

# New Caledonia

There's no better place to experience the Pacific with a taste of France than New Caledonia, where Melanesian tradition blends with French sophistication. This mix of the chic yet casual, *très* French but ultimately Pacific comes together with peerless élan in Noumea, the cosmopolitan capital. Dining out and shopping run the gamut from gourmet restaurants to humble *roulottes*, from Chinatown's colourful shops to the expensively elegant, air-conditioned boutiques on rue de Sébastopol.

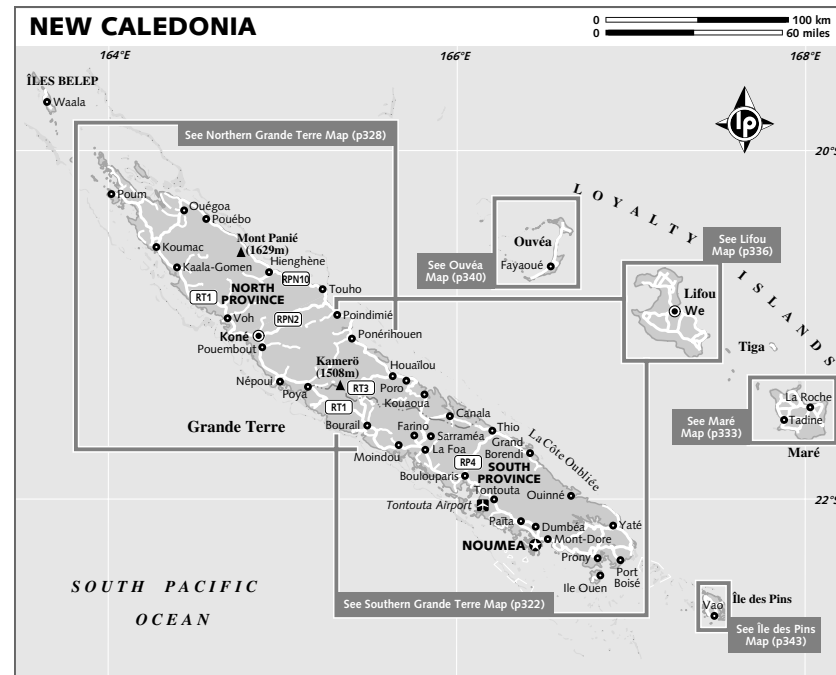
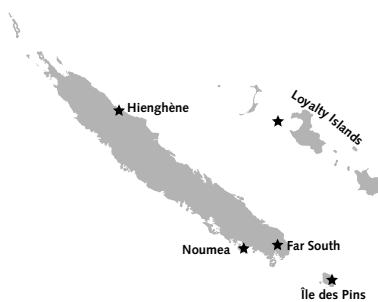
When you leave the capital, the urban scenery gives way to a wealth of changing landscapes – the rolling plains of *la brousse* (the bush), lush river valleys, steep mountains coursed by tumbling waterfalls, cool rainforests and wild coastlines.

Southeast of Grande Terre, the main island, lies romantic Île des Pins with its slender pines, white-sand beaches and emerald lagoon. To the east, life proceeds at a leisurely pace in the relaxed Loyalty Islands, steeped in Kanak culture.

New Caledonia is surrounded by the world's largest enclosed lagoon, where marine treasures of all shapes and sizes lie waiting to be discovered – canyons and caves, exquisite coral, the smallest of tropical fish, turtles, sea snakes and sharks. Dolphin and whale spotting are other delights in store, or simply the luxury of total relaxation on the soft, warm sand of a deserted isle.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience traditional Kanak life in **Hienghène** (p330), staying in homestays and discovering the region's waterfalls, rock formations and old river ferry
- Kayak through a drowned forest, abseil down waterfalls and hike in the solitary landscape of the **Far South** (p321)
- Visit the magnificent **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p315) in Noumea and treat yourself to fine wine and French cuisine in the capital's gourmet **restaurants** (p318)
- Glide across tranquil Baie d'Upi on **Île des Pins** (p344) in a traditional sailing *pirogue*
- Feast on grilled lobster at a friendly Kanak homestay on the **Loyalty Islands** (p332) before retiring to your *case* for the night



## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

New Caledonia has a temperate climate with two main seasons: cold (June to August) and hot (mid-November to mid-April). Water temperatures drop to 21°C in the cold season, and average air temperatures are around 24°C during the day and 15°C at night. Travellers wanting to laze around on the beach should avoid these months, but

for hikers this is an ideal time to visit New Caledonia. In the hot season average maximum temperatures vary between 26°C and 30°C. The cyclone season occurs during the hottest months, January to March.

Overall, the best time to visit New Caledonia is from September to December, when the days are not too hot and sticky, and there's less likelihood of rain.

For Noumea's climate chart, see p827.

## NEW CALEDONIA FACTS

- Capital city (and island):** Noumea (Grande Terre)
- Population:** 230,000
- Land area:** 18,575 sq km
- International telephone code:** ☎ 687
- Currency:** Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)
- Languages:** French and Kanak
- Greeting:** *Bonjour* (Hello)
- Website:** www.newcaledoniaturism-south.com

## HISTORY

New Caledonia was first populated by a hunter-gatherer people known as the Lapita (see the boxed text, p39), who arrived from the islands of Vanuatu around 1500 BC. The Lapita were the ancestors of the Melanesians and Polynesians.

From about the 11th century AD until the 18th century, groups of Polynesians also migrated to New Caledonia.

## Early Europeans

The English explorer James Cook spotted Grande Terre in 1774, naming it New Caledonia because the terrain reminded him of

the highlands of Scotland (which was called Caledonia by the Romans).

During the 19th century British and US whalers, followed by sandalwood traders, were the first commercial Westerners to land on the islands.

The first missionaries, two Protestant Samoans from the London Missionary Society, arrived on Île des Pins in 1841. A little later, French Catholic missionaries established a mission at Balade on the northeast coast of Grande Terre in 1843.

### French Colonisation

France officially claimed New Caledonia in 1853, initially establishing it as a penal colony. The first shiploads of convicts arrived at Port-de-France (present-day Noumea) in 1864. In 1871 they were joined by political prisoners from the Paris Commune uprising and the Arab revolt of 1870 against the French colonial government in Algeria.

Having served their sentences, many former convicts were given concessions to farm, and as more settlers arrived an increasing amount of Melanesian land was taken over. This resulted in the revolt of 1878, led by chief Ataï, which lasted several months and was eventually quashed by the French, aided by allied clans.

### WWI & WWII

During WWI male Caldoches (New Caledonia's European inhabitants) and Kanaks (the indigenous Melanesians) were recruited to fight on the French and Turkish fronts.

During WWII New Caledonian soldiers fought for the allied forces in North Africa, Italy and France. Meanwhile, 40,000 US and a smaller number of New Zealand (NZ) soldiers set up a base in New Caledonia. The influence of the US soldiers in particular ushered New Caledonia into the modern era.

### Postwar

Between 1946 and 1956 Kanaks were progressively given the right to vote, and in 1953 the first political party involving Kanaks was formed.

A nickel boom in the 1960s and '70s saw many New Caledonians abandoning their professions to work in the nickel industry. The boom brought a large number of

French migrants to the territory, creating significant social upheaval. The migrants were seen as opportunists by the locals and after the boom ended a lot of people were left unemployed.

Independence became an increasingly important issue for Kanaks, and the majority of Kanak parties joined to form the Front Indépendentiste (Independence Front) in 1979. In 1977 Jacques Lafleur established the loyalist Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR), the main adversary of the pro-independence movement.

### The Independence Movement

In 1984 other pro-independence parties joined the Front Indépendentiste to form the Front de Libération National Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), with Jean-Marie Tjibaou as its leader.

In that same year, mounting political tensions resulted in Les Événements (the Troubles), a period of violent confrontation between pro-independence Kanaks and loyalist supporters.

In 1986 the UN General Assembly voted in favour of adding New Caledonia to its decolonisation list.

### Conflict & Resolution

In January 1987 the French National Assembly approved a new plan for the territory and an election was called for 24 April 1988, the same day as the first round of voting for the French presidency. Pro-independence supporters demanded that the date be changed, and ended up boycotting the election. The disagreement led to the Ouvéa hostage drama (see p339).

The presidential elections saw the Socialists returned to power and a concerted effort was made to end the bloodshed in New Caledonia. Newly elected Prime Minister Michel Rocard brokered the Matignon Accords, a historic peace agreement signed by the two New Caledonian leaders, Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur.

Under the accords it was agreed that New Caledonia would be divided into three regions: the Southern, Northern and Loyalty Islands provinces. It was assumed that the latter two would come under Kanak control in an election. The accords also stated that a referendum on self-determination would

be held in 1998, with all New Caledonians eligible to vote.

In May 1989 Jean-Marie Tjibaou and his second-in-command, Yeiwene Yeiwene, were assassinated (see p339). The assassinations ended the political violence in New Caledonia.

### A Common Destiny

Following the Matignon Accords, a new agreement between the FLNKS, RPCR and French government was signed in Noumea in 1998. The Noumea Accord outlines a 15- to 20-year period of growth and development, planning for the gradual transfer of administrative powers from the government of France to the government of New Caledonia and culminating in a referendum on independence. It also calls for the establishment of a common destiny for New Caledonians through the selection of symbols of national identity such as an anthem and flag.

### THE CULTURE

#### The National Psyche

New Caledonia has a unique Franco-Pacific cultural blend. It's a mix of Western efficiency and Pacific casualness.

A good proportion of Noumea's inhabitants have an unmistakable Frenchness about them, such as the topless women without an ounce of fat on their tanned bodies who adorn Anse Vata and Baie des Citrons beaches. Noumea is also where many French, Caldoches and people of Asian origin have made their fortunes in business and they love displaying that wealth. People cruise around town in their big shiny cars and the city suburbs are full of large flash houses. Noumeans are also very sporty, and in the evenings you'll see them cycling, jogging and walking along the city's picturesque southern bays.

Outside the capital you will generally meet two types: discrete Kanaks and sociable Broussards (rural Caldoches). Your first impression of Kanaks will probably be of reserved, polite and somewhat distant people and it may take a while to break the ice. Broussards on the other hand are great storytellers and you will find it hard to fit a word in edgewise. The one thing all rural New Caledonians have in common is their generosity and warm hospitality.

### Lifestyle

The lifestyles enjoyed by Kanaks and Caldoches are similar in many ways, as both groups are family oriented and enjoy being outdoors in their leisure time. What sets them apart are cultural differences such as *la coutume*, the essential component of Kanak society.

*La coutume* is a code for living that encompasses rites, rituals and social interaction between and within clans. During important events such as birth, marriage and mourning, symbolic offerings are made and discussions are held.

### Population

The last census, carried out in 2004, tallied New Caledonia's population at around 230,000, two-thirds of whom live in the greater Noumea region. Kanaks are the largest group, making up 45% of the population, followed by Europeans (35%), Polynesians, Asians and other minority groups.

All New Caledonians are French citizens, but as in any multicultural society these citizens are divided into various groups.

Kanaks, the indigenous Melanesians, are courteous and rather shy. The majority live in rural clan communities known as *tri-*

#### KANAK GRANDE CASE

The *grande case* (big hut) is one of the strongest symbols of the Kanak community. It is the widest and tallest *case* in each clan settlement and is traditionally home to the chief. Nowadays the chiefs all have modern homes located close to the *grande case* where tribal gatherings and discussions still take place.

Where possible, the hut is built on a knoll above the rest of the village. The central pillar, an immense tree trunk, is erected first. It will support the entire *case* and symbolises the chief. A stone hearth is laid between the central pillar and the door.

The entrance to the *grande case* is via a low doorway flanked by carved posts. Inside, the walls and ceiling are lined with wooden posts or beams, lashed to the frame with strong vines, all of which lean against the central pillar to symbolise the clan's close link to the chief. Finally, the roof is topped with a *flèche faiteière*, a carved wooden spear that becomes home to ancestral spirits.

bus. Many Kanaks from northern Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands have moved to Noumea to pursue their secondary and tertiary education and to find employment. However, they still maintain strong ties with their *tribus*, and return there for holidays and cultural and family celebrations.

New Caledonia's European population has two distinct groups: the Caldoches and the Métros. Caldoches are those who were born in New Caledonia and have ancestral ties that go back to the days of the penal colony or to the early French settlers. They are also subdivided into two groups: urban Caldoches, who often prefer to be referred to by the term Caledonian; and rural Caldoches, known as Broussards (people from the bush). Many Broussards are cattle breeders who have forged a culture of their own, similar to that of Outback Australia. Depending on the context, Caledonian refers to all New Caledonians or second-generation inhabitants.

The term *Métro* comes from *Métropolitain*, as in metropolitan France, and refers to those who were not born in New Caledonia but who have migrated temporarily or permanently from France. *Zoreille* is a more colloquial term used to describe these people and, depending on the context, can be derogatory.

There is a large Polynesian population in New Caledonia, mainly from the French territory of Wallis and Futuna. In fact, more Wallisians live in New Caledonia than in their homeland and they make up 12% of the population.

People of Asian origin, including Indonesians, Vietnamese and Chinese, began arriving in New Caledonia in the early 20th century. Today they are mainly involved in the trade sector.

## SPORT

*Pétanque*, a game inherited from the French and sometimes called *boules* (bowls), is played mainly by men on a *boulodrome*, a smooth, hard pitch. Soccer, volleyball and a local version of cricket are also popular.

## ARTS

Wood sculpture is a popular form of artistic expression in New Caledonia, particularly in Kanak culture. Île des Pins is famous for its sculpted wooden posts. A few workshops

### PLACE NAMES

You'll come across many different spellings for Kanak place names. We have used the most commonly used spellings in this chapter.

on Lifou are open to the public. Soapstone sculpture is popular on the northeast coast of Grande Terre around Pouébo.

Painting is another popular art, and several art galleries in Noumea sell paintings by local artists.

For an overview of Kanak arts, visit the Tjibaou Cultural Centre (p315).

### Dance

Many dance styles are currently popular in New Caledonia, including *pilou* (traditional Kanak dance), Tahitian, Vietnamese and Indonesian. Performances are held regularly at festivals and public events such as the *Jeudis du Centre Ville* (see p314) in Noumea.

### Literature

New Caledonia has a dynamic literary scene made up of several publishers and many authors.

Déwé Gorodey is a Kanak politician and writer who evokes the struggle for independence in her writing and gives a feminist view of Kanak culture. *The Kanak Apple Season* is a collection of short stories, exploring Kanak political and cultural issues.

Pierre Gope is another Kanak writer whose works include poetry and plays. Caledonian Nicolas Kurtovitch writes poetry, short stories and plays. *Les Dieux sont borgnes* is a play co-written by Gope and Kurtovitch. The first half is set in the 18th century at the arrival of the first European, Captain James Cook. The second half is set in contemporary New Caledonia. Bernard Berger, also Caledonian, is a cartoonist whose *Brousse en Folie* comic-book series is immensely popular.

Louis-José Barbançon, a Caledonian historian, has written books on the penal-colony history and the difficult political climate of the 1980s. *L'Archipel des Forçats* looks at the convict history of New Caledonia.

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(Continued from page 300)

### Music

In addition to popular Western music and hip-hop, reggae has a huge following in New Caledonia, along with music from Tahiti, Vanuatu and Fiji. The immensely popular local music known as Kaneka is a mixture of reggae and traditional Kanak rhythms.

Dick and Natr Buama, formerly of the band Gurejele, have both produced solo albums in recent years. Edou, leader of the band Mexem from Lifou, continues to produce albums, both solo and with his band. Gulaan, former lead singer of OK! Ryos, sings beautiful melodies in his clear, mellow voice. Tim Semeke and his cultural dance troupe We Ce Ca have produced several albums.

### LANGUAGE

There are more than 30 Kanak languages. French is the official language.

#### New Caledonian basics

Hello/Good morning.	<i>Bonjour.</i>
Good evening.	<i>Bonsoir.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Au revoir or Tata</i> (Kanak farewell)
Yes.	<i>Oui.</i>
No.	<i>Non.</i>
Thank you (very much).	<i>Merci (beaucoup).</i>
Please.	<i>S'il vous plaît.</i>
Excuse me.	<i>Excusez-moi.</i>
I'm sorry.	<i>Pardon.</i>
How are you?	<i>Comment allez-vous?</i>
I'm fine (thanks).	<i>Je vais bien (merci).</i>
I don't understand.	<i>Je ne comprends pas.</i>

### ENVIRONMENT

Despite its small size, New Caledonia has a rich endemic biodiversity. The main threats to its natural environment are mining, deforestation, cattle farming and wildfires.

### Geography

The territory is made up of an archipelago comprising the main island, Grande Terre (16,500 sq km); Île des Pins (152 sq km); the Loyalty Islands (1980 sq km); and the tiny Îles Belep. Scattered around at considerable distances are various minuscule and uninhabited dependencies.

Grande Terre is 400km long and 50km wide. Central mountain ranges divide the

### BEST EATING

New Caledonia's excellent restaurants offer a choice of gourmet, traditional or international cuisine. The following are Lonely Planet's top six dining options:

- Combine a picnic lunch with a spot of people-watching in Noumea's Place des Cocotiers (p314). There are many *snacks* (small eateries) and lunch bars in the vicinity of Place des Cocotiers.
- Walk down to Le Roof (p320) at the end of the pier at Anse Vata for a gastronomic experience.
- Be entertained by Tahitian dancers over a sumptuous seafood buffet at Anse Vata's Nouvata Park Hôtel (p317).
- Tuck into one of Île des Pins's famous *bougnas* at Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis (p346).
- Admire the ocean view as you savour a seafood meal at the friendly Gîte Seday (p334) on Maré.
- Join other guests around the table for a convivial three-course meal at Relais de Poingam (p329).

lush, mountainous east coast from the dry west coast and its savanna plains. Grande Terre is rich in minerals and has one of the biggest nickel reserves in the world. The opencast mining technique used to extract nickel has caused a significant amount of erosion, which has affected many mountains and rivers, as well as the lagoon. However, legislation to minimise negative environmental impacts introduced in the 1970s has resulted in mining companies assuming more environmental responsibility.

The Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins are uplifted, flat coral islands (see p63). New Caledonia has 1600km of reef enclosing a magnificent 23,500 sq km turquoise lagoon, the largest enclosed lagoon in the world.

### Ecology

New Caledonia's flora and fauna originated in eastern Gondwanaland, evolving in isolation when Grande Terre became separated 80 million years ago. As a result there are many unique plants and animals, especially birds, and per square kilometre New Caledonia boasts the world's richest diversity.

### THE CAGOU

The flightless *cagou* (*Rhynochetus jubatus*) is a much-loved New Caledonian bird, and like the kiwi in New Zealand it is an unofficial national symbol. The *cagou* is about 50cm tall and has a soft grey plumage and crest, red eyes and an orange beak. It has an unusual call that sounds like a dog yapping. Ironically, dogs are its main predator as the *cagou* cannot fly.

Of the 3250 flowering plant species, 80% are native.

With an estimated 68 species of land birds, about 20 of which are indigenous, New Caledonia is of interest to ornithologists and amateur bird lovers alike. The most renowned indigenous species is the endangered *cagou* (*Rhynochetus jubatus*), New Caledonia's unofficial national bird (see the boxed text, above). Of the few land mammals, only *roussettes* (members of the fruit-bat family), a traditional Kanak food source, are indigenous. Introduced mammals include rusa deer, one of the largest of its species. The deer have reproduced to such an extent that they are creating major damage to native plants and the environment in general. The venison is served in local restaurants. You can see the deer on Caldoche farms on the west coast.

New Caledonia's waters are home to around 2000 species of fish. Humpback whales visit between July and September. New Caledonia's 14 species of sea snakes are often sighted on the water's surface or on land. The most commonly seen is the amphibious *tricot rayé* or banded sea krait. They are highly venomous but not aggressive and bites are extremely rare.

### Parks & Reserves

There are many land and marine parks and reserves in New Caledonia. In the Far South, Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue (p321) and Chutes de la Madeleine (p322) are easily accessible. The ascent of Mont Panié (p331), at 1629m New Caledonia's highest peak, is suitable for fit hikers.

The French government is in the process of applying to have New Caledonian's lagoon added to the list of Unesco World Heritage sites.

## NOUMEA

### pop 92,000

With its cheerful multi-ethnic community, New Caledonia's cosmopolitan capital is both sophisticated and uncomplicated, classy and casual. The relaxed city sits on a large peninsula, surrounded by picturesque bays, and offers visitors a variety of experiences. Diners have the choice of eating out at classy French restaurants or humble establishments in Chinatown, while shopaholics can blow their savings on the latest Paris fashions or go bargain hunting for imported Asian textiles.

### ORIENTATION

Central Noumea revolves around Place des Cocotiers, a large, shady square with landscaped gardens, a couple of blocks in from the waterfront. The main leisure area where locals and tourists hang out lies south of the city centre at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata, with beaches, restaurants, bars and nightclubs. The domestic airport at Magenta is 4km to the east of the city centre.

### NOUMEA IN...

#### One Day

Head out to the **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p315), then into town for a picnic at **Place des Cocotiers** (p314) or a three-course lunch at **Zanzibar** (p320). While away the afternoon at the **beach** in Anse Vata or Baie des Citrons (p315). In the evening have a drink at **Bodega Del Mar** (p320), then amble down the pier to **Le Roof** (p320) for a gourmet meal.

#### Two Days

Follow the itinerary above and on the second day do the Noumea **walking tour** (p313), starting with breakfast at the **market** (p315). Visit the **aquarium** (p315) before catching a taxi boat to **Île aux Canards** (p315) for some fabulous snorkelling. Back on terra firma, head to the **Baie des Citrons shopping complex** (p319) for dinner, then check out the nightlife at one of Anse Vata's **nightclubs** (p320).

### Maps

Bookshops sell IGN maps with scales ranging from 1:50,000 to 1:500,000. These have the most geographical detail but they are about 15 years old. The Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud (see right) has very good free maps of Noumea and New Caledonia.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Librairie Calédo Livres** (Map p318; ☎ 27 38 11; 21 rue Jean Jaurès) Specialises in books on New Caledonia and the Pacific.

**Librairie Montaigne** (Map p318; ☎ 27 34 88; 23 rue de Sébastopol) Has a selection of books and travel guides in English.

#### Internet Access

**Cyber BD Citron** (Map p312; ☎ 24 11 69; cyberbdcitrons@hotmail.com; 35 promenade Roger Laroque) In the Baie des Citrons complex.

**Cyber Noumea Centre** (Map p318; ☎ 26 26 98; tetnet@mls.nc; Galerie Noumea Centre)

#### Medical Services

Pharmacies, identified by a green cross, are dotted all over Noumea. On Saturday afternoons and Sundays only one emergency pharmacy is open, according to a rotating schedule.

**Hôpital Gaston Bourret** (Map p318; ☎ 25 66 66, emergencies 25 67 67; 7 rue Paul Doumer) Noumea's main hospital.

#### Money

ATMs are outside most banks, and they accept most major credit cards. There are several banks on av de la Victoire/Henry Lafleur.

**Banque Calédonienne d'Investissement** (BCI; Map p318; ☎ 24 20 60; cnr rue du Général Mangin & rue Anatole France)

**BNP Paribas** (Map p312; ☎ 26 21 03; 111 promenade Roger Laroque) At the Anse Vata shops.

**Société Générale Bank** (Map p318; ☎ 25 63 00; 44 rue de l'Alma & 56 av de la Victoire/Henry Lafleur) Western Union representative.

#### Post

**Main post office** (Map p318; ☎ 26 84 00; 7 rue Eugène Porcheron) The main office of the Office des Postes et Télécommunications (OPT) has a poste restante and fax service, and there's an ATM outside the building. There's also a post office in Anse Vata.

### Tourist Information

The main visitor information centres for the North Province, Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins are based in Noumea, along with those for Noumea and the South Province.

**Destination Île des Pins** (Map p318; ☎ 24 92 80; infoipd@canl.nc; 12 bis rue du Général Mangin; ☎ 8am-12.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) In the small mall next to the Mobil station, the office arranges bookings for Île des Pins.

**Destination Îles Loyauté** (www.iles-loyaute.com) Central Noumea (Map p318; ☎ 27 66 27; fax 27 48 27; Immeuble Central 1, 2nd fl, 27 rue de Sébastopol; ☎ 8-11.30am & 12.30-5pm Mon-Fri; Anse Vata (Map p312; ☎ 28 93 60; 117 promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 9-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Sat)

**Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud** (Map p318; ☎ 28 75 80, free call 05 75 80; office-tourisme@canl.nc; Place des Cocotiers; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) The main Noumea and Southern Province visitor information centre has masses of practical information including excellent (free) maps of Noumea and New Caledonia in English, information on the Northern and Loyalty Islands provinces and a monthly entertainment guide, *NC Pocket*, listing festivals, exhibitions, concerts and Jeudi du Centre Ville themes.

**Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud Point i** (Map p312; ☎ 28 75 80; promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 9am-5.30pm daily) Small information centre in the *faré* on the beach at Anse Vata.

**Tourisme Province Nord** (Map p318; ☎ 27 78 05; www.tourismeprovincenord.nc; 35 av du Maréchal Foch, Le Village shopping centre; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) The Northern Province visitor information office has informative free maps and brochures on the North Province.

### Travel Agencies

The following companies can organise transport, tours and accommodation within New Caledonia.

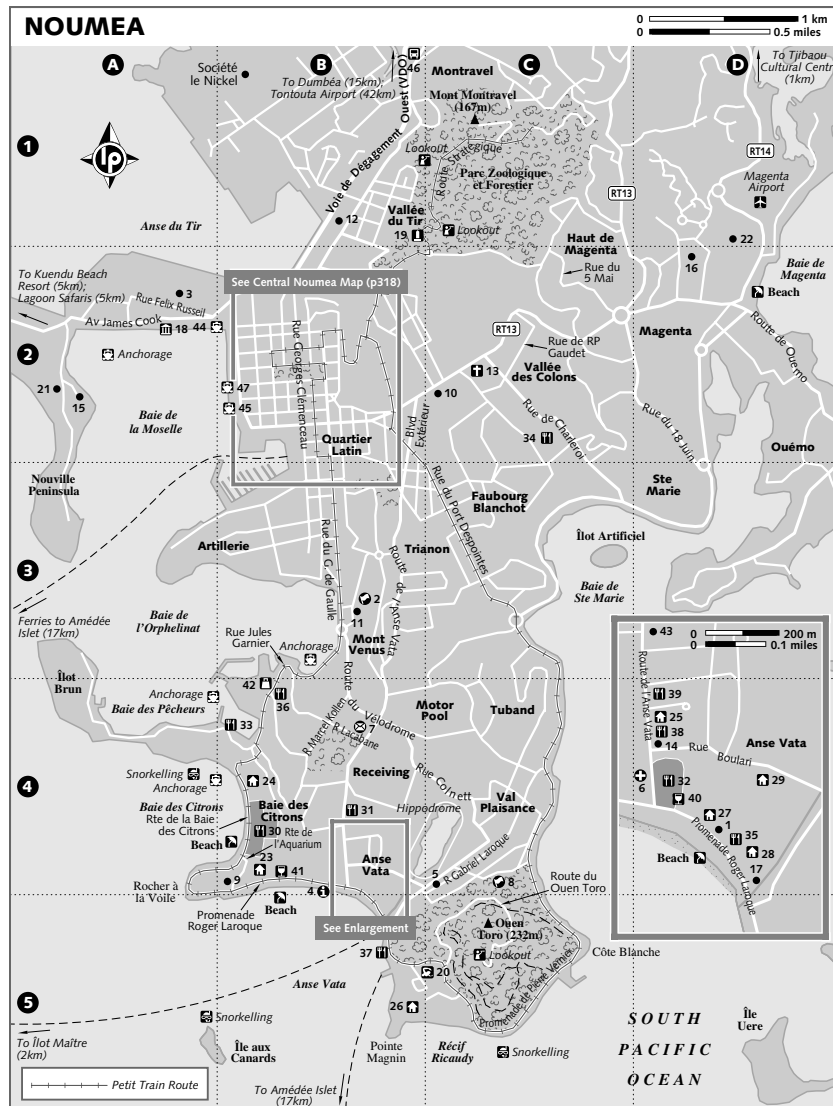
**Air Calédonie** (Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; 39 rue de Verdun)

**Alpha International** (Map p312; ☎ 27 24 20; www.alpha-tourisme.com; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata)

**Arc en Ciel Voyages** (Map p318; ☎ 27 19 80; www.arcenciel-voyages.nc; 59 av du Maréchal Foch)

### TRANSPORT Getting There & Away AIR

Tontouta International Airport is 45km northwest of Noumea. See p351 for details of international flights.



**Air Calédonie** (Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; www.air-caledonie.nc; 39 rue de Verdun; ⏰ 7.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 11am Sat) is the domestic airline, with flights to northern Grande Terre, Île des Pins and the Loyalty Islands. It also has a **ticket office** (☎ 25 21 77) at the domestic airport in Magenta. See p353 for information on flights and fares.

## BOAT

The friendly and efficient **Harbour Master's Office** (Capitainerie; Map p318; ☎ 27 71 97; port.moselle@sodemo.nc) is at Port Moselle's southern end. Noumea is connected to the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins by the fast *Betico* ferry and the *Havannah*, a slower cargo boat. See p353 for details.

INFORMATION		Piscine du Ouen Toro.....20 C5		DRINKING ☑	
BNP Paribas.....(see 40)		Plages Loisirs Kiosk.....(see 4)		Bilboquet Plage.....(see 17)	
Cyber BD Citron.....(see 30)		Prison.....21 A2		Bodega Del Mar.....(see 37)	
Destination Îles Loyauté.....1 D4		Université de la Nouvelle-Calédonie.....22 D1		Cort'o Maltese.....(see 37)	
Indonesian Consulate.....2 B3				Ethnic.....(see 30)	
Office des Douanes.....3 A2				La Guinguette.....(see 41)	
Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud Point.....4 B4		<b>SLEEPING ☑</b>		La Plage.....(see 30)	
Pharmacie de Val Plaisance.....5 C4		Casa del Sol.....23 B4		L'Acropole.....(see 35)	
Polyclinique de l'Anse Vata.....6 D4		Hôtel Beurivage.....24 B4		Les 3 Brasseurs.....(see 30)	
Post Office.....7 B4		Hôtel le Lagon.....25 D4		Malecon Café.....(see 30)	
Swiss Consulate.....8 C4		Hôtel Le Méridien.....26 B5		Mister Swing.....40 D4	
		Lantana Beach Hôtel.....27 D4		Startruck.....41 B4	
		Le Pacifique.....(see 28)			
		Nouvata Park Hôtel.....28 D4		<b>SHOPPING ☑</b>	
		Ramada Plaza.....29 D4		Galerie Commercial Port Plaisance.....42 B4	
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>				Palm Beach Shopping Center.....(see 17)	
Alizé Diving.....(see 17)		<b>EATING ☑</b>		Tricot Rayé.....(see 42)	
Amac Tours.....(see 17)		Baie des Citrons Shopping Complex.....30 B4			
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## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Tontouta International Airport is 45km northwest of Noumea. Public buses operated by **Carsud** (☎ 25 16 15; 400 CFP) run there from the corner of rues Georges Clémenceau and Paul Doumer. Several private companies, including **Philo Tours** (☎ 28 99 57; philo@canl.nc) and **Arc en Ciel Voyages** (Map p318; ☎ 27 19 80; www.arcen-ciel-voyages.nc), run airport transfers (2500 CFP).

Blue-line Karuia buses (200 CFP) and **taxis** (☎ 28 35 12) run to the domestic airport at Magenta for around 1100 CFP.

### BUS

Red-and-white buses (200 CFP) operate around the city from 6am to 7pm. The ticket office is at Place des Cocotiers, and the routes are colour coded.

**Verte (Green)** Kuendu–city centre–Baie des Citrons–Anse Vata.

**Bleue (Blue)** Tjibaou Cultural Centre–Magenta–city centre.

**Orange (Orange)** Val Plaisance–city centre.

**Jaune (Yellow)** Faubourg Blanchot–city centre–Gare de Montravel.

**Violette (Purple)** Magenta–Vallée des Colons–city centre.

The hop-on, hop-off **Noumea Explorer** (☎ 27 19 80; day pass 1000 CFP) bus service does an hourly

circuit from Anse Vata into the city via Baie des Citrons then on to the Maritime Museum in Nouville, the Parc Zoologique et Forestier and the Tjibaou Cultural Centre before returning to Anse Vata.

### CAR & SCOOTER

The Noumea visitor information centre (see p311) has a list of car- and scooter-hire companies; also see p354 for a list of companies. Car rental costs between 3500 and 5000 CFP per day, including free 150km per day.

### TAXI

Noumea's taxis are operated by **Radio Taxis de Noumea** (☎ 28 35 12). The main taxi rank is on rue d'Austerlitz, adjacent to the Galerie Noumea Centre.

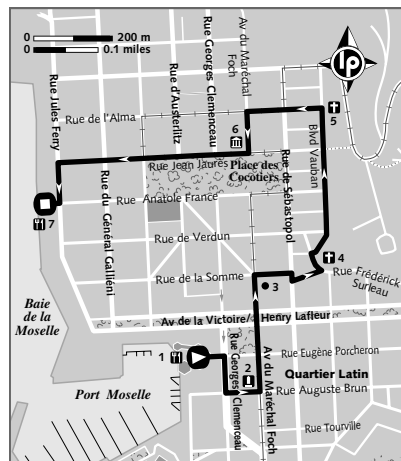
## NOUMEA WALKING TOUR

The tour begins at the southern end of town at the market, and heads northeast past several attractive old buildings before going west down to the waterfront. If you're negotiating this tour with a wheelchair or pushchair, take rue Surcouf or, if it's too steep, rue de Verdun up to rue Frédéric Surleau.

Wake up early and head to Port Moselle for a breakfast of coffee and croissants at the **market** (1; p315). Wander over to admire the

**WALK FACTS**

**Start** Le Marché  
**Finish** Gare Maritime  
**Distance** 2km  
**Duration** Two hours



amazing **Mwà Ka** (2; right), then walk down av du Maréchal Foch to the corner of rue de la Somme for the **Bibliothèque Bernheim** (3; ☎ 24 20 90; 41 av du Maréchal Foch; ☎ 1-5.30pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-5.30pm Wed, to 4pm Sat), the attractive colonial-style public library with its old chandeliers and curved wooden staircases.

Turn right into rue de la Somme and walk along to the steps at the top of the street, which lead up the side of a building to rue Frédéric Surleau and **Cathédrale St Joseph** (4; right). From the cathedral, head north along blvd Vauban to the attractive old stone **Temple Protestant** (5) at the top of rue de l'Alma. Then head down to the charming **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (6; right), opposite Place des Cocotiers. From there, walk down to the waterfront and wander along to the Gare Maritime, where you can have lunch or a coffee at **Café de la Gare** (7; p319).

**PLACE DES COCOTIERS**

The natural starting point for exploring Noumea is Place des Cocotiers, in the heart of the city. The square slopes gently from east to west and at the top is a band rotunda, a famous landmark dating back to

the late 1800s, where teenagers often meet in the afternoon to show off their hip-hop dance moves. The square is a great place to stop for a rest or simply watch the world go by. Near the band rotunda there's a popular *pétanque* pitch and a giant chess board. The lower end of the Place des Cocotiers is like a lush botanical garden, with palms and large spreading trees.

Regular concerts and street markets are held in Place des Cocotiers. The popular **Judis du Centre Ville** (☎ Thu evenings) street market has a different theme each week, outlined in *NC Pocket*, which you can pick up at the Noumea visitor information centre (see p311). Stalls sell arts and crafts, fresh produce, cakes and local dishes, and entertainment includes live music and traditional dance.

**MUSÉE DE LA VILLE DE NOUMEA**

The beautiful colonial-style **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (Noumea Museum; Map p318; ☎ 26 28 05; rue Jean Jaurès; admission 100 CFP; ☎ 9am-4.45pm Mon-Sat), dwarfed by towering palm trees, overlooks Place des Cocotiers. It features temporary and permanent displays on the early history of Noumea.

**CATHÉDRALE ST JOSEPH**

The **cathedral** (Map p318; ☎ 27 32 88; 3 rue Frédéric Surleau) was built in 1888 by convict labour and is one of Noumea's landmarks. It has beautiful stained-glass windows and an elaborately carved pulpit, altar panels and confessional. The main entrance is generally locked, but you should find the side doors open.

**MUSÉE DE NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE**

The **Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Museum of New Caledonia; Map p318; ☎ 27 23 42; smp@gouv.nc; 42 av du Maréchal Foch; adult/child 200/50 CFP; ☎ 9-11.30am & 12.15-4.30pm Wed-Mon) provides an excellent introduction to traditional Kanak and regional Pacific culture. Local exhibits are displayed on the ground floor and regional artefacts on the mezzanine level.

**MWÀ KA**

The magnificent Mwà Ka is erected in a landscaped square opposite Musée de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. The 12m totem pole is topped by a *grande case* (chief's hut), com-

plete with *flèche faitière* (carved rooftop spear), and its carvings represent the eight customary regions of New Caledonia. The Mwà Ka is mounted as the mast on a concrete double-hulled *pirogue* (outrigger canoe), steered by a wooden helmsman, and celebrates Kanak identity as well as the multi-ethnic reality of New Caledonia.

**LE MARCHÉ**

The colourful multi-ethnic **market** (Map p318; ☎ 5am-11am) is beside the marina at Port Moselle. Enticing stalls sell fruit and vegetables, flowers, bread, cakes, olives, meat and fish. There's also an arts and crafts section where there's a busy café. On Saturday and Sunday a local string band keeps shoppers entertained. The market is at its busiest early in the morning.

**MUSÉE DE L'HISTOIRE MARITIME**

The **Musée de l'Histoire Maritime** (Maritime Museum; Map p312; ☎ 26 34 43; 11 av James Cook; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has exhibitions on early seafaring days in New Caledonia and the Pacific.

**PARC ZOOLOGIQUE ET FORESTIER**

The **Parc Zoologique et Forestier** (Zoological and Botanical Gardens; Map p312; ☎ 27 89 51; rte de Laubarède; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 10.15am-5.45pm Tue-Sun, to 5pm 1 May-31 Aug) house native species such as the flightless *cagou*, *roussette* (fruit bat), *notou* pigeon and various parakeets. The gardens have an excellent network of paths through areas of native shrubs and trees, plus there's a café, playground and an enclosure with farm animals for children to pet.

The park is about 4km northeast of the city centre and is not easy to get to. No public buses run there but *le petit train* (see right) and Noumea Explorer buses (p313) run here from the city centre.

**TJIBAOU CULTURAL CENTRE**

The **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (☎ 41 45 45; www.adck.nc; adult/child 500 CFP/free, guided tours 1500 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), named after the pro-independence Kanak leader who was assassinated in 1989, sits in a peaceful woodland and mangrove setting on Tina Peninsula behind the Magenta airport. The harmony that's been achieved between the centre's contemporary architecture (designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, who also

designed Paris' Pompidou Centre) and the surrounding landscape is amazing. The main buildings are a series of tall, curved wooden structures which rise majestically above the trees. The centre is a tribute to a remarkable man and aims to increase awareness and appreciation of the art and culture of New Caledonia and the Pacific. Displays include sculpture, paintings and photographs representing Kanak culture, as well as other cultures from around the Pacific. Behind the main building there are three traditional *grandes cases*; the centre publishes a concert programme. Amenities include a multimedia library, theatre, shop and café. Blue-line city buses and the Noumea Explorer bus (see p313) run regularly to the centre.

**AQUARIUM**

A new **Aquarium** (Map p312; ☎ 26 27 31; rte de l'Aquarium; adult/child/student/senior 650/115/210/300 CFP; ☎ 10am-4.45pm, closed Mon) was nearing completion at the time of writing, next to the old one at Anse Vata. The aquarium will house species found in New Caledonian waters, including nautilus, sea snakes, stone fish, turtles and sting rays. A living coral display will also be transferred there.

**LE PETIT TRAIN**

These miniature **trains** (☎ 77 80 51; adult/child 1300/700 CFP) are an entertaining way to discover Noumea. They do a city circuit tour as well as tours to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre and Parc Zoologique et Forestier. Purchase tickets from the driver or from **Amac Tours** (Galerie Palm Beach, Anse Vata).

**BEACHES**

The two most popular beaches are at **Anse Vata** and **Baie des Citrons**. On a breezy day at Anse Vata you can watch the colourful kite- and wind-surfers skimming up and down the bay.

**AROUND NOUMEA**

There are many places close to Noumea which you can discover in a day or two by taking a tour (see p316).

**Islets Around Noumea**

The lagoon around Noumea is sprinkled with beautiful islets. Most are marine reserves and the clear waters surrounding

them are great for snorkelling. The most accessible are Île aux Canards, in Anse Vata bay, and Îlot Maître, 2km further west.

### AMÉDÉE ISLET

This islet, about 20km south of Noumea, is a popular day-trip destination. It's famous for its tall white lighthouse, **Phare Amédée** (200 CFP), with its spiral staircase which you can climb. There's also a snack bar and curio shop.

### Dumbéa

Dumbéa is 18km north of Noumea on the RT1. The area offers various activities, including hiking, swimming and canoeing.

### MONTS KOGHIS

The turn-off to these mountains is on the RT1, 14km north of central Noumea. Monts Koghis are clad in rainforest and rich native flora, and they have several walking trails; the Direction des Ressources Naturelles (p348) publishes a free walking map.

**Koghi Parc Adventure** (Map p322; ☎ 43 02 52, 82 14 85; talon@mls.nc; 2000 CFP; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat & Sun, by reservation Mon-Fri), behind the auberge (see opposite), offers tree-top trails on swinging bridges and rope walks.

### DUMBÉA RIVER

The Dumbéa River is popular during the hot summer months, as the shady park is a good picnic area and the river here is a popular swimming spot. The RT1 crosses the river at Parc Fayard, 16km north of Noumea. **Terra Incognita** (☎ 25 39 93, 78 94 46; terincognita@canl.nc) hires canoes and kayaks, and runs full-moon kayaking trips down the river.

### Tours

**Alpha International** (Map p312; ☎ 27 24 20; www.alpha-tourisme.com; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata) Organises catamaran trips to islets and Le Ponton.

**Amiral's Dream** (☎ 77 16 21) This speedboat goes to Phare Amédée (7000 CFP) and the other islets (3000 to 5000 CFP). Departs from Port Moselle and also organises fishing trips.

**Mary D** (Map p312; ☎ 26 31 31; mary-d@offratel.nc; Galerie Palm Beach, Anse Vata; 11,350 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-noon Sat) Runs day trips to Phare Amédée, leaving from Port Moselle.

**Pacific Charter** (Map p318; ☎ /fax 26 10 55; www.pa.nc/charter) Organises sailing trips departing from Port Moselle.

**Plages Loisirs** (Map p312; ☎ 26 90 00; plageloisirs@mls.nc; promenade Roger Laroque) Runs taxi boats to Île aux Canards and Îlot Maître from a kiosk at Anse Vata.

**Raid Ngatahi** (☎ /fax 77 24 40; www.raid-ngatahi.nc; Noumea) Runs tailored speedboat excursions to islets in the southern lagoon for 18,500 CFP per day.

## ACTIVITIES

### Diving

The reef around Phare Amédée is a popular dive site, and you are likely to see sharks and rays. Noumea's dive clubs charge around 13,000 CFP for a two-dive package; see p348 for details of the 'Plongée' discount card.

**Alizé Diving** (☎ 26 25 85; www.alizedive.com) At the Palm Beach complex at 127 promenade Roger Laroque at Anse Vata.

**Amédée Diving Club** (Map p318; ☎ 26 40 29; www.amedee.sponline.com; 28 rue du Générale Mangin)

**Lagoon Safaris** (☎ 24 18 04; www.lagoon-safaris.com) At Kuendu Beach Resort on the Nouville Peninsula.

### Other Water Activities

Beneath the visitor information *faré* on the beach at Anse Vata, **Plages Loisirs** (Map p312; ☎ 26 90 00; plageloisirs@mls.nc; promenade Roger Laroque; per hr kayaks/windsurfers/fun boards/hobby cats 1500/2000/2500/4000 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm) hires out various water-activity equipment. Some of the hotels at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata provide guests with an activity pass which entitles them to free use of Plages Loisirs' snorkelling equipment.

**Locajet** (Map p312; ☎ 77 79 79; www.locajet.info; 1/3hr 7000/12,000 CFP), in Nouville on the western side of Baie de la Moselle, rents jet skis. You can do a great circular trip by jet ski from Baie de la Moselle out to Île aux Canards, Îlot Maître and a few more islets which brings you back to the northern side of the Nouville peninsula on Baie de la Moselle.

## NOUMEA FOR CHILDREN

Noumea has plenty of sights and activities for children. They can spend hours swimming or building sand castles at **Anse Vata** or **Baie des Citrons** beaches (p315). There are shady playgrounds at Baie de l'Orphelinat off rue du Générale de Gaulle, and next to the public swimming pool at Ouen Toro near Anse Vata. A ride on **le petit train** (p315) or a visit to the new **aquarium** (p315) are exciting possibilities, and **Parc Zoologique et Forestier** (p315) is a must. There are children's **rides** (200 CFP; ☎ from 3pm Mon-Sun) in the car park

opposite the market. If you pop by **Place des Cocotiers** (p314) on a Thursday evening there are traditional dances to watch, candyfloss to eat and Liesse's famous face-painting stall. And if the kids are getting cranky but you haven't finished shopping, promise them an ice cream. There are ice-cream bars at the Anse Vata shops, the Baie des Citrons shopping complex and Place des Cocotiers.

## TOURS

One of the most popular tours of Noumea is organised by *le petit train* (see p315). The Noumea visitor information centre (p311) can recommend city-tour operators.

## SLEEPING

Noumea has very few budget options but plenty of choices in the mid- to top-end price brackets.

### Budget

**Auberge de Jeunesse** (Map p318; ☎ 27 58 79; yha.noumea@lagoon.nc; 51 bis rue Pasteur-Marcel Ariège; dm/d 1400/3300 CFP) This sparkling-clean hostel, behind St Joseph's Cathedral, has a fantastic view overlooking the city and Baie de la Moselle. It's an HI member and charges 200 CFP extra for nonmembers. The quickest way to get there from the centre of town on foot is up the steps at the top of rue Jean Jaurès. Advance bookings are recommended.

### Midrange

**Hôtel Beurivage** (Map p312; ☎ 26 20 55; www.beurivage.grands-hotels.cc; 7 promenade Roger Laroque; d 6050 CFP; ☎ ☎) This hotel at the northern end of Baie des Citrons is just across the road from the beach. Rooms have fridges and cost an extra 1000 CFP with a sea view.

**Auberge du Mont Koghi** (Map p322; ☎ 41 29 29; kogiland@offratel.nc; Dumbéa; r 6500-7500 CFP, chalets s/d 7500/9500 CFP, half board for 2 15,000 CFP) Overlooking Noumea and its bays, 476m above sea level, the auberge has chalets and more remote huts about a 10-minute walk into the forest. The restaurant has a fireplace and warm timber interior, and serves melted-cheese *raclette* (3900 CFP) and fondue (3300 CFP).

**Casa del Sol** (Map p312; ☎ 25 87 00; www.newcaledoniahotelsresorts.com; 10 rte de l'Aquarium; apartments 10,600-13,000 CFP) These spacious self-catering apartments behind Baie des Citrons are a couple of minutes' walk from the beach.

**Lantana Beach Hôtel** (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 12; lantana@canl.nc; 133 promenade Roger Laroque; s/d from 7750/8750 CFP) Rooms at this hotel across the road from the beach at Anse Vata have fridges and tea- and coffee-making facilities.

**Hôtel Le Lagon** (Map p312; ☎ 26 12 55; lelagon@offratel.nc; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata; d/4-person studio 10,350/13,350 CFP) This hotel has comfortable, self-catering rooms. It's a two-minute walk to Anse Vata beach.

**Le Pacifique** (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 00; resa@nchotels.com; 123 promenade Roger Laroque; d from 15,350 CFP; ☎ ☎) This place is attached to the top-end Nouvata Park Hôtel at Anse Vata but offers cheaper accommodation.

