfer to Nadzab Airport; it compares very well with flying.

Getting Around

There are no taxis in Lae, but **Bas A Nova** (☎ 472 7300) will run you around if you call.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most visitors use one of the airport bus services, which collect you from your hotel and complete the journey at alarming speed – usually only 20 minutes. The **Balus Bus** (☎ 472 7350) and Bas A Nova are popular at K20 a trip, while the security on **Guard Dog Security** (☎ 475 1069; K55) would make Rambo look under equipped.

Local PMVs (K3, 45 minutes) leave from the main market, but with no taxis, getting to or from the market can be a hassle.

CAR

There's no shortage of choice if you want a hire car:

Avis Town (☎ 472 4644; Lae Travellers Inn, Vee St) Nadzab (☎ 475 3029) Can provide a driver at an additional K10 per hour plus accommodation and meals. To be driven to Goroka will cost around K1700 including tax and fuel. The manager, Rita, can also arrange transport on an hourly basis (K30 per hour) for ad-hoc tours.

Budget Town (☎ 472 3230; lae@budget.com.pg; Air Corps Rd) Nadzab (☎ 475 3089)

Hertz Town (☎ 472 5982; IPI Bldg, 2nd St) Nadzab (☎ 475 3150)

PMV

PMVs around Lae cost between K0.50 and K1 to Unitec. The local PMV stop in Eriku is on Huon Rd. The other local PMV stop (known as Top Town) is on 7th St. There are route numbers painted on urban PMVs but these can be fairly vague.

THE HUON GULF COAST

The clear blue waters of the Huon Gulf coast are blessed with a number of white sandy beaches and villagers so laid-back they barely get vertical. Indeed, to even describe life here as merely relaxed is an understatement, akin to describing Errol Flynn (who once made his way to these parts) as merely having 'a way with the ladies'.

Being ultrareaxed can have its drawbacks. Transport is a touch on the inconsistent side and little things such as electricity don't always work. But, hey, this really is off-the-beaten-track PNG at its best, so trash the calendar and hop into a boat and strike out for the series of villages where it is all too easy to while away a few days...or weeks.

But before sailing into that sunset, be sure to speak with the **Village Development Trust** (VDT; p129), which can book accommoda-

tion by radio and give you the low-down on whose boat is running where. Most of the VDT-affiliated guesthouses offer basic accommodation in a dorm or multibed room at a very reasonable rate. It's also worth visiting the **Morobe Tourism Bureau** (p129), which has recently researched this area and is in contact with various guesthouses along the coast.

Trips down the coast from Lae start at Aigris market, Voco Point and your conveyance is almost always a PMV banana boat. There's no schedule, but a general rule is that the further the destination, the less frequently it runs. Very few boats operate on Sundays. Banana boats along this stretch of coast usually come from the village early in the morning, bringing people to market. They return about noon, with the same people they brought. Nothing is guaranteed, but it's worth checking the day before for approximate departure times. There are rumours of a new boat, the *MV Rainforest*, operated by Lutheran Shipping that will service the villages along the coast, but who knows.

Accommodation is very basic and toilets are of the pit variety. Bring extra food, a mosquito net and your own sleeping sheets. The following towns are listed in a southeasterly direction from Lae.

Labu Tali Conservation Area

About 50 minutes (K20) from Lae by banana boat is **Labu Tali**, a traditional village where it is possible to overnight and explore the **Labu Tali Conservation Area**. The chief drawcard here is the huge hawkbill and leatherback turtles (p136) who, with a lot of grunting and groaning, lay their eggs between November and March.

Further inland, the **Labu Lakes** are the source of the Labu mud-crabs and the shells collected here are used to make *kambang*, the lime powder required in betel-nut chewing. An easy 20-minute walk from **Busamang Beach** inland brings you to **Gwado** and the **Bula Falls**, set in pristine jungle with an excellent swimming hole.

SLEEPING & EATING

There is a basic guesthouse at Labu Tali village and another at Buli village – a camp run by the Huon Coast Turtle Conservation programme. Contact the project coordinator, **Mr John Ben** (☎ 472 3011, 6814192; jb20010299@hotmail.com), if you intend to sleep here.

LEATHERBACK TURTLES

The beaches around Busama and Labu Tali villages are an important breeding site for leatherback turtles, incredible reptiles that can live to a great age, weigh up to 500kg and measure up to 2m in length. From November until February they come ashore, dig deep nests and lay as many as 100 eggs, which hatch about two months later. It is a truly extraordinary sight.

Traditionally the eggs are gathered by local villagers, but over the years demand for eggs has increased to the point where the turtle is in danger of dying out. To save the turtle and improve the villagers' basic living standards, sections of the beach have been set aside for conservation.

The beaches north of Lababia are also a favourite with the turtles. A US-backed monitoring programme here links villagers by radio, and means you can be called when the turtles arrive, rather than just sit on an empty beach all night for nothing.

At Busamang Beach, Eliot Hanso opens his home to travellers and has a one-bedroom **guesthouse** (K10) that can accommodate two. Bring your own food or share Mr Hanso's family's for an additional fee.

Bula Falls Guesthouse (VDT in Lae ☎ 472 1666; K50; James Komblang, Gwado village) has a fireplace for self-caterers and the beds come with mattresses, pillows and linen. Guides to Bula waterfalls and various Hote villages can be arranged here.

Salamaua

The picturesque peninsula protruding from the coast an hour south of Lae marks **Salamaua**. There is little to suggest that the tranquil village you find today played such a significant part in the development of Wau and Bulolo in the gold-rush days, or a pivotal role in the course of the Pacific war (see p26). You can walk to, or dive on, a few interesting war relics. Follow the steep trail to four **Japanese gun emplacements** and what remains of the original town cemetery in the peninsula's hills. The trail begins in the northwest corner of the school oval. Near the start of the path is the now-blocked entrance to a Japanese tunnel.

If you want a full day's walk, **Mt Tambu** has spectacular views and a huge battlefield where the Australians met the Japanese as they advanced towards Wau. Local guides are available for about K35 a day. The **Black Cat Track** starts and ends at Salamaua; see opposite for details.

Salamaua bay has a scattering of reefs and coral formations, although you will need to bring your **snorkelling** equipment to appreciate them.

Most days there are boats from Lae to Salamaua (K30 one hour). From Busamang Beach it is a five-hour walk along the beach to Salamaua.

SLEEPING & EATING

Salamaua Guesthouse (Haus Kibung; Huon Peninsula Investment Office in Lae ☎ 472 3782; dm K22) Has bungalows with shared bathrooms plus a couple of larger family rooms (K66). Bring your own food and use the well-equipped kitchen.

Salamaua High School (Education Dept in Lae ☎ 472 3001; tw per person K20) The other option in town, which has a few simple but clean rooms. Washing is by bucket and there are no fans, but the atmosphere is expectedly communal and good fun.

The village store sells rice, noodles and SP Lager (the generator even works the fridge between 6pm and 10pm!).

