

History

THE FIRST ARRIVALS

Archaeological evidence suggests humans first reached New Guinea, and then Australia and the Solomon Islands, by island hopping across the Indonesian archipelago from Asia at least 60,000 years ago. The migrations were made easier by a fall in the sea level during the Pleistocene period, or Great Ice Age, and by a land bridge that linked PNG with northern Australia. The descendants of these people speak non-Austronesian (or Papuan) languages and are today called Melanesians. The Solomon Islands formed the eastern edge of the inhabited Pacific until the second great wave of colonisation began only about 3000 years ago. This second wave of migration is identified with the dispersion of distinctive ornately decorated pottery fragments known today as Lapita pottery, named after an archaeological site in New Caledonia. Archaeologists have claimed that 'Lapita people' were the first culturally complex people to inhabit the Pacific and some have likened the impact of their arrival to that of Europeans in the Americas. They were speakers of Austronesian languages and it was in Tonga and Samoa that they developed into the people we now call Polynesians.

THE WORLD'S FIRST AGRICULTURALISTS

Evidence of early New Guinea coastal settlements includes 40,000-year-old stone axes found in Morobe Province. It is believed humans climbed up to settle in the Highlands about 30,000 years ago. At Kuk (or Kup) Swamp in the Wahgi Valley in Western Highlands Province, archaeologists have found evidence of human habitation going back 20,000 years and there is evidence of gardening beginning 9000 years ago, which makes Papua New Guineans among the world's first farmers. They cultivated breadfruit, sago, coconuts, yams and sugar cane (which originated in New Guinea). New Ireland, Buka and the Solomon Islands were probably inhabited around 30,000 years ago and Manus Island 10,000 years ago.

Elsewhere in the world, the development of agriculture resulted in the establishment of cities and an elite class, but this did not happen in New Guinea or the Solomon Islands. Perhaps this was because basic food crops could not be stored long so food couldn't be stockpiled. It's not known when pigs and more productive starch crops (Asian yams, taro and bananas) were introduced but New Guineans have had domesticated pigs for at least 10,000 years. People lived in small villages on well-established tribal lands practising shifting cultivation, fishing and hunting. Coastal people built canoes, and feasting and dancing were regular activities. Each settlement comprised just one extended family as well as the captives from raiding neighbouring

In 1927 an 18-year-old Errol Flynn arrived in New Guinea. He worked as a cadet patrol officer, gold prospector, slaver, plantation manager, copra trader, charter-boat captain, pearl diver and a diamond smuggler for six years. He called New Guinea one of the great loves of his life.

settlements – ritual head-hunting, slave-raiding and cannibalism were common. People worshipped ancestors, not gods.

POLYNESIANS & MALAY TRADERS

Between AD 1200 and AD 1600 some Polynesians started heading westward again and, finding most of the islands of New Guinea and the Solomons already inhabited, settled some of the remaining isolated islands and atolls. They travelled vast distances in small canoes. Today some parts of PNG and the Solomon Islands remain as isolated Polynesian outposts – the Trobriands in PNG's Milne Bay Province and Mortlock (Takuu) Islands in PNG's North Solomons Province, and the Temotus, Ontong Java, and Rennell and Bellona in the Solomon Islands are examples. Polynesian settlements in the Solomons regularly suffered raids between the 14th and 18th centuries from eastern Polynesians from Tonga and Tokelau, seeking to exact tribute for their rulers.

By the mid-16th century, sweet potatoes were being taken from South America into Southeast Asia by the Portuguese and Spanish, and Malay traders brought them to the western part of the New Guinea island. The high yield of sweet potatoes in cold climes allowed for the colonisation of still higher altitudes in the Highlands and the domestication of many more pigs. Around this time steel axe-heads were traded into the Highlands from the coast. These developments saw huge population increases, and an increase in war, slave-trading and head-hunting.

THE FIRST EUROPEAN CONTACT

The first definite European sighting of the New Guinea island was in 1512, when Portuguese sailor Antonio d'Abreu sighted the coast. However, it wasn't until 1526 that another Portuguese, Jorge de Menezes, became the first European to set foot on the main island – he named it Ilhas dos Papuas. But New Guinea was regarded as a large, daunting place with no obvious wealth to exploit and very hostile natives, so it was largely left alone while European colonists plundered the Americas. In fact it was the Solomons that first fired the imagination of Europeans.