## Top End

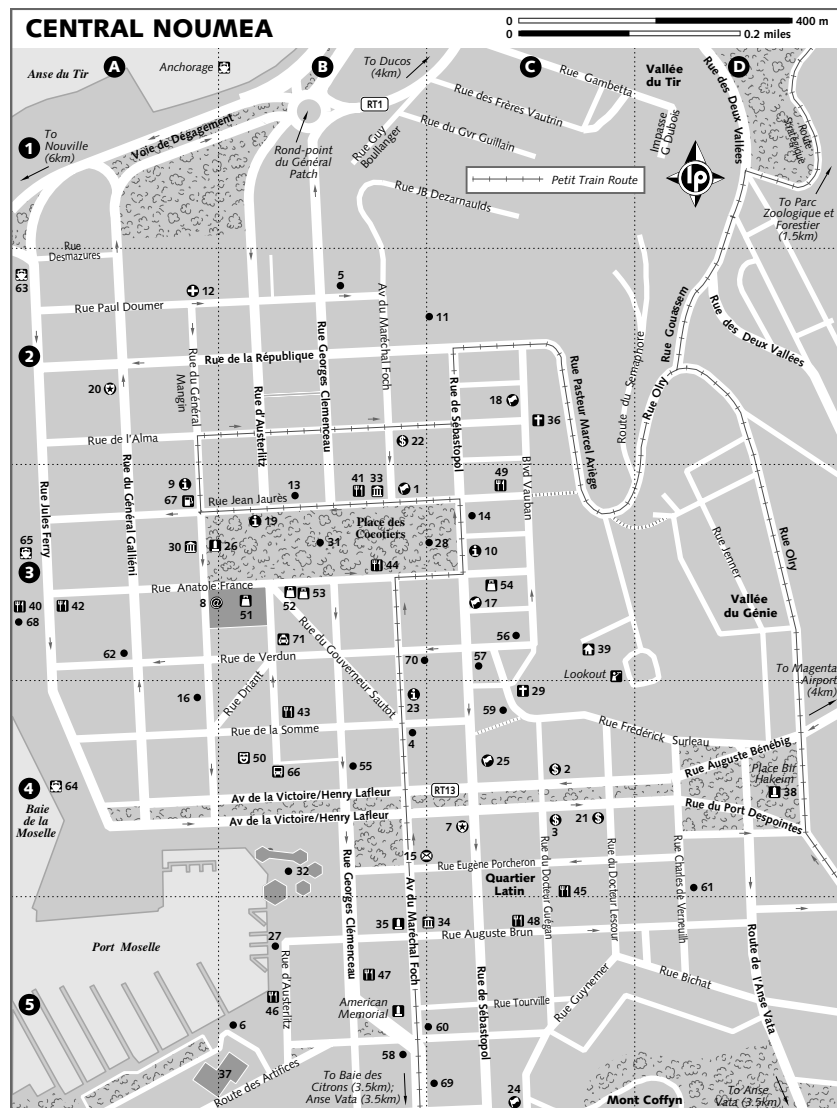
**Ramada Plaza** (Map p312; ☎ 23 90 00; www.ramada-plaza-noumea.nc; r from 16,900 CFP, st from 30,900 CFP) The rooms and suites at the twin-towered Ramada Plaza are tastefully decorated in contemporary Pacific style. Rooms have racecourse or sea views and facilities include a kids' club and spa. There's a revolving restaurant on the top floor (dishes from 2500 CFP).

**Nouvata Park Hôtel** (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 00; resa@nchotels.com; 123 promenade Roger Laroque; d with garden/beach view from 27,900/22,900 CFP; ☎ ☎) This four-star hotel is right in the middle of the tourist atmosphere at Anse Vata and has all the facilities you'd expect.

**Hôtel Le Méridien** (Map p312; ☎ 26 50 00; lemeridien@meridien.nc; Pointe Magnin; d 20,900-24,900 CFP, st 53,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) This five-star hotel at the southern end of Anse Vata beach has landscaped grounds, a relaxing pool area and several restaurants.

### THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

**Kuendu Beach Resort** (☎ 24 30 30; kuendu.beach@lagoon.nc; over-water bungalows 35,000 CFP, garden/beach bungalows 12,150/18,150 CFP; ☎ ☎) By a sheltered bay on secluded Nouville Peninsula, the Kuendu Beach Resort has attractive thatched garden bungalows and romantic bungalows over the water with wooden decks which face the sunset. The pool, with water slides, is popular with children. Lunch is served at the beachfront restaurant and there's also a gourmet restaurant in an impressive thatched dining room.



**Coral Palms Island Resort** (☎ 26 05 12; resa@newcaledoniahotels.nc; Îlot Maitre; bungalows with garden/beach view 40,500/45,500 CFP, over-water bungalows 60,500 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This idyllic hotel on Îlot Maitre has bungalows set in a tropical garden and luxury over-water accommodation. There's a relaxing pool area and a wide range of water activities.

## EATING

Noumea has an endless list of good restaurants specialising in French and international cuisine as well as seafood. There are also restaurants at the hotels listed in the Sleeping section (p317); three that we particularly recommend are Ramada's Le 360 panoramic revolving rooftop restaur-

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Banque de Nouvelle Calédonie (BNC).....	3 C4	Cathédrale St Joseph.....	29 C4	L'Association des Sculpteurs de Nouvelle-Calédonie.....	53 B3
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Société Générale Bank.....	21 C4	Coco Glacé.....	44 B3	Zanzibar.....	49 C3
Société Générale Bank.....	22 B2	La Chaumière.....	45 C4		
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UK Consulate.....	24 C5	Roulottes.....	47 B5		
Vanuatu Consulate.....	25 C4	Snack Loan.....	48 C5		

ant; Méridien's L'Hippocampe gourmet restaurant; and Kuendu's Le Grand Chêne gourmet restaurant. Many cafés and restaurants are closed on Sunday or Monday.

## City Centre

You'll find numerous small and inexpensive *snacks* (small eateries) in Chinatown, in the southern part of the city centre. The sandwich bar opposite the Compact Mégastore in the Galerie Noumea Centre sells sandwiches, quiche, pizza and a mouthwatering selection of cakes and pastries.

**Coco Glacé** (Map p318; ☎ 24 99 89; Place des Cocotiers; lunch 350-500 CFP; 🍷 7am-6pm Mon-Sat) Coco Glacé serves ice creams, sorbets, crêpes and waffles at outdoor tables on a shady deck area.

**Café Shop** (Map p318; ☎ 24 99 89; 37 rue Jean Jaurès; sandwiches 350-500 CFP; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri) This popular sandwich bar near Musée de la Ville, opposite Place des Cocotiers, also serves paninis and burgers.

**Café de la Gare** (Map p318; ☎ 28 24 24; rue Jules Ferry; dishes 1000 CFP; 🍷 7am-4pm Mon-Sat) This café at the Gare Maritime serves quiches and salads and makes excellent coffee.

## Quartier Latin & Port Moselle

**Roulottes** (Map p318; rue Georges Clémenceau; dishes around 600 CFP; 🍷 dinner) These food vans in the large car park opposite the market serve great takeaway meals.

**Snack Loan** (Map p318; ☎ 27 13 51; rue August Brun; dishes 550 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This takeaway *snack* specialises in Asian food, including mouthwatering samosas, spring rolls and wontons, rice and noodle dishes. It's in a colonial house with a red roof.

**La Chaumière** (Map p318; ☎ 27 24 62; 13 rue du R Guégan; dishes 2000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) An excellent choice for connoisseurs of French cuisine.

**Le Bout du Monde** (Map p318; ☎ 27 77 28; 4 rue de la Frégate Nivose; dishes 1500-2500 CFP; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This relaxed bar and restaurant next to the marina at Port Moselle serves a lunchtime salad buffet on week days.

## Baie des Citrons

Baie des Citrons shopping complex at the southern end of the bay has a wide choice of restaurants serving seafood, crepes, salads and various international cuisines. There's also an ice-cream bar.



### THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

**Zanzibar** (Map p318; ☎ 25 28 00; 51 rue Jean Jaurès; dishes 1500 CFP; 🍷 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) One of the most popular restaurants in central Noumea, classy Zanzibar is tastefully decorated in warm tones. It serves international cuisine and a divine selection of desserts. At 1800 CFP, its three-course set lunch menu is excellent value.

**La Fiesta Chez Alban** (Map p312; ☎ 26 21 33; 5 promenade Roger Laroque; dishes 1500 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This colourful Basque restaurant serves dishes from the southwest of France, as well as pizzas.

**Le Galapagos** (Map p312; ☎ 26 22 18; 21 rue Jules Garnier; dishes 1600-1800 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The Galapagos is in Baie de l'Orphelinat, a short walk north from Baie des Citrons. It does a fantastic cheese buffet (1900 CFP) on Thursday evenings.

### Anse Vata

There are several restaurants at the Anse Vata shops opposite the beach.

**L'Amédée** (Map p312; ☎ 26 10 35; 153 rte de l'Anse Vata; dishes 1000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) This cosy restaurant is a good choice for lovers of seafood.

**Snack Ulysse** (Map p312; ☎ 26 69 28; rte de l'Anse Vata; sandwiches 400-650 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The popular *snack* near Hôtel le Lagon serves generously filled hot or cold sandwiches, burgers, chips and rice dishes.

**La Sorbetière** (Map p312; ☎ 26 28 03) For a mouth-watering range of ice creams, waffles and crepes head to the Anse Vata shops.

**Casa Italia** (Map p312; ☎ 25 92 58; 113 rte de l'Anse Vata; small/large pizzas 1400/2000 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This Italian restaurant serves great pizzas and pasta dishes. It's about 800m from the beach, near the Shell petrol station.

**Le Roof** (Map p312; ☎ 25 07 00; 134 promenade Roger Laroque; dishes 2500 CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon & Wed-Sun) This classy haven for gastronomes is built over the water at the southern end of Anse Vata, with tables overlooking the water and two large aquariums inside.

### Dumbéa

**Nakamal du Col** (Dumbéa; kava per shell 100 CFP; 🍷 3.30-10pm Mon-Fri, 3.30pm-midnight Sat & Sun) This *nakamal* (kava house) on the RT1 has

small *farés* built on a terraced hillside. The site has a panoramic view over Noumea and its bays, and there are fantastic sunsets.

### DRINKING Nightclubs

Most nightclubs are closed from Sunday to Tuesday. They usually open at around 10pm but don't really get going until after midnight.

In Baie des Citrons those in their late teens and early 20s head to **La Plage** (Map p312; Baie des Citrons shopping complex).

Anse Vata's nightclubs are spread along promenade Roger Laroque. Crowds in their 30s and 40s head to **Mister Swing** (Map p312; ☎ 24 03 93; 115 promenade Roger Laroque); **L'Acropole** (☎ 24 19 38; 119 promenade Roger Laroque); **Startruck** (Map p312; ☎ 26 17 54; promenade Roger Laroque) and **La Guinguette** (Map p312; ☎ 26 17 54; promenade Roger Laroque) at the western end of the bay; and **Cort'o Maltese** (Map p312; ☎ 26 27 25; 134 promenade Roger Laroque), on the small pier at the eastern end of the bay.

### Bars

There are a handful of relaxed bars at the Baie des Citrons shopping complex, including **Malecon Café** (Map p312; ☎ 28 28 05), **Les 3 Brasseurs** (Map p312; ☎ 24 15 16) and **Ethnic** (Map p312; ☎ 27 20 20). They often have live music on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

At the eastern end of Anse Vata, **Bodega Del Mar** (Map p312; ☎ 26 11 53; 134 promenade Roger Laroque) is a trendy bar on the pier. **Bilboquet Plage** (Map p312; ☎ 26 46 60), opposite the beach, has an upstairs restaurant and a café that's a relaxing place for a drink.

Not far from the city centre, **Le Bout du Monde** (Map p318; ☎ 27 77 28; 4 rue de la Frégate Nivôse) at the Port Moselle marina is a pleasant place for a drink as well as a meal (see p319).

### ENTERTAINMENT

The Noumea visitor information centre (see p311) publishes the *NC Pocket* ([www.sortir.nc](http://www.sortir.nc)) entertainment guide. The majority of Noumea's nightlife happens at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata.

### Cinemas

**Ciné City** (Map p318; ☎ 29 20 20; 18 rue de la Somme; admission 950 CFP) At the western end of av de la Victoire/Henri Lafleur, Ciné City

screens movies in French except during La Foa Film Festival in late June or early July, when movies are screened in their original language.

### SHOPPING

You'll find shops selling French designer labels as well as prêt-à-porter outlets along rue de Sébastopol, rue de l'Alma and rue Jean Jaurès. There are also duty-free shops in this area. Two shops selling local clothing brands are **Teeprint Boutique** (Map p318; 48 rue Anatole France) and **Tricot Rayé** (Map p312; Galerie Commercial Port Plaisance).

**L'Atelier des Femmes de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Map p318; cnr rue Gouverneur Sautot & rue Anatole France) sells local crafts and **L'Association des Sculpteurs de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Map p318; ☎ 77 51 24; rue Anatole France), next door, sells Kanak sculptures.

## GRANDE TERRE

pop 210,000 / area 16,500 sq km

Measuring 400km long and 50km wide, Grande Terre (Main Land) is not only New Caledonia's major island but also the third-largest island in the Pacific after Papua New Guinea and NZ. A chain of mountains sweeps down the middle of the island, and the wide plains that stretch along its west coast are dotted with country towns where cattle breeders stroll down the street in Stetsons and cowboy boots. On the east coast the mountains descend to the sea, their lush vegetation meeting the steep and sinuous coastline. Waterfalls rush down the mountainsides into deep pools before trickling gently into the sea. Grande Terre is enclosed by the world's second-largest lagoon, where the islands' inhabitants spend much of their leisure time fishing, boating and enjoying other water sports.

### THE FAR SOUTH

The main attraction of the Far South is its feeling of remote wilderness. The vast, empty region is characterised by its hardy scrub vegetation and red soil, and offers a wide range of activities including hiking, kayaking, abseiling and mountain biking. If you are looking for a bit of action and adventure while you're in New Caledonia, head to the Far South.

### Transport

It's worth hiring a car for a day to explore the Far South; see p354 for car-rental agents in Noumea. From Noumea it is about 1½ hours to Yaté and two hours to Port Boisé by car.

For information on tours to the Far South, see p323. Buses to Yaté (600 CFP, two hours) leave from Noumea's Gare Routière at 11.30am Monday to Saturday.

### Orientation & Information

To get to the Far South head east out of Noumea towards Mont-Dore. The easiest route is to follow the Voie Express out of Noumea to the RP1. The road forks when it reaches the mountain at La Coulée: you can take either the RP3 across to Yaté or continue along the RP1 south to Prony and Port Boisé, as the two routes eventually meet at the Chutes de la Madeleine.

A small **visitor information centre** (☎ 43 33 44; 🍷 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) beside the RP1 at Boulari has information on accommodation and activities in the Far South, including several walking-track brochures.

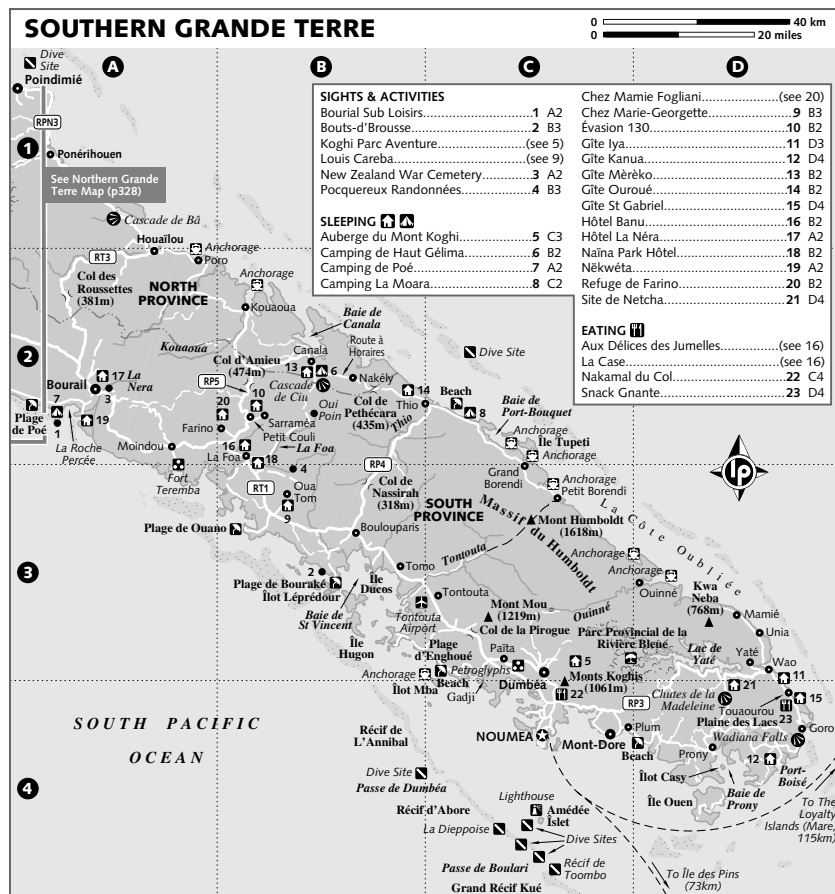
### Sights & Activities

To get an idea of the range of activities you can get up to in the Far South, see the list of activity-based tours on p323.

### PARC PROVINCIAL DE LA RIVIÈRE BLEUE

If you take the RP3 from La Coulée you will arrive at the western end of the artificial **Lac de Yaté**, a hydroelectric dam. Located here is **Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue** (☎ 43 61 24; adult/child 400/200 CFP; 🍷 7am-5pm Tue-Sun, entry closes 2pm), a protected nature reserve that's home to many bird species, including the *cagou*. The park's landscape is a mixture of the Far South's typical scrub vegetation and dense rainforest. One of the park's famous features is a drowned forest where old tree trunks protrude from the water.

To the west and northwest of the park are the Rivière Blanche and Rivière Bleue, Lac de Yaté's main tributaries. If you have your own vehicle you can drive along the banks of Rivière Blanche to the end of the road, 18km from the park entrance. The road on the Rivière Bleue side of the park is closed to vehicles but you can walk or bike there, or kayak up the river. At the time of writing, the park was planning to introduce a shuttle bus on the Rivière Bleue side.



There is a visitor information centre by the entrance gate which has good displays in English and French on the park's flora and fauna. At the entrance you will also find free maps which outline the park's many walks.

#### CHUTES DE LA MADELEINE

This small **waterfall** (☎ 46 92 47; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☎ 8am-5pm) sits in a botanic reserve in the middle of a vast plain. Swimming is forbidden at the waterfall but permitted about a kilometre downstream at **Site de Netcha** (☎ 46 92 47; adult/child 1000/500 CFP), which has wooden diving platforms over the river and shelters and tables overlooking the water. Camping here costs 200/100 CFP per adult/

child. You can picnic and swim for free between the waterfall and Netcha where the road runs beside the river.

To get to the waterfall from the RP3, take the signposted road turning towards the eastern end of the Lac de Yaté; it is 11km to the waterfall. This road joins the road connecting Prony and Port Boisé a few kilometres further on.

#### YATÉ & CASCADE DE WADIANA

From the eastern end of Lac de Yaté the RP3 winds to the top of a mountain, then drops steeply to the sea. If you turn right at the bottom of the escarpment, and cross a small bridge, the road leads past Wao to tourist gîtes and camp sites. If you continue, the

road veers left to Yaté village, where there's a small shop and petrol pump.

South of Wao you come to Touaourou then Goro. At Goro the road passes beside **Wadiana Falls** which cascade down a rocky slope into a natural pool where you can swim. From Goro you can go on, past the rusting remnants of an iron-mining operation, to Port Boisé and round past Prony back to Noumea.

#### PORT BOISÉ

Port Boisé is an isolated bay surrounded by forest, 6.5km from the turn-off on the main road. The only infrastructure here is a gîte. There are enjoyable walking tracks along the coast and to a lookout point behind the gîte.

#### PRONY

Once a convict centre, the small settlement of Prony sits in a lush hollow surrounded by forest beside Baie de Prony. A stream runs through the village of corrugated-iron cottages and overgrown stone ruins. It's a charming place to wander through or enjoy a picnic beside the sea. The GR1 walking track starts about 500m south of the village at Baie de la Somme, which is part of the larger Baie de Prony. Whale-watching trips also leave from here from July to September (see right).

#### GR1 WALKING TRACK

The **GR1** (Grande Randonnée 1; www.trekking-gr-sud-nc.com) is a two- to three-day (44.4km) walk between Prony and Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. It begins at the sea and traverses a diverse landscape of plains, forests, hills and streams, with magnificent views over the hills to the sea along the way. To overnight, you can bunk down in a hut at Refuge des Néocallitropsis (3km from the road) at the end of the first leg (14km) or pitch your tent at Site de Netcha (500m from the road) at the end of the second leg (10.8km). Either way, drop-offs or pick-ups need to be arranged. The track is part of an ongoing project which will eventually traverse the whole of the Southern Province from south to north.

You must arrange transfers to Prony, Refuge des Néocallitropsis or Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue through the office at **Site de Netcha** (☎ 46 92 47), near the Chutes de la Madeleine.

#### Tours

The following operators run activities and activity-based tours in the Far South. Most rates are based on a minimum of two adults.

**Adventure Pulsion** (☎ 26 27 48; aventure@canl.nc; 4WD per adult per day 12,000 CFP, kayak or mountain bike per half-/full-day 2500/4500 CFP) Specialises in 4WD tours and hires out kayaks and mountain bikes at Site de Netcha. Adventure Pulsion has an office in Noumea (Map p312).

**Caledonia Tour** (☎ 25 94 24; caledoniastours@lagoon.nc; adult/child 9500/6000 CFP) Runs minibus tours of the Far South and specialises in bird-watching and botanic tours.

**Koghi Decouverte/Sud Loisir** (☎ 77 81 43; koghidecouverte@hotmail.com; mountain bikes 1800 CFP, mountain bikes and kayaks adult/child 5750/4600 CFP) Hires mountain bikes and kayaks in Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. It also offers return transfers between Noumea and the park (2500 CFP).

**Pacific Blue** (☎ 77 80 52; ggarnier-iruka@mail.com; adult/child 7500/5500 CFP) Runs whale-watching trips in the Far South on a catamaran.

**Pacific Free Ride** (☎ 79 22 02; www.pfr.nc; canoe half-/full-day 5000/10,000 CFP, quad bikes half-/full-day 10,000/17,000 CFP, abseiling 8000 CFP) Offers canoe trips in Baie de Prony and abseiling down the falls at Goro or Yaté.

**Raid Ngatahi** (☎ 77 24 40; www.kujirado.com; per person 18,000 CFP) Runs whale-watching excursions on a motorised boat south of Baie de Prony, including lunch on Ilot Casey.

**Teranga** (☎ 35 49 54; willypetrel@hotmail.com; adult/child 7500/5500 CFP) Runs whale-watching trips on a catamaran departing from Prony.

**Terra Incognita** (☎ 25 39 93, 78 94 46; terincognita@canl.nc; kayaks half-/full-day/full moon 3350/5350/3950 CFP, 4WD per adult 9880 CFP) Hires out kayaks in Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue (minimum of six required).

#### Sleeping & Eating

The following accommodation places are all on the coast south of Yaté. They all serve meals to nonguests but you must book in advance. You can also camp at Site de Netcha (see opposite), where there is no electricity and you must take drinking water.

**Gîte Iya** (☎ 46 90 80; bungalows 5000 CFP, camping per tent 1500 CFP) This gîte is on a signposted turn-off, just south of Wao. The rustic but comfortable bungalows are set in a coconut grove beside a small private beach, and bungalow rates are for up to three people. Set menus are available for 1800 CFP (closed for dinner on Sunday). When the sea is

calm you can snorkel along the fringing reef not far from the beach.

**Snack Gnante** (☎ 46 40 40; dishes 850 CFP; ☎ 6am-7pm) This small eatery is about 1km south of Touaourou on the main road. Dishes include prawns and rice, and octopus salad.

**Gîte St Gabriel** (☎ 46 42 77; www.gitesaintgabriel.com; modern/traditional bungalows 7500/6500 CFP, camping adult/child 700/350 CFP) St Gabriel sits on wide lawns sweeping down to the beach about 3km south of Touaourou; bungalow rates are for two people. The restaurant serves excellent seafood platters, which must be ordered in advance, and a set menu costs 1900 CFP. The sea here is shallow but it is a peaceful spot and you can go for long walks along the beach. Canoes and bikes can be hired for 500 CFP per half-day.

**Gîte Kanua** (☎ 46 90 00; fax 46 91 22; bungalows s/d 7350/14,700 CFP, camping per adult/child 800/500 CFP) This gîte is the only infrastructure you will find at isolated Port Boisé. It has a small camp site and four thatched traditional-style bungalows with private bathrooms (rates for bungalows include half board). The water in front of the beach is shallow but you can snorkel further out on the edge of the fringing reef. The gîte can arrange excursions to offshore islets and 4WD tours (10,000 CFP for two people, and 1000 CFP per extra person), as well as kayaking, canoeing and windsurfing (600 CFP per hour). It also organises *bougna* for visitors at a local *tribu* (3600 CFP) – a traditional *Kanak* meal of yam, *taro* and sweet potatoes with chicken, fish or crustaceans, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in coconut milk in an earth oven.