Kamiali Wildlife Management Area

A further 30km south of Salamaua is **Lababia**, a village of about 750 people in a sandy cove. The attraction here is the 69,000 hectare Kamiali Wildlife Management Area. The area comprises forests, mangroves, sandy beaches, coral reefs, waterfalls, rivers and lakes, and includes the steep **David Suzuki Trail** through some pristine forest – the view from the top is well worth an early rise. At night, if the season is right, you can see leatherback turtles laying their eggs.

There is a colourful reef mere meters from the Kamiali Guesthouse but for some serious **snorkelling** charter a local boat to run you to the reefs surrounding the Fly group of Islands.

Boats run between Lae and Lababia (K50, two to three hours) about three times a week, and from Salamaua to Lababia (K30, one hour) whenever they feel like it. Tell one of the boatmen who leaves Salamaua for Lae to pass on a message that you want a ride south or arrange with VDT (p129) beforehand to send a boat. To walk takes at least two days.

The **Kamiali Training Centre & Guesthouse** (VDT in Lae ☎ 472 1666; per person K35, incl 3 meals K75) is a short distance from the Lababia community and nestled within the wildlife management area. It's comfortable, serves good traditional food and is a great base to explore both the coastal waters and lush mountain rainforest. BYO snacks, water, torch, binoculars and snorkelling gear.

Waria Valley

It's a big hop down the coast to **Saigara**, one of many villages dotted along the Waria River as it winds inland. For a taste of village life take a boat upriver to **Pema**, where there's an interesting arts-and-craft

centre and which hosts the annual **Nange Arts Festival**.

From Pema you can walk back along the Waria River, cross over and finish in **Bau**, not far from the border with Oro Province. VDT (p129) in Lae can give you contacts who can organise fishing expeditions, island tours and arrange *singsings*. Bau is also a great place to buy Morobe *Tapa* (beaten bark cloth).

The Waria Valley experiences a very wet rainy season from May to September and travel at this time is all but impossible. Occasional boats head south from Lababia to Saigara or Bau (K100 to K120, four to five hours), but if you don't want to wait for days, your best bet is to pass a message through a boatman.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HISTORY

Two of the most historic and famous tracks in PNG still attract a few trekkers. They require experience, planning and stamina, and don't even think about attempting them without a local guide. Speak with the Morobe Tourism Bureau (p129) or Tim Vincent of Wau Adventures (p139) who can help find you a guide (K60 per day) and offer up-to-date information on the condition of the tracks.

Port Moresby-based **Papua New Guinea Trekking Adventures** (☎ 325 1284; www.pngtrekkingadventures.com) has also lead several treks down the Black Cat.

Black Cat Track

This track was used by miners in the 1920s (p125) and its difficulty lies in the 'no-matter-what' route straight from Salamaua to its objective – the Black Cat mine, northeast of Wau. The miners took eight days to cover the 50km, and parts of the track were later used by Australian soldiers during WWII.

These days the middle sections of the Black Cat are seldom used by anyone, and the trail itself is often overgrown or obstructed by landslips and fallen trees. It will take three to five days to walk depending on which end you start (the climb is 1800m) and how fit you are. Note that this track shouldn't be attempted by inexperienced walkers. A couple we met in Salamaua, one a former member of the British SAS, rated the Black Cat an eight out of 10 for difficulty, compared with a five for the Kokoda Track. There is a series of traverses with loose footing and long drops below, plus several crossings of the Bitoi River. Be sure to wear long pants and boots with an edge and heel for grip on the traverses.

For a fuller description see accounts by **Richard Stanaway** (<http://richard.stanaway.net/blackcat.htm>) and **Paul Greene** (www.wanemya.com).

Bulldog Track

The WWII Bulldog Track, intended to link Wau with the south coast, winds its way from Edie Creek to Bulldog, from where you had to travel by river. When completed in 1943 the track was actually a road capable of bearing large trucks. It has deteriorated since and been cut by landslides and jungle. Depending on how much of it you want to walk, the Bulldog Track takes from three to nine days and passes through a stunning array of landscapes and villages, little changed over centuries. You'll pass through cool moss forests, tracts of pine-covered hills and villages where grass skirts remain common.

The longer trip is a bona fide adventure; see the excellent description by **Richard Stanaway** (<http://richard.stanaway.net/bulldog.htm>). The shorter trip requires as much planning, and requires a charter flight to meet you at Kakoro. Don't be late.

TAMI ISLAND

Tami Island is an idyllic collection of four coral atolls and every bit the South Sea cliché you could hope for – white sandy beaches, friendly locals, coconut palms and good snorkelling with none of the pesky Western intrusions such as electricity, shops, food and reliable transport.

Tami islanders are renowned carvers and you'll most certainly be shown the famous Tami Island bowls, although it is possible to purchase these on the mainland at Malasiga, a recently settled village by the Islanders.

On the island ask for Willie Silas, who runs the **Tami Guesthouse** (K12 per person), although it's BYO everything except coconuts and firewood. Ditto for St Balmer Guesthouse.

Enquire around Dregerhafen for boat departure times to the island – market days are best; expect to pay K20 for passage on a banana boat or K300 return if you charter the whole thing. Unless you charter, plan to stay the night.

If you get desperate, pay a local boatman to take you out to Lababia Island, then ambush the PMV boat as it goes past. You should be able to squeeze in. Alternatively prearrange transport in Lae with VDT.

SLEEPING & EATING

VDT (p129) in Lae can give you the current status of the guesthouses in the valley, including the following:

Tulip Guesthouse (all-inclusive per person K50) In Bau, and run by the Tulip Women's Club who offer traditional meals and home baked bread.

Unu Guesthouse (all-inclusive per person K50) Further south, the Unu has 20 bunk beds in two rooms. The guesthouse is built at the foot of Mt Unu, the mountain fortress of the Dzia tribe. Meals are included and cooked over an open fire.

FINSCHHAFFEN AREA

The town of Finschhafen was the German New Guinea Company's first attempt at colonising New Guinea (see p125). Unfortunately, things didn't go well; nothing remains of the original settlement aside from a lone Lutheran Mission building. Today Finschhafen refers to the district and the collective series of peaceful coastal towns within it. The principal settlement is **Gagidu Station**, 3km from **Buki Wharf** and about 30km from **Maneba**.

Towards the end of WWII the area was used as a staging post for US troops and vast numbers of GIs passed through. The war's abrupt end left millions of dollars worth of aircraft and equipment redundant, so the whole lot was bulldozed into a huge hole; ask at Dregerhafen High School, about 4km south of Gagidu Station, for directions.

Although there isn't a lot to do in Finschhafen, its proximity to Lae and abundance of white

sandy beaches make it a great weekend escape. **Butaweng waterfalls** and **Langemack Bay** are the pick of the mainland swimming spots. There are a number of well-preserved sunken ships and aircraft wrecks offshore crying out for a local dive operator. Even Gagidu's foreshore is pleasant, although the snorkelling around Dregerhafen (next to Buki) is better. Better still, slap on the sun screen and take a day trip to Tami Island (above).

