

Palau

The Republic of Palau is inimitable. Most tourists who come here like to spend their time underwater, for Palau is among the world's most spectacular diving and snorkelling destinations. It features coral reefs, blue holes, WWII wrecks, hidden caves and tunnels, more than 60 vertical drop-offs to play with, and an astonishing spectrum of coral, fish, and rare sea creatures. There are also some outright miracles of evolution: giant clams that weigh a quarter of a ton, for example, and a lake teeming with 21 million softly pulsating, stingless jellyfish.

But you don't have to get wet to enjoy Palau. On land the republic embraces Micronesia's richest flora and fauna: exotic birds fly around the islands, crocodiles slip through the mangrove swamps and orchids sprout profusely in backyards.

The Palauan archipelago is incredibly diverse, encompassing the polyglot state of Koror; the marvellous Rock Islands; Micronesia's second-largest island, Babeldaob (the land that Pacific standard time forgot); Peleliu, once war ravaged, now just ravishing; tranquil, tiny Angaur; the coral atolls of Kayangel and Ngeruangel; and the remote South-West Islands.

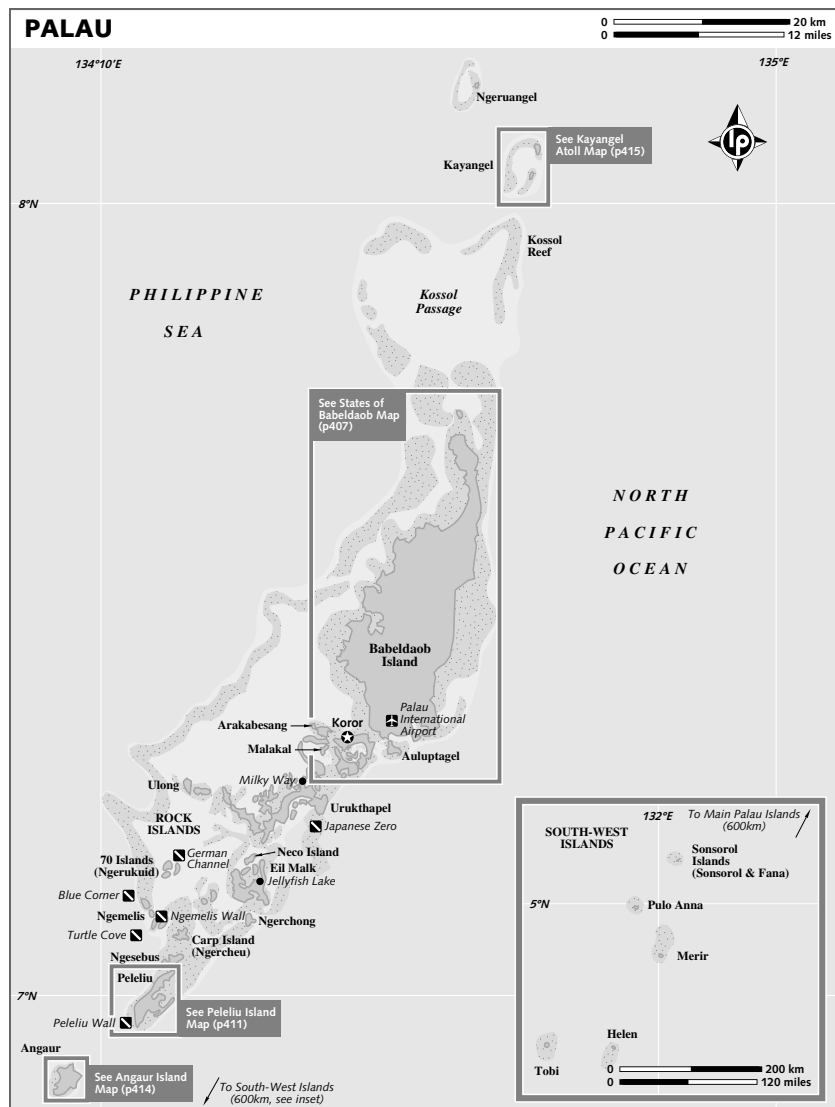
Toss into the mix some of Micronesia's most sociable (and responsible) people, and it's no surprise that parts of Palau are known as the 'beginning of everything', a template the rest of the world would do well to follow.

About that responsibility: Palauans love a good, socially aware acronym, and you can see them everywhere on signs and billboards, like 'WAVE – Welcome All Visitors Enthusiastically' or 'STARS – Start Treating Alcohol Related Symptoms'. You might find yourself playing this game, too. And perhaps you'll come to the same conclusion we did, that the name of this country is itself an acronym: 'Palau's Archipelago: Lovely and Unique'.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel and kayak around the surreal **Rock Islands** (p404), a series of mushroom-shaped limestone islets undercut by erosion
- Walk and dive around **Peleliu** (p410), a peaceful southerly island with a potent history
- Experience **Babeldaob** (p407) with its powerful waterfalls, traditional *bai* (men's meeting houses) and mysterious monoliths
- Sample the culinary delights of **Koror** (p403), including fruit-bat pie if you dare
- Take it real easy doing nothing much at all on **Angaur** (p413)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Koror's average highest temperature is 30°C, with the average low 24°C; humidity averages 80%. The annual rainfall is 373cm (there are numerous heavy thunderstorms in June), with June to August the wettest months; February and March are the driest, although rain can seemingly strike at

any time. As Palauan President Tommy Remengesau Jr said at the 2005 South Pacific Mini Games, 'In Palau you can guarantee that you can catch a fish if you go fishing, but you can never guarantee what the weather will be.' Although Palau lies outside the main typhoon tracks, it does occasionally get hit.

See p827 for Koror's climate chart.

HISTORY Clans & Land

According to Rock Island carbon dating, people from eastern Indonesia first inhabited Palau as far back as 1000 BC. Palauan culture was matriarchal and matrilineal: women inherited property (although it was owned by the clan) and men needed their permission to spend money.

In fact, land and money have always been a big deal in Palauan society, with clans ranked according to wealth. Villages were typically settled by between seven and 10 clans, and the chief of the highest-ranking clan was the village leader.

Spaniards, Brits & the Pox

The first European to sight Palau was probably the Spaniard Ruy Lopez de Villalobos in 1543. Spain claimed Palau in 1686 but did nothing to develop the islands.

In 1783 English captain Henry Wilson wrecked his ship, the *Antelope*, on a Palauan reef. The crew were treated well by Chief Ibedul of Koror, who helped rebuild the ship and sent his young son, Prince Lebuu, back with Wilson to England for schooling. The prince died of smallpox soon after arriving in London, a tragedy that touched the city's elite and sparked off a romantic melodrama that played on London stages and became a popular book.

The British became Palau's main trading partners until Spain expelled them in 1885. The Spanish introduced Christianity and a written alphabet before selling Palau to Germany in the wake of the Spanish-American War.

Germans & Coconuts

The Germans used Palauan forced labour to start coconut plantations and other business ventures, although by the time they'd taken control in 1899 only about 4000 Palauans had survived diseases introduced by Western explorers; pre-contact, the population was 40,000. The Germans took steps to contain contagious diseases by providing inoculations and instituting sanitary controls.

Japan & Expansion

The Japanese occupied Palau from 1914 until the end of WWII, establishing a colonial administration. Islanders were taught a

PALAU FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Koror
- **Population:** 20,600
- **Land area:** 494 sq km
- **International telephone code:** 680
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** Palauan and English (Sonsorolese and English in Sonsorol; Tobi and English in Tobi; Angaur, Japanese and English in Angaur)
- **Greeting:** *Alii* (Hello)
- **Website:** www.visit-palau.com

subservient dialect of the Japanese language and village chiefs lost power to Japanese bureaucrats.

Japan expanded the commercial ventures started by the Germans and developed many more. Traditional inheritance patterns were shattered as Palauans lost their land through sale or confiscation.

After 1922 all of Japan's Pacific possessions were administered from Koror, which the Japanese developed into a bustling, modern city complete with paved roads, electricity and piped-in water. Out of its 30,000 residents, only about 20% were Palauan.

In the late 1930s, Japan closed Palau to the outside world and began concentrating its efforts on developing military fortifications throughout the islands.

America & War

During the final stages of WWII the Allied offensive targeted Japan's Palauan installations, bombing Malakal Island and Airai State in March and July 1944. But the real battles took place in September that year on Peleliu and Angaur.

Before the invasion, most Palauans were rounded up by the Japanese and sent to central Babeldaob. There are islanders who insist that the Japanese planned to kill the Palauans, and that they even dug mass graves, while there are historians who credit the Japanese for moving the islanders out of harm's way (Koror and Babeldaob were never invaded, despite the fierce fighting on Peleliu and Angaur).

Palau & Independence

In July 1978 Palauans voted against becoming part of the Federated States of Micronesia, instead forming a separate political entity. In July 1980 Palauans adopted their own constitution, including a nuclear-free provision even though the US saw Palau as part of a 'defensive arc' (a fall-back, together with Guam and Tinian, in case the US lost its Philippines bases).

Disregarding the anti-nuclear constitutional provision, the US drafted a Compact of Free Association that not only allowed it to bring nuclear weapons into Palau, but also gave it the right of eminent domain over virtually all Palauan territory. In exchange, the US offered Palau millions of dollars in aid. In June 1985 the antinuclear Haruo Remeliik, Palau's first president, was assassinated; three years later his successor, Lazarus Salii, was found shot in an apparent suicide. Meanwhile, implementation of the compact and the new Western style of government triggered a power struggle between elected officials and Palau's traditional authorities.

In November 1993 Palauans voted with a 68% majority in favour of the compact, figuring that the Cold War's end meant the US was unlikely to build military installations on Palau. Palau officially became an independent nation on 1 October 1994.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

The concept of *omelengmes* – politeness and respect – is ingrained in the Palauan psyche. It might manifest itself in the act of standing to one side to let an older person pass, or crouching when walking through a crowd. Practising it indicates that a person is 'a good Palauan', that they are proud of their culture and tradition. However, a recent survey asked Palauans across all age groups and social strata to name the three things that worried them the most. The most common responses were the erosion of traditional values, the state of the economy, and the ever-growing influx of foreign workers.

Newspaper articles talk longingly of the old days, when tradition was central to daily life. Others say that those times were harsh, with crowded housing, hard labour, unwieldy power structures and food shortages the norm, and that in the move to push for a

BEST EATING

Palau rivals Guam for good vittles. Try the following:

- Dragon Tei (p403) features Okinawan and local cuisine, with a touch of class.
- Mexican, German, Palauan – all sorts at the convivial Krämer's Café (p403) bar/restaurant.
- Traditional Indian food is served with passion and flair at Taj (p403).

better (ie Westernised) life there has to be a trade-off – in this case, traditional values.

Not only is this a psychic schism that won't be easily resolved in the near future, it's a reflection of the issues facing Micronesia as a whole.

