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ACCOMMODATION

Papua New Guinea offers poor value in terms of accommodation. When compared with the cheap-as-chips places of nearby Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia, or even with the developed-world prices of neighbouring Australia, it makes grim reading. The Solomon Islands, thankfully, is not as bad.

Overall the quality is reasonable but in most towns options are limited. Where there is enough accommodation to warrant it, we've divided our reviews into budget, midrange and top-end categories (see boxed text, p284). In both PNG and the Solomons there is a 10% value added tax (VAT, but sometimes called

GST), and all prices in this book are inclusive of tax. In PNG, the VAT situation is more ambiguous for cheaper lodges and guesthouses – those that turnover less than K100,000 a year aren't required to collect the VAT so they won't add it to your bill. More importantly, if you book and pay for your PNG accommodation in advance from outside the country it is VAT-exempt – a good way to save money on your accommodation costs.

Booking ahead is also a good idea, especially for moderately priced hotels and guesthouses and especially at festival times, when everything is packed. Apart from festival weekends (see p294) and national holidays (see p295), tourists make up such a small percentage of hotel guests that there is no clearly defined high or low season.

Don't expect to save money by bargaining. You can ask about weekend rates, which can offer some savings. In the bigger corporate-style hotels it might be worthwhile flashing your frequent-flyer card – it can't hurt. Hotels will often give free transfers between the airport; especially useful where there's no public transport. Breakfast is usually included in the room tariff, and when all meals are included, 'all-inclusive' or 'including three meals' is shown in the accommodation listings.

Camping

Camping is not a traditional part of Melanesian culture. Travellers are welcomed into whatever dwelling is available, and refusing such hospitality in favour of pitching a tent can be quite offensive. All land has a traditional owner somewhere and you would need to seek permission to camp – finding the landowner could take a while, and chances are that when you do they'll offer you room in a hut anyway. So unless you're planning on doing some seriously off-the-beaten-track trekking, don't bother bringing a tent.

Hotels & Resorts

The vast majority of hotels fall into the midrange and top-end categories. In the midrange category, prices and quality vary greatly, ranging from about K150 to K400 a night for a twin or double in PNG.

PRACTICALITIES

Newspapers

- PNG has two daily English-language newspapers: the *Post Courier* (www.postcourier.com.pg), majority owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, and *National* (www.thenational.com.pg), owned by Malaysian logging giant Rimbunan Hijau. Both are critical and quite aggressive where issues such as corruption and waste are concerned, however many people are critical about the *National's* coverage of PNG's controversial logging industry. Both can be read on the web and they're available in most provincial capitals. The *Wantok* daily newspaper is written entirely in Tok Pisin; reading it will help familiarise you with the local language. The weekend *Sunday Chronicle*, PNG's only locally-owned newspaper, was launched in 2006.
- In the Solomons, the English-language *Solomon Star* (www.solomonstarnews.com) is published five days a week in Honiara. It's delivered around the country on the Solomon Airlines flights and thus may be a day or two (or more) out of date by the time it's available in the provinces. The Solomons also has two twice-weekly newspapers – the *National Express* and the new *Island Sun* which was launched in November 2006. The *Solomon Times Online* (www.solomontimes.com) was launched in April 2007, and is a web-only news service.

Radio

- PNG has two government-funded national radio stations: Karai on the AM band and Kalang on FM. National commercial stations include NauFM (Now) broadcasting in English and YumiFM (You-me) broadcasting 24 hours in Tok Pisin. BBC World Service can be heard in Port Moresby on 106.7FM. There are numerous local radio stations mostly devoted to local pop music.
- In the Solomons, national broadcaster SIBC can be heard on MW (1035kHz) and SW (5020kHz). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is at 630kHz MW.
- Short-wave frequencies for Radio Australia include 6080kHz or 7240kHz. For BBC see www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/schedules. Shortwave reception is often poor in PNG.
- For a full list of stations and frequencies in PNG and the Solomon Islands, see <http://radio.stationworld.com>.

TV

- EmTV is the only local station in PNG. Most of its programming comes from Australia's Nine Network. The Solomons launched its first national TV service in 2006 – One News broadcasts 7am to 8am and 9pm to 10pm in English in Honiara only (for now). In both countries most places with 'cable' (actually satellite) can pick up CNN and BBC World plus a range of stations from rural Australia.

Electricity

- Electricity, when it exists and is flowing, is 240V, AC 50Hz and uses Australasian-style plugs.

Weights & Measures

- Both PNG and the Solomons use the metric system. On the Sepik River fuel for motor-canoes is bought by the gallon and trade boats in some parts fuel up by the gallon too.

Discounts for singles (where they exist) are usually small. You can expect a room with bathroom, cable TV, phone and air-con, and some will include one or more of fridge, tea- and coffee-making facilities, breakfast and free transport.

Top-end places are fewer and prices can get up as high as K1000 for a plush suite. You'll usually have access to a swimming pool, the internet or a business centre, and the usual range of pricey bars and restaurants. Service is usually pretty good, as you'd expect.

A BED FOR THE NIGHT

Prices for a twin or double room fall into the following categories:

Papua New Guinea

Budget Up to K150.

Midrange K150 to K400.

Top end More than K400.

Solomon Islands

Budget Up to S\$200.

Midrange S\$200 to S\$400.

Top end More than S\$400.

There are a few wonderfully indulgent resorts scattered around. Rather than being dedicated solely to sand and sun they usually boast some other attraction: diving, fishing, trekking and watching wildlife, or a combination. Some of the better resorts:

Madang Resort Hotel p143.

Tawali Resort (Alotau ☎ 641 1167; Tawali ☎ 641 0922; www.tawali.com) In Milne Bay Province; see p114.

Tufi Dive Resort (Port Moresby ☎ 323 3462; Tufi ☎ 275 3200; www.tufidive.com) In Oro Province; see p108.

Uepi Island Resort In the Solomon Islands; see p267.

Walindi Plantation Resort In West New Britain; see p227.

There are also several resorts operated by **Trans Niugini Tours** (www.pngtours.com) including Ambua Lodge (p174) in Tari, which is regularly patronised by David Attenborough. Rates are usually quoted in Australian or US dollars and are often more than A\$200 per person, including meals.

Wherever you head, don't forget to ask about specials, and corporate and weekend rates.

Missions, Hostels & Guesthouses

The cheapest accommodation options are usually the region's many mission guesthouses, community-run hostels and private guesthouses. These can be good value for money. Mission guesthouses are mainly for church types, but the lodgings are generally clean, homely and open to travellers. Quality varies and the cheaper ones have no air-con and share bathrooms. And you'll have to put up with a few rules – drinking and smoking are discouraged (or banned) and you can expect to hear grace before meals. But the managers are usually pretty interesting people and great

sources of information – best described as Bible-handlers rather than bashers. The clientele can be interesting too, as it's often made up of mission workers, NGOs, aid workers and students who've often been to some pretty interesting and remote parts of PNG and the Solomons and have some great stories to tell.

There are also a number of places run by women's associations. Men are usually allowed to stay, but some YWCA establishments only take women.

These types of lodgings are found in many towns and cities, and in rural areas missions can be the only official accommodation around. Prices vary, but a bed (or sometimes a whole room) will usually be between about K70 and K130 per night with meals provided in the communal dining room. Among the missions, the Lutheran guesthouses are consistently good.

Rental Accommodation

Large numbers of expats come and go from PNG and the Solomon Islands and there is no shortage of long-term rental accommodation. Much of it is attached to midrange and, more often, top-end hotels, but there are some less expensive alternatives. The formula is simple enough: provide large walls, plenty of security guards and the facilities of a hotel, and people will come. Weekly, monthly and yearly rates are very attractive when compared with hotel prices. Check www.pngbd.com/forum/f74s.html on the Papua New Guinea Business Directory. Alternatively, contact some of the volunteering organisations in PNG and the Solomon Island (see p303). Or you could try the diplomatic representatives of your country in Port Moresby or Honiara – both cities have large, gated enclaves of expat workers.

Village Accommodation

One of the great experiences of travelling in PNG and the Solomons is taking the

opportunity to stay in a village. Village accommodation comes in all manner of guises. It might be a basic *haus win* (open-air structure) in the Solomons; a tiny thatched stilt house in the Trobriand Islands; or one of the simple village guesthouses on the Huon Gulf coast, or around Tufi, Milne Bay, the Sepik or New Ireland. It might not be a village house at all, but a spare room in a school, space in a police station, in a church house or just about any building you see. Just ask.

Village accommodation can be pretty rough but it's the cheapest way to see the country, and in most villages you'll find a local who'll put you up. You must pay, and K40 to K50 is a fair amount to offer a family providing you a roof and *kai* (food). But ask locals before you head out of town what might be appropriate compensation – a live *kakaruk* (chicken) might be the go. But a live *kakaruk* can be a hassle to lug around, so maybe a sack of rice, or some bully beef, salt, tea or sugar might be better. In some instances a carton of beer is good currency, but alcohol can be a very sensitive issue in some communities, so proceed with caution.

In some villages couples might be asked to sleep in separate buildings to observe local custom. Most rural villages have a men's house and these spaces often function as domiciles for elderly or widowed men and young male initiates, as resthouses for male guests and as places where men practise 'the arts'. Men's houses are *tambu* (forbidden) to women – female travellers will be enthusiastically 'adopted' by the village women and quickly engaged with the muliebre affairs of the community. In some villages there's a *haus kiap* – a village house set aside for travellers to stay in. These were originally erected for accommodating visiting *kiaps* (government patrol officers) and some remain today. You might be asked to stay in one of these, but it's more enjoyable to stay with a family in a traditional house than sleeping by yourself.

High schools are often quite isolated and all have boarding quarters, so you could get lucky and find a spare bed. You might have to sing for your supper or at the very least do a lot of talking! Police stations around the country almost always allow you to stay, for no charge, if they have a spare room.

ACTIVITIES

Travel to PNG and the Solomons Islands is all about being outdoors in the elements and

part of the natural environment. (Let's face it, there's precious little shopping and very few galleries and museums!) Offshore you can angle for monster-fish, be the first to surf remote breaks and enjoy what some say is the most spectacular diving and snorkelling on the planet. Onshore, PNG's trekking is both challenging and rewarding, the caving is extreme and the bird-watching attracts hard-core ornithologists from all around the globe.

Bird-Watching

PNG and the Solomons are home to thousands of species of flora and fauna and seeing some of it, especially the rich bird life, is becoming easier as local guides learn what birders want.

Birders report that in a three-week trip you'll see about 300 species. A small number of local guides are well-worth seeking out. You can plan and execute your trip with these guys for a fraction of the cost of a tour. Samuel Kepuknai (p206) is *the* man in remote Western Province, while former hunter Daniel Wakra of Paradise Adventure Tours (p319) knows the sites around Port Moresby very well. Paul Arut is the expert at Kumul Lodge (p169) in Enga Province. Steven Warili from Warili Lodge (p174) in Tari is a passionate bird-watcher, lovely fella and reputable guide.

In the Highlands and the Sepik several lodges, such as Ambua Lodge (p174) at Tari, have programmes specifically for bird-watchers. You'll find similar tours on the Sepik River, around Madang and at Bensbach in Western Province.

Most of the main tour operators (see p311 and p319) have bird-watching trips.

Also look at these specialist companies:

Eagle Eye Tours (www.eagle-eye.com) US-based group with one or two tours per year.

Field Guides (www.fieldguides.com) Texas-based

company that does specialist birding tours of PNG.

Sicklebill Safaris (www.cassowary-house.com.au) Regional birding expert Phil Gregory's company.

Some books and websites on birds (you can find the books at www.abebooks.com):

Birds of New Guinea By Bruce M Beehler et al.

www.birdingpal.com Find a local birder for the latest information.

www.camacdonald.com/birding/papapua-newguinea.htm Excellent links to trip reports, lodges, and other PNG-specific birding sites.

www.papubirdclub.com Birding in West Papua.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

Boating

Few roads. Lots of rivers. More islands. It's a combination that makes boating in one form or another almost inevitable in PNG and the Solomons. And many of the forms qualify as far more of an experience than simply a mode of transport from one place to the next. The one ingredient you need for almost every boat trip is time, not just to reach the journey's end, but most often to get the journey underway! Local dinghies and motor-canoes seem to take an eternity to get their cargo loaded up – cartons of beer, margarine, rice and Kundu crackers – and then, of course, the boat's pilot must be found (who'll be asleep under a tree somewhere) and his cousin's sister who's catching a ride... Nothing will test your patience like catching a local boat – don't leave home without it! Prices vary wildly depending on the level of comfort you require (if comfort is even an option). For a guide, see p315.

RIVER JOURNEYS

PNG has some of the world's largest and most spectacular rivers. The Sepik is often compared to the Amazon and Congo Rivers, while the Sepik Basin is an artistic and cultural treasure house. Local people use rivers (including the Sepik, the Ramu, the Fly and many rivers that flow into the Gulf of Papua) as highways. On these rivers, there is often an assortment of craft, ranging from dugout canoes to tramp steamers.

For travellers there are a number of possibilities. If you're hard core (insane) you could buy your own canoe from a villager and spend weeks paddling along the Sepik fending off *natnats* (mosquitoes), baking under the relentless midday sun and getting nowhere fast. People on the riverbanks would probably laugh at you, calling you *longlong* (crazy). Or you could pay your way travelling from village to village using PMV boats (unscheduled, intervillage, motorised, dugout canoes). But most people charter a motor-canoe and guide/driver on the river, or take a tour boat, including luxury cruise ships (see p315).

SEA JOURNEYS

If you don't own a cruising yacht (and when you see PNG's islands and harbours you'll wish you did), there are four alternatives: use the regular coastal shipping; take a tour; charter a boat; or crew a yacht. For more on these

options see p315. With time, ingenuity and luck you can travel anywhere by boat.

With a dense scattering of beautiful islands, PNG is a great place for sea kayaking. **Milne Bay Magic Tours** (p111; www.toursmilnebay-png.com/) in Alotau has four kayaks that were originally paddled from Cairns. **Trans Niugini Tours** (www.pngtours.com) offers guided sea-kayaking tours around Madang on the north coast of PNG. **Southern Sea Ventures** (www.southernseaventures.com) offers an amazing 11-day guided sea-kayaking voyage from Rabaul to Alotau. Apart from these, it's BYO everything, and be sure to take plenty of food and water.

Caving

Caves in the limestone regions of the Southern Highlands may well be the deepest in the world, but actually getting into them requires something approaching a full-scale expedition. The Mamo Kananda in the Muller Range (near Lake Kapiago) is reputed to be one of the longest caves in the world at 54.8km. There are also caves around Bougainville (Benuea Cave is thought to be the world's biggest cavern at 4.5 million cubic metres), Pomio (East New Britain Province) and Manus Province.

While there are no tour operators offering caving as an activity, caving expeditions from the UK, USA and France have been exploring PNG caves in recent years, including one for the National Geographic Society in January 2006 which explored the remote river caves of the New Britain's Nakanai Mountains.

Diving & Snorkelling

PNG and the Solomons offer some of the most interesting, exciting and challenging underwater activities on earth. Many divers rate the region more highly than the Red Sea, the Caribbean or the Great Barrier Reef.

Those who like diving on wrecks will find literally dozens of sunken ships – either as a result of WWII or the maze of spectacular coral reefs. And the reefs are not only for divers – excellent visibility and an abundance of fish make them perfect for snorkellers, too, who can have much of the fun for a fraction of the cost.

PNG is the muck-diving capital of the world and Milne Bay is at its epicentre. Anyone who can swim can witness the extravagant coral, fantastic tropical fish and the detritus of history side by side underneath the Samarai piers (see p115); a truly unforgettable experience.

Other locations worth heading for include Alotau, Kavieng, Kimbe, Lorengau, Madang, Rabaul and Wuvulu Island. In most of these places, dive operators offer courses, equipment and tours.

The best time to dive varies depending on the location. As a rough guide, Milne Bay is best from October to March, when the winds are lightest. Head to Kimbe and Kavieng from April to September, though it's possible to dive these two most of the year.

There are several good live-aboard dive boats available for charter in PNG and these allow you to enjoy a range of locations during a single trip. Prices vary, but at several hundred US dollars a day none of them is cheap. The years of diving experience on board, however, is usually worth it. For a listing of live-aboard dive boats, dive resorts and good diving operators see the Diving chapter, p55.

Fishing

Fishing, and particularly sportfishing in PNG's many river estuaries, is one of the country's major tourist drawcards. There are dozens of virtually untouched rivers brimming with fish, including species such as barramundi, mangrove jack and the legendary Papuan black bass. And off the coasts of PNG and the Solomons there's no shortage of big fish either. Yellowfin tuna, mackerel, sailfish and blue, black and striped marlin are just some of monster fish hooked by die-hard anglers that come here from all over the world.

You can't just get in a boat and go. Everything and every piece of PNG is owned by someone, including streams and reefs, and unless you have permission from traditional

owners, you could easily get yourself into trouble. It's obviously a lot easier to arrange your fishing via a tour company or lodge.

Some lodges and specialist fishing charters worth looking at:

Baia Sportfishing Lodge (p227; www.baiaisportfishing.com) In Open Bay, West New Britain

Bensbach Wildlife Lodge (p208; www.pngtours.com/lodge5.html) On the Bensbach River near the border of Indonesian Papua, Western Province

Laelae Charters (p253; www.lalae.com.sb) Moored at Point Cruz Yacht Club in Honiara, Solomon Islands

Lindenhafen Fishing Lodge (www.lindenhafen.com) In West New Britain

Zipolo Habu Resort (p265; www.zipolohabu.com) In Vonavona Lagoon, Western Province, Solomon Islands

Most major towns have fishing clubs affiliated with the **Game Fishing Association of Papua New Guinea** (www.gfa.com.pg). The excellent website has lots of information on events and competitions including some major fishing-charter companies not listed here.

Surfing

There's something very cool about surfing in PNG and the Solomon Islands. The tropical water is warm and crystal clear, the breaks are remote and you can be among the first people to surf them. There's absolutely no surf-rage, no surf-nazis and no stoner-guys bongin' on in the Kombi in the carpark. How cool is that? Gnarly dude, way cool, wicked and fully sick!

It's possible to surf year-round in one part of PNG or another, and in the Solomons too. The southern coast of the PNG mainland gets swell from June to September when Hula Beach (p90), 100km east of Port Moresby, gets 1m to 2m waves. Big swells

BUSH BOARDS

For years the local surfers of Vanimo have been making their own surfboards, not from foam and epoxy resin like the orthodox method, but by hacking them out of giant exposed tree roots with machetes. The right root of a specific tree has a gentle curve in it to form the nose-end of the surfboard. It's shaped, sanded and left to dry out for a week before it's varnished. It's not just that Lido villagers can't afford commercially made boards, there are no surf shops in PNG. Over the years visiting surfers had donated a few boards to the surf club, but there were never enough to go around.

In February 2007 Mark Davis did a report on Lido village's Sunset Surf Club for the Dateline current affairs programme on the Australian SBS TV network. SBS started a campaign where people could donate boards – new and used – to their Sydney offices for the Vanimo surfers. The response was amazing. Air Niugini flew 40 boards to Vanimo free of charge, and, of course, there was a follow-up story on SBS.

hit Guadalcanal's remote Weathercoast in the Solomons, but we don't know anyone who's surfed there.

The best waves are during the monsoon season from late October to April along the north coast and in the islands. Beach, point-and plenty of reef-breaks are out there, and reaching them is becoming easier. You'll only need one good all-round board, and a vest to keep the sun off.

In PNG the best places to head are Kavieng (p229) and the western end of New Ireland, Wewak (p179) on the northern coast of the PNG mainland and, the pick of the lot, Vanimo (p185) on the north coast near the border with Indonesian Papua. At Vanimo you will soon become acquainted with the laid-back guys of the Sunset Surf Club at Lido village (see boxed text, p287), who'll be happy to show their new *wantoks* (clans-people) the best breaks. The reef-break off Ahus Island (p239), north of Manus, is reputed to host a 3.6m-high swell and be a life-and-death event. There is accommodation of varying standards available at or near all these places, and if you find a wave you just can't bear to leave you can always stay in a nearby village.

