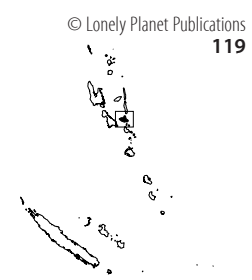


# Ambrym & Paama



Ambrym has amazing twin volcanoes, Mt Marum and Mt Benbow. They're magnificent, building temperature and pressure, spewing ash and gases, calming down again, and keeping volcanologists all over the world on the alert. Climb up through the eerie ash plains to the caldera and see the lava boiling, like a satanic pot of tomato soup. Most tourist facilities are geared towards treks up to the caldera. Other attractions include Vanuatu's best fern carvings and *tamtam* (slit gongs or drums); Rom dances of northern and western Ambrym; and overnight tours to villages where life still features traditional magic and conjuring tricks – like lifting a person up using only jungle leaves.

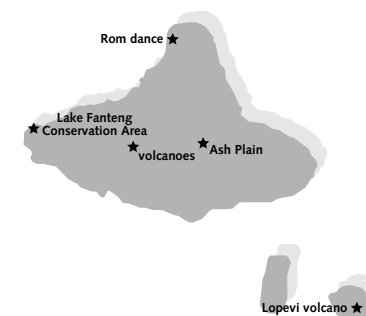
Ambrym is also called the Black Island because of its dark volcanic soils. It's an appropriate name, particularly within the enormous central caldera, which is devoid of vegetation. The island is often devastated by cyclones, and its volcanoes have wiped out whole villages several times. Drifting ash and sulphur dioxide gases create serious problems by disrupting the fruiting of food plants and increasing soil acidity. But the locals rebuild, replant, smile and prepare for the next lashing by Mother Nature.

Paama is an oblong, forested island with high hills falling straight to the sea. On Paama, you climb up the hill to the toilet and down the hill to the bathroom. Cultivable land is scarce. Fortunately, the soil is extremely fertile – the island has an abundance of high-quality fruit.

Lopevi is easily reached from Paama, and a climb will take you up to the perfect cone of this active volcano.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Trekking to the awe-inspiring **volcanoes** (p122) and spending a night on the ash plain
- Admiring powerful performances of the **Rom dance** (p120) in northern Ambrym
- Seeing **master carvers** (p125) at work and shopping for *tamtam* and handicrafts
- Chartering a speedboat and visiting the perfect cone of **Lopevi volcano** (p126)
- Soaring with the 30 species of birds at **Lake Fanteng Conservation Area** (p123)



# AMBRYM

pop 13,500 / area 680 sq km

While Vanuatu's southern islands are called paradise, you could easily think Ambrym was the devil's playground. Craig Cove is a sad mix of concrete buildings by a rocky bay where fishermen clean their fish, and the cargo boat *Saraika* lies half-submerged and rusting. By contrast, the people are fabulous, and as you travel south or north the landscape opens up. There are hot springs, attractive villages and a grand choice of *kastom* (traditional) activities as well as the trek to volcano territory.

## History

The Malnatco, an indigenous trading association of Malekula, reached Ambrym during WWII and built several roads in vain anticipation of the arrival of US cargo. The Nagriamel movement from Santo established several villages on the island in 1970. In June 1980, some Modérés on Ambrym announced their secession and formed a provisional government. When the rebellion was mopped up, more than 500 rebel supporters were arrested.

## Climate

The climate is pleasant, but there is a shortage of water. Drilling for ground water is a bit risky – you might strike lava. So when the volcanoes turn the rain to acid, or the tankwater dries up, the villagers must walk a long way to collect water from bush springs. Tourists won't have a problem, but wash in the sea or a hot spring.

## THE ROM DANCE

Ambrym's most striking traditional ceremony, the Rom dance, combines *maghe* elements with magic. The dancers perform first in their home village, then visit other villages to put on shows, wearing the extraordinary Rom costume: a tall, conical, brightly painted banana-fibre mask and a thick cloak of banana leaves.

The Rom dance originally came from the Olal area. Legend says a local girl made the first costume to gain the love of a young man, but when she revealed how she had made it he killed her, then sold the copying rights to other men.