Lifestyle

Palauans are among Micronesia's most Westernised people. Although most are Christian, some still hold traditional beliefs based on nature spirits, clan-ancestral worship and village deities. Modekngai, a revived form of indigenous religion, was apparently founded as a nonviolent opposition to Japanese occupation during the war. Some Palauans leave a light on in their homes through the night to ward off unwanted spirits.

Traditional ceremonies are still held all over Palau, including birth ceremonies and first-house ceremonies.

Population

Of Palau's population of 20,000, around 4500 are foreign workers – the majority of these are Filipino, the next largest ethnic group with 15.3% of the population. The Chinese represent 5%.

Most Palauans have large extended families – if you spend much time with a Palauan you'll doubtless meet a never-ending lineage of cousins, uncles and aunts.

SPORT

Palauans love sport, and in 2005 the republic hosted the seventh South Pacific Mini Games (appropriately dubbed the 'Rainy Games' due to the notoriously wet weather around these parts). Palau did pretty well, too, finishing sixth out of 22 nations with

nine gold medals (as well as three silver and six bronze) – making it the most successful Micronesian nation, even above Guam.

However, Palau's Vice President Sandra Sumang Pierentozzi recently poured cold water on such success, criticising the amount of funding that goes into sport at the expense of education. 'Can those athletes live off their medals?' Pierentozzi asks, proving that she is, quite literally, a spoilsport.

Volleyball is especially popular in Koror; if there's a game on at the island's gymnasium, make sure you pop in for a vibrant spectacle.

ARTS

Intimately carved storyboards (see the boxed text, below) are a Palauan speciality. Traditional dancing is no longer as strong in Palau as it once was, but maybe more modern forms are, like hip swivelling pelvis shaking – how else do you explain the fact that Palau was the world's first country to produce an Elvis stamp?

LANGUAGE

Palauan is spoken at home and in casual situations, but English is more common in business and government. Sonsorolese and Tobian are more closely related to Yapese or Chuukese dialects than to Palauan.

Many Palauan words begin with 'ng', a nasal sound pronounced like the ending of the word 'bring'. The 'ch' spelling is pronounced 'uh'.

Palauan basics

Hello.	<i>Alii.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Mechikung.</i>
How are you?	<i>Keuangerang?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Ak messiich (sulang).</i>
Please.	<i>Adang.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Sulang.</i>
Yes.	<i>Choi.</i>
No.	<i>Diak.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental problems include erosion, overfishing and litter. In 2004 Palau passed severe anti-sharking laws, culminating in the frenzied spectacle of Palauan President Tommy Remengesau publicly burning shark fins and bodies seized from Taiwanese ships. Each bonfire typically destroys shark parts worth around US\$200,000 (if the parts were to slip through Tommy's ring of fire, they'd end up as shark-fin soup, fetching a high price in Taiwanese and Hong Kong restaurants).

However, Palau is nothing if not contrary when it comes to the environment. The republic is one of the very few countries in the world to support Japan's pro-whaling stance – unsurprising, given the nation's heavy reliance on the Japanese tourist yen.

Geography

Part of the Caroline Islands, Palau is Micronesia's westernmost region. The tightly clustered Palau archipelago consists of the high islands of Babeldaob, Koror, Peleliu

THE MASTER CARVERS: STORYBOARD ART

Palau's unique art form is the storyboard, a smaller version of the carved legends that have traditionally decorated the beams and gables of *bai* (men's meeting houses). The storyboards are carved from local wood (usually mahogany) and they portray scenes from a range of local myths and legends. Their genesis is interesting because, contrary to what many tourists believe, they're not really an indigenous art form. In fact, Hisakatsu Hijikata, a Japanese anthropologist, introduced the concept to Palau in 1929. Hijikata was smitten by the carvings on Palauan *bai*, but he was sad that no more *bai* were being built. So he gathered together a group of locals and encouraged them to carve scenes on pieces of wood for sale to the Japanese in Palau.

Today, some of the more interesting examples are a product of Koror Jail, where good-behaviour inmates have long been granted the privilege to carve storyboards and sell them to the public; in 2004 total sales amounted to US\$50,000. On the inside, the best practitioners are known as the Master Carvers and they've come to develop their own style, represented by unpainted, three-dimensional elements with an overt erotic flavour.

The Master Carvers take their art very, very seriously, and none more so than Baris Sylvester, the founder of the jail style. Mr Sylvester, when confronted with an inmate who claimed artistic supremacy, cut off the hand of his hapless rival.

PALAU IN...

Two Days

In the morning, catch up on some local history at Koror's **Belau National Museum** (p400) and the **Etpison Museum** (p400). Then make your way to Malakal for a gander at some **giant clams** (p401) and to indulge in some snorkelling at **Icebox Park** (p401). At night, dine at **Dragon Tei** (p403), a superb Okinawan/Palauan restaurant.

The next day, rise early for your **Rock Island experience** (p406). Snorkel with **stingless jellyfish** (p405), dive into **aquatic wonderlands** (p405) or take it easy on **Carp Island** (p405) with a picnic lunch. That's your whole day taken care of and you may now die happy. Back on Malakal, eat and drink at lively **Krämer's Café** (p403).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary. On the third day, hire a 4WD and drive (slowly; there's no choice) along Babeldaob's dirt roads to **North Beach Cottages** (p409), where you might want to stay. On the fourth day, book a **land tour** (p409) around Babeldaob's mysterious **monoliths** (p409) and stunning **waterfalls** (p409).

and Angaur; the low coral atolls of Kayangel and Ngeruangel; and the limestone Rock Islands. The islands run roughly from north to south, covering about 201km. Except for Kayangel and Ngeruangel in the north and Angaur in the south, all islands in the Palau group are inside a single barrier reef.

The South-West Islands extend 595km southwest from the main Palau islands, reaching almost as far as Indonesia.

Thickly vegetated Babeldaob is 43.5km long and has a land area of 398 sq km. Together, the other Palauan islands total just 96 sq km.

KOROR STATE

pop 13,300 / area (Koror Island) 8 sq km
Koror, Malakal and Arakabesang islands, all connected by causeways, form the core of Koror State, Palau's economic centre and capital, and home to almost two-thirds of the population. In prewar days Koror's

population was three times the size it is today and the town was jammed with military facilities, geisha houses, Shinto shrines, kimono tailors and public baths.

Today, it retains an energetic atmosphere. Many people come here from outlying villages for employment opportunities, joining a steady stream of workers from the Philippines and other countries. The result is a kind of 'interzone' (as per William Burroughs), in which histories are mingled and cultures are borrowed. Koror can be heady stuff (it has one of the Pacific's highest population densities), but not for everyone.

The actual island of Koror is not especially picturesque, but if you're at all interested in gauging the future of Pacific life, then you'll enjoy your stay.

ORIENTATION

Koror is connected to Babeldaob by bridge. The airport in Airai State is a 25-minute drive from central Koror; a taxi should cost around US\$20 (make sure you fix a price before you get in).

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Café@Palau (Map p400; ☎ 488 4323, 488 8336; Koror)

With wireless access.

Coconut Hut (Map p400; ☎ 488 2124)

PC Express (Map p400; ☎ 488 0757)

Medical Services

Belau Medical Clinic (Map p400; ☎ 488 2687; Koror)

For nonemergencies.

Belau National Medical Hospital (Map p399; ☎ 488 2554; Arakabesang) Has a decompression chamber.

Money

There's an ATM outside the Bank of Hawaii and one in the lobby of the WCTC Shopping Center.

Bank of Guam (Map p400; ☎ 488 2696, 488 1648; PO Box 338, Koror)

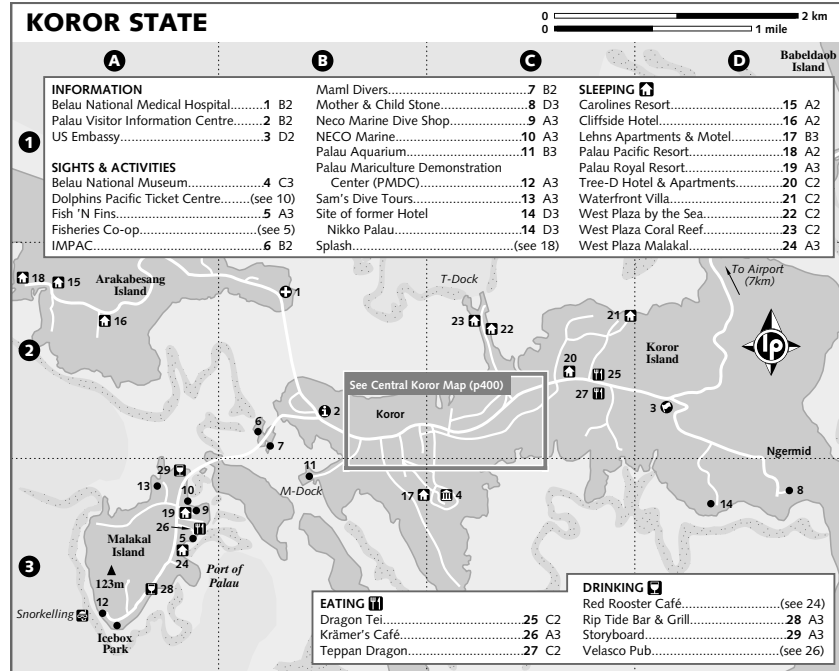
Bank of Hawaii (Map p400; ☎ 488 2428; PO Box 340, Koror)

Post

Post office (Map p400; Koror; ✉ Mon-Fri 8am-4pm, Sat 9-10am)

Tourist Information

Palau visitor information centre (Map p399; ☎ 488 2793; www.visit-palau.com; ✉ 9am-5pm)



TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

See p417 for details of international flights to Palau.

AIR

Belau Air (☎ 587 8090; www.gecpalau.com/belauair.htm) flies between Koror, Angaur and Peleliu on Thursday, Friday and Sunday (Koror to Peleliu or Angaur one way/return US\$50/90). It also offers charter flights to the Rock Islands.

BOAT

For details of official boat services to Peleliu see p410, and to Angaur see p413.

Getting Around

For a small Pacific island, the traffic can be unbelievable in downtown Koror, especially during rush hour. There's just the one main road and, especially on the way to Malakal and Arakabesang, no pavement to speak of, which means that walking can be a hair-raising affair. Legging it to Babeldaob can just about be ruled out, given that you'll

be dodging falling coconuts, feral dogs and that steady stream of traffic all at once. If you do set out on foot, just be alert – that's all we ask. Often, drivers will inquire if you need a lift; a small tip is expected.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels provide airport transport if you call ahead.

CAR

There are a few booths at the airport. The following companies in downtown Koror will be able to rent you a 4WD for Babeldaob trips. There are many smaller firms around, too.

