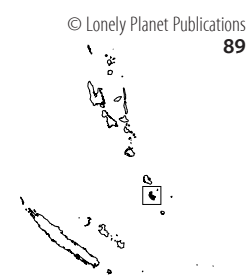


# Tanna



Tanna means 'earth' in Tannese. Glorious, rich, soft volcanic earth, producing seriously organic meat and vegetables; lush, undisturbed rainforests; heady night-perfumed flowers; coffee plantations; plains where wild horses gallop; mighty mountains; a giant banyan, the world's largest living organism; hot springs; waterfalls; and presiding over it all, fuming, furious Mt Yasur, the world's most accessible active volcano. To be so close to nature's raw power is mind-blowing. And the sea also offers surf, coral reefs, bays, harbours and deep blue swimming holes.

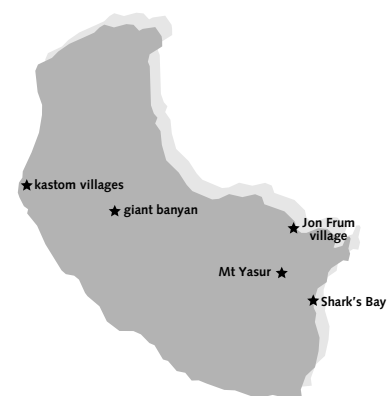
The Tannese are passionate about their island. Local chiefs form marine and wildlife sanctuaries. There are gardening, surfing, cycling, walking or volcano enthusiasts everywhere, and very serious quarantine controls – the island has no nasty bugs, so everything's grown without insecticides, herbicides or pesticides, which is how they want to keep it. Christianity, cargo cult (where believers act like Europeans so that wealth 'cargo' will come their way) and *kastom* (the rules surrounding ancient ancestral legacies and customs) are important and all natural phenomena have a fourth dimension of spirituality and mystique.

The entire island is a tourists' playground. So when the volcano has finished working its magic on you, grounding you, bringing the spiritual into focus, there's horses to ride, forests to trek, waterfalls to stand under, and a 1.6km-deep drop-off tumbling with coral to snorkel along. Meet *kastom* villagers wearing *nambas* (penis sheaths) and grass skirts, watch age-old festivals or just laze on a tropical island beach and watch the sun set.

Stay for ages: it will be unforgettable.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvelling at nature's fireworks display on a night visit to **Mt Yasur volcano** (p98)
- Discovering traditional Vanuatu at Tanna's **kastom villages** (p94)
- Joining a Friday-night dance at a fascinating **Jon Frum village** (p97)
- Horse riding to the largest living organism on earth, a **giant banyan** (p94)
- Watching the sharks at **Sharks Bay** (p99) and walking around the cliff tops of this scenic coast



■ POPULATION: 33,000

■ AREA: 565 SQ KM

## History

Early in August 1774, Commander James Cook, seeing a great glow (Yasur volcano) in the sky, went to investigate. He landed in a small bay, which he named Port Resolution after his vessel, the HMS *Resolution*. He wanted to climb the volcano, but the islanders wouldn't let him because it was *tabu* (sacred and forbidden).

When sandalwood traders came to Port Resolution the locals offered them three pigs for every Erromangan brought to them – they didn't like Erromangans, except as pot fillers. The bride price at the time was 10 pigs.

Polynesian religious teachers and Missionaries were all forced to flee as the islanders believed any disaster was caused by sorcery – their initial impression of Christianity.

John Paton arrived at Port Resolution in 1858. He was a fundamentalist missionary of the fire-and-brimstone type and forced his male converts to have only one wife, stop fighting, take over garden work from the women, and wear European clothes rather than *nambas*. But what really disrupted village tradition was his ruling against arranged marriages between villages, through the Nekowari ceremony (p92).

The Tannese revolted against Paton's bigotry in 1862, and he moved on to 'civilise' Aniwa.

By the early 20th century, Presbyterian missionaries dominated Tanna's religious and political life. They had their own courts and sentenced Christian offenders to perform menial tasks as punishment. *Kastom* worshippers soon numbered only 25% of the island's population.

The Jon Frum movement, a hybrid of Christianity and traditional beliefs, emerged as a form of resistance to the missionaries' teachings (see the boxed text, p97). By the end of WWII it was one of Tanna's three main religious groups, the others being Presbyterians and *kastom* people.

In the early 1970s, Tanna became highly politicised. In 1979 Jon Frum cultists and a Tannese *kastom* group called Kapiel allied themselves with the secessionist Nagriamel group in Santo and the Modérés in the rest of Vanuatu. Galvanised into action by the 'coconut rebellion' in Santo in May 1980, Tannese Modérés seized two British government staff, who were freed by police action two days later. Many Modérés were taken

prisoner, so 300 of their group attacked to try to free them. In the ensuing shoot-out a Modéré leader was killed. Arrests were made and the Tannese insurrection fizzled out.

By 2000 Tanna had developed into a peaceful ecocultural island. It now sports many secondary schools, a strong cultural climate and comfortable coexistence of *kastom*, Christian and Jon Frum religions.

## Climate

Tanna's weather is usually drier and milder than most other islands in Vanuatu. Isangel's average summer maximum is 30°C while winter nights can be cool, making a jacket necessary.

A freak, hours-long hailstorm in late 2002 caused landslides that took out concrete bridges and dumped massive boulders on South Beach Rd – it also destroyed much of Turtle Bay Inn, but the resort has been rebuilt.

Cyclone Ivy blew away or damaged every ni-Van house and school on the island in February 2004.