It's *tabu* (sacred and forbidden) to see a Rom costume being made. Only men who have paid for the right to enter the *nasara* (chief's private area) may be involved; certainly not women nor any tourists. Anyone who disobeyed this *tabu* would be fined a pig, and have their backs whipped with *nanggalat* (a native plant) – it burns your skin for days – or wild cane, which also marks the entrance to the taboo area. So be careful!

## Local Customs

Magic is strongest on the islands with active volcanoes, and Ambrym is considered Vanuatu's sorcery centre. Sorcerers (*man blong majik* or *man blong posen*) are feared and despised. Many islanders have seen too many unexplained happenings and would treat anyone who was found practising black magic severely. Magic for tourists is not considered black.

Ambrym is also the island for sand drawings, with 180 sand designs, each referring to a specific object, legend, dance or creature.

*Maghe* ceremonies (as grade-taking is called in Ambrym) are major events and no transaction occurs without the exchange of pigs. Pigs can also be paid as fines or as licence fees to the copyright owner of, for example, a *tamtam* design.

**Back to My Roots Festival** is a week of celebrations in August each year; an extravaganza of cultural demonstrations and ceremonies, fashion shows, Rom dances, magic and cooking lessons. Accommodation (1500Vt) is organised for tourists, crafts are for sale, stalls are heaped with food, and there's tour guides and explanations of dances. Check with the **Vanuatu Cultural Centre** (☎ 22129; vks@vanuatu.com.vu) or **Sowany Merani** (☎ 48631) for details.

## Arts

Most villages have carvings, *tamtam*, tree-fern figures, war clubs, walking sticks, musical instruments and bizarre masks for sale. *Tamtam* in the north are usually up to 3m high, and stand sentinel in Ranon and other villages. Near Melvat you'll see rooster-headed *tamtam* and, down south, there's a rare five-faced *kastom tamtam* in

the *nasara* of Lele (entry 2000Vt) near Craig Cove. In the south, *tamtam* are very tall – up to 6m high. There's a particularly tall example of a southern Ambrym *tamtam* in front of the chief's *nakamal* (clubhouse), near the cultural centre in Vila.

Tree-fern figures were originally made prior to *maghe* ceremonies and placed in pairs in the grade-taker's gardens to guarantee a good crop. If a tree-fern sculpture is perfect, the spirit of an ancestor will make it its home. Tree ferns are also used to make ceremonial masks (*tamake*). All are brightly painted and decorated with hair made from dried banana palm. They are destroyed after the ceremony in case the dancer's spirit remains within.

Volcanic-rock sculptures of stylised men, 1m high, are occasionally made for the very highest *maghe* levels. Much more common are magic stones that are small enough to hold. These guarantee prosperity or success in love, but are occasionally used to inflict sickness or accidents on rivals.

A large, hoe-shaped, ironwood club is used to kill the pigs at *maghe* ceremonies.

Many are carved with stylised human features on them. Clubs with two faces carved back to back indicate the owner is a person of considerable rank.

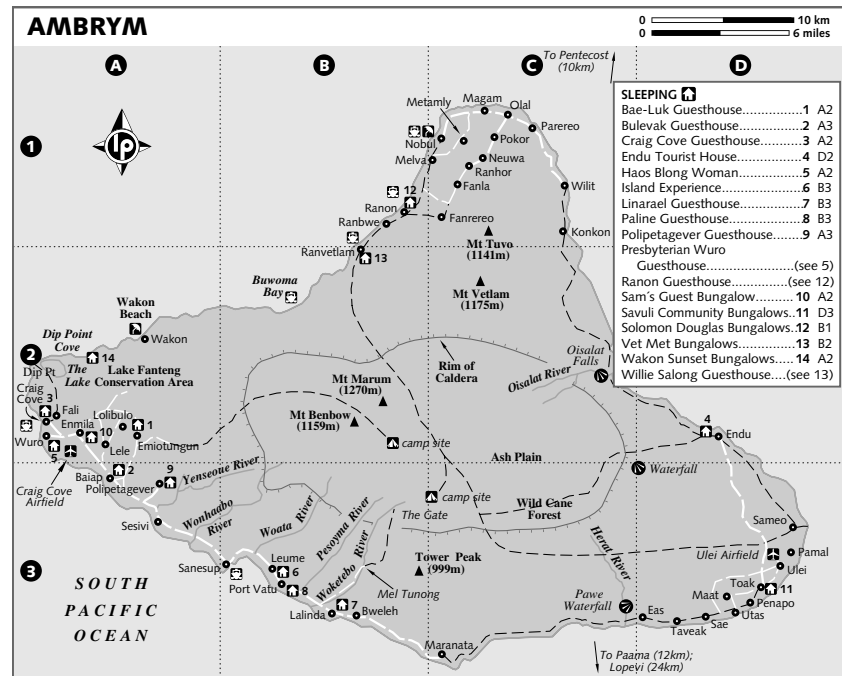
## MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Many islanders play a single-string bow, used like a jew's-harp. The musician places it on his lower lip and plays by plucking it with a coconut leaf. The lads make their own ukuleles, with five strings. Buy one, and everywhere you go ni-Vans will ask to borrow it so they can play you a tune.