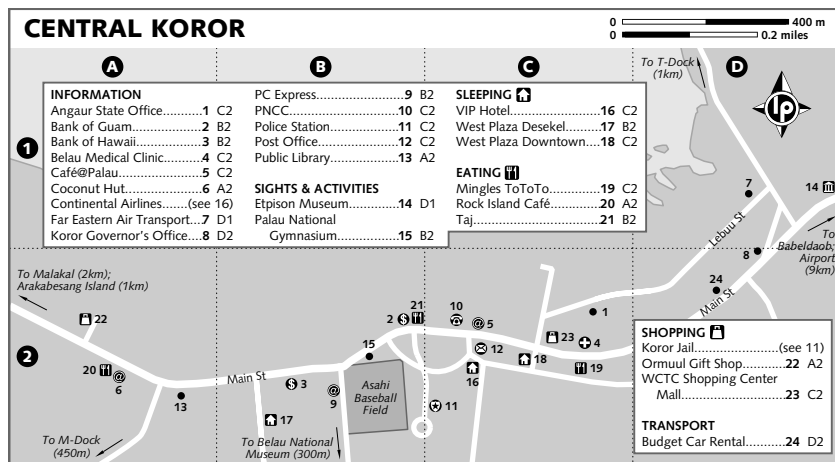
Budget Car Rental (Map p400; ☎ 488 4211; budgetpalau@palaunet.com; 1st fl, Neco Bldg, Koror)

IA Car Rental (☎ 488 1113, 488 1395; iabc@palaunet.com)

Palau Automotive (☎ 488 1040, 488 3140; palauautomotive@palaunet.com)

PIDC Car Rental (☎ 488 8350, 488 8351; pidc@palaunet.com)

Toyota Car Rental Airport (☎ 488 5599, 578 5599; T-Dock, PO Box 280, Koror)

**TAXI**

City Cab (☎ 488 1394)

Koror & Airport Taxi Service (☎ 488 4900)

KOROR ISLAND**Belau National Museum**

This nifty little **museum** (Map p399; ☎ 488 2265; www.belauationalmuseum.com; admission US\$3; ☎ Mon-Fri 8am-4pm, Sat 10am-4pm) features exhibits from all eras of Palauan life, including artworks, photography, sculpture, storyboards and more. As you move between floors, it can be more than a little eye opening to trace the history of colonial occupation on this island; flying in the face of Spanish, German and Japanese forces, it's commendable that Palauans have managed to retain so much of their own traditions and beliefs.

The museum grounds contain a striking **wood-and-thatch bai** (men's meeting house), carved and painted with depictions of Palauan legends. Although it's a recreation of an older *bai* that burnt down in 1979, it is built in the traditional manner: constructed of rough planks with notched jointing and set above the ground on stone stacks.

To get here, take a short walk uphill from Koror's main road, then follow the signs beginning at the Palau Community College.

Etipson Museum

This private **art museum** (Map p400; ☎ 488 6730; etpison@palaunet.com; ☎ Mon-Sat 9am-9pm) houses artefacts from early Palauan cultures, although it's the exterior that initially catches

the eye: two human statues clad in traditional garb guard the entrance (accompanied by a massive arachnid), while a fishy mural, the bombastic creation of Hawaiian artist Wyland, covers the entire east wall (Wyland's a specialist in marine life).

Inside, rare exhibits keep things interesting: Palauan money beads, turtle-shell medicine bowls and some painted pottery dating to 640 BC.

The Etipson family are big players in Palau – they also own the Palau Pacific Resort (p402).

Palau Aquarium

This intriguing **aquarium** (Map p399; ☎ 488 6950; www.picrc.org/index2.html; adult/child US\$7/3; ☎ Mon-Fri 8am-5pm, Sat & Sun 9am-5pm) is part of the Pacific International Coral Reef Centre, a Japanese-funded research complex. The aquarium aims to educate about Palau's coral reef ecosystem and features 17 themed sections, each re-creating a different habitat. Here's a fun tale: when two yellow seahorses were recently introduced to the aquarium, one of them later gave birth to 150 babies. Oh, to be a seahorse. Not only do the *males* give birth, but they can knock out up to a thousand offspring at a time, although in the wild most of their brood will die due to cannibalism.

Mother & Child Stone

The village of Ngermid is home to the **Mother and Child Stone**, apparently the Lot-like remains of a mum and kid who were turned

to stone after the mother took a forbidden peek inside the village men's house.

To get there, head towards the airport from Koror; once you're out of central Koror, take the paved road to the right until you reach Ngermid. Look for the small sign on the left side of the road and follow the footpath.

The defunct Hotel Nikko Palau used to be in operation around here; some say it closed down after guests began to see the ghosts of Japanese soldiers killed in WWII.

MALAKAL ISLAND

Malakal has the Fisheries Co-op, the deep-water commercial port, small-boat docks and other marine businesses, and some good bars. At the southern tip of the island is **Icebox Park**, so named because it was the site of an ice-making plant during the Japanese era. It's now a grassy public park and although there's no sandy beach, there is access to the clear waters for swimming and snorkelling.

You can also gaze at the majesty of the nearby Rock Islands from halfway up Malakal Hill (123m), where the road ends at a water tank. From Icebox Park, take the steep, narrow dirt road to the left, just past the green sewage plant; it's a 10-minute walk.

Palau Mariculture Demonstration Center

So, you like bivalves? Come on, don't clam up. The **PMDC** (Map p399; ☎ 488 3322; adult/child US\$2/1; ☎ Mon-Fri 8-11.30am & 1-4pm), at the end of the road on Malakal Island, is a research marine laboratory engaging in conservation and commercial projects. It trains islanders in sea-farming technology and cultivates the threatened giant *tridacna* clam, raising millions of seed clams and planting them in reefs around Palau and other islands.

The *tridacna* grows more than 1.2m in length and they can weigh more than 225kg. Their fleshy mantles have intriguingly mottled designs of browns, greens and iridescent blues. They can live more than 100 years. And they get to travel: these farm-raised bivalves wind up as sashimi all over Micronesia. Palauans have long eaten the meat of the clams, sold the huge shells to tourists and ground the smaller shells into lime powder to chew with betel nut.

You can wander around the PMDC complex and peer into long shallow tanks of giant clams. Further back are deep, round tanks containing various species of sea turtles.

ARAKABESANG ISLAND

Once a Japanese military base, Arakabesang has a village on the south side of the island that's been settled by people from the South-West Islands, complete with traditional outrigger canoes.

After crossing the causeway northwest of Koror, the first road to the right has concrete pillars flanking its entrance; the next road to the right with similar pillars is the turn-off to one of the Japanese-era **seaplane ramps** – follow the road to the water. There's another seaplane ramp on the beach at Palau Pacific Resort on the west side of the island.

ACTIVITIES**Diving & Snorkelling**

With its calm, shallow and clear waters, the beach fronting the Palau Pacific Resort (p402) has some of Koror's best snorkelling. Colourful tropical fish bustle together with platter and mushroom corals, along with giant *tridacna* clams with iridescent mantles – mmm, some kind of fishy heaven to be sure. The resort charges nonguests a day fee to use the beach (US\$25 for adults, US\$12 for children).

Also try Icebox Park (left); to the right, towards the PMDC, there are fairly calm waters and a beginners' reef for those comfortable with overhead depths. Expect to find clownfish hiding in anemone shelters as well as crown-of-thorns starfish.

Palau's best diving and snorkelling is away from Koror; see p406 for a list of diving operators.

Sportfishing

You must have a fishing permit (US\$20). The following companies will obtain one for you.

Fish 'N Fins (Map p399; ☎ 488 2637; www.fishnfins.com) Full day US\$720, including lunch and transfers.

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) One to two people US\$450, each extra person US\$50.

Sam's International Anglers (☎ 488 5305; www.samstours.com/fishing.html) Run by Sam's Tours. Operates a fly bridge sportfisher and a power cat. Half-/full-day tours US\$400/600.

PALAU FOR CHILDREN

Koror has a few attractions that are suitable for kids. History's page can become children's stage at the **Belau National Museum** (p400) and the **Etpison Museum** (p400), while the **Palau Aquarium** (p400) is obviously suited to wide-eyed innocents. Take them to the **Mother and Child Stone** (p400) for an insight into what can happen to them if they're naughty.

Malakal Island (p401) gives them a chance to eyeball some **giant clams** (p401), and what kid doesn't love enormous, non-threatening, prehistoric-style aquatic beasts? The **Rock Islands** (p404) hold many delights for children, including the chance to **swim with dolphins** (p406). A **kayaking and Jellyfish Lake tour** (p406) is a great option for older children, while **Carp Island** (p405) could be good for a family picnic or simply just mucking around in sea and sand. Mysterious **Babeldaob** (p407) will keep your little hellions awestruck, with its scenic **waterfalls** (p409) and freaky **monoliths** (p409).

TOURS

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) Koror sightseeing tour adult/child US\$40/28.

Mami Divers (Map p399; ☎ 488 8029; www.mamdivers.com; Koror) City tour US\$40.

Neco Marine Dive Shop (☎ 488 1755; www.neco.marine.com; Malakal) Four-hour Koror city tour US\$25.

SLEEPING Budget

Tree-D Hotel & Apartments (Map p399; ☎ 488 3856; www.tree-d-hotel.com; s/d US\$50/55; 🏠 🚿) Bad pun, lovely hotel – the Tree-D is a terrific option, with likeable staff, quirky bungalow charm, wood-panelled hallways and pleasant, clean rooms (with a slight Japanese feel to the interior design). It's about a 20-minute walk from downtown Koror, good or bad depending on your predilections. Tree-D often offers considerable discounts for stays of three nights or more.

Lehns Apartments & Motel (Map p399; ☎ 488 1486; lehnsmotel@palaunet.com; s/ste/apt US\$45/65/85; 🏠 🚿) In the heart of a leafy village, the pinky exterior will amuse. The standard rooms are as big as the apartments, but with fewer amenities: a TV but no phone; pots and pans but no stove; *Popular Science* magazines but no pop culture. There's a big laundry on the premises and the staff aim

to please. Heading west in the direction of Malakal, take a left turn just past the post office, on the street with a petrol station on the corner. Then, when the road curves left, take the first right.

VIP Hotel (☎ 488 1429; vipghotel@palaunet.com; Koror; s/d \$54/70) This clean and functional hotel is within walking distance of a clutch of good shops and restaurants. The 22 rooms do a good job of getting you to sleep in comfort, and feature queen-size beds, cable TV and private bathrooms. You can also opt for studio rooms with kitchenettes, or the large bedroom suites with kitchenettes. Beware: the service at times can be nonexistent.

Midrange

Waterfront Villa (Map p399; ☎ 488 5776, 488 2904; www.palauwaterfrontvilla.com; s/d US\$80/100 🏠 🚿) This place is not at all bad, with immaculate rooms, comfy beds, and ornately trimmed, marble-floored bathrooms. All rooms look out onto the ocean. Coming into Koror from Babeldaob, take the first right after the Dragon Tei restaurant and turn right again at the stop sign. Take a left about 400m on, into the first paved road, and follow it to the end.