## Local Customs

Although Tanna has a modern hospital, many villagers still trust traditional medicine where their backs are lacerated and herbs placed over the incisions. Mothers with large families or people who've been chronically sick have many scars on their back. *Kleber* (Witch doctors) cast spells both to heal and to harm people. Some rainmakers can conjure wet weather and others try to stop cyclones. If a sorcerer wants to kill someone, he weaves a curse on the victim's clothing. Then he warns the victim how long he or she has to live.

## WAHOO

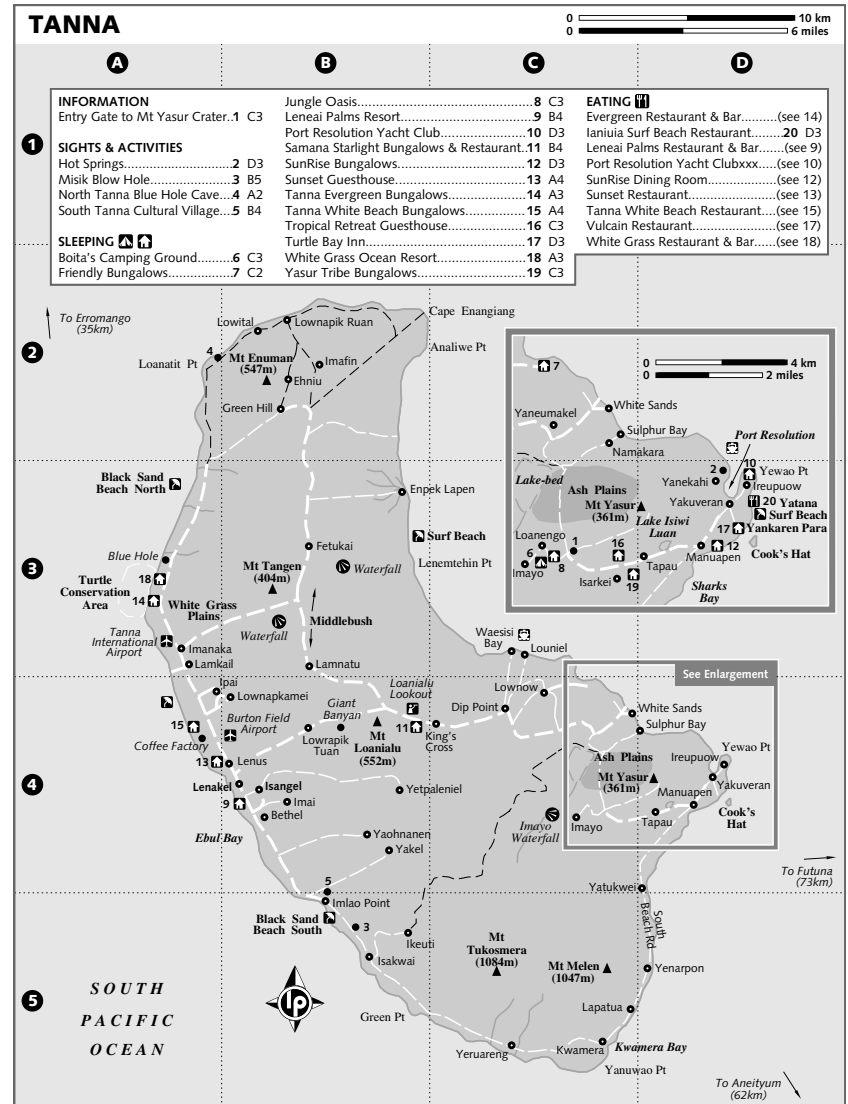
Silver-haired Wahoo, who sadly died in 2002, was known by everyone in Tanna. Wahoo's mother was captured by blackbirders in about 1902, along with several other villagers. When the locals realised, the *kastom* Cleverer (important person) of saltwater and wind was summoned to cast a spell on the ship – the *Wahoo*. A storm blew up, the ship floundered on the reef just out from Leneai Palms Resort, and the villagers escaped and swam to shore where Wahoo was born that night.

The Tannese believe in ghosts and that the spirits of the dead reside in Mt Yasur.

## THE NIEL

Originally a special feast where men rejuvenated themselves by eating their dead enemies, the Niel has evolved into a surplus-sharing ceremony.

In 1888 the adventurous British artist Charles Gordon Frazer chanced upon the Niel at Yanekahi, near Port Resolution. His famous painting, called *A Cannibal Feast on the Island of Tanna*, shows three men, bound and waiting to be eaten. There's a copy of the painting in the Cultural Centre in Vila.



### THE NEKOWIAR & TOKA CEREMONY

About every three years, come August, a great restlessness spreads across Tanna. It's like waiting for Christmas. The men scour the bush and villages for pigs and kava, counting and calculating. Finally one of the chief's announces that his village will host the Nekowiari. Hooray! Romance is in the air. It will be a three-day extravaganza of song, dance and feasting, when the leaders of neighbouring villages organise marriages. Young people beware: your fate will soon be sealed. Negotiations for the marriages continue for months afterwards.

The preparations for the Nekowiari are exhaustive. Three complex dances are practised at the rehearsal site and beauty magic takes over. Men, women, boys and girls use powders mixed with coconut oil to colour their faces a deep red, with black and yellow stripes down their nose and across to their ears.

Finally up to 2000 people assemble while the hosts display around 100 pigs, tied by the feet and suspended on poles.

The ceremony begins with the host village's young men dancing an invitation to the women. They respond with the Napen-Napen, a spectacular dance that represents their toil in the fields, and continues throughout the first night.