An unusually shaped bamboo flute, almost 1m long, is decorated with geometric designs and has a long, multispined end piece.

## Information

Ambrym's volcanoes are being destructive again, spewing hot ash kilometres into the air since mid-2004. It's really affected the crops and there are no food markets. So come with lots of food and water for yourselves, your hosts and your guides, even if meals are provided. Besides, plants around



the volcanoes are high in fluoride which is a little bit deadly.

### Getting There & Away

Ambrym's airfields are at Craig Cove in the southwest and Ulei in the southeast. **Vanair** (☎ 25025) calls in to both airports on flights out of both Vila and Luganville twice a week on Tuesday and Saturday.

Some tour companies in Vila offer volcano adventure flights to Ambrym. For boats that call into Ambrym, see p185.

The best anchorages are at Craig Cove, Sanesup in the south (Port Vatu is OK in good weather), and Buwoma Bay, Ranvetlam, Ranon and Nobul in the north.

You can travel from northern Ambrym to southwestern Pentecost by speedboat (9000Vt).

### Getting Around

Some 4WD trucks grind their way along the rutted road that connects Craig Cove with Maranata in the south. Others go from Ulei to Endu on the east coast. There are roads around the northern tip but no trucks.

Speedboats travel between Craig Cove and Ranvetlam (12,000Vt one way). Ask your bungalow host to arrange transport and guides.

## THE VOLCANOES

The dark, brooding outlines of Mt Benbow and Mt Marum are a kilometre or so apart. Usually shrouded in smoke and cloud, they dominate the vast, grey ash plain that lies within the old caldera. At night, the sky above them glows red from the infernos below.

It is silent, desolate and lifeless on the ash plain. Its sheer starkness, combined with the dramatic results of water erosion and volcanic activity that have rumpled the earth, make it unique and totally awesome.

White smoke pours from Mt Benbow's vents, but it dumped half its side in on itself, plugging up its central crater in 2005. Pressure is building up. It's not certain how long it will be before it blows the plug. You can look over the smoky gullet of Mt Marum, and see the boiling magma way below. She's been spewing molten rock and dense black smoke from her vents. They are both being closely monitored and evacuation plans are ready.

### Great Volcano Walk

You have to be fit and used to walking on steep terrain, and you need a good guide to hack the right way through jungle. You cross glassy strips of old lava, push through wild bamboo forest, trudge gasping along steamy gorges, breathe again as you hit the high ridges. Yep, you need to be fit. And when you reach the caldera the hard work starts.

There's no shade, just wave after wave of barren grey ridges. The awful sound of crunching follows every hot footstep. Skin protection and plenty of drinking water are essential. No matter how high you climb, you come to the next ridge and there's still more waves and ridges, with a few dead rivers a darker streak of grey.

The slopes around both volcanoes are covered with a dry slippery crust, so your boots need to be strong enough to kick toe holes. Ankle support is also necessary as there's some boulder-hopping. Between the mountains, the walk over the razor-backed ridge gets very narrow, and snakes nastily upwards, with vents all around spurting smelly smoke.

Then the weather suddenly changes, the wind is icy and the surfaces even more slippery. Mother Nature does her best to be daunting. Go take up her challenge!

### Access Points

The best idea is to go up one way, and down another (different guides will meet you on the caldera). All the landscapes are different, and there's different cultural activities available at each access point. If you camp overnight your host will have tents available. Trek prices depend on the distance travelled by truck, local fees, whether you stay overnight, number of guides etc, but start perhaps from north/south 6000/9500Vt. The northern access is unavailable from September through January (see p125).