The reef-breaks tend to be a long paddle from the shore, but if you have access to a boat you can find plenty of waves. These reef-breaks aren't for the inexperienced.

The **Surf Association of Papua New Guinea** (☎ 326 0884 in Port Moresby; www.surfingpapuanewguinea.org.pg) has a decent website with links to surfing tours. Other websites worth looking at include that

of the ecologically sound **Nusa Island Retreat** (www.nusaislandretreat.com.pg) off Kavieng (see p232) and **World Surfaris** (www.worldsurfaris.com).

In the Solomons, the same October-to-April monsoon swell brings excellent waves near Gizo (p63) at Pailongge, Titiana and Makuti Island, as well as several breaks near Zipolo Habu Resort on Lola Island (p265). At Maravagi Resort (p261) on Mangalanga Island in the Nggelas there are several breaks, and there are said to be waves at Poro on Santa Isabel and Tawarogha and Star Harbour at Makira.

Contact the **Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau** (☎ 22442; www.visitsolomons.com.sb) for more information on surfing in the Solomons.

Trekking

PNG is a trekking paradise. The country is crisscrossed with tracks, many of which have been used for centuries by the local population, and it is rarely more than a day's walk between villages. Some of the walks are tough but, especially on the coast, it's possible to avoid the steep ascents and descents characteristic of PNG.

In the bush your expenses plummet. Your major costs will be paying for guides, where they are necessary, or buying petrol for outboards on rivers. Expect to pay a guide K50 per day. You'll also have to provide or pay for their food. The best way to find a reliable guide is to ask around the local expat population – they will usually be able to put you in touch with someone who knows someone. All of the tour companies can provide guides or at least information on where you might procure one.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR TREKKING

Before embarking on a trek, consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience:

- Pay any fees and possess any permits required by local authorities.
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable walking for a sustained period.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions along your intended route.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment.
- Trek only in regions, and on tracks, within your realm of experience.
- Be aware that weather conditions and terrain vary significantly from one region, or even from one track, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any track. These differences influence the way trekkers dress and the equipment they carry.
- Ask before you set out about the environmental characteristics that can affect your trek and how local, experienced trekkers deal with these considerations.

JUNGLE TREKKING TIPS

Trekking through the jungle tracks of PNG can be a highlight of any visit. But to the uninitiated each step can become a new experience in discomfort. The following tips will help limit the pain.

- Practise climbing before you leave home, as it's the climbs and ascents that hurt most.
- On overnight trips bring two sets of clothing: one for hiking and one for wearing at night. Keep your night clothes in a plastic bag, as everything in your bag will be wet from rain or sweat.
- In dense vegetation wear long pants with your sturdy boots. Otherwise, shorts and a T-shirt will do.
- Carry talcum power and/or Lanoline to nip chaffing in the bud; or better, wear no underwear at all.
- Carry and drink plenty of water. Oral rehydration salts are a must, especially if you sweat a lot.
- Have your glasses treated with an anti-fog solution before you leave.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment – or take a guide to do that for you.

A number of tour companies offer trekking. Organised treks are not cheap but are worth considering if you have limited time. For tour companies see p311 and p319.

The Kokoda Track (p96) is the most popular trek in PNG. Mt Wilhelm (p162) is climbed reasonably frequently, and some people then walk from there down to Madang (p163). The Highlands are full of interesting treks of varying durations. Among the more notable is Lake Kopiago to Oksapmin (p174). Apart from the Kokoda Track, the Black Cat Track (p137) and the Bulldog Track (p137) will appeal to those with a military or historical bent...and a wide masochistic streak.

In the Solomons intrepid types can organise some amazing walks on Guadalcanal to the Weathercoast, on Malaita around the artificial islands of Lau Lagoon and the Kwaio region of the eastern coast, and around Vella Lavella or New Georgia Islands in Western Province. You will need to take a guide and be well prepared.

The website of the **Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau** (www.visitsolomons.com.sb) has a link to an excellent PDF document (written in March 2007) called 'Treks and Adventures in the Solomon Islands'. It has comprehensive notes on trekking, and some information on surfing.

MAPS

If you want topographic maps you're strongly advised to contact the **National Mapping Bureau** (NMB; ☎ 327 6223; www.lands.gov.pg/Services/National_Mapping_Bureau; Melanesian Way, Waigani) well before

you leave home to make sure it has the maps you want; see also p296.

Even with a map, it's best to employ a guide. Maps can't speak local languages, and they don't know shortcuts. Guides (hopefully) do.

Wildlife-Watching

Among PNG's exotic animal species is the tree-kangaroo, which is probably the best-known of PNG's mammal species but can be very difficult to spot in the wild. There are also countless insect and butterfly species. The famous Queen Alexandra's Birdwing butterfly, for example, is only around at certain times of the year. And your chances of seeing exotic stick insects are very slim without a good guide. For the best places to go wildlife watching, see p53.

Most of the main tour operators have wildlife-watching trips.

Also look at these specialist companies: **Eagle Eye Tours** (www.eagle-eye.com) US-based group with one or two tours per year. **Eco-Tourism Melanesia** (www.em.com.pg)

Windsurfing

The lagoons of PNG and the Solomons are ideal for windsurfing. There are many sheltered harbours and strong winds between June and August. One of the best and most accessible places to head is Hula Beach (p90), about 100km southeast of Port Moresby, though don't head there alone. If you don't have your own board, ask around the yacht clubs and resorts.

BUSINESS HOURS

Opening and closing times can be erratic, but you can rely on most businesses closing at noon on Saturday and remaining closed all day Sunday. In this book, hours will accord with the following lists unless stated otherwise.

Papua New Guinea

Banks (☎) 8.45am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8.45am-4pm Fri)

Government Offices (☎) 7.45am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.06pm Mon-Fri)

Post Offices (☎) 8am-4pm Mon-Fri & 8-11.30am Sat)

Private Businesses (☎) 8am-4.30pm or 5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Restaurants (☎) lunch 11.30am-2.30pm, dinner 6pm or 7pm-10pm or whenever the last diner leaves)

Shops (☎) 9am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat)

Solomon Islands

Banks (☎) 8.30am or 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Government Offices (☎) 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Post Offices (☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat)

Private Businesses (☎) 9am-4.30pm or 5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Restaurants (☎) lunch 11.30am-2.30pm, dinner 6pm or 7pm-10pm or whenever the last diner leaves)

Shops (☎) 9am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat)

CHILDREN

People who bring their *pikininis* (children) to PNG or the Solomons are often overwhelmed by the response of local people, who will spoil them mercilessly given half a chance. Child-rearing in Melanesian culture is a communal village activity and just when you're starting to fret about your missing two-year-old he/she will turn up being carried on the hip of a six-year-old girl. Kids are quickly adopted by village children – the art of child's play transcends all language barriers – and women coo over pale-skinned kids (and especially those with blonde hair!).

Practicalities

There are few really child-friendly sights – no theme parks or carousels – but the practicalities of travelling with children aren't too bad. Take a child into PNG or the Solomons and people are falling over themselves to help you. Top-end and midrange hotels should have cots, and most restaurants have high chairs. You'll be lucky, however, to find dedicated nappy-changing facilities anywhere, and forget about safety seats in taxis – working safety belts are a novelty.

As you'd expect in a country where bare breasts are everywhere, breast-feeding in public is no problem. A limited range of nappies and baby formula is available in larger towns. There are no daycare centres catering to travellers, though larger hotels can usually recommend a babysitter.

For more on family travel, read Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*.

CLIMATE CHARTS

The wet and dry seasons in PNG are not as black and white as elsewhere in Asia. In practice, for most places the wet just means it is more likely to rain, the dry that it's less likely. Temperatures rarely get too hot but the humidity is always high and can be oppressing.

Rainfall is generally heavy but varies greatly. In dry, often dusty Port Moresby, the annual rainfall is about 1000mm and, like

areas of northern Australia, the wet is short and sharp and followed by long, dry months. Elsewhere, rainfall can vary from a little over 2000mm, in Rabaul or Goroka for example, to over 4500mm in Lae. In extreme rainfall areas, such as West New Britain Province or the northern areas of the Gulf and Western Provinces, the annual rainfall can average more than 8m a year!

The island provinces and the Solomons have a more steady climate, with the 'dry' season from December to late May having milder temperatures (about 21°C to 28°C during the day) and infrequent, light rainfall. The heat and humidity rise during the 'wet' monsoon season, from late May to December. However, other parts of the Solomons are affected by their own microclimates, such as Honiara (with the heaviest rainfall occurring between December and April and fairly stable temperatures year-round). Cyclones can blow between January and April. For more information, see p15.

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS

Visitors to both PNG and the Solomons are allowed to import 200 cigarettes (or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco), 2L of alcohol and perfume not exceeding 1L or 1000g, duty-free. In addition, visitors to PNG can bring in new goods to the value of K1000 without paying customs duty. Exceed this K1000 threshold, however, and things get ugly – the customs duty plus GST will make your shiny, new video camera that you bought duty-free at Brisbane airport much more expensive than you anticipated. One shifty way to get around this is to ditch the packaging before you board the PNG-bound plane and act as if the goods are *not* new when you disembark at Jackson's Airport.

Since most people fly into and out of PNG and the Solomons from Australia, the customs and quarantine restrictions that apply in Australia are particularly pertinent. Most travellers will want to bring home some souvenirs from PNG or the Solomons – a *bilum*, Sepik mask or Trobriands carving perhaps. Problems can arise when you go through to Australian customs with anything containing animal parts, such as skin, teeth or feathers. As a rule, polished wood won't cause much alarm, but anything with bark on it will need to be treated, or confiscated. The same goes for feathers or any other bits of

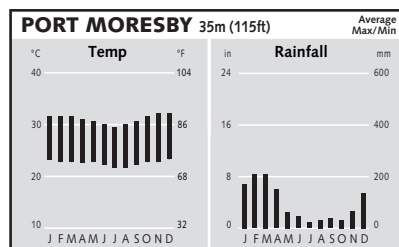
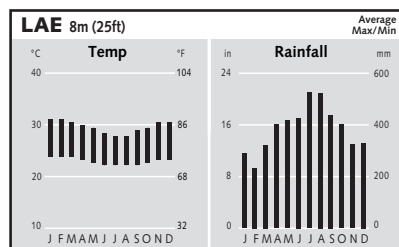
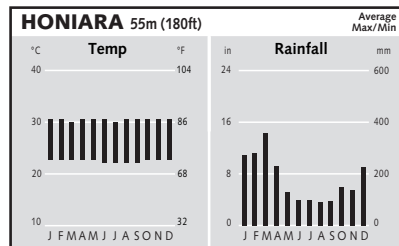
dead animal. Kundu drums would make fine souvenirs – they're light, robust and relatively compact. Ah, but that's lizard skin stretched across the drum-head, and that's a no-no with Australian quarantine authorities. Bukaware itself is fine, but small bugs love to hide in the weaving, so spray your basket thoroughly with fly spray and give it a good thump on the ground before you board your flight out of PNG or the Solomons.

Anything created before 1960, including traditional stone tools, certain shell valuables and any item incorporating human remains or bird of paradise plumes, cannot be exported. If you are uncertain of what your purchases are made of, get them checked at the National Museum in Port Moresby (p75) or Honiara (p250).

If anything you are carrying is deemed to be a quarantine risk you'll have to pay to have it irradiated, a process that can take several days. This can be done by Australian customs officials, but if you have a same-day onward connecting flight you can kiss your artefacts goodbye. Places such as PNG Arts (p81) in Port Moresby or the Melanesian Arts Gallery (p133) in Lae can arrange (for a fee) fumigation and certification, but Australian customs officials won't take any notice of these documents and will want to either confiscate or fumigate your goods to their own exacting standards – better to save your money! Post is a good alternative. Be sure to choose your artefacts carefully so that you don't fall foul of the Australian Customs Service and feature in a border-security reality-TV programme.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

It's very difficult to get the balance right about dangers of travelling in PNG and the Solomons. If you believed the hype then you'd never go and you'd never understand that Melanesians are by nature among the most gentle, hospitable and generous people in the world. While urban drift has undoubtedly caused 'law and order' issues in both PNG and the Solomons, it's not like the Wild West where gun-law rules and stepping outside is to put your life in danger. That's just the perception perpetuated by a lazy Australian media, which provides this region's information to international media. The Australian media doesn't report on any feel-good, warm-and-fuzzy stories from this part of the world.



DANGER, WILL ROBINSON...

For the latest travel warnings and advice you can log onto the following (overly cautious) websites:

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade (www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/index.asp)

German Federal Foreign Office (www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/laender/infos/reise_warnung.html)

Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mofa.go.jp/anzen)

Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.minbuza.nl/default.asp?CMS_ITEM=MBZ458731)

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (www.mft.govt.nz/travel)

UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (www.fco.gov.uk/travel)

USA Department of State/Bureau of Consular Affairs (www.travel.state.gov)

If you use your common sense, especially in larger towns, the chance of encountering the notorious *raskols* (bandits) is small. In all the years we've been travelling in PNG and the Solomons we've *never* been mugged or robbed. That said, when things do go wrong in PNG and, to a much lesser extent, in the Solomons, it can be pretty frightening. Violent crime is not unusual, but the victims are rarely tourists.

So what does this mean for the traveller? Most importantly, don't be paranoid. We've heard from travellers who've had bad experiences, but the vast majority of feedback (including from lone women) is overwhelmingly positive. Of course, what's dangerous to one person is everyday to another, and each traveller will decide for themselves what is safe and what is not. Those who have travelled to developing countries in the past probably won't be overly concerned. But for inexperienced travellers the lack of structure and the number of unemployed standing idly around the cities can be intimidating.

Bear in mind that everything is much more relaxed outside Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen. Tribal fighting is still common deep in the Highlands, and while this can make things unpredictable it rarely embroils outsiders. In villages people quickly get to know you and you rapidly lose the anonymity that makes a stranger a target. Expats will tell you not to ride the buses and PMVs, but that's just silly. They'll regale you with stories of rape and pillage and plunder (even murder), but these tales are often urban legends that can have very tenuous connections to real events. It's worth asking

those same expats: so how many times have you been robbed?

It's pretty simple – in the main areas where travellers are likely to go in the daytime with people around you are highly unlikely to encounter any trouble. The mantra is common sense. Fortunately, common sense is not rocket science, but here are some tips:

- Don't flaunt your wealth – wear unremarkable clothes and keep your camera hidden. Carry a *bilum* rather than a daypack.
- Always keep at least K50 'raskol money' in your pocket to appease any would-be thief. Hide the rest of your money in a money belt or your shoe.
- Speak to people rather than being aloof.
- Be especially careful on the fortnightly Friday pay nights when things can get pretty wild.
- If you get held up, as in this situation anywhere, stay calm. Most robberies are fairly unsophisticated affairs.

Apart from crime, the main annoyance is the zillions of mosquitoes.

Scams

There aren't many actual scams in PNG or the Solomons. However, in the few PNG cities that have taxis there's a chance you'll encounter one of the developing world's favourite cons: 'Sorry, no change'. If you're waving anything more than K10 or K20 around, then it might not be a scam at all. But if you only need K5 or K7 in change, for example, they will almost certainly have it.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Air Niugini offers a 25% discount to students under 26 who have a valid International Student Identity Card (ISIC) and university ID. This discount applies to the full fare only, and with Air Niugini's new excursion fares it may well be cheaper to use one of those – see p306.

The very occasional sight in PNG offers student discounts – Port Moresby's Botanical Gardens is an example.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES**Papua New Guinea**

A round of belt-tightening a few years back saw many of PNG's foreign missions closed. Diplomatic representation abroad include the following:

PAPUA NEW GUINEAN EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 3322; www.png.canberra.org; 39-41 Forster Cres, Yarralumla); Brisbane (☎ 07-3221 7915; pngcg.kundubne.org; Level 11, Suite 8, 320 Adelaide St, Brisbane, Qld 4001)

Belgium (☎ 02-779 0609; kundu.brussels@skynet.be; Av de Tervuren 430, 1150 Brussels)

Fiji (☎ 330 4244; kundufji@connect.com.fj; PO Box 2447, Government Bldgs, Suva)

Indonesia Jakarta (☎ 021-725 1218; kundujkt@cbn.net.id; 6th fl, Panin Bank Centre, Jalan Jendral Sudirman 1, Jakarta); Jayapura (☎ 967-531250; kundudji@jayapura.wasantara.net.id; Jalan Serui No 8, Jayapura)

Japan (☎ 03-3454 7801; fax 03-3454 7275; Mita Kokusai Bldg, 3rd fl, 313, 4-28 Mita 1-Chome, Minato-Ku, Tokyo)

Malaysia (☎ 03-4257 5405; fax 03-4257 6203; 11 Lingkunga Thant Ampang, Kuala Lumpur)

New Zealand (☎ 04-385 2474; pngnz@globenet.nz; 279 Willis St, Wellington)

Philippines (☎ 02-811 3465; kundumnl@pdw.net; Corinthian Plaza, Paseo de Rozas Cnr, Makati)

Solomon Islands (☎ 20561; fax 20562; PO Box 1109, Honiara)

UK (☎ 0207-930 0922; 14 Waterloo Pl, London SW1R 4AR)

USA (☎ 202-745 3680; www.pngembassy.org; Suite 805, 1779 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington DC 20036)

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

All embassies are in Port Moresby.

Australia High Commission (Map p77; ☎ 325 9333; www.embassy.gov.au/pg.html; Godwit St, Waigani); Honorary Consul (Map p75; ☎ 472 2466; Trukai Industries, Mataram St, Lae)

France (Map p75; ☎ 321 5550; 12th fl, Pacific Pl, Champion Pde, Town)

Indonesia Consulate (☎ 857 1371; fax 857 1373; Vanimo); Embassy (Map p77; ☎ 325 3544; fax 325 0535; Kiroki St, Waigani)

Japan (Map p75; ☎ 321 1800; 1st fl, Cuthbertson House, Cuthbertson St, Town)

New Zealand (Map p75; ☎ 325 9444; nzhcpom@dg.com.pg; Magani Cres, Waigani)

Solomon Islands (Map p75; ☎ 323 4333; Unit 3, GB House, Kunai St, Hohola)

UK (Map p75; ☎ 325 1677; emergency 683 1627; www.britishhighcommission.gov.uk/papuanewguinea; Kiroki St, Waigani)

USA (Map p77; ☎ 321 1455; ConsularPortMoresby@state.gov; Douglas St, Town)

Solomon Islands**SOLOMON ISLANDS EMBASSIES & CONSULATES**

Solomon Islands diplomatic representation includes the following:

Australia High Commission, Canberra (☎ 02-6282 7030; <http://solomon.emb.gov.au>; JAA Bldg, 19 Napier Close, Deakin, NSW, 2600); Melbourne (☎ 03-8531 1000; fax 03-8531 1955; 1 Southbank Blvd, Melbourne, Victoria 3006); Sydney (☎ 02-9361 5866; fax 02-9361 5066; Level 5, 376 Victoria Rd, Darlinghurst, NSW, 2010)

EU (☎ 02-732 7085; 106255.2155@compuserve.com; Ave Edouard 17, 1040 Brussels, Belgium)

Japan (☎ 03-5275 0515; fax 222-5959 5960; 16-15 Kirakawa-cho, Z-Chome, Shyoda-ku, Tokyo)

USA (☎ 212-599 6192; 800 Second Ave, Suite 8008, New York)

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

All foreign embassies and consulates are in Honiara.