The male guests watch and wait for dawn when they dance the Toka – pounding, colourful dances that show scenes of daily life. The Toka reaches its climax that night. If the Toka dancers make a circle around a woman, she's tossed up and down between them. Tourists may watch, but should remain well back. During this stage a man may have sex with any woman who is willing.

On the third day the chief of the host village produces the Kweriya, a 3m bamboo pole with white and black feathers wound around it and hawk's feathers on top. It announces that the Nao – the host village's dance – is to begin. This men's dance enacts events such as hunting and wrestling.

The climax is in the afternoon. Pigs, kava roots, woven mats, grass skirts and massive quantities of *laplap* (filled doughy mix) are brought out. The pigs are ceremonially clubbed and cooked, and a huge feast begins.

If you get a chance to attend, go for it. You may need to camp out, like the villagers, and it costs 6000Vt to watch, plus 10,000Vt to video the ceremony.

### Orientation

Isangel is the administrative centre of the Tafea province. The name Tafea comes from the five populated islands in the province: Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Erromango and Aniwa.

Spectacular South Beach Rd is its own Disney ride, with amazing ocean and cliff views at every turn. It takes about three hours to make the 30km trip, and make sure you've reached the end before dusk, as you'll never find the road using your headlights.

In the centre is a fertile, dense forest, aptly called Middlebush. This is the garden area of Tanna with coconut, coffee, vegetables and fruits grown here for export. Kava is a major cash crop.

East Tanna is a tourist highlight, with the Mt Yasur volcano, Shark's Bay and Port Resolution within hiking, horse-riding or cycling distance of each other.

### Information

You can change travellers cheques at the NBV bank in Isangel. Credit cards are accepted at the resorts, but you'll need cash everywhere else.

**Ambulance** (☎ 68659)

**Emergencies** (☎ 112)

**Hospital** (☎ 68659) At Lenakel.

**Internet** (Map p94; per min 25Vt; ☎ 7-11.30am & 1.30-5pm) Located at Lorakau Computer School next to the market.

**Police** (☎ 68658) At Isangel.

### Festivals & Events

There is a variety of special events held on Tanna throughout the year.

#### FEBRUARY

**Jon Frum Day** On 15 February, prayers and flowers are offered in the church at Sulphur Bay, followed by a flag-raising ceremony and military parade, where men armed with bamboo rifles march like US army sergeants.

#### APRIL

**Yam Festival** There is dancing and feasting in the villages to praise the harvest.

#### MAY & JUNE

**Cross Island Relay** Teams of seven form from all over the nation. The leaders set out from Lenakel; the race finishes at Mt Yasur car park. Contact a local resort to join a team.

#### JULY–OCTOBER

**Horse-Racing Carnivals** Races are held during winter (July to September/October) at old Burton Airport and on the Mt Yasur ash plains. They are an awesome sight.

**Circumcision Ceremonies** Dancing, colourful costumes, face and body paint and a grand feast celebrate the rite of passage of a boy, held in August and September. Tourists are welcome to watch, but need a ni-Van guide as there are serious restrictions as to where you can walk.

**Mini Games at the Lenakel Soccer Stadium** Tanna athletes compete for positions in the Tafea Games in August and September.

**Cultural Spirit Arts & Carving Exhibition** Local artists and artisans are invited to exhibit their craft in Lenakel in October. There's a different theme each year.

**Nekowiari & Toka Ceremony** A three-day extravaganza of dancing and feasting in September/October about every three years, when villages cement relationships and arrange marriages. The place and date is only announced at the time, but one is expected to be held in 2006.

### Getting There & Away

Vanair's rather swish ATR42 flies between Vila and Tanna every morning. Another very little plane makes twice-weekly flights, landing at Aniwa, Aneityum, Futuna and Erromango.

For boats that call into Tanna, see p185.

There are ports of entry at Port Resolution and Lenakel, and anchorages at Sulphur Bay and Waesisi Bay. **Immigration** (☎ 68658) is at the police station in Isangel. **Customs & quarantine** (Map p94; ☎ 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm) is in Lenakel, opposite Lenakel Wharf. The customs officer goes to Port Resolution once a week.

### Getting Around

Tanna has a network of unsealed roads and 4WD tracks; all the major attractions are linked by roads to Lenakel, the capital.

Trucks and the local bus meet each incoming flight. The fare from the airport to Lenakel by taxi/bus is 1000/200Vt. Ring ☎ 68647 to ask the bus to pick you up on its rounds.

It costs about 6000Vt to cross the island. Though expensive, the trip is an adventure with wonderful views, and your truck will fill with friendly villagers needing a lift.

#### BICYCLE

This is a pleasant alternative as the roads and paths are soft-packed volcanic ash lined with ferns, flowers and shrubs. There are few cars and navigating is easy. But you can't just head off as all land, beach and reef belongs to somebody. Resorts with bikes available will give you a map of bike trails; get to all the dances, beaches etc, and really experience the rainforests.

**Zuma Scooter Hire** (p65) in Vila hires bikes and tents that you can bring to Tanna. Bring spare parts and tools, and check that the bikes are not being left on the tarmac as you fly out.

#### WALKING

The 41km walk from Lenakel to Port Resolution follows the main road, climbs steep hills, and takes you past some great places to stay; or enjoy the challenging forest path over the range from Yakel to Sulphur Bay (five or six hours). A little easier is the 7km scenic coastal walk from Black Beach North down to White Grass. Ask your host to arrange a guide (see p176).

### WEST TANNA

Visible from the aeroplane as you come in are the coral reefs and rock pools of the west coast.

Around 1000 people live in **Lenakel**, which has mains electricity and several stores and **markets** (see p96).

Tanna's **kava** is potent, probably the strongest in the country.

