

Destination Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands

You can buy, download and print individual chapters from this guidebook.
Get Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands chapters >

In both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, you should not judge the country by its capital. Port Moresby has a rotten international reputation and despite complaints from PNG politicians that this is the fault of the media, unsavoury situations continue. Port Moresby and Honiara are ringed with ugly urban squatter settlements, and neither is indicative of the incredible natural beauty and warm Melanesian generosity to be found in the provinces.

Yet even in the ugliest of these squatter settlements people grow flowers – Papua New Guineans and Solomon Islanders have a powerful connection to the soil and seem able to grow almost anything, as displayed by the patchwork of gardens on the barren hills around their capital cities. Despite the urban drift, people retain strong links to their clan and village. Hard-nosed economists regard the defence of traditional ‘land rights’ as a major impediment to economic progress, and both countries are looking at customary land reform as a way to find a middle ground between the rights of traditional land-holders and development. However, in these lands where gardening is next to godliness, few people go hungry and villagers with no cash income at all can still feed themselves. The *wantok* system, where clanspeople look after each other, is both a blessing and a curse.

PNG’s economy relies upon huge resource projects. First it was the Bougainville copper mine, majority-owned by Australia’s CRA (Conzinc Riotinto of Australia) with a 19% PNG government shareholding. But that closed after plunging Bougainville into a messy 10-year secessionist war. The Ok Tedi copper mine followed, built in the geologically unstable Star Mountains where constructing a waste dam was considered so risky that the waste was instead dumped into the Fly River. Other big projects – Porgera and Lihir gold mines and the Kutubu oilfields – have provided sorely needed export revenue. China could be the next big mining investor. PNG was desperately hoping a gas pipeline to Queensland would be its economic saviour, but the project was scrapped in 2006 when developers Exxon Mobil and Oil Search decided it was too expensive. Another proposed pipeline from Western Province gas fields to Gove in the Northern Territory might yet go ahead – Canada’s Alcan and British Rift Oil are partners in this project. But these huge projects employ relatively few locals and most families instead survive on growing cash-crops – coffee, cocoa, copra and oil palm. The price for PNG vanilla, which was making growers rich just a few years ago, has fallen through the floor.

PNG’s biggest problem is neither its crime nor corruption but a dysfunctional political system. The Australian-inherited Westminster system cannot cope with a bewildering political paradigm where MPs represent 820 languages and have little or no allegiance to their political party. The 109 members are essentially free agents who regularly cross the floor to vote with the opposition, resulting in 109 cross-purposes. As a consequence, until the most recent election in 2007, no prime minister in the 32 years of independence (since 1975) had served a full, five-year term without being brought down in a no-confidence vote – survival, not policy, tends to be the focus of PNG politics.

A treaty was signed on 30 June 2004 between PNG and Australia to implement the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) to help PNG address continuing challenges in law and order, governance and economic management. A deployment of 210 Australian Federal Police and 64 officials were leaving for PNG when the PNG Supreme Court ruled on 13 May 2005 in favour of Morobe Governor Luther Wenge’s challenge to the operation. Under the terms of the ECP, Australian police and officials were to have immunity against prosecution under PNG law. Wenge successfully argued that this provision was unconstitutional and the ECP fell over, but there are currently about 40 Australian civilians deployed in PNG in advisory roles. This new, hands-on approach is a bold experiment under Australia’s new cooperative intervention policy, which led to the (so far) successful Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). But some – including the enigmatic Solomons prime minister Manasseh Sogavare – decry this interventionism as outright Australian neo-colonialism.

In the July 2007 election ‘Grand Chief’ Sir Michael Somare became the first prime minister to serve a full term and then be re-elected. After the 2002 national elections saw widespread violence in the Highlands, many were expecting trouble, but the 2007 election was remarkably peaceful and trouble-free. This was PNG’s first election using a limited preferential voting system and had the unexpected results of tipping out former prime ministers Rabbi Namaliu and Pius Wingti – voters were used to the first-past-the-post electoral system and didn’t realise the importance of allocating their preferences. Another surprise was the re-emergence of former prime minister Julius Chan as the minister for New Ireland Provincial. Chan had resigned in disgrace in 1997 over the scandalous Sandline Affair (see p241).