Australia (☎ 21561; fax 23691; Mud Alley St)

EU (☎ 22765; ecsol@solomon.com.sb; City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave)

France & Germany (☎ 22588; fax 23887; Tradco office, City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave)

Japan (☎ 22953; fax 21006; NPF Bldg)

New Zealand (☎ 21502/21503; fax 223777; nzhicom@solomon.com.sb; City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave)

Papua New Guinea (☎ 20561; fax 20562; Anthony Saru Bldg, Ashley St)

UK (☎ 21705; bhc@solomon.com.sb; Telekom House, Mendana Ave)

USA Consular Agent (☎ 23426; mobile 94731; fax 27429; jmporras@bjs.com.sb; BJS Agencies Limited, Honiara)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Most shows and festivals are held on weekends, so the dates change from year to year, but usually only by a few days. Many smaller *singsings* (celebratory festivals), however, are local affairs with no fixed yearly schedule, so you'll have to depend on word-of-mouth to find them. And even some of the bigger events on the yearly social calendar sometimes move from month to month (just to keep us on our toes!). Check www.pngtourism.com and www.visitsolomons.com.sb for more precise dates. See also Holidays (opposite) for other dates worth watching out for.

March

Ambunti Crocodile Festival (PNG) Cultural groups from the Sepik region perform to promote community tourism and crocodile conservation.

April

National Fishing Titles (PNG) First week of April. Reelin' in the big ones off Port Moresby.

Gogodala Canoe Festival (PNG) Late April. Balimo, on the vast floodplains of the Aramia River in Western Province, hosts this annual event with canoe races and feasting.

May

Brisbane-to-Gizo Yacht Race (SI) Early May. This was cancelled for some years after the ethnic tensions but resumed in 2006.

Vakatepe Festival of the Sea (SI) Mid-May. Timed to coincide with the first boats arriving in Brisbane-to-Gizo yacht race.

Spear-Fighting Festival (SI) New moon in May. A two-day event on Santa Catalina Island in Makira Province.

Whit Monday (SI) Eighth Monday after Easter – May/June. Celebrated all over the Solomons with marching, dancing and singing.

June

Tufi Cultural Show (PNG) Early June. *Singsings*, feasting and dancing.

Wahgi Cultural Show (PNG) Early June. The first of the Highlands shows in the calendar year.

Port Moresby Show (PNG) Mid-June. Traditional and modern events.

Gulf Mask Festival (PNG) Mid-June. Spectacular display of traditional masks in Toare Village near Kerema.

July

National Mask Festival (PNG) Mid-July. Masks from all over the country are displayed in Rabaul.

Malagan Festival (PNG) Mid-July. A rare opportunity to see striking Malagan art displayed en masse in Kavieng.

Warwagira Festival (PNG) First two weeks of July.

Dukduks and *tumbuans* (masked forest spirits) come out of the sea from canoes at dawn to dance. At night, Baining fire dancers perform. Takes place in Kokopo or in Rabaul.

August

International Orchid Spectacular (PNG) First weekend in August. The grounds of Port Moresby's Parliament Haus come alive with thousands of orchids.

Mt Hagen Show (PNG) Late August. The first really big gathering of Highlands clans for the year. A spectacular event.

September

National Garamut & Mambu Festival (PNG) Early September. Wewak hosts this colourful event of traditional music and dance.

Bargam Agricultural Show (PNG) First week of September. Harvest celebrations on the coast north of Madang.

Goroka Show (PNG) Mid-September. This is the big Highlands *singsing* and well worth adjusting your travel plans around. A huge gathering of clans in traditional dress and *bilas* (finery).

Hiri Moale Festival (PNG) Mid-September. This festival in Port Moresby celebrates the huge Papuan trading canoes.

Kalam Culture Festival (PNG) Third week of September. The festival at Simbai, a tiny Highlands outpost, is a traditional event featuring male initiation rites, nose piercing and bride-price payments.

October

Kundiawa Simbu Show (PNG) Early October. Traditional *singsing* and agricultural show.

Morobe Show (PNG) Late October. This, the final big *singsing* of the year, goes off in Lae.

November

Milne Bay Kundu & Canoe Festival (PNG) First weekend in November. A spectacular festival with sailing canoes from the province and beyond racing to Alotau.

FOOD

For information on eating and eateries in PNG and the Solomons, see p64.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

It's quiet noticeable that gay men in recent years have been more prepared to express themselves. These days you do see effeminate Melanesian men and while they may not be strident or provocative about it, there's nothing ambiguous about their sexual orientation. And that's pretty gutsy – homosexuality is illegal in both PNG and the Solomons, although the law is rarely, if ever, enforced. Talk to Melanesian men and their homophobia

is quite palpable (unlike in Polynesia where there are strong traditions of trans-genderism and homosexuality). We've not seen any local women prepared to 'fly the flag' in public, but there must be some around. Any local 'gay scene' that exists is closeted and underground.

Homosexuality is far from a topical issue in Melanesian society. This is hardly surprising given that the churches have been reinforcing the idea that homosexuality is morally reprehensible for years.

You'll see many local people hold hands as they walk down the street – women with women and men with men. But don't misunderstand – this is simply an expression of friendliness and affection that's common and quite natural in Melanesian societies.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to the national holidays listed here, each province has its own provincial government day (usually a Friday or Monday) and there is usually a *singsing* to mark the occasion. Like anywhere, accommodation is harder to find during holiday times, particularly Christmas and Easter. The following national holidays apply to both PNG and the Solomons unless otherwise stated.

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter March/April, variable dates. Includes Good Friday and Easter Monday.

National Remembrance Day 23 April (PNG only)

Queen's Birthday Second Friday of June

Solomon Islands Independence Day 7 July (SI only)

PNG Independence Day 16 September (PNG only)

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INSURANCE

Especially in PNG and the Solomons, where help is often an expensive helicopter ride away, a travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is essential. There is a wide variety of policies available and travel agents often know which is most suitable. Read the small print to check it covers potentially 'dangerous activities' such as diving and trekking.

You might prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home

country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight (medivac) home.

INTERNET ACCESS

PNG and the Solomons are two of the least internet-aware countries around, though the Solomons is at the forefront of an innovative shortwave internet. Like pretty much all infrastructure there is no internet outside the major cities and a few expensive hotels and resorts. In more and more places if you're carrying your own laptop you can get internet access with an RJ-45 cable (via a LAN connection) in a hotel. Honiara's main Telekom office even offers wi-fi by the hour, as do a few of the better hotels and trendy cafés in Port Moresby, Honiara and Gizo. But even with these concessions to the 21st century your experience of the information super highway will likely be a frustrating one with mind-numbingly slow connections and drop-outs. Broadband is finally being rolled out to some of the major towns.

Honiara has far more internet café terminals than Port Moresby does, and seems a little further advanced in internet ideology. Port Moresby does not have the viral proliferation of internet cafés you'd expect for a city of its size, but slowly more are opening up.

In PNG, the one or two internet cafés in each major town charge anything between K15 to K40 per hour. All top-end hotels and a growing number of midrange places have a computer you can use to get online.

In the Solomons, internet cafés (often just a terminal in the local Telekom office) charge about S\$18 to S\$30 per hour. The Solomons has been at the forefront of an innovative internet technology that digitally interprets shortwave radio signals. The **People First Network** (www.peoplefirst.net.sb) provides text-only internet connectivity. With a solar-powered laptop computer and a short-wave radio attached to a modem the most remote parts of the Solomon Islands – some of the most isolated communities on the planet – can stay connected to the whole world.

LEGAL MATTERS

Visitors to PNG have little reason to fear trouble with police. The occasional after-dark road block shouldn't be a concern and aside from that there's no reason why you'll be stopped.

COMING OF AGE

For the record:

- The legal voting age in PNG and the Solomons is 18.
- You can drive legally at age 18 (to rent a car you must be 25).
- Heterosexual sex is legal at age 16 in PNG and 15 in the Solomons.
- To legally buy alcohol you must be 18.

If by chance you are, you're unlikely to be asked for a bribe and shouldn't offer one, at least not until you've refused several times and there seems to be no other option. Always be deferential.

Unfortunately, however, while most police are courteous enough (even friendly!) don't expect them to do much about any crime perpetrated against you. For years police have been out-numbered, out-gunned and out-motivated by gangs of *raskols*, and the number of crimes solved is piteously low. Police frustration is common, and don't be surprised to hear of swift justice being applied when a *raskol* is caught. If you need the police to go anywhere you might need to pay for their fuel.

Travellers could attract unwanted attention by buying marijuana, which has become much more prevalent in the last decade. The government takes its anti-drug stance very seriously, and has even managed to convince much of the public that *raskols* do their thing because they have been whipped into a violent frenzy by smoking too much weed!

MAPS

There are two maps of PNG that should be available to purchase online, if not necessarily at your local bookstore. Hema Maps' *Papua New Guinea* (1:2,600,000) 2nd Edition (1992) is the most common, and is readily available in PNG as well. More recent is ITMB's *Papua New Guinea* (1:2,000,000). This is probably the pick of the two.

If you're planning on trekking, or just want more detailed maps, you're advised to contact the **National Mapping Bureau** (NMB; ☎ 327 6223; www.lands.gov.pg/Services/National_Mapping_Bureau; Melanesian Way, Waigani), order the maps you want and then collect them from the office in Port Moresby when you arrive. The topographic maps

range in scale from 1:2000 through 1:50,000, 1:100,000 and 1:250,000. They have the whole country covered though they're often out of stock, out of paper or out of date. Some of the provincial Lands and Survey departments also sell these maps but the helpful office in Port Moresby is your best bet. When reading old maps be aware that villages in PNG and the Solomons tend to move around over the years. If you are planning to walk the Kokoda Track, the NMB's *Longitudinal Cross Section of the Kokoda Trail* (1995) is very useful. It's been reproduced many times and is available at the **Kokoda Track Authority** (Map p77; ☎ 325 1887; kokodatrackauthority@global.net.pg, 1st fl, Brian Bell Plaza, Boroko; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

Hema Maps publishes *Solomon Islands* (1:1,200,000), and ordinance survey maps of the Solomons are available at Ministry of Lands & Housing offices; the **Honiara branch** (Map pp252-3; ☎ 21511) has most of them.

Finally, the **Ex Kiap website** (www.exkiap.net/other/png_maps/index_png_maps.htm) has maps covering the whole country.

MONEY

Perhaps appropriately for such a diverse country, travelling in PNG requires a diverse approach to money. Cash, credit cards and travellers cheques will all be useful, and it pays not to put all your eggs in one basket. Credit cards are increasingly accepted, but you don't need to go too far off the track before you're fully reliant on cash.

Both the PNG kina and the Solomon Islands dollar have seen a steady decline in value against major currencies. But expect inflation to take prices of goods and services up to the same rate as the local currency falls. Since almost everything is imported, the slide in the local currency just means that things cost more.

Traditional currencies, such as shell money and leaf money, are still occasionally used. You'll see women in the Trobriand Islands carrying *doba* (leaf money), which is dried banana leaves with patterns incised on them.

See the Quick Reference (inside front cover) for exchange rates. **Oanda** (www.oanda.com/convert/classic), the online currency converter, is useful for calculating up-to-date exchange rates, but be aware that you won't get the Interbank rate with banks in PNG or the Solomons. You'll be *selling* your local currency for kina or Solomon dollars at the

'typical cash rate' which is some increments less attractive.

ATMs & Credit Cards**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Credit cards are accepted in most top-end and many midrange hotels, and in a few restaurants and stores in Port Moresby and other larger cities. Visa and MasterCard are the favourites, with Amex, JCB and Diners Club not so widely accepted. Credit-card payments often incur an additional charge.

ATMs are fairly common in cities, but only those at **ANZ** (www.anz.com/png/importantinfo/atmlocations.asp) and **Westpac** (www.westpac.com.au) branches allow you to withdraw cash against your Visa or MasterCard. ANZ has many more ATMs than Westpac, and in our experience these machines are far more likely to issue cash. Both ANZ and Westpac machines are linked to the Cirrus, Maestro and Plus networks, though it is dangerous to be relying solely on getting money this way. If the machines are broken, head inside and you should be able to get a cash advance against your credit card over the counter.

Bank South Pacific (BSP) has plenty of ATMs, but they're still not linked to international networks.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Major credit cards are accepted in larger hotels and most restaurants and stores that see tourists. There are ATMs at the ANZ and Westpac banks in Honiara's main strip, as well as Auki, Gizo and Noro. At the time of writing ANZ ATMs were being installed in Tulagi, Munda, Kira Kira, Taro and Buala, with Rennell next off the blocks.

Cash**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

PNG's currency is the kina (*kee-nah*), which is divided into 100 toea (*toy-ah*). Both are the names of traditional shell money and this connection to traditional forms of wealth is emphasised on the notes, too. The K20 note features an illustration of that most valuable of village animals, the pig. Most banknotes are plastic and look very similar to Australian banknotes – the colours are even the same.

In remote areas, having enough small bills is important. People are cash-poor and won't have change for K50. You'll need cash for small purchases and PMV rides and it won't

hurt to give a child a kina for showing you that WWII relic.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

The local currency is the Solomon Islands' dollar (\$S). As in PNG, be sure to have plenty of small notes for when you leave the bigger towns.

International Transfers

The easiest way to transfer money to PNG is by Western Union. For a list of Bank South Pacific branches that are Western Union agents, see www.bsp.com.pg/personal_banking/per_western_union.htm.

Western Union's one money-exchange facility in the Solomons is a counter in the **Honiara post office** (☎ 24474; Mendana Ave; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-11.30am Sat).

Taxes

There is a 10% value added tax (VAT, and sometimes called GST) on top of most transactions in both PNG and the Solomons. It's worth asking your hotel whether this is included in the quoted rate, as quite often it is not.

Tippling

Tippling is not customary anywhere in PNG or the Solomons. The listed price is what you'll be expected to pay.

Travellers Cheques

You can change travellers cheques in every major town in PNG, although chances are it will take ages. It will cost a bit too, with all the banks (in typical Australian-bank fashion) applying hefty charges for changing your cheques. For the Solomons, use Visa, Amex and Thomas Cook.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are pretty close to a photographer's nirvana. The stunning natural colours and locations are just the start, and shooting a cultural show could end up a career highlight. You could easily burn dozens of rolls of film, or gigabytes worth of memory. Negative film (about K17 for a roll of 36 in PNG) is widely available but you'll need to bring your own slide film. If you're shooting digital it's worth bringing some sort of portable storage device, as you'll have a hard time finding an internet café

(or the like) where you can download images and burn to a CD. Also bring batteries, cables and, most importantly, a cleaning kit and a large, sturdy plastic bag big enough to hold all your gear when it starts pissing down with rain. Silica gel sachets are handy for soaking up excess moisture.

Divers should consider giving themselves a series of uppercuts if they arrive without an underwater camera, preferably with a light. Enough said.

Use higher ISO ratings on your digital still camera (or use faster film – ISO 400 or greater) if you'll be anywhere in the jungle, where it can be pretty dim. Photographing dark-skinned people also requires some different rules: a flash is almost an imperative, otherwise the contrast with a light-coloured background can cause underexposure – black featureless faces.

You'll find people are generally happy to be photographed, even going out of their way to pose for you, particularly at *singsings*. But be careful nonetheless, and ask permission before shoving a camera in someone's face, especially around the markets of the bigger cities – Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen – as people can get a little testy about this. It's better to buy something at a market and then ask the vendor to pose for a picture. If you're shooting on digital you'll get a great reaction when you show people the images you've just taken of them.

Some people, usually men dressed in traditional style, might request payment if they are photographed – K10 is a popular price. People are aware that Western photographers can make money out of their exotic photos and see no reason why they shouldn't get some of the action. If you've gone ahead and taken a photo without getting permission and establishing a price, you may well find yourself facing an angry, heavily armed Highlander demanding K20 or more in payment. It would take some nerve to argue.

Never take a photograph of, or even point a camera in or at, a *haus tambaran* (or any other spirit house) without asking permission from a male elder. For more tips see Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography*.

POST Papua New Guinea

PNG has an efficient postal service and you can usually rely on your mail or parcels get-

ting home, even if it takes quite a while. There is poste restante in most post offices, though the larger ones will be more reliable. An international aerogram costs K2.60. Letters or cards up to 50g cost K3.35 to Australia and the Pacific, K5.35 everywhere else; a 5kg package costs surface mail/airmail K135/158 to Australia, ranging up to K200/351 for other countries. You might've been feeling impulsive and impetuous when you bought that 20kg skull rack, but you'll be thinking long and hard about the cost of posting it home – K290/313 to Australia, K540/585 to the UK and USA, and K540/841 to most of the rest of the world. Allow at least three months for surface mail to the USA or Europe.

Note that there is no postal delivery in PNG, so everyone and every business has a PO Box. Hence when you look in the phone book all addresses are listed as PO Box something, rather than a street address. The same applies in the Solomons.

Solomon Islands

In the Solomons aerograms cost S\$3. Letters under 50g cost S\$1.90 to Australia and New Zealand, S\$2.60 to the USA and S\$3 to Europe. The Solomons postal system is reliable but slow – a letter takes about two weeks to reach Australia.

SHOPPING

You're not coming to PNG or the Solomons to buy a hi-tech new camera or kit yourself out in the latest designer outfits (except, perhaps, for a handsome *koteka*; see boxed text, opposite), but there is no shortage of wonderful artefacts and craft objects to take home. The best advice to shoppers is to buy one good piece you really like – it might even cost several hundred kina – rather than armfuls of small inferior carvings and artefacts. *Bilums* and Highland hats are easy to get home in your luggage, but lugging more than one or two unwieldy artefacts around the country is going to be a hassle.

The style of carving and artefacts varies so widely that general rules are hard to establish but look for the carver's deft touches and see how well the recesses are finished. Look at the details and feel the weight in the timber – sometimes inferior timbers are blackened and passed off as high-quality ebony.

There are good stores in Port Moresby (p81), Lae (p133) and Wewak (p183), but

BIZARRE SOUVENIRS

You can see it now... 'Gee Bill, that's a mighty fine skull rack you've got there. Which village did that come from?' The skull rack, fashionable in homes around the Gulf country as a convenient and practical way to display the skulls of your ancestors and vanquished enemies, would definitely be a trendy addition to your interior décor back home. But they're heavy and hard to find.

Perhaps you'd prefer a cassowary thigh-bone dagger, etched with traditional Sepik tribal markings? But you know how it is these days with lethal weapons and carry-on luggage. A Solomons' canoe prow with a traditional *nguzunguzu* carving? Big and unwieldy and hard to fit in your luggage. A traditional mask with real boar's teeth and tusks? It would frighten small children.

No, we reckon you shouldn't leave PNG without a *koteka*. *Koteka* are traditional penis gourds still worn by many Highland men. They're light, readily available in most traditional artefact shops and come in all manner of sizes, so if you're buying one for personal use you can try a few on before deciding which to buy.

buying direct from the artist is usually cheaper and not only gives you a fuzzy feeling, but also a good story.

See Customs Regulations, p291 for information about getting PNG and Solomons artefacts through Australian customs.

Bargaining

There is no tradition of bargaining in Melanesian culture so don't expect to be able to cut your costs much by haggling. Bargaining is, however, starting to creep into some aspects of society, souvenir shopping being one. It's a rather grey area and impossible to give definitive advice, but if you tread sensitively you should be OK. For example, artists who are used to dealing with Westerners (eg at Port Moresby's markets) will have experienced bargaining to some degree so will probably not be too offended if you make a lower bid for their work. But forget about the old 'offer one third and work up to a half' maxim, it's more like they ask K300, you offer K200 and you get the piece for K250. Maybe. Some artists are used to being asked for a 'second price', and might even come at a 'third price' if asked. What you should never do is demean the quality of the work in an effort to reduce the price – this is highly offensive.

Having had to recently come to terms with this 'modern' idea of bargaining some artists will explain at the outset that an item you're interested in has two prices – one high one and one lower one. This is an interesting strategy when negotiating a price and certainly gives the seller the element of surprise. Perhaps it means that the high price is what they'd like to receive and the low price is what they'd like to be prepared to accept. Where we can

we like to wrest back that element of surprise and pay the seller the *higher* price! (What's a few kina? The guy might be able to buy shoes for his kids.)