**Isangel** is the administrative centre for Tafea. It's tidily laid out with colourful poincianas, pines, banyans and red coral trees. There's a **market** on Wednesday; villagers set up their stalls Tuesday afternoon.

### Sights

All experiences start with **Mt Yasur volcano** (p98). Tours from the west start midafternoon and return for dinner about 8pm.

At **South Tanna Cultural Village** (Map p91; South Beach Rd; admission 1500Vt; ☎ Mon, Wed & Fri or by arrangement), a young *kastom* villager drums you through the forest but warriors leap out

with war whoops to bar your way. Don't worry, the chief soon intervenes with the traditional peace branch. From here, you are guided through displays of food preparation, *kastom* medicine, how to catch wild animals and much more. Finally the men perform the famous, expressive Toka dances. There are handicrafts for sale in the clearing.

Visit **kastom villages** Yakel or Ipai where village life has not changed in centuries and villagers wear only *nambas* and grass skirts, or Imai, a small Jon Frum settlement. There's *kastom* dancing, colourful costumes, *laplap* (filled doughy mix) and artefacts. As many as 600 people gather at the open-air *nakamal* (clubhouse) at Yakel

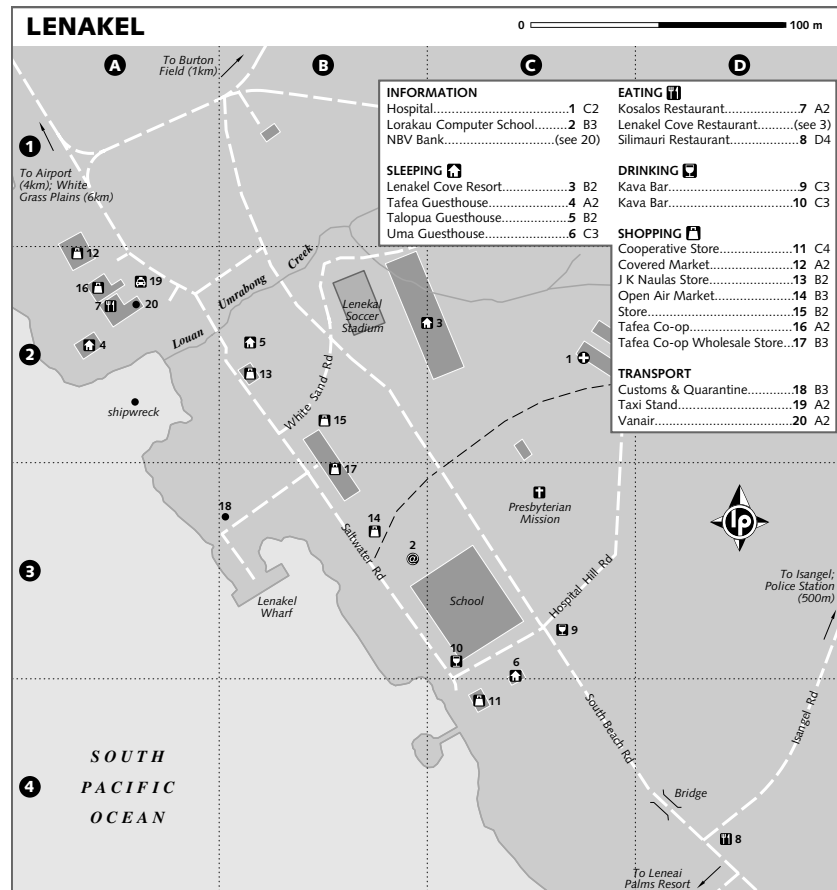
under a huge banyan, to drink kava; dancing nights occur on a regular basis.

Further along towards Bethel, Seventh-Day Adventists hold Saturday baptisms on the small black-sand beach at **Ebul Bay**. Visitors are welcome.

Vanuatu's main coffee-growing area is in the Middlebush. Tanna Coffee Development Co in Fetukai welcomes visitors, but inquire first at your bungalows.

### Activities

For **horse riding** (village/banyan tour 2000/3500Vt), Lenakel Cove Resort has horses and guides; jungle trails take you past villages full of adoring children to a **giant banyan** as big as a soccer field. It's near Lowrapik Tuan.



### TANNA COFFEE

Coffee bushes grow all through the Middlebush, in plantations and around villages. The coffee cherries develop in bunches along the branches of the bush at the nodules. Up till 2004 the farmers would poke the bean out of the cherry by hand, or bite the cherries and spit out the bean. A new project has placed 27 stainless-steel pulpers around Middlebush so the beans are now removed by machine. The flesh becomes humus, and the beans are fermented overnight, washed and laid on black plastic to sun-dry. Once dry, villagers load the beans into sacks and walk to the coffee factory, next door to Tanna White Beach Bungalows, where the moisture content is tested – the price is 200Vt/kg if the beans are dry enough. Beans go into a machine that removes the papery outer skin and grades them, ready to be shipped to Vila where they are roasted, packed and sold. Pure organic Arabica coffee: it tastes great and makes an excellent souvenir.

A longer ride goes past the banyan to the coast; gallop along the shoreline, and swim in the freshwater streams.

Do an African safari stint up on White Grass Plains, the haunt of **wild horses**. They are magnificent animals, racing on this wild plateau.

**Sea kayaks** are available for hire at several resorts. Get to deserted beaches and snorkel virgin reefs, but take a guide as the reefs and swells are rugged and unpredictable.

**Guided walks** take you through rainforest and coffee plantations, among the wild horses, along stunning coastlines, and under two grand waterfalls. And there's a two-day trek around the top of Tanna, camping overnight in a village.

