

New Caledonia

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New Caledonia Snapshots

New Caledonia is in the midst of a period of political, economic and cultural change as it anticipates strong economic growth and tries to exploit its natural and mineral resources, and to create a national identity. With two major billion-dollar nickel-processing plant projects on the horizon, New Caledonia looks set for an industrial revolution. Having been on standby for nearly two years for exceeding its projected budget, construction resumed in 2004 at the Goro Nickel processing plant in the far south near Prony. It continues to attract criticism from some local Kanak and environmental groups concerned at the long-term environmental effects of effluent from the chemical-extraction method being dumped into the sea.

In the northern province another nickel-processing project near Koné was given the green light to move into the construction phase at the end of 2005. However, many people believe there is not enough room in New Caledonia for two new nickel-processing plant projects to take off at the same time. The country already has one nickel smelter owned by the Société Le Nickel (SLN) in Noumea.

The classification of New Caledonia's lagoon on the Unesco World Heritage list is an ongoing project that makes the headlines from time to time. The project has been endorsed by most groups concerned, however one of the main factors for the remaining opposition is the concern that classification could hamper the progress of the new nickel-processing plants.

Another economic concern is the financial loss to businesses caused by frequent strikes and blockades. This severe industrial action often causes public disruption that affects thousands of commuters mainly in the Noumea region and also jeopardises small local businesses. Politicians, employers associations and trade-union leaders have so far been unable to find a solution and the strikes look set to be an ongoing problem for some time.

In the political sphere, differing interpretations of the electorate make-up for New Caledonia's elections is causing intense debate. Pro-independence parties believe the Noumea Accord stipulates that only French citizens who were resident in New Caledonia before the 1998 accord are eligible to vote. The Loyalist camp, however, believes any French citizen with at least 10 years' residency should be allowed to vote. The French government has promised to try and find a way out of the deadlock.

Culturally, the country is turning towards a new future. The rebirth of Kanak culture, which has been growing stronger over the past 30 years, is at an all-time high. Caldoche culture (that of white people born in New Caledonia) is also being acknowledged as an individual identity. This and the acknowledgement of other cultures is creating an incredibly diverse national identity as New Caledonia attempts to create a common destiny for all its people.

HISTORY

The western Pacific was first populated by hunter-gatherers who came from Southeast Asia at least 50,000 years ago. This was the Pleistocene period, a time when the lowered sea level opened an easy migration route through Indonesia to Australia and New Guinea, and as far as the Solomon Islands.

Subsequent people, collectively known as Austronesians, moved into the area from the west and mixed with the Papuans. These were the ancestors

Noumea's original name, Port-de-France, was changed because mail addressed there kept ending up in Fort-de-France in Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean.

PETROGLYPHS

Petroglyphs, or rock carvings, are found throughout the Pacific. There are more than 350 sites in New Caledonia, with over 4500 designs. They are often geometric – spirals, ellipses, crosses and circles – and sometimes resemble animal or human shapes. The meaning or purpose of petroglyphs remains something of a mystery, as does their age. One theory is that these rock carvings were used to mark out territory at the beginning of the 1st millennium, when tribe numbers were increasing and battles became more frequent. They're not easily seen, apart from at the Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie in Noumea. There is a site by the main road near Païta (see p248); otherwise, if you stay at a Kanak homestay ask whether there are any sites in the vicinity.

of Melanesians and Polynesians. Eventually wider seas were conquered and Austronesians, now known as Lapita, settled over the Melanesian archipelagos. In about 1500 BC, they arrived in New Caledonia from Vanuatu.

The Lapita were both hunter-gatherers and agriculturists and are named after a site near Koné on New Caledonia's main island, Grande Terre, where their elaborate, pinhole-incised pottery was discovered (see p205). Lapita sites include petroglyphs on Grande Terre (see above). From New Caledonia, the Lapita continued to Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, and were the predecessors of Melanesians and Polynesians.

From about the 11th century AD until the 18th century groups of Polynesians also migrated to New Caledonia. They mainly landed on northern Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands, where they intermarried with the Melanesian tribes.

These early settlers of New Caledonia cultivated yams, taro, manioc and other crops; the terraced fields they once worked are still visible in many places on Grande Terre such as Païta, Bourail and Houaïlou.

Life centred around the *grande case*, the clan's largest (conical) hut, where the chief lived. The hut was topped by a wooden rooftop spear known as a *flèche faitière*, which symbolised the presence of the ancient and highly worshipped ancestors. Rule within the clan was by a revered tradition known in French as *la coutume* (custom), which was orally recalled by the tribal elders (see the boxed text, p202).

EUROPEAN ARRIVAL

The first Europeans arrived in New Caledonia in the late 18th century. At the time the indigenous population was estimated to be more than 60,000.

The English explorer James Cook spotted Grande Terre in 1774 when midway through his second scientific expedition in search of Terra Australis. He named it New Caledonia because the terrain on the northeast coast where he landed, reminded him of the highlands of Scotland (called Caledonia by the Romans).

Cook and his crew, aboard HMS *Resolution*, anchored off the northeast coast on 4 September 1774 and spent 10 days exploring the region, where they were given a friendly reception. The *Resolution* then sailed down the east coast of the main island (without sighting the Loyalty Islands) until Cook came across the beautiful Île des Pins (Isle of Pines).

French interest in New Caledonia was sparked 14 years later when Louis XVI sent comte de la Pérouse, Jean-François de Galaup, to explore its

economic potential. But La Pérouse and his crew on the *Astrolabe* and *La Boussole* disappeared in a cyclone on the reefs off Vanikoro in the south-east of the Solomon Islands. The Musée de l'Histoire Maritime in Noumea has detailed information on the shipwreck (see p233). A mission to find them set out from France on 28 September 1791. Led by Admiral Bruny d'Entrecasteaux and Captain Huon de Kermadec, the *Espérance* and *La Recherche* landed at Balade on 17 April 1793, having sailed past Vanikoro where, it is believed, survivors of La Pérouse's expedition were still living.

Shortly after arriving in New Caledonia, de Kermadec died. D'Entrecasteaux and members of his crew carried out an exploration of northern New Caledonia, crossing by foot from the east to the west coast and back again. They stayed a month but were not given the same friendly reception as Cook. One recent theory given for the different perceptions of the English and French is that Cook and his crew had introduced new diseases that had killed many natives. As a result, they were much less welcoming to the new group of Europeans.

In 1793 D'Entrecasteaux made the first European sighting of Ouvéa, the northernmost of the Loyalty Islands; however, he died on the return journey to France. In the same year, the English captain Raven on the *Britannia* sighted Maré, the southernmost of the Loyalty Islands, and reported the presence of sandalwood. But it wasn't until 1827 that the Loyalty Islands were correctly charted by the French explorer Dumont d'Urville.

HUNTERS & TRADERS

British and American whalers were the first commercial seafarers to make landfall on the islands. The British whalers set out from the small Australian settlement of Port Jackson (now Sydney) and by 1840 had set up an oil-extraction station on Lifou, the largest of the Loyalty Islands.

The whalers were followed by sandalwood traders, who were the first Europeans to have any real impact on the islanders. Sandalwood was traditionally burnt as incense in Chinese temples. Between 1840 and 1850, traders operating out of Australia almost completely stripped first Île des Pins, then the Loyalty Islands and finally Grande Terre's east coast. The traders gave the islanders tobacco and alcohol or metal tools such as axes, nails and fish-hooks in return for the sandalwood. With their ships loaded, they sailed to China, where the fragrant wood was traded for tea for Australia.

Later in the 19th century, many Kanaks were recruited to work on plantations in Australia. Some stayed on and their descendants still live there.

MISSIONARIES

During the 19th century both Catholic (French) and Protestant (English) missionaries arrived in New Caledonia. In 1841, two Samoan Protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) were the first to arrive on Île des Pins. Though soon driven off by unreceptive locals, the British missionaries successfully established themselves on Lifou in 1842. Meanwhile French Marists established a mission at Balade on the northeast coast of Grande Terre in December 1843. See p283 for more information.

Anne Pitoiset's *Nouvelle-Calédonie, Horizons Pacifiques* gives a brief historical background and a look at contemporary events in New Caledonia.

TIMELINE 1500BC

The Lapita, New Caledonia's first inhabitants, arrive from Vanuatu

1774

European discovery of New Caledonia by Captain James Cook

1853

French annexation of New Caledonia

1864

The first convicts arrive in the new penal colony

In addition to Christianity, the Protestant missionaries introduced cricket. An adapted version is still played today and is wildly popular. With the introduction of Christianity, polygamy and cannibalism eventually ceased.

A detailed account of convict transportation and political deportation to New Caledonia is given in *Île d'Exile, Terre d'Asile*, published by Musée de la Ville de Nouméa.

FRENCH ANNEXATION

In the early 1850s, the French were looking for a strategic military location, as well as an alternative penal settlement to French Guyana in South America, whose unhealthy climate had resulted in a high mortality rate among the convicts.

In 1853, Napoleon III ordered the annexation of New Caledonia and the French flag was raised at Balade on 24 September 1853. Britain did not react; however, an article in the Australian newspaper *Sydney Morning Herald* criticised Britain's slackness for not beating the French to colonise New Caledonia, a strategic point on the trade route between Australia and China and the west coast of America. There was also a negative reaction to France's plans to establish New Caledonia as a penal colony after the recently won struggle to abolish convict transportation to Australia (1852).

LA NOUVELLE – THE PENAL COLONY

Exile and deportation are a sorry but irrefutable chapter in the history of New Caledonia. During its penal-colony years convicts banished to New Caledonia were said to be going to *La Nouvelle*. These days New Caledonia is often referred to by the other half of its name: *La Calédonie*.

The first convict ships arrived in May 1864 at Port-de-France (present-day Noumea) after an arduous six-month journey from France, around the Cape of Good Hope. On arrival, the convicts were kept in large huts on Île Nou (present-day Nouville) while the penitentiary was being built. They carried out the colony's public works, including the construction of roads and Noumea's Cathédrale St Joseph.

Between 1887 and 1895, the most difficult convicts were sent to Camp Brun where conditions were so harsh that it was referred to as 'the slaughterhouse'.

France continued to send convicts to New Caledonia until 1897. Around 25,000 hard-labour convicts and petty offenders in total were sent to New Caledonia; only 1000 were women. Once freed, the majority of ex-convicts were obliged to settle in the colony since hard-labour convicts sentenced to eight years and over were subject to 'perpetual residence in the colony' even after they had served their sentence. Some obtained land concessions and others took up trades. Those that were unable to reintegrate society ended their days in the penitentiary's old people's home. Of the 1700 or so hard-labour Arab convicts sent to the colony, most stayed on after they were freed and settled mainly in the Bourail area where their descendants still live.

Although levels of comfort, such as the installation of electricity, in the penitentiary improved with time, diminished funding towards end of the penal colony period meant certain conditions, such as access to health care, worsened. The convict penitentiary was finally closed in 1928 and, as if to bury the episode, Île Nou was renamed Nouville.

The Paris Uprising & Arab Deportees

In 1871, following the Paris Commune uprising, some 4300 political deportees or Communards were banished to New Caledonia. Unlike hard-labour convicts, Communards weren't imprisoned but were restricted to

DEPORTEES

Following are profiles of some of the colony's more famous political deportees.

Victor-Henri Rochefort, Marquis de Rochefort-Lucay (1831–1913)

In 1868 Henri Rochefort became widely known when he began publishing *La Lanterne*, a daily newspaper in which he lambasted the imperial regime and which enjoyed an astonishing popularity. Although not a true Communard, he was nevertheless arrested and condemned to deportation in New Caledonia, where he arrived in 1873. He was confined on the Ducos Peninsula but only three months later made a spectacular escape, together with five other deportees, and succeeded in reaching Australia. When the general amnesty was granted to the Paris Communist deportees in 1880, Rochefort returned to Paris and founded another newspaper, *L'Intransigeant*, in which he continued to criticise the authorities, a stance which cost him a further six years of exile, 1889–95. Later, because he chose to oppose the campaign to exonerate Captain Dreyfus, a Jewish officer convicted unjustly of spying, he was disowned by his party. However, he remained a loyal friend of Louise Michel (see below) to whom he also gave a lifelong pension.

Louise Michel (1830–1905)

Louise Michel was a provincial schoolteacher until she arrived in Paris where she espoused the republican cause and played an active role in the Commune. After her arrest she was sentenced to deportation and arrived in New Caledonia in December 1873 in the same convoy as Henri Rochefort. She spent five years on the Ducos Peninsula. In January 1879 she moved to Noumea where she supported herself by giving lessons, especially teaching music, to the children of the town. Louise Michel left New Caledonia in September 1880 after the general amnesty; she was remembered for her generosity, her sensitivity towards the natural environment of New Caledonia, and her fascination with the Kanak society with which she had little direct contact, but of which she always spoke with warmth and sympathy.