If your chosen route is mainly over sand cliffs, you'll cop more sulphurous air and ash. Jungle paths have healthier air, but are steamier. The four access points:

**Emiotungan** Truck it to the road's end then it's a fun six-hour walk along sand cliffs with no major slopes. If you come back this way, go direct with the truck to the hot pools at Baiap.

**Lalinda** The slopes are fierce but it's the quickest; a truck trip then a three-hour slog from the end of the road. The sudden break from forest to ash plain is stunningly

beautiful. Lalinda is home to Jimmy Penuel, a fantastic authoritative guide.

**Ranvetlam** A complete experience: six hours of jungle, views, ash plain, and not too excruciating. Many tours continue on down to Craig Cove.

**Ulei** A four-hour trek to the ash plain, across Wisal River, and return through a wild cane forest, down to Endu (five hours) past a magnificent waterfall and back along black-sand beaches, natural spas and pools.

### Volcano Tours

Your tour guides usually have gear (sleeping bag, hard hat, gloves, gas mask) available should you want to hire anything.

**Apia** (☎ 48450) Arranges truck and trek tours out of Ulei. **Isaiah Bong** (☎ 48405) Takes an overnight walk from Ranvetlam down to Craig Cove, climbing both volcanoes (tents and food provided).

**Ramel Bong** (☎ 48620) Takes 12-hour day trips by truck and trek from Craig Cove to Mt Marum. Bring your own food.

**Solomon Douglas** (☎ 48405) Takes an eight-hour trek from Ranvetlam to either one of the volcanoes.

## WEST AMBRYM

Several very small villages are scattered around the airfield, and a short walk away is the commercial centre of **Craig Cove**. It has a guesthouse, NBV bank, and a co-op that sells fresh bread, canned food, alcohol and hardware.

East of the airport is **Baiap**, which has geothermal hot springs and a hand pump for bathing.

**Sam** (☎ 48620) at the airport can supply information about volcano tours, cultural sites, and accommodation in the area. Allan James, local **Area Secretary** (☎ 48994; malpc@vanuatu.com.vu) for Malampa Council, can also help.

### Sights & Activities

Only a 10-minute walk from Craig Cove airport, this **Melten Cultural Nasara** (entry 2000Vt) makes a grand entry to the extraordinary adventures you'll find on Ambrym. After a welcome drink you are shown *kastom* dressing and taken on a nature walk.

Villagers at **Lolibulo** perform the Rom dance (4500Vt). **Emiotungan** has lovely old carvings in the *nasara* (*natsaro*), Rom dancing (5000Vt), magic shows (800Vt), sand drawings (1000Vt) and also string-band concerts (1000Vt).

An interesting but difficult two-hour walk takes you through the forest over hilly terrain to **Lake Fanteng Conservation Area** (entry

500Vt) at Dip Point. It's pleasant, too, to take a boat (1200Vt). The lake is a beautiful spot, with many wild ducks and 30 bird species.

You can walk from Craig Cove to the hot springs at Baiap and Sesivi.

### Tours

Volcano tours run out of Craig Cove, Emiotungan and Polipetagever (see left for details).

**West Ambrym Eco-Cultural Tours** (JBong@vu.peace.corps.gov; Vila ☎ 26160, ask for James Bong; Ambrym ☎ 48620, ask for Sam), based in Polipetagever, offers fabulous one- and two-day tours: visit Lele hot springs and hear the myths and legends from the villagers; canoe to an isolated village and sleep under the stars; indulge in a bush-walking bonanza and camp on a beautiful beach. Its tours include transfers, transport, accommodation, meals, camping gear, tour guides and entrance fees (per single/family from 10,000/19,000Vt).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Presbyterian Wuro Guesthouse** (☎ 48994; Wuro; dm 500Vt). Across the village green, it has six beds, bedding and a kitchen. It's part of the village, and you'll probably be invited to join the locals for kava, and an evening sitting around chatting. The ladies will cook meals for 200Vt.

**Haos Blong Woman** (☎ 48625; Wuro; floor space 500Vt) Five minutes from the airfield in the middle of Wuro is an empty shed, but there's a double mattress if you're quick (no bedding). Toilets are nearby at the school and you wash in the sea.