Further down the coast towards Sialum are some of the world's best examples of **uplifted marine terraces**. From the air it is possible to appreciate the ancient coral reefs that have been thrust upwards to form a geological staircase. The entire area, which also incorporates the **Bobongara** archaeological site (the oldest human habitation site in the Pacific outside of Australia), has been nominated as a World Heritage listing.

Sleeping & Eating

Huon Peninsula Lodge (☎ 474 7073; hplodge@global.net.pg; Gagidu Station; tw K72-165; 🍴) Set in a well-kept garden on the coast, fan rooms and air-con rooms share a bathroom and kitchen; there's one self-contained room. Go fishing in the lodge outrigger (gear is provided) and barbecue your catch in the *haus win* (open-air structure like a gazebo). The lodge is opposite the municipal headquarters, about 700m north of Gagidu market.

Senior Flierl Seminary Guesthouse (☎ 474 7038; Private Bag, Logaweng; Finschhafen, Morobe Province) Calling ahead is vital as staff need to send a truck to collect you from the wharf – a 20-minute drive from the Seminary. There are cooking facilities but bring your own food. Locals can guide you to nearby Butaweng falls.

Huon Motors Store (☎ 474 7018; huonmot@global.net.pg; Gagidu Station; r K99) It also operates a guesthouse that sleeps four, and its car is for rent (K220 per day). Also sells a few basic tinned goods but no vegetables.

Getting There & Around

Nearly all Madang-bound boats call at Finschhafen (at either Maneba or Buki wharf, maybe even both). Banana boats usually only go as far as Buki. Lutheran Shipping's comfortable *Gejamsao* had been in 'dry-dock' for two months when we passed through and no one seemed to know if schedules were to be resumed – ask around.

Harbor Star Shipping (☎ 472 2993; lpi Bldg, 2nd St) runs *MV Orion*, which departs from the Luship wharf at Voco Point for Buka wharf every Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday morning between 9am and 10am, returning the following day. The tickets (deck/air-con/1st class K40/50/80) can be bought at the wharf prior to departure. The trip takes six hours and is met by PMV trucks that trundle to Gagidu Station (K1.50).

Alternatively, banana boats (K50, three to four hours) leave from Lae and Buki Point Beach when they're full – usually in the morning. They won't run in bad weather, which is frequent between June and September.

Tough-as-nails PMVs run between Gagidu and Maneba over a diabolical road (1½ hours, K5).

WAU & BULOLO

In the 1920s and '30s New Guinea's gold rush made the mining towns of Wau (pronounced 'wow') and Bulolo thriving centres of industry (see p125). Not anymore. The nicest thing about these towns today is the welcome change from the stifling heat and humidity of the coast. At an altitude of about 1300m, the abundant pines give a refreshing slant on equatorial vegetation.

Unemployment is sky-high and local people still work small claims in the area. Gold traders advertise with signs saying: *Salim Gol Long Hia* (Sell Your Gold Here). Only one old dredge remains in Wau from the glory days, rusting in the creek bed downstream from town. There are seven others in the area, mostly near Bulolo.

A gold mine discovered a few years ago at nearby Hidden Valley is bringing some hope to the area and helping Wau and Bulolo move

on from its former 'cowboy' town reputation. These days both towns are far safer and friendlier than Lae down the road.

If you make it up here, your best bet is to contact Tim Vincent of the soon to be launched **Wau Adventures** (☎ 474 6210; vincententerprises@global.net.pg; www.wauadventures.com.pg). Tim will be able to coordinate everything from accommodation to meals, trekking guides to local tours.

Donna's Stoa (☎ 474 6210; Wau) is where the PMVs stop in the centre of town.

Sights

There are several places around Wau and Bulolo of interest to walkers and nature lovers, particularly those with a thing for insects. The **Wau Ecology Institute** (WEI; ☎ 474 6431; wauecology@datec.com.pg) seems to be steadily running down, but its laboratory, library, museum, lecture theatre, large insect collection and accommodation (below) are still operating.

Perhaps the most viable of the WEI's activities is its **Butterfly Ranch** (☎ /fax 474 6212). It supplies collectors around the world with examples of PNG's astounding variety of insects. The philosophy is that villagers earn money by collecting and selling butterflies, beetles and other insects that have already laid their eggs, thereby ensuring the procreation of their species. While earning an income, villagers also interact more closely with their environment (and become less tempted to cut down trees for a fast buck). Of a similar nature is the **Insect Farming & Trading Agency** (☎ 474 5285; www.ifta.com.pg; Godwin St) in Bulolo, uphill and to the left from the post office.

Eating & Sleeping

There aren't many options in Wau and Bulolo. The only official place to stay in Wau is the **Wau Ecology Institute** (WEI; ☎ 474 6431; dm K50, ind meals K75), a couple of hilly kilometres west of town; call ahead for a pick-up. Its basic twin rooms and shared bathrooms need some work. Its phone seldom works. Tim Vincent (above) can help travellers with accommodation around town.

In Bulolo, **Pine Lodge** (☎ 474 5220; fax 474 5284; r K264) has passable rooms and food (meals K25 to K35). Each room sleeps two and comes with private facilities. A cheaper option is the **Bulolo Vocational Center** (☎ 474 5223; fax 474 5471), but you'll need to bring your own food.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacies are well represented.

Family Clinic (☎ 852 2828; Coastwatchers Rd) Has an Australian doctor on the staff.

Madang General Hospital (☎ 852 2022; Modilon Rd) At the southern end of town, with a casualty ward.

MONEY

All major hotels cash travellers cheques, often at a rate that's competitive with the banks. There can be long queues at the banks. Major credit cards are widely accepted.

ANZ (☎ 852 2866; Coastwatchers Ave) Opposite BSP and has ATMs. Charges 1% commission on travellers cheques.

Bank South Pacific (BSP; ☎ 852 2477; Coastwatchers Ave) Charges a flat K50 to change travellers cheques. It has an ATM lobby in the Beckslea Plaza on Nanulon St.

Westpac (☎ 852 2213; Nuna St) No ATMs. No commission to change travellers cheques.

POST

Post Office (☎ 852 2006; Nuna St)

TELEPHONE

Telikom (Nuna St) Next to the post office. It has public phones outside.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (☎ 852 3302; www.madangtourism.com; Modilon Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) It's hard to overstate how much impact Toshi Kinoshita, a Japanese JICA volunteer, has made at this bureau. Often at his own expense, Toshi has researched the entire province, reviewing its attractions and road-testing the accommodation options. Hopefully his legacy will continue when he returns home.

Melanesian Tourist Services (MTS; ☎ 852 2766; www.mtspng.com; Madang Resort Hotel, Coastwatchers Ave) Runs local tours (opposite) and books airline tickets.

Sights

On an overgrown grassy mound in the centre of town is the old **cemetery**. Tombstones have fallen over and become illegible with time, but it's an interesting reminder of the German and Australian colonial days.

The 30m-high **Coastwatchers' Memorial beacon**, visible 25km out to sea, is a reminder of those who stayed behind enemy lines during WWII to report on Japanese troop and ship movements. It's a rather ugly concrete memorial, but the 3km beachfront road south of the memorial is the most pleasant walk in Madang, fringed by palm trees and poincianas

and backed by the golf course with fine views across Astrolabe Bay.