Ahmed Bou Mezrag Ben el Hadj el Mokrani (d 1905)

Ahmed Bou Mezrag el Mokrani, the brother of the *bachaga*, arrived in Noumea at the end of 1874 and was detained on Île des Pins then on the Ducos Peninsula after 1880. Eventually he was permitted freedom of movement, established a flourishing business trading between Noumea and Île des Pins, and lived in a de facto relationship with Eugénie Lemarchand, a former prisoner of the penal colony. The two general amnesties granted to political prisoners in 1879 and 1880 did not apply to the Arab deportees, although individual amnesties were given in subsequent years. When a general amnesty was finally granted in February 1895 there were only 24 of the original 116 Algerian deportees still in New Caledonia. However, since the Governor General of Algeria opposed the return of Ahmed Bou Mezrag, he was not granted an amnesty until January 1904, by which time he was a respected and well-liked citizen of Noumea who, before his departure, made his farewells to the citizens of Noumea with a public parade through the streets of the town. For many years his establishment had been the gathering place for the Arabs of Noumea, who respected him as their unofficial leader. He and his companion, Eugénie, sailed for Marseilles in May 1904; he died the following year in his homeland of Algeria (see p194).

1878

Kanak revolt led by Chief Ataï against land appropriation by French settlers

1917

Another Kanak revolt, this time to oppose forced recruitment into French army during WWI

1942

40,000 US troops arrive when US army sets up WWII base in New Caledonia

1946–1957

Kanaks progressively get the right to vote and to French citizenship

certain areas. Most Communards were sent to Île des Pins but a few of the more 'dangerous' ones were exiled on the Ducos Peninsula near Noumea. Among the more famous of these was Henri de Rochefort, a newspaper editor who was a member of parliament in 1869. Another well-known deportee was the feminist and anarchist Louise Michel, who was also imprisoned at Ducos. For more information see p193.

In 1870 Arab warriors in Algeria, France's North African colony, revolted against the colonial government. This uprising became known as the Mokrani Uprising after Mohamed Ben el Hadj el Mokrani, the *bachaga* (high-ranking official in the Arab administration) of Medjana who was killed during the uprising. Repression by the French authorities was swift and relentless, and some of those tried and found guilty of civil offences were initially condemned to death. However, these sentences were eventually commuted to deportation as the President of the Republic recognised the political nature of their activities. The rebellion was crushed and 110 Berber leaders were sent to Île des Pins and Ducos in 1874. For more information about deportees see p193.

By 1879, a series of pardons for the Communards was granted, allowing many of them to return to France. With the exception of Bou Mezrag Al Mokrani, the Arab deportees were granted a general amnesty in 1891 although prior to this date, many had received individual pardons. All the Arab deportees eventually left the colony.

THE REVOLT OF 1878

In the 1860s and 1870s, aided by the discovery of nickel in 1864, a programme was set up to bring settlers from France. Hostilities between the Kanaks and the French arose as the settlers encroached on tribal lands. The process of taking Melanesian land began in earnest under Governor Guillain (1862–70). Large tracts of land were taken over for cattle farming. This destroyed the Kanaks' taro and yam beds and wrecked their irrigation channels.

Some of the best land was taken from Chief Ataï for an extension of the La Foa penitentiary, which led to the revolt of 1878. The revolt, led by Ataï, broke out around La Foa and Boulouparis. It continued for seven months, involving clans all the way from Boulouparis to Poya. The French military eventually crushed the revolt with the help of allied Kanak tribes. In all, 200 French and 1200 Kanaks, including Ataï, were killed. As a result of the rebellion, 800 Kanaks were exiled to either the Îles Bélep or Île des Pins. A handful were sent to Tahiti. The women were given as a reward to Kanak tribes who had sided with the French.

ESTABLISHING THE COLONIAL ORDER

Full-scale colonisation began at the end of the 19th century. However, it was the *indigénat* system, instituted by the French soon after the 1878 revolt, that was to be the most damning aspect of colonisation. This system put Kanaks outside of French common law, legally giving them a subordinate status. The locals were forced into reservations in the mountainous highlands, which they could leave only with police permission. Interisland trading routes among Kanaks were halted and religious or

KANAK DEPORTATION

In New Caledonia itself, the sentence for those of the Kanak population who were found guilty of political insurrection or activities hostile to French rule was exile to Île des Pins, the Loyalty Islands or deportation to penal institutions in other French colonies. In many cases, particularly those of mass exile or deportation, the damage to Kanak society as a whole was devastating.

Chiefs were invariably sentenced to deportation. In 1858, Chief Bouarate of Hienghène was found guilty of plotting against the French and hostility towards the French missionaries and was deported to the Fort of Taravao in Tahiti, where he served five years before being pardoned.

Nine years later, 13 Kanaks from Pouébo were sentenced to exile with hard labour on the island of Lifou. The 10 who survived were later deported to the prison of Poulo Condor in Cochinchina (now southern Vietnam); their Chief, Ouarébate, was deported to Tahiti. All had been found guilty of crimes committed during the uprising at Pouébo in October 1867.

The Kanak revolt of 1878 was, for the most part, punished by internal exile to the Île des Pins or the Îles Bélep in the north. However, a number of chiefs were deported much further to Tahiti, including Chief Boerou who died in hospital in Papeete in 1879, and the high chief of Oua-Tom who remained there until 1888.

After the second conflict between opposing Catholic and Protestant factions on the island of Maré, in 1881 15 Protestant chiefs were deported to the prison at Poulo Condor. Their letters describe a life of abject misery – beatings, lack of food, malnutrition, deprivation, complete isolation, illness and death. Truly, a very high price was exacted for their misdeeds.

In 1887 Chief Poindi-Patchili was arrested and deported to Obock near Djibouti where he died the following year. The incumbent high chief of Hienghène in 1894, the young Bouarate, was exiled to the Île des Pins before being granted an amnesty in 1896. He was subsequently deported to Tahiti, thus following in the footsteps of his grandfather.

ancestral ties to sites and places were ignored. They were forced to work for settlers or the colonial authorities.

When the flow of convicts stopped in 1897, the settlers' free-labour supply was extinguished (although the Kanaks were soon brought in to fill the convicts' place). The metallurgical industry, whose mines had previously been worked by hundreds of convicts, faced the same labour crisis. The flow of foreign labour – mainly from Indonesia, Indochina and Japan – that began in the early 1890s increased.

The Kanak population began to decline, dropping from 42,500 in 1887 to only 28,000 in 1901. The *indigénat* system was reviewed every decade until WWII, with the French authorities deciding on each occasion that the natives hadn't reached sufficient moral or intellectual standards to run their own affairs. Not until 1946, when the system was abolished, were they allowed to leave their reservations without permission.

THE WORLD WARS

During WWI 2145 men from New Caledonia, including 1005 Kanaks, were sent to the French and Turkish fronts. Nearly 600 died, including 382 Kanaks. Noumea's Musée de la Ville (see p233) has a permanent exhibition on New Caledonian WWI soldiers.

The Kanak soldiers had been volunteered by their chiefs under pressure from colonial authorities. This and other reasons resulted in the

EVOLUTION OF PENAL-COLONY CONDITIONS

1864 – length of journey about 6 months in sailing ship via Cape of Good Hope

1897 – length of journey 1½ months in steamship via Suez Canal

1880 – end of corporal punishment

early 20th century – telephone and electricity installed in penitentiary

1970s

Nickel boom attracts 20–25,000 immigrants from France

1984–1988

Les Événements, a period of violent confrontations throughout New Caledonia between pro-independence and loyalist supporters

1988

Matignon Accords signed outlining 10-year period of development and greater autonomy from France

1998

Noumea Accord signed establishing 15- to 20-year period of stability and growth towards possible independence

1917 Kanak revolt in the Koné-Hienghène led by Chief Noël. Two hundred Kanaks, including Noël, and 11 French died in the uprising.

The Kanak population reached its lowest level shortly after WWI. In 1923, the teaching of French in schools became compulsory and the practices of Kanak medicine men were outlawed, with the threat of jail for anyone practising 'wizardry'.

During WWII the majority of French people in New Caledonia chose to support President Charles de Gaulle and the Free French Forces as opposed to the collaborationist Vichy regime that took over France in WWII. New Caledonians and Tahitians fought in North Africa, Italy and France with the Pacific Battalion, nicknamed the Guitarists' Battalion because they seized every opportunity for a sing-along.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor all New Caledonia's Japanese workers were rounded up and exiled. Many had married local women and families were torn apart. Many of those who were exiled did not have the financial means to return and never saw their families again.

The USA set up a military base on Grande Terre and, in early 1942, 40,000 American and a smaller number of New Zealand personnel arrived. The influence of the Americans, in particular, ushered in a new modern era for New Caledonia.

THE POSTWAR PERIOD

New Caledonia's status was changed from a colony to a French overseas territory after WWII. In 1946, Kanaks were given French citizenship and progressively, over the next decade, gained the right to vote.

In 1953, the first political party involving Kanaks was formed. Union Calédonienne (UC) was a coalition of Kanaks, white small-scale land-owners, the missions and union supporters. The UC was to dominate the New Caledonian political scene over the next two decades. During this period, Roch Pidjot, the man who later became known as the 'grandfather of the independence struggle' became the first Kanak to be elected to the French National Assembly.

The nickel boom of the 1960s and '70s brought prosperity but also caused an imbalance in the country's way of life as farmers and Kanaks left their land to work in the mines. By the late 1960s a new wave of immigrants – people from New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), Wallisians, Tahitians and a large number of French people – arrived on the nickel 'bandwagon'.

THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

A new political consciousness was raised by the first Kanak university students, who returned from France in 1969 having witnessed the student protests in Paris the year before. One such student was Nidoish Naisseline, the son of the chief of Maré, who formed the Foulards Rouges (Red Scarves), a group that took pride in its Kanak culture. Kanak politician, writer and feminist Déwé Gorodey was an early member of the group. She was elected vice president of New Caledonia's government in 2001 and again in 2004.

Having witnessed the evolution of independence in Fiji (1970) and Papua New Guinea (1975), new political groups formed and wanted more than the limited autonomy that the UC had previously aspired to. In 1975 the Kanak leader Yann Celene Uregei first spoke of independence. In the 1979 territorial assembly the majority of Kanak parties united to form the Front Indépendantiste (Independence Front).

In 1977 the loyalist Rassemblement pour Calédonie dans la République (RPCR) was set up by Jacques Lafleur. It became the main adversary of the pro-independence movement.

In 1983 round-table talks were held in France between the government and pro- and anti-independence leaders, at which France accepted the 'innate and active right to independence of Kanak people'. In turn, the pro-independence leaders recognised that other communities in the territory, principally the Caldoches, were 'victims of history' and had as much right to live in New Caledonia as the Kanaks.

LES ÉVÉNEMENTS

The turning point for the independence movement was 1984, the year that Les Événements (the Events) began. In 1984 the Front Indépendantiste, along with other pro-independence parties, became the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) with Jean-Marie Tjibaou at its helm.

The FLNKS immediately boycotted the forthcoming territorial election and proclaimed the Provisional Government of Kanaky, presided over by Tjibaou. Ten days later, mixed-race settlers killed 10 Kanaks near Hienghène (see p277). With the country on the brink of civil war, a plan that included a referendum on independence and self-government 'in association' with France was proposed in January 1985. But it was rejected by the independence movement.

A few days later, after the murder of a young settler Yves Tuval, one of the most radical FLNKS leaders, Eloi Machoro, was killed by paramilitary marksmen near La Foa. His death sparked riots all over New Caledonia and a six-month state of emergency was declared.

France decided to usher in a new program of land reforms and increased autonomy for Kanaks.

After the French legislative elections in May 1986, an uneasy calm prevailed as the new conservative minister in charge of the territory released his plan for New Caledonia's future. It stripped the territory's four regional councils of much of their autonomy and abolished the office that had been buying back land for Kanaks. A referendum on the question of independence was scheduled for late 1987. The FLNKS wanted eligible voters to consist only of Kanaks and those people who were born in the territory with at least one parent also of New Caledonian birth. With a United Nation's resolution backing this demand, the FLNKS decided, if France would not agree to it, that it would boycott the referendum. By now rifts had begun to appear in the FLNKS.

In December 1986, the UN General Assembly voted 89 to 24 in favour of New Caledonia's re-inscription on the UN's decolonisation list. It was an important step towards independence, as it gave international credence to the territory's 'inalienable right to self-determination'.

On 13 September 1987, the referendum on independence was held and boycotted by 84% of Kanaks. Of the 59% of eligible voters who cast a ballot (which included everyone who had lived in the country for more than three years, such as all the nickel-boom immigrants of the 1960s and 1970s), 98% were against independence. The referendum was trumpeted as a resounding victory by loyalists in the territory and the conservative French government.

In October, the seven men charged with murdering the 10 Kanaks at Hienghène in 1984 went before the court. The magistrate ruled that they had acted in 'self-defence' and would not stand further trial.