Somare was returned to power with trouble at home and a telecommunications industry in disarray (see p300), and trouble abroad with continuing fallout from the Moti Affair (see p31). Corruption remains a major problem in the country’s politics and almost everyone you speak to – from grassroots to the educated elite – will bemoan the state of representative democracy in PNG.

In the Solomon Islands, the RAMSI deployment has been in its peace-keeping role since mid-2003 with seemingly no end in sight. The ethnic tension that led to the 2000 coup that ousted then-prime minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu (who died in 2007) seems to have settled dramatically – so much so that the first post-coup national elections were held in April 2006. The election of controversial Snyder Rini as prime minister resulted in two days of rioting and anarchy in the streets of Honiara, in which the historic Chinatown and huge Pacific Casino Hotel were razed. Australia flew in reinforcements for the RAMSI personnel. Allegations were made that Rini used bribe-money from Asian business interests to secure the votes of MPs. To the people on the street, Rini symbolised everything that was corrupt about Solomons politics and, after a no-confidence vote, he resigned just eight days after the election. The subsequent ascension of Manasseh Sogavare as prime minister immediately brought calm to the Solomons capital.

The Solomons is just one of a handful of countries that recognises Taiwan as an independent country, and Taiwanese largesse has been lining the pockets of Solomons’ members of parliament for years. Some among the Asian community in the Solomon Islands were said to have bribed their way to residency and into the country’s sphere of influence. Thus the resentment of the Chinese community that had been bubbling away for a long time exploded into violence and anarchy, and terrorised many honest long-term Asian expatriates to the point where they finally fled the Solomons for good.

FAST FACTS – PNG

Population: 6.25 million

GDP: US\$4.3 billion

GDP growth: 4.5%

Inflation: 4.3%

Languages spoken: 820

Languages spoken per adult: 3

Land border with Indonesia: 820km

Parliamentary political parties: 45

Indigenous counting systems: More than 50 (one is based on joints of the body and the nose)

Number of airports: 492

FAST FACTS – SOLOMON ISLANDS

Population: 534,000

GDP: US\$394 million

Languages spoken: 70

People per telephone: 79

Number of airports: 33

American and Japanese warships sunk in Iron Bottom Sound: 67

Number of islands in the Solomons group: 992

Percentage of land that is cultivable: 30%

Annual rainfall on Guadalcanal’s Weather-coast: 12m!

But Manasseh Sogavare turned out to be a controversial figure himself and the antipathy between his administration and the Australian government rendered the bilateral relationship dysfunctional, despite the ongoing RAMSI operations. Sogavare expelled the Australian High Commissioner Patrick Cole in September 2006 alleging Cole undermined his leadership and meddled in Solomons' affairs. Sogavare survived several votes of no-confidence, but continued to alienate many members of parliament and Solomons leaders with his appointment of controversial Julian Moti (see p31) as the Solomons' Attorney General, and his intentions to expel Australia from RAMSI and reissue firearms to the police force. On 13 December 2007, Sogavare finally lost a no-confidence motion and one week later the Member for North East Guadalcanal Derek Sikua was elected as the 13th prime minister of the Solomon Islands. One of his first acts was to extradite Julian Moti to Australia on Christmas Day.

The Solomons economy relies on the export of copra and palm oil. The islands' timber resources have been seriously overexploited – often illegally – and it also exports processed tuna. A 2007 Anglican Church of Melanesia study reported on widespread commercial child sexual exploitation associated with an Asian logging company around Arosi in Makira Province.

The Gold Ridge Mine, 40km southeast of Honiara, operated for only one year until it was closed by ethnic tensions and abandoned in June 2000. In that year it produced 30% of the Solomons' GDP. New owners Australian Solomons Gold anticipate reinstating commercial operations in the first half of 2008, with an expected output of 150,000 ounces of gold per annum.