Go out on a local **fishing boat** to try for wahoo, yellowfin tuna, barracuda or skipjack.

There's excellent **snorkelling** right along the west coast, with the reef face cascading down for 100m, over one-million-year-old lava beds. You'll also see turtles, dolphins and whales, with any luck. There's even a blue hole with an underwater hot spring. **Black Sand Beach North**, in a secluded cove, offers good swimming and a freshwater stream.

**Surfing** at the black-sand beach near Louniel is fun. Boogie boards are available, or try riding the local outrigger canoes – it'll test your balance! A tour here will include a swim at the waterfall.

**North Tanna Blue Hole Cave** is a fishing-boat trip away. Duck-dive and come up in a stunning grotto, where the turquoise water is lit from a hole in the cave roof.

### Tours

All activities are best done in a small group, and any place you stay will have a full range

of activities available. Prices range from 1000Vt to 10,000Vt, depending on distance (fuel is very expensive), fees, and the number travelling. If you are staying at a small place, ask if you can join a group doing the tour out of a resort, where costs may be shared. Every tour ends up way better than you expect.

Isso at Louniel Tours runs many tours and camping trips (tents available). Ask your bungalow host.

### Sleeping

**Sunset Guesthouse** (Map p91; ☎ 68683; PO Box 9; s/d 2000/3000Vt) Conveniently on the road between Lenakel and the airport, pretty green plaited-bamboo bungalows with mains electricity look down on the rock pools and swimming areas. Helen and Jimmy will introduce you to village life.

**Tanna Evergreen Bungalows** (Map p91; ☎ 68774; ☎ /fax 68846; Tevergreen@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 9; budget s/d 3500/5500Vt, garden s/d/tr/q 4500/6500/8000/9000Vt, camping 1000Vt; ♿) Bungalows hide coolly in the lush forest between hammocks strung from the trees, some with bathrooms, others with ocean views (500Vt more). Snorkel gear, baby-sitting, laundry, massage, glass-bottom kayaks, a full range of tours – it's all here, with excellent snorkelling at the doorstep. Rates include breakfast; transfers are 200Vt. Visa, MasterCard and travellers cheques accepted.

**Talopua Guesthouse** (Map p94; ☎ 68008; ☎ /fax 68612; PO Box 854; dm/s/d/tr 2200/3200/6400/7200Vt) Behind the JK Naulas store, where you get the key – ask for Johnny Tavo. Bright painted rooms, good shared facilities and a sparkling kitchen should you wish to cook. Take your meals (150Vt to 700Vt) onto the wide veranda to catch the cool breezes and great views. Canoes, kayaks and tents can be hired.

**AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Tanna White Beach Bungalows** (Map p91; ☎ 68866; Tanna\_whitebeachbungalow@yahoo.com; PO Box 83; s/d with breakfast 2875/4600Vt) There's a rambling track through the forest, opening suddenly onto a gorgeous clearing around a huge shade tree. Sparkly new bamboo bungalows have modern bathrooms tucked behind. A white-sand and rock-pool beach is off to the side. Ahead, the open restaurant with soaring roof pushes up into the treetops (right). Security lights – true! All fabulous, owned and run by the local villagers (ask for Erick). Snorkel the drop-off (bring your gear), borrow the canoes, lounge under the trees – you'll never want to leave.

**Lenakel Cove Resort** (Map p94; ☎ 68860, 23759; [Lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu](http://Lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu); PO Box 887; s/d/tr with breakfast 5000/7000/8500Vt) Spacious Melanesian bungalows with bathrooms, in a stunning garden overlooking the soccer stadium, an easy stroll into town. Camp for 1200Vt. It is *tabu* to kill birds and butterflies in the area, so you are surrounded by birdsong. Visa, MasterCard and Amex accepted.

**leneai Palms Resort** (Map p91; ☎ 68750; [leneai.palms@vanuatu.com.vu](mailto:leneai.palms@vanuatu.com.vu); PO Box 106; 📍) An amazing spot, down on the bay where grand bungalows with lounging rooms and shuttered windows open onto sea views. There's spacious lawns and homemade ice cream – all great, especially for families. The coast is dotted with protected rock pools so snorkelling is fun. Snorkel gear and board games are available, or get a volley ball game happening.

**White Grass Ocean Resort** (Map p91; ☎ 68688; fax 68677; [whitegrassanna@vanuatu.com.vu](mailto:whitegrassanna@vanuatu.com.vu); [www.whitegrassvanuatu.com.vu](http://www.whitegrassvanuatu.com.vu); PO Box 5; s/d/tr with breakfast 13,000/19,000/22,500Vt; 📍) A cosy resort where bungalows look out onto tiny rocky inlets, and are linked with timber bridges. There's a bar, 24-hour electricity and local handicrafts for sale. Snorkel, swim in blue holes, play tennis or *pétanque* (a type of lawn bowls played on a hard surface), or jog around the three-hole golf course. Snorkel gear, mountain bikes, kayaks and golf clubs are available. Rates include transfers. Visa, MasterCard and Amex accepted.

Two seriously down-market guesthouses are **Tafea Guesthouse** (☎ 68695; fax 68846; PO Box 9;

beds 1500Vt, camping 1000Vt) and **Uma Guesthouse** (☎ 68768; PO Box 16; B&B 3200Vt).

**Eating & Drinking**

Lenakel has several excellent bakeries.

**Silimaui Restaurant** (Map p94; meals 300Vt; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) Hides prettily under vines as you turn into Isangel Rd. Dorah prepares a different dish each day and closes when it has all sold. With any luck, she'll be serving her fish in coconut cream with papaw and rice.