The French National Assembly approved a new plan for the territory put forward by the government in January 1987, and called an election for 24 April 1988, the same day as the first round of voting for the French presidency. The new plan redefined the four regional council boundaries

Le Pays du Non-Dit by Louis-José Barbançon gives an analysis of New Caledonia's political environment in the 1980s.

Kanaké – The Melanesian Way: a study (available in English) by Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Philippe Missote of Kanak culture following the Melanesia 2000 festival of 1975.

so that the Kanaks were likely to lose one region and be left with the country's most underdeveloped and resourceless areas.

In April 1988, just before the French presidential elections, the Ouvéa crisis erupted (see p315). The Socialists were returned to power in France and a concerted effort was made to end the bloodshed in New Caledonia.

THE MATIGNON ACCORDS

In June 1988, the newly elected French Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, brokered the Accords de Matignon, an historic peace agreement signed at the Hôtel Matignon, the Prime Minister's office, by the two New Caledonian leaders, Tjibaou and Lafleur.

Under the accords, New Caledonia was divided into three regions: the Southern Province, the Northern Province and the Loyalty Islands Province. The accords stated that a referendum on self-determination would be held in 10 years. In May 1989, Tjibaou and his second in command, Yeiwene Yeiwene, were assassinated.

TOWARDS A COMMON DESTINY

Following the Matignon Accords period, a new agreement between the FLNKS, RPCR and French government was signed in Noumea in 1998. The Noumea Accord lays out a 15- to 20-year period of growth and development culminating in a referendum on independence. The accord outlines the setting up of local institutions including a local government, which was established in 1999. The government is made up of both pro-independence and loyalist party members. The Noumea Accord period also involves the gradual transfer of administrative powers from the government of France to the government of New Caledonia. It also calls for the building of a common destiny through the selection of symbols of national identity such as an anthem and flag.

THE CULTURE

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

For years New Caledonians have used the catch phrase 'France in the Pacific' to promote their country on the international tourist market. It's true that New Caledonians speak French, and croissants and baguettes are an important part of their diet. However, there is a unique Pacific identity mixed into the French influence. The laid-back Pacific way New Caledonians carry out some tasks – with a complete disregard for time constraints – contrasts totally with the structured and efficient Western attitude with which they approach others.

In Noumea, while there is nothing French about part of the population, a good proportion of the capital's inhabitants have an unmistakable Frenchness about them. You will notice it in the streets when impeccably groomed women in designer clothes waft past you in clouds of expensive perfume. You are also bound to notice the topless women without an ounce of fat on their tanned bodies adorning the beaches while their equally tanned male counterparts in skimpy Speedos doze gently beside them.

Noumea is where many French and Caldoche people (white people born in New Caledonia) 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 every evening you'll see them cycling, jogging and walking around the city's picturesque southern bays.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The term 'Kanak' (or *canaque* as the French originally spelt it) was invented by early Europeans living in Polynesia. It is probably derived from the word 'Kanakas', which was used for people from the South Pacific who were abducted by blackbirders (slavers) to work in Australia and other places in the 19th century. The word was viewed by New Caledonia's indigenous people as an insult and it eventually died out as the French colonial authorities preferred to use *indigène* (native). It wasn't until the early 1970s, when political consciousness and cultural revival were on the agenda, that New Caledonia's indigenous people proudly reclaimed the name Kanak.

The word Caldoche originated in the 1960s. It was initially used as a pejorative term by new French arrivals in the territory. Many Caldoches still don't like this term and prefer to be referred to by the more politically correct term 'Calédoniens'.

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. Their natural shyness means it takes a while to break the ice. Once the initial introductions are over, don't expect them to be bubbling with conversation. Westerners, for whom small talk is a sign of friendliness, may feel slightly uncomfortable. But if you relax you will soon find that the silence is companionable rather than awkward.

Broussards on the other hand are great storytellers and you will find it hard to fit a word in edgewise. Their anecdotes are a touch fanciful and sorting out the facts from the fiction can be challenging. The one thing all rural New Caledonians have in common is their generosity and warm hospitality.

LIFESTYLE

For people who live in Noumea the 'big city' is a place to work, study, shop and go pubbing and nightclubbing. But come the weekend and holidays, all Noumeans generally pack up the car and head out of the city.

Family is very important in all of New Caledonia's cultures. In Kanak and Caldoche cultures, for instance, urban dwellers will spend the weekend or holidays on the family property or in their *tribus* (rural Kanak settlements) where the lifestyle is convivial and outdoor activities such as fishing and hunting are high on the list of pastimes. Hunting is usually a male domain but women take part in fishing. Men will spend the best part of a day in a motor-boat out at the barrier reef spear-fishing while women will gather shells on the coral platforms at low tide, crabs from among the mangrove roots, or shrimps from the rivers. Needless to say, both Kanak and Caldoche cuisine is based around fish, seafood or spoils of the hunt.

For Kanaks, tending their yam and taro gardens is another important activity. They live a communal lifestyle that emphasises sharing of wealth and family support.

Having no family properties or *tribus*, Métros or Zoreilles (immigrants from France) head out of Noumea to rural *gîtes*, camping grounds and hotels for relaxation and to meet and mix with Kanak or Caldoche families. In the Northern and Loyalty Islands provinces, there is a strong emphasis on local tourism, the local tourists being the expatriate French people.

Traditional Kanak Culture

The clan, not the individual, was *the* important element in traditional Kanak society. Life was based on communal principles achieved through village living. Village life ensured that nobody went hungry or was un-

'Tata' is an informal New Caledonian way of saying goodbye.

Information on Kanak history and culture can be found at www.adck.nc.

THE GRANDE CASE

The *grande case*, or 'big hut', is one of the strongest symbols of the Kanak community. Having followed the same building pattern for centuries, it is the widest and tallest *case* in each clan settlement, and traditionally home to the chief. Today, the chiefs all have modern homes, called *chefferies*, located close to the *grande case*, where the tribal gatherings and discussions still take place.

In building a *case*, the central pillar, an immense trunk of a carefully chosen tree, is erected first. It will support the entire *case* and symbolises the chief (in a normal *case*, it represents the family's head). A stone hearth is laid between this post and the door where a fire is lit for warmth during the cool months. Smoke also helps keep the thatch waterproof.

The entrance to the *grande case* is via a low doorway flanked by wide wooden boards. These are often carved in the form of a face and called *katara*, meaning 'the sentinel who reports the arrival of strangers'. 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, symbolising the clan's close link with the chief. Finally, a *flèche faitière* (rooftop wooden spear) is erected on the roof and traditional money is hung or buried nearby, providing an important link with the ancestral and spiritual world.

Replicas of *grandes cases* from various parts of New Caledonia can be seen at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Noumea.

cared for – everyone contributed in some aspect, whether it was fishing, gathering food, tending fields, sculpting wood or repairing huts. In return, everyone reaped the rewards. The ancient Kanak code of *la coutume* (see p202) kept this system alive and it provided a common bond and understanding between all Kanaks. This aspect of Kanak culture is very much alive today.

THE CLAN

Some 300 clans are believed to have existed when white people first arrived. The missionaries coined the term 'tribe' to describe a clan or subclan (*'la tribu'* in French). Each clan lived in its own *tribu* and had its own totem – often deriving its name from its totem. The clan's lineage continued through the bloodline of one person and was linked or related to a spiritual ancestor. Relationships with these ancestors and the spirit world were strong, and were demonstrated by symbolic festivals and dances. Each clan had its own traditions and legends. Bridal exchanges and polygamy meant many villages were interrelated. The clan's activity was centred around the largest hut, the *grande case*, where the chief lived (see above).

THE CHIEF

Men became chiefs either on a hereditary basis or were appointed for their skills. In this oral society, eloquence was highly revered and the greatest chiefs were those who could best use the power of words. The chief administered justice and, when necessary, declared wars. Assistance was given to him through a council of elders, made up of the oldest men of each family in the clan. Today, the chief represents or speaks for the local community.

THE WOMEN'S CLAN

In Kanak culture a woman generally becomes a member of her husband's family after marriage, and children are named after the father. However, when a child is born, it is permanently linked to its mother's clan through the mother's brother, known as the 'maternal' uncle. The maternal uncle takes on a role in the child's life that is more important than that of the father, because he is the child's guardian and lifetime mentor.

The missionaries found the traditional grass skirts worn by women to be immodest and introduced the Kanak or 'Mother Hubbard' dress. This shin-length, loose-fitting dress, usually adorned with lace, is still the preferred dress of many Kanak women today.

Caledonian & French Culture

French culture is firmly implanted in Noumea and, to a degree, along Grande Terre's west coast, but not in New Caledonia as a whole.

The Broussards, rural Caldoches, are typically hard-working folk who enjoy fishing, hunting, and rodeos. Their forebears were mainly convicts and free settlers. Over the years, the Broussards have forged a culture of their own that, according to some, is more akin to that of outback folk in neighbouring Australia than anything in France. Indeed, the Australian stockman's hat is very much a part of their dress code.

Métros and Caledonians, urban Caldoches, epitomise the most renowned aspects of French culture: cuisine, clothing, art and sport. Noumea has a bounty of restaurants specialising in French cuisine.

POPULATION

The last census, carried out in 2004, tallied the population at around 230,000. Two-thirds of the population lives 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.

The population is largely confined to what is referred to as 'Greater Noumea', which includes the capital and nearby towns of Dumbéa, Païta and Mont-Dore.

SPORT

New Caledonians love sport. Football (soccer) is the most popular spectator sport and is a uniting factor for the population. The country has produced several international football stars over the years, including Christian Karembeu from Lifou who played for France in the late '90s and early 2000s. In 1998, he was part of France's World Cup champion team. Soccer is mainly played by men.

TIPS ON MEETING KANAKS

In the rural areas even if you're inside a vehicle going past pedestrians you'll soon find you do a lot of waving.

The ancient Kanak customary law of offering visitors food persists. Arriving in a village, you may be invited to share a cup of tea or coffee or even an entire meal in the house of someone you met only 10 minutes earlier. Nothing more than a 'thank you' is expected in return if you are just passing through. However, if you stay a day or so, out of politeness you should present your host with some food.

Do not enter a *tribu* wearing just swimwear or revealing shorts. Women should make sure their skirts or pants are of a 'decent' length and men shouldn't be bare-chested. Dressing in revealing clothes is OK around the beach suburbs of Noumea, but everywhere outside the capital it's frowned upon. Going topless is fine on Noumean beaches but it's not accepted outside the capital.

Traditional Kanak cemeteries are the abode of the ancestors and, unless you have permission from tribal elders, you should not enter these places.

Visitors are expected to ask permission from local people before exploring forests, swimming in *trous* (deep rock pools), or wandering around any tribal areas.

La Brousse en Folie (The Mad Bush) is a comic book series by Bernard Berger that follows the adventures of four typically Caledonian characters. It includes *Beating Around the Bush*, the only book of the series that is translated into English.

LA COUTUME

La coutume (custom) is the essential component of Kanak identity. This code for living encompasses rites, rituals and social interaction between and within the clans, and maintains the all-important link with the ancestors. Nowadays, modernity often clashes with *la coutume*.

The exchange of gifts is an important element of *la coutume*, as it creates a much-revered network of mutual obligations. The one who offers a gift receives prestige from this action while placing an obligation, which is never ignored, on the receiver to respond. After a gift is given discussions relevant to the event (marriage, mourning, festival, welcoming visitors) are held.

When Kanaks enter the home of a chief, they offer a small token as a sign of respect and to introduce themselves; a few metres of cloth, money, and a packet of tobacco. If you're given the rare privilege of being invited to a tribal home, you should respect *la coutume* by bringing a gift as you would in most other cultures. When you want to camp on a clan's ground or visit a site, you should first introduce yourself to the chief or someone from the clan.

Women play mainly volleyball and cricket, which are also played by men. New Caledonian cricket is based on the British game but has been adapted over the years to suit local taste.

Another popular sport, this time inherited from the French, is *pétanque*. Sometimes called *boules* (bowls), it's played mainly by men in the cool of the late afternoon on a flat, hard, dirt pitch (a *boulodrome*) in the shade of large trees. *Pétanque* is played passionately by French, Caldoches and Kanaks all around the country. In Noumea there are two places to watch the game; on the beachfront at Anse Vata and in Place des Cocotiers.

There are many successful athletes in the country. For years, the New Caledonian team has dominated the points table at the Pacific Games held every four years around the Pacific. This success is due in part to good sporting facilities and the availability of qualified coaches.

Triathlons and marathons are held between May and November. During these months multisport orienteering events are also held throughout the country. One of the most popular is called the Trans-Caledonian, a coast-to-coast run held in July. An event is scheduled almost every weekend of the season.

MULTICULTURALISM

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

Kanaks

Kanak is the local name given to New Caledonian Melanesians. Melanesians in general are the group of people who inhabit many of the islands in the southwestern Pacific (see the boxed text, p199).