Elsewhere in society, taxi drivers in PNG are used to haggling to a limited extent (though not in Honiara in the Solomons, where they're very honest indeed), and you could try your luck in hotels, but not in village accommodation.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Travelling alone in PNG and the Solomons is potentially a risky business, but we get letters from travellers who describe incredible journeys that they undertake all on their own. Parts of PNG and the Solomons are extremely remote – they see literally no travellers and can be weeks away from the nearest medical help. If you get into trouble in some of these places it could take a long time to raise an alarm. That said, there could be no greater adventure for someone well prepared to drop out, go feral for a few months and discover communities that may never have seen an outsider. Expats will tell you that in cities such as Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen the golden rule is 'safety in numbers', but with some traveller smarts even these places can be safe enough for the solo traveller.

Outside the cities this sort of travel can be especially rewarding for male travellers and rambling from village to village is a great way to get around. Assuming you've got your head screwed on and take the usual common sense precautions you should be fine.

Women don't have it quite so good. For more information, see p304.

TELEPHONE & FAX Papua New Guinea

Telecommunications in PNG can be very unreliable and in the more remote parts of the country a working telephone line is pretty rare. The complex networks of relay stations that link many towns and villages are also precarious. In larger centres there's no guarantee of getting a line. There are no area codes in PNG. Dialling out of PNG can be problematic as the limited number of international lines fills quickly – the automated voice says 'please try again later.'

In 2001 there were moves afoot to privatise the government-owned PNG Telikom. In July 2004 an agreement was reached with Econet Wireless, a South African telecommunications company. In December of that year, after much vacillation, the PNG government reneged on the agreement and, after a drawn-out legal battle, paid Econet Wireless unspecified millions of kina to go home to South Africa. The PNG government decided that PNG Telikom would remain a government-owned entity after all. Then things got really kooky in 2005 when the government issued two licenses for mobile phone carriers (see below).

FAX

Kwik piksa leta (fax) is still pretty big in PNG, where email is still in its infancy. You can send faxes from post offices for a few kina and they can be a useful way of making accommodation bookings. Fax numbers are listed in telephone directories. The cost of sending a fax from a post office within PNG is K5 for one page, K6 for two pages (and so on). To send a one-page fax to Australia/Pacific/rest of the world costs K8/9/10 with each additional page costing a further K2.

MOBILE PHONES

The situation regarding mobile telephony in PNG is total shemozzle. In 2005 Digicel and GreenCom were issued licenses as mobile phone carriers. GreenCom is yet to start operations. **Digicel** (www.digicelpng.com), however, moved quickly, launching in early 2007 and offering cheap handsets and call rates. The take-up was enormous. For the first time grassroots people (in the major centres at least) could afford mobile phones. The cost of a PNG Telikom **B-Mobile** (www.pacificmobile.com.pg) start-up kit was K335 while Digicel introduced

a K89 start-up kit. B-Mobile started slashing its prices only to find subscribers complaining in the letters pages of the newspapers that they'd obviously been ripped off until now.

In July 2007 the government revoked the operating license it granted to Digicel and tried to kick it out of the country. At the time of writing Digicel officially had no operating license but a huge market share, and the feeling was that if the government moved against Digicel there would be a massive outcry from the people, including huge numbers of first-time mobile-phone users.

In an attempt to unseat Digicel, PNG Telikom rendered its fixed-line and mobile networks uncommunicative with the Digicel mobile network. That is, a Digicel ('Expect More, Get More') handset could not ring a B-Mobile ('Feel the Buzz') handset or a landline number within PNG. Nor could a B-Mobile phone dial a Digicel phone. A Digicel handset could only ring other Digicel mobiles or make overseas calls. As a consequence, when we were in PNG many people were carrying *two* mobile phones – one Digicel handset and one B-Mobile.

Resolving this ridiculous situation was seen as one of the most immediate challenges for the Somare government returned in the July 2007 elections.

There's mobile-phone coverage in all the major centres in the PNG provinces with coverage being expanded as we speak.

PHONE CODES

There are so few phones in PNG that there are no local telephone codes for long-distance domestic calls. PNG's international code is ☎ 675. Some other codes:
Dialling outside PNG ☎ 05
International directory assistance ☎ 0178
PNG directory assistance ☎ 013
Reverse charge calls from other phones ☎ 016
Reverse charge calls from payphones ☎ 0176
Ships at sea ☎ 300 4646
To call a HF radio phone ☎ 019

For a full list of phone codes, see the front of the PNG phone book.

PHONECARDS & TELIKAD

Most PNG cities have phonecard public phones, but people rarely buy a phonecard that needs to be inserted into a phone. Almost everyone has a Telikad. The Telikad has a

12-digit code on the back and comes in denominations of K5, K10, K20 and K50, but the K5 card is hard to find.

Telikads are widely available and easy to use. Just dial ☎ 123 from *any* fixed-line phone, including any type of public phone, then 1 for English, your 12-digit code and then your number. Telikads are great for using in hotels, but only for long-distance calls as most hotels will still charge you K1 for the call, even though you're paying for it.

The phonecard system has all but superseded the last of the coin-operated pay phones around PNG.

SATELLITE PHONES

In PNG and the Solomons there are two functioning networks: **Iridium** (www.iridium.com), which is worldwide and uses a Motorola phone; and **Aces** (Asia Cellular Satellite; www.acesinternational.com) which only covers parts of Asia. The compatible phone is made by Ericsson. Aces is a fair bit cheaper, but less reliable.

Solomon Islands

Public phones are reasonably common in larger centres and phonecards widely available; Solomon Telekom is the most reliable supplier. Cards come in denominations of S\$10 and are the same as the PNG 'punch-in-the-number' variety; the cheapest way of making an international call is from a public phone using a phonecard. Faxes can be sent internationally via Telekom offices. Your hotel might do it cheaper. Telekom will also receive faxes, but they must be collected by the customer.

The Solomons IDD code is ☎ 677. To ring out of the Solomons simply dial ☎ 01 + country code. All international calls are charged at S\$7.50 per minute regardless of where the call is connected through to.

Solomon Telekom offers its 'Breeze' GSM mobile phone service in Honiara, Gizo and Auki, with new with poles and relays being erected all the time.

There are no area codes in the Solomon Islands. For information on satellite phones, see above.

TIME

The time throughout PNG is 10 hours ahead of UTC (GMT). When it's noon in PNG it will be noon in Sydney, 9am in Jakarta, 2am in London, 9pm the previous day in New York and 6pm the previous day in Los Angeles. There

is no daylight saving (summer time) in PNG. See World Time Zones, pp350-1. Time in the Solomon Islands is 11 hours ahead of UTC.

You will inevitably encounter 'Melanesian time' at some point, the habit throughout Melanesia (and all the South Pacific) of putting a low premium on punctuality.

TOILETS

Most toilets are 'thrones', though often what you're sitting on is far from gold-plated. In remote villages you might find a long-drop consisting of a pit with a hollow palm trunk on top, and a toilet seat on top of that. And that's relatively extravagant. If you're in a village and can't spy the loo, be sure to ask someone. Even if there's no throne, there will be a place where people usually defecate; if you accidentally take a crap in the village garden the locals might get shitty.

TOURIST INFORMATION

In both PNG and the Solomons there is not much in the way of organised, Western-style tourist offices that hand out maps and brochures. Instead, the best information is almost always gathered by chatting with the locals; be it in the street, a PMV, a hotel or guesthouse, a bar – anywhere. Most are genuinely happy to point you in the right direction; sometimes they'll drop everything and take you there!

There are, of course, a few tourism offices around. Among the more useful:

Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau (☎ 852 3302)

Milne Bay Tourism (☎ 641 1503; www.milnebaytourism.gov.pg)

Morobe Tourism Bureau (☎ 472 7823; www.tourismmorobe.org.pg)

PNG Tourism (☎ 320 0211; www.png-tourism.com)

This is the all-new website of the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority. It's well designed and informative.

PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (☎ 320 0211; www.pngtourism.org.pg) Focuses on marketing campaigns, but the website has useful info and links. A few international offices can be accessed from the website.

Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (☎ 22442; www.visitsolomons.com.sb)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

PNG and the Solomons have little infrastructure to cater for the needs of disabled travellers. Access ramps are virtually nonexistent and only the most upmarket hotels are likely to have lifts (elevators).

For general information check out the following websites:

Access-Able Travel Source (www.access-able.com)

Radar (www.radar.org.uk)

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (www.sath.org)

VISAS

Visitors must have a valid passport or internationally recognised travel document valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry into PNG or the Solomon Islands.

In PNG there are heavy penalties for overstaying any visa.

Papua New Guinea

TOURIST VISAS

Far and away the easiest and cheapest way to get a 60-day tourist visa is to apply on arrival at the airport. The process is simple enough: once inside the terminal change money to get your K100, fill out a form, take your cash and one passport photo to the immigration desk and Bob's your aunty's live-in lover. Note that on weekends or at random other times the exchange bureau inside immigration can be closed, and you'll be sent into the arrivals hall (without your passport or luggage) to change at the Bank South Pacific. This process can be fraught however if you have a same-day connecting flight out of Port Moresby into the provinces – the queues can be *very* long and the process can take hours. So, far and away the most reliable and stress-free way to get a 60-day tourist visa is to apply at PNG diplomatic mission (see p293). In Australia the cost of a tourist visa is A\$35 (see www.pngcanberra.org/visas/visitor.htm).

At the time of writing the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority was advertising its intention to waive the fee for tourist visas in an effort to promote tourism. However, when we inquired, the PNG High Commission in Canberra, Australia, was as yet under no instructions to change its procedure of collecting fees for tourist visas. Watch this space.

Wherever you apply, be sure to ask for the full 60 days, as extending is a nightmare. You might need to show onward ticketing and adequate funds to support yourself.

People coming in by yacht pay K200 for a visa (which must be obtained in advance) and a K300 customs clearance fee when they leave.

WORKING VISAS

Applying for a business visa requires all manner of letters from home (including letters of invitations from businesses) and PNG, as well as details of your business. Approval can take months, so start early. A Business Short-Term Multiple-Entry visa is valid for 12 months and allows stays of up to 60 days each time and costs A\$220. If you are seeking an employment visa, you must provide certain medical results, details for a police clearance, a copy of your employment contract and a copy of a Work Permit issued by the PNG Department of Labour & Employment.

Church and aid volunteers can enter on a special A\$25 visa (plus A\$50 'transmission fee') but the issuing authorities are required to wait for special immigration department approval. Researchers, filmmakers and journalists must submit their visa applications with a special application form from the **National Research Institute** (☎ 326 0300; fax 325 0531; PO Box 5854, Boroko). They cost A\$25 (visas for journalists cost A\$220).

VISA EXTENSIONS

Tourist visas can be extended once only, for one month, for a K200 fee. To do it yourself, go to the Department of Foreign Affairs' **immigration section** (☎ 323 2010; ground fl, Moale Haus, Wards Strip, Waigani; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri), where you'll battle hordes of agents who are on first-name terms with the staff. Extending a visa takes one to two weeks, though occasionally travellers do it faster.

Stories abound of travellers trying to extend visas by mail from other parts of the country and having, after weeks of waiting, to trek back to Port Moresby to retrieve their passports. Don't bother.

If money is not too tight, using an agent will save you a lot of grief. Agents can be found in the *Yellow Pages* under 'Visa Services'.

VISAS FOR INDONESIA

Visas for Indonesia can be bought in Port Moresby or Vanimo (see p293). For the low-down on crossing the Vanimo-Jayapura border see p310.

Solomon Islands

In theory, entry visas are not required as a three-month visitors permit is granted upon arrival to most nationalities, and especially to Commonwealth, US and most EU

passport-holders. However, the guidelines are ambiguous for nationals from former or continuing communist countries, the Indian subcontinent, Nauru and Kiribati. Nationals from these countries should seek advice from a Solomon Islands embassy (p293) before travelling. If you do need a visa and there's no Solomon Islands embassy around (pretty good chance of that), head for a British embassy.

Visitors permits can be extended for a further three months at the **immigration office** (☎ 25081; Mendana Ave, Honiara; ☎ 9.30-11.30am & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) in the Department of Commerce, Industries & Employment building. It takes 24 hours and costs \$50.

VOLUNTEERING

There are several organisations operating volunteer projects in PNG, and a couple in

the Solomons. These are often in remote communities, so this sort of work is not for those who will faint at the sight of a spider.

Activities range from teaching and medical assistance to advisory roles with local area councils. Most are either associated with the churches or with international volunteer organisations.

Lonely Planet's **volunteering website** (www.lonelyplanet.com/volunteer) has excellent resources for those interested in making a contribution to PNG or the Solomon Islands.

Most of the organisations listed here have projects in both PNG and the Solomons.

Australian Business Volunteers (www.abv.org.au)

Australian Volunteers International (AVA); www.australianvolunteers.com)

Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO); www.cuso.org)

VOICES: RAE SMART, VOLUNTEER

Rae Smart, aged 64, has lots of experience in volunteering, especially in PNG where she worked for 15 years as a teacher, both in Bougainville (which she had to evacuate from in 1990) and in Port Moresby. She is now a business development and eco-development director and runs **Australian Business Volunteers** (www.abv.org.au). We met her in Rabaul during the Warwagira Mask Festival, which she's eager to promote abroad.

You volunteered in various countries. What makes volunteering in PNG different from volunteering in other destinations? I must say volunteering in PNG is often a challenge, which implies a physical challenge. Take the Sepik area for example: amenities are scarce and life's tough. But the rewards are huge. The culture is so diverse and so distinct from anywhere else that it does get under the skin like no other place on earth – even if you don't want it to!

In the minds of many people, PNG has a fairly negative image. Is it a dangerous country to be a volunteer in?

Some aspects of this bad publicity are true. Crime and lawlessness are a problem. But it's equally true to say that people in PNG are incredibly kind-hearted; whatever they have they share it with you – especially true for women. Don't be shy of these people, getting to know them is very rewarding.

What are the main voluntary programmes in PNG? There are lots of possibilities: health education, AIDS awareness, poverty reduction, agriculture, fisheries, peace and reconciliation in Bougainville, business development, among others. There's something for everybody.

Is PNG a safe place for women volunteers? It depends on where they go. Rapes and attacks are not uncommon in this country, and it can be quite daunting. It's preferable to avoid cities. As a rule of thumb, the deeper you go into the bush, the safer it is. Rural areas are much safer because the community looks after you and values you.

Then it's a matter of etiquette and behaviour. My tips: act confidently; find out what the taboos of the local culture are; dress modestly; don't swim in bikinis, and cover your knees; don't walk on your own and try to take a local guide to accompany you; make friends with women; in cities, don't go out of your hotel with anything you don't want to lose. Whatever the hardships, all I can say to potential women travellers and volunteers is: don't hesitate to go to PNG.

German Development Service (DED; ☎ 325 5380; www.ded.de)

Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA; ☎ 325 1699; www.jica.go.jp/png)

Voluntary Service Overseas (British VSO; ☎ 852 1924; www.vso.org.uk)

Volunteer Service Abroad (NZ VSA; ☎ 325 4136; www.vsa.org.nz)

Some other useful websites that have details for those interested in volunteering:

Global Volunteers (www.globalvolunteers.org)

Volunteer Abroad (www.volunteerabroad.com)

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Plenty of women travel to PNG and the Solomons and while doing so with a man, or a friend, is usually safer than doing so alone, quite a few solo women have written to us with glowing reports of their trips. Lone women can find PNG trying, but if you've travelled to developing countries by yourself in the past (Africa, the Middle East, Indonesia...) you probably won't find PNG or the Solomons particularly difficult. Of course, lone women need to be more aware of where they go, what they wear and how they act. There are common-sense precautions outlined in *Dangers & Annoyances* (p291).

We haven't heard of any women travellers being sexually assaulted, but women are raped with disturbing regularity in PNG so you should avoid any situation where you're alone with a man you don't know well. At night, don't go *anywhere* alone, and avoid secluded spots at any time.

Men sometimes assume you're fair game if travelling alone and it's not uncommon to

experience some low-level harassment, such as whistling, hissing etc. Ignore it.

It can sometimes be difficult for women to have a normal conversation with a man without being misinterpreted as a flirt. Similarly, a Western man who attempts to initiate a conversation with a local woman can cause embarrassment and confusion.

You need to think about what you wear, but not too hard. Three-quarter-length pants and T-shirts are common and you can get away with shorts if they're not too far above the knee – showing thighs is considered sexually provocative.

Skimpy tops, however, should be avoided. You won't see local women in Western-style swimwear, and unless you're at a resort it's best to use a *laplap* (sarong) as a wrap. Take your cue from local women.

Public displays of affection are almost unknown, and a Western couple making physical contact in public – even holding hands – is regarded as an oddity and, especially in traditional rural societies, may be regarded with contempt. This can put the woman in danger. In villages you'll notice a distinct difference between the way local people see themselves and how they expect Westerners to see them. Women will cover their breasts as soon as you arrive, a hang-up from the time of the conservative *mastas* (colonial white adult males) and their haughty attitudes towards locals.

Many towns have women's groups (which sometimes have guesthouses) and these are good places to meet local women and learn about their lives. Usually it's OK for men to go as well, but check first.

PNG and the Solomons have many strong beliefs about women and their menstrual cycles, and in some parts women are considered to be dangerous to men during menstruation – if it's that time of the month it's better not to mention it. In some parts, the Sepik for example, women are thought to have powerful energies that can be harmful to men. It is *tambu* in many places for a woman to pass over a man – to step over a seated man's outstretched legs or even over his possessions, and a man mustn't swim under a woman in a canoe.

WORK

There are about 20,000 expats living in PNG and they work in just about every facet of the economy. Mining, logging, financial services, aviation and tourism are full of expats, often earning quite good money. At the other end of the spectrum, aid agencies and projects in PNG and the Solomons attract volunteer workers (see p303).

Potential employees will need to get a work permit/visa, which can be a convoluted process (see p302).

SOLO WOMEN TRAVELLERS *Lina Abirafeh*

The country and its cultures differ dramatically depending on where you are. The strongly patriarchal culture of the Highlands can make it difficult for solo women travellers. Violence in this part of the country is common and men may be more aggressive towards women. Road travel in the Highlands is also risky, where hold-ups and ambushes can lead to sexual violence. It's not uncommon for women travellers to use armed escorts on the Highlands Hwy.

On the other hand, people in some of the coastal regions, such as Milne Bay Province, live in matrilineal societies and they're very receptive to solo women travellers. Generally, the coastal and islands regions are safer for women and get more tourists.

Women are warmly received if they make the effort to wear a *meri blaus* (a top worn by local women) or other local attire. Local women appreciate the gesture and men acknowledge that this is a sign of respect for their local cultures and customs. This is highly recommended for lone women travellers. *Meri blaus* can be purchased in local markets.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE REGION

Most people can enter both Papua New Guinea and the Solomons with nothing more than a passport with six months' validity, an onward ticket and enough money to support themselves. Make sure you have at least some cash on you to pay for your visa. For details, see p302. There is a departure tax of \$540 in the Solomon Islands while in PNG the departure tax is incorporated into your ticket price.

AIR

The vast majority of visitors to PNG and the Solomon Islands will arrive by air.

Airports & Airlines

The good thing about flying into either PNG or the Solomons is that you don't have to shop around too much looking for a ticket. In the past routes into both PNG and the Solomons were almost exclusively controlled by the national airlines of the respective countries. Recently there's been some new competition that, thankfully, has brought down airfares. But, even though prices have come down, airfares into PNG and the Solomons are still expensive.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The national airline is **Air Niugini** (☎ 1300 361 380 in Australia; www.airniugini.com.pg). It and **Airlines PNG** (☎ 1300 764 696 in Australia; www.apng.com) are the only carriers that operate scheduled services to PNG. **Qantas** (www.qantas.com) has a code-share agreement with Air Niugini that awards Qantas Frequent Flyer points on international flights. Qantas sells seats on flights between Australia and PNG, but Qantas planes no longer fly to PNG: Air Niugini carries Qantas passengers. Air Niugini flies to Cairns, Brisbane and Sydney in Australia, and Tokyo, Manila, Singapore and Honiara. At the time of research, Cairns and Brisbane were the only cities from which you could fly to PNG with Airlines PNG.