**Kosalos Restaurant** (Map p94; Tafea Co-op; meals 300-500Vt; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri) Has beef curry and rice lunches. Book for weekends.

**Sunset Restaurant** (Map p91; meals 500Vt; ☎ 10am-noon) Quaint, and just the place to stop if you're walking into town – choose from steak, chicken or fish with rice and vegetables.

**Lenakel Cove Restaurant** (Map p94; ☎ 68860; meals 500-1200Vt; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Your host will serve you perfectly cooked eye fillet or maybe a fish curry, but you must book.

**Evergreen Restaurant & Bar** (Map p91; ☎ 68774; mains 1000-1800Vt; ☎ 6am-10pm) Serves great seafood mains and yummy pancakes on a pretty deck.

**leneai Palms Restaurant & Bar** (Map p91; ☎ 68750; meals 760-2500Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) Specialises in country cooking, with fish and vegetables straight from the market – the mud crab platter is a total experience.

**White Grass Restaurant & Bar** (Map p91; ☎ 68688; meals 800-2500Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) A great place: rock pools, reef and ocean, a spread of light and colour at sunset. Enjoy papaw soup or baked fish in coconut sauce.

**Tanna White Beach Restaurant** (Map p91; ☎ 68866; meals 800-2500Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) A magnificent traditional building, with views over the beach and local freshly cooked meals, but you must book or the ladies will go home and you'll get Erick cooking.

Two kava bars on the southern side of town provide a meeting place.

**Shopping**

The Tafea Co-op (Map p94) sells processed food lines, alcohol, clothing and hardware. For the kids, there's a range of icy-poles.

A covered market (Map p94) across from the Co-op and an open market near the wharf are both set up Monday, Thursday afternoon and Friday. Women come in

from the villages all around, even from over at White Sands, place their mats on the ground and spread their produce out on the mat. Then they set about talking to the other villagers. The markets are colourful and fun – check out the long plaits of wild mandarins – and the ladies will be keen to hop aboard your truck if you're heading their way at dusk.

There's another market in Isangel on Wednesday; villagers set up their stalls Tuesday afternoon, as nobody will attempt to steal their goods.

**ACROSS THE CENTRE**

Loanialu Lookout (Map p91) on top of the main range on the road from Lenakel to Port Resolution offers a magnificent view of Mt Yasur volcano. On a clear day Aniwa and Futuna can be seen in the distance; look for a pancake and a hat.

The steep, narrow, winding section of road here was constructed by British army engineers in 1990.

**Sights & Activities**

At Dip Point there's a turn-off to **Waesisi Bay**, where an 8km beach runs north to just beyond Lenemtehin Point. There's surf, and Waesisi is one of Tanna's few good **anchors**. The **William Grey Memorial Church** (1882) at Waesisi is of great importance to the vil-

lagers, who still speak very highly of the missionary.

**JON FRUM VILLAGES**

**Sulphur Bay** used to be a major centre of the Jon Frum cult until it was split after a philosophical rift between the chief Isaac Wan and Prophet Fred. Like other Jon Frum villages, it's built around a square ceremonial ground. The church to one side houses the movement's most sacred red cross. Beside it, an unpainted post dedicated to Christ is used to heal backaches. Entry to the village is 500Vt. Ask for permission to use the hot spring on the black-sand beach: it's hydrotherapy, jumping out of the spring into the surf.

Dances are held on the oval on Friday nights, when songs of praise are sung to the tunes of American battle hymns.

When Prophet Fred, leader of the Jon Frum movement, successfully predicted that Lake Isiwu Luan would burst its banks in 2001, he founded a new religion called Unity and a new village on the mountain between Sulphur Bay and Port Resolution. However, his followers still come down to the Friday-night dances.

**Namakara**, up the road towards the ash plain, is where chief Isaac Wan looks after his handful of followers. You'll be made very welcome if you visit this attractive

**JON FRUM MOVEMENT**

Magic is a central force in ni-Vanuatu lives. So in 1936, when Jon Frum came from the sea at Green Point and announced himself to some kava drinkers, they could see that he was the brother of the god of Mt Tukosmera. He told the men that if the Europeans left Tanna, there would be an abundance of wealth. They listened intently and spread the word. It was the beginning of a neo-pagan uprising, with followers going back to their traditional dancing and kava drinking – but not cannibalism, fortunately.

When the US troops arrived a few years later, many Tannese went to Efate and Santo to work for them. There they met black soldiers, colourful with their theatrical uniforms, decorations, badges, belts and hats. The African-Americans had huge quantities of transport equipment, refrigerators, radios, and endless supplies of Coca-Cola and cigarettes. But most of all, they were generous and friendly, treating the ni-Vans as equals. Here was the wealth and way of life they'd been told about. They concluded that Jon Frum must be American.

Some supporters made radio aereals out of tin cans and wire to contact Jon Frum. Others built an airfield in the bush and constructed wooden aircraft to entice his cargo planes to land. Still others erected wharves where his ships could berth. Small red crosses were erected all over Tanna, since the Red Cross meant free medical treatment; they remain a feature in Jon Frum villages. Flags are raised each evening to this god of their collective imagination.

When will Jon Frum come? 'How long have Christians waited?' they ask. 'Nearly 2000 years, yet we've waited only 70!'

village; take some gifts, and be prepared to dance all night (no entry fee).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Friendly Bungalows** (Map p91; Tanna ☎ 68040; Vila ☎ 26856; [friendlybungalows@vanuatu.com.vu](mailto:friendlybungalows@vanuatu.com.vu); PO Box 63; s/d 2250/3000Vt, bungalows with bathroom d/tr 6000/7500Vt) A tree fern-lined road opens onto a beautiful black-sand beach where rickety, rustic bungalows are managed by Mary who'll look after you very well. A generator provides lighting and 24-hour cold drinks – bliss after your Mt Yasur experience; all tours are available from here. The licensed restaurant (set meals 1250Vt to 2100Vt; open lunch and dinner) specialises in local cooking; come on lobster night! Visa and MasterCard accepted. Transfers are 2000Vt.