The large majority live in clan communities known as *tribus*, inland or along Grande Terre's east coast, on Île des Pins and on the Loyalty Islands. In recent decades many Kanaks have left their traditional life in search of work and education in Noumea but they still maintain a strong attachment to their *tribus*.

Inhabitants of European Descent

New Caledonia's European population has several distinct groups.

CALDOCHES

There are two groups of Caldoches; urban Caldoches who often prefer to be referred to by the term Calédoniens, and rural Caldoches known as

Broussards (people from the bush). Caldoches are those who were born in New Caledonia, with ancestral ties that go back to the days of the penal colony, or to the early French settlers. Broussards generally settled in rural areas along Grande Terre's west coast, where many continue to run large cattle properties. Calédoniens live mainly in and around Noumea and a large number are civil servants.

Many Caldoches find this term derogatory so it is better to refer to them as Calédoniens. This can cause some confusion since, depending on the context, the term Calédoniens can also refer to all New Caledonians or second-generation inhabitants.

MÉTROS OR ZOREILLES

The term Métros comes from Métropolitains, as in metropolitan France and refers to French people not born in New Caledonia but who have migrated temporarily or permanently from France. Zoreille is a more colloquial term used to describe them and, depending on the context, can be derogatory. Many Métros who have been in the country for a longish period will themselves use it to refer to newly arrived Métros. It implies someone not used to the 'local way' of doing things and is often used to poke fun at new arrivals.

There's a small community of about 2000 *piets noirs* (literally black feet), as Algerian-born French colonialists are called by their fellow French. They moved to New Caledonia after the fall of Algiers in 1962.

Other New Caledonians

POLYNESIANS

There is a large Polynesian population in New Caledonia. Some are from French Polynesia but the majority are from the French territory of Wallis and Futuna, northeast of Fiji and are known as Wallisians. A larger number of Wallisians live in New Caledonia than live in their homeland and they make up 12% of the population. Their opposition to independence has created a strong divide between them and pro-independence Kanak.

ASIANS

People of Asian origin including Indonesians, Vietnamese and Chinese arrived in New Caledonia in the early 20th century and again in the '60s and '70s with the nickel boom. They have strong ties to their culture and many speak French as a second language. Today they are mainly involved in the trade sector. There are many Asian shops in Noumea's Chinatown area (see p236).

OTHERS

Other ethnic groups include ni-Vanuatu and, with the development of new mining projects, there is a steady trickle of English-speaking foreigners from countries such as Australia and Canada.

RELIGION

Religion holds an important place in society. The Christian Protestant and Catholic faiths have the greatest following. Almost two-thirds of the population is Catholic. Believers are made up of mainly European, Kanak, Polynesian and French descent. Other religious groups include Muslims, generally of Indonesian or Arab descent, Mormons, Buddhists, Baha'ists, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Les Cœurs Barbelés by Claudine Jacques is a love story showing the cultural differences between the Kanak and Caldoche lovers but at the same time highlighting their similarities.

The website of the popular comic book series *La Brousse en Folie* (www.brousse-en-folie.com) has loads of information on New Caledonian society.

In New Caledonia the nickname for Australians is Pokens.

WHERE AM I?

In New Caledonia it is easy to get confused with place names as they often have more than one name or different spellings. This explains why you may be under the impression that you are in two places at once. On the northeast coast of Grande Terre road signs indicate two variations of place names; the original Kanak name and the contemporary version (usually a French misrepresentation of the original name). However, it is not uncommon for a place name to have three or four variations. In this book we have used the most common names and spellings.

WOMEN IN NEW CALEDONIA

New Caledonian women have been actively involved in local associations for many years and are the movers and the shakers at grass-roots level. However, it is only since the introduction of the French law on political parity in the early 2000s that they have taken a more prominent role in politics. The law requires all party lists to have an equal number of male and female candidates, including in the top positions.

The 2004 New Caledonian government elections saw women elected to both the top positions of president and vice president. Marie-Noëlle Thémereau became the country's first woman president while Kanak writer Déwé Gorodey retained the vice president's position she had held since the previous mandate.

Kanak women, including Gorodey, are currently lobbying for admission to the Kanak customary senate, a body that advises the government on customary issues.

ARTS

Art in New Caledonia dates back to ancient Lapita pottery (see opposite) from 1500 BC. Today the main fine arts include both traditional and contemporary wood and soapstone sculptures, paintings including sand and bark paintings, weaving and basketwork. The Tjibou Cultural Centre (see p234) has temporary and permanent exhibitions featuring examples of both traditional and contemporary art.

Traditional Sculpture
WOOD

In older times, spirits were carved in wood, and today the art of sculpture embodies the spirit of Kanak culture. The most important wooden sculpture is the *flèche faitière*, which resembles a small totem pole with symbolic shapes.

Other wooden carvings resemble hawks, ancient gods, serpents and turtles. They were often carved from tree trunks and placed as a palisade or fence around important objects such as the *grande case*. An interesting example of these carvings – which looks vaguely like a mini Stonehenge – surrounds a religious memorial near the village of Vao on Île des Pins.

War clubs were carved from the strongest trees and were fashioned with a phallic head, known in French as a *casse-tête* (head-breaker), or as an equally lethal bird's-beak club or *bec d'oiseau*.

In conflicts, spears made from niaouli trees were used; these were often lit and thrown into the enemy's hut to set it alight.

These days, the art of wood sculpture is alive and well in New Caledonia. Sculptures can be bought in Noumea (see p244), and from roadside stalls along the northeast coast. Prices are considerably cheaper at these stalls than in Noumea.

The Kanak Apple Season by Déwé Gorodey is a collection of short stories offering glimpses into traditional aspects of Kanak life, the status of Kanak women and the struggle for Kanak emancipation.

Find out about New Caledonian writer Jean Mariotti (1901–75) at www.eojeanmariotti.asso.nc.

STONE

The most important stone artefact in New Caledonia is the ceremonial axe, a symbol of the clan's strength and power. It was generally used to decapitate enemies during a battle or to honour ancestors during *pilou* celebrations. The stone of this axe, usually green jade or serpentine, is polished smooth until it resembles a disk. Two holes like eyes are drilled into the central area of the stone, and a handle made of flying-fox fur is woven through these holes and fastened. The bottom of the handle is adorned with stones and shells, with each pendant serving as a symbolic reference to a particular clan.

Soapstone carvings are commonly made, and are sold from curio shops in Noumea, as well as from roadside stalls along the northeast coast. Prices for a small piece depicting an ancestor's face range from about 700CFP in *la brousse* (the outback), to 2000CFP from a shop in the capital.

BAMBOO ENGRAVING

Between 1850 and 1920, anthropologists collected intricately engraved bamboo canes from Kanak communities. As most of these canes date from around the arrival of Europeans, it's unclear whether cane engraving was a form of traditional art dating back many centuries or simply a fad of the time.

The canes averaged a metre in length and were used by Kanaks in dance ceremonies or when entering a village. They contained magic herbs that warded off evil spirits and were covered with designs. The designs were mostly geometrical, although real images – ranging from the *pilou* dance to agricultural motifs and village scenes such as fishing or building a *case* – were also often portrayed. The canes were held over fire to give the engraved areas a black patina.

The Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie in Noumea has a good collection of these old canes on display. Contemporary Kanak artist Micheline Neporon is well known in this field. She has held exhibitions in New Caledonia and has participated in international arts festivals.

Dance

There are many different styles of dance that are currently popular in New Caledonia including *Pilou* (traditional Kanak dance), Tahitian, Vietnamese and Indonesian. Performances are held regularly at festivals and other public events such as the *Jeudis du Centre Ville* (see p233).

Literature

New Caledonia has several book publishers and many authors who make up a dynamic literary scene. Grain de Sable in Noumea is a publisher that

LAPITA POTTERY

The pottery found at Lapita, as the site near Koné became known, formed the basis of the Lapita culture theory. Compared with other archaeological findings elsewhere in the Pacific, it allowed researchers to better understand the original Melanesian migration patterns.

Having its origins in the late Neolithic cultures of the Philippines and east Indonesia, Lapita culture penetrated the west Pacific between 2000 BC and 1000 BC. The people were highly mobile Austronesian-speaking voyagers with advanced maritime technology.

In New Caledonia the pottery styles differed in the north and south, varying from simply decorated objects to those showing a more elaborate approach using handles and glazes. Geometric patterns and stylised human faces were sometimes used as decoration, however better known are the pinhole-incised designs that were carried out using tooth combs.

Le Piéton du Dharma is an Ouessant prize-winning collection of poetry on New Caledonia by Nicolas Kurtovitch.

KANAK MONEY

Kanak ancient bead money was not a currency in the common sense of the word, for it was never used for buying or exchanging. Instead, it was given as a customary exchange of respect at a birth, marriage, funeral or other ceremonial event, and as a seal to support and maintain relationships and alliances that had somehow been previously damaged. The money needed long and careful preparation. It was made in the form of the ancestors, with a carved or woven 'head' from which hung a string of pendants, either of bone, shell or herbs, resembling the 'spinal cord'. It was always presented wrapped in a tapa (bark cloth) pouch. Several examples of old Kanak money (and contemporary versions using plastic beads and wool) can be seen at the Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie in Noumea.

The New Caledonian writers' association site, www.ecrivains-nc.org, has up-to-date information on the country's literary scene.

specialises in works dealing with New Caledonia's heritage. Works include novels, short stories, plays and poetry. Some prominent writers:

Bernard Berger A Caledonian cartoonist. His *Brousse en Folie* comic book series is immensely popular.

Pierre Gope Another Kanak writer whose works include poetry and plays.

Déwé Gorodey A Kanak politician and writer who evokes the struggle for independence in her writing and gives a feminist view of Kanak culture.

Claudine Jacques This French-born writer is another fiction writer to look out for.

Nicolas Kurtovitch A Caledonian who writes poetry, short stories and plays.

Music

In addition to popular Western music and hip-hop, reggae has a huge following. Throughout New Caledonia you can see Kanaks wearing bright green, yellow and red reggae colours and dreadlocks. The immensely popular local music known as Kaneka is a mixture of reggae and traditional Kanak rhythms. For examples of Kaneka bands see p244. Tahitian and other music from the Pacific such as Vanuatu and Fiji is also popular.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Music-making is an important element of traditional ceremonies such as initiation, courting or the end of mourning, and always accompanies dance and song. Sometimes instruments are played simply for the clan's entertainment. Above all, however, Kanak music is vocal.

The following (with Anglicised names) are some of the instruments used in ancient Kanak culture:

Bamboo stamping tubes Struck vertically against the ground and played at main events.

Coconut-leaf whizzer A piece of coconut leaf attached to a string and twirled, producing a noise like a humming bee.

Conch or Triton's shell Used like a trumpet on special occasions and played by a special appointee.

End-blown flute Made from a 50cm-long hollowed pawpaw-leaf stem. The pitch varies depending on the position of the lips and how forcefully the air is blown through the flute.

Jew's-harp (*Wadohnu* in the Nengone language where it originated) Made from a dried piece of coconut palm leaf held between the teeth and an attached segment of soft nerve leaf. When the harp is struck, the musician's mouth acts as an amplifying chamber, producing a soft, low sound.

Oboe Made from hollow grass stems or bamboo.

Percussion instruments These include hitting sticks, palm sheaths that are strummed or hit, and clappers made from a hard bark filled with dried grass and soft niaouli bark, tied together and hit against each other.

Rattles Worn around the legs and made from coconut leaves, shells and certain fruits.

Architecture

Colonial buildings with ornate wrought iron or wood trimming around their roofs and balconies are one of the most aesthetic elements of New

Caledonia's architectural heritage. Noumea has some beautiful examples of colonial houses (see p236). Outside Noumea you will see the occasional colonial house along the main west coast road.

To see a traditional Kanak *case* in Noumea you will have to visit the Tjibaou Cultural Centre or Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie (see p233). In the Loyalty Islands they are plentiful, especially on Lifou where there is at least one *case* inside almost every family compound. If you detour off the main road you will also see them in many *tribus* on Grande Terre. For more information on the *Grande Case* see p200.

For contemporary architecture, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre is a must-see work of art. The centre sits on a peninsula surrounded by mangroves. Internationally renowned architect Renzo Piano blended his contemporary design harmoniously into its natural environment (see p234).

ENVIRONMENT

THE LAND

New Caledonia (18,580 sq km) is in the southwest Pacific Ocean, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn, and roughly between the latitudes of 18° to 23° south, and longitudes of 158° to 172° east.

The territory is made up of an archipelago comprising the main island, Grande Terre (16,350 sq km); Île des Pins (152 sq km); the Loyalty Islands (1980 sq km); and the tiny Îles Bélep. Scattered around it at considerable distances are various dependencies, with a combined total area of 4 sq km (see p208).