In early April 2007, 54 people were killed and thousands left homeless after a tsunami struck Western and Choiseul provinces. Gizo, the Solomons' second-largest city, was at the centre of the disaster and the subsequent relief effort.

Getting Started

Travelling in PNG and the Solomon Islands can be challenging. With almost no tourism infrastructure and limited information available in books and on websites, it can feel like you're stepping into the great unknown. But this is exactly why travellers find these places so compelling. Nothing is contrived for tourists and every experience is authentic. The striking natural beauty and myriad complex cultures offer some riveting and truly life-affirming experiences.

WHEN TO GO

PNG and the Solomons have some of the most variable climates on earth, which can confound the best of travel planning. The wet season is roughly from December to March and the dry is from May to October. April and November are anyone's guess. There are, however, plenty of exceptions to this pattern (Lae and Alotau are wet when everywhere else is dry); see the regional chapters for details. The months from June to September are cooler, drier and better to visit PNG and the Solomons, but it's generally hot and humid year-round.

It's worth scheduling your trip around a festival or event (p294), such as one of the unforgettable cultural shows that are held between July and October. If you plan on trekking (p288), diving (p286), surfing (p287) or looking for that elusive bird, see the relevant activities information in this book in each region about the best times to go.

There are no high or low tourist seasons in PNG and the Solomons, but at Christmas, Easter and other major holidays (p295), hotels can fill up, and international flights can be hard to book. You'll need to book your accommodation (p282) ahead if you're in a town during one of the cultural shows.

COSTS & MONEY

You'd think PNG, being a developing country next to dirt-cheap Indonesia, would be an inexpensive place to travel. It's not. The reason is that the cost of

See Climate Charts (p290) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Valid travel insurance, noting the emergency phone and policy numbers (p295)
- Anti-malarial prophylactics (p323) and a basic first-aid kit
- Insect repellent, hat and sunscreen
- Good footwear, lightweight trousers and a long-sleeved shirt for protection against sunburn and *natnats* (mosquitoes)
- Poncho-style raincoat that covers your backpack and opens into a groundsheet
- Snorkel, mask, rash vest and reef shoes, and C-card and logbook if you're a diver
- Swiss Army Knife with scissors and can opener, tin plate and camping cutlery set
- A torch (flashlight) for late-night toilet expeditions (vital in a village)
- A sleeping sheet, mosquito net (*only* the box-style type) and inflatable hiker's sleeping mat if you're sleeping rough (in villages)
- Bottle of sweet-chilli sauce (or other condiments) to spice up the village diet
- Books (the bookshops are crap) for village kids
- A sweater if you're going to the Highlands
- Sense of humour and a deep well of patience – your best plans *will* go awry at some point.

doing anything in PNG is unreasonably high. Loan interest rates have fallen from over 20% in recent years, but they remain high and repayment periods are short. Virtually everything is imported and there's little competition despite the usual free-market forces.

For the traveller, this means sleeping, eating and getting around are all relatively expensive. But the biggest single factor is that fact that getting anywhere within PNG and the Solomons usually means flying and there the costs add up rapidly. Backpackers are doing well if they can get by on less than K178 (US\$60) per day, staying in guesthouses, self-catering and eating in cheap restaurants and at *kai* bars (cheap, takeaway food bars). Budget any flights on top of that. If you're staying in good hotels and resorts, eating in the better restaurants, with activities and flights, the sky is the limit, but figure on about K890 (US\$300) per day. There are plenty of midrange options and couples or pairs pay less per person – most midrange solo travellers staying in the main towns can expect to spend about US\$100 per day. However, your expenses plummet if you get off the beaten track. Wandering off to stay in the villages is not only a great way to see the country and witness the culture, it's also inexpensive: food and lodging will cost you about K50 per night, often less (p284). The steady devaluation of both the kina in PNG and the Solomon Islands dollar have made travelling slightly cheaper in recent years. But tourism facilities tend to use imported goods.

Happily, travelling in the Solomon Islands is a little less expensive than PNG, with cheaper transport, hotels and food.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Michael Moran's excellent *Beyond the Coral Sea* sees the author retrace the steps of some of the colourful characters and empire-builders who were so influential in forming the country you see today.