The local **Madang museum** (☎ 852 3302; www.madangtourism.com; Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau, Modilon Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri) is a small but fascinating place. Look for the ceremonial headdress from Bosmum village on the Lower Ramu River. These are worn during the 'cleansing of the blood', the time in which blood is drawn from a boy's tongue and penis as part of an initiation rite to manhood (ouch!).

Madang must be Batman's idea of paradise – filled with **bats** but with sun, sand and palm trees. You can't miss them, they're everywhere; wheeling overhead all day, constantly disturbed by the town noises below and local boys who like to take pot shots at them with their slingshots (apparently they taste delicious). Locals told us that these **Kwandi** (Spectacled Flying Foxes) moved into town in the mid-'70s, although no one could say why. The most surprising thing is with so many bats (roughly 7000) there is so little bat shit.

Activities

Excellent visibility, stunning tropical coral and fish life and countless WWII wrecks make the **diving** and **snorkelling** around Madang world famous. Local favourites include Barracuda Point, Magic Passage, Planet Rock and Eel Gardens. There's also good snorkelling just off Lion's Reserve Beach and off the rocks at Madang Lodge and Smugglers Inn Resort, but watch the swell and the tides because the rocks, coral and sea urchins can be hazardous.

For more information on diving in Madang, see p56.

Both operators listed run PADI open-water certification (around K1000), snorkelling cruises and one-day, two-dive packages (K220 to K290), of which the combination wreck/reef dive gives you the best of both worlds. You can also hire gear from both shops.

Aquaventures PNG (☎ 853 3123; www.aquaventures-png.com.pg; Jais Aben Resort) Located 22km north of Madang at Jais Aben Resort (p146), Aquaventures won a PADI environmental award for raising locals' awareness of reef ecology and sustainable fishing practices. If you dive the nearby Mitchell B-25 bomber, ask to read its folder of information about the wreck. The brutally brief 'lost-in-action' telegrams are quite moving. Aquaventures comes highly recommended.

Niugini Diving Adventures (☎ 852 2655; www.mts.png.com; Madang Resort Hotel, Coastwatchers Ave) The equipment here is older than that of Aquaventures. Night diving is available.

Some small **swimming beaches** are on Coronation Dr, but the best ones are on the nearby Krangknet (p145) and Siar Islands (p145).

For golf enthusiasts, the **Madang Country Club** (☎ 852 2181; Coronation Dr) is the place to stomp some divots. Madang Resort and Coastwatchers Hotel are both corporate members of this beachside, nine-hole course and the clubhouse is a great place for a beer.

Tours

Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (opposite) offers plenty of suggestions and practical advice for day tours and excursions.

Madang Resort Hotel's Melanesian Tourist Services (opposite) runs **village tours** (half-/full day K90/180) to the south coast stopping at lookout points, war memorials and Bilbil village to buy pottery. Its **harbour cruise** (half-/full day K95/162) uses banana boats to visit the rusting wreckage of Japanese landing craft and takes in coral viewing through glass-bottomed boxes at Krangknet Island. Also operating out of Madang Resort is the new **MTS Suwannee River**, a 98-foot, luxurious live-aboard boat that is available for dive and fishing charters.

Festivals & Events

The four-day **Mabarosa Festival** is supposedly held annually in August or September although it was cancelled in 2007. It features **singsing** groups from all over the country and there's a canoe race from Krangknet Island to Madang, parades and live bands.

The **Madang Provincial Government Day** is celebrated in early August, and **Independence Day** on 16 September is celebrated with gusto.

Sleeping

Madang has some of the best accommodation options in the country, from budget stays to plush resorts.

Lutheran Guesthouse (☎ 852 2589; lghm@global.net.pg; Coralita St; s/d/f K66/77/98, self-contained units K132) Breakfast is included and additional meals are K15. If fully occupied, solo travellers are expected to share and each room, although basic, has its own bathroom. The self-contained unit sleeps five.

CWA Guesthouse (☎ 852 2216; cwa@global.net.pg; Coastwatchers Ave; dm/s/tw/tr K55/85/110/165) It's pretty clean, pretty basic and pretty central – on the waterfront near the town centre. You can borrow-a-book (K1) and there is a Saturday morning coffeeshop on site. Bathroom facilities are shared except in the self-contained family room. Meals aren't served but there's a communal kitchen.

our pick Madang Lodge (☎ 852 3395; www.madanglodge.com.pg; Modilon Rd; s K72-214, d K88-248; ☎ ☎) With something for everyone and a stone's throw from some great snorkelling, this is one of the best places to stay in PNG. There's a variety of rooms for a variety of budgets. The backpacker rooms are simple, fan-cooled affairs, while the top-end, semidetached bungalows have a kitchenette, cable TV and air-con. All of them are good value for money. Scattered about the manicured grounds you'll find a stunning array of orchids, a seaside pool, carver's workshop and waterfront restaurant (meals K25 to K50; open 6am to 9.30am, 11am to 1.30pm and 4pm to 9pm).

Smugglers Inn Resort (☎ 852 2744; smugglers@daltron.com.pg; Modilon Rd; s K140-340, d K159-363; ☎ ☎) Over the years the shine has been polished off this hotel; the rooms need updating and the pool needs chlorine. It was once a great place to stay and could be again. The waterfront views are spectacular from the traditional, *haus win* restaurant (meals K22 to K45; open breakfast, lunch and dinner). The menu includes lobster pernod (K33) and *mumu* chicken (K31).

Coastwatchers Hotel (☎ 852 2684; www.coralseahotels.com.pg; Coastwatchers Ave; r K231-324; ☎ ☎ ☎) As the name implies, this Coral Sea Hotel enjoys ocean views – but not from every room. It's a modern, tasteful complex adjacent to the Coastwatchers' Memorial and the golf course. The rooms are large and some are split over two storeys, ideal for families or groups. Coastwatchers offers weekend discounts and loyalty points to Qantas Frequent Flyer members. There's good dining in Coasties Restaurant and Bar (meals K35 to K45; open 6am to 9.30am, 11.30am to 2pm and 6pm to 10.30pm) upstairs on the open-air veranda. On a muggy night it catches a pleasant breeze, and the lazy fans and cane furniture add to the tropical ambience. A buffet is served on Thursdays (K44).

Madang Resort Hotel and Kalibobo Village Resort (☎ 852 2655; www.mts.png.com; Coastwatchers Ave; s K210-510, d K230-530 plus tax; ☎ ☎ ☎) Madang Resort

and Kalibobo Village are owned by the same people, sit side by side, share facilities but are run separately. Both are five star all the way: enormous waterfront grounds, three pools, some brilliant orchid gardens, various wildlife menageries, a carvers' workshop, poolside bars and restaurants, a conference centre, travel agent and dive shop (p142). Rooms range from Presidential Suites to cottages and everything in between.

Eating

The overall standard for restaurant dining in Madang is probably PNG's best outside of Port Moresby's.