## CENTRAL GRANDE TERRE

Not far from the cosmopolitan capital, a different travel experience awaits you. Central Grande Terre offers enriching cultural experiences, coastal scenery and mountain treks. On the west coast you can stay in a *Kanak tribu* or on a Caldoche farm and explore the surrounding countryside by foot or on horse back. On the east coast, in Thio and Canala, there are simple camp sites in beautiful coastal and riverside settings.

## Transport

Several buses a day from Noumea stop in the west-coast towns. There is a daily bus to Thio and Canala from Noumea, but no

connecting services between the two towns. For bus schedules and fares, see p354.

## Orientation & Information

The west-coast settlements of Bourail and La Foa are the main towns in the region. Both have a *gendarmerie*, pharmacy, post office, bank and supermarket.

The friendly and efficient staff at the **visitor information centre** (☎ 41 69 11; www.lafoa.com; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun), La Foa Tourisme, can advise on accommodation and activities in La Foa, Farino and Sarraméa.

## Boulouparis

Trips to **Îlot Ténia**, a beautiful sandy islet surrounded by clear waters near the barrier reef, depart from Boulouparis. The turn-off to Bouraké beach, the departure point for trips to the islet, is at the northern end of Boulouparis. Îlot Ténia is a popular surfing, diving and snorkelling spot.

**Bouts-d'Brousse** (☎ 43 29 62; www.boutsdbrousse.com; half-day trips per adult/child 4500/2600 CFP, full-day 6600/3640 CFP, diving half-/full-day 7800/10,900 CFP) organises trips to the island which include dolphin watching. The dolphins are great fun, especially for children. Take your own picnic lunch. The company also runs surfing trips to the reef and day trips from Noumea (adult/child 14,040/7800 CFP) which include lunch.

## La Foa

La Foa is a neat and tidy town 1½ hours from Noumea. The **sculpture garden** (☎ 8am-8pm Sep-Apr, 8am-6pm May-Aug) behind La Foa Tourisme features wonderful sculptures by artists from throughout New Caledonia. The garden is a pleasant place for a picnic, with a children's playground and public toilets.

**Sarraméa**, 15 minutes' drive north of La Foa, sits in a lush valley surrounded by mountains. At the end of the road a path continues through a farm gate and past an old colonial house to **Trou Feuillet**, also known as *la cuve*, a refreshing rock pool in a mountain stream. On the main road, just past the Sarraméa turn-off, is **tribu de Petit Couli**, where a beautiful old *grande case* stands at the end of a row of tall araucaria pines.

**Farino** is a mountain village known for its produce and craft markets held every second Sunday of the month. The real crowd

puller is its Vers de Bancoule market day in September, which culminates in a contest to see who can eat the most fat, wriggling white grubs.

The **Refuge de Farino** (☎ 44 37 61; refuge.farino@lagoon.nc) organises quad-bike tours (5000/1000 CFP per first/subsequent hour) in the forest around Farino. The turn-off to Farino is on the road to Sarraméa.

There are many enjoyable walks and horse treks in the La Foa region. Most places offer half- or full-day treks and some offer overnight treks.

**Louis Careba** (☎ 44 38 17; 1/3hr guided walks per person 1000/2000 CFP, 1/2hr horse treks 2500/3100 CFP) Louis offers historical and botanical walking trails and short horse treks in *tribu* de Oua Tom. The turn-off is 13km south of La Foa.

**Pocquereux Randonnées** (☎ 77 32 54; half-/full-/2-day trek 5000/8000/20,000 CFP) The turn-off to this ranch is 3km south of La Foa.

**Tribu de Oui Poin** (☎ 41 72 81, 35 45 22; guided walk 500-2000 CFP, half-/full-day horse trek 2500/5000 CFP) In the mountains 25km east of La Foa. Overnight walks or horse treks to Canala can also be arranged.

## Bourail

With a rural atmosphere and strong Caldoche community, Bourail is the next biggest town on Grande Terre after Noumea. The main road crosses the Néra River bridge at the southern end of town, and the turn-off to La Roche and Poé beach is immediately after the bridge.

An old stone building 500m south of the centre houses the **Musée de Bourail** (☎ 44 12 18; adult/student 250/100 CFP; ☎ 8-11am & 1-5pm Mon-Fri; 8-11am & 1-4pm Sat; 8-11am & 1-3pm Sun). Its displays include objects relating to the presence of US and NZ troops in Bourail during WWII and a guillotine complete with the basket where the decapitated head was placed. The guillotine was brought to New Caledonia in 1867 although the one in the museum is a later model. Behind the museum there's a *case*.

Bourail holds a hugely popular **country fair** over the weekend that falls closest to 14 August, when there are farm animals on display, and produce and arts and crafts for sale. There are also children's rides, food stalls and, the highlight, a rodeo.

About 9.5km south of Bourail is the well-tended **New Zealand War Cemetery**, where over 200 NZ soldiers killed in the Pacific during

WWII are buried. New Zealand troops set up a hospital in the area during the war, and many locals received free medical care there. A ceremony is held at the cemetery every Anzac Day (25 April) and local children place a flower on each grave.

La Roche, 7km west of Bourail on the coast, has two famous rock formations: **La Roche Percée** (pierced rock) and **Le Bonhomme**, a rock shaped like a tubby man. A walking track begins at the base of the cliff near the rocks and follows the coast for 4km past Baie des Tortues (Turtle Bay) to Baie des Amoureux (Lover's Bay).

There's a panoramic viewing point above Le Bonhomme where you can often spot turtles in Baie des Tortues below. With its bent araucarias and wide beach, Baie des Tortues is a beautiful spot but beware of the strong currents. To get there by car, follow the main road round to the right instead of turning left to La Roche. As you ascend the hill, turn onto the dirt road to the left. By foot, follow the coastal walk from the base of the cliff near Le Bonhomme.

The dive club **Bourail Sub Loisirs** (☎ 44 20 65, 78 20 65; butterfly.diving@lagoon.nc; 2-dive package 11,000 CFP) is located at the southern end of La Roche at the Néra River mouth. Surfing trips to the barrier reef and boat trips (from 3000 CFP) can be arranged through Nék-wéta (see p326). You can also surf from the beach at the mouth of the Néra River.

**Plage de Poé** is a beautiful, long white-sand beach 9km north of La Roche. On the beach at Poé, near the camp site, **La Base Nautique de Poe** (☎ 44 23 27; basenautique@lagoon.nc) hires kayaks (1100 CFP per hour), windsurfers (2600 CFP per hour) and mountain bikes (1000 CFP per hour). Glass-bottom boat tours cost 1800 CFP.

## Thio & Canala

These two east-coast towns are in the heart of mining country, and the destructive mining practices of the past have left terrible scars on the mountains, especially around Thio. Don't be put off, though, as where the landscape has been left intact it is beautiful. There are a couple of lovely beaches in Thio where you can camp. Thio also has a small **mining museum** (☎ 44 51 77; adult/child 200 CFP/free; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun).

A scenic coastal drive from Thio heads 30km south to Petit Borendi. On a sunny

day the starkly contrasting red, green and blue of the earth, vegetation, sea and sky are amazing.

Between Thio and Canala is a 13km stretch known as *route à horaires* (literally, 'schedule road'). It's a one-way system that works on an alternating schedule: cars depart at odd hours from the Thio end, between 5am and 5pm, and at even hours from the Canala end, between 6am and 6pm. You can only enter the road in the first 20 minutes of the hour. All is explained at the Thio end, where the single-lane road drops away vertically on one side. After dark, traffic becomes two way. Don't try to find out why.

The views from the valley looking up at the 60m **Cascade de Ciu** and vice versa are spectacular. To abseil down the waterfall get in touch with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000 CFP). The more people on the trip, the cheaper it is. The turn-off is a couple of kilometres south of Canala. It isn't signposted, so look out for the sealed road that leads up the hill beside a green corrugated-iron shop.

## Sleeping & Eating

### LA FOA & AROUND

**Hôtel Banu** (☎ 44 31 19; fax 44 35 50; d 4350 CFP, d bungalows 6350 CFP; 🍷 🍴) This hotel is in the middle of La Foa, with accommodation behind the hotel building. The hotel has a restaurant (dishes 1200 to 2000 CFP), and the ceiling in the bar next to it is covered with over 4700 caps. If you don't believe us you can count them yourself.

**Naïna Park Hôtel** (☎ 44 35 40; tr bungalows 7300 CFP; 🍷 🍴) This hotel south of town has bungalows in a shady garden, a relaxing pool area and a restaurant (dishes 1800 to 2200 CFP).

**Évasion 130** (☎ 44 55 77; bungalows d/child 13,500/1000 CFP; 🍷 🍴) A modern hotel overlooking a stream at the end of the road in Sarraméa. Meals in the restaurant cost 1500 to 3500 CFP.

**Refuge de Farino** (☎ 44 37 61; refuge.farino@la goon.nc; camping per adult/child 600/300 CFP, bungalows d/child 5000/1000 CFP) On a hillside in a forest, this refuge has wooden bungalows with kitchenettes. It's 4km from the Farino *mairie* (town hall).

**Chez Marie-Georgette** (☎ 44 38 17; camping per tent 1000 CFP) The table d'hôte in *tribu* de

Oua Tom has camp sites and serves Kanak cuisine including *bougna*, and chicken or prawn dishes (set menu 2000 to 2500 CFP). Book 24 hours in advance.

**La Case** (☎ 81 83 23; coffee 250 CFP, cake 100-300 CFP; ☎ 5.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sun) This café on the main road north of the centre of La Foa serves cakes, pastries and a variety of coffees.

**Chez Mamie Fogliani** (☎ 43 23 14; set menu 1500-3000 CFP) Mamie Fogliani's table d'hôte serves filling Caldoche cuisine including venison, wild pig, fish and duck dishes. It's 3km from the Farino *mairie*.

**Aux Délices des Jumelles** (☎ 43 46 65; set menu 2500 CFP) This table d'hôte near the chapel on the main road in Sarraméa serves Kanak cuisine. Order a day in advance and BYO.

## BOURAIL

**Camping de Poé** (☎ 41 28 78; camping per tent/person from 1000/100 CFP, bungalows 2500 CFP) The small wooden bungalows at this camp site by the beach are unfurnished. The site has hot showers, a small shop, and a food bar open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

**Nékwéta** (☎ 41 90 81; www.nekweta.com; case adult/child 3000/1500 CFP) The attractive camp site is set in a garden at La Roche, 200m from the beach. Turn left at La Roche Percée, then left again 700m further on.

**Hôtel La Néra** (☎ 44 16 44; s/d 5700/6700 CFP; 🍷 🍴) This hotel with comfortable rooms and a river view is by the Néra River bridge. Dishes at the hotel's restaurant are 1800 CFP.

**Mambo Café** (☎ 44 29 30; dishes 1350-1600 CFP; ☎ 6am-1.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm) Mambo Café specialises in Asian dishes and also does pizzas (small/large 1350/2450 CFP); it's in town.

**Snack Hibiscus** (☎ 44 12 17; dishes 950 CFP, snacks 350-500 CFP; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Sun) This busy place in town does paninis, toasted sandwiches and burgers, as well as rice and meat dishes. There are also a couple of food vans at the northern end of town.

## THIO & CANALA

Thio's and Canala's camp sites have attractive settings but their bathrooms leave a bit to be desired.

**Camping La Moara** (☎ 44 51 84; camping per tent 1500 CFP) This grassy camp site sits by a white beach curved around a small bay. It's 11km southeast of Thio.

**Gîte Ouroué** (☎ 44 50 85; camping per tent/person 1000/150 CFP, bungalows 4000 CFP) North of Thio, this gîte is in a coconut grove beside a remote beach. You can camp anywhere on the long shady stretch of lawn, or stay in one of the sparsely furnished bungalows (they have bathrooms). Meals are 1800 CFP, and half-day kayak hire costs 300 CFP.

**Camping de Haut Gélina** (☎ 78 64 90; camping per tent 1000 CFP) Also known as Camping Kouré, this tranquil camp site is in a lush garden beside the river flowing from Cascade de Ciu. It's 1.5km from the main road and around 3km south of Canala; the turn-off is signposted. Guided walks here cost 300 CFP per person.

**Gîte Méréko** (☎ 42 84 42; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case adult/child 1200/800 CFP, d case 3000 CFP) This gîte in *tribu* de Kuinet is on the road to Cascade de Ciu. It's a place where you can get to know the locals, and the *cases* are a modern version of the traditional structures. Meals are 1800 CFP and guided walks cost 300 CFP per person.

## Entertainment

**Cinéma Jean-Pierre Junet** (☎ 43 16 67; admission 800 CFP; ☎ evenings Mon, Fri, Sat & Sun) The small theatre in La Foa predominantly screens movies in French except during its annual film festival in late June or early July, when movies are projected in their original language.

## NORTHWEST COAST

Much of the northwest coast and its rolling plains is taken up by cattle ranches. The coast is not great for swimming, as it has mangrove swamps and shallow bays, so it makes more sense to head inland for horse trekking, staying on a Caldoche farm or in a Kanak homestay.

## Transport

Air Calédonie has two flights a week between Noumea and Koné; for detailed information see p353. There are daily buses from Noumea to Koné and Koumac; see p354 for fares and schedules. Three buses a week travel from Koumac to Poum. The gare routière (bus station; Rue Roger Trouillot) 300m from the roundabout in Koumac has schedules for buses going north to Poum and northeast to Ouégoa and Pouébo.

## Orientation & Information

Koné, the Northern Province capital, is surprisingly plain and smaller than Koumac, further north. Both towns have a post office, *gendarmerie*, clinic, pharmacy, supermarkets and banks with ATMs. Pouembout, 8km south of Koné, is in many ways an extension of the capital. The remote region north of Koumac is known as the Far North.

**Le Cybercafé de Koné** (☎ 47 17 00; microforma@mls.nc; Internet per 30 min/hr 600/900 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) The only cyber café in the north at the time of writing. It's 50m down the dirt road opposite the market and court house.

**Visitor information centre** (☎ 42 78 42; www.koumac-tourisme.com; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Koumac Tourism is at the northern end of town, opposite the post office.

## Pouembout & Koné Region

Koné is noted for its excellent horse-trekking opportunities. The following places organise treks into the foothills or to the summits of the central mountain range.

**Centre d'accueil d'Atéou** (per person per hr 1000 CFP) In *tribu* d'Atéou; see p328.

**Koné Rodéo** (☎ 47 21 51; 1-/3-day trip 8000/24,000 CFP) Signposted 2km north of Koné.

**Ranch du Carré 9** (☎ 44 21 87; 1-/2-/3-day trip 8000/16,000/22,000 CFP) From Voh it's 17km inland.

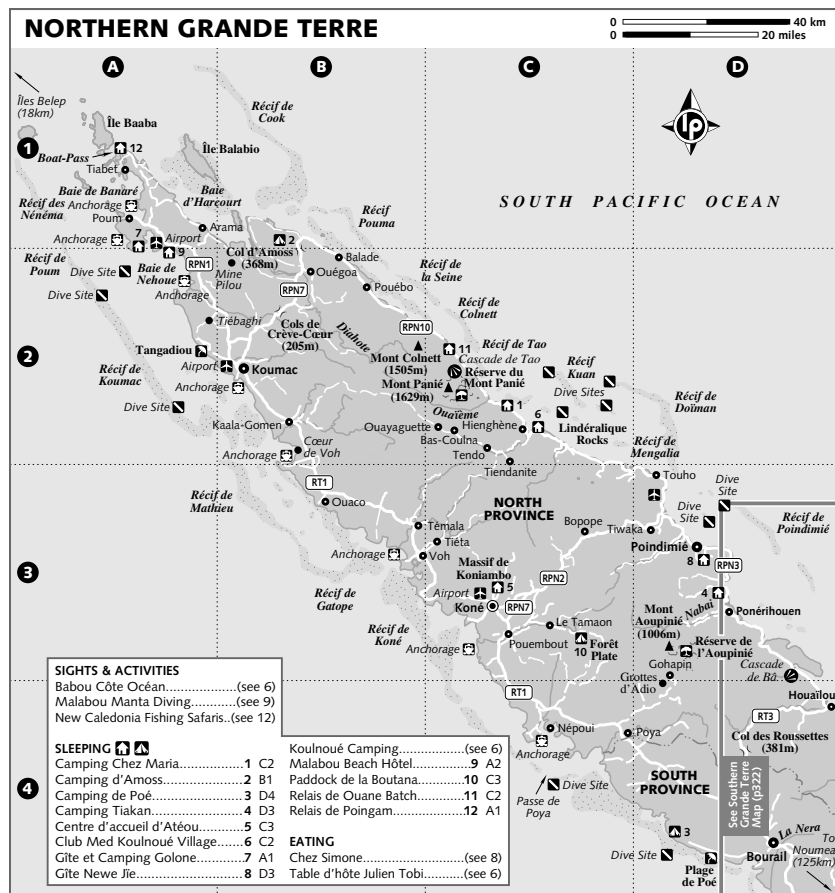
North of Koné, in Voh, there's a mangrove swamp which has developed some unusual natural designs. The most intriguing is a perfect heart shape, the **Coeur de Voh**, which is on the cover of *Earth from Above*, the book of aerial photography by famous photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand. The heart is best seen from the air. **Alain Nouard** (☎ 47 25 93) or **Pierre Couget** (☎ 47 32 87) from the ultra-light club in Koné can fly you there in a microlight for 5000 CFP. Book several days in advance.

## Koumac

Located near the roundabout, eye-catching **Église Ste Jeanne d'Arc** was constructed in 1950 out of a WWII aircraft hangar. Take a peek inside at its stained-glass windows and traditionally inspired wood carvings.

## The Far North

Most visitors to the Far North head past Poum, the only (tiny) town, straight to Relais de Poingam (see p329), where sportfishing



is the main attraction. **New Caledonia Fishing Safaris** (☎ 25 19 40; r.berlin@newcaledoniafishingsafaris.nc; 2 people per day 50,000 CFP) organises sportfishing tours to Poingam. **Malabou Manta Diving** (☎ 42 39 83; www.malabou-dive-center.com; 2-dive package 10,400 CFP), based at Malabou Beach Hôtel (see opposite), organises diving trips.

## Sleeping & Eating

### POUEMBOUT & KONÉ REGION

**Centre d'accueil d'Atéou** (☎ 47 26 13; camping/cabin per person 600/1000 CFP) The mountain *tribu* here accommodates visitors in a wooden cabin and has wonderful views down the mountain to the coast. It's 20km from Koné and is signposted from behind the post office. Meals cost 1500 CFP and

guided walks are 1000/1500 CFP per person for two/four hours.

**Paddock de La Boutana** (☎ 47 16 17; paddockbou.tana@mls.nc; adult/child 7500/4250 CFP) A peaceful farmstay 20km inland from Pouembout. The rate includes half board, a 4WD farm tour at sunset and a deer-spotting tour after dinner. Children under seven may only stay by prior arrangement.

**Hôtel Le Bougainville** (☎ 47 20 60; bougainville@mls.nc; r 5900 CFP, d bungalows 6900 CFP; ♿) The bungalows at this hotel in Pouembout are set in a quiet garden. The restaurant and bar are in a massive *case* with beautiful woodcarvings (meals 1850 CFP).

**Hôtel L'Hibiscus** (☎ 47 22 61; hibiscus@canl.nc; s/d 6500/6800 CFP; ♿) This modern hotel at the

southern end of Koné has rooms and a restaurant (dishes 1750 to 2350 CFP) opening onto a paved pool area.

**Tumbala Café** (☎ 42 44 39; snacks 250-550 CFP, dishes 950-2000 CFP; ☎ 6am-11pm Mon-Sat) The bright and popular Tumbala Café is the best place to eat in Koné. It serves light snacks, and meat and fish dishes.

## KOUMAC

**Monitel Koumac** (☎ 47 66 66; monitelkoumac@lagoon.nc; bungalows s/d 6900/7400 CFP; ♿) The Monitel has comfortable bungalows with fridges. The set menu costs 1950 CFP.

**Tumbala Café** (☎ 42 59 20; bungalows s/d/tr 6000/6500/7000 CFP; ♿) There's bungalow accommodation at this groovy café (dishes 1150 to 2000 CFP) at the southern end of town. The café opens from 6am to 10pm, Monday to Saturday.

## THE FAR NORTH

The following places are listed from south to north. Stock up on supplies before heading to the Far North.

**Malabou Beach Hôtel** (☎ 47 60 60; malabeachotel@canl.nc; d/tr bungalows 10,300/13,000 CFP, 4-person ste 20,280 CFP; ♿) This large beachfront hotel has bungalows that have fridges and coffee-making facilities. Dishes at the hotel restaurant cost 1000 to 2000 CFP. Activities include tennis, canoeing and mini-golf. The hotel is signposted on the main road.

**Gîte et Camping Golone** (☎ 47 90 78; camping per person 600 CFP, d bungalows 5000 CFP) A tranquil and isolated place to stay on a small peninsula 5km from the main road. Meals here cost 800 CFP. The turn-off is about 400m north of Malabou Beach Hôtel. Take your mosquito repellent.

**Relais de Poingam** (☎ 47 92 12; camping per person 500 CFP, d bungalows 8500 CFP, d safari tent 12,500 CFP; ♿) On a long beach at the northern tip of Grande Terre, this place has comfortable bungalows with attractive external private bathrooms. There is also a luxury walk-in

safari tent, and the restaurant serves mouth-watering dishes (lunch 900 to 2000 CFP, dinner 2800 CFP). The shallow lagoon is not great for swimming, but the saltwater swimming pool is better. From the turn-off south of Poum it's 23km to Poingam. Only the first 6km are sealed.

## NORTHEAST COAST

The stunning coastline here is edged by foothills covered in lush vegetation, gentle rivers, fascinating rock formations, waterfalls and deserted beaches. Visitors have the opportunity to experience traditional Kanak life in a *tribu* for a day or two. There is also an endless choice of nature trails to suit all levels of fitness, from 20-minute walks to hikes lasting several days. Keen hikers can climb Mont Panié (1629m), New Caledonia's highest peak.

## Transport

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

It doesn't matter too much whether you head up or down the northeast coast, as you can take any of the roads across from the west coast at Bourail, Koné or Koumac. If you head across on one of the roads south of Bourail the stretch of road between Kouaoua, north of Canala, and Houailou winds through the mines and can seem very long.

## Air

Air Calédonie flies twice a week to Touho; see p353 for details.

## Bus

Buses from Noumea run daily to Poindimié and six times a week to Hienghène; see p354 for fares and schedules. Buses run four times a week from Koumac to the northwest coast to Ouégoa and Pouébo.

## Orientation & Information

Poindimié and Hienghène are the two main towns on the northeast coast. Both have grocery stores, a post office, clinic, pharmacy, bank and ATM, and *gendarmerie*. The airfield at Touho is roughly halfway between Poindimié and Hienghène.

The **visitor information centre** (☎ 42 43 57; hienghen-tourism@mls.nc; Hienghène; ☎ 8am-noon, 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) is on the riverbank above the marina (which it manages) in Hienghène. The staff can book accommodation in *tribus*.

## DOUBLE IDENTITY

Many *tribus* and towns on the northeast coast have more than one name or are spelt differently. Road signs show two variations. Those in this chapter are the most commonly used names and spellings.

## Houailou to Poindimié

If you are heading up the northeast coast you will probably arrive by the RT3 from Bourail. The road veers north at a roundabout (there is only one) in Houailou, just before crossing over a long bridge.

There is a lovely picnic spot at **Cascade de Bâ** (car/adult 100/50 CFP), a waterfall beside a large pool where you can cool off. It's 13.5km north of the Houailou bridge. Turn down the gravel track immediately after the bridge at the northern end of *tribu* de Bâ.

Thrill seekers can abseil down the waterfall with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000 CFP). A minimum of two people is required and it's cheaper if there are more. Arrange the trip 48 hours in advance.

## Poindimié

The largest town on the coast, Poindimié has a picturesque coastline and the peaceful Ina, Napoémien and Amoa River valleys stretching inland, where you can admire the natural bush or pretty *tribu* gardens. They are delightful places for a walk or a scenic drive. Ina valley is at the southern end of town. To get to Napoémien turn inland at the *mairie*. In Amoa valley you can explore the lush southern side of the river or more populated northern side. Turn either before or after the bridge just before the church at Tié Mission.

Poindimié overlooks **Îlot de Tibarama**, an islet just offshore. **Tiéti Diving** (☎ 42 42 05; www.tietti-diving.com; 2-dive package 12,000 CFP) is run by a friendly instructor who also offers transfers to Îlot de Tibarama (per person 1500 CFP), a great spot to relax, snorkel and swim.

The scenic Koné–Tiwaka Rd (RPN2) crosses the central mountain range between Koné on the west coast and Poindimié on the east. The road winds through the mountains, over high river bridges and past forested slopes, before joining the east coast 14km north of Poindimié at the Tiwaka River mouth. Halfway through the mountains you can detour via *tribu* de **Bopope**, with its charming bark-and-thatch *cases* perched on the edge of steep slopes.