Jackson's Airport (POM) located in Port Moresby is, for the time being, the only international airport in PNG. For years there has been talk of Mt Hagen and Alotau reopening for international flights – if they do, flights will probably be to/from Cairns only.

There's an **Air Niugini office** (☎ 327 3396) at Jackson's Airport where you can buy domestic and international tickets.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Airlines (☎ 20031; www.solomonairlines.com.au), the national carrier, is vying for the title of least reliable airline on earth, though to be fair its international services are better than the domestic flights. From its base at Henderson Airport (HIR),

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

11km east of Honiara, Solomon Airlines flies four or five days a week to Brisbane. At the time of research this Honiara-Brisbane service was looking shaky – its plane was grounded and it had chartered an Ozjet plane to service this route. It also has one or two flights weekly to Nadi in Fiji and Port Vila or Santo in Vanuatu.

Formerly Air Nauru, **Our Airline** (☎ +677 22586 in Honiara, 1300 369 044 in Australia; www.airnauru.com.au) flies weekly on a Thursday from Brisbane to Honiara, overnights in Honiara, then flies Friday Honiara-Nauru-Tarawa (Kiribati) and back.

Air Pacific (☎ +679 672 0888 in Fiji, 1800 230 150 in Australia; www.airpacific.com), Fiji's national carrier, flies weekly from Nadi with good connections to Brisbane, all over the Pacific and beyond.

Air Niugini (☎ +677 20336 in Honiara; www.airniugini.com.pg) flies twice weekly between Honiara and Port Moresby. Air Niugini was flying a direct route between Tokua (Rabaul, PNG) to Honiara a few years ago. It's possible that this route may be resurrected.

Tickets

If you buy your flight to PNG with Air Niugini you qualify for discounts on the airline's domestic services.

Almost all flights to Honiara go via Australia or Fiji. So if you're coming from Europe, Asia or anywhere in between – head for Australia. From North America, also look at **Air Pacific** (www.airpacific.com) or anyone else flying to Fiji.

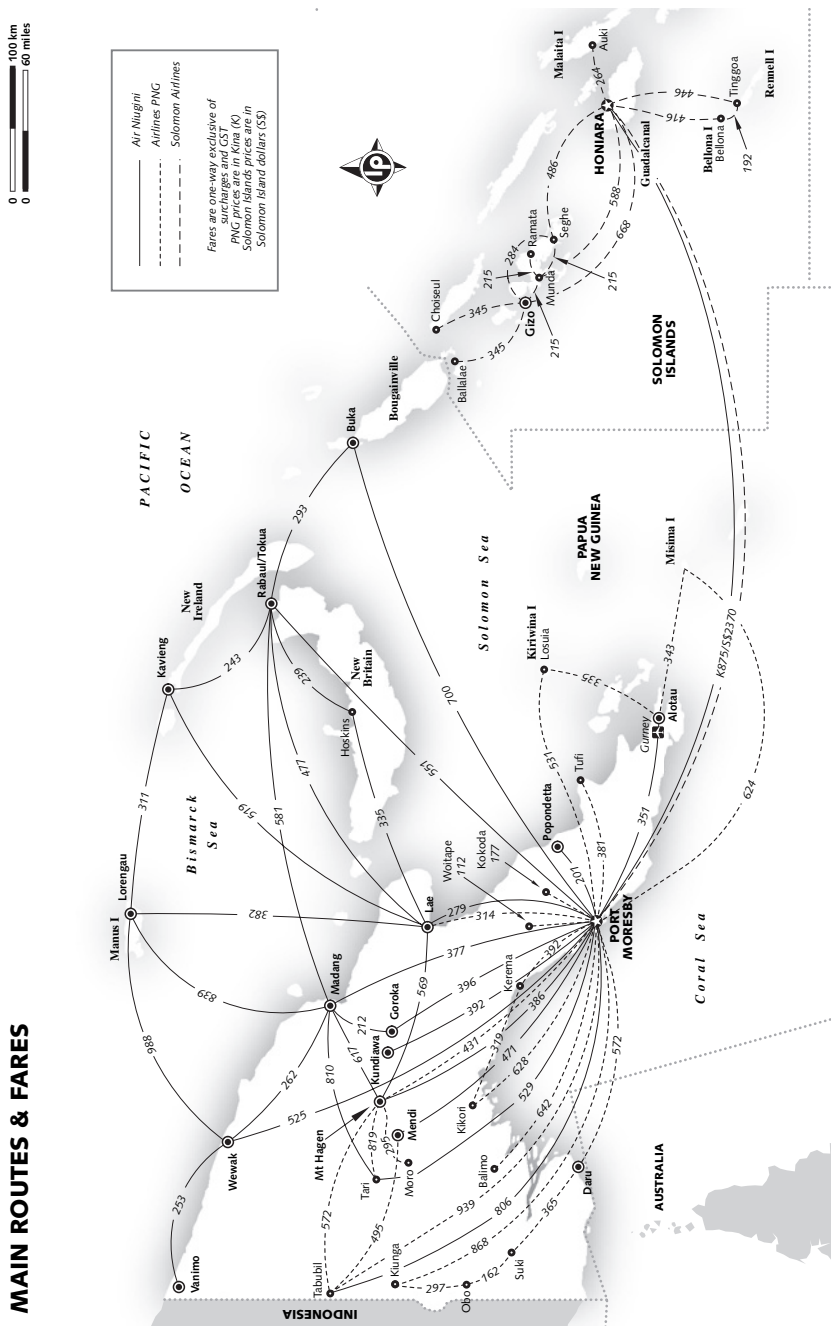
Asia

There are no flights between PNG and neighbouring Indonesia. Garuda Indonesia and a couple of Indonesia's new budget airlines do fly to Jayapura, just across the border from PNG; travel agencies in Jakarta and Denpasar can help, otherwise you have to fly via Singapore or Cairns.

Air Niugini has weekly flights between Manila and Port Moresby on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. There are also flights from Singapore on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and Tokyo on Saturday and Sunday.

From anywhere else in Asia you'll need to first get to one of the cities listed here or somewhere in Australia.

An agency worth considering is **STA Travel** (Bangkok ☎ 02 236 0262; www.statravel.co.th; Singapore ☎ 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg; Tokyo ☎ 03 5391 2922; www.statravel.com.jp). Another resource in Japan is **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03 3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com). **Schenker Travel** (☎ 2545 1033;



www.schenker.com.hk), in Hong Kong, is efficient and reliable.

Australia & New Zealand

Air Niugini operates code-share services with Qantas between Australia and PNG. There are a range of fares and some complex discount structures (see www.airniugini.com.pg for details) and it pays to book ahead. The following prices are for the full-fare/cheapest discounted return seats including taxes and charges: Sydney (A\$2670/810, twice weekly); Brisbane (A\$2225/805, daily); and Cairns (A\$1463/534, daily). Promotional fares must be paid for within 24 hours of booking. You can book at either Qantas or Air Niugini offices online (the Air Niugini website calculates fares in kina) or through a travel agency.

To the Solomons, a 30-day Solomon Airlines return airfare to Honiara from Brisbane costs A\$1080; it flies at least four times per week. **World Aviation Systems** (☎ 07 3407 7149 www.worldaviation.com.au) are agents in Australia for Solomon Airlines. Agencies worth looking at include **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) and **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au). For online bookings, try www.travel.com.au or www.zu.ji.com.

From New Zealand to PNG, connect with an Air Niugini flight in Australia. Flights to Australia can be very cheap if you plan ahead. **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) has branches throughout the country and www.travel.co.nz is a good online source.

Continental Europe

The easiest and probably the cheapest way from Europe to PNG is to put together a ticket to Singapore or Australia and then on to Port Moresby on an Air Niugini flight. There are millions of deals to Australia or Singapore, some of the cheapest with airlines such as **Gulf Air** (www.gulfairco.com), **Emirates** (www.emirates.com), **Qantas** (www.qantas.com) or **Eva Air** (www.evaair.com), costing from €1100 return including taxes. Most round-the-world tickets take in Singapore and Australia; you could tack on a flight to PNG or the Solomons. The Singapore option is obviously shorter, but coming via Australia gives you far more dates (more than a dozen flights per week versus two from Singapore to Port Moresby).

Alternatively, you could fly return to Fiji with **Korean Air** (www.koreanair.com) and hook up

with a Nadi–Port Moresby or Nadi–Honiara flight with **Air Pacific** (www.airpacific.com), Air Niugini or Solomon Airlines.

Some reliable agencies:

FRANCE

Anyway (☎ 0892-893 892; www.anyway.fr in French)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825-000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr in French)

OTU Voyages (www.otu.fr in French) This agency specialises in student and youth travel.

GERMANY

Just Travel (☎ 089-747 3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 01805-284 366; www.lastminute.de in German)

OTHER COUNTRIES

Airfair (☎ 020-620 5121; www.airfair.nl in Dutch) In the Netherlands.

Barcelo Viajes (☎ 902-116 226; www.barceloviajes.com in Spanish) In Spain.

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06-462 0431; www.cts.it in Italian) Italian agency, specialising in student and youth travel.

The Pacific

Air Pacific operates from Nadi to Honiara (S\$3184 one-way including taxes), from where Air Niugini flies to Port Moresby. Alternatively, Air Niugini flies Nadi to Port Moresby return for K1623 (valid for 14 days). The only other way of getting to PNG from the Pacific is via Australia.

Solomon Airlines flies weekly to Honiara from Port Vila in Vanuatu. A 30-day return fare costs S\$4060. From Nadi the return Solomon Airlines fare is S\$3401.

The UK & Ireland

Flying via Australia is the obvious way to get to PNG from the UK and Ireland, and is especially attractive given the plethora of cheap deals on offer. Return tickets from London to Australia can cost as little as UK£680 including taxes; or you could consider a round-the-world ticket taking in Australia and starting at about UK£850. You would then have to tack on flights to the PNG, but if you make your way to Cairns these are relatively cheap.

The other option is flying to Singapore, then on to Port Moresby. Again, there is always some sort of deal to Singapore – Emirates and other Middle Eastern airlines have some great offers.

To get to the Solomons, make your way to Australia and take a flight from Brisbane.

In the UK, advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free magazine *TNT*. Also check out the following:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870-444 7474; www.b-t-w.co.uk)

STA Travel (☎ 0870-160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk) For travellers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (☎ 020-7938 3939; www.trailfinders.co.uk)
Travel Bag (☎ 0870-890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

The USA & Canada

There are a couple of options from North America: fly to Australia, then on to Port Moresby; or fly to Narita (Tokyo), Manila or Singapore, then on to Port Moresby. Deals between a number of US and Canadian cities and Australia's east coast are common and a good return flight to Australia is about US\$1150. From North America you could fly to the Solomons via Brisbane or, if you coordinate with Solomon Airlines' infrequent flights, travel via Nadi in Fiji or Port Vila in Vanuatu.

The via-Asia options might prove cheaper, but with only one or two flights to PNG a week they can be inconvenient. Deals to Narita can be particularly good (US\$570 from the west coast, US\$730 from New York), and if you're flying from the east coast, might cut out a couple of stops. Some agencies recommended for online bookings:

www.cheapflights.com

www.expedia.com (www.expedia.ca in Canada)

www.orbitz.com

www.travelocity.com (www.travelocity.ca in Canada)

In Canada there's also **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com), the country's national student travel agency.

LAND Border Crossings

The only land border crossing in either PNG or the Solomon Islands is between Vanimo in Sandaun Province and Jayapura in Papua Province (West Papua), Indonesia. At the time of research this **border** (PNG ☎ 9am-5pm, Indonesia ☎ 8am-4pm) was open and operating pretty smoothly, but it has a history of closing at short notice so check Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree** (<http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com>) bulletin board before making plans.

Leaving PNG for Indonesia is relatively straightforward although it can take all day to cross between the two countries. If you haven't already got an Indonesian visa in Port Moresby (p293) you'll need to get one at the **Indonesian Consulate** (☎ 857 1371; fax 857 1373; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) in Vanimo. It takes 24 hours to issue a 30-day or 60-day visa and only the 30-day visas can be extended inside Indonesia. You'll need K70, two photos, a completed application form (which you get there) and a passport valid for at least six months. It's best to say you're heading for Bali or Manado as they are less controversial destinations than anywhere in Papua.

Locals travel by PMV to the market on the Indonesian side of the border to stock up on cheaply made goods. Immigration officials turn a blind eye to shopping day trippers although this courtesy is seldom extended to foreigners. PMVs to the border (K10, 1½ to two hours) leave around 8am from the main roundabout every weekday. Failing that, Visser Enterprises Ltd (p187) will drive you there for K154.

Formalities on the PNG side are easy, however Indonesian immigration isn't able to stamp you into their country. Instead, you must go directly to the immigration office once you get to Jayapura (opposite the Dafonsoro Hotel), fill out a form and present your passport and 50,000Rp. The staff here like to keep you waiting but if you don't get the stamp you will have dramas exiting. If you plan on travelling elsewhere in Papua you will need a Surat Keterangan Jalan (SKJ), or travel permit. This is issued by the provincial police office in Jayapura for a small fee and two photos.

Back at the border you will need to catch a shared taxi (16,700Rp or 350,000Rp for the whole car) into Jayapura or hitch.

Entering PNG you must first get a visa in Jayapura (or any other PNG mission; see p293). This is fairly straightforward, but will take at least a couple of days. Remember you must get stamped out of Indonesia at the immigration office in Jayapura, not at the border itself. You'll need to pay a 50,000Rp fee and you must leave within 24 hours of the date of your stamp. The office is open (or can be opened) most of the time and if the staff tell you that your passport can be stamped at the border hold your ground because the border officials will insist that you return to Jayapura!

The occasional bus (1½ hours) leaves for the border. You might need to change buses a few times. If you're in a hurry consider hiring an *ojek* (motorbike), or perhaps two (to help with luggage) to take you straight there.

SEA

There are plenty of boats plying the waters around PNG and the Solomons, but very few are actually scheduled services to other countries. For information on travelling between Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, see the boxed text, p314.

Papua New Guinea

Unless you are a Torres Strait Islander, it is illegal to island hop between Thursday Island (known as TI to locals) and PNG. You can exit Australia from TI but you must go directly to PNG, usually Daru, where you can pass through immigration if you already have a visa.

PRIVATE BOATS

PNG and the Solomons are popular stopping points for cruising yachts, either heading through Asia or the Pacific. In PNG you can clear immigration at Alotau, Daru, Kavieng, Kimbe, Lae, Lorengau, Madang, Misima Island, Port Moresby, Rabaul, Samarai and Vanimo. You must get a visa before you arrive. See www.noonsite.com for a full rundown.

CRUISE SHIPS

There is no shortage of 'Pacific island paradises' in PNG and the Solomons, but finding one of the huge trans-Pacific cruising vessels that calls in is nigh impossible. Samarai Island in Milne Bay Province used to see one or two ships a year, but not anymore.

On a slightly smaller scale **North Star Cruises** (☎ +618 9192 1829; www.northstarcruises.com.au) offers cruises aboard the *True North* which is limited to 36 passengers who depart from Cairns in Australia on a Dash 8 aircraft and land in Alotau. The luxury boat plies through the Louisiade islands in Milne Bay Province, Tufi, New Britain, the Duke of Yorks and onto Kavieng from where passengers fly back to Cairns.

The **Orion** (☎ 1300 361 012 in Australia; www.orioncruises.com.au) has a cruise that leaves Auckland in New Zealand, and travels through New Caledonia, Vanuatu before visiting Santa Ana,

the Nggelas and Gizo in the Solomons, and Rabaul in PNG.

The **Coral Princess** (☎ +617 4080 4080; www.pngholidays.com.au) plies a route from Cairns to Alotau, through the Trobriands, New Britain, the Sepik, Madang and Tufi to Port Moresby.

For something smaller and more boutique try the **SV Imajica II** (www.theimajicaexperience.com) that does charters, surfaris, diving and exploratory cruises through the waters of PNG.

Solomon Islands

The Solomons is similarly popular with private yachting but, like PNG, doesn't see much in the way of big boats. Places where you can complete immigration formalities include Honiara, Gizo, Graciosa Bay (Ndende Island, Santa Cruz), Noro and Yandina. Boats can stay in the Solomons for three months and this can be extended to a total of six months. For a swathe of detail see the excellent www.noon.site.com.

It might be possible to crew on a yacht participating in the newly re-established Brisbane to Gizo Yacht Race held annually in May (it was cancelled in 2007 because of the April tsunami). For more information contact the **Gizo Yacht Club** (www.gizoyachtclub.com.sb).

TOURS

The three main PNG-based inbound tour operators are Melanesian Tourist Services, Trans Niugini Tours and Niugini Holidays. They offer a wide variety of tours but prices are usually disconcertingly high. As with tours anywhere, taking this option should give you a pretty smooth trip, but you can do much the same thing for about half the price if you're prepared to send a few emails and organise it yourself. For smaller operators, see p319. For Kokoda Track tours, see p93.

Dick Lang's Desert Air (☎ 08-8264 7200, 1800 004 200, both in Australia; www.dicklang.com.au) Operates all-inclusive air safaris. A unique option, visiting some off-the-beaten-track places. Itineraries are usually timed around the Goroka and Mt Hagen shows.

Eco-Tourism Melanesia (☎ 323 4518; www.em.com.pg) Locally owned and operated, Eco-Tourism Melanesia focuses on village-based tours and cultural, wildlife, bird-watching and trekking trips. Highly recommended, but not cheap.

Field Guides (www.fieldguides.com/png.htm) Well-organised but expensive bird-watching tours, focusing on birds of paradise. US-based.

Melanesian Tourist Services (☎ 675-311 2050; www.mtspng.com) Operates several high-end resorts, which you'll stay at on its tours. Runs diving and Sepik tours.

Niugini Holidays (☎ 1300 850 020, 02-9290 2055, both in Australia; www.nghols.com) Probably the biggest range of tours, from specialised family tours through surfing, fishing, diving, trekking, war-veterans tours and more.

Trans Niugini Tours (☎ 675-542 1438; www.pngtours.com) Based in Mt Hagen, these guys operate the *Sepik Spirit* (see p315) and several luxury lodges. There are general tours, wildlife tours, treks, cruises and tours of the cultural shows.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

PNG and the Solomon Islands are probably more reliant on air transport than any other country on the earth. The population is scattered, often isolated in mountain valleys and on tiny islands, but even the most remote villages now have some familiarity with the

ubiquitous *balus* (aeroplane). About 2000 airstrips have been cut out of the bush or into hill tops and coral islands during the last 80 years or so and the aeroplane has become almost symbolic of the way technology has intruded so successfully into what was a loose collection of hunter-gatherer societies. Less than a quarter of these airstrips are regularly used today, but many involve the sort of hair-raising landings you won't easily forget. The pilots are extremely skilful – keep telling yourself this as you approach flat-topped ridges masquerading as airports.

Aircraft are often small and strips can be almost unrecognisable if you don't know to look for them. Some of the more remote strips you land on might look and feel more like rally tracks, and others have slight bends to negotiate during take off and landing! The strip at Wau is on a nine-degree slope. All of them are great fun!

Aviation in PNG and the Solomons will probably prove more informal than you're used to (alert: understatement of the year!).

Outside Port Moresby and Honiara you can forget about X-rays and metal detectors. For lighter aircraft, not only is your baggage weighed (16kg is the limit but 20kg is usually accepted), so are you – this can be embarrassing if you've been indulging in too much *kaikai* (food) and *bia* (beer). Excess-baggage charges are reasonable but can add considerably to your travel costs if you're lugging around a weighty Sepik carving that you bought in a moment of pique. Some remote strips have no facilities at all – sometimes just a guy with a two-way radio who meets the flights, and at many of these remote strips you'll have to buy your ticket direct from the pilot – cash only.

Outside the main centres don't rely on being able to pay for anything on credit. Even in big towns there's no guarantee. Air Niugini refused our plastic at Jackson's Airport in Port Moresby because 'the phone lines are down' – a common problem.