Janek Aben Restaurant (☎ 854 1323; Coastwatchers Ave; meals K18-35; 🕒 6.30-9.30am & 10am-3pm) This restaurant serves breakfast and informal lunches. Located in the Madang Resort Hotel and Kalibobo Village Resort.

our pick **Eden Restaurant** (☎ 852 3198; Coronation Dr; meals K20-30; 🕒 10.30am-2pm & 5.30-10pm Mon-Sat, 5.30-10pm Sun) Admittedly, this restaurant doesn't make much of a first impression; it's right on the foreshore but cleverly designed to have no views at all. But people don't come for the view, they come for the fantastic lunch-time specials (K12) and a bowl of fiery seafood *laksa* (curry noodles) that's guaranteed to knock your socks off. The dinner mains come in three sizes and are made to share – bring your friends. For the views, stroll on through to the Madang Country Club's clubhouse and buy yourself a beer.

Madang Club (☎ 852 1384; Coastwatchers Ave; meals K25; 🕒 11am-2pm & 6pm-10pm Mon-Sat, 6pm-10pm Sun) Get here early to secure a table on the small harbourside veranda. The predominately Chinese/Malay lunch-time specials (K10) are very popular.

Rukaen (☎ 854 1309; Coastwatchers Ave; meals K30-48) The menu features a range of Japanese dishes and *shabu-shabu* (hotpot) is served here by request.

Haus Win Restaurant (☎ 854 1333; Coastwatchers Ave; meals K35-65; 🕒 6.30pm-9.30pm) This restaurant, located in the Madang Resort Hotel and Kalibobo Village Resort, has an excellent international menu, a seafood buffet (K66) on Saturdays and a Sunday barbeque sizzle (K65).

Shopping

Bilbil clay pots are a local speciality, Highlanders come down with some *bilums*

and hats, and you'll see Bukaware and items from the Sepik. Have a look through the market and in the carvers' huts attached to Madang Lodge and Madang Resort Hotel. All the hotels have gift shops.

The market has fruit and vegetables as well as some clothing, *bilums* and local shell jewellery. The large Cash & Carry and Steamships trade stores carry pretty much everything you might need, including bush knives, kerosene lamps, food and clothing.

Getting There & Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 7km out from Madang. Most of the hotels and guesthouses have complimentary airport transfers and will meet your flight. PMVs run along Independence Dr and into town (K2).

AIR

Madang was headquarters of the now defunct Airlink and is consequentially feeling the pinch of the airline's demise. Planes don't fly between 5pm and 8pm (when the flying foxes leave their roosts) for fear of bat-strike!

Air Niugini (☎ 852 2699; fax 852 2849; Nuna St) has flights into Madang daily from Port Moresby (K487, one hour) and Wewak (K360, 40 minutes) and Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday flights to Lae (K270, 30 minutes), Kimbe (K556) Rabaul (K710) and Kavieng (K660).

MAF (☎ 852 2229) and **Island Airways** (☎ 852 2601) are both based at the airport and service many small communities in remote areas. Their schedules vary with passenger requirements but if you are heading to the Finisterre or Bismarck Ranges or the Ramu Valley (Aiome, Simbai or Teptep), these are the guys to see. Island Airways also flies to Mt Hagen. To charter a Cessna capable of carrying four people plus luggage costs around K1450 per hour of flying time.

BOAT

Lutheran Shipping (Luship; ☎ 852 2577; luship.madang@global.net.pg; Modilon Rd) is predominantly a cargo carrier but it is possible to secure passage on the weekly boat to Wewak (K79 to K107, Monday night departure), the fortnightly boat to Vanimo (via Aitape; K107 to K192) or the monthly boat to Lorengau (Manus Island). There are two classes but apparently little difference between them – both can be packed.

Rabaul Shipping (Star Ships; Lae ☎ 472 5699) has no office in town but the staff in the Lae office should be able to give you the schedule for the *MV Kokopo Queen*, which sails twice monthly to Vanimo (K165, two nights) via Wewak (K80, overnight). Alternatively the staff at Luship may be able to help.

CAR

Budget (☎ 852 1144; Coastwatchers Hotel, Coastwatchers Ave) The chauffeur service (per hr K80) includes driver, tax and fuel.

Hertz (☎ 852 3103; Modilon Rd)

PMV

On the north coast the road is sealed to Bogia. PMVs travel to Siar village (K1, 35 minutes), Riwo/Jais Aben (K1, 45 minutes), Malolo (K3, one hour) and Bogia (K12, four hours).

Heading south along Madang's main thoroughfare, the road becomes the Ramu Hwy and rises over the tortuous Finisterre Range into the vast Ramu Valley on its way to Lae; and via the Highlands Hwy, deep into the central mountains. This is very spectacular driving and the only 'interstate' in the country.

Wet seasons wash out bridges in the Ramu Valley and cause occasional landslides in the Highlands, but the road is mostly sealed and in good condition.

Buses gather around the market at 8am and the door-guys yell out their destinations 'LaeLaeLaeLae' and 'HagenHagenHagen' with a great sense of theatre. Once full they head off. The fare to Lae is K40 (six hours) and to Goroka K50 (seven hours). The overnight buses to Mt Hagen (K70) rendezvous with Lae buses at Watarais where they form a convoy – presumably for safety.

Local buses include the 6A, which runs to Barasiko market at the Lae junction, 6B which continues 3km up the North Coast Highway and 6C that goes to Yabob village. All cost K0.50.

AROUND MADANG

Small boats run to the islands in Madang harbour from an inlet behind the CWA Guesthouse, hourly or so from 7am to 5.30pm (K1 to K5).

Krangket Island

Krangket Island, across Dallman Passage from Madang, is a large island with several villages and a beautiful lagoon. Krangket has an idyllic

setting where you can swim, snorkel and get around in an outrigger canoe. There's a popular picnic spot, which was a former rest area for wounded Australian soldiers in the days following the Japanese surrender in WWII. Krangket is a lovely spot and worth the K5 locals charge visitors for entry.

Boats from Madang (K0.50, 15 minutes) drop their passengers about 45 minutes' walk from the lodge, though you should be able to negotiate passage to the lodge end of the island.

The **Krangket Island Lodge** (☎ 852 3302 Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau or 852 2655 Madang Resort Hotel; s/f K40/80) is operated by the Dum clan (pronounced 'doom'). It consists of a few comfortable bush cottages tucked away from the village. They're rustic but come with kitchenette, private bathroom, shower and septic toilet. The kitchenette has a gas stove, kerosene fridge and utensils. There's fresh linen, but you need to take your own provisions.

Siar Island

Siar is another pretty island with beautiful white-sand beaches, great snorkelling and village guesthouse accommodation. Siar is a short boat ride (K2) from Madang and has lots of WWII aircraft wreckage. People come on the weekend to picnic here. Take a mask and snorkel.

The **Siar Island Guesthouse** (☎ 692 1869; s incl meals K50) is another established grass-roots guesthouse having been around since the first edition. In that time not much has changed. It is still run by Simon Tewa, there is still no electricity, no plumbing and the toilet is still a long-drop over the sea – enjoy!