## Hienghène

This serene village is tucked into the foothills on the shores of Baie de Hienghène, at the mouth of the Hienghène River. The area has fascinating rock formations and

it is also important historically, as it was the home of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the pro-independence leader who was assassinated on Ouvéa in 1989 (see p339). People still speak of Tjibaou with great respect, and he is buried in Tiendanite, a *tribu* 20km up the Hienghène valley.

Hienghène's renowned **Poule Couveuse** (Brooding Hen) rock formation sits on one side of the entrance to Baie de Hienghène, facing the sphinx on the other. You can view these two rock formations from the signposted lookout, 2km south of the village. There's a better profile of the sphinx about 1.5km north of the village.

The **Lindéralique rocks** are towering black limestone rocks with jagged edges, which begin about 10km south of Hienghène. At Lindéralique, about 4km south of Hienghène, you can kayak beneath the rocks. There is also a large cave, **Grotte de Lindéralique** (adult/child 200/100 CFP), which you can visit. To get there follow the signposted turn-off 2.5km south of Hienghène.

Hienghène's small **Centre Culturel Goa Ma Bwarhat** (☎ /fax 42 80 74; culturehienghene@mils.nc; museum adult/child 150 CFP/free; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Thu, to 4pm Fri & Sat, 9am–noon Sun) has various exhibitions, a museum, a couple of *cases* and a sculptor's workshop. It organises jazz, choral and classical concerts at Grotte de Lindéralique once a month.

**Babou Côté Océan** (☎ 42 83 59; www.babou-plongee.com; 1/2 dives 5500/10,600 CFP, half-day island excursion 4500 CFP), at the camp site in *tribu* de Kouloué (see opposite), organises boat trips.

## Hienghène to Pouébo

This is the wildest and most stunning stretch of the northeast coast. It's covered in tropical vegetation, and waterfalls and streams rush down the mountains to join the sea.

New Caledonia's last surviving **river ferry** carries vehicles across the wide Ouaième River, 17km northwest of Hienghène. It's free and runs 24 hours a day. The ferry's uniqueness makes the crossing one of the highlights of the journey.

The **Cascade de Tao** plummets down a mountainside 7km north of the Ouaième River ferry. A path leads to the bottom of the falls starting at the cottage just after Tao bridge (200 CFP). You can abseil down the waterfall with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000 CFP).

The track to **Mont Panié** (1629m), New Caledonia's highest peak, leaves from Tao. It's a two-day hike but you first need authorisation from the **Direction du Développement Economique et de L'Environnement** (DDEE; ☎ 42 72 52) office in Poindimié. For guided walks in the region, including the climb to Mont Panié and to Cascade de Tao, contact **Association Dayu Biik** (☎ 42 87 77; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri). Guided walks cost around 12,000 CFP for one day and 18,000 CFP for two days based on a maximum of four; you need to get authorisation from DDEE even if you go up Mont Panié with a guide.

## Pouébo to Ouégoa

The rugged coastal scenery changes to rolling hills, plains and mangrove swamps at Pouébo. Inside Pouébo's large Catholic church there's a marble **mausoleum** where the remains of Bishop Douarre, who set up New Caledonia's first Catholic mission, are interred. The mission was founded at Balade, where the first Europeans arrived in New Caledonia.

In 1843 Bishop Douarre arrived there with a group of Catholic missionaries and the stained-glass windows in the small church beside the road here tell the eventful story: the first mass at Balade on Christmas Day 1843, the murder of Brother Blaise by angry and starving Kanaks in 1847, the missionaries' escape to the French navy ship *La Brillante*, and the return of Brother Blaise's skull to Bishop Douarre in 1849. In 1853, France officially laid claim to New Caledonia at Balade, the same year in which Douarre died.

An altar beneath an enormous banyan tree at **Mahamat beach** commemorates the place where the first Catholic mass was held on Christmas Day 1843. The turn-off to the beach is 1.5km north of the church.

Nine kilometres north of Balade the road heads inland over Col d'Amoss (Amoss Pass) towards Ouégoa, then across to the west coast.

## Sleeping & Eating

Unless otherwise stated, most camp sites below are in coconut groves by the sea and don't have hot water.

### POINDIMIÉ

**Camping Tiakan** (☎ 42 85 14; camping per person 500 CFP) A peaceful camp site, 22km south of

Ponérihouen, with thatched shelters and hot water.

**Gîte Neue Jie** (☎ 42 70 74; bungalows s/d/extra person 3100/4200/1000 CFP, case per person 2100 CFP, baby cot 600 CFP) This gîte in Vallée d'Ina offers comfortable and impeccably clean accommodation, with a large well-equipped kitchen and dining area. Take the Vallée d'Ina turning 2km south of Poindimié and follow the signposts illustrated with a hut. The gîte is also signposted.

**Monitel de Tiéti** (☎ 42 64 00; s/d 6760/7800 CFP child free; ☎ ☎) The beachfront hotel here was about to undergo major renovations at the time of writing.

**La Bicyclette Bleu** (☎ 78 58 69; snacks 350 CFP; ☎ 6am–1pm Mon–Fri) Serves cappuccinos (400 CFP), paninis, sandwiches, pizza and a selection of sweet pastries. Turn left as you go up the hill past Poindimié Discount.

**Snack Le Banian** (☎ 86 64 81; dishes 1000–1700 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon–Fri, lunch Sat) A *snack* under two large banyan trees selling meals such as steak and chips and light snacks.

**Chez Simone** (☎ 42 74 84; ppswc@lagoon.nc; dishes from 1800 CFP) This welcoming table d'hôte (where guests share a communal home-cooked meal) serves Kanak cuisine. Dishes are based around wild deer, pig or fish. The turn-off is 4km south of Poindimié and it's another 3.5km to Simone's in *tribu* de Nessapoé.

### HIENGHÈNE

In the Hienghène valley there are many **accueil en tribu** (per person around 800 CFP), traditional homestays where you can experience life with a Kanak family. Visitors usually sleep on mattresses in a *case* and take part in everyday activities and meals (breakfast 400 CFP, dinner 1200 CFP, *bougna* 1500 CFP). The visitor information centre in Hienghène (p329) takes bookings at least three days in advance.

**Kouloué Camping** (☎ 42 83 59; camping per person 400 CFP, tent hire 1000 CFP) Head 1km past Club Med to reach this camp site. The Babou Côté Océan dive club (opposite) is based here.

**Camping Chez Maria** (camping per tent 800 CFP) Maria's camp site is by a sandy beach on a sheltered bay, 10km north of the village.

**Gîte Ka Waboana** (☎ 42 47 03; d bungalows with/without kitchenette 7280/6720 CFP, extra person 1000 CFP) The colourful bungalows at this gîte

are perched on a hill opposite the marina, with views of the bay. Dishes here cost 1000 CFP.

**Club Med Koulnoué Village** (☎ 42 81 66; clubmed.koulnoue@offratel.nc; 1-2 person bungalows 10,300 CFP, extra person 2750 CFP, 4-person case 10,300, extra person 1800 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This Club Med establishment has comfortable and spacious bungalows with fridges and tea- and coffee-making facilities. Activities include tennis, canoeing, horse riding and biking. It serves an excellent buffet breakfast for 1500 CFP, and lunch and dinner cost 3100 CFP. The turn-off is 8.5km south of Hienghène.

**Table d'hôte Julien Tobi** (meals per person 2500 CFP) The table d'hôte near Grotte de Linderalique serves local food. Book a day in advance through the visitor information centre (p329).

### HIENGHÈNE TO POUÉBO

There are a couple of **camp sites** (camping per tent 1000 CFP) north of the river ferry where you can simply turn up. Stock up on groceries before you go.

**Relais de Ouane Batch** (☎ 42 47 92; camping per tent/person 800/100 CFP, 2-/4-person bungalows 2000/2500 CFP) Run by a friendly family, 16km north of the river ferry, the unpretentious bungalows here have communal bathrooms with hot showers. There is also a table d'hôte that serves very good meals (2000 CFP); book 24 hours in advance. Activities include canoe hire (half-/full-day 600/1000 CFP) and fishing trips (10,000 CFP).

### POUÉBO TO OUÉGOA

**Camping d'Amoss** (☎ 42 42 11; camping per tent 800 CFP) This secluded camp site is on the beachfront at the foot of Col d'Amoss. To get here, turn off the main road onto the dirt road on the right where it turns inland at Col d'Amoss.

## LOYALTY ISLANDS

pop 22060 / area 1980 sq km

The sparsely populated Loyalty Islands have large tracts of impenetrable bush, secluded beaches and hidden caves. Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa each have their own characteristics: Maré is known for its deep rock holes, rugged coastal scenery and serene beaches; Lifou for its breathtaking cliff-top

views and small secret beaches; Ouvéa for its unending beach and tranquil lagoon stretching endlessly to the horizon.

The islands' inhabitants blend traditional and modern lifestyles with ease, though unless you are staying in a hotel you will need to take cash as most other places do not accept credit cards. Each island has at least one bank with an ATM that accepts most major credit cards. Seafood is a speciality in the Loyalty Islands and most accommodation places and restaurants offer lobster or crab platters. You need to order usually 24 hours in advance.

### Transport

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

##### Air

**Air Calédonie** (Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; www.air-caledonie.nc; 39 rue de Verdun) operates at least one flight a day between Noumea and each of the Loyalty Islands. A one-way/return flight costs around 11,600/23,500 CFP. For more information see p353. There are no direct flights between the Loyalty Islands.

##### Boat

The fast ferry *Betico* sails three times a week from Noumea to Lifou and Maré, and once a week to Ouvéa. The fare for trips from Noumea to any of the islands is 6200/12,400 CFP one way/return. Another option is the slower cargo boat *Havannah*, which also takes passengers. Travelling between the islands costs 3300 CFP. For more information see p353.

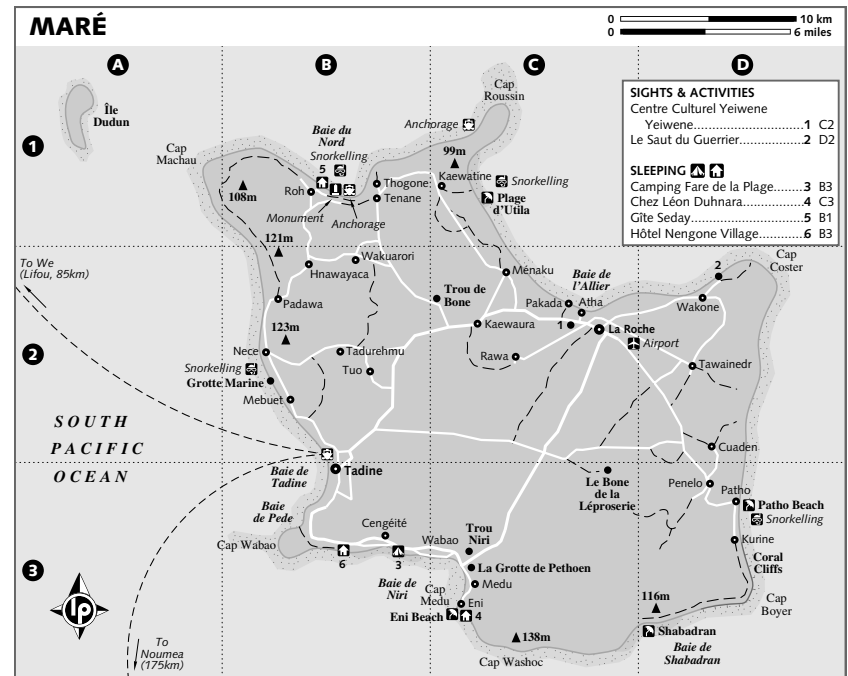
## MARÉ

pop 7400 / area 641 sq km

Maré's scenic coastline is lined with stunning beaches and rugged coral cliffs. Inland, it has impressive sunken pools and a mysterious ancient rock edifice. Small wonder that some of Maré's geographical features have inspired legends.

### Orientation & Information

The small coastal town of Tadine is Maré's main centre; if you're travelling by ferry you'll arrive or leave from the wharf there. In addition to shops and a petrol station it has a **BCI bank** (☎ 45 40 62; 🕒 7.15am-noon & 1.15-4pm Mon-Fri), **gendarmerie** (☎ 45 41 17) and **post office** (☎ 45 41 05; 🕒 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri).



### Tadine & Western Maré

The main road runs beside the coast for almost the entire length of western Maré. It's a picturesque drive, taking you past beaches, cliffs, *tribus* and forests. The sights and activities that follow are listed in geographical order from south to north.

Just before you arrive in Medu there is a *trou bleu* (deep rock pool) near the road known as **La Grotte de Pethoen**, where you can see the dark shapes of eels swimming beneath an overhanging rock wall. Ask permission from anyone in Medu to go there.

Inland from Medu there is another *trou bleu* known as **Le Bone de la Léproserie**; there was once a leper hospital nearby which explains the name. This enormous hole in the limestone rock, hidden by thick vegetation, drops vertically to a pool of still water. It's considered one of the largest drowned cavities in the world. To get there, turn right at the roundabout on the road from Medu to La Roche. There is a signposted turn-off not far along this road, and the *trou bleu* is 1.5km down a dirt track beside some solar panels.

The southwest coast has several gorgeous **beaches** where you can swim or snorkel during the day and watch the glorious sunsets in the evening. The small beach at Eni is the southernmost beach, and between July and September you may even spot humpbacked whales from here. Further north at Cengéité and Wabao there's a fabulous beach beside a small enclosed lagoon whose water is an exquisite turquoise.

Heading north from Cengéité, stop at the long white beach at Hôtel Nengone Village (p335) or continue along the main road to la plage de Pede, a sheltered beach protected by the headland at Cap Wabao. A path to the beach leads through a gate from the main road at the sharp bend where it joins the coast.

If you are after a spot of exercise, you can follow the pleasant 6km **coastal walk** that links the beach at Hôtel Nengone Village with that at Pede. It is mostly flat and shady as the path follows the shoreline through the trees just above the beach. The path starts at the northern end of the hotel grounds. Near Cap Wabao, it veers inland and meanders

through a forest beneath a small cliff. Turn left at the end of the cliff and follow the wide path straight ahead through a wooded paddock to Baie de Pede.

About 3km south of Tadine a large **rock pool** sunk in the cliffs provides a natural aquarium where you can watch fish and sometimes turtles swimming in the translucent water. It is only a few metres inland from the sea and is linked to it by an underground channel. It is signposted by a parking area beside the main road.

The FLNKS leader Yeiwene Yeiwene, who was assassinated with Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1989, is buried at Tadine. His **grave** sits facing the sea beside the road about 2km south of Tadine. Ask permission before approaching.

About 3km off the La Roche–Tadine road, on the road to Thogone, is **Trou de Bone**, a deep rock cavity which drops to a lush tropical garden and a pool. It's on the right-hand side of the road as you're heading to Thogone, about 1.5km from the turn-off. It isn't signposted so look out for a metal guardrail beside the road. There is no security railing around the *trou* so be careful as you explore here. Yell out to let off some steam and hear your echo.

## La Roche & Eastern Maré

Paths lead through the forest to the coast in the northeast of Maré; you can inquire about them at the various *tribus*. Maré's southeastern coastline is rugged and wind-swept. The following sights and activities are listed from north to south.

The **Centre Culturel Yeiwene Yeiwene** (☎ 45 44 79; 🕒 7.30–11.30am & 1–4pm Mon–Fri), about 2km out of La Roche on the road to Tadine, is rather empty. Of more interest, mainly because of their mysterious nature, are the **stone ruins** behind the cultural centre. Known as the Hnaenedr wall, this ancient rock fortification dates back to AD 250. The origins of the people who built the wall and what its purpose is are not entirely clear.

A huge limestone rock covered in vegetation near the coast gives the surrounding area of **La Roche** (the Rock) its name. The rock, known locally as Titi, rises above an attractive Catholic church with a red steeple. You can climb to the top of the rock with a local guide. Make inquiries in the *tribu*.

Nine kilometres east of La Roche and 2km north of Wakone is **Le Saut du Guerrier** (Warrior's Leap). It is a gap in the cliffs, 5m wide and 30m above the pounding surf, which has given rise to a legend that tells of how a warrior once escaped his enemies by leaping across the abyss.

**Shabadran** is an isolated, sheltered spot at the very south of Maré surrounded by cliffs and forest. The curved sandy beach here is cut off from the sea by a reef where waves crash and send foaming water cascading over coral terraces into a small sparkling lagoon. Shabadran's beauty is enhanced by the effort of getting there as it can only be reached on foot and it's a two-hour walk: take plenty of water, wear sturdy footwear and don't forget your picnic lunch. You must go with a **guide** (☎ 45 05 96; per person 2000 CFP), whom you will find in Kurine, the last *tribu* before the end of the road. Book in advance. You need to be relatively fit to do this walk.

## Tours

The hotel and gîtes (see below) organise tours of the island for around 2000 CFP per person.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are only a handful of places that offer accommodation and meals on Maré. All places to stay also serve meals to nonguests but you must book in advance.

**Camping Fare de la Plage** (☎ 45 42 24; camping per tent 1100 CFP, case per person 1100 CFP) On idyllic Wabao beach, there is a *case* behind the restaurant and campers can pitch their tent anywhere near the restaurant. The restaurant is in a large open *faré* but meals (from 1200 CFP) are often served at tables under the trees on the beach. You can arrange to hire canoes (per hour 300 CFP) and airport/wharf transfers cost 1000/600 CFP.

**Gîte Seday** (☎ 45 02 25; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) The welcoming gîte in the quiet *tribu* of Roh sits in a coconut grove by the rocky coast. The owners refer to the simple thatch and concrete bungalows as *cases*; these sleep between four and six people on mattresses. The charming honeymoon bungalow is built on a rock in the water. There is no beach, but you can sunbathe or admire the ocean view from a large wooden platform on the rocks above

## THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

**Chez Léon Duhnara** (☎ 45 43 70; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) This family homestay sits tranquilly in well-kept grounds under a coconut grove at Eni. It has a couple of *cases* and lots of space for camping, and is across the road from the rocky shoreline of Baie de Niri where the family runs a *nakamal* (kava house; shells 100 CFP). Guests can relax here with a shell or two of kava at sunset. Eni beach is just a short, pleasant stroll away through the picturesque *tribu*. During the school holidays the family's daughters entertain guests with dances before dinner, which is served in an attractive *faré*. The restaurant serves beautifully presented seafood meals (meals 1500 CFP, more expensive for nonguests). Guests can hire bikes or the homestay's car (6000 CFP per day). Airport/wharf return transfers are 2000/1500 CFP.

the water and swim or snorkel beneath the rocks. The restaurant, in a *faré* by the water, serves excellent meals that are usually based around fish accompanied by home-grown vegetables (meals 1500 CFP). The owner of the gîte is a sculptor, who shares his skills with visitors, and other activities include fishing and walks (free for guests; nonguests pay 500 CFP per person). Airport or wharf return transfers are 2000 CFP.

**Hôtel Nengone Village** (☎ 45 45 00; nengone@canl.nc; bungalows 9500 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This comfortable two-star hotel at Cengéité is Maré's top accommodation option, with attractive square bungalows along the waterfront and in the garden. The hotel sits above a beautiful white-sand beach but is often very windy. There is a small pool and free kayaks for guests. Meals are available (breakfast 1300 CFP, dishes 1900 CFP, set menu 2750 CFP) and airport/wharf return transfers cost 2200/550 CFP.

## Getting There & Around

**Air Calédonie** (☎ main office 45 42 77, airport 45 55 10; Tu; 🕒 8–11am & 2–5pm Mon–Fri) has an office in Tuo on the main road between La Roche and Tadine. For information on getting to Maré from Noumea, see p332.

The easiest way to get around Maré is by car since there is no public transport. You can try biking around Maré if you are fit but the inland roads are long, straight and monotonous. Some places to stay rent bikes (1000 CFP per day) to guests. Hire companies:

**Hôtel Nengone Village** (☎ 45 45 00; scooters per half-/full-day 2500/4000 CFP, bikes per half-/full-day 600/1000 CFP) Based in Cengéité; rents scooters and bicycles.

**Jema Location** (☎ 45 44 06; per day 5760 CFP)

**Maré Île de Beauté** (☎ 45 43 75; per day 6500 CFP)

You can also try hitching. Drivers stop readily but depending on where you want to go it could be a long wait.

All places to stay offer island tours (around 2000 CFP) and airport or wharf transfers.

## LIFOU

pop 10,320 / area 1207 sq km

Lifou is home to magnificent cliff-top views, sheltered bays where coral teeming with colourful tropical fish grows, secluded beaches, fascinating caves and a rich traditional culture.

## Orientation & Information

The main centre in Lifou is We, which is also where the Loyalty Island provincial offices are based. We is a pleasant town which stretches for about 2km along the main road beside Baie de Châteaubriand. Aside from people-watching or relaxing on the white beach at the northern end of town, there is not much for visitors to do. The town has several shops and the wharf where the *Betico* and *Havannah* dock.

**BCI bank** (☎ 45 13 32; 🕒 7.20am–noon & 1–3.45pm Mon–Fri) On the main road opposite the Air Calédonie office. BCI has an ATM (DAB).

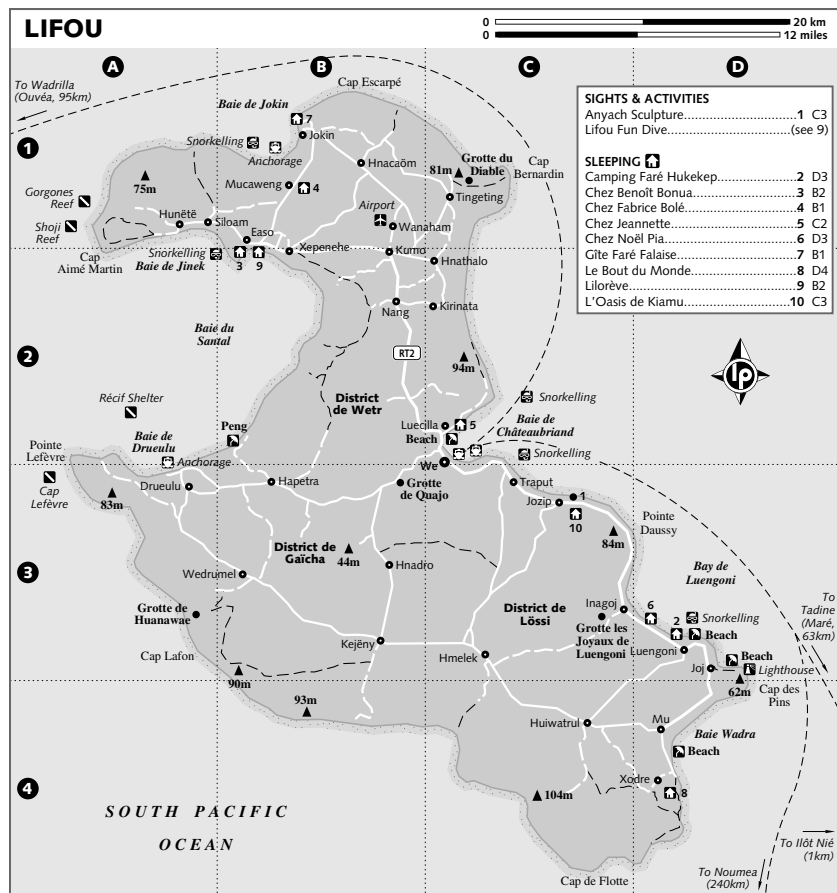
**Cyber@** (☎ 45 09 04; Internet per 30 min 210 CFP; 🕒 8.30am–noon & 1–7pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–noon & 2.30–5.30pm Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun) A cyber café on the main road opposite the Loyalty Island provincial offices.

**Marina** (☎ 45 10 62; dae@loyalty.nc; 🕒 6am–6pm Mon–Fri) Customs and immigration clearance, at the south end of We.

**Post office** (☎ 45 11 00; 🕒 7.45am–3pm Mon–Fri) Behind the provincial headquarters.

**Visitor information centre** (☎ 45 00 32; cemaïd@lagoon.nc; 🕒 7.30–11.30am & 12.30–4.30pm Mon–Fri) CEMAID, the small visitor information centre next to the *mairie*, hands out informative island maps and brochures. It has a desk at the airport that's open at each arrival.





## Sights & Activities

### NORTHERN LIFOU

**Jokin**, Lifou's northernmost *tribu*, sits on the cliff tops overlooking a vast bay. The cliffs are behind the church at the end of the road, with brilliant sunset views; the footpath around to the left of the church leads to a cove where you can snorkel among the coral formations. Between the church and the cliffs is a large attractive *case*. Ask permission before taking photos.