Unpredictable weather combined with mechanical problems and complex schedules can frequently lead to delays, or cancellations. It's not unheard of for passengers to stand around scanning the horizon all day. In the Solomons your domestic flight has about a 50% chance of arriving on the right day. So have a book (or two) handy, and make friends with the locals.

Flying in this part of the world is far more than just getting from A to B and provides some of the most memorable moments of your trip (or your life). It would be even more of a joy if it wasn't so damned expensive.

The PNG domestic air scene is currently in a period of dramatic change. Popular third-level airline Airlink went broke in mid-2007 after being grounded for a period over transgressions of safety regulations. Airlink was the only flyer servicing many remote airstrips in PNG – many barely profitable with the current cost of aviation fuel – so it remains to be seen exactly if or how this hole will be filled.

At the time of writing, Airlines PNG had 'suspended indefinitely' since June 2007 its services to all but its major destinations. After the collapse of Airlink this created further isolation for people around the remote airstrips.

Following stiff competition from Airlines PNG for both its main international and domestic routes, Air Niugini revised its fares in 2007. Air Niugini domestic fares were reduced by an average of about 10%.

A 30-day Port Moresby to Honiara return flight with Air Niugini costs K1449 (K2206 valid for six months).

Airlines in the Region

While Air Niugini operates larger planes to the larger centres, the smaller second- and third-level airlines service everywhere else. Airlines PNG (formerly called Milne Bay Air) is the main secondary airline in PNG, with North Coast Aviation, covering destinations out of Lae, and MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) dealing with the smallest communities, and doing it pretty well. In theory, tickets on Air Niugini and Airlines PNG can be booked at any travel agency linked into the international computer reservations network.

Following is a list of airlines operating scheduled flights in PNG and the Solomons. Local offices are listed on the airline websites or under the relevant destinations in the regional chapters; the websites also have up-to-date fare tables. Other airlines do charter services; see the Yellow Pages.

Air Niugini (☎ 327 3444; www.airniugini.com.pg)

Airlines PNG (☎ 325 0555; www.apng.com)

MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship; ☎ 325 2668; www.maf.org.au)

North Coast Aviation (☎ 472 1755; norco-lae@global.net.pg)

Solomon Airlines (☎ 20031; www.solomonairlines.com.au)

Fares & Discounts

Airlines PNG doesn't offer any discounts on its domestic sectors, so a return fair is simply twice the price of a one-way fare, all year round. One-way flights within PNG are a little cheaper with Airlines PNG than with Air Niugini, so if you're only travelling one way it's better to fly with Airlines PNG. If, however, you can arrange your itinerary around return flights then it's better to fly with Air Niugini.

Air Niugini has a bag full of discounts – *nobody* pays the full fare on Air Niugini domestic flights – and its discounts apply to return journeys. To benefit you must arrange your flights as a series of return journeys. So if you want to fly Port Moresby–Rabaul–Kavieng–Port Moresby, rather than buying three one-way flights, buy a Port Moresby–Rabaul return, and a Rabaul–Kavieng return.

The 'See PNG Fare' offers a 20% discount on all advance purchases of domestic tickets to non-PNG residents who can produce

THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN & THEIR FLYING MACHINES

The development of the Wau and Bulolo gold fields in the 1920s launched aviation in New Guinea. Cecil John Levien realised the gold fields would never be successful as long as getting men and supplies up from the coast involved a long, hard slog across difficult terrain populated by unfriendly tribes. So his Guinea Gold company set up Guinea Airways.

Its pilot, 'Pard' Mustar, had to do far more than just fly the first DH-37 biplane. First he arranged for an airstrip to be constructed at Lae (the local jail provided prisoners to build it), then he walked from Salamaua to Wau to supervise the airstrip construction there. Next, he had to travel back to Rabaul where the DH-37 had arrived in pieces as sea cargo, assemble it and fly to Lae – a 650km journey, much of it over sea and unexplored jungle, in a single-engine aircraft of dubious reliability.

In April 1927 Mustar took off on his first flight to Wau – and couldn't find it! He returned to Lae, took more directions and advice and tried again with an equal lack of success. Finally, on his third attempt, and with an experienced guide on board, he made the first of many 50-minute flights.

Mustar quickly realised the need for more capacity and reliability, and before the end of 1927 he went to Germany to buy a Junkers W-34 at the astronomical cost of UK£8000. It may have been expensive, but at the time it was the latest thing in cargo aircraft and could lift over a ton. A second W-34 soon followed, and with these aircraft Guinea Airways operated a service that proved the real possibilities of air transport just as convincingly as the much better publicised flights of Lindbergh or Kingsford-Smith. Wau became the busiest airfield in the world and more air freight was lifted annually in New Guinea than in the rest of the world put together!

Mustar left New Guinea but in 1929 was called back to attempt a scheme that, to many people at the time, must have seemed like something in the realms of science fiction. He had to find a way of flying gold dredges weighing 3000 tons into the gold fields. Mustar's answer was to dismantle the dredges and buy another Junkers, the G-31, a three-engine, all-metal monster that cost UK£30,000 and could lift three tons. In the early 1930s a fleet of these aircraft carried not just gold equipment but also workers and even the first horses ever to be transported by air.

FROM BOUGAINVILLE TO GIZO – THE GUN RUN *Markus Arnold & Win Schumacher*

The route between the Solomon Islands and Bougainville was for years the main thoroughfare for smuggled guns from the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) and contraband for the people of Bougainville which was blockaded during the secessionist war. Today, the route is once again open to civilian traffic, although 'open' is something of an overstatement – the crossing is illegal and there is no PNG immigration post in Bougainville so you can't get an exit stamp in your passport. However it's possible to slip into the Solomons and get to Gizo, either by plane (from Ballalae airstrip, infrequently serviced from Gizo) or by motor-canoe.

We met two intrepid German travellers who did the Bougainville–Shortlands–Gizo crossing in a 10m motor-canoe:

'Initially we wanted to get to Buin, to the southern tip of Bougainville, where we had planned to share a boat ride to the Shortlands (on Saturday, which is market day), but the Arawa–Buin road was blocked due to a landslide. Luckily we found a motor-canoe in Sirawai, a few kilometres from the landslide. The crossing to the Shortlands took three hours, along Bougainville's amazing coastline. We registered at the police station in Lofung, to the east of Shortland Island. The policemen were truly surprised to see two foreigners but did not make any fuss about our arrival by boat from PNG. We spent the night near Korovou.

The next morning we had an early start (3am) to tackle the second crossing, due south to Gizo. What a crossing! The first hour was nightmarish – the sea was so rough (think 3m swells) that we had to take shelter in the lagoon south of Fauro Island. When the sea calmed down a bit, we started off again, this time in the open ocean. We tried to forget all those stories of capsized boats in these waters... Apart from a few showers, the sea remained fairly calm. The boat made a few stops, at Vella Lavella and other smaller islands. Around noon the silhouette of Mt Kolombangara became visible on the horizon. The crossing of Gizo Strait was a bit nerve-racking due to huge swells. We arrived in Gizo at 2pm, exhausted but relieved to have covered this stretch without any incident. The ride cost us S\$200. We went to the Immigration Office and got stamped in without fuss'.

There are definitely some risks involved in this crossing, but here are a few words of wisdom for the intrepid who'd like to travel by boat between the Shortlands and Gizo as safely as possible:

- Preferably test your seaworthiness beforehand, eg by taking a boat ride on shorter routes, such as Rabaul–Duke of York Islands or Kavieng–New Hanover.
- It's best to have previous experience of the open ocean. Being out at sea with no landmarks is quite intimidating. Between the Shortlands and Gizo, there's a one- to three-hour period of time (depending on the weather conditions) when you can really feel that sense of emptiness. You need to be self-confident.
- Choose a boat in good shape, equipped with a powerful engine (minimum 40Hp, but preferably 60Hp), and with two drivers.
- Avoid boats that are overloaded – risks of capsizing are greater.
- Check the equipment on board: ask about the number of lifejackets (one per person).
- Be sure to register at the police station in Lofung and let them know your whereabouts. Should something go wrong during the crossing, at least some officials will know about it.
- Never do this crossing in bad weather.
- Bring waterproof bags to secure your passport, money and camera gear, as well as a raincoat. The boats that ply this route have no roof so you're exposed to the elements.
- Bring water, food and sunscreen.

their international ticket (so don't forget it). This is the only discount available if you're buying the ticket outside PNG; it's valid year-round.

Following is a summary of other deals. If these tickets are purchased *outside* PNG they're GST-exempt. Some are not applicable at peak times such as Christmas and Easter.

Discounted tickets must be paid for in full within 24 hours of booking. For more details see www.airniugini.com.

Flexisaver Fares At 30% off the normal economy round-trip fare, Flexisaver Fares have no minimum stay and a 90-day maximum stay.

Fully Flexi Fares At 15% off the normal economy round-trip fare, Fully Flexi Fares can be upgraded to full economy class.

Supersaver Fares These are 45% off the normal economy class round-trip fare. The same conditions apply on these tickets as on the Wantok Fares (though they may be available when Wantok Fares are not).

Wantok Fares These are the cheapest at 60% off the normal economy class round-trip fare. Passengers must stay away at least one Sunday (if they fly out on a Sunday they must stay away at least one week). There's a 30-day maximum stay.

These fares may not be available at all times, and must be issued on Air Niugini ticket stocks – you must buy them from an Air Niugini office. Be certain of your travelling dates as changing them incurs a K110 penalty. Cashing them incurs a K165 penalty.

Solomon Airlines has no discounts on its domestic fares.

Air Passes

Air Niugini offers an excellent-value four-coupon 'See PNG Pass' that allows visitors to travel four domestic sectors for US\$375 (not including taxes and charges). The pass must be purchased prior to arrival in PNG.

BICYCLE

In the odd town or island, such as New Ireland, it's possible to rent a bike (about K20 per day), but don't expect anything flash.

BOAT

Island hopping through PNG and the Solomons is a pretty cool way of travelling, especially if you have no concern for time. Unless you take a cruise, the only certainties of travelling this way are that you'll have a truly memorable, exotic experience, and you'll spend a lot of time sitting under palm trees waiting for your freighter, banana boat, luxury yacht or outrigger canoe to finally set sail. But hey, life could be worse.

The main ways of getting around by sea are by large boats, small boats, charters and yacht crewing.

Boat Charter

Many dive operators charter their boats, some for extended cruises. A cheaper alternative, if you're not looking for comfort and the chance to dive, is to try to charter a work boat. Chartering is definitely possible in Milne Bay, Lae and the islands – for a group of five or six, it isn't ruinously expensive. For more on dive boats, see p55.

Cruise Boats

Melanesian Travel Services (MTS; www.mtspng.com), owners of the Madang Resort Hotel, Malagan Beach Resort et al, sold their popular cruise boat *MTS Discoverer* in November 2006. They plan to build another cruiser soon.

For the time being, that leaves only the *Sepik Spirit*, run by **Trans Niugini Tours** (www.pngtours.com), cruising PNG waters full-time. It can accommodate up to 18 people in its nine luxury rooms and does mainly Sepik River cruises, usually packaged with the company's luxury lodges in the Highlands and on the river. It's not cheap – all inclusive four-day/three-night Sepik cruise costs about US\$1740 per person, twin share.

Large Boats

Sailing from one exotic locale to the next, via who-knows-where, on a slowly rolling freighter has a certain Joseph Conrad–style romance to it. And while cargo boats generally don't take travellers, it's worth trying your luck. Lae on the north coast is the main shipping hub in PNG, and it's the best place to look; ask around the port to see what's going. You'll almost always have more luck getting on a freighter by talking directly to the ship's captain (and perhaps investing in a few SP Lagers) rather than the office people. Accommodation is usually in a spare cabin and you should ask about food and water (you'll probably have to BYO). Bring plenty to keep yourself entertained as freighter 'schedules' are unreliable due to delays in loading/unloading cargoes. If freighters load (or expect to load) dangerous cargo such as petrol, they will not accept passengers.

If you don't have time to sit around waiting, there are regular passenger services linking the island provinces with Lae and, to a lesser extent, Madang.

Several boats have recently started scheduled services to the islands of Milne Bay (see p113), making those more accessible than they

have been for years. There are no passenger vessels linking the north and south coasts or any running along the south coast.

The main operators along the north coast and to the islands are **Lutheran Shipping** (☎ 472 2066 in Lae, 852 2577 in Madang, fax 852 3641; luship.madang@global.net.pg) and **Rabaul Shipping** (Star Ships; ☎ 982 1070/1071, fax 982 1955 in Rabaul; rabship@starships.com.pg). Based in Lae, Lutheran Shipping has a virtual monopoly on passenger shipping along the north coast. Boats run at least once a week from Lae to Oro Bay, Finschhafen, Madang, Kimbe and Rabaul. From Rabaul there are regular boats to Kavieng and Manus. Schedules are released at the end of the month for the following month, and you can only make a booking once the schedule is out. Even then, the departure is far from guaranteed.

Some boats carry cargo and passengers and have tourist class (air-conditioned seats and berths) and deck class (air-vented seats and berths). Deck class can get crowded; both classes have video 'entertainment' and it's worth avoiding bunks near the video. There sometimes are simple snack bars which might be just someone with soft drinks in a cooler and a carton of kundu crackers. Students are sometimes entitled to discounts.

In the Solomons cargo ships leave Honiara in all directions and it's best to ask at the wharf or check at the **Marine Office** (☎ 21609) to see what's going. **Wings Shipping** (☎ 22811 in Honiara) services Western Province and Malaita, **Transwest Shipping** (☎ 60240, fax 60421 in Gizo) goes to Western Province and Choiseul, and **Isabel Development Corporation** (☎ 22126, fax 22009 in Honiara) goes to Santa Isabel.

Passenger Boats

In the Solomons two relatively new vessels – fast, clean and efficient – are making a big difference to inter-island travel and for the first time 'Sol Air' has some competition. The **MV Pelican Express** and **MV Solomons Express** (☎ 28104, 28064; elite@solomon.com.sb) have bucked the trend of the slow and smelly diesel freighters that have been sailing between Solomons' waters for ages. They run between Honiara, Malaita and Western Province.

Small Boats

In addition to the freighters and passenger boats, local boats and canoes go literally everywhere. For these you have to be in the right

place at the right time but, with patience, you could travel the whole coastline by village hopping in small boats.

Trade boats – small, wooden boats with thumping diesel engines – ply the coast, supplying trade stores and acting as ferries. They are irregular but if you're prepared to wait, they can get you to some off-the-track places. Don't expect comfort, bring your own food and make sure the operator is trustworthy before you commit yourself to a day or two aboard. If you're in a major centre, such as Alotau, ask around the port and at the big stores, which might have a set schedule for delivering supplies to the area's trade stores. Negotiate the fee before you leave.

For shorter distances, there are dinghies with outboard motors, often known as speedies or banana boats. These are usually long fibreglass boats that leap through the waves and are bone-jarringly uncomfortable. The cost of running outboard motors makes them expensive if you have to charter one, but there will often be a PMV boat (a public transport boat; see p318) with reasonable fares – about K20 to K30 per hour's travel. Note, banana boats are no fun at all when the wind picks up and the open seas should be avoided. And the wind can pick up with little warning. We did a trip once returning from the Duke of Yorks back to Kokopo. The weather looked fine when we left but pretty soon the boat's pilot was zigzagging around the crests of 3m waves and we were wet to the bone – it was genuinely terrifying! People die reasonably frequently in open-sea banana-boat crossings; try to stay within sight of shore.

For shorter distances, such as from Tufi to the surrounding villages, you might take an outrigger canoe and will be expected to assist with the paddling.

Yacht Crewing

While there are thriving yacht clubs located in **Port Moresby** (www.rpyc.com.pg), **Lae** (☎ 472 4909; laeyacht@global.net.pg), **Wewak** (☎ 856 2708), **Rabaul** (☎ 982 1299; rabaulyc@global.net.pg), **Honiara** (☎ 22500) and **Gizo** (☎ 76004; www.gizoyachtclub.com.sb), in practice it's very hard to get a crewing berth on a yacht even if you have some experience. Yachties are sometimes looking for people to share costs and for the company. You could try contacting the yacht clubs directly or try the bulletin boards at www.noon.site.com.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving yourself around PNG and/or the Solomon Islands is not really a viable way of travelling. PNG really only has one road – the Highlands Hwy – that connects two or more places you might want to visit, and in the Solomons you need no more explanation than the 'Islands' part of the country's name.

In PNG it's pointless bringing your own vehicle as even a dirt bike would need to be shipped between many locations due to the lack of roads. The same applies to buying a vehicle; it's not worth the hassle.

You could, however, hire a car or 4WD in Lae or Madang for the trip up the Highlands Hwy, or perhaps to drive around New Ireland. All the major cities have an array of car-hire companies.

Driving Licence

Any valid overseas licence is OK for the first three months you're in PNG. International driving permits are accepted in the Solomons, as are most driving licences. People drive on the left-hand side.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Fuel can be hard to find and is expensive. In PNG a litre of petrol costs K3.30, while diesel is K3.90 per litre in cities, but expect prices to rise dramatically once you leave town. As for spare parts, start praying.

Hire

Four-wheel drives can be hired in most PNG cities, including on the islands, and in Lae and Port Moresby you can hire a plain old car. You must be 25 to hire a car and have either a credit card or K2500 cash as a deposit. Hiring anything will cost you an arm and probably both legs, and the rates are even higher when you add the per-km charges, insurance and tax. For example, a compact car (the cheapest option) costs from K175 per day, plus K0.80 per kilometre, plus 10% VAT, plus any fee for personal insurance. A 4WD is about K250 per day plus K1.35 per kilometre. Probably the cheapest way of hiring is with an accommodation and car-rental package; **Coral Sea Hotels** (www.coralseahotels.com.pg) and Budget do some good deals.

One-way rentals are available at locations along the Highlands Hwy. The following companies have offices around PNG; see destination chapters for details.

Avis (☎ 324 9400; www.avis.com.pg)

Hertz (☎ 302 6822; sales@leasemaster.com.pg)

Travel-Car (☎ 323 9878; queenemmalodge@daltron.com.pg)

The Solomon Islands has less than 1500km of roads. Cars can be hired in Honiara, but nowhere else.

Insurance

Most hire companies supply full insurance as standard in their rental agreements, but be sure to ask before you drive off. This is particularly important as some travel insurance policies don't cover driving off-road.

Road Conditions

Perhaps the most pertinent point about the roads in PNG is that there aren't very many. Port Moresby, for example, is not linked by road to any other provincial capital except Kerema, and that road is subject to seasonal difficulties. The most important road is the Highlands Hwy, which runs from Lae to Lake Kopiago, via Goroka, Mt Hagen and Tari. Madang is also connected to the highway via the Ramu Hwy. In 2008 the long-anticipated Southern Highlands Gulf Highway will connect Kikori in the Gulf Province to the Highland Highway near Mendi.

The road conditions are variable, to say the least. Many are full of potholes and only passable by 4WD, and only then in the dry. Others are recently sealed all-weather affairs. If you're planning on getting out of the towns, a 4WD is a necessity.

Road Hazards

Roads in PNG come with a range of hazards. There is the deterioration factor: many are becoming almost impassable due to lack of maintenance. There's the wet-season factor: it rains, you get bogged. And then there's that one you can't do much about: the *raskol* (bandit) factor. Your chances of being held up are admittedly quite slim, but it's worth reading the Dangers & Annoyances section (p291) for tips on what to do if it happens to you.

Bear in mind the tourist office's recommendations if you are involved in an accident: don't stop, keep driving and report the accident at the nearest police station. This applies regardless of who was at fault or how serious the accident (whether you've run over a pig or hit a person). Tribal concepts of pay back

apply to car accidents. You may have insurance and you may be willing to pay, but the local citizenry may well prefer to take more immediate and satisfying action.

Road Rules

Cars drive on the left side of the road. The speed limit is 60km/h in towns and 80km/h in the country. Seat belts must be worn by the driver and front-seat passengers. Most cars won't have seat belts in the back.