The **West Plaza Hotel Group** (☎ 488 2133; west.plaza@palaunet.com; r from US\$70; 🏠 🚿) has five Koror locations; book through the central number. Rooms are clean, comfy, roomy... and bland – perfect for the traveller who's not fussed. West Plaza by the Sea (Map p399) has rooms that face the lagoon, while

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Palau Pacific Resort (Map p399; ☎ 488 2600; www.palau.panpacific.com; Arakabesang; low/high/peak season garden-view r US\$235/275/305, ocean-view r US\$275/315/350; 🏠 🚿 🚿) This place has a genuine ace up its sleeve. While the resort is one of only two hotels in Palau with a beachside location, the beach here is the clear winner: it's simply gorgeous, spread over 300m of sand. Alongside there are a swimming pool and a nifty bar: pure indulgence. Rooms have rattan furniture, tile floors, ceiling fans and private *lanai* (verandas). The fish pond has two resident green turtles – and they show no signs of leaving, either.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Dragon Tei (Map p399; ☎ 488 2271, 488 5429; dragon@palaunet.com; dishes US\$8-35; 🍴 dinner Thu-Tue) Arguably Palau's finest restaurant, certainly the most beloved, Dragon Tei features a measure of Japan mixed with a dash of Palau. The Okinawan chef and owner is a true master, able to turn his hand to anything from *kim chee* hot pots with Napoleon fish to *rafute* (stewed pork belly) to the infamous fruit-bat pie. More conventional fare includes *okonomiyaki* (Japanese 'pizza') and baked fish in banana leaves. There's a palpable sense of conviviality, starting from the staff and trickling down to the customers; you'll linger for hours on end, just see if you don't.

Across the road is **Teppan Dragon** (Map p399; ☎ 488 1139, 488 8743; dragon@palaunet.com; Koror; courses US\$25-35; 🍴 dinner Thu-Tue), run by the same people and featuring exquisite teppanyaki courses, including local seafood.

West Plaza Coral Reef (Map p399) has ocean views that also take in a parking lot, and that's probably only appealing to JG Ballard fans. West Plaza Desekel (Map p400) is above the Desekel Market grocery store, while West Plaza Downtown (Map p400) has only four rooms with street views; the rest have windows that look out onto the hallway (yuck). West Plaza Malakal (Map p399) has the Red Rooster Café & Brewery (p404) downstairs.

Top End

Cliffside Hotel (Map p399; www.sunrisevilla-palau.com; Arakabesang, s/d/ste US\$130/160/210; 🏠 🚿) Get a load of that cracking view, right over the lagoon. Plump for the elegant and spacious doubles with the requisite views; the smaller singles aren't such a good deal (you might as well upgrade). The outside terrace bar, perched on high with more dreamy views, concocts a wicked margarita. At the time of writing, the Cliffside was undergoing renovation but some rooms were available.

Carolines Resort (Map p399; ☎ 488 3754; www.carolinesresort.com; Arakabesang; bungalows from US\$155; 🏠 🚿) This hilltop resort has seven bungalows that mimic traditional Palauan architecture, using bamboo and mahogany. The view over the Philippine Sea is great for gushy types, although the walk up to the highest bungalows may leave smokers, oldies and the terminally unfit short of breath. Guests can use the Palau Pacific Resort's facilities, including the private beach.

Palau Royal Resort (Map p399; ☎ 488 2000; www.palau-royal-resort.com; Malakal; d low-to-high/peak season from US\$200/280, ste from US\$450/550) Here's the latest offering from the Nikko hotel group after their Hotel Nikko Palau bit the dust in mysterious circumstances (see p400).

The L-shaped building contains around 200 stylish rooms showcasing hidden angles and pine-and-cream interiors; a small, private beach with its own bar; a classy restaurant; and elegant grounds with rock-strewn water features and floating seating arrangements.

EATING

Palau has a legitimate claim to Micronesia's best dining scene (even though in numbers it has a fraction of the restaurants of Guam, the other contender). This is especially so if you have a seafood fetish – mangrove crabs and shellfish are as common as muck. But the grub can be quirky, too; fruit-bat pie is on many menus...so go on, make like Ozzy Osbourne and get a big black bat into you. They say it tastes like chicken.

Krämer's Café (Map p399; ☎ 488 8448; Malakal; mains US\$6-16; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Named after Dr Augustin Krämer, the German anthropologist and recorder of Palauan history, this 2nd-floor café serves delicious eclectic fare like blue-cheese burgers, skewers of fish with fruity papaya salsa, and blackened sashimi. There's no theme – just whatever feels good – plus a commanding view of the water, mountains and docks.

Taj (Map p400; ☎ 488 2227; 1st fl, PDC Bldg, Koror; mains US\$8-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This is quality and class all the way, delivering traditional Indian with a flourish. Tandoori chicken is brought to your table impaled on what looks like a short sword and all the classics are here, like chicken tikka and rogan josh. Crisp, elegant and fresh food, served by lovely sari-clad staff.

Mingles ToToTo (Map p400; ☎ 587 2133; mains US\$7-35; 🍴 dinner) A ridiculous moniker but good seafood and a reasonable Japanese

menu. Eat on an open-air patio overlooking Koror's hills – perfect for sunset moods. If you're lucky, a plucky member of staff might strap on an acoustic guitar and strum sweet melodies to no-one in particular (the poor, lovesick lad). The menu displays a sense of humour, depicting a fruit bat in a dish with its tongue hanging out. Mingles is on the 2nd floor, next to Surangel's store.

Further west, try **Rock Island Café** (Map p400; ☎ 488 1010; mains US\$5-13; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner), with good pizza, seafood and steaks.

DRINKING

Palau's local beer, Red Rooster, is worth sampling. The mango brew has a honeyed aftertaste; the light beer has a toffee nose; the amber comes on like a European lager, while the dark is a malty mouthful. Makes a nice change from the standard Micronesian diet of Budweiser and Asahi.

Krämer's Café (Map p399; ☎ 488 8448; Malakal) Gather around the bar, watch the boats dock and dream of sailing away to the Rock Islands. The staff are full of bonhomie, the drinks list is extensive and the menu (see p403) is champion.

Velasco Pub (Map p399; ☎ 488 7330; velasco@palau.net.com; Malakal) This intimate bar near the waterfront has an appropriate maritime theme with porthole doors. Velasco has good bar snacks and an authentic sense of fun, and if the weather's hot the outdoor area is cool.

Storyboard (Map p399; ☎ 488 1982; Malakal) A raucous joint favoured by expats and a few locals. The actual bar is a traditional storyboard – something like a Palauan Kamasutra. As the waitresses will inform you, one side is R-rated and the other X-rated. It can be fun watching the faces of squares who unwittingly choose the dirtiest side.

Red Rooster Café (Map p399; ☎ 488 6718; West Plaza Desekel Hotel, Malakal) Here's a place that could use a good PR firm and a makeover. It's the official café of the Red Rooster brewery next door but it looks like it belongs at a provincial airport. It's plastic and soulless and not enough fuss is made of the beer. Where are the souvenirs? The Red Rooster T-shirts? The take-home samplers? A wasted opportunity. Still, all the Red Rooster varieties are on tap.

For sunset drinkies, try the bar at the Palau Pacific Resort (p402) or at the Cliffside

Hotel (p403); both are impeccable, with fine scenery – the former has a wonderful beach, the latter a breathtaking hilltop location. The **Rip Tide Bar & Grill** (☎ 488 3486; Malakal) is a hip open-air bar on a nice artificial beach.

SHOPPING

Koror Jail (Map p400; 🕒 8-11.30am & 12.30-3pm) Sells storyboards carved by inmates (from US\$150); you can also commission work (see the boxed text, p397).

Ormuul Gift Shop (Map p400; ☎ 488 2575, 488 2165; Senior Citizen's Center, Koror; 🕒 Mon-Fri 8am-4pm) Watch local craftspeople make (and sell) hats, baskets and purses out of pandanus and coconut palm.

ROCK ISLANDS

Comprising over 200 rounded knobs of limestone, the Rock Islands (known locally as Chalbacheb) are the crown jewels of Micronesia – a wormhole into another world, a vista of serene and surreal beauty. Totally covered with green jungle, they dot the waters for a 32km stretch southwest of Koror and are the reason why most travellers come to Palau. But while divers and snorkellers may get all gooey over the Rock Islands, they're a treat no matter how wet you like to get.

The bases of the islands have been undercut by water erosion, grazing fish and the tiny chitons that scrape at the rock, fashioning them into utterly unique mushroom shapes. The islands are home to crocodiles and fruit bats and are rich with bird life: kingfishers, reef herons, black noddies, white-tailed tropicbirds, black-napped terns, and introduced cockatoos and parrots. The surrounding waters contain some of the most abundant and varied marine life on the planet, supporting over 1500 varieties of reef and pelagic fish.

What's more, there are four times the number of coral species in Palau than in the Caribbean, including immense table-top corals, interlocking thickets of stag-horn coral and soft corals of all types and colours.

TRANSPORT

Most visitors see the Rock Islands via dive-shop boat trips (see p406).

SIGHTS Marine Lakes

The Rock Islands hold about 80 marine salt lakes, former sinkholes that are now filled with saltwater and have a limited exchange with the sea. Variations in algae give them different colours and some have soft corals, fish, sponges or jellyfish. Each lake has a unique ecosystem, providing habitat for specialised creatures that have evolved in their waters over the millennia.

Jellyfish Lake is the outstanding example. You'll need to hike up over a hill about 10 minutes through the jungle to reach this mangrove-bordered lake. Mark your entry point into the lake to avoid losing your way back out, and be careful of slippery rocks around the shoreline where the water is murky and green.

Snorkelling in Jellyfish Lake is an absolute must; it's filled with millions of harmless transparent jellyfish that swim en masse to follow the path of the sun. Although the jellyfish have ostensibly lost the ability to sting, due to a lack of predators, they can give off a slight tingle, so don't be surprised if that happens.

Floating among these flimsy pink creatures – which expand and contract like so many pulsating brains – is like exploring the atmosphere of an alien world: inspiring, uncanny and spiritual, all at once.

You're not supposed to touch the jellyfish, so fragile are they, but that hasn't stopped Taiwanese tourists filling their bags with them for later culinary use. At the risk of stating the bleeding obvious, don't eat the jellyfish; they have no natural predators, so don't you start...otherwise they might develop their sting again in a few hundred years' time and give your descendants a nasty shock.

Carp & Neco Islands

For one-day outings, try Carp and Neco Islands, the private domains of Palau Diving Center (p406) and Neco Marine Dive Shop (p406) respectively. You'll be dropped off in the morning and picked up after the last dive, usually for the cost of the snorkelling tour.

Carp Island, also known as Ngercheu Island, is great for lazing around; getting there involves a long, scenic southbound trip through the Rock Islands. This is indeed a peaceful corner of the world, with a

white-sand beach lined with coconut palms and hammocks tied to shady ironwood trees. At high tide the Rock Islands appear to be floating on the sea; as the water recedes they become encircled by beaches and linked by sand bars, and all around Carp Island beautifully rippled shoals of sand appear.

Neco Island is better for snorkelling, though you'll see only half as many Rock Islands en route.