Grande Terre

This mountainous island, 400km long and 50km wide, is the third largest in the South Pacific, after New Zealand and New Guinea. It is divided by central mountain ranges, the highest peaks being Mont Panié (1629m) on the northeast coast and Mont Humboldt (1618m) in the southeast. From this mountain chain, numerous rivers make their way to the sea, causing sudden floods in the wet season.

Grande Terre's two long coasts couldn't contrast more. The east coast is wet, lush and mountainous, and has a shoreline cut by narrow but deep estuaries. The west coast is dry and windy, with wide, grassy coastal plains and large but shallow coastal bays. The bays are lined with mangrove forests and mosquito-infested beaches. The far south is mainly an iron plateau, 250m high, with red earth, small natural lakes and marshes.

In contrast to many Pacific islands, Grande Terre was not created by volcanic activity. It was part of Gondwanaland, the ancient continent that held present-day Africa, South America, Antarctica, the Indian subcontinent, Australia and New Zealand together. Grande Terre and New Zealand broke away from eastern Australia about 140 million years ago and, 80 million years later, Grande Terre went its own way.

Grande Terre is rich in minerals and is one of the biggest nickel reserves in the world.

Offshore Islands

The Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins originated from a chain of submarine volcanoes, which have been inactive for the past 10 million years, situated on the eastern border of the Australian plate. All are now highly porous, uplifted coral islands, created after the old volcanoes sank and

The Tjibaou Cultural Centre was designed by the famous Italian architect Renzo Piano whose other works include the George Pompidou Centre in Paris and Kansai airport terminal in Japan.

An information site on New Caledonia's biodiversity, www.endemia.nc has links to other environmental websites.

Listen to local music at www.mangrove.ws.

DEPENDENCIES OF NEW CALEDONIA

New Caledonia's four dependencies are scattered around the perimeter of the territorial waters, hundreds of kilometres from Grande Terre. They range from reefs with barely emerged coral cays and islets like the Chesterfield and d'Entrecasteaux groups, to larger outcrops such as Walpole and the volcanic Matthew and Hunter Islands. All are uninhabited but have enormous ecological importance because of their rich variety of bird and marine life.

Some 600km west of the northern tip of Grande Terre in the Coral Sea, the Chesterfield group lumps together the Îlots Sable and Chesterfield, Caie de l'Observatoire and the Récifs de Bellona. The land surface of the Chesterfield group totals just 1 sq km. These scraps of land are essential sea-bird rookeries and turtle-nesting areas.

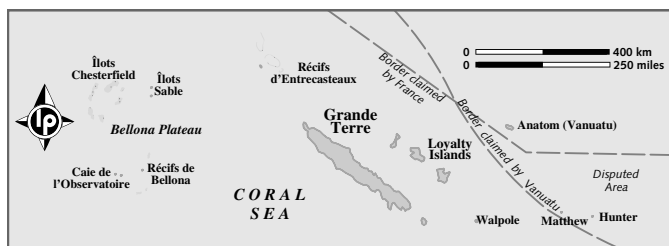
The Récifs d'Entrecasteaux are aligned with the Îles Bélep and Grande Terre's mountain axis. They sit about 220km to the northwest, separated by the Grand Passage, and are made up of a few atolls, which have a surface area of just over 0.5 sq km.

Walpole, 150km east of Île des Pins, is a raised coral island 3km long and 400m wide. It is exposed and inhospitable, without any beach or protecting reefs. It is a veritable 'Citadel of the Ocean', with its raised 70m-high limestone cliffs hiding numerous caves and shafts – popular nesting spots for various sea birds.

As for the Matthew and Hunter Islands, these two tiny volcanic islands have been the centre of a territory dispute between Vanuatu and New Caledonia (ie France) since 1929. They are closer to Vanuatu than to Grande Terre, but in 1929 the French authorities included the islands in newly drawn maps of New Caledonia despite customary claims to the islands by Vanuatu's Anatom people. A plaque was erected by the French on Hunter in 1975, only to be removed by Vanuatu's government in 1980 and replaced by its flag. In turn, France pulled down the Vanuatu flag and raised the tricolour. It was then guarded by a French military contingent for seven years until the personnel were withdrawn.

What exactly is the fight all about? Basically, the islands are incidental; the dispute has much more to do with each country trying to increase its territorial waters. Hunter and Matthew Islands are of little interest to New Caledonians, sitting 450km and 525km respectively east of the southern tip of Grande Terre.

The only people really interested in the islands are the Anatom islanders and the odd yachtie en route to Fiji or Tonga looking for a shelter for the night.



the reef rose around them. The islands are essentially flat and have no rivers. Fresh water is caught in water tables. Île des Pins has a few low hills and some streams.

The Reef

New Caledonia has 1600km of reef (*réci* in French). The main barrier reef encompasses Grande Terre. Its western side is 600km long, while the eastern flank extends for 540km. It creates a magnificent 23,500 sq km turquoise lagoon, the largest enclosed lagoon in the world. It is about 25m deep on the west coast and averaging 40m in depth on the east. Occasion-

THE NAUTILUS

Unchanged for more than 100 million years, nautili are living fossils, the only survivors of a family that was common 450 million years ago and also included ammonites (whirled shells like a ram's horn). It's a mystery why most of this group suddenly disappeared 70 million years ago. There are six remaining species of nautili living in the southwest Pacific, although in earlier times they were more widespread. One species, *Nautilus macromphalus*, is found only in New Caledonia.

The nautilus is a mollusc; however, it is the only cephalopod (those molluscs with a well-developed head and eyes, and a ring of sucker-bearing tentacles) to have an external shell. All others, such as cuttlefish and octopus, have an inner 'shell'.

Never growing larger than 30cm, the nautilus' ivory-coloured, curled shell has red-brown stripes and is lined with mother-of-pearl inside. Its shell is divided into about 36 chambers, formed one by one as the nautilus grows and moves forward, each time closing off the preceding chamber. The oldest segments are filled with a gas, while the newest and biggest are filled with water and air. It moves by water expulsion through a siphon and can vary its buoyancy by changing the levels of gas and air in the individual chambers. It avoids light and warm water and usually lives on the external slopes of the barrier reef at extraordinary depths of up to 500m. Crabs, shrimps and all kinds of dead bodies are its food source, and it uses its many tentacles (about 90 around the mouth) to feed and protect itself. The nautilus' strange, big eyes are undeveloped and its reproduction system is not properly understood.

ally the barrier reef is interrupted by underwater valleys, the remains of old river beds that can drop to 80m. In addition to the barrier reef, close-to-shore fringing reefs surround all the smaller outlying islands.

WILDLIFE

New Caledonia's flora and fauna originated in eastern Gondwanaland. When Grande Terre became separated 80 million years ago, they evolved in isolation and, as a result, the country has many unique plants and animals, especially, birds. Per square kilometre, it boasts the world's richest diversity.

The biodiversity is caused by Grande Terre's central mountain range, which has created a variety of niches, landforms and microclimates where endemic species thrive. Sometimes a species will be confined to a small mountainous area, with only a single known population.

Animals

Around 4500 species of terrestrial animal life have been identified in New Caledonia, mainly consisting of birds, reptiles and some mammals.

ROUSSETTES

Of the few land mammals in New Caledonia, only *roussettes* (members of the flying fox or fruit bat family) are indigenous. There are four species; one, the rock flying fox (*Pteropus macmilliani*), is endemic and endangered. These nocturnal creatures live in 'camps' in trees and fly out at sunset, travelling up to 15km in search of food such as fruit and flowers, before returning at dawn. They are a traditional Kanak food source, although hunting is restricted in all areas and is illegal at nesting or sleeping sites.

RUSSA DEER

New Caledonia's Russa deer is one of the largest of its species. The deer, introduced in the 20th century, have now reproduced to such an extent that they are creating major damage to native plants and the environment

New Caledonia has one of the highest concentrations of endemic plants (around 75%) in the world.

Back in 1862, about a dozen Russa deer were introduced to New Caledonia. Today their numbers are estimated at over 100,000.

The *cagou* is an endemic bird whose call sounds like a dog barking. Ironically, dogs are its main predator since the *cagou* is flightless.

in general. The venison is served in restaurants throughout the country and is also exported to France. You can see the deer on Caldoche farms on the west coast.

BIRDS

With an estimated 68 species of land birds, about 20 of which are indigenous, New Caledonia holds the interest of ornithologists and amateur bird lovers alike. The most renowned indigenous species is the endangered *cagou* (*Rhynochetus jubatus*), New Caledonia's unofficial national bird (see p255).

The most endangered native bird is the Ouvéa crested parakeet (see p313).

Other birds include doves and pigeons, such as the large indigenous *notou* or imperial pigeon (*Ducula goliath*), whose numbers are becoming vulnerable.

You can see large numbers of terns (*Nereis sterna nereis*) on islets around New Caledonia or hear their haunting cry at night.

REPTILES

Several species of skinks get around but the one you're most likely to encounter is the gecko. An insectivorous nocturnal lizard, it has little affixing disks with microscopic hooks that help it master walls and ceilings. These timid little creatures, with pale skin and wide eyes, come out in the evening to feast on moths and mosquitoes. They make a loud clicking noise that can be startling if you hear it at night.

There are four varieties of endemic, giant geckos, including the rare *Rhacodactylus leachianus*. At 35cm in length, excluding its tail, it is the biggest gecko in the world and lives in rainforest areas.

MARINE LIFE

New Caledonia's waters are rich with sea fauna in an amazing spectacle of colour and form. Reef sharks, stingrays, turtles, dugongs, dolphins, colourful gorgonian coral, sponges, sea cucumbers and a multitude of diverse molluscs – including trochus (*troca* in French), cowrie and cone shells, giant clams, squid and the beautiful nautilus – all thrive in these waters. For more details on marine life, see the Diving chapter, p219.

While in New Caledonia you are likely to see the amphibious *tricot rayé* or banded sea krait (*Laticauda semifasciata*) – one of New Caledonia's 12 species of sea snakes – which is often sighted on the water's surface or on land. Well adapted to the sea, it has a flattened, paddlelike tail and airtight nostrils and can stay underwater for up to an hour. Its poison is particularly potent. Although often curious, it is not aggressive unless deliberately provoked or when protecting its nest. It is numerous on the islets around Noumea and particularly on Amédée islet. It has been made particularly famous by a successful local clothing brand that uses the snake on its logo.

Humpbacked whales (*Megaptera novaengliae*) frequent New Caledonian waters between July and September. For a close encounter with one of these magnificent creatures you can do a whale-watching tour off the Far South coast (see p253).

Plants

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

A great deal of New Caledonia has been stripped of its virgin forest. At present, 4000 sq km, or around 20% of the land, is still covered by

indigenous forest. that includes some amazing trees. The *Araucaria columnaris*, from the araucaria family, is a columnar pine that can stand an impressive 60m in height and has a diameter of 2m. Its natural habitat is the coast and it is used for making pirogues (dugout canoes) and in carpentry. It was planted in Kanak villages and isolated patches of these trees in mountainous regions point to old settlements. In Kanak symbolism this tree has male status.

The huge banyan (*Ficus prolixa*) tree from the fig/rubber family has a wide canopy and big aerial roots. Banyan seeds are spread into other trees by birds or by wind. Its roots descend from the branches to the soil, encircling and eventually strangling the host tree. The roots are used for pirogue floats, while cricket balls are made from its sap.

The king of New Caledonia's forests is the *houp* (*Montrouzieria cauliflora*). This endemic slow-growing hardwood tree is highly sought after and sports bright red flowers.

The kauri (*Agathis lanceolata*), from the araucaria family, is a conifer heavily forested for its good-quality wood, which is supple, light and without knots. It's one of the giants of the forest.

New Caledonia also has a wide range of ecosystems. The niaouli savannah, known in French as '*savane à niaoulis*', is a type of open grassland, predominant on the west coast. It was established when the land was cleared and burned to make grazing pastures for cattle. The tree most frequently found growing here is the niaouli but, without human intervention, the more dominant *gâïac*, ironwood and gum oak would take over.

The coastal flora of New Caledonia includes mangroves, which are found mostly on the west coast and cover nearly half of the island's shoreline. Behind the mangroves, or alternatively the beach, is a small protective band of casuarina, acacia, pandanus and pine, while the estuary forests have rosewood, sandalwood, vines, pines and bluewood.

The *maquis minier*, also known as serpentine scrub, is a diverse community that covers 30% of Grande Terre and consists of a variety of trees and shrubs thriving in soils that are poor in major elements but have an abnormal concentration of heavy minerals. This is especially so in the south, where the mineral-rich soil has created an adapted flora where few other species can compete.

PARKS & RESERVES

There are both land and marine parks and reserves throughout the country. For more information visit the Direction de Ressources Naturelles in Noumea (p320).

Land

Three types of reserves exist: nature reserves, special botanical or fauna reserves, and provincial parks. The level of protection offered varies, but only nature reserves have strict measures limiting access.

Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue (p254) and Chutes de la Madeleine (p255) in the Far South are easily accessible and have good infrastructure.

Mont Humboldt and Mont Panié (p281) are high mountains ideal for fit hikers. Both have mountain huts.

Mont Mou (p248) is more accessible and has a rich variety of flora.

Marine

At present, only 530 sq km of marine area are protected. The heaviest restrictions apply to the 170 sq km Réserve Yves Merlet, between the

Palmiers de nos jardins by Danielle Tardieu lists the main palms of New Caledonia.

Details of New Caledonia's dry forest conservation programme: www.foretseche.nc.

Poisson de Nouvelle-Calédonie by Pierre Laboute and René Gramperrin lists over 1000 species of fish found in New Caledonian waters.

Jean-François Clair's *Nouvelle-Calédonie Sauvage* is a guide to treks in New Caledonia's parks and reserves.

New Caledonia's lagoon is the largest enclosed lagoon in the world.

southern tip of Grande Terre and Île des Pins. Except for scientific research, entry to this reserve is strictly forbidden.

Other than this, there are 'special marine reserves' where limitations are imposed on tourism and commercial activities, and where it is illegal to remove or disturb minerals, flora or fauna. The French government is in the process of applying for classification of New Caledonian's lagoon on the Unesco World Heritage Sites list. A decision is expected in 2008. Classification would ensure better preservation of the marine ecosystem.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Traditionally, Kanaks had a very sensible relationship with the environment, considering it their *garde-manger* (food safe), which meant the territory had to be managed properly in order to provide a sustainable food supply. This contrasts greatly with modern-day Western attitudes and practices such as mining, deforestation and cattle farming.

Open cut nickel mining has caused deforestation, erosion, pollution of rivers, streams and lagoons, and reef damage. The last has occurred

particularly along the midsection of the east coast of Grande Terre, as the runoff from the stripped mountains pours straight into the sea.

The emissions released from Doniambo nickel smelter in Noumea are another serious issue. International health and environmental agencies have classified nickel, a carcinogen, as an 'extremely hazardous substance' and have recognised that it can induce asthma. Measures to analyse the air in the greater Noumea region were only just being introduced in 2005.

The nickel processing plant project funded by Goro-Nickel in the far south is causing controversy with its new chemical extraction methods. The long-term environmental effects of this method are not known. Environmental groups are also concerned about the effluent that will be flushed into the sea.

Bushfires, which lead to erosion and desertification, are a huge problem despite public awareness campaigns calling for vigilance and responsible action. Fires are often deliberately lit to clear land for agriculture and for hunting wild pigs (in order to herd them into specific areas).

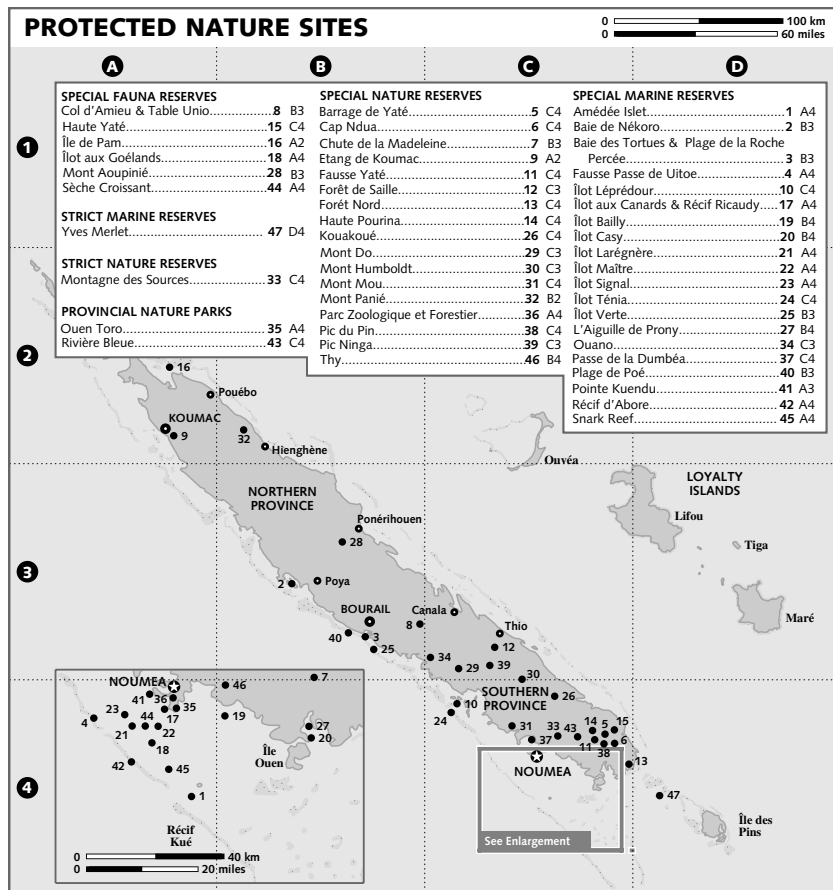
Although fishing may not yet be a big moneymaking industry for New Caledonia, certain restrictions are put on the use of nets and lines. Fishers on pleasure craft cannot sell their fish, and their catch is limited to 50kg.

The trade in turtles is prohibited. However, they can be caught, in limited numbers and at a certain time of the year, for private consumption. Unfortunately this law is sometimes flouted by restaurants. Crabs can't be caught in December and January and at other times they must measure at least 15cm (excluding the legs), while lobsters must be a minimum of 7.5cm along the breast. Oysters can be harvested from May to August only.

Thankfully, the reef ecosystem is in relatively good health. The crown-of-thorns starfish occurs here in balanced numbers.

Two nongovernmental organisations work to protect the environment. The **Association pour la Sauvegarde de la Nature Néo-Calédonienne** (ASNNC; ☎ 28 32 75; 12 blvd Vauban) in Noumea has been around for 30 years. The other, **Le Centre d'Initiation à l'Environnement de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (CIE; ☎ 27 40 39; 89 promenade Roger Laroque) at the SPC, works with schools and the government to increase environmental awareness among New Caledonians.

The Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (www.ird.nc), the main scientific research organisation in New Caledonia, is focusing on the development of its land and marine resources.



FOOD & DRINK

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

As in most other Pacific countries, New Caledonia's staple foods are fish, coconut, banana, taro, sweet potato and yam (see below). Needless to

STAPLE ROOT FOODS

Yam (*igname* in French): The yam is to Pacific islanders what the potato is to Westerners, an energiser. It has a high status in Kanak society and is treated with a reverence normally reserved for elders and ancestors. It's nutritious (particularly rich in vitamins B and C, and in minerals) and grows as a climbing vine. The long, edible roots can be roasted, boiled, used for fritters and in curries.

Sweet potato Originating in South America, this plant has tasty tubers and grows in many varieties. It is associated with the arrival of Polynesians in New Caledonia.

Taro This root plant spread from Southeast Asia long ago and it is still widely used, although its cultivation is declining as the consumption of rice takes over. The plant has big, edible leaves and stocky roots about 30cm long. It is an energy booster and is full of fibre, calcium and iron.

Cassava Also called manioc or tapioca, this plant has five to seven lobed leaves. It grows where yam and taro fail and both roots and leaves are eaten.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

If you visit the monthly market in the mountain village of Farino in September, be sure to sample *ver de bancoul*, a scrumptious fat wood grub. On the Loyalty Islands you can taste *roussette* (a fruit bat), a local Kanak delicacy. And don't miss the opportunity to dine on *escargots* (snails), the speciality on Île des Pins.

Carpaccio de cerf is a typical Caledonian dish of thinly shaved raw venison sprinkled with olive oil and herbs.

say, their nutritional value is higher than much of their imported tinned counterparts but, unfortunately, traditional fare is being replaced by expensive processed foods, as you'll see by the piles of canned beef and tins of coconut cream found in the shops.

Lobster (*langouste*), coconut crab, dugong and turtle (*tortue*) are all traditional Kanak food sources. These days the number of turtles and dugongs that can be hunted for food is limited, and their killing for commercial purposes is prohibited.

Various local recipes exist for cooking *roussette*, a fruit-eating bat, but most commonly it's boiled, the skin taken off and then the flesh cooked again in coconut cream.

A variety of nuts – such as the candlenut (known as 'tai' in Kanak) and pandanus nuts – are eaten, as are the seeds from breadfruit, pawpaw, watermelon and pumpkin.

One of the most famous nuts is the coconut, which grows on palm trees (*Cocos nucifera*) that can live for up to 80 years. Coconuts usually take a year to ripen – they're ready when you can hear the juice shaking around inside. The less developed the coconut, the sweeter the juice, which is why many people cut off the tops when the outside husk is still green and drink the milk. Even young, the soft coconut flesh is tasty, although the flavour increases with age.

While there's a decent range of fruit, New Caledonia does not have the abundance of tropical delights you might expect of a Pacific island and, in large supermarkets, imported fruits usually outnumber local produce. Seasonal fruits include avocados, passionfruit, mangoes, pineapples, custard apples, watermelons and citrus fruits such as oranges and pomelos. Bananas, coconuts and pawpaws are available year-round.

Unlike in Western countries, unripe pawpaw is used in New Caledonia for salads and in cooking. It is grated and sprinkled with a vinaigrette dressing to make a tasty side dish.

Breadfruit trees bear large starchy fruit containing a lot of sugar. As the name suggests, the fruit can be baked or roasted and can replace flour when dried and pounded. The seeds and young leaves of the tree are also eaten.

Guavas, originating in tropical America, grow wild along the roadsides in New Caledonia. The ripe yellow fruit tastes a little like a tomato and has many hard little seeds to spit out. It breaks the record for vitamin content and also contains a lot of pectin (used for making jam).

DRINKS Alcoholic Drinks

The preferred drinks in New Caledonia are *vin* (wine) and *bière* (beer). The local beers are Number One and Havannah, brewed at the Grande Brasserie de Nouvelle-Calédonie (GBNC). Heineken and Kronenbourg, two international beers, are also brewed locally. A good pub to try that brews several of its own beers is Les 3 Brasseurs at the Centre Commercial Baie des Citrons in Noumea. Pubs and bars serve Foster's, Heineken, Number One, Kronenbourg and DB Export Gold on tap or in cans – expect to pay

about 350CFP for a beer at a pub. Nightclubs charge about double the pub price for all drinks. Supermarkets and shops sell unrefrigerated beer.

French, Italian, Australian, New Zealand and Californian wines are all available in supermarkets, although French wine far outnumbers the others. You'll pay from 450CFP for a cheap bottle of *vin de table* (table plonk) to 4500CFP for Moët & Chandon champagne. Restaurant prices for wine are up to triple what you'd pay in a shop and, unfortunately, the concept of BYO (bring your own) has not caught on here.

Drinks are further divided into typical aperitifs like *porto* (port) and *pastis*, an aniseed-flavoured drink much loved in France. Mixed with about five parts water, it's strong and refreshing.

Then there are *digestifs*, drinks to conclude the meal – although it's not unknown for a *digestif* to be taken during a meal, supposedly to make room in the stomach for the next course! Typical choices are brandies (800CFP per nip) like Armagnac and Cognac. French liqueurs like Cointreau and Grand Marnier are readily available.

Nonalcoholic Drinks WATER

Throughout New Caledonia, except on Ouvéa, water is safe to drink. Should you prefer bottled water, several French brands – such as Evian, which costs about 110CFP per 1.5 litres – are sold in shops, or there's a local equivalent bottled from a spring at Mont-Dore. On the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins, take care not to overuse the locals' limited supply of fresh water.

COFFEE

The French take coffee-drinking very seriously and it's a passion that hasn't disappeared just because they're now in the Pacific.

A cup of coffee can take various forms but the most common is a small, black espresso called *un café noir*, *un express* or simply *un café*. You'll pay between 150CFP to 200CFP; you can also ask for the long (*grand*) version. A *café crème* is an espresso with steamed milk or cream, while a *café au lait* is a large espresso with steamed milk and costs 220CFP to 270CFP.

CELEBRATIONS

Many festivals in New Caledonia are harvest celebrations based around a particular food. They are big public affairs with food, as well as arts and craft or produce stalls. The festivities usually include singing and dancing. The most important Kanak festival is the festival of the yam. The yam is considered a sacred food. During this festival however there are no public festivities. Following are some festivals:

Avocado festival Held in May in Maré

Prawn and venison festival Held in May in Boulouparis

Mandarine festival Held in July in Canala

Beef festival Held in October in Païta

Seafood festival Held in November in Poum

Letchi festival Held in December Houaïlou

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

New Caledonia has a wide variety of cuisines but the most common restaurants are French, Vietnamese, Chinese and Indonesian. You'll also find a few West Indian, North Africa, Mexican and Italian restaurants, but mainly in Noumea. Outside the capital, restaurants are somewhat

The local beer, Number One, won a prestigious first prize in Brussels in 1993.