MENDAÑA & THE STORY OF SOLOMON

In the early 1560s in Spanish-occupied Peru there was a story about a group of islands in the far western Pacific that was visited by an Inca king called Tupac Yupanqui about 100 years earlier. He had brought back gold and dark-skinned slaves. In November 1567, Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra, the 25-year-old nephew of Peru's Spanish viceroy, set out in two ships to find the islands or the legendary Great Southern Land. He first saw Tuvalu then Roncador Reef near Ontong Java, and on 7 February 1568 he saw a large island and named it Santa Isabel. Mendaña and his men gave many

'Today some parts of PNG and the Solomon Islands remain as isolated Polynesian outposts'

TIMELINE

60,000 BC

The Ice Age of the Pleistocene period allows the first humans to island hop their way to New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

30,000 BC

Papuan-speaking hunter-gatherers from New Guinea settle islands in eastern Solomons before the sea levels rise with end of the Ice Age in 10,000 BC

7000 BC

The first evidence of food gardens and domesticated pigs makes New Guineans among the world's first agriculturalists

1000 BC

The second great wave of migration in the Pacific associated with proto-Polynesian 'Lapita people' colonises islands east of the Solomons

AD 1200–1600

Westward migration of Polynesians settle some of the remaining isolated island groups and atolls of the Solomons and New Guinea

1400–1800

Solomons' Polynesian communities on the outlying atolls and islands are subjugated by Tongan and Tokelauan rulers who send raiding parties to murder, plunder, extort and enslave them

SOLOMONS LEGENDARY PEOPLE

The first Polynesians are said to have come across the Hiti people on Rennell and Bellona. They had furry skin and made off with the women. There are still allegedly sightings of Hiti people on Bellona. Others tell of pygmy like pre-Melanesian people called the Kakamoras who hid in mountain caves on Santa Isabel, Makira, Choiseul and Guadalcanal. They had long straight hair and pointy teeth. Then there are stories of the Mumutambu people of the Nggela Islands and the Sinipi of Choiseul.

Nobody knows whether any of these people ever existed, and academics tend to laugh at such stories. But then a few years ago, scientists found the skeletons of *Homo floresiensis* or 'hobbit man' in a cave on Flores island in Indonesia. So who can be sure?

of the neighbouring islands Spanish names, some of which survive to this day. His expedition was looking for gold but after six months of constant conflict with the native people it set sail again for Peru. The islands became known as Yslas de Salomon – the Solomon Islands. Mendaña was keen to return but could not raise the funds for an expedition until 1595, when he travelled with four ships and 450 would-be colonists. The expedition was a disaster – Mendaña couldn't find the Solomon Islands and lost a ship in the process. Eventually he came upon and named Santa Cruz, where the colonists were racked by disease and hostile islanders. Mendaña died from malaria and the colony was abandoned after only two months – survivors limped back to Peru via the Philippines.

Mendaña's chief pilot from the 1595 expedition, Pedro Fernández de Quirós, spent the next 10 years raising money for yet another return to the Solomons and the search for Terra Australis. He missed Santa Cruz altogether but reached the Duff Islands in early 1606 and venturing further south came upon and named Espiritu Santo in northern Vanuatu on 3 May. Quirós was separated from the two other ships in his expedition and his second in command, Luis Váez de Torres, subsequently navigated the southern coast of New Guinea in the body of water that today bears his name – the Torres Strait. Pedro Fernández de Quirós' ignominious return to Peru told of yet another failed attempt to establish a colony, this time on Santo, and this signalled the end of Spanish interest in the western Pacific.

EUROPEAN EXPLORATION

Eager to protect incursions into the eastern end of their fabulously profitable Dutch East Indies Empire (modern-day Indonesia), the Dutch East Indies Company claimed sovereignty over unexplored New Guinea in 1660. And so it remained for more than a century.

Captain Philip Carteret, a Briton, came upon Santa Cruz and then passed on to Malaita in 1767, initially refusing to believe he'd rediscovered

the Solomons. The following year Louis-Antoine de Bougainville discovered Buka, Bougainville and Choiseul islands. Many British, French and American explorers followed and from 1798 whalers sailed through the islands. Sandalwood and bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) traders brought iron and steel tools, calico and fish hooks, but ultimately it was treachery and resentment that they left. European diseases were devastating in New Guinea and the Solomons, and the guns the traders brought resulted in an explosion of warfare and head-hunting.

The British East India Company explored parts of western New Guinea in 1793 and even made a tentative claim on the island but, in 1824, Britain and the Netherlands agreed the latter's colonial claim to the western half of the New Guinea island should stand (and it did until 1963). A series of British 'claims' followed which were repudiated each time by Queen Victoria's government.

By the late 1860s the sandalwood had been worked out and resentment toward Europeans led to the murder of several missionaries in the Solomons. The islands quickly became regarded as the most dangerous place in the Pacific, inhabited by head-hunters and cannibals. There were violent and unpredictable attacks on foreigners, and several savage massacres. Despite their frenzied activity elsewhere in the Pacific, churches moved cautiously in the Solomons.

COLONIALISM

German interest in the New Guinea's northeast coast finally spurred the British to get serious about its own colonial ambitions. When in September 1884 the British announced that they intended to claim part of New Guinea, the Germans quickly raised the flag on the north coast. A compromise was reached – an arbitrary line was drawn east–west through the 'uninhabited' Highlands between German and British New Guinea.

New Guinea was now divided into three sections: a Dutch half protecting the eastern edge of the Dutch East Indies, a British quarter to keep the Germans (and everybody else) away from Australia and a German quarter that would ultimately become a highly profitable outpost of German plantation agriculture. But the Germans would have to wait – for 15 years the mosquitoes were the only things to profit from the German Neuguinea Kompagnie's shifting headquarters on the north coast first at Finschhafen, then Bogadjim on Astrolabe Bay and then Madang. The Germans finally decamped for the relative comforts of New Britain. Many German-initiated plantations are still operating today.