**Samana Starlight Bungalows** (Map p91; fax 68638; White Sands Rd, PO Box 863; s & d 8700Vt) Right in the middle of the island, in lovely spacious grounds, these are very elegant bungalows, well built and modern yet keeping the traditional feeling. The restaurant (mains 700Vt to 1800Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is the perfect spot for a break if you're trekking cross-country.

### EAST TANNA Mt Yasur Volcano

**Mt Yasur** (Map p91; admission 2250Vt) is one of the world's most accessible active volcanoes. In fact, 4WD vehicles can get to within 150m of the crater rim.

Mt Yasur's ash-laden smoke has smothered the vegetation, reducing the landscape

to an alien prehistoric desert with the gaunt shapes of surviving pandanus palms adding to the surrealistic view. The track from the entry gate enters a gully on the southern slopes. Tree ferns crowd in on either side, a lush contrast to the desolation of the plains.

In the local language Yasur means 'old man'. Southeastern Tannese believe that the volcano is the originator of the universe, and that it's where a person's spirit goes after death. Jon Frummers will tell you that Jon Frum lives in the volcano along with a huge army of spirits. One popular legend about the genesis of Yasur is that two ladies were washing their clothes when a complaining old hag approached. Suddenly she grew. The women were covered by the massive, complaining hag. They're still trapped under Yasur, and the hag still complains. Your guides will tell you their version of the legend as you walk up to the rim.

It's windy on the exposed rim, and there's ash blowing around, so wear long trousers and a long-sleeved shirt. Some nights you'll need warm clothing. There's no safety fence, so carry small children to prevent them from falling, or being blown, over the edge.

Don't go up to the rim when the volcano is reaching levels three and four. A molten rock is so hot that you would disintegrate if it hit you. You can buy some special singed cards to post at **Volcano Post** ([www.vanuatu.post.vu](http://www.vanuatu.post.vu)), the world's only post box on top of a volcano.

### VISITING MT YASUR

The level of activity within Yasur fluctuates between dangerous and relatively calm, but when it's hot it's hot. Along the path to the crater rim there's whiffs of sulphur and whooshing, roaring noises. Ahead is a silhouette of people on the rim, with golden fireworks behind them. Then you're looking into a dark central crater where three vents take it in turns to spit rockets of red molten rock and smoke. The ground trembles and a fountain of fiery magma shoots up and spreads against the sky. All turns quiet, except for the thudding of boulders as big as trucks somersaulting down into the vast campfire.

Just when you're getting used to it, there's a gasp, a bang, the ground shakes and lumps of red-hot magma shoot high overhead. Black smoke boils upwards in a dense column, lightning flashes inside the crater, magma splashes in the central vent and subsides again.

You realise why tourists have been badly singed, or lost their cameras in flight, and why one tourist has died. It is important to take heed of your guide about how close you can go.

Some visitors find Yasur terrifying; it's definitely unforgettable. At night the fireworks are more spectacular, and you can see the lava bombs coming, though it may be too late to duck.

Still game? Take a torch, a jacket, and do have your personal affairs in order.

**Volcano tours** are available through all the bungalows – prices depend on the distance travelled and whether snacks are included. You can get package deals in Vila that typically include airfares, transfers, accommodation, meals and visits to Mt Yasur and a *kastom* village (about 35,000Vt).

### Port Resolution

This beautiful bay, with its magnificent cliffs, is Tanna's best anchorage, although a yacht wreck from 2005 shows the folly of heading out through the rocky entrance during a storm. Nearby is Cook's Pyramid where Cook took sightings in 1774.

The village of **Yakuveran** has pretty bungalows and a market with handicrafts, fruit, vegetables etc. Wide, flower-lined paths lead to the beach: one comes out near the bay at **Yewao Point** to a marine sanctuary. The water is calm just before the coral reef finishes, offering excellent snorkelling. Further around the bay is a *tabu* rocky outcrop where people's spirits go when they die.

Another path reaches an attractive white-sand beach at **Irepuuwo**.

The last path brings you to a top surf beach, starting at **Yatana** and running into **Yankaren Para**, with deep swells along 2.5km. Just make sure your board travels on the same plane you do.

Port Resolution is a port of entry for yachts.

### Sharks Bay

This tiny bay attracts dozens of yellow reef sharks. You can stand on the clifftop and look down on them. Feed them if you like (admission 500Vt). The cleared grounds around the viewing platform are a perfect spot for a picnic; ask your host to contact the *kastom* owners and they will prepare one for you.

### Sights & Activities

**Mt Yasur Volcano** dominates the landscape as you travel east across the ash plains. There are many tours up to see the old man, but there are many other extraordinary things to see as well.

For **horse riding**, horses are available at Jungle Oasis (p100). Head across the ash plains, up the volcano, down to Port Resolution and Sharks Bay. Your guide will look after new riders.

You can **board-ride** down Yasur's ash plains. It's a quick trip down after a long walk up.

**Cultural concerts** are held in a clearing, where narrow paths lead to magical fire-walking, animal traps, luminous mushrooms, handicrafts; in the meantime, string bands and little kids sing and dance on a small stage high up in a banyan.