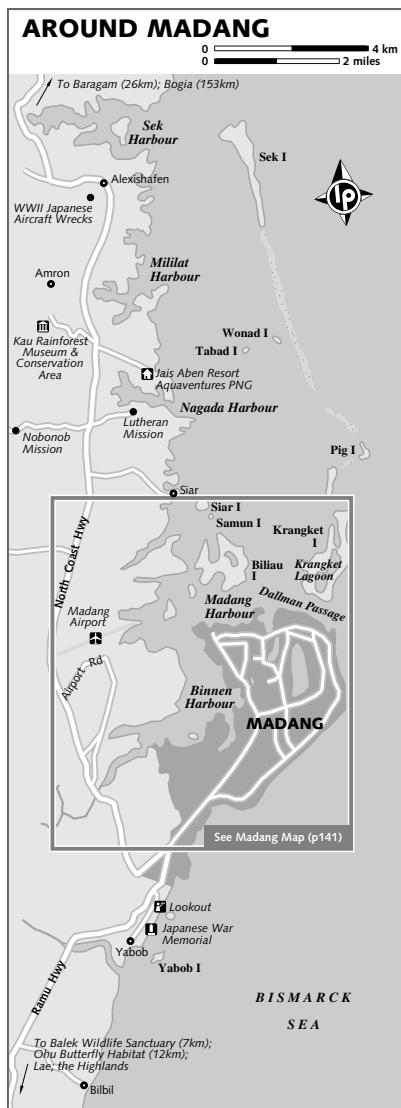
Yabob

Take the main Modilon Rd south out of Madang and you'll come to the Yabob road forking left just after the hospital. It passes a lookout and a Japanese memorial on its way down to Yabob village. There's a little island offshore, which you can reach by canoe.

Before Europeans came, Yabob was famous for fine clay pots that were traded along the coast, but not nowadays.

Bilbil

This attractive village still produces pottery and traditionally made some of the Pacific's largest ocean-going canoes. Take the first road left after the Gum River, off the Ramu Hwy;



this loops back to the highway or get a PMV 15B (K1) to four-mile market from where it is a 20-minute walk.

Balek Wildlife Sanctuary

This wildlife management area (adult/child/student K7/1/2.50) is 10km south of Madang. It's featured in scenes from the 1996 film

production of *Robinson Crusoe* with Pierce Brosnan. There's a sulphur creek that flows from a huge limestone formation. Spirits inhabit the site and the water has curative properties. The water is incredibly clear and you can feed eels and turtles with bananas and fresh meat. The best time to see butterflies is either around 10am or between 3pm and 5pm. Catch a 15B PMV from town (K2).

Ohu

The **Ohu Butterfly Habitat** (☎ 852 2303; person/family K10/15; 🕒 7am-3pm), 15km southwest of Madang, is a community conservation and research project where butterflies, including PNG's famous birdwing varieties, feed on the nectar of the flowering *aristolochia*. Catch a 13B PMV from Madang to the 'Medo' drop off from where it is a 70-minute (5km) walk.

NORTH COAST HIGHWAY

The whole north coast offers excellent beaches, diving and snorkelling, and some great hills and rivers to explore. The road runs north of Madang as far as Bogia from where you have to walk or catch speed boats if you are heading to Wewak.

Nobonob & Nagada Harbour

Beyond the Siar village turn-off on the North Coast Hwy, 17km from Madang, there are two turn-offs. The right leads to the Lutheran Mission on Nagada Harbour. The left leads to Nobonob Mission outstation, used as a Japanese lookout during WWII. It's about a 20-minute drive. There is a pretty park here with a fine view over the north coast, Madang and the harbour; below the park is one of few remaining virgin rainforests near Madang. Local guides can show you around and often take in nearby Guntabag village and the spectacular Tamolalakud lookout.

Jais Aben Area

Divers rave about the north coast sites, such as the US freighter *Henry Leith* in 20m of water near Jais Aben Resort, and the nearby minesweeper *Boston*. The 'waterhole' is an enclosed lagoon connected to the open sea by a large underwater tunnel and offers dramatic snorkelling. Sinub Island and Tab Island are also recommended snorkelling spots but landowners ask a K5 levy.

The **Jais Aben Resort** (☎ 853 3111; jaisaben@global.net.pg; 185-230; 📶 📺 📶) is 20km from Madang,

off the main road. It's a pretty place on its own little peninsula, with beaches and lawns. The beachside bungalows are large and comfortable, with enclosed verandas and seafront outlooks. All have fans and TV, some have kitchens. The newer 'deluxe' bungalows are flashier and have air-con. There's a beachfront bar where burgers and steaks (K15) are served and a fine restaurant (meals K33) whose changing menu incorporates local and international dishes.

Jais Aben offers half-day tours (K45) to nearby villages and the surrounding lagoon is perfect for snorkelling and kayaking. It is a popular place to stay for divers as **Aquaventures** (p142) has its dive shop and jetty next door. Town and airport transfers are free for guests. PMV 17A runs along the main road from Madang (K1) but stops 1km shy of the resort.

Amron

A couple of kilometres further north, off to the left of the road, is Amron, the site of the Japanese WWII strategic command headquarters.

Kau Rainforest Museum & Conservation Area

On the west side of the main coast road, not far from the turn-off to the Jais Aben Resort, is a rough track leading to the Kau Rainforest Museum & Conservation Area.

In 1963, when the PNG logging industry was in its infancy, the Didipa clan set aside over 300 hectares of its forest as a wildlife conservation area. Since then the clan has protected the area from gardening, burning, logging and hunting. Today, it is one of the last significant undisturbed forest remnants near Madang. In 1992 when the clan refused to sign an agreement with Japanese loggers, an environmental impact report turned up a handful of Madang paradise birdwing butterflies, previously considered extinct.

There's a small museum that seeks to retain and display traditional knowledge. Ask here for guides who will teach you about traditional uses for plants – the sticky sap of the breadfruit tree can be used as glue, and two local vines can be used as contraceptives. PMV 17A can deliver you to 'Good Shepherd' from where it is a 10-minute walk.

Alexishafen

Alexishafen Catholic Mission is off the road to the right, 23km north of Madang. The name

'Alexishafen' is derived from the combination of the German word for harbour, *hafen*, and the first name of a Russian princess, Alexis. The graveyard here stands as a reminder to the early missionary period. Beyond the mission you can see the old overgrown missionary-built airstrip.

Like so much of the area, Alexishafen was badly damaged during the war. The WWII Japanese airstrip (a little off the road to the left, between the mission airstrip and Alexishafen) is now threatened by the encroaching jungle. Only bomb craters and the odd aircraft wreck hint at the saturation bombing that destroyed the base. The most impressive of these aircraft wrecks is the Japanese *Donryu*, next to the bomb crater that destroyed it. Nearer to the road is the fuselage of an early Junkers mission aircraft.

Bargam

The annual **Bargam Agricultural Show** has the dual aims of promoting sustainable farming practices and providing an opportunity for local *singsing* groups to don their feathers and finery. While not as impressive as its Highland cousins, if you are in Madang during the first weekend in September it is worth the hour's drive north. Contact the Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (p142) for details.