Milky Way

This cove is popular with those who love a good facial, for the water is actually an emulsion of white limestone sand. Dive down, scrape some up and apply it to your skin; the Japanese swear by its health-giving properties.

ACTIVITIES

You'll need to pay a US\$15 Rock Island use-tax, which goes towards conservation. The permit is valid for 30 days and you should carry it on all trips to the Rock Islands in case a ranger busts you.

Diving & Snorkelling

Divers share the waters with manta rays, sea turtles, moray eels, giant *tridacna* clams, grey reef sharks and sometimes even a sea snake, rare dugong or chambered nautilus. The sea temperature averages about 27°C and visibility extends to well over 30m along drop-offs.

The **Blue Corner** is Palau's most popular dive, beloved for its sheer abundance of underwater life. Expect to be totally bedazzled by the incredible variety of fish, including barracudas and schooling sharks, as well as hard and soft corals. Strong tidal currents nourish this chain of life, but also render it a dive for the more experienced.

Both the **German Channel** and **Turtle Cove**, near Peleliu, offer dives that will suit novices. Manta rays and mackerels are frequently spotted in the German Channel. **Devil Fish City** is also a good place for snorkellers, as is the Turtle Cove beach area.

The **Ngemelis Wall**, also called the Big Drop-off, is widely considered the world's best wall dive. From knee-deep water, the wall drops vertically nearly 305m; divers can free float past a brilliant rainbow of sponges and soft corals whose intense

blues, reds and pure whites form a backdrop for quivering 3m orange-and-yellow sea fans and giant black coral trees. The wall is also good sport for snorkellers who can see coral, turtles and anemones.

The Rock Islands host some intriguing wrecks, including the Japanese ship **Gozan Maru**. There's also a half-submerged **Japanese Zero fighter**; when the tide is out and the wreck is fully visible, it's a sobering sight. According to local lore, the pilot survived and managed to swim to shore.

DIVE SHOPS

Most dive trips leave Koror at 8 or 9am and return around 4pm, breaking for lunch on a Rock Island. Note that companies have bad-weather cancellation policies.

Dive Palau (☎ 488 3548; www.palaudiver.com) One-/two-/three-tank dives US\$70/110/155; night dives US\$60; snorkelling trips US\$55. All include lunch.

Fish 'N Fins (☎ 488 2637; www.fishnins.com; Koror) One of the oldest dive shops in Palau. One-/two-tank dives US\$85/105, third tank extra US\$40; canoe and kayak trips US\$85; snorkelling and Rock Island tours US\$90, Jellyfish Lake extra US\$30.

Mam! Divers (Map p399; ☎ 488 8029; www.mamldivers.com; Koror) Two-tank dives US\$100, extra dives US\$40; night dives US\$60; snorkelling tours US\$65; kayak tours US\$80; Rock Island tours US\$85, Jellyfish Lake extra US\$27.

Neco Marine Dive Shop (Map p399; ☎ 488 1755; www.necomarine.com; Malakal) Among Palau's largest operations. Two-dive day trips US\$110, third dive extra US\$40; kayak tours (minimum of four people) US\$90; Rock Island snorkelling tours (minimum of four people) US\$110.

Palau Diving Center (☎ 488 2978; carpcorp@palauet.com; Malakal) Owned by Carp Island Resort. One-/two-/three-tank dives including lunch US\$75/115/150, Jellyfish Lake extra US\$25.

Sam's Dive Tours (Map p399; ☎ 488 1062; www.sams.com; Malakal) This five-star operation is hugely popular. Tours are limited to eight divers so, they say, you can 'see less bubbles and fins and more fish and reef'. Two-tank dives including lunch and Jellyfish Lake snorkel tour US\$120, third dive extra US\$25; night dives US\$60; Rock Island snorkel tours (minimum of four people) US\$90.

Splash (Map p399; ☎ 488 2600; www.splash-palau.com; Palau Pacific Resort, Arakabesang) A five-star dive centre. Two-tank dives US\$110 and snorkelling tours (which nondivers are free to join) US\$65; lunch is included. Jellyfish Lake extra US\$10.

LIVE-ABOARDS

Palau Aggressor II (☎ 488 6075; www.aggressor.com; d/deluxe US\$2600/2800) is a 32m diesel-powered

boat that offers week-long Sunday to Saturday cruises including 5½ days of diving. Each of the eight carpeted air-con cabins has a queen-size and a single bed, toilet, sink, shower and individual temperature controls.

Fish 'N Fins runs the **Ocean Hunter** (☎ 488 2637; www.oceanhunter.com; from US\$2700), an 18m, six-passenger boat which runs trips from seven to 14 days. Booking six months ahead is recommended, though last-minute discounts can occur if someone drops out.

Dolphin Watching

On the Rock Island of Urukthapel (Ngeruktabel), **Dolphins Pacific** (☎ 488 8582; www.dolphinsofpacific.com) is a 'marine mammal interaction, educational and research facility'. You can swim and snorkel with dolphins (US\$80) or scuba dive (US\$120) in their company. The ticket centre is at Neco Marine (left).

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) offers a Sightseeing and Dolphin Close Encounter Tour (adult/child US\$90/50).

Kayaking

God must have been into water sports, because the Rock Islands were made for ocean kayaking. Most of the dive companies offer kayak tours; see left for details.

Planet Blue Guided Kayak Tours (☎ 488 1062; csamstour@palauet.com), a subsidiary of Sam's Dive Tours, runs excellent trips (US\$90) and can transport the kayaks by speedboat to your site to spare you the paddle work.

TOURS

Most of the dive companies offer Rock Island Tours; see left for details.

Antelope (☎ 488 1059; antelope@palauet.com; Malakal) **IMPAC** (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) Kayak and Rock Island tour adult/child US\$85/50; kayak and Jellyfish Lake tour adult/child US\$100/65; half-day Rock Island or Jellyfish Lake tour adult/child US\$65/40.

Palau Island Adventures (☎ 587 3333; pia@palau.net.com; Malakal)

Rock Island Tour Co. (☎ 488 1573; palauritc@palau.net.com; Malakal)

SLEEPING

The Rock Islands offer Micronesia's best camping; the star gazing, as you'd expect, is tremendous. Some islands have shelters and picnic tables, though none have fresh water; some are infested with rats, so do

your research. Bring protection from biting sand gnats.

There are no fees, just the cost of transport. You can organise for a dive shop to drop you off on a deserted island and pick you up later at an arranged time; they might even drop you off for free if you coordinate your schedule with diving or snorkelling trips (ie they'll pick you up from your Rock Island so you can join the dive group at the same rate as if you came aboard in Koror).

You can also camp on the beach near the Carp Island resort and use the outdoor public shower for US\$25 per night.

Carp Island Resort (☎ 488 2277, 488 2978; carp@palauet.com; cottages from US\$90) Run by the Palau Diving Center, the resort features four rooms in duplex cottages, each with two single beds, a shared indoor toilet and a porch overlooking the beach. Electricity is often off between 9am and 2pm, when guests are usually diving. There's an informal restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner.

BABELDAOB

pop 4600 / area 398 sq km

Babeldaob (or Babelthau) is Micronesia's second-largest island, weighing in at three-quarters the size of Guam. It's a mysterious place, physically impenetrable for the most part and shielding enigmatic monoliths whose origin and purpose is unknown (save for various theories about God). The east coast has beautiful stretches of sandy beach, particularly north from Ngwal to Ngarard, while the west coast has a largely mangrove-studded shoreline. Ancient stone footpaths connect many villages, the roads are dirt, there are no traffic lights, and resort hotels, for the moment, are a world away. You can imagine this is how all of Palau was in the old days. Babeldaob is sparsely populated, too; younger people traditionally make an annual exodus to Koror in search of jobs.

But none of this is going to last. In fact, it's all about to change in the most dramatic fashion (see the boxed text, p408).

GEOGRAPHY

Although Babeldaob is a high volcanic island, the highest of its gently rolling hills, Mt Ngerchelchuu, reaches only 217m. Babeldaob's Lake Ngardok, about 914m long



and 3.6m deep, is one of Micronesia's few freshwater lakes and is the region's largest natural lake. Parts of the island's dense jungle interior remain virtually unexplored.

TRANSPORT

Private speedboats, fishing boats and state motorboats going to Babeldaob generally leave from Koror's T-Dock or the Fisheries Co-op on Malakal; simply go to the docks and ask if anyone's heading that way. You can generally join a boat by sharing fuel costs. Some boats return to Koror the same day, some stay overnight.

You can get from Koror to the *bai* in Airai in a sedan, but beyond that you'll need a 4WD vehicle, given the nature of

THE PRICE OF PROGRESS

The Babeldaob state of Melekeok has been constitutionally designated Palau's future capital, a changeover planned for October 2006; already a clearing on a hill in the jungle has been made and construction of the necessary buildings is nearing completion. All that remains is to get people there.

You see, the thing is this: Babeldaob has traditionally only had a few dirt roads, which generally follow the paths of the once-extensive road system constructed during the Japanese era. Some states have just a few kilometres of roads that go through a main village and then stop; roads in one state don't always connect up with roads in the next. The nature of this system has always made travelling around the island a real challenge, and hardly worthy of a brand, spanking-new capital.

So, a few years back, the US committed US\$149 million to constructing an 85.3km road around the island. To mitigate the environmental impact, two conservation areas totalling 5 sq km were established in parts of Ngjwal and Melekeok states. Along with ensuring that politicians can reach their new playpen, this will make the island much more accessible to tourists. The exodus will therefore be reversed: officials estimate that, given these new developments, two-thirds of Koror's population will move to Babeldaob over the next 10 years, bringing their businesses, their families and their cars. There are even plans to build a resort in Melekeok.

Construction of the road began in 2000 and was due to be finished by 2003, but at the time of writing the damned thing was still under construction. Ask any taxi driver and they'll give you various theories about the ongoing delays, besides bureaucracy perhaps the most popular being the nature of Palau's unpredictable, stop-start weather. Frequent, fleeting rain (and subsequent mud slides) washes all the good work away, so they say.

When the road is completed, Babeldaob will be profoundly changed: physically, environmentally and economically – perhaps even spiritually.

Needless to say, not all Palauans are happy about paying such a high price for progress.

Babeldaob's roads. A trip from one end of the island to the other can take hours. It's possible to drive as far as Melekeok on the east coast and Ngeremlengui on the west coast along rough dirt roads (although rental companies may restrict vehicle use in these areas, and in wet weather the roads become impassable).

The Palau **visitor information centre** (☎ 488 2793) might be able to help with arranging a guide.

Folks at North Beach Cottages (opposite) can transport you to Ngaraard by boat (US\$250) or via a two-hour car journey (US\$150; maximum four people).

SIGHTS

Airai State

Airai, at Babeldaob's southern end, has a population of 2100 – and Palau's international airport. The state's relatively passable roads and its proximity to Koror make it easy to explore.