HITCHING

Hitching is an important part of travelling in the region. The lack of scheduled transport means jumping onto a bus, truck, tractor, outrigger, freighter, plane – or whatever else is going your way – is a time-honoured way of getting around. You'll often be expected to pay the equivalent of a PMV fare. If your bag is light, it's also sometimes possible to hitch flights at small airports.

Keep in mind that hitching is never entirely safe in any country. Travellers who decide to hitch are taking a small but potentially serious risk, and solo women should absolutely *not* hitch in PNG or the Solomon Islands. People who choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

LOCAL TRANSPORT IN URBAN AREAS

Local transport is not particularly sophisticated in PNG and the Solomons. The vast majority of trips are made by minibuses known as PMVs (public motor vehicles), though in a few places you'll find more exotic means of transport, such as outrigger canoes for getting around Tufi or dugout canoes for paddling between villages on the Sepik River. They operate on the same principal as a PMV; they're cheap and leave when full.

A few (and only a very few) towns and islands rent battered bikes to travellers for a few kina a day.

Minibus (PMV)

In most urban areas a fleet of minibuses, universally known as PMVs, provides public transport along a network of established routes. Stops are pre-determined and are often indicated by a yellow pole or a crowd of waiting people. You can't just ask to be let off anywhere. The destination will be indicated by a sign inside the windscreen or called out

by the driver's assistant, aka 'conductor', in a machine-gun-style staccato.

PMVs have a crew of two: the driver, who usually maintains an aloof distance from the passengers; and the conductor, who takes fares and copes with the rabble. On most occasions, the conductor sits in the seat nearest the door, so when the PMV stops, he's the man to ask about the destination. If it's heading in the right direction and there's a centimetre or two of spare space, you're on. Don't be surprised if you have to wait for your change; it will come when the conductor gets his change sorted.

If you tell the conductor where you want to go he'll let the driver know when to stop. In town, PMVs usually cost 70t per trip, irrespective of length.

Taxi

Considering PNG's reputation for nocturnal danger, it's surprising there are not more taxis. Port Moresby and Alotau have plenty and there are two in Vanimo. That's it. Lae, Wewak, Madang, Popondetta, Goroka and Mt Hagen have no taxis, making it difficult to get around after dark when you don't want to be walking. To fill the gap, hotels often have minibuses that will run you around.

If you do manage to get a taxi you'll find most of them are complete clunkers – wind-screens that look like road maps, broken seats, smelly drivers, no radios. Prices aren't excessive (starting at about K5 and averaging about K2 per kilometre) but you'll have to negotiate the fare before you get in, and don't expect to be offered change when you get out. The one shining exception is **Scarlet Taxis** (☎ 323 4266) in Port Moresby, where the cars and drivers are (mostly) clean and well-kept, there is a radio dispatch network and the meters work.

In the Solomons, Honiara has plenty of taxis and Gizo and Auki have a few.

PMV

PMV is the generic term for any type of public transport and wherever there are roads, there will be PMVs. Whether it's a dilapidated minibus, a truck with two facing wooden benches, a tractor in the Solomons, a pick-up with no seats whatsoever but space in the tray, or any other means of transport (boats are also referred to as PMVs), the PMV is one of the keys to travelling cheaply in PNG. It's also one of the best ways to meet local people.

There's no real science to using PMVs; just turn up at the designated departure point and wait for it to fill up. Many rural routes have only one service a day so ask around a day ahead for the intelligence on when it leaves and from where (usually the local market). It might also save you waiting for hours as most PMVs start in one town very early in the morning, drive to another (usually larger) town, then wait a couple of hours while the morning's passengers go to market before returning.

Out of town you can assume that anything with lots of people in it is a rural PMV. The conductor will tell you where it's headed and take your money, usually at or just before the end of the trip. If you want to get off before the end, just yell 'stop driver!'. Market days (usually Friday and Saturday) are the best days for finding a ride. On secondary roads, traffic can be thin, especially early in the week.

Most of the time, travelling in a PMV is perfectly safe; your fellow passengers will be most impressed you're with them and not in some expensive 4WD. There is, of course, a risk of robbery, especially on the Highlands Hwy. Lone women travellers are also at greater risk and should think twice about travelling by PMV. If you do, find a vehicle with women passengers and get a seat nearby.

Costs

PMVs are refreshingly cheap. For example, from Lae to Madang costs K40; from Madang to Goroka is K40 and Mt Hagen to Madang is K60. Remember that oil price fluctuations affect the whole world...not just the price of fuel in your home town.

TOURS

From rough-and-ready village tours to luxury-lodge and cruise-boat affairs, there is a PNG tour to suit almost everyone. Of

particular interest are the specialist tours catering to those with a penchant for watching wildlife, bird-watching, trekking and village-based tours. Smaller operators are usually cheaper and offer a more personal experience, though not necessarily a better-organised trip – try to contact them before coming to PNG and allow a couple of weeks organisation time.

The following companies have good reputations. For tours of the Kokoda Track, see p93, and for bigger companies, see p311.

Paradise Adventure Tours (☎ 542 1696; www.paradisetours.com.pg) This Mt Hagen-based operation has had good feedback on its Highlands, Sepik and bird-watching tours. Good value.

PNG Frontier Adventures (☎ 856 1584/1400; www.pngfrontieradventures.com) These guys are Sepik experts. They can provide everything from a single guide to a full-blown tour. Recommended.

PNG Highland Tours (☎ 732 1602; png.gold@global.net.pg) A range of Highlands tours organised by the friendly Norman Carver, including climbs of Mt Wilhelm.

PNG Trekking Adventures (☎ 325 1284; www.pngtrekkingadventures.com) This operator offers the usual Kokoda Track fare, but also some interesting guided treks up Mt Wilhelm, the Wilhelm–Madang walk, the Black Cat Track and a Milne Bay War History walk.

Sepik Adventure Tours (☎ 856 2525; www.ambunti-lodge-sepiktour.com.pg) Alois Mateos has vast experience and knowledge of the Sepik and can arrange all manner of tours. A genuinely nice guy.

WALKING

The best and cheapest way to come to grips with PNG is to walk (see p288). With a judicious mix of walks, canoes, PMVs, coastal ships and the odd plane, PNG can change from a very expensive country to a reasonable one. Accommodation and food is normally available in the villages – meaning floor space and sago or sweet potato. See p284 for information on staying in villages. Of

Health

Dr Michael Sorokin

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With sensible precautions and behaviour, the health risks to travellers in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands are low. Mosquito-transmitted disease is the main problem. The countries share two serious health hazards: malaria and saltwater crocodiles. The region is rabies-free.

Both countries lie in the tropics and are under-resourced in terms of medical infrastructure. Although steadily improving, overall standards of health and healthcare are not good.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while abroad. See your dentist before departing, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity or obtain a prepared pack from a travel health clinic.

INSURANCE

If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider supplemental insurance. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments

directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In PNG and Solomon Islands, most doctors expect payment in cash.)

Check whether your insurance covers evacuation to the nearest major centre (eg Brisbane) – the extra premium is not usually inordinately expensive.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination. Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

It is a good idea to carry a medical and first-aid kit with you. Following is a list of items you should consider packing.

- acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin*
- adhesive or paper tape
- anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- antibacterial ointment (prescription only, eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- antibiotic plus steroid eardrops (prescription only, eg Sofradex, Kenacort otic)
- antibiotics (prescription only), eg ciprofloxacin (Ciproxin) or norfloxacin (Utinor, Noroxin)
- anti-diarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- anti-giardia tablets (prescription only, eg tinidazole)
- antimalaria pills
- bandages (including a long compression bandage), gauze, gauze rolls, waterproof dressings
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- iodine tablets (for water purification)
- oral rehydration salts (eg Gastrolyte, Diarolyte, Replyte)

- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- pocketknife**
- scissors, safety pins, tweezers**
- steroid cream or hydrocortisone cream (for allergic rashes)
- sun block
- syringes and sterile needles, and intravenous fluids if travelling in very remote areas
- thermometer

*Aspirin should not be used for fever; it can cause bleeding in cases of dengue fever.

**Not in carry-on luggage.

If you are travelling more than 24 hours away from a town area consider taking a self-diagnostic kit that can identify, from a finger prick, malaria in the blood.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, the **Lonely Planet website** (lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The World Health Organisation publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at www.who.int/ith at no cost.

Other websites of general interest are **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost; the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (www.cdc.gov); **Fit for Travel** (www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk), which has up-to-date information about outbreaks and is very user-friendly; and **www.traveldoctor.com.au**, which is a similar Australian site.

It's also a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspss/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

FURTHER READING

Good options for further reading include Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan, and *Healthy Travel Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* by Dr Isabelle Young.

IN PNG & SOLOMON ISLANDS

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

The quality of health care varies over the region and within each country. In the main centres – Port Moresby and Lae (PNG) and Honiara (Solomon Islands) – you can expect primary care of a high standard that is limited by the lack of access to sophisticated laboratory and radiological procedures. Specialists in internal medicine, surgery and obstetrics/gynaecology are also available in these centres, while in Port Moresby there are also paediatric, orthopaedic and psychiatric specialists.

In secondary centres, eg Madang (PNG) and Gizo (Solomon Islands), the quality of service can be lower – often because of lower-quality diagnostic and treatment facilities. Small hospitals, health centres and clinics are well-placed throughout these centres but staffing and facilities will vary. Intergovernmental or church mission aid and doctors may be in some of these facilities.

Private medical practitioners will usually expect payment in cash. Consultation fees for a general practitioner are often slightly less than those charged in a Western country. Where hospital facilities (government or private) exist, a cash deposit will be required. In the Solomons, payment by credit card to a government institution may not be accepted. Public hospital outpatient services are free or of negligible cost, but apart from serious emergencies waiting time can be very long.

Commonly used drugs, including oral contraceptives and antibiotics, are available in the main centres where there are private pharmacies, but do not expect large supplies. If necessary, special drugs can be flown in. For diabetics, it may not be possible to obtain exactly the type of insulin preparation or drug that you are using and, although alternatives will be available, it is much safer to have enough of your own supply. The more up-to-date antiepileptics and antihypertensives may also be hard to find.

Tampons and pads can be easily obtained in major centres. In smaller centres they may have been sitting on the shelf for some time.

Private dentists practice in Port Moresby. Elsewhere, limited government dental services may be available.

Medical help will be available within a day's journey. Self-medication for minor skin infections or cuts and for simple diarrhoea is reasonable. In the case of fever in a malarious area it is always best to try and rule malaria out. If you don't have a diagnostic kit (which is not foolproof anyway), almost all clinics will have the ability to do a blood-smear check. Your medical adviser may have decided to prescribe self-treatment medication for malaria rather than preventive antimalarials, in which case you should still try to get an accurate diagnosis and certainly get to a major medical centre for treatment.

The region is generally not an ideal holiday destination for a pregnant woman. Malaria can cause miscarriage or premature labour and prevention cannot be guaranteed even when taking antimalarials. As far as vaccinations are concerned, the three recommended ones (for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid fever) do not contain live organisms so are not a problem, but the mumps/measles/rubella vaccine does contain live virus material and should not be given during pregnancy. Also, because of possible allergic reactions, Japanese B encephalitis vaccination is not recommended during pregnancy.

Travel with children can present special problems. In tropical climates, dehydration develops very quickly when a fever and/or diarrhoea and vomiting occur. Malaria is much more dangerous to children than to adults, as is dengue fever. Insect repellents are essential.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

When travelling to PNG and the Solomon Islands, vaccination for yellow fever (and the certificate to prove it) is required if you are entering from a yellow fever-endemic country. Vaccinations are also recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid fever. For PNG, it is also recommended that some visitors are vaccinated against Japanese B encephalitis.

All vaccinations can produce slight soreness and redness at the inoculation site, and a mild fever with muscle aches over the first 24 hours. These are less likely with hepatitis A inoculations and a little more common with hepatitis B and typhoid inoculations. Japanese B encephalitis vaccine has been associated with allergic reactions that require an antihistamine. Yellow fever vaccine is dangerous for anyone with an allergy to eggs and in about 5% of cases causes a flu-like illness within a week of vaccination.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is spread through mosquito bites. It causes a feverish illness with headache and severe muscle pains similar to those experienced with a bad, prolonged attack of influenza. There might also be a fine rash. Mosquito bites should be avoided whenever possible – always use insect repellents. Self-treatment includes paracetamol, fluids and rest. Danger signs are prolonged vomiting, blood in the vomit, and/or a blotchy dark red rash. Dengue fever is not a danger in the Highlands.

Filariasis

Also known as elephantiasis, filariasis (found only in the Solomon Islands) is another mosquito-transmitted disease. It can cause a fever with lymph gland enlargement, and prolonged exposure (over a period of months) can lead to chronic limb swelling. Though rare, it hasn't been eliminated and is another reason for anti-mosquito precautions. It's treated with the drugs albendazole or ivermectin. These drugs are used by governments in periodic mass-treatment campaigns, and long-stay expats who are offered this would be wise to accept.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a virus causing liver inflammation. Fever, debility and jaundice (yellow colouration of the skin and eyes, together with dark urine) occur and recovery is slow. Most people recover completely over time but it can be dangerous to people with other forms of liver disease, the elderly and sometimes to pregnant women in their third trimester. It is spread by contaminated food or water. Self-treatment consists of rest, a low-fat diet and

avoidance of alcohol. The vaccine is almost 100% protective.

Hepatitis B

Like hepatitis A, hepatitis B is a virus causing liver inflammation, but this virus is more serious and often progresses to chronic liver disease and even cancer. It is spread, like HIV, by mixing body fluids through sexual intercourse, contaminated needles and accidental blood contamination. Treatment is complex and specialised but vaccination is highly effective.

HIV/AIDS

HIV infection is on the rise in the whole region of West Melanesia. Government reports usually underestimate the extent of the problem, so when the international conferences discuss the incidence reaching epidemic proportions you can take it that the danger of unprotected sex is huge. Condom use is essential. If you require an injection for anything check that a new needle is being used or have your own supply.

Japanese B Encephalitis

This disease, found in the southern region of PNG including Port Moresby, but excluding the Highlands, is a serious virus transmitted by mosquitoes. Early symptoms are flu-like and this is usually as far as the infection goes, but sometimes the illness proceeds to cause brain fever (encephalitis), which has a high death rate. There is no specific treatment. Effective vaccination is available (involving three costly inoculations over a month). Allergic and sensitivity reactions to the vaccine, though rare, can occur. Vaccination is usually recommended for anyone staying more than a few weeks and/or going to work in villages.

Malaria

Malaria, found in all areas of PNG below 1000m, and in the Solomon Islands (except the outlying atolls and Honiara), is a parasite infection transmitted by infected anopheles mosquitoes. While these mosquitoes are regarded as night feeders they can emerge when light intensity is low (eg in overcast conditions under the jungle canopy or the interior of dark huts). Both malignant (*falciparum*) and less-threatening but relapsing forms are present here. Since no vaccine is available you'll have to rely on mosquito-bite prevention (including exposing as little skin as possible, applying top-

DRINKING WATER

To prevent diarrhoea, a sensible precaution is to avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets) and to steer clear of ice. The municipal water supply in capital cities in both countries, and in the majority of towns in PNG, can be trusted. If you're trekking, drink only from streams at a higher altitude than nearby villages – local guides know which water is safe.

ical insect repellents, knockdown insecticides and, where necessary, bed nets impregnated with permethrin) and taking antimalarial drugs before, during and after risk exposure. No antimalarial is 100% effective.

Malaria causes various symptoms but the essence of the disease is fever. In a malarious zone it is best to assume that fever is due to malaria unless blood tests rule it out. This applies up to a few months after leaving the area as well. Malaria is curable if diagnosed early.

Typhoid Fever

Sporadic in the region, typhoid fever is a bacterial infection acquired from contaminated food or water or both. The germ can be transmitted by food handlers and flies, and can be present in inadequately cooked shellfish. It causes fever, debility and late-onset diarrhoea. Untreated it can produce delirium and is occasionally fatal, but the infection is curable with antibiotics. Vaccination is moderately effective but care with eating and drinking is equally important.

Yaws

This is a bacterial infection found in Solomon Islands that causes multiple skin ulcers. It was thought to have been eliminated, but there has been a recent resurgence. The infection spreads via direct contact with an infected person. Treatment with penicillin produces a dramatic cure.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Diarrhoea is caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites present in contaminated food or water. In temperate climates the cause is usually viral, but in the tropics bacteria or parasites are more usual. If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids,

preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte, Gastrolyte, Repllyte). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should take an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain, seek medical attention.

Giardiasis

A parasite present in contaminated water, giardia produces bloating as well as a foul-smelling, persistent, although not 'explosive', diarrhoea. One dose (four tablets) of Tinidazole usually cures the infection.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Acute Mountain Sickness

Areas of PNG's Highlands higher than 2500m, including Mt Wilhelm (4509m), are high enough for acute mountain sickness (AMS), or altitude sickness, to be a risk. Lack of oxygen at high altitudes affects most people to some extent. Less oxygen reaches the muscles and the brain, requiring the heart and lungs to compensate by working harder. The major risk factor in AMS is the speed with which you make your ascent. AMS is a notoriously fickle affliction and can affect even trekkers accustomed to high altitudes. AMS has been fatal at 3000m, although 3500m to 4500m is the usual range.

Acclimatisation is vital and usually takes from one to three days. Once you are acclimatised to a given height you are unlikely to get AMS at that height, but you can still succumb when you travel higher. If the ascent is too high and too fast, your body's compensatory reactions may not kick into gear fast enough.

Mild symptoms of AMS usually develop during the first 24 hours. They tend to be worse at night and include headache, dizziness, lethargy, loss of appetite, nausea, breathlessness, difficulty sleeping and irritability. More serious symptoms include breathlessness at rest, a dry irritative cough (which may progress to the production of pink, frothy sputum), severe headache, lack of coordination (typically leading to a 'drunken walk'), confusion, irrational behaviour, vomiting and eventually unconsciousness.

TREATMENT

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, usually a day or two. Take paracetamol or aspirin for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, however, *immediate descent* is necessary – even 500m can help. The most effective treatment for severe AMS is to get down to a lower altitude as quickly as possible – any delay could be fatal.

The drugs acetazolamide (Diamox) and dexamethasone are recommended by some doctors for the prevention of AMS. However, their use is controversial. While they can reduce the symptoms, they may also mask warning signs; severe and fatal AMS has occurred in people taking these drugs. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

Bites & Stings

LAND CREATURES

Snakes (eg the death adder or highly venomous taipan) seldom attack humans without reason, so when walking in areas in PNG where visibility is not clear (such as long grass, leaf-covered ground or at night), be alert and careful. Compression by pad and bandage over the bite and immobilisation of the limb with any form of splint is the first-aid treatment. Victims should stay still unless there's no other option. Antivenins are usually available from major medical centres.

The redback (jockey spider) is a distinctive small spider (known for the orange-red stripe on its back) that can cause a very painful bite with occasional generalised poisoning heralded by marked sweating of the affected limb, severe pain, weakness and vomiting. An ice pack is useful as a first-aid measure. An antivenin is available – check with local village clinics.

Leeches are present in swampy jungle areas and easily fix themselves onto skin. They aren't dangerous except to the rare person who may be allergic. Liberal application of insect repellent to skin, clothing and boots will prevent leech infestation. Pulling a leech off the skin may result in bleeding – it is better to induce the leech to remove itself by applying an insecticide (or burning it with a cigarette tip!).

MARINE CREATURES

Saltwater crocodile attacks, though rare, are well recorded. Crocodiles can swim into tidal rivers; heed local warnings.

The notorious box jellyfish (seawasp) has been recorded in the waters of the Torres Straits, but much more common are the whip-like stings from the blue-coloured Indo-Pacific man o' war. If you see these floating in the water or stranded on the beach it is wise not to go into the water. The sting is very painful and is best treated with vinegar or ice packs. Do not use alcohol.