Malolo to Hansa Bay and on to Watam

The road continues north to the old Malolo (pronounced 'mah-lollo') plantation, 42km up the coast, site of the Malolo Plantation Lodge (p148). The **black-sand beaches** along the coast are indicative of volcanic activity on Karkar and Manam Islands. There's good swimming, but watch the currents. The 1996 film production of *Robinson Crusoe* was filmed around here.

About 20km on from Malolo, there's a Catholic mission at **Magiya**. Beyond here is a road leading inland about 5km to **Aronis**. A kilometre from the main village is an aid post, near which is **Manubyai Cave**, home to a colony of horseshoe bats.

Salembe is a small village about a three-hour drive from Madang inland over rough roads from Malolo. At 900m above sea level, the area is home to many birds of paradise and a nice guesthouse (p148).

Bogia is 185km northwest of Madang and the departure point for Manam Island. The road is sealed all the way to Bogia but

peters out a short distance thereafter before the mighty Ramu River. At Bogia Bay, a Japanese Zero fighter lies upside down in the water a few hundred metres out from the jetty. Bogia town is a pretty place – the crystal-clear waters of the bay and the numerous traditional villages make it an ideal place to lose a few days.

In 2004 the **Manam Island** volcano erupted, displacing 6000 people who fled to the safety of the mainland. Only 2000 or so have returned. It is possible to visit the still-smoking island and explore the carnage. Anua Negu Lodge (right) can arrange a speed boat (K400, one hour) to run you there and back.

Hansa Bay is a popular diving spot past Bogia, where the wreckage of 35 Japanese freighters and US aircraft lie in a shallow harbour. The upper deck of the 6000-ton *Shishi Maru* lies in just 6m of water, two anti-aircraft guns on the bow point upwards and brass shell castings litter the deck. Two fire engines are sitting in the hold, just before the bridge, where they were waiting to be unloaded.

Hansa Bay also has some spectacular wreck dives. A Japanese freighter has one davit projecting from the water (known as the Davit Wreck); it was sunk in 1943 by US bombers. You can swim through the wreck, which makes this an exciting dive in only 12m of water. Nearby, in 10m of water, is the Mast Wreck, with its mast protruding from the water; there is a gun on the bow, ammunition on the deck and a field artillery piece in the hold. The Madang dive shops organise dives to Hansa Bay and other north-coast sites. See p142.

There's some marine-biology research happening on **Laing Island** in Hansa Bay, a beautiful island with white beaches and good snorkelling.

After Bogia is a series of old coconut plantations, now home to many Manam Island relocation camps. Villagers have cut patches into the plantations to grow their gardens. Eventually the road narrows to a single-lane track and abruptly ends at a small, deep tidal river. If you are not up for swimming, hail the villagers on the other side for a lift in their canoe.

To walk to the **Ramu River mouth** either follow the inland footpath through a swamp then onto the beach, or head for the beach directly. The Ramu is too large to swim, so wave and shout madly to the folks in the fishing camp

on the western shore. If you are heading up the Ramu ask the men around here about boat departures otherwise continue walking along the coast (low tide only), through Marangis village, to **Watam**. Due to its strategic position, it is not surprising that Watam is one of the bigger villages in the area. Ask around for Felix Eddie who speaks excellent English and is knowledgeable on this area. From Watam, banana boats regularly leave for Angoram on the Sepik River.

SLEEPING

Keki Eco-Mountain Lodge (☎ 852 3302 Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau; Salemben; r per person K30) Perched high on a ridge, two traditional bungalows have double rooms and cooking facilities. At around 900m above sea level it's a great place for birding, and birds of paradise often sit atop the lodge roof. It's difficult to get to though – catch a PMV from Madang to Bunabum junction and walk the remaining 26km (eight hours) or BYO 4WD.

Anua Negu Lodge (Nigugini Electrical Gas; ☎ 852 2923, 852 2005; gatibong@datec.net.pg; Bogia; s K60) Recently opened and mere metres from the waves, this lodge has eight basic rooms and generator-supplied electricity. If you can't face yet another pack of instant noodles the women here will cook meals upon request. The lodge offers jeep tours to nearby beaches where it is possible to snorkel US and Japanese war wrecks (BYO gear). It can also arrange a day trip to the smoking, volcanic island of Manam (K400).

Malolo Plantation Lodge (☎ 542 1438; Mt Hagen; www.pngtours.com; s/d US\$305/400; ♿ ♿) In lovely surrounds and fronting a long black-sand beach, the lodge operated by Trans Niugini Tours (p165) was once a plantation house. The grounds are planted with orchids and stag-horn ferns, and birds abound, including a tame *kokomo* (horn bill) featured in *Robinson Crusoe*. Malolo is sometimes empty, catering as it does for mostly inbound package tourists who spend a few days in each of Trans Niugini Tours' hotels around PNG. It's a very nice place, but it's way overpriced for a walk-up punter.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The 17C PMV runs from Madang to Malolo for K3. It's more than three hours' drive to Bogia and PMVs travel up daily (K12). Besides walking the best way to get from Bogia to the Sepik

is to either catch a bus to Boro and canoe to Watam, or catch a PMV to the Ramu River base camp (K5) and from there catch a PMV boat (or charter your own) to Watam. From Watam boats leave for Angoram on the Sepik.

INLAND

There are some isolated and interesting places in central Madang Province. The Ramu is one of PNG's great rivers and its broad valley is sugar cane and cattle country. The Ramu Sugar Refinery is a major industrial development, designed to make PNG self-sufficient in sugar. The Ramu Valley is also a major fault zone, prone to earthquakes and wet-season floods.

Simbai

The big attraction here is an opportunity to witness the everyday workings of a rural village cut off from the rest of the world. Don't, however, expect 'natives-in-loin-cloths' – instead you'll find a people, despite their isolation, both well informed and politically savvy. That and really cool *singsings*.

The community-built **Kalam Guest House** (s/d/tr K25/35/50) is the only place to stay. It's 15 minutes from Simbai Station, and constructed from bush materials. Vegetarian fare (K8 to K15) is provided but bring your own protein (eggs, meat or canned fish).

The locals have rallied and organised treks and homestays as far afield as the Ramu River. In Madang contact **MAF** (☎ 852 2229) or **Eson Dotch** (☎ 852 3416) well in advance so the village can prepare for your arrival, especially if you want them to perform a traditional *singsing* (K300). In Simbai contact Dickson Kangi (ask around to find him), who speaks on behalf of the chief, Ernest Simgi. The Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau is also worth contacting (p142).

The inaugural **Kalam Culture Festival** was held in 2005. In 2006 there were nine tourists, in 2007 only 14. Held in the third week of September the festival is a unique chance to witness traditional ceremonies which are normally closed to tourists – adult initiation rites, bride-price exchanges and pig-killing festivities. There is talk of making the festival a biannual event; check with the Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (p142) first.

Simbai is 45 minutes from Madang Airport by Island Airways Cessna (K290) or about 30 minutes from Mt Hagen with MAF (K190).