**Craig Cove Guesthouse** (☎ 48991, ☎/fax 48507; dm 1000Vt) An old concrete building right by the water; has cooking facilities, some electricity, a bucket-flush toilet and sleeps 14 people. It's outside the co-op, where everyone hangs out – collect the key from Pierre in the shop.

**Wakon Sunset Bungalows** (☎ 48547, 48991; www.positiveearth.org/bungalows/MALAMPA/wakon.htm; s/d 1000/2000Vt) On a long black-sand beach at Dip Point, Chief Jessy's new bamboo bungalow has two bedrooms, bush kitchen, and ocean for washing. Be Robinson Crusoe, bush-walk, fish in the chief's canoe, or bird-watch – Lake Fanteng Conservation Reserve is a 10-minute walk away. Camp beside the bungalows for 1000Vt a tent. A speedboat from Craig Cove is 1200Vt. Meals are 200Vt.

**Polipetagever Guesthouse** (☎ 48991, 48994, 48852; jbjong@vu.peacecorps.gov; Polipetagever; s/d with all meals 1500/3000Vt) Accommodation is free if you are booked on one of the West Ambrym Eco-Cultural Tours. Either way, you'll be comfortable and well fed. The quaint guesthouse is handmade, with forest timber planed smooth with axes and tied with vines. If you are just staying on the way to the volcano, transfers return to the airport/volcano road's end are 3000/2500Vt.

**Bulevak Guesthouse** (☎ 48567, 48955; Baiap; s with all meals 1500Vt) This is the swishest place in Baiap, with louvre windows, cement floor and comfortable beds. It's also closest to the hot springs. Return transfers to the airport 3000Vt.

**Sam's Guest Bungalow** (☎ 48620, 48575; Enmilla; s/d with all meals 1600/3200Vt) A small bungalow in Sam's family compound with a separate cook house, a water-seal shared toilet and a bath house where you tip water over yourself. Sam and his family are great company – find Sam at the airfield; he can arrange tours and transport.

**Bae-Luk Guesthouse** (☎ 48955, 48991; Emiotungun; s/d/tr with all meals 4000/5000/6000Vt) This house will leave you well rested for your hike, with its Western-style kitchen, flush toilet and shower. There's electricity and water, when the plumbing and wiring works. Return transfers to the airport 6000Vt.

## SOUTH AMBRYM

From Craig Cove, the coastal road winds its tortured way through villages, coconut plantations and jungle. Paths lead down to the shore, and there are some excellent views. Along the way, stop at the hot springs at **Sesivi**, below the Roman Catholic mission. After a soak, wander up to the mission's kava bar. Continue on to **Sanesup**, a pretty village where a pleasant walk ends at a copra drier that is usually in operation. Or swim at the crystal-clear, black-sand beach, which extends all the way to **Maranata** where the south road grinds to a halt.

## Port Vatu

This is a most interesting village, large and attractive, laid out along the coast road. High seas smashed a yacht here in 1989.

It's a good place to set out for the four-hour trip to the **volcanoes** (☎ 48996; guides

3000Vt, entry fee extra). The taxi is 7000Vt from Craig Cove.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Island Experience** (☎ 48679, 48996; s with all meals 2500Vt) John Tasso has two lovely bungalows. While you stay, you learn to make local *kaekae* (food), see cultural and historical places of interest, join in village life, and, wait for it, you build a house. You'll learn how to gather vines and *natangura* leaves to make the thatch, and nestle into your own little mushroom.

**Paline Guesthouse** (☎ 48679; dm 1200Vt) This spacious concrete place at the eastern end of Port Vatu is run by Chief Jack Samuel. It's sparkling clean, with three bedrooms and a well-equipped kitchen. Walk down to a pretty black-sand beach. Meals are 200Vt and there's a shop with food and handi-crafts for sale.

## Lalinda

The chief at Lalinda is the *kastom* owner of the southern access to the volcanoes (entry fee 1000Vt). The trek starts at a vehicle drop-off point about 5km away at **Woketebo River**. Problem is, the village is divided by church affiliations. If you come by truck, take your driver's advice about where to go, but try to find Jimmy Penuel who is a volcano consultant for *National Geographic* and very knowledgeable and professional. He's with the SDA (Seventh-Day Adventist) faction, and they have built a new entry road that is quite superior – an added bonus.