Nakamals (clubhouses where kava is drunk), originally from Vanuatu are now a major success throughout New Caledonia.

Eliane Fogliani has produced a Caldoche cuisine recipe book called *Recettes Calédoniennes de Mamie Fogliani*.

scarce and are usually attached to hotels. The islands and the east coast are your best bet for trying traditional Melanesian fare.

Thanks to the long midday break, just as big a fuss is made about lunch as it is about dinner. Restaurants are generally open between 11am and 2pm and 7pm to 11pm. On Sunday many establishments are closed.

French Cuisine

French restaurants abound in Noumea. On one corner will be a little café with filling but hardly what one would call fine food and, opposite, an extravagant restaurant specialising in local *fruits de mer* (seafood), *escargots* (snails) from Île des Pins, *venaison* (venison) and other French gourmet dishes. Places to eat always have a *carte* (menu) posted outside so you can decide before going in whether the selection and prices are to your liking.

The best value for money comes by ordering either a *plat du jour* (dish of the day), which typically costs about 1000CFP. Alternatively, there's often a fixed-price, multicourse *menu du jour*, usually referred to simply as a *menu* (not to be confused with a *carte* – throughout this book we italicise *menu* to distinguish it from the English word 'menu'). For anywhere upwards of 1600CFP, a *menu* generally entitles you to an entrée, main course, dessert, bread and chilled water (and sometimes a small carafe of wine and an espresso). Some restaurants offer a *menu* at both lunch and dinner, while at others it's a lunch-time special only.

Alternatively, you can order à la carte, which means you must select dishes individually from the menu. A three-course meal composed in this way is considerably more expensive than a *menu du jour*.

Melanesian Cuisine

Kanak cuisine is served in most homestays outside Noumea. Often they cater to Western tastes so it doesn't mean the food is authentically Kanak. *Bougnas* are prepared for tourists on the Loyalty Islands, Île des Pins and Grande Terre's east coast. (For more information see below.)

Other Cuisines

Most of the Vietnamese, Indonesian and Chinese restaurants cater to their local populations. There are several Japanese restaurants in Noumea and seafood is widely available throughout the country.

Snacks & Cafés

The cheapest type of restaurant is called a *snack*. These establishments do a swift trade at breakfast and lunch and then close at about 2pm. Some reopen in the late afternoon until about 6pm or 7pm. Trendy French-run

PREPARING A BOUGNA

The main Melanesian dish in New Caledonia is *bougna*. It is served on special occasions such as traditional festivals, weddings or when welcoming visitors. It is a mixture of yam, sweet potato, taro, vegetables and meat, fish or seafood covered in coconut milk. All the ingredients are cooked together in tightly wrapped parcels made from banana leaves. The parcels are arranged among 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 and the meal is left to cook for 1½ to two hours. It is served piping hot and portions are usually so generous that you can't finish it.

Most Melanesian-run *gîtes* or homestays can prepare a *bougna* but you must order it 24 hours in advance. Expect to pay from 1500CFP to 3000CFP per person.

NEW CALEDONIA'S TOP FIVE

- Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny – The setting alone is worth the price of the meal at Kou-gny (p298) on Île des Pins. Dining on lobster with your toes in the sand of a lagoon is bliss.
- Chez Mamie Fogliani – You can't beat Fogliani's (p264) for home cooking in Farino. The filling Caldoche cuisine, quiet forest setting and informal atmosphere make for an enjoyable meal.
- Gîte Seday – In Maré, this place (p306) serves mouth-watering seafood dishes. The presentation is flawless and the service warm and friendly.
- La Chaumière – In Noumea, this restaurant (p240) is warm and inviting. Its refined French cuisine has an exotic Pacific touch.
- Zanzibar – We love the casual but classy atmosphere at this restaurant (p240) in Noumea. The food is exotic and the desserts are divine.

cafés don't fit this description, as they generally don't close in the afternoon; they stay open until late at night and their meals are pricey.

Snacks all serve much the same sort of meals: *steak-frites* (steak and chips) for about 950CFP, *poulet au curry* (curried chicken) for 800CFP, and *crevettes à l'ail* (garlic prawns) for 900CFP. In Noumea, many meals are available from mobile vans (*roulottes*) that set up nightly in car parks.

Some takeaway specialities include *nems* (Vietnamese spring rolls), *bami* (a spicy Chinese or Indonesian dish based on noodles with chicken, pork or shrimps and vegetables), and *salade Tahitienne* (a favourite raw-fish salad from Tahiti). *Casse-croûtes*, also known as *sandwichs variés*, are immensely popular and consist of a half-baguette filled with cheese, egg, meat, seafood or salad. These enormous things sell for between 325CFP and 650CFP, depending on the filling. Ice creams and sorbets, costing 250CFP/400CFP for one/two scoops, can be bought from *glacières* (ice-cream shops) in Noumea, as can crepes and *gaufres* (waffles).

Breakfast

Hotels generally offer two types of breakfast: continental or the more expensive American buffet. The continental version is strictly a typical French breakfast: *baguette* (French stick) or croissants served with butter (*beurre*) and jam (*marmelade*), plus tea or coffee. American breakfasts usually combine eggs, bacon, sausages, fruit and orange juice with croissants and baguettes. Neither type of breakfast is included in room prices unless specified here. Rates vary hugely: between 500CFP and 1400CFP for a continental breakfast, and 800CFP to 1800CFP for American.

Alternatively, you can nick down to a local café for a coffee and croissant for about 400CFP.

Quick Eats

There are a couple of the multinational fast-food outlets in Noumea. Otherwise there are the more traditional fast-food options such as cafés or *snacks*. Most *roulottes* (food vans) are a cheap, filling and delicious option. In Noumea there is a wide choice of dishes at the *roulottes* in the car park diagonally opposite the market (see p241). Noumea also has many sandwich bars where you can order something quick and easy to takeaway.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

There are no restaurants or cafés specialising in vegetarian food and few places have a vegetarian option on the menu. It's not hard to eat vegetarian,

La Nouvelle-Calédonie en 60 recettes by Gilles Moglia is a New Caledonian cuisine recipe book.

The New Caledonian prawn, originally from Mexico, is internationally renowned for its high quality. It is the country's principal food export.

The site www.passeport-gourmand.com lists restaurants around New Caledonia and sells discount vouchers for meals.

though, as most places will simply omit the meat if you ask them, the draw back being that dishes are not very exciting. If you are self-catering you will find plenty of fresh vegetables at markets and in supermarkets. In Noumea the latter also stock products such as tofu.

EATING WITH KIDS

Most places have a children's special that usually includes a main dish and a dessert. This is often just sausage and chips followed by ice cream. Few places have highchairs. If you have children who are too young to sit still long enough for a meal, one good option is to buy a takeaway lunch and have a picnic at the beach or in a park. Baby food is available in supermarkets in Noumea and major towns.

Diving in New Caledonia

Jean-Bernard Carillet

So, you want swaying gorgonians wafting in current, healthy hard corals, Technicolor tropical fish, impressive pelagics, including sharks and whales, thrilling passes and stunning seascapes? You came to the right place! New Caledonia's distinctive features are its lagoon, the largest in the world, along with several idyllic islands, pristine waters and a sense of adventure that spices up the diving. Good news: you don't need to be a strong diver – most sites cater for all levels. Low diver impact and small groups (with the exception of the Noumea area) make the diving experience much more enjoyable than at busier Pacific resorts.

A tip: try to combine New Caledonia with nearby Vanuatu, where you'll dive legendary wrecks. Thus, you'll get the complete portfolio of underwater wonders.

DIVING CONDITIONS

Diving is possible year-round although conditions vary according to the season and location. On average, visibility ranges from 20m to 40m. During the rainy months, New Caledonia's rivers become swollen and the subsequent rainwater run-off can affect visibility in the lagoon – especially on the east coast, the most exposed to prevailing winds – but fortunately it has no impact on water clarity on the outer reef. The sites that are exposed to currents are usually done as drift dives.

Water temperature peaks at a warm 27°C in February but can drop to about 21°C in August. Consider taking a 5mm wet suit from March to December.

DIVE SITES

GRANDE TERRE

Grande Terre holds much to fascinate divers of all skill levels, with a variety of sites conveniently scattered off the east and west coasts. Most dives take place along the barrier reef or near the passes.

Noumea

Passe de Boulari (Boulari Pass), about 18km south of Noumea, close to Amédée islet, is a long-standing favourite. The typical dive plan is a drift dive in the pass at incoming tide. A profusion of fish, including manta rays, Napoleon wrasses and groper, compensates for the lacklustre corals. Regular shark-feeding sessions also maintain a large population of sharks. You don't have to go deeper than 18m. In the same area, **Récif Sournois** (Sly Reef) is a huge coral block that acts as a magnet for colourful species, especially goatfish, surgeonfish, moray eels and eagle rays.

Straight off Noumea, **Passe de Dumbéa** (Dumbéa Pass) is another exciting drift dive. The terrain is nicely sculpted, with canyons and chasms that harbour a wealth of species, including lobsters and groper. Napoleon wrasses, trevallies, mackerel and the occasional shark might also pass by. There is also a mine dating from WWII.

One downside in New Caledonia is that most dive sites are offshore, which involves a boat trip that can last from 15 to 45 minutes.

A big draw in New Caledonia is the absence of crowds on the sites. Pressure on the reefs is therefore low and it allows for ideal conditions.

DIVING AND FLYING

Most divers get to New Caledonia by plane. While it's fine to dive soon *after* flying, it's important to complete your last dive at least 12 hours (some experts advise 24 hours) before your flight, to minimise the risk of residual nitrogen in the blood that can cause decompression injury. Careful attention to flight times is necessary in New Caledonia because interisland transportation is by air.

Between Passe de Boulari and Amédée islet, **La Dieppoise** is the best-known shipwreck in New Caledonia. She lies in 26m and was scuttled in 1988. Gropers, trevallies, snapper and nudibranchs call it home. Not far from Dumbéa Pass, the 45m-long **Humboldt** is another atmospheric wreck.

The reef around Amédée islet is a popular dive and snorkelling site with Noumea-based clubs. If you're lucky, you'll see sharks and rays.

Boulouparis

Picture-postcard Îlot Tenia could be dubbed 'the Aquarium' for the profusion of small reef species and the dazzling variety of shapes and colours that can be encountered. If you're lucky, you'll also come across dolphins and rays.

Bourail

In this area of central Grande Terre, it's the topography that impresses more than anything. South of Bourail Bay, **La Fausse Passe de l'Île Verte** (False Pass of Green Island) is an enticing dive with a cluster of coral pinnacles on a sandy sea bed. Fish life is prolific and includes whitetip sharks, leopard sharks, stingrays, leopard rays, gropers, Napoleon wrasses and shoals of trevallies. The reef is also broken up by a network of canyons and cavelets.

La Faille de Poé (Poé Fault), also known as Faille de l'îlot Shark, is a stunning dive in a narrow channel chiselled into the reef perpendicular to the coast; it's the remnant of a former river bed and home to numerous rays, sharks and gropers. Visibility is often reduced.

Le Grand Coude de Kele refers to a small pass in the reef, full of life. You're almost guaranteed to see grey reef sharks, trevallies, gropers and eagle rays. The drop-off starts at 18m and falls to great depths. This site boasts several atmospheric canyons.

Poum

The main reef off Poum, **Grand Récif de Poum**, at the northwestern tip of Grande Terre, ranks among the most exhilarating dive areas in New Caledonia. It is virtually pristine and offers enthralling drift dives and a prolific marine life, especially sharks. It involves a tedious boat ride to get to the sites (about 45 minutes).

Hienghène

A dozen sites are regularly dived in the Hienghène area in northern Grande Terre, including **Donga Hiengha**. It takes about 20 minutes of travelling by boat to reach this reef off Koulnoué. Eagle rays, reef sharks and shoals of snapper are regularly encountered, not to mention the occasional turtle paddling past. Another highlight is two caves blessed with intricate gorgonians, in about 12m of water.

To the northwest, two longstanding favourites include **Tidwan** and **Anse Aux Baleines**. They combine copious fish life with a dramatic seascape. You'll wend your way around canyons, arches and tunnels.

At Donga Hiengha look for the resident ribbon morays, with a yellow feather on the nostril.

Doiman reef involves a 45-minute boat ride from Koulnoué but is well worth the effort. The **Cathédrale** features a dramatic drop-off that tumbles from 7m to 55m. It features some luxuriant displays of gorgonians. Tuna, mackerel, grey reef sharks, silvertips, barracuda and shoals of bumphead parrotfish can often be seen cruising along the wall. Another highlight is the topography. You descend vertically through a chimney at 6m and exit at a ledge, at 17m, into the cobalt open water.