The road from Jokin to Easo winds through a cool green forest past Mucaweng, a *tribu* known for its **vanilla plantations**. One vanilla grower, Félix Bolé, shows visitors around his plantation for a small fee. Visitors can sample vanilla tea or coffee at the end of

the tour. The farm is down the track next to the white water tower in Mucaweng.

**Lifou Fun Dive** (☎ 45 02 75; www.lifoufundive.com; 2-dive package 12,900 CFP), based at Easo, organises dive trips. The club also offers night dives (7500 CFP), full-day sailing trips (10,000 CFP per person) and whale-watching excursions between July and September (10,000 CFP per person). Lifou's dive sites have an abundance of soft corals, gorgonians and tropical fish.

At the large white cross at Easo, a sealed road turns off the main road onto the Easo peninsula, ending 2km further on at a parking area beneath the small **Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes**. Steps lead up the hill to the chapel, topped by a statue of the Virgin

Mary, from where there are fantastic views of Baie de Jinek to the west and Baie du Santal to the east and south. The chapel was built in 1898 to commemorate the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in 1858.

About 200m before the chapel a road heads off to **Baie de Jinek**, where steps from a wooden platform built above sharp coral rocks lead down to the water. It's a great place for snorkelling, as the bay's clear water teems with small tropical fish.

Northeast of the airport, near *tribu* de Tingeting, you can visit **Grotte du Diable** (Devil's Cave). To get there, turn right after the church in Tingeting and follow the signposts to the house of **Adrien Trohmae** (☎ 45 17 93; tour per adult/child 800/400 CFP, filming 500 CFP), who runs guided tours.

Three kilometres southeast of the airport is **Hnathalo**, home of the chief of Wetr, one of Lifou's three districts. Behind the chief's massive modern house, which is near the church, there's a *grande case* surrounded by a wooden palisade. Ask permission before entering the chief's compound or taking photos.

### SOUTHERN LIFOU

There is a blissful and secluded beach at **Peng** on Baie du Santal. It's down a dirt road, 3.5km off the We–Droueu road; the turn-off is at Hapetra. The *tribu* at Hapetra was once based at Peng but the inhabitants moved away in 1925 when leprosy broke out.

**Droueu** is the home of the chief of Gaïcha district. The *grande case*, surrounded by a wooden palisade, sits at the western end of the *tribu* by the beach. You can visit the *case* but must ask permission before entering the grounds.

On the east coast, at Jozip, you can visit a sculptor's workshop where Dick Ukewed and his wife Jacqueline, Lifou's first woman sculptor, run **Anyach Sculpture** (☎ 45 14 79; ☎ 7-11am & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 7-11am Sat & Sun).

Just before Luengoni beach there are some limestone caves known as **Grotte les Joyaux de Luengoni** (the Jewels of Luengoni). There are caves both above and below ground here; the underground caves have beautiful deep rock pools which shimmer emerald green when you shine a torch on the water. **Noël Pia** (☎ 45 03 09) runs guided tours (1000 CFP).

At Luengoni a stretch of fine white sand borders a stunning lagoon. Locals boast that it is New Caledonia's most beautiful beach. The sheltered bay is a renowned turtle haunt and it is quite common to see the creatures' heads above water as they surface for air.

### Tours

**Someltrans** (☎ 45 14 78; someltrans@cyberdidact.net; tours per person 2500 CFP) runs half-day tours that take in either the northern or southern parts of the island; it is also possible to tour the entire island by prior arrangement. The company runs return transfers from gîtes and hotels, to Luengoni or Peng beaches (2000 CFP).

### Sleeping & Eating

In *cases* guests usually sleep on mattresses on the floor – these are usually just as comfortable as a good bed. You'll find grocery shops with limited supplies in each village.

### WE

**Ché Jeannette** (☎ 83 81 54; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, paillote 3500 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) Jeannette runs a homestay in Luecilla, a *tribu* at the northern end of We. Her place is next to the beach at the northern end of Baie de Châteaubriand. Its thatched *paillotes* (straw huts) have beds and sleep two. The homestay only caters for house guests (meals 1500 CFP). To get there, follow the unsealed road in front of the *tribu* along the waterfront. Airport/wharf return transfers are 2000/1000 CFP.

**Hôtel Drehu Village** (☎ 45 02 70; drehuvil@canl.nc; We; d bungalows 9880 CFP; ☎ ☎) This two-star hotel fronting onto Châteaubriand beach is Lifou's top-end accommodation option, with comfortable bungalows set in the garden and along the beachfront. The restaurant opens onto a pleasant pool area where you can also dine under a *faré* (breakfast 1300 CFP, dishes 1800 to 2400 CFP). Activities include free canoeing and kayaking for guests, as well as bike hire (per half-day 600 CFP). Airport/wharf return transfers are 1950/700 CFP.

**Snack Makanu** (☎ 77 76 87; We; dishes 500-1000 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) This eatery is at one end of the Korail Alimentation store car park north of the roundabout. It offers a good choice of dishes and light snacks, and has a small veranda area with tables.

**Restaurant Madinina** (☎ 45 01 88; We; dishes 1300 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This relaxed waterfront restaurant serves generous helpings of West Indian food. You can also eat on the veranda overlooking Baie de Châteaubriand.

#### NORTHERN LIFOU

**Gîte Faré Falaise** (☎ 45 02 01; camping 1500 CFP, r/case per person 1500 CFP, d bungalows 5000 CFP) Perched on the very edge of the cliffs at Jokin, Faré Falaise has magnificent sunsets and one of the best views on the island. The rustic but charming bungalows have wooden decks looking over the bay, and they have private bathrooms. Guests can also stay in rooms in the family house or in a *case*, and a set menu is available for 1800 CFP. Activities offered here include bike hire (per half-/full-day 500/1000 CFP), boat trips (per day 1900 CFP) and island tours (3500 CFP). For swimming and snorkelling, access to the sea is via steps near the gîte. The gîte accepts credit cards. Airport/wharf return transfers cost 1600/2000 CFP.

**Chez Fabrice Bolé** (☎ 45 07 69; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) This homestay in Mucaweng is in a vanilla plantation, beside the winding forest road south of Jokin. Guests can sample homemade vanilla jams for breakfast (500 CFP, set menu 1700 CFP) and tour the plantation where they can see the interesting pollination process.

**Lilorève** (☎ 45 14 23; camping per tent/person 1000/1000 CFP, bungalows s/d 3500/4000 CFP) Lilorève sits on a grassy property sloping down to Baie du Santal, with a wide view over the bay and a private sandy cove which is underwater at high tide. There are attractive thatched

bungalows with mattresses on the floor and a sparkling-clean shower block. A set menu is available for 1800 CFP. Activities include bike hire (500/1000 CFP per half-/full-day). It is near the junction of the Mucaweng road, just before the Lifou Fun Dive club.

**Chez Benoît Bonua** (☎ 45 90 08; camping per tent 1000 CFP, paillote/case per person 1500 CFP) By the jetty on the road to the Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes, this place has a sandy beach, a shady camp site and basic *paillotes*. Meals are 800 CFP. Activities include kayak hire (500/1500 CFP per hour/half-day) and bike hire (per day 1000 CFP).

#### SOUTHERN LIFOU

The following places are listed heading south from We.

**L'Oasis de Kiamu** (☎ 45 15 00; www.oasis-de-kiamu.com; dm/d 2000/7900 CFP; ☎) This midrange hotel at Jozip is set in a quiet garden beneath a cliff across the road from a sandy cove. There is a small pool and rooms have fridges. A set menu is 2400 CFP. Airport/wharf return transfers are 2200/1200 CFP.

**Chez Noël Pia** (☎ 45 03 09; camping per tent/person 1000/1000 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) Noël's place is by a small coral headland at one end of magnificent Luengoni beach. In the morning turtles swim around the coral rocks behind the camp site. Noël arranges reputable snorkelling excursions to the nearby reefs (1000 CFP) and guided trips to the Joyaux de Luengoni caves. Meals are available for 1000 CFP.

**Camping Faré Hukekep** (☎ 45 14 34; camping per tent 1000 CFP, paillote s/d 3000/3500 CFP) At the southern end of Luengoni beach, this peaceful place is the only accommodation option south of We

that is away from the main road. The *paillotes* have both beds and mattresses. Meals cost from 1000 CFP. To get there, turn left down a sealed road opposite a monument with a cross. Airport/wharf return transfers per car load cost 3000/2000 CFP.

#### Getting There & Around

**Air Calédonie** (☎ airport 45 55 20, main office 45 55 50; We; ☎ 7.30-11.30am & 12.30-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 8-11.30am Sat) has a desk at the airport which opens for flights, and a main office on the main road in We. For information on getting to Lifou from Noumea see p332.

The best way to get around the island is by car, although short bike excursions can be enjoyable. Some places to stay rent bikes (500 to 1000 CFP per half-day, 1000 to 1500 CFP per full day) but unless you are extremely fit, the island is too big to tour entirely by bike. Hitchhiking is another option as drivers stop readily, although there is very little traffic on some roads. The following car-rental companies usually drop off or pick up vehicles at the airport or wharf at no extra cost.

**Aéro Location** (☎ 45 04 94; per day from 6500 CFP)

**Loca V** (☎ 45 07 77; per day from 5500 CFP)

Some places to stay offer island tours; make inquiries when you get there. Otherwise, book yourself on a tour with Someltrans (see p337).

#### OUVÉA

pop 4360 / area 132 sq km

Ouvéa is a long, thin sliver of land with a 25km-long perfect white beach and an exquisite lagoon stretching as far as the eye can see. This magnificent lagoon is surrounded by a chain of tiny islets known as the Pléiades.

#### Orientation & Information

Ouvéa's main administrative centres are Wadrilla and Fayaoué in the middle of the island. However, the facilities in these villages are so spread out that nowhere on the island can really be described as a centre. There's a clinic near the airport.

**BCI bank** (☎ 45 71 31; Wadrilla; ☎ 7.20am-noon Mon-Fri, 1-3pm Wed)

**Gendarmerie** (☎ 45 71 17; Fayaoué)

**Post office** (☎ 45 71 00; Fayaoué; ☎ 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri)

#### Sights & Activities

##### NORTHERN OUVÉA

The **Grotte de Kong Houlop** cave is in the bush near the airport at Houlop, set in a cliff wall. From behind the airport runway, you can drive or walk along a rough track to the bottom of the cliff where the cave is found. **Chez Jedyjah** (☎ 45 90 95, 86 59 36; per person 1100 CFP) takes guided tours to the cave and provides interesting commentary on local legends, history and flora.

The large white **memorial** by the road in Wadrilla is a tribute to 19 Kanaks who died in 1988 during the hostage crisis which arose over a political disagreement between the pro-independence movement and the French government. The 19 Ouvéans died when French military personnel stormed a cave to free French *gendarmes* being held hostage; four *gendarmes* had been killed when the Kanaks took the hostages. Tragically, it was also on Ouvéa that Kanak pro-independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene were killed by an angry Ouvéan in 1989 as they were taking part in a memorial ceremony. Their killer believed that they had ceded too much to France.

The deep **Trou Bleu d'Anawa** is sunk in the coral rock about 3km north of the island's wharf, and is connected to the sea underground. You can see fish and turtles in the blue water, and you can jump in yourself but the only way out is to pull yourself up the pool's steep sides with the help of a rope. The pool is behind a house near the road where it curves sharply away from the coast. Ask permission at the house.

A few metres south of the *gendarmerie* in Fayaoué, the sailing club **Canio** (☎ 45 71 01; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Sat) rents out equipment including windsurfers (2000/3500 CFP per one/two hours), hobby cats (3000/3500 CFP per one/two hours) and kayaks (1000/1750 CFP per one/two hours).

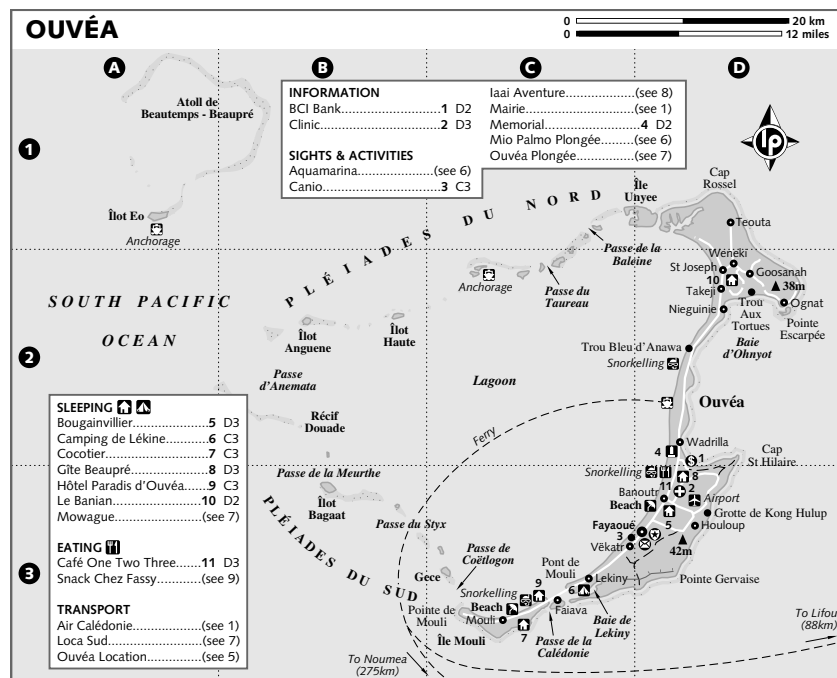
##### SOUTHERN OUVÉA

A long, narrow bay stretches inland at **Lékiny** (also spelt Lékine), and two small channels at its southern end let in water from the open sea. The cliffs rise above the bay to the east, and at low tide you can wade across to them to climb a wooden ladder to a cave where worn stalactites hang from the roof. Coral grows abundantly in this part of the

#### THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

**Le Bout du Monde** (☎ 45 02 46; someltrans@cyberdidact.net; camping per tent/person 1000/200 CFP, case per person 1500 CFP) This delightful place is perched on the edge of the low coral cliffs at Xodre. It is at the very south of Lifou, and with its view stretching across the endless ocean is aptly named 'the back of beyond'. Anémone, who manages the place, is a bubbly person who makes you feel at home in no time.

Le Bout du Monde has a *case* and *paillote* under a coconut grove behind a stone wall. In front of its small thatched restaurant the cliffs have been terraced smooth so diners can eat outdoors while looking out for turtles in the waves below. The house speciality is coconut crab and seafood, which you must order a day in advance (dishes from 1800 CFP). Beside the restaurant, steps lead down to a small beach sheltered by the cliffs. Activities include a full-day tour of the *tribu* (5500 CFP) which involves a custom ceremony, a *bougna* preparation demonstration and a visit to a cave. One-way airport/wharf transfers cost 2500/1500 CFP.



bay, making it a great place for snorkelling. To visit the cliffs or go snorkelling you must go with a guide; inquire at **Camping de Léline** (☎ 45 00 67; 2hr 700 CFP). The bay is a fishing reserve for *tribu* de Léline, and visitors are prohibited from swimming in it unless they are doing the guided tour.

**Aquamarina** (☎ 45 00 67; aquamarina-ouvea@yahoo.fr; adult/child 1750/1000 CFP) organises glass-bottomed boat trips around Baie de Léline. If you cannot go snorkelling, this is your chance to see the wonderful marine life of the bay up close.

The island's only bridge is **Mouli bridge** at Léline, where Ouvéa's southern tip is cut off by a wide channel that flows out of Baie de Léline into the Ouvéa lagoon. From the bridge, the scenery is an almost surreal display of dazzling white sand and different shades of blue, and you can watch sharks, rays, turtles and fish swimming beneath you.

At the very south of Ouvéa is **tribu de Mouli**, a peaceful settlement spread along the waterfront. An avenue of araucaria pines leads up from the beach to the Catholic church, and

the road continues past the *tribu* to the very tip of the island. When the weather is calm it is a good place to snorkel, but be careful of the strong currents.

### Tours

To get to the Pléiades du Nord contact **Le Banian** (☎ 45 70 63; 4-person trip 20,000 CFP), a homestay near St Joseph. For Pléiades du Sud contact **Koïo Drany** (☎ 45 72 87; per person 6000 CFP), based in Fayaoué, or **Charly Aema** (☎ 45 07 60; adult/child 5000/2500 CFP), near Mouli in southern Ouvéa (see opposite). You can also visit Pléiades du Sud by taking a diving trip with one of Ouvéa's two dive clubs.

**Mio Palmo Plongée** (☎ 45 00 67; aquamarina-ouvea@yahoo.fr; 2-dive package 12,000 CFP) A friendly club based at Camping de Léline.

**Ouvéa Plongée** (☎ 45 09 90; www.ouveaplongee.com; 2-dive package 2500 CFP) Just south of Cocotier in *tribu* de Mouli.

### Sleeping & Eating

There is a grocery shop in each *tribu*, although the best-stocked one is Chez Fella in Fayaoué, just before the *gendarmérie* as

you head south. Most places to stay can prepare lobster or coconut crab (around 3000 CFP). The following places are listed from north to south.

**Le Banian** (☎ 45 70 63; case s/d 3000/3500 CFP) Near St Joseph, this homestay is the only accommodation available in the north of Ouvéa. The homestay has three *cases* and can prepare *bougna* (1500 CFP) or lobster (3000 CFP) on request; a set menu costs 1800 CFP. Airport return transfers are 3000 CFP.

**Café One Two Three** (☎ 87 72 27; buffet 1000 CFP; ☺ lunch Mon-Sat) This restaurant, set between Fayaoué and Wadrilla, serves a buffet lunch including dessert. When we visited it had plans to open for dinner in the near future. The owners are big soccer fans and named their place in honour of France's 3-0 victory over Brazil in the 1998 World Cup.

**Gîte Beauré** (☎ 45 71 32; bungalows d/tr 7000/7800 CFP, studios s/d/tr 3850/4400/4950 CFP) Three wooden bungalows with private bathrooms are set in a quiet garden here across the road from the beach. The basic studio rooms have shared bathrooms. The gîte accepts credit cards and a set menu costs 2000 CFP. Airport/wharf return transfers are 1000/1500 CFP.

**Bougainvillier** (☎ 45 72 20; camping per tent/person 1000/100 CFP, s/d 3000/3500 CFP) Set a short distance from the beach, this homestay in Fayaoué has attractive thatched accommodation. The set menu here is 2000 CFP. Return airport/wharf transfers cost 800/1600 CFP.

**Camping de Léline** (☎ 45 00 67; camping per tent 1500 CFP, tent hire per night 1700 CFP) Beside Baie de Léline, near the bridge. Airport/wharf return transfers are 1500/1800 CFP.

**Snack Chez Fassy** (dishes 300-500 CFP; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) The cheapest place to eat on the island is south of Mouli bridge, before the Hôtel Paradis d'Ouvéa.

**Hôtel Paradis d'Ouvéa** (☎ 45 54 00; hotelparadis@canl.nc; d bungalows with garden/beach view 22,300/33,800 CFP, 4-person villas with garden view 33,800 CFP; ☺) On the beach, just south of Mouli bridge, this four-star hotel has spacious bungalows and a large restaurant overlooking the beach (set menu 2000 to 3500 CFP). Airport return transfers are 2000 CFP.

**Cocotier** (☎ 45 70 40; camping per tent 1000 CFP, case per person 2000 CFP, paillotes s/d 3500/4000 CFP, bungalows s/d 4500/5000 CFP) This homestay

with two *cases* and two *faré* is about 500m north of the church. It is in Mouli, across the road from the beach, but you can pitch your tent on the beachfront. A set menu is 1800 CFP. Airport/wharf return transfers cost 2000/2500 CFP.

**Mowague** (☎ 45 07 60; paillotes s/d 3500/4000 CFP) This friendly homestay is about 5km south of the bridge, before the church. It's run by Charly Aema, who is famous for the boat excursions he organises on the lagoon and to Pléiades du Sud (5000/2500 CFP per adult/child). The homestay has a set menu on offer for 1200 CFP, and it also serves coconut crabs, lobster or *bougna* on request for around 3000 CFP per person. Airport/wharf return transfers will cost you 3000 CFP.

### Getting There & Around

**Air Calédonie** (Office ☎ 45 570 22; 7.30-11am & 1.30-3pm Mon-Fri; Airport ☎ 45 55 30; 7.30-10.30am & 1.30-4pm Mon to Fri) has an office in Wadrilla and a desk at the airport in Houloup. For information on getting to Ouvéa from Noumea, see p332.

A **private bus** (☎ 45 70 77) leaves St Joseph daily except Sunday at 6.30am, passing through Fayaoué at around 7.30am to arrive at Mouli at around 9am. It then returns, stopping at Fayaoué at around 10.30am and arriving at St Joseph at around 11.30am. The driver stops anywhere along the route if you flag him down. The fare is 150 CFP between St Joseph and Fayaoué, and 100 CFP between Fayaoué and Mouli.

Cycling is a great way to get round the island. **Iaï Adventure** (☎ 45 09 77; adult/child per half-day 750/500 CFP, adult/child per full-day 1500/750 CFP), 200m south of Gîte Beauré in Fayaoué, rents bikes.

Ouvéa has a couple of car-rental companies that usually drop off or pick up vehicles from the airport, wharf or accommodation places for free.

**Loca Sud** (☎ 45 70 13, 79 86 51; car hire per day from 5000 CFP) At Mouli, just before the Cocotier homestay.

**Ouvéa Location** (☎ 45 73 77; car hire per day from 4000 CFP) At Fayaoué, on the main road 500m south of the airport turn-off.

Hitchhiking is quite common on Ouvéa. Drivers will usually offer you a lift even if you are not hitchhiking, although it can take a while for a car to come along.

## ÎLE DES PINS

pop 1900 / area 152 sq km

A tranquil paradise of turquoise bays, white-sand beaches and tropical vegetation, Île des Pins is also a haunting place where dark caves lie hidden in the forest and the bush invades the crumbling ruins of a convict prison. The Kuniés, as the island's inhabitants are known, have kept alive the tradition of sailing *pirogues* (outrigger canoes), and you'll see these ancient craft gliding elegantly across the calm lagoon.

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Vao, on the southern end of the island, is the main administrative centre and it's where the bank, post office and the small visitor information centre are located. There are hotels and gîtes scattered around the island but the main tourist area is Kuto. The Île des Pins visitor information centre in Noumea (see p311) can book accommodation, car rental and activities.

**BCI bank** (☎ 46 10 45; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-3.30 Mon & Fri, 8am-noon Tue & Wed, 1-3pm Thur) In Vao, opposite the red-roofed market and 100m from the church. There's an ATM inside the building.

**Gendarmerie** (☎ 46 11 17) On the peninsula near the wharf in Kuto.

**Post office** (☎ 46 11 00; 🕒 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri) Île des Pins' only post office is in Vao. It also has a public telephone; there are others at the airport and wharf.

**Visitor information centre** (☎ 46 10 27; www.ile-des-pins.com; 🕒 8-11.30am & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) The Point d'Information is opposite the red-roofed market in Vao. There is an information desk (☎ 46 14 00) at the airport which opens for flights.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Do not climb the taboo rock in Baie de Kanuméra (Le Rocher). This is the large vegetation-covered rock with wooden stairs up the side that is separated from the beach at high tide. It is OK to swim around it or sit on the sand beneath it.

### TRANSPORT

With regular flights and ferry sailings, Île des Pins is easily accessible from Noumea. On the island itself there are several transport options to choose from, including bicycles and scooters.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

**Air Calédonie** (✈️ airport 44 88 46, Kuto 44 88 50; 🕒 7.30-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.30am Sat) flies to Île des Pins from Noumea at least twice daily. One-way/return flights cost around 8150/16,350 CFP.

#### BOAT

The *Betico* sails to Île des Pins from Noumea three times a week, docking at the wharf in beautiful Baie de Kuto. The one-way/return fare is around 4700/9400 CFP; day trips are 8200 CFP. For more information, see p353.

### GETTING AROUND

The hotel or gîte where you are staying should be able to arrange airport or wharf transfers. Some of them also hire scooters and cars, and can arrange island tours (around 1700 CFP per person).

Hôtel Kou-Bugny and Gîte Nataiwatch hire scooters (3200/4700 CFP per half-/full-day). Along with Hôtel Kodjeue, they also hire cars (7000 CFP per day Monday to Friday, 8500 CFP Saturday and Sunday). Rates are generally cheaper if you are a guest at the hotel or gîte. Rates include airport and wharf drop-offs and pick-ups, as well as petrol. Relais Le Kuberka hires cars to guests only.