SIMBAI TO THE RAMU RIVER TREK

It is possible to walk and raft from Simbai to the Ramu River base camp in five to six days. This route, developed by the Simbai villagers, only opened in 2007 and represents a fantastic opportunity to experience something truly unique. Guides are essential (who else will have the homestay contacts?) and while it isn't a patch on the Kokoda Track, you will need to be capable of walking all day.

The first day's eight-hour walk from Simbai brings you to **Kenenj** where you can overnight. Depending on your fitness level it may be wise to split this leg over two days. From there it's a shorter day's walk to **Aiome** and a final day's trek brings you to **Akaraski** on the banks of the Ramu River.

From here catch a raft downriver to **Kwanga** (overnight) and then a motorised canoe to the Ramu River base camp just after Bunapas. From the base camp it is possible to then catch a PMV to Madang or a boat to Watam (for the Sepik). With some advance planning it is possible to arrange the jeep from Anua Negu Lodge (opposite) to collect you.

Bundi & Brahmin

Bundi is a six-hour walk from Brahmin Mission, and Brahmin is about 25km west from the Lae–Madang road. PMVs travel from Madang to Brahmin (K10, two hours). There are some simple bungalows in Bundi at **Mt Sinai Centre** (Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau ☎ 852 3302). This is midway on the walk down to Madang from the Highlands, and about the only place to stay in the region.

SOUTH OF MADANG

The Rai Coast Highway connects Madang to Lae on paper only, although it may be possible to get through in a 4WD in the dry season. Otherwise travel down the coast is by speed boat (aka banana boat) and into the mighty Finisterre Range by MAF light aircraft.

Bandit

In an effort to revive their culture, the Dugu Roots Growers Association launched the **Umboldi Cultural Show** in February 2007. There were only five or six groups in attendance, but what the show lacked in numbers the 3m-tall wicker headdresses made up for in size.

'ROOS IN TREES

The last place you expect to find a kangaroo is in a tree. At first glance they seem rather ill-suited to an arboreal lifestyle – monkeys, yes; kangaroos, no. Whenever people think of kangaroos they imagine great big brutes bounding across the vast Australian deserts, not these furry little fellows clambering up New Guinea trees. It doesn't seem right, but the staff at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, USA and the headquarters of the **Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program** (TKCP; www.zoo.org/conservation/treeroo.html) assured us they are a kind of kangaroo alright, 'right down to their pouches'.

There are 10 species of tree kangaroos – all with incredibly long tails for balancing (hence their Tok Pisin name: *kapul longpela tel*) and large claws to assist in climbing. And furthermore, if they do fall (or jump), they invariably land safely and hop off with true kangaroo aplomb.

The TKCP is particularly active in the mountains and villages of the Kabwum District including Teptep village, collaborating with locals to protect the species and conserve their habitat on the Huon Peninsula. The result is a community-based conservation programme that has been working to create PNG's first official Conservation Area under the PNG Conservation Areas Act.

Besides being incredibly lucky in the forests near Teptep, your best chance to see one of these tree-hugging 'roos is at the Rainforest Habitat in Lae (p129) or at the National Botanic Gardens in Port Moresby (p76).

The celebrations are divided into the daytime 'red' *singsing*, when participants paint their bodies blood-red and don their headdresses, and the midnight 'black' *singsing* when the headdresses are changed for something less cumbersome.

It takes three to four hours by boat from Madang to the nearest wharf in Fangel and from there a further three-hour walk to Bandit. The Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (p142) should be able to advise on exact dates.

Teptep

Almost 2000m up in the Finisterre Range, Teptep is a small, isolated village on the border with Morobe Province, and is a good base for trekking in the area. Researchers for the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program (see boxed text, above) visit here but you are unlikely to come nose to snout with a tree hugging 'roo yourself. The **Teptep Guesthouse** (☎ 852 2229 MAF in Madang; sK30) has spectacular views and delicious home-grown strawberries. Evenings are cool, like the Highlands, so come prepared.

MAF flies to Teptep a few times each week from both Madang (K290) and Lae. An interesting trip is to fly in and walk out to Bonga (via Jaupatom) on the coast. It is a long 13-hour trek down a rain-worn, root-ridden, muddy path. Locals like to whistle and yodel as they walk, we prefer to grunt and groan. Bonga is well known for its dugongs and sea turtles.

You will need to prearrange a boat to collect you; again, the Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (p142) should be able help.

ISLANDS

Long Island

The largest of the volcanic islands, Long is 48km off the coast. It has two active craters, one of which contains a lake surrounded by crater walls that rise to 250m. There are only a few hundred people on the island and it's renowned for prolific birdlife and the many fish that swarm around its reefs. Turtles come ashore to lay their eggs at certain times of the year. Getting there isn't easy – from Madang, you can hire a banana boat or catch a lift with a boat supplying a trade store.

Karkar Island

William Dampier, the English pirate-cum-explorer, made an early landing on this island. Later, Lutheran missionaries had a hard time from malaria, volcanic eruptions and the fierce inhabitants and were temporarily evicted. Today Karkar has both Catholic and Lutheran missions.

The island is also one of the most fertile places in the country with some of the most productive copra plantations in the world. The volcano erupted violently in 1974 and again in 1979, killing two vulcanologists. It takes 12 hours return to climb the crater (1831m, K135 for a guide); bring plenty of sunscreen to combat the heat that bounces off the bare

basalt and seek permission from the villagers as the crater has religious significance.

A road encircles the island and it takes four hours to drive around. You can also walk around, but treat the river crossings with caution. When it rains on the mountain, water comes down these rivers like a wall – there have been deaths. Karkar is encircled by a reef and has good beaches and snorkelling.

The high school and the airstrip are at the government station at Kinim.

Tugutugu Guesthouse (per person K60; meals K5-15) is the only accommodation on the island and about 3km from Kulili wharf (45 minutes by foot), and 10km from Kinim wharf. The guesthouse is set in beautiful grounds and is a 15-minute walk to a white sandy beach where it is possible to rent canoes (K20).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Cargo ships bound for Kulili (MV *Medea* or MV *Kanaogi*, K15, six hours) or Biabi (MV *Thompson* or MV *Tuali*, K15, four hours) and Biabi-bound banana boats (trying saying

that in a hurry; two hours, K50) leave from Madang's Rab-Trad wharf.

Alternatively catch the 17C PMV north to Kubugam (K5, one hour) and from there a speedboat to either Kinim or Biabi (K30).

Manam Island

Manam is 15km offshore from Bogia. It's an almost perfect volcanic cone, rising to 1829m. The soil is extremely fertile and very productive, but the volcano has blown 23 times in the last 100 years. It erupted in 1996 and 1997, killing 30 people and wiping out villages. At night the crater glows and spurts orange trailers into the sky. There is a seismological observatory on the side of the cone.

Manam erupted twice again in late 2004 causing the rapid evacuation of the island's 9000 people. It remains one of the world's most active volcanoes.

Manam is 193km from Madang and not easy to get to. Government and private boats leave Bogia for Manam most days, although there is no schedule.

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