If you continue straight on the main road, rather than turning towards the airport, you'll arrive at the bombed-out shell

of a **Japanese administration building**, on the left just after the pavement ends. Here, a **Japanese tank** and a few **guns** rust in union.

Continue on the main road for about 180m to a security gate; past that the road splits. Take the road to the left to the **new bai**; it's on the right, 7.2km from the bridge. The *bai* is mostly made of concrete though it incorporates traditional features.

Beyond this, turn left at the T-junction. Shortly after, the road ends at Palau's **oldest bai**. It's over 100 years old, 21m long and 6m wide, with a steeply pitched roof reaching a height of 12m. It was constructed without nails, using local materials of wood and thatch on a stone platform. Chances are the keeper of the *bai* will miraculously appear – it's around US\$5 to visit the *bai* and US\$10 to photograph it.

Both of these *bai* have legendary scenes and symbolic designs painted inside and outside.

At Airai's southern end, **Metuker ra Bisech** is a quarry for Yapese stone money, with a stairway, handrail and covered rest station. It's about 20 minutes by boat from Koror.

Ngatpang & Ngardmau Waterfalls

These two outstanding water features are probably Babeldaob's top attractions. **Ngatpang waterfall** is more popular with tourists, given that it's closer to Koror and therefore relatively easy to access. There's a reasonably challenging hike through the slippery forest path to the river valley and the waterfalls' base, where, naturally, a swim and a picnic are in order.

Ngardmau waterfall, flowing from Mt Ngerchelchuus, is the tallest waterfall in Micronesia. It makes for a tough but rewarding hike, as you trek alongside the wartime Japanese railway and also pass through traditional villages and taro patches. A dip in the pools at the base of the falls is not to be missed.

Ngaraard State

Ngaraard has villages on both its east and west coasts, with a road connecting them. Some of Babeldaob's prettiest **beaches** are on Ngaraard's east coast, and although the state has only 600 people, that's enough to make it Babeldaob's third most populated state (after Airai and Ngarchelong).

Ngarchelong State

Ngarchelong, at Babeldaob's northernmost point, has an open field with rows of **basalt monoliths** known as Badrulchau. Their origin and purpose is unknown, but according to one legend the gods put them there to support a *bai* that held thousands of people. There are 37 stones in all, some weighing up to five tonnes.

Many of Babeldaob's hillsides were once elaborately terraced into steps and pyramids, and some terraces can still be seen. Archaeological research suggests that construction probably began around AD 100 and was abandoned around 1600. Quite mysteriously, few villages seem to have been located close to these terraced hillsides, Badrulchau being the only known exception.

Ngarchelong is also home to some very baffling **stone faces**, similar to those found on Easter Island.

ACTIVITIES & TOURS

If you enjoy seclusion, find a guide to take you to Ngeremeduu Bay, Micronesia's largest estuary, where kayaking is good on

rivers feeding into the bay. There will also be the chance to see birds, mangroves and the occasional crocodile.

Fish 'N Fins (☎ 488 2637; www.fishnfins.com; Koror) 4WD land tours US\$150.

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) Big Island tour adult/child US\$90/55, minimum of two people; Ngardmau waterfall and hiking tour adult/child US\$95/65, minimum of two people.

Mam! Divers (Map p399; ☎ 488 8029; www.mam!divers.com; Koror) Waterfall tour US\$95.

Neco Marine Dive Shop (Map p399; ☎ 488 1755; www.necomarine.com; Malakal) Full-day 'Babeldaob Adventure' tour US\$145. Takes in the island's monoliths, *bai*, terraced hillsides and waterfalls.

North Beach Cottages (☎ 824 4444; www.northbeachcottages.com; Ngaraard) Offers a variety of car tours. Ngardmau waterfall US\$50; Ngarchelong monoliths and stone faces US\$10 per person.

Sam's Dive Tours (Map p399; ☎ 488 1062; www.sams-tours.com; Malakal) Babeldaob tour including waterfalls US\$150.

SLEEPING

To camp you'll need to first obtain permission from the village chief. You can camp on site at the North Beach Cottages for US\$25 (see below).

Airai View Hotel (☎ 587 3530; www.airaiview.com; Babeldaob; deluxe/ocean view r US\$95/110; 📶 🚰) Old-fashioned character is the score: rich mahogany floors, a grand lobby decorated with the island's largest storyboard, a balcony restaurant and a piano bar. Standard rooms are plain yet elegant, with two double beds and wooden furniture; deluxe rooms have huge balconies looking across the jungle towards the ocean. It's on the road between Koror and the airport.

Melekeok Guesthouses (☎ 654 1001; Melekeok; r US\$40) Lovely and spacious, these three guesthouses sit side by side, constructed from beautiful dark wood, with 24-hour electricity, hot-water showers and good kitchen facilities. Local meals are available and transportation can be arranged.

North Beach Cottages (☎ 824 4444; www.northbeachcottages.com; Ngaraard; cottages US\$120; 📶) These four Palauan-style cottages are a winner, set on a lovely white-sand beach. They're made of local mahogany and set in lush greenery. There's even a bar and restaurant that serves terrific meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$6/8/12) using local ingredients, plus a gift shop and a store.

Also:

Maria's Homestay (☎ 622 1086; Ngchesar, PO Box 6025, Koror; per person US\$25)

Patrick's Homestay (☎ 622 1067; Ngchesar, PO Box 1067, Koror; per person US\$25)

Reef Side View Lodge (☎ 824 1066, 824 2975; emilytkel@yahoo.com; Ngaraard; r from US\$55) Rooms on the beach front with balcony, cable TV, VCR, kitchenette and telephone.

PELELIU

pop 600 / area 13 sq km

Peleliu is peaceful and laid-back. There's not much to do and that's entirely the charm, for you can really *hear* the silence. Often it will seem like you've got the entire island all to yourself (you might not spot another tourist during your entire stay, and maybe not even a local, if you walk far enough). It's a lovely little place, and that's why it's so hard to imagine it torn apart by war. Yet during 1944 Peleliu was the site of one of the bloodiest battles of WWII (see the boxed text, below). Although the island is only 13 sq km, in two months over 15,000 men were killed here, almost equalling Palau's current population. Peleliu's forests were also bombed and burned to the ground.

Today there's no immediate sense of war at all, save for the unearthly sensation engendered by an encounter with an eerie, rusted

pillbox or tank in the jungle's secondary growth. Even then, the experience is leavened by the whistles and songs of tropical birds thriving in the regenerated vines and leafy foliage, a cornucopia that has mostly healed the hideous battle scars of old.

TRANSPORT

The state boat *Peleliu Islander*, with a 30-passenger capacity, runs between Elochel Dock in Klouklubed and the Fisheries Co-op on Koror (US\$6, three hours), usually leaving Koror at 2pm on Monday and Friday and returning from Peleliu at noon on Thursday and Sunday. Reservations aren't necessary but departure times can change, so you should call the Palau **visitor information centre** (☎ 488 2793) for verification.

Going by boat is highly recommended – not only will you encounter curious (but friendly) locals who will be wondering what the hell you're doing so far off the beaten track, you'll also share the ride with as many chickens, roosters and wide-eyed kids as can be crammed on board. Bring your sea legs – the waters can be rough.

Private speedboats sometimes operate; ask around at Koror's Fisheries Co-op.

Belau Air flies from Koror to Peleliu (one way/return US\$50/90; see p399 for details).

In a day you could do maybe half of Peleliu on foot, as the coral and concrete roads

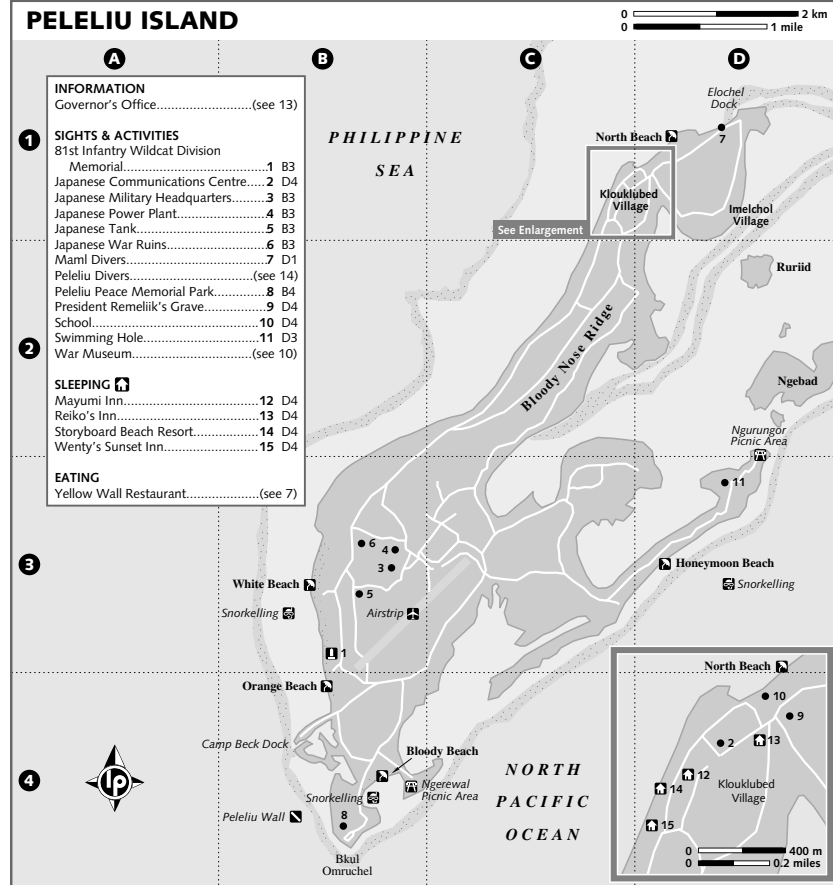
MASS COFFINS: THE BATTLE FOR PELELIU

The battle for Peleliu was conceived by US military tacticians who were worried that Japanese attacks from bases in Peleliu and Angaur might prevent a successful retaking of the Philippines. By mid-1944, however, US air bombings had reduced Peleliu to a negligible threat and it could easily have been bypassed, as were many other islands held by the Japanese. Instead, Peleliu was captured at a terrible, unanticipated cost, with more than 8000 US casualties.

At the time of the US invasion, some 10,000 Japanese soldiers were holed up in the caves that honeycombed Peleliu's jagged limestone ridges. Their goal was not to win, but to stall defeat. Far away from the beaches and the reach of naval bombardment, the Japanese tenaciously defended these caves to their deaths. In the bloody assaults that followed, the caves became mass coffins as American troops used flamethrowers, grenades and explosives to seal them shut.

Rather than the expected quick victory, it took 2½ months for the Americans to rout out the last of the Japanese forces. In the end only 400 prisoners were taken alive and the majority of those were Korean labourers.