Solomon Time: An Unlikely Quest in the South Pacific, by Will Randall, is an unassuming and well-written tale of a naive Englishman who finds himself on a remote Solomons island, breeding chickens.

Four Corners: Into the Heart of New Guinea, by Kira Salak, retraces the 1927 journey of British explorer Ivan Champion by foot and canoe, and his meetings with missionaries, cannibals and incredible landscapes.

Legendary swashbuckler Errol Flynn's autobiography, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, covers the actor's six formative years in New Guinea. It's engaging and relevant, and almost single-handedly informed the world-view of New Guinea at the time.

Into the Crocodile Nest keeps you turning the pages as author and masochist-traveller Benedict Allen becomes the first white man initiated into an obscure crocodile cult on the Sepik River.

Mister Pip, by New Zealander Lloyd Jones, was shortlisted for the 2007 Booker Prize. It tells the story of an inspirational white schoolteacher in Bougainville in the 1990s during the blockade and war.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There isn't a vast array of websites about PNG and the Solomons, but new ones are appearing and existing sites are improving. Some worth looking at before you leave:

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) The Thorn Tree bulletin board and Postcards have invaluable up-to-date information and tips.

National (www.thenational.com.pg) Website of the daily *National* newspaper.

PNG Buai (www.pngbuai.com) The clever acronym stands for PNG Books, Useful Articles and Information. It's a valuable source for each topic.

HOW MUCH PNG?

Midrange hotel room
K100-400

1hr internet access
K15-35

Bilum (string bag) K50

Meal in a cheap
restaurant K18

Bekim moni ('payback' or
compensation money) for
running over a dog K250-
14,000 depending on
your negotiating skills

HOW MUCH SOLOMON ISLANDS?

Midrange hotel room
S\$200-400

1hr internet access
S\$15

Meal in a cheap
restaurant S\$25

Bekim moni ('payback' or
compensation money)
for running over a dog
S\$500-8000s

TOP 10

Indonesia

NEW
GUINEA

Nauru

SOLOMON

BEST BOOKS & FILMS

Many books and films on the region have a distinctly anthropological slant because the truth about PNG and Solomon Islands cultures is often stranger than fiction. The films are hard to find; try www.roninfilms.com.au, or see p42.

- 1 *Throwim Way Leg* (1998), written by Tim Flannery
- 2 *Papua New Guinea: People, Politics, and History Since 1975* (2000), written by Sean Dorney
- 3 *Happy Isles of Oceania* (1992), written by Paul Theroux
- 4 *Visitants* (1979), written by Randolph Stow
- 5 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), written by Bronislaw Malinowski
- 6 *In a Savage Land* (1999), directed by Bill Bennett
- 7 *First Contact* (1983), directed by Bob Connolly & Robin Anderson
- 8 *The Shark Callers of Kontu* (1987), directed by Dennis O'Rourke
- 9 *Betelnut Bisnis* (2004), directed by Chris Owen
- 10 *Robinson Crusoe* (1996), directed by Daniel Defoe

OUR FAVOURITE TREKS

There are dozens of challenging treks in Papua New Guinea and the Solomons. Here are a few of our favourites.

- 1 Kokoda Track (PNG; p91)
- 2 Mt Wilhelm trek (PNG; p162)
- 3 Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area trek (PNG; p160)
- 4 Black Cat Track (PNG; p137)
- 5 Climbing up Kombiu (Mt Mother) volcano (PNG; p223)
- 6 Walking New Ireland's remote west coast road (PNG; p237)
- 7 Kopiago to Oksapmin (PNG; p174)
- 8 Mt Wilhelm to Madang trek (PNG; p163)
- 9 Wedau to Alotau on the northeastern tip of the PNG mainland (PNG; p114)
- 10 Blazing a trail over Guadalcanal's mountainous interior from the north coast to the wild and undeveloped Weathercoast (SI; p261)

TOP DIY CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

The Melanesian experience can be as culturally rich as you allow it to be. Go ahead and try:

- 1 Learning new dance steps at a Highland *singsing* (celebratory festival/dance)
- 2 Watching the Asaro mud men
- 3 Playing *garamuts* (a hollowed log) and *kundu* (hour-glass shaped, lizard-skin) drums, nose flutes and jew's-harps
- 4 Chewing betel nut
- 5 Drinking the juice of a green coconut
- 6 Setting a fish trap in the Sepik River
- 7 Eating freshly slaughtered pig at a village celebration
- 8 Learning to prepare sago and a *mumu* (underground oven)
- 9 Sleeping in a *haus tambaran* (spirit house)
- 10 Commissioning or buying a piece from a Sepik master carver

PNG Business Directory (www.pngbd.com) PNG's 'business and tourism' website can be awkward to navigate, but it has handy information and plenty of photos.

PNG Gossip Newsletter (www.png-gossip.com) Primarily a bulletin-board, this site also has good links and posts some interesting news items.

PNG Tourism (www.png-tourism.com) This new website is an initiative of the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority. It has useful information and links to all the major inbound tour companies. It's the best place to start when researching your trip.

PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (www.pngtourism.org.pg) The official website of PNG's peak tourism body. Has good links.

Post Courier (www.postcourier.com.pg) Website of the *Post Courier* newspaper that provides updates of the daily news.

Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (www.visitsolomons.com.sb) Travel information and visas.

Solomon Star (www.solomonstarnews.com) The Solomons' daily newspaper also publishes on the web.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTE

MAINLAND ODYSSEY

Two to Three Weeks / Port Moresby to Madang

From **Port Moresby** (p68), fly to sleepy **Alotau** (p109) at the eastern end of the mainland. Take a boat out to the colonial-era capital of **Samarai Island** (p115) before returning via historic **Kwato Island** (p116). Fly to **Lae** (p128) and check out the **Rainforest Habitat** (p129) and **Salamaua** (p136). Take a bus up the Highlands Hwy to **Goroka** (p156) and see the **Goroka Show** (p158), or visit the **Asaro mud men** (p159).

Back on the bus, make your way to **Betty's Place** (p163) at Kegsugl for the amazing **Mt Wilhelm climb** (p162). Travel onward to **Mt Hagen** (p164), enjoying the spectacular scenery and a game of Highlands darts. If there's no clan warfare going on, continue along the highway to **Tari** (p173) via **Mendi** (p170) and stunning **Lake Kutubu** (p172), but if the feisty Southern Highlanders are fighting you'd better do this leg by aeroplane – the beautiful **Tari Basin** (p173) is worth it. Don't miss the **Huli Wigmen** (p173).

Fly to coastal **Wewak** (p179) and the Sepik area, and take a boat up the mighty **Sepik River** (p188). Fly from Wewak to a luxury resort in **Madang** (p140) and relax.

This tour of mainland PNG takes in the coast, the Highlands and the Sepik. It's busy, and with so many flights it's pricey, but if you want more time and/or want to save money cut out the Alotau leg and fly straight to Lae.



ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

BOUGAINVILLE & BEYOND

Three to Four Weeks / Lae to Honiara

This nautical extravaganza has a Joseph Conrad feel to it; taking slow boats to remote places, crossing borders without showing passports, living and moving as locals do. In **Lae** (p128), find a boat to **Kimbe** (p225) – you might have to wait, but you'll get used to waiting on this trip. From Kimbe head down to the **Walindi Plantation Resort** (p227) for some diving or snorkelling with (if you're lucky) killer whales, and return for the twice-weekly boat to **Rabaul** (p219).

In Rabaul, head out to **Matupit Island** (p223) to check out belching **Tavurvur** (p219), the volcano that buried the Pacific's prettiest city, before getting under the water at the WWII-era **Submarine Base** (p223). Sleep in the excellent value **Rabaul Hotel** (p221), a great place to chill out until the boat leaves for **Buka Island** (p242).