Récif de Kaun combines remarkable topography with varied marine life, at depths of less than 25m. An elaborate system of fissures, caves, swim-throughs and arches creates a scenic seascape, especially when sunbeams filter down through the coral structures. Gorgonians add a touch of colour. Though fish life is not the most distinctive feature of the site, keep an eye out for barracuda, trevallies, turtles, eagle rays and sharks.

Poindimié

Don't expect to have frequent pelagics sightings in Poindimié in northern Grande Terre. The area is more renowned for reef life, soft corals and nudibranchs. Most dive sites are located in Grande Passe de Bayes and in Passe de la Fourmi.

Spaghetti features a massive pinnacle inside the lagoon, approximately halfway between Poindimié and Grande Passe de Bayes. The typical dive plan consists of swimming around the pinnacle, starting from the base at approximately 26m, and spiralling up. It is abuzz with small life and colourful nudibranchs and is festooned with delicate gorgonians. Occasional trevallies and mackerel might also turn up.

In Grande Passe de Bayes, **Natacha** boasts a varied seascape, with swim-throughs, canyons and cavelets. You'll also be delighted by the majestic gorgonians that decorate the reef. Maximum depth is about 25m.

Place des Cocotiers is another inviting site off Poindimié. Divers will swim among a field of massive, scattered coral pinnacles draped with spectacular gorgonians and elaborate soft corals in less than 26m. Some notable residents include triggerfish and angelfish.

In a channel between the two main passes, **Val d'Isère** is an easy dive in about 16m. The main focus is the quantity and the quality of the coral, which comes in all shapes and varieties. A careful look in the blue might also yield leopard-shark, stingray and Napoleon-wrasse sightings.

Yaté & Îlot Casy

This area in the Far South of Grande Terre is a heartbreaker. It has some of the best sites of New Caledonia but unfortunately they were seldom dived at the time of writing. There used to be a dive centre in Port Boisé but it was closed when we visited, and the Noumea dive shops don't service the area on a regular basis.

If you have the chance to go there, don't miss **Fosse aux Requins**, off Goro. It refers to a cleft carved into the reef, approximately 600m in length and 20m in depth, that looks like a winding serpent. Several species of sharks, along with rays and barracuda, have called this canyon home. There is also a massive boulder in the channel and a wreck. It is treated as a drift dive.

Another highlight in the area is **Îlot Nouaré** (Nouaré islet), which combines a varied terrain and prolific marine life. Between 24m and 30m, a huge coral boulder acts as a magnet for sweetlips, angelfish, barracuda, reef sharks and other reef species. You might also spot eagle rays and turtles. The best dive plan is a drift dive.

Aiguille de Prony (Prony Needle), in Prony Bay, north of Îlot Casy, can be truly mystical. It features a pyramid-shaped mineral spike rising from the

The Aiguille de Prony is not a coral formation but results from the calcification of an undersea freshwater spring.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

New Caledonia is ecologically vulnerable. By following these guidelines while diving, you can help preserve the ecology and beauty of the reefs:

- Encourage dive operators in their efforts to establish permanent moorings at appropriate dive sites.
- Practise and maintain proper buoyancy control.
- Avoid touching living marine organisms with your body and equipment.
- Take great care in underwater caves, as your air bubbles can damage fragile organisms.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals.
- Take home all your trash and any litter you may find as well.
- Never stand on corals, even if they look solid and robust.

sea bed, from 40m below the surface to within 2m of the surface. It exudes an eerie atmosphere that you won't soon forget. Invertebrate life is abundant, with nudibranchs, shells and sponges. The typical dive plan consists of working your way up and around the structure, starting at about 25m.

Whales can be seen cruising past the area from July to September.

ÎLE DES PINS

Île des Pins has several first-class sites and offers a varied topography. Most dives take place off the northwestern tip of the island. **Vallée des Gorgones**, off Gadji Reef, northwest of the main island, features a drop-off that starts in 5m of water and descends to about 45m. The wall is blessed with a profusion of graceful gorgonians and you'll find a dense array of reef fish. If you're lucky, you might spot some pelagics, including sharks and rays. Another strong point is the contoured shape of the terrain, with numerous chasms, gullies and swim-throughs. The usual dive plan is a drift dive.

Passe de Gié (Gié Pass) is an excellent drift dive, renowned for its density of fish, both reef species and pelagics. You'll encounter shoals of trevallies and barracuda, along with grey reef sharks and whitetips in less than 25m.

South of Passe de Gié, **Récif de Kasmira** (Kasmira Reef) is one more superb dive, featuring a coral mound ranging from 3m to 17m. The highlight of the dive is the variety and quantity of marine life, from nudibranchs to leopard sharks.

Grotte de la Troisième (Cave of the Third) is a stunning dive. The location and topography are very unusual. It takes place in a cave filled with crystal-clear freshwater, about 6km north of Kuto. Divers walk through the forest for about 10 minutes before arriving to the hole. You'll wend your way inside the cave, at about 6m. Numerous stalactites and stalagmites create an eerie atmosphere. Despite the shallow water, this site is for experienced divers only. There are tunnels and curves and it is easy to get disoriented.

LOYALTY ISLANDS Lifou

There are some great diving spots around this part of the island where you can sometimes see sharks and rays, but mainly you will be entranced by the magnificent underwater scenery with beautiful coral formations, caves and tropical fish.

North of Santal bay, **Gorgones Reef** is a sheltered site that takes its name from the numerous brightly coloured gorgonians that adorn huge coral

blocks and arches in about 25m of water. The whole area is resplendent with reef species, and visibility is usually quite good. Look out for grey sharks, leopard sharks, barracuda, Napoleon wrasses and tuna.

In the same area, **Shoji Reef** is a drift dive. Amid a field of healthy hard and soft corals and attractive gorgonians, you might spot tuna, sharks, rays and barracuda.

Récif Shelter (Shelter Reef) refers to a solitary reef south of Santal bay. A drift dive will yield tuna and bluefin trevallies. Also keep an eye out for silvertip sharks and eagle rays.

Cap Lefèvre, south of Santal Bay, is riddled with canyons, cavelets and tunnels that form the playground for a broad range of species, including lobsters, in about 18m. Shafts of sunlight filter through the cave roofs and create an exhilarating atmosphere. Sharks and the usual pattern of reef species add a touch of colour and action.

In Lifou, whales can be seen from July to September.

Ouvéa

Ouvéa is wilderness at its best. If you want to experience frontier diving, you've come to the right place. You'll be rewarded with pristine sites, such as **Passe du Styx** (Styx Pass), **La Piste de Ski** (Ski Slope), **Pasteur** or **Les Miettes** (the Crumbs), all located off the southern tip of the island, some 20 minutes by boat from the local dive shop. Most of the dives are drift dives, and you can expect pelagic sightings, especially manta rays and sharks. There are also beautiful gorgonians, although in smaller quantities than off Lifou.

DIVE CENTRES

The standard of diving facilities in New Caledonia is high. You'll find professional and reliable dive centres staffed with qualified instructors catering to divers of all levels. Most dive centres are affiliated with an internationally recognised dive organisation – eg Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI), Scuba Schools International (SSI) or Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS). They are

GETTING STARTED

New Caledonia provides ideal and safe conditions for beginners, with its reassuringly sheltered lagoons, crystalline, warm water and prolific marine life. Arrange an introductory dive with a dive centre to give you a feel for what it's like to swim underwater. It will begin on dry land, where the instructor will run through basic safety procedures and show you the equipment.

The dive itself takes place in a safe location and lasts between 20 and 40 minutes under the guidance of the instructor.

You'll practise breathing with the regulator above the surface before going underwater. Then the instructor will hold your hand if need be and guide your movements at a depth usually between 3m and 10m. Some centres start the instruction in waist-high water in a hotel swimming pool or on the beach.

There are no formal rules but you shouldn't dive if you have a medical condition such as acute ear, nose and throat problems, epilepsy or heart disease (such as infarction), if you have a cold or sinusitis, or if you are pregnant.

If you enjoy your introductory dive, you might want to follow a four- to five-day course to get a first-level certification that will allow you to dive anywhere in the world, like a driving licence. New Caledonia is a good place to get certified.

The islands – Lifou, Ouvéa, Île des Pins – offer an area of tremendous diving potential and remain largely unexplored.

From October to December, Passe de Dumbéa is a breeding ground for gropers, which hang around the edge of the pass in dense congregations.

usually hotel-based but welcome walk-in guests. Staff members usually speak English. Dive centres are open year-round, most of them every day, but it's best to reserve your dive one day in advance. Since most sites are offshore and involve a boat ride of 15 to 45 minutes, they typically offer two-tank dives, usually in the morning.

Be aware that even if standards apply, each dive centre has its own personality and style. It is a good idea to visit the place first to get a feel for the operation.

Diving in New Caledonia is expensive in comparison to most destinations in Asia, the Caribbean or the Red Sea. Set dive packages (eg five or 10 dives) are usually cheaper. All types of courses are available. Gear rental is usually not included in the price of the dive, so it's not a bad idea to bring your own equipment if you plan many dives.

DOCUMENTS

If you're a certified diver, don't forget to bring your C-card and your logbook with you. Dive centres welcome divers regardless of their training background, provided they can produce a certificate from an internationally recognised agency.

GRANDE TERRE

Noumea

Nouvelle-Calédonie Plongée (www.nouvellecaledonieplongee.com) is a dive association that groups 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 (2500CFP) or one year (5000CFP).

There are several dive clubs in Noumea that charge around 13,000CFP for a two-dive package. Clubs include the following:

Alizé Diving (☎ 26 25 85; www.alizedive.com; 2-dive package 12,500CFP)

Amédée Diving (Map p230; ☎ 26 40 29; www.amedee.sponline.com; 28 rue du Général Mangin; 2-dive package 10,800CFP)

Lagoon Safari (☎ 24 18 04; www.lagoon-safaris.nc; 2-dive package 12,000CFP) Based in Kuendu Beach Resort.

Nouméa Diving (Map p228; ☎ 78 78 07; www.noumea-diving.nc; Nouville-Plaisance; 2-dive package 11,500CFP)

Boulouparis

Bouts-d'Brousse (Map pp260-1; ☎ 43 29 62; www.boutsdbrousse.com; adult/child per half-day 4500/2600CFP, 1 day 6600/3640CFP) Organises trips to l'Îlot Ténia. A diving trip with material costs half-/full day 7800CFP/10,900CFP. Take a picnic lunch. It also runs day trips from Noumea (adult/child 14,040/7800CFP), which include lunch.

Bourail

Bourail Sub Loisirs (☎ 44 20 65, 78 20 65; butterfly.diving@lagoon.nc; 2-dive package with/without equipment 11,000/10,000CFP) Based in La Roche Percée at the Néra river mouth.

Poum

Malabou Dive Center (☎ 42 39 83; www.malabou-dive-center.com; 2-dive package 12,000CFP) Based at Hôtel Malabou Beach.

Hienghène

Babou Plongée (☎ 42 83 59; www.babou-plongee.com; Babou Côté Océan; 1/2 dives 5500/10,600CFP, half-day island excursion 4500CFP) Offers various boat excursions as well as diving. It's at Koulnoué camp site in tribu de Koulnoué, 1km past Club Med.

HOW MUCH?

Two-tank dive
10,500CFP (without
gear), 12,500CFP (gear
included)

Introductory dive
7500CFP to 8500CFP

Open-water certification
about 42,000CFP

Poindimié

Tiétï Diving (Map p274; ☎ 42 42 05; www.tieti-diving.com; 2-dive package with/without equipment 12,000/10,500CFP) Based at Monitel. Runs transfers to Îlot de Tibarama (per person 1500CFP).

ÎLE DES PINS

Kunié Scuba Center (Map p292; ☎ 46 11 22; www.kunie-scuba.com; kuniescuba@canl.nc; 2-dive package 12480CFP, day trip per person 8000CFP) Based at Hôtel Kodjeu (see p298), this dive club also runs fishing trips (per person 8000CFP) and boat excursions to islets in baie de Gadji, which include snorkelling and a picnic lunch. The club has a choice of more than 20 dive sites at the edge of the reef near baie de Gadji. Most of them are sheltered. Divers can experience coral formations, gorgonian corals, caves and, on night dives especially, turtles. It also organises cave dives at Grotte de la Troisième, 8km north of Kutos.

LOYALTY ISLANDS

Lifou

Lifou Fun Dive (☎ 45 02 75; www.lifoufundive.com; Easo; 2-dive package with/without equipment 12,870/10,920CFP, night dives 7500CFP) The managers also run full-day sailing and whale-watching excursions (per person 10,000CFP). It is cheaper if there are more than three people. The dive club is on the main road just before the white cross at the turning to the peninsula.

Ouvéa

Ouvéa Plongée (☎ 45 09 90; www.ouveaplongee.com; Mouli; 2-dive package with/without equipment 10,500/12,500CFP) Just south of Cocotier in tribu de Mouli.

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

This section's coverage focuses on some of the most renowned sites – there are still others for diligent divers to discover.

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