**NC-First** (☎ 46 10 90; fax 46 10 91; per day from 7280 CFP) is a car-hire company in Kuto. **Kunié Loca Fun** (☎ 43 54 80; Kuto; per half-/full-day 5000/7000 CFP) hires scooter cars (tiny two-person vehicles). You must be over 16 to drive them but a driver's licence is not necessary.

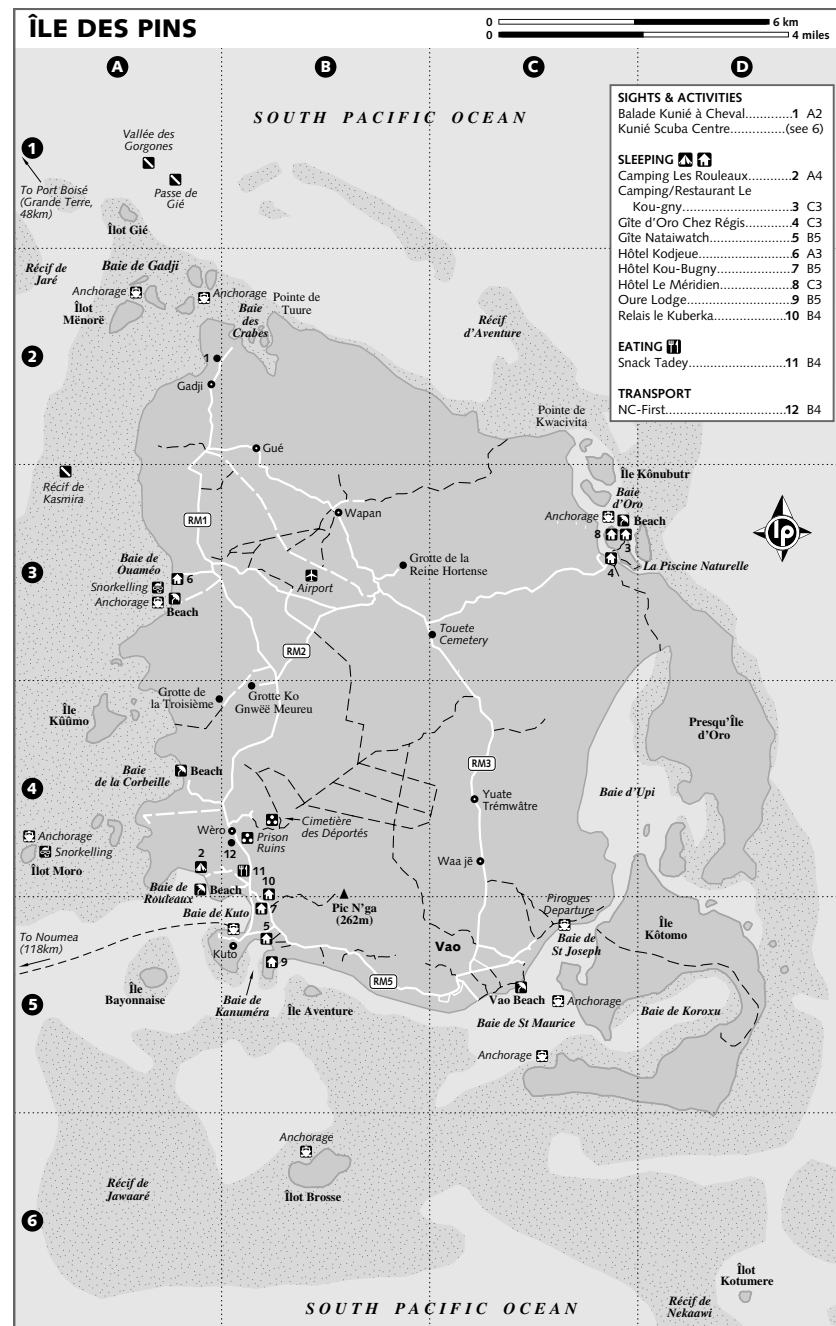
Cycling is another great way to explore Île des Pins since there aren't too many steep climbs and distances between places are relatively short. Gîte Nataiwatch rents bikes (1000/1500 CFP per half-/full-day).

**Taxi Île des Pins** (☎ 79 19 26) runs a taxi service but to be on the safe side you have to book well in advance.

### VAO

Île des Pins' main village, Vao, is a serene place with several interesting sights and activities in the town and the surrounding area.

The attractive 19th-century **Catholic church** dominates Vao. It was established by the Marist priest Father Goujon, who managed to convert most of the island's population



in just over 30 years following his arrival in 1848. There are beautiful carvings around the altar and wooden panelling in the ceiling. A path behind the church leads up the hill to a small chapel from where you can admire the view over the village to the lagoon.

The **Statue de St Maurice** at Baie de St Maurice, about 600m from the church, commemorates the arrival of the first missionaries on the island and is also a war memorial. It's a great photo opportunity, especially as you don't need permission to photograph the site, a circle of wooden totem poles guarding a statue of Christ, just above the beach. To get there, heading west from the church, take the first left and head straight down to the sea.

**Baie de St Joseph**, 2km east of Vao, is so well known for its *pirogues* that it is also referred to as Baie des Pirogues. Early morning, when the *pirogues* are out on the water, is the best time to visit. Later in the day you can watch sailors building their *pirogues* on the beach under the coconut palms. A trip on one of these crafts is a must if you're visiting Île des Pins. For more information, see the boxed text, below.

## KUTO

Kuto is 6km west of Vao, with two gorgeous beaches and aquamarine bays. Not surprisingly, there are several hotels and gîtes here.

About 1km north of Baie de Kuto, beside the main road, are the crumbling, overgrown ruins of an old **convict prison** built in the late 19th century. Île des Pins was initially used as a place of exile for convicts, including

Paris Communards and Algerian deportees in the 1870s. The deportees' cemetery is nearby.000

Baie de Kuto and Baie de Kanuméra are separated by the narrow neck of Kuto peninsula. It's tough to pick a favourite between the two picturesque bays. **Baie de Kuto** is the perfect place to lie on the beach or swim in the calm sea. Leafy trees grow to the edge of the beach so even on the hottest of days you'll be guaranteed some shade. For snorkelling go to **Baie de Kanuméra**, where coral grows not far from the shore.

If you are feeling energetic you can climb **Pic N'ga** (262m), the island's highest point. It is a steady 45-minute climb and the path is mostly exposed so it is best to do the walk in the early morning or late afternoon. From the summit there are fantastic views over the entire island and its turquoise bays. The signposted path to the summit begins from the main road 200m south of Relais Le Kuberka.

## NORTH OF KUTO

Heading north from Kuto, the main road travels through open areas and small patches of forest. A couple of roads lead down to beaches.

About 8km north of Kuto a signposted turn-off leads down a dirt track and through a forest to the sunken **Grotte de la Troisième**. From the main road it's about 800m to the cave. The track continues but you will know where to stop when you come to a clearing where cars can turn around. The cave is down a path, 30m from the dirt track. You can climb a few metres down into the

cave's wide opening, from where you can peer into its depth. If you have a torch and a sense of adventure, venture further down the steep, sometimes slippery, floor of the cave to the bottom, which is filled with fresh water. Experienced divers can venture even further into the underground caves.

**Kunié Scuba Centre** (☎ 46 11 22; kuniescuba@canl.nc; 2-dive package 12,480 CFP, boat day trip per person 8000 CFP), based at Hôtel Kodjeu at Baie de Ouaméo, organises dives to the caves, along with other dive trips and boat excursions. There is a wide choice of dive sites off the northern tip of the island at Gadji, especially Vallée des Gorgones, where divers can see soft and hard corals and a profusion of sea life, including eagle rays and leopard sharks. Boat excursions include snorkelling gear and a picnic lunch. Fishing trips can also be arranged for 8000 CFP per person.

Also at Gadji, **Balade Kunié à Cheval** (☎ 49 93 07; per hr/half-day 2500/6000 CFP) organises horse treks along the beach, through the forest or up to the plateau. Turn down a dirt road at the 'ranch' signpost on the road to Gadji.

## NORTH OF VAO

North of Vao the road climbs gradually towards the central plateau, where you have views over the dense forests of the east coast to the sea.

Northeast lies beautiful **Baie d'Oro**, a secluded bay on the eastern side of Île des Pins. The bay has a beautiful, long white-sand beach, enclosed on one side by a reef and on the other by tall araucaria pines reaching towards the sky. The area is best known for **la piscine naturelle**, a natural pool with exquisite turquoise water, sheltered behind the reef. The pool is not on the bay itself but is part of a narrow waterway leading from the open sea to Baie d'Oro. You can follow the sandy waterway east to the pool from the Hôtel le Méridien, and at high tide wade through the knee-deep water or follow a path on the bank. Another waterway leads north back to the beach at Baie d'Oro, coming out near Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny. Baie d'Oro is 5km from the main road; the turn-off is 9km north of Vao opposite a small cemetery.

Just north of the airport road turning is **Grotte de la Reine Hortense** (admission 200 CFP), an impressive cave which tunnels into a limestone cliff. A path leads through a

beautiful wild tropical garden to the wide entrance where stalactites hang from the roof. This cave was where Queen Hortense, wife of a local chief, is believed to have taken refuge for several months during intertribal conflict in 1855. At the back of the cave there's a smooth rock ledge where she slept. The friendly lady who maintains the cave and its surroundings can inform you about the history of the cave and the island in general.

The cave's earth floor can be slippery. There are usually a few torches available at the entrance but the batteries are sometimes flat. To be on the safe side take your own torch with you. The sealed road down to the cave is signposted.

## TOURS

Most hotels and gîtes organise tours and excursions on the island and out on the lagoon.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Île des Pins' *escargots* (snails) are a local speciality and most places serve them. Seafood, in particular lobster, is another popular dish; prices vary from 2500 to 5000 CFP. All restaurants attached to gîtes or hotels accept nonguests but you must book in advance and in some cases order in advance too. Restaurants can also prepare sandwiches if you'd like a picnic lunch.

## Vao

**Snack Le Kohu** (☎ 46 10 23; dishes from 900 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) This small eatery serves snacks and meals including chicken or steak and chips, sandwiches (from 300 CFP) and a dish of the day (1250 CFP). It's by the main road heading north from Vao and is a pleasant place to stop for lunch, with tables under thatched shelters.

The **market** (☎ 6-11am), selling local produce, is held on Wednesdays and Saturdays. It is opposite the visitor information centre 100m south of the church.

## Kuto

**Oure Lodge** (☎ 43 13 15; ourelodge@lagoon.nc; garden/lagoon/beach bungalows 27,000/33,000/39,000 CFP; ☎ ☎) At the sheltered eastern end of Baie de Kanuméra, the bungalows at this lovely hotel have a minibar, phone and Internet

### PIROGUE EXCURSION

Its idyllic scenery aside, Île des Pins' most famous attraction is its wooden *pirogues* with their triangular sails. It is possible to do a round trip out on the lagoon but the most popular excursion is to Baie d'Oro. *Pirogues* leave from Baie de St Joseph at around 8am, transporting passengers to the northern end of Baie d'Upi where a path leads through a dense forest to **la piscine naturelle** (a beautiful natural pool) in Baie d'Oro (see opposite). You can laze on the sand around the pool or snorkel in its clear waters. Take a picnic lunch (most hotels and gîtes can prepare one for you) or tuck into one of the legendary *bougnas* at nearby Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis (see p346). Other lunch options close to the pool are the highly commended seafood dishes at Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny (p346) and the range of dishes served at the luxurious Hôtel le Méridien (p347).

Most of the hotels and gîtes can organise *pirogue* excursions including transfers to Baie de St Joseph and from Baie d'Oro (around 3800 CFP). If you are doing an excursion independently (1500 CFP per person), simply turn up at Baie de St Joseph before 8am and arrange a pick-up from Baie d'Oro.

### THE AUTHORS' CHOICE

**Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny** (☎ 46 10 65, 83 59 21; camping per tent 1200 CFP) This charmingly rustic camp site/restaurant has an excellent reputation for both its setting and lobster meals (3900 CFP, set menu 2200 CFP). Tables spread with seafood are set under the trees on the beach overlooking a dreamy lagoon. If you're camping here, don't leave your belongings unattended; they make easy pickings as, other than at lunchtimes, the place is usually deserted.

Le Kou-gny is along the beach from Hôtel Le Méridien but you have to walk through the forest to get there as a small cliff juts into the water separating the two places. From the Hôtel Le Méridien bridge, follow the path to the right through the forest; it's a five-minute walk. You can also walk there from *la piscine naturelle*, by following the causeway closest to the coast then walking along the beach. Le Kou-gny does not arrange transport for guests.

connection. Near the beach there is a peaceful swimming pool area in front of a large airy dining room (à la carte mains 2100 to 4500 CFP). A great place to get away from it all.

**Hôtel Kou-Bugny** (☎ 46 18 00; www.kou-bugny.com; standard/deluxe bungalows 16,500/19,500 CFP; 🍷) Kou-Bugny is on the opposite side of the quiet road from divine Kuto beach. The main hotel building and traditionally inspired bungalows sit under the spreading branches of trees overlooking a small pool. The restaurant here serves excellent seafood (dishes 1800 CFP). Airport/wharf return transfers are 1700/400 CFP.

**Camping Les Rouleaux** (☎ 46 11 16; camping per person 1000 CFP) This large, shady and peaceful camp site fronts onto the sandy beach at Baie des Rouleaux. Unlike Île des Pins' other calm bays this one has waves, and in July and August it's a popular spot for board riders and kite surfers. The camp site is 1km from the main road. Heading north, the turn-off is just before Snack Tadey; immediately after that, you take the right fork.

**Relais Le Kuberka** (☎ 46 11 18; camp site 1600 CFP, s/d 6200/6700 CFP) This quiet place with a small pool is 350m from the beach. Rooms are set around a small tidy garden and have fridges and private bathrooms. The restaurant serves excellent meals (dishes 2000 CFP). Airport/wharf return transfers 1300/400 CFP.

**Gîte Nataiwatch** (☎ 46 11 13; www.nataiwatch.com; camping per tent 1800 CFP, modern/traditional bungalows 7500/8000 CFP, per extra person 500 CFP) Nataiwatch is a simple and relaxed gîte set in a wooded area about 100m from the beach, towards the eastern end of Baie de Kanuméra. The modern concrete bungalows have bathrooms, and the traditional ones have kitchens but share a toilet and

shower block with the camp site. Meals cost 1600 CFP. Bike hire (1000/1500 CFP per half-/full-day) and return transfers from the airport/wharf (1200/ 400 CFP) are available.

**Snack Tadey** (☎ 46 10 68; dishes 1100 CFP; 🍷 8am-5pm) This tiny place at the northern end of Baie de Kuto serves sandwiches and meals. Its opening hours are erratic but if it's closed go round the back and if someone's there they'll open up. Attached is a small shop with a limited selection of groceries.

### North of Kuto

**Hôtel Kodjeue** (☎ 46 11 42; resa@kodjeue.nc; 4-3-/5-person bungalows 26,000/21,000/16,000 CFP; 🍷) On the calm waterfront of Baie de Ouaméo, this place has wonderful sunsets. The bungalows are clean and comfortable but are set on a wide lawn and have little privacy. The four-person bungalows have decks built out over the beach as well as a TV and fridge, and the five-person bungalows have a kitchenette. The hotel has a small grocery store (open from 7.30am to noon and from 4pm to 6.30pm), and meals are available for 1800 CFP. Airport or wharf return transfers cost 600 CFP.

### Baie d'Oro

#### BUDGET

**Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis** (☎ 43 45 55; www.gitedoro-ile-despins.com; camping per tent 1500 CFP, d bungalows 8150 CFP) Chez Régis offers accommodation in a shady camp site or bungalows which are tastefully decorated using local materials. Overlooking one of the waterways leading to *la piscine naturelle* is the open-thatched restaurant that's famous for its *bougnas* (chicken/lobster 2500/4000 CFP); order your *bougnas* a day in advance. If you arrive

at around 10am, you can watch the ladies preparing them; they take them out of the earth oven at around noon. Airport/wharf transfers cost 1200/1600 CFP.

### TOP END

**Hôtel Le Méridien** (☎ 46 15 15; meridiendp@meridien.nc; deluxe r 55,000 CFP, deluxe ste 65,000 CFP, premium bungalows 75,000 CFP; 🍷) This hotel is pure tropical luxury. Idyllically set in a forest growing down to the beach, it has views across Baie d'Oro to araucarias silhouetted against the sky on the surrounding islets. An optical illusion would have you believe the swimming pool flows into the lagoon, as if you could float from one to the other. Breakfast for two and return transfers to the airport are included in the rates. Lunch/dinner costs 4500/5000 CFP. There's a supplementary 1000 CFP tax on the rates.

### SHOPPING

**Boutique Créations Île des Pins** (☎ 46 12 68; 🕒 9-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm) Near the wharf in Kuto, this shop sells Île des Pins souvenirs including coffee-table books (in English), postcards, and hand-painted tops and *pareos* (sarongs). A DVD (3950 CFP) featuring underwater and island scenes on Île des Pins is also on sale. Several of the books on the island were written by the boutique's owner, Hilary Roots.

### PREPARING A BOUGNA

The main Melanesian dish in New Caledonia is *bougnas*, served on special occasions such as traditional festivals, weddings or when welcoming visitors. It is a mixture of yam, sweet potato, taro, other vegetables and meat, fish or seafood, covered in coconut milk and tightly wrapped in banana leaves. The parcels are arranged on hot stones in an earth oven and covered with more hot stones. Green leaves are placed on top of the stones to keep in the heat and steam the food, and the meal is left to cook for 1½ to two hours. It is served piping hot and portions are usually extremely generous.

Most Melanesian-run gîtes or homestays can prepare a *bougnas* but you must order 24 hours in advance. Expect to pay from 1500 to 3000 CFP per person. Lobster *bougnas* is the most expensive option.

## NEW CALEDONIA DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATION

Most midrange and top-end hotels and resorts are in Noumea, but there are a couple of good choices on the east coast of Grande Terre, at least one each on Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa, and a few on Île des Pins. Rates start at around 5000/8000/13,000 CFP per night for a basic/midrange/top-end hotel. You'll find that accommodation is often cheaper if you buy a package deal in your own country.

If you're on a budget there are homestays, gîtes and camp sites everywhere around the country, except in Noumea. Camp sites have toilets and showers (usually with only cold water) of varying degrees of cleanliness. Camping costs about 1000 CFP per tent and some places charge an extra 100 CFP per person.

Gîtes are very modest small hotels with bungalows (small chalets or huts) that sleep between two and six people. They usually have private bathrooms, a restaurant or a communal kitchen. Prices range from around 4000 to 9000 CFP for one or two people and 1000 CFP per extra person.

Homestays, called *accueil en tribu* or *accueil chez l'habitant* in French, are the best way to meet Kanak people. They are usually within a family compound, or set slightly apart within a *tribu*, and have *cases*, usually with mattresses, or bungalows, usually with beds. Homestays cost around 800 to 1500 CFP per person per night. Meals are extra.

The concept of farmstays is similar to that of homestays, and they are the best way for travellers to meet rural Caledonians or Broussards. They cost around 2500 CFP per person. Unless otherwise stated, prices quoted in this chapter include a 5% services tax.

### ACTIVITIES Abseiling

New Caledonia has many high waterfalls which are ideal for abseiling. **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc) runs abseiling trips to Cascade de Ciu (p326), Cascade de Bâ (p330) and Cascade de Tao (p330).

## PRACTICALITIES

- *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* ([www.info.nc](http://www.info.nc)) is the only daily newspaper. *Les Infos* is a weekly current affairs paper, *Le Chien Bleu* is a monthly satirical paper and *Mwâ Vée* is a quarterly publication addressing Kanak cultural issues.
- There's just one public television station, Télé Nouvelle-Calédonie, part of the French territories broadcasting service (RFO). All programmes are in French. Canal Satellite, a network of pay channels, has more choice. Radio Nouvelle-Calédonie (RNC) is the national radio service. Other radio stations include Radio Djiido, the pro-independence network; Radio Rythme Bleu (RRB), the loyalist Rassemblement station broadcasting a lot of party propaganda; NRJ, aimed at young people and broadcasting mainly music; and Radio Océane, a more moderate loyalist station.
- Videos are usually based on the PAL system.
- As in France, plugs have two round pins (220–240V, 50Hz AC).
- New Caledonia follows the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

## Diving &amp; Snorkelling

New Caledonia has the world's second-largest reef, so there's no shortage of snorkelling sites. The best are the reefs around the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins. Bring your own equipment and watch out for strong currents. In Noumea, take a boat to the Île aux Canards, Îlot Maître or Amédée Islet (p315) marine sanctuaries.

New Caledonia has many wonderful dive sites, most of them on the outer reef and reached by boat. Dive clubs usually offer a two-dive package for 10,000 to 13,000 CFP.

**Nouvelle-Calédonie Plongée** ([www.nouvellecaldonieplongee.com](http://www.nouvellecaldonieplongee.com)) is a dive association involving the majority of dive clubs throughout the country. It sells 'Plongée' cards which give holders a 15% discount at any of the member clubs. Cards can be purchased at all member clubs and are valid for one month (2500 CFP) or one year (5000 CFP).

## Fishing

Air Mer Loisir and Pacific Charter (see below) in Noumea run fishing tours. **New Caledonia Fishing Safaris** (☎ 25 19 40; [www.newcaledoniafishingsafaris.nc](http://www.newcaledoniafishingsafaris.nc)), also based in Noumea, runs sportfishing safaris around the rest of New Caledonia.

## Hiking

New Caledonia has diverse landscapes that are great for hiking, which is best done during the cooler mid-year months. Popular hiking areas and tracks around Noumea include Monts Koghis (p316), Parc Provinciale de la Rivière Bleue (p321) and the GR1 walking track (p323).

Along Grande Terre's northeast coast, many trails wind up to waterfalls or into the mountains from river valleys. **Association Dayu Biik** (☎ 42 87 77) organises guided walks in the Hienghène region (see p331).

Hikers should visit the **Direction des Ressources Naturelles** (Map p318; ☎ 24 32 55; [drm@province-sud.nc](mailto:drm@province-sud.nc); 19 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) to pick up free brochures and maps (mainly in French) detailing a selection of hikes on Grande Terre.

## Horse Riding

Many ranches and *tribus* on Grande Terre offer one- or multiple-day horse-riding trips into the central mountain ranges. *Tribu de Oui Poin* (p325) in La Foa, *tribu d'Atéou* (p327) in Koné and Ranch du Carré 9 (p327) in Voh all run horse treks.

## Sailing &amp; Boating

The **Cerde Nautique Calédonien** (CNC; ☎ 26 27 27; 2 rue du Capitaine Desmier, Noumea) yachting club in Noumea's Baie de l'Orphelinat is a good place to inquire about yachting and sailing.

**Air Mer Loisir** (Map p318; ☎ 28 29 01; [www.aml.nc](http://www.aml.nc); Port Moselle, Noumea) Operates one-week catamaran excursions on 12m to 23m catamarans from 300,000 CFP.

**Pacific Charter** (Map p318; ☎ /fax 26 10 55; [www.pa.nc/charter](http://www.pa.nc/charter); Port Moselle, Noumea) Has speedboats available for hire from 15,000 CFP per day, as well as yachts and organised sailing trips.

**Raid Ngatahi** (☎ /fax 77 24 40; [www.raid-ngatahi.nc](http://www.raid-ngatahi.nc); Noumea) Speedboat excursions to islets in the southern lagoon for 18,500 CFP per day.

## Scenic Flights

Ultra-light aircraft (known as ULM) offer an exhilarating experience, particularly when flying over Coeur de Voh, north of

Koné. **ULM Blue Travel** (☎ 77 88 42; [gilbulm@lagoon.nc](mailto:gilbulm@lagoon.nc)) offers courses and introductory flights (ULM per 15/30 minutes 3000/5000 CFP, water-planes per hour 10,000 CFP).

Private helicopter flights leave from Magenta airport and fly over Noumea's bays, Amédée Islet and the other islets sprinkled over the lagoon, the barrier reef and Baie de Prony in the Far South. Operators:

**Heliocéan** (☎ 25 39 49; [heliocéan.dir@mls.nc](mailto:heliocéan.dir@mls.nc); 30 min per 3 people 27,300 CFP)

**Helitourisme** (☎ 26 96 62; [helitourisme@mls.nc](mailto:helitourisme@mls.nc); 30 min per 3 people 32,500 CFP)

## Water Sports

Wind- and kite-surfing are extremely popular on Noumea's bays. Windsurfing boards, kayaks and catamarans can be rented at Anse Vata from Plages Loisirs (p316). **Glisse Attitude** (Map p312; ☎ 78 27 69; [glisseattitude@lagoon.nc](mailto:glisseattitude@lagoon.nc); per hr/half-day 4500/9000 CFP) in Noumea organises kite-surfing trips and courses with a qualified instructor.