At booming Buka take in **Sohano Island** (p242) and buy supplies for the next leg of the journey that takes you across the Buka Passage to Bougainville Island and beyond. Head down the east coast to **Arawa** (p244), and then to **Buin** (p245), via Aropa, for the quasi-legal border crossing known as the **Gun Run** (p314), because it was once used by Bougainville Revolutionary Army rebels to smuggle guns from the Solomon Islands. Spend your waiting time on Buin trekking to **Admiral Yamamoto's aircraft wreck** (p245).

After the three-hour canoe ride to the mangroves of the Shortland Islands, fly from Ballalae Island to **Gizo** (p270), where the diving and WWII history is amazing (and you can pass through immigration). Island hop from here all the way to **Honiara** (p247), via the WWII war dumps at **Munda** (p264) and idyllic **Uepi Island Resort** (p267) in the marine wildlife wonderland that is **Marovo Lagoon** (p266).

Being on a boat or under a palm tree for at least three weeks, covering more than 1200km, should give you plenty of time to read. We recommend *Beyond the Coral Sea* by Michael Moran.



TAILORED TRIPS

BATTLEFIELD NEW GUINEA

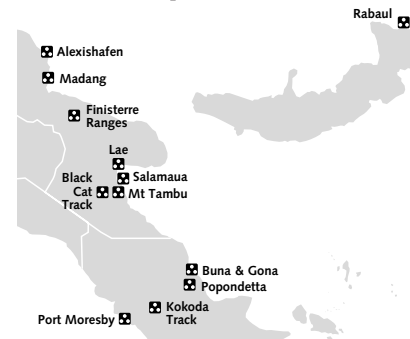
Three Weeks / Port Moresby to Rabaul

PNG is littered with rusting relics of WWII both above and below the water. Start in **Port Moresby** (p68) and get a feel for the challenges faced by the troops by walking the **Kokoda Track** (p91). From Kokoda, continue on to **Popondetta** (p105) and spend a day visiting the overgrown remains of the Japanese bases at **Buna** and **Gona** (p106).

Take a boat to **Lae** (p128) and visit the **Lae War Cemetery** (p129) before tracking back down the coast to **Salamaua** (p136). Check out the Japanese guns and tunnels on the Salamaua peninsula and trek up part of the **Black Cat Track** (p137) to the battlefield at Mt Tambu.

Returning to Lae, take a PMV to **Madang** (p140), crossing the Finisterre Ranges through which Allied troops pursued the retreating Japanese after the fall of Lae. In Madang, visit the **Coastwatchers' Memorial** (p142) and **Alexishafen** (p147), where bomb craters and Japanese bombers can be seen around the wartime airstrip.

Fly to **Rabaul** (p219) and visit the **East New Britain Historical & Cultural Centre** (p214) in Kokopo, snorkel around **Submarine Base** (p223) and check out the **Japanese Barge Tunnels** (p218).



RIPPING THE CURL

PNG and the Solomons are emerging as great surfing destinations for those wanting to immerse themselves in tropical waters and friendly Melanesian culture. On the north side, monsoon swells come in from October to April, while PNG's southern side gets waves from June to September. Some of these breaks are just newly discovered: this is for intrepid surfer-explorers. **BYO boards.**

Start at **Vanimo** (p185), near the Indonesian border, and surf off Lido Village where reef breaks peel left and right. Then fly to **Aitape** (p187) for some simple village accommodation and some unexplored surf breaks. At **Wewak** (p179) there are waves at Moem Point and nearby Muschu, Kairuru and Wallis islands. On the coast north of **Madang** (p140) there are great point breaks up towards **Bogia** (p147). Take a plane or a slow boat to **Kavieng** (p229) where the guys from **Nusa Island Retreat** (p232) will take you to breaks like **Pikinini**. Go to Manus where the reef break off **Ahus Island** (p239) can be huge.

Fly to the Solomon Islands and take a boat to the **Nggelas** (p261) where Maravagi Resort on **Mangalona Island** (p262) has several breaks. Back at Honiara catch a plane or the **MV Pelican Express** to **Gizo** (p270) and surf the reef breaks at Pailongge, Titiana and Makuti Island, and near Zipolo Habu Resort on **Lola Island** (p265).