In the late 1950s, a Japanese straggler who had been hiding in the jungle was discovered by an elderly woman as he entered her garden. Crouching low to see who had been stealing her tapioca, the woman froze and then screamed, thinking she was seeing a ghost. The man's uniform was torn to shreds, his hair matted and teeth streaked black. Police from Koror hunted down the straggler, bound him with rope and paraded him around for everyone to see. In that inglorious manner, the last WWII soldier left Peleliu.



are in good condition. A bicycle is a fine idea; your accommodation can help you find one (they might be able to rent you a car, too, if you really must). The island still has a scattering of live ammunition, so take care if you go off the beaten path and refrain from taking any 'souvenirs', no matter how small or insignificant they may seem – there's a US\$15,000 fine for the removal of war relics (or your life if you take an unexploded bomb).

SIGHTS Klouklubed

Palau's first president, the assassinated Haruo Remeliik, was from Peleliu; his **grave** is directly opposite the governor's office.

Klouklubed's small **war museum** contains war artefacts, munitions and period photos. There's a multistorey, bombed-out **Japanese communications centre** right in the middle of the village, tangled with vegetation and encircled by homes.

Heading towards the dock you can spot a **cave** and **pillbox** on the right, opposite a sandy beach.

Japanese War Ruins

Heading south, just before you come to White Beach, you'll see the ruins of a **Japanese war building** to your left. Just past there, from the main road, turn inland and follow the dirt road until you come to a tiny, rusted Japanese **tank**; it's hard to believe

Japan defended the island so tenaciously with these tiny contraptions at their disposal. To the left, heading east, another dirt path leads you to the ruins of the **Japanese power plant and military headquarters** – if you don't believe in ghosts, you might be forced to revise your opinion after a visit here. With stairs that lead nowhere, pockmarked ceilings, and exposed wires and girders forming uncanny shadows on the green, slimy walls, the headquarters in particular impart the freaky feeling that you're being watched.

Orange Beach

The first US invasion forces to land on Peleliu came ashore at Orange Beach on 15 September 1944. From concrete pillboxes the Japanese machine-gunned the oncoming waves of Americans as they hit the beaches. Despite the barrage, about 15,000 US soldiers made it ashore that first day.

Today Orange Beach is a quiet picnic spot with a sandy beach and waters that are calm and clear. Just before the beach there are two grey **coral monuments** with plaques dedicated to the US Army's 81st Infantry Wildcat Division. On the beach, look to the south to see a Japanese **defence bunker** partially concealed by the rocks.

Camp Beck Dock

Behind Camp Beck Dock, where the water is a creamy aqua, you'll find a huge pile of mangled WWII plane engines, cockpits, pipes, tubing, fuselages, anchors and who knows what, all compacted into blocks of twisted aluminium and steel and overgrown with jungle.

South Beaches

At Bkul Omruchel, on the southwest tip of the island, the Japanese have constructed half-a-dozen chunky concrete tables and named the area **Peleliu Peace Memorial Park**. From here you can see to the south, and when the surf crashes, there are some small blowholes that erupt near the shore.

Despite its name, **Bloody Beach** is a calm circular cove with a nice sandy beach. Just to the north is the Ngerewal picnic area.

Northeast of the airport is **Honeymoon Beach**, a long stretch of beach with good seasonal surf. At the eastern tip of this stretch is the **Ngurungor picnic area**, which has some

mangroves and tiny rock island formations just offshore.

Heading back from Ngurungor, off a grassy road to the right, there's a refreshing little **swimming hole** of half-salt, half-fresh water that bobs up and down with the tides. A metal ladder hangs down the side of the tiny pit, but local kids just jump in from the top.

ACTIVITIES

Divng & Snorkelling

The Peleliu Wall, southwest of Peleliu, is one of the world's finest dives – an abrupt 300m drop that starts in about 3m of water. It's a veritable treasure trove of sharks, hawksbill sea turtles, black coral trees, mammoth gorgonian fans and an amazing variety of fish.

Both White Beach and Bloody Beach have coral and good snorkelling; Honey-moon Beach is also good for snorkelling.

DIVE SHOPS

Many of Palau's best dive spots are closer to Peleliu than Koror, but most people start out from Koror with one of the dive shops based there (see p406).

Maml Divers (☎ 345 1652; www.mamldivers.com; Peleliu) Two-tank dives US\$80, additional dives US\$40; snorkelling tours US\$45, lunch included.

Peleliu Divers (☎ 345 1058; pdivers@palaunet.com; Peleliu) Two-tank dives US\$90, lunch included.

TOURS

Tangie Hesus gives an excellent tour of the island (US\$80 for one to four people, US\$15 per person); he's a friendly, indefatigable character and Peleliu's resident historian of sorts. Tangie can generally be reached at the **Mayumi Inn** (☎ 345 1036).

Peleliu Divers and Maml Divers (above) both do land tours (US\$30).

IMPAC (Map p399; ☎ 488 3779; www.palau-impac.com) runs a Peleliu Island historical tour (adult/child US\$120/90), with a minimum of three people.

SLEEPING

Camping

Camping is easy, as some of the beach picnic sites have open-air shelters, tables, barbecue pits and outhouses, but you'll need to take drinking water with you. You'll also need a close-knit screened tent or insect

repellent. While no permission is required to camp, you should first check in at the helpful governor's office. You can arrange for a car to drop you off at your camping site and to pick you up later.

Ngurungor picnic area is a good choice for camping. It's close to the swimming hole and it usually has a refreshing breeze. Orange Beach is another possibility, though it can be hot and muggy. Honey-moon Beach, with covered picnic tables, is also a nice spot, but beware the bitey sand gnats.

Guesthouses

No credit cards are accepted on Peleliu, so bring enough cash and travellers cheques.

Storyboard Beach Resort (☎ 345 1019; pdivers@palaunet.com; cottages US\$85) Six simple but pleasant A-frame concrete cottages on the beach, with hot showers, screened windows, *lanai* (verandas) and ceiling fans; rustic and peaceful. Some cottages have queen-size beds, others have twin beds. Breakfast can be prepared for US\$6 and dinner for US\$12.

Also:

Mayumi Inn (☎ 345 1036; Peleliu; per person US\$22; ☎) Ten plain rooms behind Keibo's Store with a shared outdoor bathroom. Tasty meals available (US\$12).

Reiko's Inn (☎ 345 1106; per person US\$25) Near the governor's office.

Wenty's Sunset Inn (☎ 345 1080; Peleliu; per person US\$15) Little guesthouse alongside a nice beach with five rooms, each with a double bed.

EATING

Yellow Wall Restaurant (☎ 345 1652; mains US\$7-15; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by Maml Divers, this is Peleliu's only restaurant, such as it is (it's more like a tiny café). It serves good local seafood including mangrove crab and fruit-bat pie, as well as Korean, Filipino and Japanese fare.

ANGAUR

pop 200 / area 8 sq km

Serene, low-key Angaur Island, garnished with a goodly dollop of timeless South Seas charm, has plenty to offer isolationists. Eleven kilometres southwest of Peleliu, the island is outside the protective reef that surrounds the majority of Palau's islands:

MONKEY ISLAND?

Never mind the people, what are the monkeys like? Yes, that's right – Angaur has thousands of crab-eating macaques, descendants of a couple of monkeys brought to the island by Germans in the early 1900s on a suicide mission: to monitor air quality in Angaur's phosphate mines. When accidentally released (escaped?), the monkeys took well to Angaur's jungle despite attempts to eradicate them. Because they occasionally raid crops and eat crabs, Palauans consider them a pest and despite recent bounties being placed on them, they still – somehow – thrive.

open ocean pounds the north coast, where the sea explodes skyward through a series of small blowholes; the southern end is much calmer and fringed with sandy beaches.

TRANSPORT

The 25-passenger state boat *Yamato Maru* makes the three-hour trip (adult/child US\$5/3) from Koror's Fisheries Co-op on Friday and Monday and back to Koror on Thursday and Sunday. Call the Palau **visitor information centre** (☎ 488 2793) for sailing schedules.

Private speedboats sometimes do the trip but not nearly as often as between Koror and Peleliu, as the channel between Angaur and Koror gets very rough.

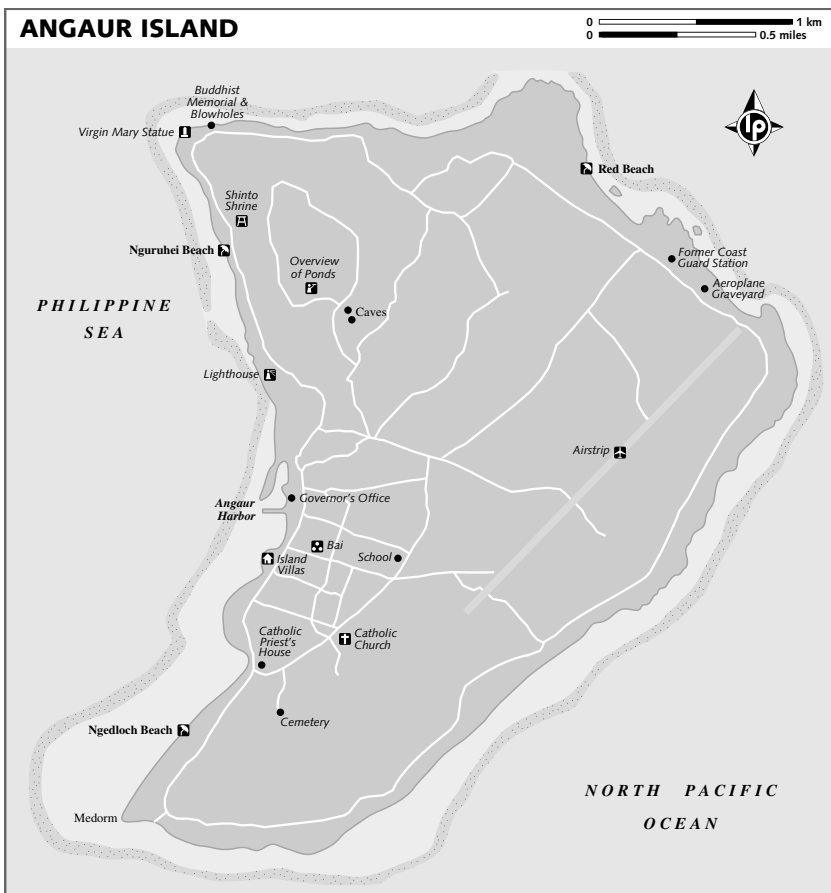
Belau Air flies from Koror to Angaur (one way/return US\$50/90); see p399 for details.

The coastal road circling Angaur is mostly level and in good condition. Angaur is just 4km long, so you can bust out the shoe leather with impunity.

Island Villas (see p414) can arrange car rentals, bicycle hire and sometimes mopeds, which are a good deal given that Angaur is flat.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

You can walk the coastal road in a day, if the heat and humidity doesn't take its toll. You might bump into some monkeys, too. Outside Angaur's one village, tall trees and tropical growth close in, allowing for shady strolls.



There are half-submerged US tanks in the harbour and blowholes to the north. In the northeast, you might come across some WWII aircraft wrecks, overgrown with jungle.