Surfing trips to the reef are run by Nèk-wéta (p326) in Bourail and Bouts-d'Brousse (p324) in Boulouparis.

## Whale Watching

Humpback whales frequent New Caledonian waters between July and September. Whale-watching excursions are run off the Far South coast (p323) of Grande Terre and in Lifou (p336) in the Loyalty Islands.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices and most private businesses are open Monday to Friday from 7.30am or 8am to 4pm or 5pm, closing between 11.30am and 1.30pm. The exceptions are the banks in Noumea and most post offices around New Caledonia, which remain open at lunchtime.

In general, shops are open weekdays from 7.30am to 11am and 2pm to 6pm, and Saturday from 8am or 9am to noon. However, some supermarkets often don't close for lunch and are open all day Saturday and Sunday morning.

Sunday is extremely quiet throughout New Caledonia.

## CHILDREN

Parents will discover useful tips in Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*. Infants under three years stay at most places free. Some

places charge for a cot. For children under 12, you usually pay about half the adult rate for accommodation and activities.

Very few places have change tables for infants so it's handy to travel with a fold-out change bag. In Noumea or on Île des Pins car-hire companies can provide a safety seat. On the Loyalty Islands not all hire companies have them. If you're travelling in Noumea with children, see p316.

## DANGERS &amp; ANNOYANCES

In general, New Caledonia is very safe for travellers. However, St Louis, in the Mont-Dore area, has experienced violent incidents in recent years. The violence has not been aimed at tourists but it's best to keep your distance if there have been recent protests.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES  
French Embassies & Consulates

**Australia** Consulate (☎ 02-9261 5779; St-Martins Tower, 31 Market St, Sydney, NSW 2000); Embassy (☎ 02-6216 0100; [www.ambafrance-au.org](http://www.ambafrance-au.org); 6 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

**Canada** Embassy (☎ 613-789 1795; fax 562 3735; [www.ambafrance-ca.org](http://www.ambafrance-ca.org); 42 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, Ont K1M 2C9)

**France** Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (☎ 01 43 17 53 53; [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr); 37 Quai d'Orsay, 75351 Paris)

**Germany** Embassy (☎ 030-590 03 90 00; [www.botschaft-frankreich.de](http://www.botschaft-frankreich.de); Parizer Platz 5, 10117 Berlin)

**Ireland** Embassy (☎ 01-277 5000; [www.ambafrance-ie.org](http://www.ambafrance-ie.org); 36 Ailesbury Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

**Japan** Embassy (☎ 03-5420 8800; [www.ambafrance-jp.org](http://www.ambafrance-jp.org); 11/44 Chome Minami Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-8514)

**Netherlands** Embassy (☎ 70-312 58 00; [www.ambafrance-nl.org](http://www.ambafrance-nl.org); 1 Smidsplein, The Hague 2514 BT)

**New Zealand** Embassy (☎ 04-384 2555; [www.ambafrance-nz.org](http://www.ambafrance-nz.org); Rural Bank Bldg, 13th fl, 11-34/42 Manners St, Wellington)

**UK** Embassy (☎ 020-07 31 000; [www.ambafrance-uk.org](http://www.ambafrance-uk.org); 58 Knightsbridge, London SW1X7JT)

**USA** Consulate Los Angeles (☎ 310-235 3200; [www.consulfrance-losangeles.org](http://www.consulfrance-losangeles.org); ste 300, 10990 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles CA 90024); Consulate New York (☎ 212-606 3600; [www.consulfrance-newyork.org](http://www.consulfrance-newyork.org); 934 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10021); Embassy (☎ 202-944 6000; <http://www.ambafrance-us.org>; 4101 Reservoir Rd NW, Washington, DC 20007)

**Vanuatu** Embassy (☎ 678 223 53; fax 678-226; Kumul Hwy, BP 60 Port Vila)

## Embassies in New Caledonia

**Australia** (Map p318; ☎ 27 24 14; 7th fl, Immeuble Foch, 19 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea)

**Indonesia** (Map p312; ☎ 23 28 80; 2 rue Lamartine, Baie de l'Orphelinat, Noumea)

**Japan** (☎ 27 83 03; BP 2009 Noumea)

**Netherlands** (Map p318; ☎ 28 48 58; 1st fl, 33 rue de Sébastopol, Noumea) Above Hôtel Lapérouse.

**New Zealand** (Map p318; ☎ 27 25 43; 2nd fl, 4 blvd Vauban, Noumea)

**Switzerland** (Map p312; ☎ 26 11 59; 18 rue Jim Daly, Val Plaisance, Noumea)

**UK** (☎ 28 21 53; 14 rue du Générale Sarrail, Noumea)

**Vanuatu** (Map p318; ☎ 27 76 21; 1st fl, 53 rue de Sébastopol, Noumea) Above Hôtel San Francisco.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See p829 for details of regional holidays.

**Festival of the Yam** (March) Kanak festival marking the beginning of the harvest.

**Giant Omelette Festival** (April) At Dumbéa, a dozen chefs, a huge skillet, 7000 eggs and many hands are used to make a free-for-all 3.5m-diameter omelette. It's held close to Easter at Parc Fayard.

**Avocado Festival** (May) Held in Nece, Maré. It's the island's biggest fair, celebrating the end of the harvest.

**La Foa Film Festival** (late June) A week-long film festival held in La Foa and Noumea.

**Noumea Contemporary Art Biennale** (July/August) Held every two years, features the work of local and international artists.

**Marathon Internationale de Noumea** (July/August) Held annually, attracts top athletes from as far away as Kenya and Canada.

**Bastille Day** (14 July) France's national day. In the evening on the 13th there are fireworks and there's a military parade in Noumea in the morning of the 14th.

**Live en Août** (August) Noumea's annual music festival featuring foreign and local bands.

**Foire de Bourail** (August/September) Big three-day country fair featuring a rodeo, cattle show, horse racing and a beauty pageant.

**Équinoxe** (October) Held in Noumea. Biennial festival of contemporary theatre, dance and music featuring local and international artists.

## COUNTRY FAIRS & RODEOS

Country fairs are popular and colourful events enjoyed by rural folk and townies alike. As well as livestock and produce contests, there are craft and food stalls, and children's rides. The highlight is the rodeo, when stockmen compete in bulldogging or flap about like rag dolls on the backs of bucking bulls. The crowd delights in the action and also gets to see a lot of horseless (or bull-less) riders carried out of the arena on stretchers.

**Fête du Bœuf** (Late October/early November) A popular country fair with a rodeo in Païta.

**Sound & Light Show** (Late October/early November) Impressive light shows are staged at Fort Teremba, near La Foa, over a fortnight.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Away from Noumea, Internet cafés are few and far between. La Foa, Koné and Lifou have at least one Internet café each. Prices vary, but it generally costs between 250 and 400 CFP to surf for 30 minutes. Connection can be slow unless ADSL is available.

Some midrange hotels in Noumea have Internet access in hotel rooms but elsewhere it's mainly restricted to top-end hotels.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Kaori** (www.kaori.nc) Contains links to other New Caledonian websites, and information on news and upcoming events.

**New Caledonia Online** (www.kaledonie.com) A portal to numerous New Caledonian websites.

**New Caledonia Tourism South** (www.nctps.com)

The official site (in French, English and Japanese) for New Caledonia's Southern Province.

## MAPS

The main visitor information centres in Noumea have good free maps of New Caledonia and more detailed maps of specific regions.

Charts can be consulted at the CNC (see p348) or purchased at **Marine Corail** (Map p318; ☎ 27 58 48; 28 rue du Général Mangin, Noumea). The Service Hydro-graphique et Océanographique de la Marine (SHOM) produces excellent mariners' maps covering all New Caledonia's territorial waters, also available from Marine Corail.

## MONEY

New Caledonia doesn't have to be expensive. Try a few money-saving tricks such as self-catering and camping. Noumea has many cheap eateries in the Chinatown area, and a lunchtime sandwich at Place des Cocotiers is cheaper than a restaurant meal.

Note that, as in France, decimals are indicated with commas (eg 1.25kg is written as 1,25kg) and thousands with points or spaces (10,000 CFP would be written as either 10.000 CFP or 10 000 CFP). For exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page.

There is a 5% services tax which is usually included in displayed prices. Banks

## HOW MUCH?

- **Baguette:** 80 CFP
- **Cup of coffee:** 200 CFP
- **Music CD:** 3000 CFP
- **1kg fresh tuna:** 1500 CFP
- **Cinema admission:** 950 CFP

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 130 CFP
- **1L bottled water:** 90 CFP
- **Can of Number One beer:** 100 CFP
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 1000 CFP
- **Croissant:** 100 CFP

in Noumea and some of the main centres change travellers cheques. Tipping is not compulsory.

## ATMs

You'll find ATMs either outside or inside most banks. They accept most major credit cards. There are many ATMs in Noumea and also in other major towns and villages. Some post offices also have ATMs.

## Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted by hotels, restaurants, big shops and airline offices in Noumea, but not at budget places outside the capital.

## TELEPHONE

New Caledonia's international telephone code is ☎ 687.

Phoning Australia or NZ costs 60/72 CFP per minute in off-peak/peak time. To the UK, US, Canada and Japan costs 100/130 CFP. To France costs 80/96 CFP. You can also dial ☎ 19 for a cheaper call to certain destinations, including France (33 CFP per minute), Australia and NZ (38 CFP), the UK (70 CFP) and Japan (60 CFP). To make a reverse-charge call (*en PCV*) dial ☎ 1050.

## Mobile Phones

Mobile-phone numbers begin with a '7', '8' or '9'. If you want to use your mobile phone in New Caledonia you need to first make sure that it is compatible with the network (GSM 900/1800). A rechargeable

Liberté phonecard costs 6136 CFP and includes 3000 CFP credit. For assistance dial ☎ 1014 free call.

## Phonecards

To make a phone call you can buy either a *télécarte* (telephone card) and use a public box or an *IZI* card and use a fixed phone. *Télécartes* cost 1000 CFP (25 units), 3000 CFP (80 units) or 5000 CFP (140 units) while *IZI* cards cost 1040/3120/5200 CFP. They're both available from post offices and some tobacconists' shops in Noumea.

## TIME

New Caledonia is 11 hours ahead of GMT. It's one hour ahead of Australian Eastern Standard Time (Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne) and one hour behind NZ and Fiji.

## TOURIST INFORMATION IN NEW CALEDONIA

The main visitor information centres are the **Office du Tourisme de Noumea et de la Province Sud** (☎ 28 75 80) for Noumea and the Southern Province, **Tourisme Province Nord** (☎ 27 78 05) for the Northern Province, **Destination Île des Pins** (☎ 24 92 80) for Île des Pins and **Destination Îles Loyauté** (☎ 27 66 27) for the Loyalty Islands. See p311 for details.

## VISAS

Passport holders from countries including European Union member countries, Switzerland, Australia and NZ are allowed entry into New Caledonia for three months without a visa. Some visitors, including citizens of Japan, Canada and the US, are allowed entry for one month without a visa. To check the latest visa requirements check the French government website for New Caledonia at www.etat.nc.

## TRANSPORT IN NEW CALEDONIA

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

#### AIRPORTS & AIRLINES

All international flights land at Tontouta International Airport, 45km northwest of Noumea. For details on travelling between Tontouta and Noumea, see p313.



The following major airlines fly into New Caledonia. Air France flies code-share with Air Calédonie International (Aircalin).

**Air France** (Map p318; ☎ 25 88 88; www.airfrance.com; 41 rue de Sébastopol, Noumea)

**Air New Zealand** (Map p318; ☎ 28 66 77; www.airnewzealand.com; Axxess Travel, 22 rue Duquesne, Noumea)

**Air Vanuatu** (Map p318; ☎ 28 66 77; www.airvanuatu.com; Axxess Travel, 22 rue Duquesne, Noumea)

**Aircalin** (Map p318; ☎ 26 55 00; www.aircalin.com; 8 rue Frédéric Surleau, Noumea)

**Qantas** (Map p318; ☎ 28 65 46; www.qantas.com; 35 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) Access from rue de Verdun.

## ASIA

Osaka and Tokyo are the only Asian cities directly connected with New Caledonia. Aircalin flies from Japan to New Caledonia for around US\$1000.

## AUSTRALASIA

In Australia, Qantas and Aircalin flights leave from Brisbane (three flights a week) and Sydney (daily). A return excursion fare from Sydney/Brisbane starts at US\$400/350.

There are four flights per week between Auckland and Noumea, either with Air New Zealand or Aircalin. The 90-day return excursion fare starts at US\$400.

## EUROPE

Qantas and Air New Zealand fly from Europe; France to New Caledonia with Qantas costs from US\$1600. Aircalin, code sharing with KLM/Air France/Cathay Pacific/Singapore Airlines, flies a more direct route via Japan for around US\$1500.

## NORTH AMERICA

The main gateway to New Caledonia from North America is Los Angeles or New York via Tahiti. You can fly with Air France or Air Tahiti Nui to Tahiti (US\$1200), where you can connect with an Aircalin flight to Noumea. Air New Zealand flies via Auckland (US\$1000) or Qantas via Sydney (US\$1200).

### DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax for New Caledonia's Tontouta international airport is included in your flight tickets.

Another option is to fly with Air Pacific from Los Angeles to Noumea via Nadi. The price is in the same range.

## PACIFIC

See p837 for details of air passes that include New Caledonia.

Aircalin flies to Nadi (Fiji) once or twice a week (US\$590 return) and to Faa'a airport in Pape'ete (French Polynesia) once a week (US\$650 return).

You can fly between Port Vila (Vanuatu) and Noumea several times a week (from US\$300 return) with Aircalin or Air Vanuatu.

Twice a week, Aircalin flies to Hihifo on Wallis Island (Wallis and Futuna), with a possible connection flight to Velevé on Futuna. The return fare for either is around US\$600.

## SOUTH AMERICA

Use an Aircalin flight to Tahiti and connect with a LAN flight to Santiago, via Easter Island. Or fly with Qantas via Sydney. A return ticket costs around US\$1400.

## Sea

### BOAT

The passenger and cargo boat **Havannah** (☎ 27 04 05; cmisa@lagoon.nc; one way 10,850 CFP) sails to Port Vila, Malicolo and Santo in Vanuatu once a month.

### CRUISE SHIP

All cruise ships dock at the Gare Maritime on Quai Jules Ferry in Noumea. They also drop anchor at various spots around New Caledonia where they shuttle their passengers ashore to spend a day on the beach.

*Pacific Sun*, *Pacific Star* and *Pacific Princess* (departing Sydney) are the most regular visitors. Ask your travel agent for more information. In Noumea, contact **CMA-CGM** (Map p318; ☎ 27 01 83; nma.scrifotoli@cma-cgm.com; 32 rue du Général Galliéni, Noumea).

## YACHT

New Caledonia welcomes about a thousand yachties every year. The territory has marinas and customs and immigration clearing services for yachties in Noumea, Koumac, Hienghène and Lifou. Ahead of arrival in Noumea, use VHF Channel 67 to contact the **Capitainerie** (harbour master's office; Map p318; ☎ 27 71 97; port.moselle@sodemo.nc).

The **Cerde Nautique Calédonien** (CNC; ☎ 26 27 27; secretariat@cnc.asso.nc; VHF Channel 68; 2 rue du Capitaine Desmier, Noumea) yacht club at Baie des Pêcheurs is a good source of information about yachting and sailing.

*Cruising New Caledonia & Vanuatu*, by Alan Lucas, gives details on many natural harbours and out-of-the-way anchorages. The *Cruising Guide to New Caledonia*, by Joël Marc, Ross Blackman and Marc Rambeau, is a general yachting guide that also provides an exhaustive list of possible anchorages around the islands. See p350 for information on purchasing marine charts.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

#### AIRLINES IN NEW CALEDONIA

New Caledonia's only domestic airline is **Air Calédonie** (Aircal; Map p318; ☎ 28 78 88; www.air-caledonie.nc; 39 rue de Verdun, Noumea; ✈ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat), not to be confused with the international carrier Aircalin. Air Calédonie operates out of Magenta airport in Noumea and flies to Koné, Touho and Koumac on Grande Terre, to each of the Loyalty Islands and to Île des Pins. There are no direct flights between the Loyalty Islands as all inter-island flights transit in Noumea. There are Air Calédonie agencies at all flight destinations, and a **ticket office** (☎ 25 21 77) at Magenta airport.

Fares quoted below are return peak fares and include a 1050 CFP tax. Off-peak fares cost 8% to 22% less. Fares for children under 12 are half-price.

#### AIR PASSES

For international travellers, the Air Calédonie Pass (31,100/6650 CFP per four-flight coupon/extra coupon) offers the

opportunity to discover various destinations within the Air Calédonie domestic network, at preferential rates. This pass is sold at the Air Calédonie office in Noumea (details above under Airlines in New Caledonia).

## Bicycle

You have to be pretty eager to cycle round 400km-long Grande Terre. However, each of the Loyalty Islands, in particular Ouvéa, and Île des Pins are ideal for cycling. Bikes can be transported on the *Betico* and *Havannah* ferries.

There are few bike lanes in Noumea, and drivers both in the capital and elsewhere are not necessarily courteous to cyclists, so you need to be vigilant.

## Boat

The *Betico*, a fast passenger ferry, sails three times a week between Noumea, the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins. *Betico* sails from Noumea to the Loyalty islands on average twice weekly either on Monday or Tuesday and on Thursday or Friday. It sails to Île des Pins three times a week on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Tickets can be bought at the **Gare Maritime des Îles** (☎ 26 01 00; commercial.betico@mls.nc; 1 av James Cook, Noumea at the Ferry Terminal; ✈ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 6am-10am Sat) on the way to Nouville, opposite the red bingo sign on rue Jules Ferry.

A one-way economy-class ticket from Noumea to the Loyalty Islands costs 6200 CFP and to Île des Pins 4700 CFP. Going between islands costs 3300 CFP. An Île des Pins day trip costs 8200 CFP. Return fares are double. Children pay around half-price.

The *Havannah*, a slower cargo boat, is operated by **Compagnie Maritime des Îles** (☎ 27 36 73; cmisa@lagoon.nc; Ferry Terminal), which

### DOMESTIC AIRFARES

From	To	Fare (CFP)	Frequency
Lifou	Maré	7600	4 per week
Lifou	Ouvéa	5350	daily
Maré	Ouvéa	10,600	5 per week
Noumea	Île des Pins	8150	daily
Noumea	Koné	11,800	4 per week
Noumea	Koumac	13,050	2 per week
Noumea	Loyalty Islands	11,550	daily
Noumea	Touho	11,800	4 per week

has an office at the dock on Quai des Caboteurs at Baie de la Moselle. *Havannah* runs on Mondays between Noumea and Maré and Lifou in the Loyalty Islands (one way 5120 CFP).

For details of boat charters, see p348.

## Bus

Nearly every town on Grande Terre is connected to the capital by bus, all leaving from Noumea's old **gare routière** (bus station; Map p318; ☎ 24 90 26; 36 rue d'Austerlitz; Noumea; 🕒 7.30am-noon & 1.30-4pm) next to Ciné City. It is best to book in advance, especially if you are travelling on Friday or Sunday.

**Carsud** (☎ 25 16 15; Gare de Montravel; rue Edouard Unger; Noumea) operates buses between Noumea and the greater Noumea region. Buses operate roughly between 6am and 6pm and go as far north as Tontouta (400 CFP), passing through Dumbéa (320 CFP) and Païta (360 CFP), and south to Plum in Mont-Dore (400 CFP).

On the other islands there are practically no buses, aside from school buses, and it's best to prearrange transport or hitchhike.

## Car, Scooter & Campervan

Touring New Caledonia by car or campervan allows you to explore places that are off the beaten track and aren't easy to reach by bus. Car-hire rates are reasonable. New Caledonia's major roads and most of its minor ones are all sealed and in good condition. Occasionally, road signs are missing so a good map is essential.

### AROUND GRANDE TERRE BY BUS

The following bus fares and schedules are for services departing from Noumea.

	Fare (CFP)	Duration	Frequency
<b>Bourail</b>	1100	2½ hr	Mon-Sat
<b>Canala</b>	1100	3½ hr	daily
<b>Hienghène</b>	1650	6½ hr	Mon-Sat
<b>Koné</b>	1300	4 hr	daily
<b>Koumac</b>	1650	5½ hr	daily
<b>La Foa</b>	900	1½ hr	Mon-Sat
<b>Poindimié</b>	1450	5 hr	daily
<b>Pouébo</b>	1850	6½ hr	Wed & Fri
<b>Thio</b>	1000	2 hr	daily
<b>Yaté</b>	600	2 hr	Mon-Sat

## DRIVING LICENCE

International Driving Permits are not required to drive in New Caledonia – a valid licence from your country will suffice.

## HIRE

Car-rental companies abound in Noumea and the larger ones also have desks at the airport. The visitor information centre (p311) in Noumea has a list of companies.

Most companies charge about 1200 to 2000 CFP per day (on average) for a small sedan. In addition, there's a charge of 20 to 36 CFP per kilometre. For free 150km per day or unlimited kilometres it costs between 3500 and 5000 CFP per day. Some companies offer good deals such as one-week's all-inclusive rental from 20,000 CFP, excluding petrol.

In the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins prices are much less competitive than in the capital (5000 to 8000 CFP per day with unlimited kilometres).

Car-rental companies in Noumea:

**ADA** (Map p318; ☎ 28 85 02; www.ada.nc; 49 rue Georges Clémenceau, Noumea)

**Discount Location** (Map p312; ☎ 27 26 99, 77 54 42; discountloc@lagoon.nc; 135 rte de l'Anse Vata, Noumea) Along with regular vehicles, also rents camping cars (two-/five-/seven-person vehicles per three days 45,000/55,000/60,000 CFP, 600km included). Also has an office at Tontouta airport (☎ 35 39 28).

**Location Camping Remorque** (☎ 46 93 42; www.camping-remorque.nc; rte de la Roche Blanche, Mont Mou; per day/Sat & Sun/Mon-Fri 4500/9500/25,000 CFP) This place in Païta rents fully equipped camping trailers. It also offers free airport transfers and helps to organise car hire.

**Noumea Fun Ride** (☎ 26 96 26; noumeafunride.org@canl.nc; Gare Maritime) Rents bicycles (per hour/half-day 1100/1300 CFP), scooters (per hour/half-day 2300/2700 CFP) and scooters (miniature cars; 2700/3800CFP).

**Point Rouge** (Map p318; ☎ 28 59 20; www.pointrouge.nc; 75 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) Also rents scooters for 1800 CFP a day.

## INSURANCE

No extra insurance is required when hiring a car. Some companies charge a security deposit of 100,000 CFP.

## ROAD RULES

As in France, driving in New Caledonia is on the right-hand side of the road. The maximum speed limit on a main road is 110km/h and in residential areas 50km/h. Seat belts are compulsory.

The maximum permissible blood alcohol concentration is 0.05%, and random breath testing is carried out.

## Local Transport BUS

Noumea is the only town in New Caledonia with an urban bus system (see p313).

## TAXI

Taxis are confined to Noumea and the larger towns on Grande Terre. They run on a meter.

## Tours

There are many tours and activities to choose from in Noumea and throughout New Caledonia. Tour operators in Noumea organise trips in and around the city as well as further afield. The visitor information centre (p311) in Noumea has details.

**Arc en Ciel Voyages** (Map p318; ☎ 27 19 80; www.arcenciel-voyages.nc; 59 av du Maréchal Foch, Noumea) A major company which covers the entire country.

**Aventure Pulsion** (Map p312; ☎ 26 27 48; aventure@canl.nc) Organises off-the-beaten-track tours by 4WD in the Far South (see p323).

**Caledonia Tour** (☎ 25 94 24; caledoniatours@lagoon.nc) Runs tours around Grande Terre (see p323).

**Caltours** (Map p318; ☎ 41 10 92, 81 20 01; 7 rue Charles de Verneilh, Noumea) Organises half-day tours to Monts Koghiis, full-day tours to Bourail (including a *bougnah* lunch in a *tribu*) and tours to the Far South. It also offers a week-long tour of Grande Terre.

**VIP Tours** (☎ 43 53 08, 79 27 89; j.brighton@lagoon.nc) Run by John Brighton, specialises in tours for English-speaking people. It runs a popular day trip called the Once-upon-a-time Tour.

Outside Noumea, many places offering accommodation, especially gîtes, homestays and farmstays, run tours such as guided walks or horse treks. These tours enable you to interact with your Kanak or Caldoche hosts and discover places that are not accessible to the general public since they are usually on private or customary land.

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