Be a trail-blazer and catch a light plane out to rarely visited **Makira Ulawa** (p280) and surf the legendary breaks at Star Harbour and Tawarogha.

For more surfing information see p287.



The Authors



ROWAN MCKINNON

Coordinating Author, Destination, Getting Started, Itineraries, History, The Culture, Food & Drink, Port Moresby, Directory, Transport

Rowan, a freelance writer and musician, has been travelling to Papua New Guinea and the Solomons for 20 years. He first went to PNG in 1988 as a musician with arty world-beat band Not Drowning Waving to record at Pacific Gold Studios in Rabaul – years before the volcanic eruptions destroyed the pretty town. He's written for three successive editions of Lonely Planet's *Papua New Guinea*, and twice contributed the Solomons chapter to Lonely Planet's *South Pacific*, so this part of the world is like a home away from home. Rowan lives in Melbourne, Australia, with his partner and kids, and an odds-and-sods collection of Melanesian *objets d'art*.



JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET

Diving in Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands, Island Provinces, Solomon Islands

A Paris-based journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard is a hopeless South Pacific addict and has travelled the length and breadth of the *Grand Océan*, from Easter Island to New Caledonia and from the Cook Islands to Vanuatu. A diving instructor, he also taught diving in the turquoise lagoons of French Polynesia. For this edition he was all too happy to don his mask again to check out the best dive sites in the Solomon Sea and to explore the rugged islands of New Guinea and the Solomons. Seen from a café in Montmartre, he can't think of a more antipodean experience.



DEAN STARNES

Central, Oro & Milne Bay Provinces, Morobe & Madang Provinces, The Highlands, The Sepik, Gulf & Western Provinces

Dean was literally thrown into the deep end on this assignment when the banana boat he was travelling in was swamped by a series of waves and sunk off a remote stretch of the Gulf Province's coast. Despite this ordeal, Dean reports that Papua New Guinea isn't as dangerous as the international press makes out and hopes this guide will encourage others to explore this wild frontier. When not on the road for Lonely Planet, Dean works as a part-time graphic designer in Auckland, New Zealand. Photographs and travel stories from this and other trips can be seen at his website www.deanstarnes.com.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. Think you can do it? Find out how at lonelyplanet.com.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Lina Abirafeh wrote the Solo Women Travellers boxed text (p304). Lina is a gender and development practitioner and PhD candidate with 11 years of development experience. She currently works in PNG, focusing on gender issues, particularly gender-based violence, in the context of HIV/AIDS. Lina has also worked in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Morocco, running programmes for women.

Peter FitzSimons wrote the Kokoda Track colour section. Peter writes for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun-Herald*. In the course of his journalistic career he has interviewed everyone from President George Bush Sr to Diego Maradona to Matt Damon. He has played for the Wallabies, written 18 books and was Australia's best-selling nonfiction author in 2001 and 2004, the latter with his book on Kokoda. Married to television presenter Lisa Wilkinson, Peter has three children and lives in Sydney.

Tim Flannery wrote the Environment chapter. Tim is a naturalist, explorer and author of a number of award-winning books, including *The Future Eaters*, *Throwim Way Leg* (an account of his adventures as a biologist in New Guinea) and *The Eternal Frontier* – a landmark ecological history of North America. Tim has been Director of the South Australian Museum, professor at the University of Adelaide and Principal Research Scientist at the Australian Museum in Sydney. In 2007 Tim was awarded the Australian of the Year. He is currently an adjunct professor at Macquarie University. His most recent book is *The Weather Makers*.

Michael Sorokin wrote the Health chapter. Michael was born in South Africa, graduated from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and holds the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Having travelled widely in the West Melanesian region, he was a district medical officer in the Solomons, lecturer at the Fiji School of Medicine, consultant physician in Lautoka, Fiji, and was awarded the Fijian President's medal for medical services in that country. Currently he is a tutor at the University of Adelaide's Medical Education unit and consults in a travel medicine clinic.

You can buy, download and print individual chapters from this guidebook. Get Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands chapters>

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'