There's good diving to enjoy around Angaur between January and July; the water is too rough at other times. There are no diving facilities on Angaur, so make advance arrangements in Koror; turn to p406 for a list of operators (although the dive companies only occasionally go to Angaur).

Island Villas organises guided land tours (US\$75) for up to four people; the company also arranges snorkelling and fishing tours.

SLEEPING & EATING

Most of Angaur's coastal areas are privately owned so you'll need to seek permission from landowners. **Belau Air** (☎ 587 8090) can arrange this for you.

Island Villas (☎ 277 1111; islandvillas@palaunet.com; s/d US\$25/35) Five rooms in a spacious, modern house on the beach with a kitchen, ocean-view deck and a couple of other rooms capable of accommodating larger groups. Serves meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$8/10/15).

OK's Motel (☎ 277 1006; okasiano@yahoo.com; r US\$15) A few rooms with shared bathroom; meals are available (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$5/8/12).

Angaur has a couple of small stores with basic provisions, but no restaurants.

KAYANGEL

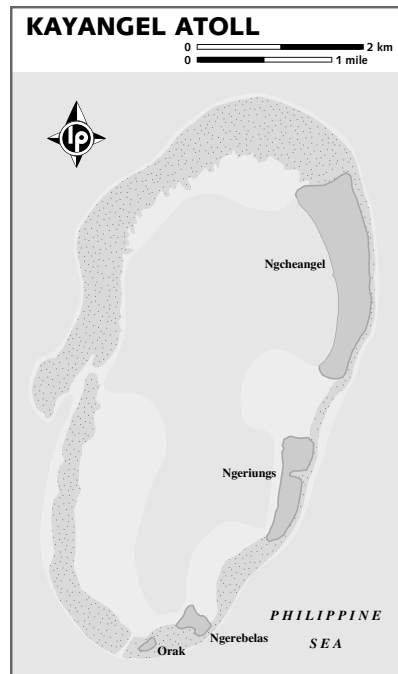
POP 137 / area 3 sq km

This picture-postcard coral atoll, 24km north of Babeldaob, consists of four islands fringed with sun-bleached beaches and a beautiful aqua lagoon. The main island, Ngcheangel, is barely 2.4km long and takes only a few minutes to walk across, yet there are two chiefs – one governing the north and a stronger chief controlling the south.

Kayangel has just one quiet village of 41 houses, a couple of small stores, a little ice-making plant and a few mopeds. This rustic charm might not last much longer, though; there are rumblings about turning Kayangel into a major Palauan tourist attraction.

Kayangel is fairly traditional and welcomes culturally sensitive visitors: women should wear a T-shirt and shorts over their bathing suit when swimming and no-one should wear shorts in the village.

Woven handbags and baskets from Kayangal are in demand as they're made of a high-quality pandanus leaf.



Contact the **Kayangal governor's office** (☎ in Kayangal 876 2967, in Koror 488 2766) about camping or staying with a family. Take rice, coffee, betel nut, baked goods or other provisions as gifts.

Operators occasionally bring divers to Kayangal for the virgin reefs and the chance to get way, way off the beaten path; check with the dive companies listed on p406.

The state speedboat leaves Kayangal for Koror every second Friday and returns to Kayangal from Koror's T-Dock the following Sunday (US\$20, two hours). Private speedboats, if you can find them, take about three hours.

You need a permit to visit Kayangal, obtainable from the governor's office.

SOUTH-WEST ISLANDS

The South-West group consists of half a dozen small islands: Sonsorol (population between 25 and 64; people migrate with visiting ships) and Fana (uninhabited) – collectively known as the Sonsorol Islands; plus Pulo Anna (population 18), Merir (population 5), Tobi (population 25) and Helen (uninhabited). The group is scattered 595km beyond Koror and 161km north of Indonesia; each island covers less than 2.5 sq km.

The Japanese used the islands for phosphate mining during their occupation, so they were once heavily populated. While Fana has remained uninhabited since WWII, the Sonsorolese visit it to fish and capture coconut crabs, turtles and birds.

Uninhabited Helen Island has nesting lesser-crested terns and green sea turtles; South-West Islanders have long sailed to Helen Reef to hunt the turtles and harvest giant clams, as do occasional government supply ships and illegal Indonesian poachers. Merir Island also has nesting green sea turtles.

South-West Islanders have more in common with Yapese and Chuukese outer islanders than with Palauans from the main Palauan islands. Unsurprisingly, the lifestyle in this part of the world is very traditional: thatched houses, carved canoes and a fishing-based livelihood complete the scene.

Other than the occasional researcher, there are virtually no foreign visitors to the islands, but those that do make the journey

find that the people are friendly and most speak some English.

There are no guesthouses here but it is possible to camp, although you should avoid Merir, with its dire mosquito infestation. Naturally, you'll need to bring all your own food and supplies.

The Sonsorol state boat visits Sonsorol every second month; the 23-hour ride from Koror is free of charge. The Tobi state boat (return US\$19.50) also chugs along to Tobi and Helen every two months, more frequently if needed, and sometimes goes to other islands. Research vessels and a Palauan fishing patrol boat occasionally make their way to the islands. Contact the **Sonsorol governor's office** (☎ 488 1237) and the **Tobi governor's office** (☎ 488 2218) in Koror for further information.

PALAU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Palau has a good spread of accommodation to suit all budgets; add 10% tax onto all room prices.

The smaller hotels generally provide free airport transfers upon request.

Many hotels have good package deals with the local dive companies; contact the hotels or dive companies for details.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Palau is at the top of many divers' lists; it's simply spectacular, as any wet-suited fool will tell you. Most of the places listed on p406 conduct PADI courses; a Discover Scuba course costs around US\$195.

Kayaking

The Rock Islands are the exemplar; again, see p406 for information.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses stay open weekdays from 8am to 5pm. Banking hours are (conservatively) 9.30am to 2.30pm Monday to Thursday and to 5pm on Friday.

CHILDREN

Palau is not really a family destination. There's nowhere specifically kiddie-orientated in Koror, and trekking around

PRACTICALITIES

- The *Palau Horizon* is published every Tuesday and Friday, and the *Tia Belau* every Friday.
- Palau has one TV station, as well as one short wave, one AM and four FM radio stations. Palau receives US cable TV.
- The video format is NTSC.
- Electricity is supplied at 110V, 60 Hz AC. Outlets use flat two-pin plugs.
- Palau uses the imperial system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

inaccessible Babeldaob with the little tackers in tow doesn't sound too appealing. The good news for those travelling with ankle biters is that there's a big shopping centre in Koror, the **WCTC Shopping Center Mall** (Map p400; ☎ 488 1633, 488 2394; Koror), where you're sure to find baby formulas and maybe a toy or two to keep older children occupied.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Palauan Embassies & Consulates

Guam (☎ 671-646 9281; 540 Marine Dr, ITC Bldg, Tamuning) Consulate.

Japan (☎ 03-3354 5500; 2nd fl, 201 Pare Cristal, 1-2 Katamachi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-001) Embassy.

Taiwan (☎ 02-2561 1580; 2nd fl – B, 100 Nanking East Rd, Sec 2, Taipei) Embassy.

USA (☎ 202-452 6814; 2000 L St, NW, Suite 407, Washington DC) Embassy.

Embassies & Consulates in Palau

USA (Map p399; ☎ 488 2920; Topside, Koror)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Youth Day (15 March) Concerts and sports.

Earth Day (22 April) Activities promoting environmental issues and 'green' awareness.

Senior Citizens Day (5 May) Parades, floats, handicrafts and dancing.

Constitution Day (9 July)

Olechotel Belau Fair (9 July) Celebration of Palauan culture with arts and crafts, exhibits, cooking and dancing.

Independence Day (1 October) Commemoration of Palau's Day of Independence in 1994 with feasts, parades and the enduringly popular Miss Palau contest.

HOW MUCH?

- **Newspaper:** 50c
- **Coffee:** US\$1.50
- **Taxi ride from the airport to central Koror:** US\$20
- **Car hire:** from US\$40 per day
- **Land tour:** US\$90

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon petrol:** US\$3
- **1L bottled water:** 80c
- **Can of Budweiser beer:** 60c
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** US\$25
- **Hamburger:** US\$2.50

HOLIDAYS

See p829 for details of public holidays in the Pacific region.

INTERNET ACCESS

Palauan Internet connections are the slowest known to man or beast – you have been warned. Costs hover around US\$4 an hour at an Internet café.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Consult the **Palau Visitors Authority** (www.visit-palau.com).

MONEY

Palau's currency is the US dollar (for exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page). Credit cards are widely accepted in Koror State but not at all in the smaller islands. ATMs are similarly found in Koror but not elsewhere. Tipping is not expected.

TELEPHONE

International phone calls can be made 24 hours from the Palau National Communications Corporation (PNCC) office in central Koror. Palau's international telephone code is ☎ 680; there are no area codes. Debusch phone cards are widely available in US\$10, US\$15, US\$25, US\$50 and US\$100 denominations.

TIME

Koror is nine hours ahead of UTC/GMT.

VISAS

All tourists may visit Palau for 30 days without requiring a visa. The visa can be extended for two 30-day periods (US\$100 per extension) if an application is made no more than seven days after expiration.

TRANSPORT IN PALAU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

All flights arrive at the Palau International Airport.

Continental (Palau ☎ 488 2448, 488 1029; www.continental.com) flies daily from Houston (Texas) via Honolulu (Hawaii) to Guam, with connections to Palau. Daily flights from Honolulu to Guam also have daily connections to Palau. Direct flights from Houston to Tokyo connect to Guam and Palau. There are flights from Manila to Palau on Wednesday and Saturday.

Far Eastern Air Transport (Palau ☎ 488 3931; www.fat.com.tw) flies from Taipei (Taiwan) to Palau on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

Sea

Visiting yachts should notify the **harbour master** (☎ 488 5789) before arrival. Yachts moor at Malakal Harbor and at M-Dock.

GETTING AROUND

There's no public transport, but if you choose to walk someone will invariably give you a lift. A small tip is expected.

Air

Belau Air (☎ 587 8090; www.gecpalau.com/belauair.htm) flies from Koror to Angaur and Peleliu on Thursday, Friday and Sunday (one way/return US\$50/90).

Boat

Many Palauans commute between islands in private speedboats; you can often hitch a ride by contributing to fuel costs. State-owned boats also travel between their home

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a departure tax of US\$20 when you fly out of Palau.

island and Koror. See the relevant island sections for details.

Car

Cars are generally left-hand drive.

DRIVING LICENCE

You can drive for up to 30 days with a current licence from your home country.

HIRE

Most car-hire agencies are in Koror State (see p399). It's possible to rent a vehicle on the other islands, though you will need

to do this either privately or through your accommodation.

ROAD CONDITIONS

Watch out for potholes and unmarked speed bumps as you drive. If you're venturing deep into Babeldaob, rent a high-riding vehicle that will be able to handle the bumps.

ROAD RULES

The maximum speed limit is 40km/h (25mph). Cars drive on the right-hand side of the road.