Poisonous cone shells abound along shallow coral reefs. Stings can be avoided by handling the shell at its blunt end and by using gloves. Stings mainly cause local reactions, but nausea, faintness, palpitations or difficulty in breathing are signs that flag the need for medical attention.

Sea snakes may be seen around coral reefs. They are extremely unlikely to attack and their fangs will not penetrate a wetsuit.

Coral Ear

This is a common name for inflammation of the ear canal. It is caused by water entering the canal activating any fungal spores that may be lying around predisposing to bacterial infection and inflammation. It usually starts after swimming but can be reactivated by water dripping into the ear canal after a shower, especially if long, wet hair lies over the ear opening.

It can be very, very painful and can spoil a holiday. Apart from diarrhoea it is the most common reason for travellers to consult a doctor. Self-treatment with an antibiotic plus steroid eardrop preparation is very effective. Stay out of the water until the pain and itch have gone.

Coral Cuts

Cuts and abrasions from dead coral cause similar injuries to that from any other sort of rock, but live coral can cause prolonged infection. Never touch coral. If you do happen to cut yourself on live coral, treat the wound immediately. Get out of the water, clean the wound thoroughly, getting out all the little bits of coral, apply an antiseptic and cover with a waterproof dressing.

Diving Hazards

Because the region has wonderful opportunities for scuba diving it is easy to get over-excited and neglect strict depth and time precautions. Few dives are very deep but the temptation to spend longer than safe amounts of time at relatively shallow depths is great and

is probably the main cause of decompression illness (the 'bends'). Early pains may not be severe and may be attributed to other causes, but any muscle or joint pain after scuba diving must be suspect. Keeping well hydrated helps prevent the bends.

At the time of writing, privately run compression chambers could be found at Port Moresby and in Honiara, but transport to a chamber can be difficult. Supply of oxygen to the chambers is sometimes a problem. Novice divers must be especially careful. Even experienced divers should check with organisations like **Divers' Alert Network** (DAN; www.danesap.org) about the current site and status of compression chambers, and insurance to cover costs.

Food

Only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Eat food that is hot through and avoid buffet-style meals. Food in restaurants that are frequented by locals is not necessarily safe but most resort hotels have good standards of hygiene, but individual food handlers can carry infection. Food that is piping hot is usually safe. Be wary of salads.

Heat

This region lies within the tropics so it is hot and for the most part humid.

Heat exhaustion is a state of dehydration associated with salt loss. Natural heat loss is through sweating so it is easy to become dehydrated without realising it. Thirst is a late sign. Heat exhaustion is prevented by drinking at least 2L to 3L of water per day and more if you're very active. Salt-replacement solutions are useful, as muscle weakness and cramps are due to salt as well as water loss and can be made worse by drinking water alone. The powders used for treating dehydration due to diarrhoea are just as effective when it is due to heat exhaustion. Apart from commercial solutions, a reasonable drink consists of a good pinch of salt to a half-litre (pint) of water. Salt tablets can result in too much salt being taken, and can cause headaches and confusion.

HEAT STROKE

When the cooling effect of sweating fails, heat stroke ensues. This is a dangerous and emergency condition characterised by muscle weakness, exhaustion and mental confusion.

Skin will be hot and dry. 'Put the fire out' by cooling the body with water on the outside and with cold drinks for the inside, then seek medical help.

Sunburn

Exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun causes burning of the skin with accompanying pain and misery and the danger of skin cancer. Cloud cover does not block out UV rays. Sunburn is more likely a problem for those taking Doxycycline as an antimalarial. The Australian 'slip, slop, slap' slogan (slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen and slap on a hat) is a useful mantra. Treat sunburn with cool, wet dressings. Severe swelling may respond to a cortisone cream.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Treatments involving local herbs, roots and leaves have evolved over centuries, with each village having their own traditional healers. Some of these folk remedies have effective ingredients, and governments and research institutions are researching many of them. Claims such as AIDS cures and aphrodisiacs can be ignored. Tree-bark concoctions for fever are like aspirin. Chinese herbs are available in all of the main towns.

Buai, or betel-nut chewing is widespread in PNG and Solomon Islands. It has an astringent effect in the mouth but claims about other healing properties remain unproven. Prolonged use predisposes to mouth cancers.

Language

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WHO SPEAKS WHAT WHERE?

After the national pidgins of Papua New Guinea and the Solomons, English is the most universally understood language, but while it's quite common in the cities and large towns, in rural areas you'll need some basic pidgin in order to communicate.

Pidgins

Pidgins are very easy for English speakers to get a handle on, and Solomons Pijin is even easier in this regard than PNG Pijin. The Solomons was a British territory and their Pijin is derived solely from English, whereas PNG Pijin has elements of German and various *tok ples* (native tongue, literally 'talk of your place'). PNG Pijin is closer to Bislama (of Vanuatu) than it is to Solomons Pijin, and Tok Pisin speakers are easily understood in Vanuatu.

This language guide only includes phrases in the pidgin of PNG, Tok Pisin, as it is similar enough to Pijin for you to get by. Listen closely to what people say, use your English inventively, and you'll find it easy to communicate in both PNG and the Solomons.

Papua New Guinea

More than 800 languages are spoken in PNG – a whopping 12% of the world's indigenous languages. Linguists divide these languages into 14 major groups. Austronesian languages are spoken by a sixth of PNG's people and dominate in the islands and around the coast. Enga is spoken by about 165,000 speakers in the Highlands region, and is the most predominant spoken native language (*tok ples*) in PNG. Kuanua, spoken by East New Britain's Tolai people, has about 61,000 speakers.

Many Austronesian languages can be understood by non-native speakers (ie speakers of other Austronesian PNG languages). A distinctive feature of these languages is that they usually have a number system based on five. Various dialects in the Highlands and Sepik regions are closely related, non-Austronesian languages that can be broadly understood across old clan boundaries.

In the early days of British New Guinea and then Australian Papua, the local language of the Port Moresby coastal area, Motu, evolved into Police Motu, and was spread through Papua by the native constabulary. It's still widely spoken in the southern Papuan part of PNG and you can easily pick up a Motu phrasebook in Port Moresby. Motu are Polynesian descendants, related to other Polynesians from elsewhere in the Pacific.

Solomon Islands

Officially, there are 67 listed indigenous languages and about 30 dialects in the Solomon Islands. It is quite common for people from villages separated by only a few kilometres to speak mutually incomprehensible languages. As a result, the national language of the Solomons is Solomon Islands Pijin, or Pijin for short.

PIJIN (SOLOMON ISLANDS)

Early 19th-century sailors stimulated the evolution of Pijin. The recruitment of labour (including Solomon Islanders) from the 1860s to 1900s to work in mines, and in Oceanic canefields and plantations, spread the language all over the Pacific. By the 1930s, Pijin was being spoken by missionaries in many areas, helping to spread it further. While English is now the official language of the administration, many government staff use Pijin in everyday conversation.

Solomon Islands Pijin – like similar languages in PNG, Vanuatu, West Africa and along the old China coast – has been condemned by all and sundry, including the UN. It has been called 'baby talk', a 'bastard language' and a 'mongrel lingo'.

Pijin speakers use two versions. One is a simplified form used by islanders to their English-speaking employers. The second is the true Pijin, which they use among their fellow countryfolk. Since the 1970s, linguists have been treating this version with respect.

TOK PISIN (PNG)

Tok Pisin (or as it has also been called, New Guinea Pidgin English, Tok Boi, Neo-Melanesian) has its origins in the Pacific labour trade. Between 1880 and 1914, thousands of New Guineans worked for periods of three years or more on the German plantations of Samoa, where Pidgin English had developed as the working language of a multicultural and multilingual workforce. On returning to New Guinea, they took with them knowledge of this language. Pidgin English also became the language of the plantations the Germans established in coastal New Guinea and the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, where young men from the more remote interior and the Highlands were employed. Until very recently, the majority of Tok Pisin speakers had acquired their knowledge of the language as part of their work experience away from their home village.

Tok Pisin has grown into a language with many functions, and is now learned as a second language in most villages. For a growing number of children in the big towns, it has become creolised (adopted as their first language). The simple plantation language of the 1920s and 1930s has changed into the national language of independent Papua New Guinea, and as such is used regularly by more than two million speakers, not only in former German New Guinea, but also in former Papua.

The spread of Tok Pisin is due not so much to deliberate policies (in fact both the German and Australian governments opposed its use for quite some time), but its perceived usefulness as a common language in a country where more than 800 languages are spoken. Tok Pisin is the major lingua franca of PNG, and even in very remote villages it's rare not to find someone who speaks it.

Much maligned as a broken English, bastard language or comic opera talk in colonial days, Tok Pisin is a vibrant and

BILONG BLO HUSAT?

In PNG the possessive word *bilong* is used in almost every sentence. These days in everyday usage it's truncated to a simple 'blo' in both spoken and common written forms. 'Bilong' is still technically correct, but it's rapidly becoming an archaic form.

expressive language used in all areas of daily life, including the PNG parliament, education, churches and the media. It has been a written language since the 1920s, and although an official writing system exists (used in the *Nupela Testamen* and *Wantok* newspaper), non-standard spellings still abound. The most widely written and spoken variety of Tok Pisin is that of the Madang region.

Most Tok Pisin words are of English origin, but many words referring to local phenomena originate in local languages such as Tolai (spoken around Rabaul). Tok Pisin speakers are tolerant of variation and visitors will find the language invaluable when they move away from the towns and want talk to Papua New Guineans socially.

For a more detailed guide to the pidgin languages of Oceania, including Solomon Islands Pijin and Tok Pisin, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Pidgin Phrasebook*.

The best places to look for books in Tok Pisin are the Christian bookshops in PNG; there is usually one in every town and they have all sorts of literature, including, needless to say, a Pidgin bible.

It is worthwhile buying the *Wantok* weekly newspaper, written entirely in Tok Pisin. As well as being a decent newspaper, reading it is a good way to learn the language. There are also comic strips, which are easy to follow even for beginners. EmTV broadcasts many programmes in Pidgin, which will also help you pick it up.

Pronunciation

Only a small number of Papua New Guineans speak Tok Pisin as their first language (about 100,000) and they are mainly in towns or non-traditional settlements. Second language Tok Pisin speakers are often influenced in their pronunciation and grammar by the conventions of their mother tongue.

Note that **p** and **f** are virtually interchangeable in both spelling and pronunciation, as are **d** and **t**, **j** and **z**. The combination **kw** represents the English 'qu'. Vowels and diphthongs are pronounced clearly, even when unstressed and at the end of a word.

a	as in 'art'
e	as in 'set'
i	as in 'sit'
o	as in 'lot'
u	as in 'put'
ai	as in 'aise'
au	as the 'ou' in 'house'
oi	as in 'boil'

Avoiding Confusion

Be wary of words that may sound similar to English but have a different meaning in Pidgin. For instance, *kilim* just means to hit (hard); to kill somebody or something you have to *kilim i dai*.

Be careful of the sexual phrases – *pusim* means to copulate with, not to push. And while you can *ple tennis* (play tennis), *ple* is also a euphemism for intercourse. A man's trunk or suitcase may be a *bokis*, but a woman's *bokis* is her vagina, and a *blak bokis* is not a black suitcase but a flying fox or bat!

You'll love the standard reply to 'how far is it?': *longwe liklik*. It doesn't actually mean a long way or not a long way – it translates more like 'not too near, not too far'.

Accommodation

Do you have a single/double room?

Yu gat rum slip long wanpela/tupela man?

How much is it per night?

Em i kostim hamas long wanpela de?

Can I see the room?

Inap mi lukim rum pastaim?

I like this room.

Mi laikim (tru) dispela rum.

Is there a mosquito net?

I gat moskita net i stap?

Where's the toilet?

Haus pekpek i stap we?

I want to stay ... day(s).

Mi laik stap ... de.

I'd like to check out today/tomorrow.

Mi laik bai mi lusim hotel tede/tumora.

Is there a ...?	<i>I gat rum ...?</i>
bath/shower	<i>waswas (i stap)</i>
laundry	<i>bilong wasim (ol) klas</i>

Conversation & Essentials

Hello.	<i>Gude.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Lukim yu.</i>
Yes.	<i>Yes.</i>
No.	<i>Nogat.</i>
Please.	<i>Plis.</i>
Excuse me/Sorry.	<i>Sori.</i>
Thank you (very much).	<i>Tenkyu (tru).</i>
How are you?	<i>Yu stap gut?</i>
I'm well.	<i>Mi stap gut.</i>
What's your name?	<i>Wanem nem bilong yu?</i>
My name is ...	<i>Nem bilong mi ...</i>
Where are you from?	<i>Ples bilong yu we?</i>
I'm from ...	<i>Ples bilong mi ...</i>
What's your job?	<i>Wanim kain wok bilong yu?</i>
I'm (a/an) ...	<i>Mi ...</i>
I (don't) understand.	<i>Mi (no) save.</i>
More slowly please.	<i>Yu tok isi isi plis.</i>
Can you draw a map?	<i>Inap yu wokim/droim map?</i>
I need help.	<i>Mi laikim sampela halp.</i>

man/woman	<i>man/meri</i>
child	<i>pikini</i>
relative	<i>pikinini</i>
sister	<i>wantok</i>
brother	<i>susa</i>
a little	<i>brata</i>
big	<i>liklik</i>
forbidden	<i>bikpela</i>
	<i>tambu</i>

Directions

Where is ...?	<i>... i stap we?</i>
Straight ahead.	<i>Stret.</i>
Turn left/right.	<i>Tanim lep/rait.</i>
How far is it?	<i>Em i longwe o nogat?</i>
Is transport available?	<i>I gat bas, teksi samting?</i>

behind	<i>bihain long</i>
in front of	<i>ai bilong</i>
near	<i>klustu</i>
far	<i>longwe</i>

Numbers

1	<i>wan</i>
2	<i>tu</i>
3	<i>tri</i>
4	<i>foa</i>
5	<i>faiv</i>
6	<i>sikis</i>
7	<i>seven</i>
8	<i>et</i>
9	<i>nain</i>
10	<i>ten</i>

11	wanpela ten wan
12	wanpela ten tu
13	wanpela ten tri
14	wanpela ten foa
15	wanpela ten faiv
16	wanpela ten sikis
17	wanpela ten seven
18	wanpela ten et
19	wanpela ten nain
20	tupela ten
21	tupela ten wan
22	tupela ten tu
30	tripela ten
40	fopela ten
50	faivpela ten
60	sikispela ten
70	sevenpela ten
80	etpela ten
90	nainpela ten
100	wan handet

Shopping & Services

I'd like to buy ...

Mi laik baim ...

How much is it?

Hamas long dispela?

What's that?

Wanem dispela?

I'm just looking.

Mi lukluk tasol.

That's very cheap.

Pe/Prais i daun (tru).

Is that your lowest price?

I gat seken prais?

I'll take it.

Bai mi kisim.

I'm looking for ...

Mi painim ...

a bank

haus mani/benk

the church

haus lotu

the hospital

haus sik

the market

maket/bung

the police

polis stesin

Time & Dates

When/At what time?

Wanem taim?

What time is it?

Wanem taim nau?

It's (eight) o'clock.

Em i (et) klok.

morning

moningtaim

afternoon

apinun

evening (7 – 11)

nait

night (11 – 4)

biknait

today

tede

tomorrow

tumora

yesterday

asde

Sunday

Sande

Monday

Mande

Tuesday

Tunde

Wednesday

Trinde

Thursday

Fonde

Friday

Fraide

Saturday

Sarere

Transport

How much is it to ... ?

Em i hamas long ... ?

How long is the journey?

Hamas taim long go long ... ?

I'd like a ... ticket

Mi laik baim tiket long ...

to ...

one-way

i go long tasol

return

go na i kambek

What time does

Wanem taim ... i kamap?

the ... arrive?

What time does the

Long wanem taim neks ... i go?

next ... leave?

boat

bot

bus

bas

plane

balus



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Pidgin Phrasebook

Glossary

arse tanket – a bunch of tanket leaves stuck into a belt to cover a man's backside; also called *arse gras* (Highlands)

bagarap – broken; literally 'buggered-up'

bagi – red shell necklace used for trade in the *kula* ring islands

balus – aeroplane

banana boat – trade boat or dinghy

baret – artificial channel or canal constructed across loops in a river (Sepik)

bigman – important man, a leader

bikpela – big, great

bilas – jewellery, decorations, finery

bilum – string bag

boi – boy

BRA – Bougainville Revolutionary Army (Solomon Islands)

buai – betel nut

buk tambu – the bible

bukumatula – bachelor house (Trobriand Islands)

bekim moni – 'payback' or compensation money

buli – tinned (bully) beef

dewel – devil

dim dims – white people

diwai – wood

doba – leaf money (Milne Bay Province)

dobu – long house

dukduk – spirit and ritual costume

garamut – drum made from a hollowed log

GRA – Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (Solomon Islands)

haus – house

haus sik – hospital

haus tambaran – spirit house

haus win – open-air structure like a gazebo; literally 'house of wind'

inap – enough

kai bar – cheap takeaway food bar

kaikai – food

karim leg – courting ceremony involving crossing legs with a partner; literally 'carry leg' (Highlands)

kastom – custom

kaukau – sweet potato

kiap – patrol officer (of colonial origin)

kina – unit of PNG currency; large shell traded from the coast as an early form of currency

kokomo – hornbill bird

kula ring – ring of trading islands in Milne Bay Province

kumul – bird of paradise

kunai – grass, grassland

kundu – hourglass-shaped drum covered with lizard or snake skin

kwik piksa leta – fax; literally 'quick picture letter'

laplap – sarong

liklik – small

liklik haus – toilet; literally 'small house'

lolo – rolls of shell money strung on lengths of cane (East New Britain)

lotu – religious service, worship

lusim – to leave

malangan – ritual of making totemic figures (also called *malangans*) to honour the dead; also known as *malagan*

masalai – spirit of the bush or water; a devil (East New Britain and New Ireland)

masta – white adult male (colonial)

mausgras – beard, moustache, whiskers

MEF – Malaitan Eagle Force (Solomon Islands)

meri – wife, woman

missis – European woman

missinari – missionary

moga – ceremony surrounding the giving away of goods to display one's wealth (Highlands)

Motu – the indigenous people of the Port Moresby area; the language spoken by these people

mumu – traditional underground oven

mwala – decorated armlets made from cone shells used for trade in the *kula* ring islands

nambawan – number one, the best

natnat – mosquito

OPM – Organisasi Papua Merdeka, or Free West Papua Movement

payback – compensation paid for a wrongdoing, but in reprisal more than revenge

pikus tri – fig tree

pinis – finish

pis – fish

pisin – bird

pitpit – wild sugar cane

PMV – public motor vehicle

pukpuk – crocodile

raskol – bandit, criminal or thief

ria – volcanic fjord, as found near Tufi

rokrok – frog
saksak – sago
salvinia – (*Salvinia molesta*) weed found in many waterways
save – understand, think
singsing – celebratory festival/dance
solwara – ocean, sea
spia – spear
story board – narrative carving done on a wooden board
susu – milk, breast

tambaran – ancestral spirit; also called *tambuan*, *tabaran* or *tabuan*
tambu – forbidden or sacred; shell money (Tolai)
tapa – beaten bark cloth
taro – tuberous root vegetable similar to a sweet potato
tasol – that's all, only
tee – ceremony where men give away goods to display their wealth (Enga)

toea – unit of PNG currency (100 toea = 1 *kina*); a shell necklace also used as currency
Tok Pisin – the Pidgin language
Tok Ples – local language; first language; pronounced 'talk place'
Tolai – the main inhabitants of East New Britain's Gazelle Peninsula, pronounced 'tol-eye'
tumbuan – large, feather-draped body mask
tupela – two, both
turnim het – a courting ceremony involving rubbing faces together, literally 'turn head' (Highlands)

voluntia – volunteer

wantok – fellow clanspeople, kith and kin; literally 'one talk' or 'one who speaks the same language'

yam – tuberous root vegetable similar to a sweet potato

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