**Linarael Guesthouse** (beds 1000Vt) sleeps six people and has a kitchen. It's clean, has a bathroom, and water is available nearby. The local people will cook dinner (500Vt), and there's a baker ready to bake for your journey!

## EAST AMBRYM

**Ulei**, an entry point to the volcanoes, has only recently been opened up (see p113).

Near the airport is **Toak**, a large village where locals will show you very traditional sand drawing, magic, *kastom* stories, dances, caves and waterfalls. Taxis can be hired here. New and gorgeous **Savuli Community Bungalows** (☎ 48786; s/d with all meals 2500/5000Vt), made of stone, bamboo and thatch, is set along the black-sand beach – ask for Jeppy. The shared bathroom has a flush toilet and shower. You

can walk out to the reef, so bring snorkel gear, or sit on the beach and watch Lopevi. Any luck she'll give a performance. Transport from the airport is 600Vt.

**Endu** is a pretty village on the coast. The chief has a good truck for airport transfers. **Endu Tourist House** (☎ 48450; s with meals 1500Vt) is in a garden and has a real shower. Ask for Apia. Tours from here include an extraordinary waterfall walk, and great Rom dances.

## NORTH AMBRYM

Most of Ambrym's northern coast is extremely rocky, high volcanic cliffs rising straight out of the sea. **Olal** is Ambrym's largest village, with a population of around 1000. **Ranhor** and **Neuwa** are woodcarving villages where you'll find excellent pieces for sale.

**Fanla** is a *kastom* and magic centre – the chiefs here are respected sorcerers. While Fanla has accepted Christianity, many of the older people prefer to worship their traditional god, Barkukul. There are distinctions between the men, based on rank. Men of very high status still live in *tabu* huts, where they cook and eat alone – historically this was to avoid being poisoned. No female may enter any of these places. Fanla's *maghe* clearing boasts several large *tamtam*. During grade-taking ceremonies, a 4m-high platform is erected for grade-takers to dance on. This symbolises their newly acquired status. Meanwhile, other dancers throw stones up at them to remind them that they are still mortals.

The tiny village of **Nobul** fronts one of the best beaches in Ambrym. Yachts are happy in this little bay, and you can pitch a tent on the grass edge of the beach. Ask permission from the young chief. He's great. He might even arrange a feast.

The sacred custom of the north is that there is no fishing, hunting or other activities from 1 September until 31 January – the yam-planting season. Volcano trips are available only from the south during these months.

## Sights & Activities

**Volcano tours** are a major attraction in the north (see p123).

The **motorboat journey** from Craig Cove to Ranon (12,000Vt) is fantastic, chugging past sheer angled cliffs, *namaruh* forests, rock caves, turtles, dolphins and wild

ducks. Stop at the hot springs for a swim on the way.

Day trips to **Mt Tuvo** and **Mt Vetlam** offer fine views of Malekula; on clear days you can see as far as Espiritu Santo. Local people believe that if you talk to another person while on Mt Tuvo, snow will fall (mist). Take warm clothes if you're going up there in winter (June to August). A coastal walk takes you to a **lava tube**.

The best **Rom dances** and magic can be seen in **Ranhor** and **Fanla** (3000Vt). An island **feast** can be prepared for eight or more people – want to go on a wild-pig hunt first?

Take a walk around the **woodcarving villages**. You'll also see the tall *tamtam* standing as permanent sentinels in village dance clearings.

Visit a **Taboo Nasara** (1000Vt) at **Metamly**, just north of Fanla, where you'll learn the history of Wingil Sangu Murumone Fenbi, the first Chief of Melwe Harkon. Master carvers will meet you there and show you unusual local *tamtam*.

**Ranon** has a swimming beach and speedboats for hire to go spear fishing. Most days there are carvers at work near the beach.

Chief Joseph is the *kastom* owner of the northern approach to the volcanoes and the guides also live in the tiny village of **Ranvetlam**.

Near Ranvetlam is **Buwoma Bay** (admission 500Vt), which has two large hot springs, one issuing from a cave and the other on the shore. Islanders use them to cook eggs, and bathe in them to cure skin complaints. This was a breeding ground for megapodes but they haven't been seen since 2004.