The impressive **Imayo Waterfall** lies deep in the rainforest. The trek takes three hours each way – it's for experienced bushwalkers. Ask your host about guides.

### Tours

**Boita Eco Tours** Learn how to make and use bows and arrows, spears and baskets or prepare kava and local *kaekae* (food).

**Kastom village tours** Visit Tapau and Imayo to see the villages and their artefacts, watch the dances, enjoy the colourful costumes and tuck into some *laplap*.

**Walking tours** (guides 500Vt) Check out bat or steam caves; travel through fern glades and bamboo forests to see flying foxes.

**Yanekahi Day Tours** (☎ 68061) Erick Philemon takes you bushwalking to steam vents then on a canoe ride to hot springs on the northern side of Port Resolution to cook a traditional lunch. It's a great place for a picnic – jump from hot spots to the cold sea.

### Sleeping

**Tropical Retreat Guesthouse** (Map p91; ☎ 68899; 68000; PO Box 85; [adventure@Vanuatu.com.vu](mailto:adventure@Vanuatu.com.vu); s/d with breakfast & dinner 1700/2300Vt) Ask for Philip Joel. This is a peaceful spot (even with old Yasur roaring) in an unusual garden that wanders up and down. The bungalows are spacious, there's a flush toilet and shower, and a nearby cave has turned into a natural sauna (250Vt).

**Yasur Tribe Bungalows** (Map p91; ☎ 68000, 68676; Box 863; s/d with breakfast & lunch 2000/3000Vt) Walk straight up a hillside, your way lit by coconut oil lamps, to these tiny bungalows. Ask Makou Fred for the double bungalow, so you can watch Yasur's fireworks across the valley. He will also introduce you to village life. The restaurant (meals 600Vt) opens for dinner and serves delicious *laplap* and other local food.

**SunRise Bungalows** (Map p91; ☎ 68022; PO Box 4, Lenakel, Crossroads Manuaren; s/d with breakfast & dinner 2300/3450Vt) The grounds are amazing, with drop-offs and cliffs and wild cane bungalows teetering. Fabulous, but don't get stuck into the kava. A family bungalow with bathroom (4600Vt) is on a grassy knoll.

Scramble down to a rocky beach, with sandy sections towards Cook's Hat. Ask for Roy Isaac when you ring. Transfers are 2500Vt, to the volcano car park 1000Vt.

**Port Resolution Yacht Club** (Map p91; ☎ 68791, 68061; fax 68676; Werry\_Narua@yahoo.com.au; PO Box 877; s/d/tr with breakfast 3200/4800/5300Vt, camping 1500Vt) Set on a cliff-top, each Melanesian bungalow has a marvellous view over the port to rugged Mt Melen. There's electricity in the evenings, a communal solar warm shower and flush toilet. Werry will arrange canoeing, or for you to play soccer and volleyball with the villagers. Transfers for one/two passengers costs 3100/5700Vt.

**Jungle Oasis** (Map p91; ☎ 68676; PO Box 858; garden bungalows s/d 2800/3500Vt, master bungalows s/d/f 3500/5000/6200Vt, camping 750Vt) Near the volcano entrance, these bungalows are in a romantic botanical garden with Yasur thundering in the background. Kelson's family are guides and baby-sitters, and teach you how to catch wild chickens. Rates include breakfast. Transfers for a group are 2000Vt each. The dining room (set meals lunch/dinner 750/1200Vt) is tiny, but they'll squeeze in a vocal group if you'd like live music; an island feast with dancing under an immense banyan can be arranged on Thursday, for more than five people.

**Turtle Bay Inn** (Map p91; Relais baie de Tortues; ☎ 68850, fax 68885; info@vanuatuparadise.com; PO Box 873; s/d with breakfast & lunch 6850/11,200Vt) The perfect spot if you want seclusion with island luxury. In a pretty clearing Maurice and Gillian have this very French place with electricity, and spacious bungalows, or you can camp between the pandanus trees (1000Vt). Walk through to the coral beach, with surf out behind the reef or lounge in a hot-water spring.

**Boita's Camping Ground** (Map p91; ☎ 68676, 68000; s with all meals 1000Vt) Bring your own

#### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Ianiuia Surf Beach Restaurant** (Map p91; ☎ 68061; Port Resolution; 3-course buffet meal 650Vt; ☎ by arrangement) It's a gorgeous beach, and there on the edge is the sweetest little bamboo restaurant. The chef, Lea, is attending a ground oven. The aromas as she opens it up are yummm. She adds food to an already-laden table of amazingly tasty dishes using local produce, fresh herbs, flair and finesse. The chicken with carrot is a flavour treat. How come? Go try it, it could be the best meal you'll ever have. The guests pile their plates, and some wander outside to watch the waves pounding as they eat. When lobster is in season, order in advance and the lads will go diving for them (extra 600Vt).

tent, or stay in a bamboo-and-palm-frond *kastom* tent – either way, you're moulded into the jungle, on clear, flat land. Another tiny clearing with a pipe from a spring is your natural bathroom.

#### Eating

**Port Resolution Yacht Club** (Map p91; mains 500-1200Vt; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Has cold drinks – even beer. The menu might include lobster, and chicken smoked in a local oven, or might be coleslaw and bananas. You need to book.

**SunRise Dining Room** (Map p91; Manuaren; meals 1000Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is pretty with large timber tables. Try the baked fish with *kumula* (sweet potato) chips.

**Vulcain Restaurant** (Map p91; Turtle Bay Inn; set 3-course meals 1800Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) Serves French and local cuisine such as Tanna soup (a mysterious mix of pumpkin, coconut, basil and cucumber), a taste treat. Visa, MasterCard and Amex accepted.