The return speedboat fare from Ranon to Ranvetlam is 3000Vt.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Ranon Guesthouse** (☎ 48405; Ranon; s with all meals 2000Vt) In Ranon; has two beds, some solar lighting and clean facilities.

**Solomon Douglas Bungalows** (☎ 48405; Ranon; s/d with all meals 4500/6700Vt) Charming and traditional; has a flush toilet and hot-water shower. The meals are excellent – you'll need the fuel as the walks are steep. The bungalows are up the hill (read: high cliff) where the views are stunning. Laan, the owner, can arrange any tours, guides or Rom dances, and speedboats to Craig Cove and Pentecost.

**Willie Salong Guesthouse** (☎ 48405; dm 1000Vt) In Ranvetlam. Very clean and traditional.

**Vet Met Bungalows** (☎ 48527, 48687, ☎ /fax 48405; www.positiveearth.org/vetmet; Ranvetlan; s/d with all meals 5100/7200Vt) Has traditional, brightly painted bungalows, flush toilet and hot shower, on a peaceful cliff where you can walk down to a small bay. Meals like chicken *laplap* (Vanuatu's national dish) and cucumber sandwiches are served in a lovely dining area. Owner Isaiah Bong arranges volcano tours, provides tents and organises Rom dances at neighbouring villages.

## PAAMA

pop 2000 / area 32 sq km

Paama has no permanent streams. Most drinking water comes from rainwater tanks or coastal springs at low tide, where it is collected in buckets. Boil all water before you drink it. Dolphins can often be seen leaping playfully through the water off the northeastern corner. However, over the years many people have been taken by sharks off the west coast. Every village claims to have at least one man who can change himself into a shark; such a person is called a *nakaimo*. Only sorcerers may do this and, as women are not meant to perform sorcery, *nakaimo* are by definition male.

If you have an enemy, your opponent will get a *nakaimo* to transform himself into a shark and devour you at sea.

### Sights & Activities

**Liro**, the largest village, has good snorkelling and swimming, great hiking, and local canoes can be hired. It's a strenuous hike from here across the mountainous interior to **Lulep Netan**, where you can get a speedboat over to **Lopevi**.

**Vaoleli** has a black-sand beach; less than 500m from the shore is colourful **Vaoleli Reef** – with very good snorkelling. The water teems with sharks, mostly of the harmless reef variety. The locals say the reef was once an island, but it was washed away in a violent storm and now only the reef remains.

### Sleeping & Eating

It's a good idea to take food; the store sells a few things, and there's a market on Fridays.

**Presbyterian Mission Guesthouse** (☎ 48411; dm 500Vt) This has a room with bunk beds and a kitchen, beautiful views and constant breezes.

**Tavir Guesthouse** (☎ 48538; dm 1200Vt) Run by Kenneth, has three bedrooms, a kitchen, comfortable beds and a pleasant veranda looking out over the bay.

### Getting There & Around

Paama's airfield is jammed against a steep hill right on the coast. Landing is unnerving. **Vanair** (☎ 25025) has two flights from Vila and one from Luganville each week. For boats that call into Paama, see p185.

A speedboat charter from Lamén Bay on Epi to southern Paama costs about 10,000Vt for a same-day return (12,000Vt to northern Paama). Speedboats to go around the coast can be hired at Liro, Tahi Netan, Lihili, Lulep Netan and Vaoleli.

A track runs down the west coast, from the airfield to Hingal on the south coast, but the steep slopes and lack of water make for trying walking conditions.

### LOPEVI

Once Vanuatu's most dangerous volcano, Lopevi sent everyone – including the Anglican Diocese of Melanesia (DOM) mission – fleeing, never to return, with a powerful eruption of molten rock in 1970. Another huge eruption in June 2001 spewed rivers of lava and blanketed poor Paama with ash, destroying crops and contaminating water supplies. She blew again in 2003, shredding trees and melting the boots of volcanologists who rushed to study her. A pilot photographed the spout of thick grey smoke heading into the stratosphere – look out for copies of the picture in brochures.

Lopevi (1413m) rises to a classic cone. Dense vegetation grows on the lower slopes in between eruptions; the upper portion stays dark with volcanic ash. She's beautiful when she's calm.

A return trip in a speedboat from Lulep Netan on Paama costs 4000Vt; it's 6000Vt from Liro. A charter from Lamén Bay costs around 10,000Vt return.

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