The Germans were also active in the Shortland Islands, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Ontong Java in the present-day Solomons. With about 50 traders and missionaries residing in the Solomon Islands, the British proclaimed a protectorate over the southern part of the archipelago on 6 October 1893.

In 1880 the Marquis de Ray, having never been to New Guinea, sent 340 would-be settlers to his New France 'colony' near Cape St George in New Ireland. Instead of fertile land and friendly natives, emigrants confronted impenetrable jungle, malaria, starvation and cannibals. Only 217 survived.

Sixteenth-century Portuguese explorers named New Guinea Ilhas dos Papuas (Island of the Fuzzy-Hairs) from the Malay word *papuwah*. Later, Spanish navigator Ynigo Ortis de Retez likened it to West Africa's Guinea and named it New Guinea. The names were combined at independence in 1975.

1526

Jorge de Menezes, the Portuguese explorer and governor of Ternate in present-day Indonesia, is the first European to land on New Guinea on its northwest shore mainland, naming it Ilhas dos Papuas

mid-1500s

Malay traders introduce sweet potatoes into western New Guinea (present-day Indonesian Papua) sourced from the Spanish and Portuguese exploits in South America

1567

Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra leaves Spanish Peru on the first of two voyages and becomes the first European to discover the Solomon Islands, finding and naming first Santa Isabel and later Santa Cruz

1606

Mendaña's pilot Pedro Fernández de Quiros leads another expedition out of Peru and comes upon the Duff Islands in the Solomons and Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu; Luis Váez de Torres navigates the Torres Strait

1660

The Dutch East India Company claims Dutch sovereignty over still-unexplored New Guinea in order to protect its interests in modern-day Indonesia

1699

Swashbuckling Englishman William Dampier charts the southeastern coasts of New Britain and New Ireland and discovers the Dampier Strait between the New Britain and the New Guinea mainland

This claim was extended in 1897 and 1898, and in 1899 Britain relinquished its claims in Samoa in exchange for Germany ceding the Shortlands, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Ontong Java to Britain. The new territory was called the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) and was under the administration of Charles Morris Woodford, the first resident commissioner.

GOVERNMENT BY PATROL

In 1888, when Sir William MacGregor became British New Guinea's administrator, he established a native police force to spread the benefits of British government. He instituted the policy of 'government by patrol', which continued through the Australian period. In 1906 British New Guinea became the Territory of Papua and its administration was taken over by newly independent Australia. From 1907 until his death in 1940, Papua was governed by Sir Hubert Murray with equal measures of paternalism and progressive thinking.

Despite being in demise elsewhere, slavery was thriving in New Guinea and especially the Solomons during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Known as 'blackbirding', men were carted off to provide plantation labour in northern Australia and Fiji. More than 29,000 people were taken from the Solomons alone.

1914-41

When WWI broke out in 1914, Australian troops quickly overran the German headquarters at Rabaul and for the next seven years German New Guinea was run by the Australian military. In 1920 the League of Nations officially handed German New Guinea over to Australia as a mandated territory.

Australia was quick to eradicate the German commercial and plantation presence, baulking only at the German missions. Australia enacted legislation aimed at restricting the commercial exploitation of Eastern New Guinea to British nationals and, more particularly, Australians. Copra, rubber, coffee and cocoa were the main earners.

The discovery of large deposits of gold at Edie Creek and the Bulolo Valley in the 1920s brought men and wealth to the north coast. After 400 years of coastal contact, some of those white men finally made it into the interior (see boxed text, opposite).

Under the Australian administration, *kiaps* (patrol officers) were usually the first Europeans to venture into previously 'uncontacted' areas, and were also responsible for making the government's presence felt on a regular basis. This situation continued until independence.

WWI bypassed the Solomons altogether, but the first prominent rejection of European values occurred in the 1927 Kwaio Rebellion (see p278) in Malaita. In 1928 several of the Kwaio rebels were hanged in the then-capital Tulagi. Basiana, the rebel leader, made a defiant prophesy shortly before his

death: 'Tulagi will be torn apart and scattered to the winds.' Fourteen years later his prediction came true... in spades.

WWII BREAKS OUT

Having raced south through Asia and the Pacific, the Japanese occupied Rabaul in New Guinea in January 1942, and in early April they seized the Solomons' Shortland Islands and Tulagi, the colonial capital, three weeks later. Soon they controlled most of the Solomon Islands. In early June, Korean labourers were seen building an airfield on Guadalcanal (present-day Henderson Airport). This would supply further Japanese advances in Allied territory in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), New Caledonia, Fiji and even Australia and New Zealand. The Allies had to retake Guadalcanal whatever the cost. The huge US war machine began landings on Guadalcanal in August 1942 and the ensuing battles exacted a terrible cost on both sides. During the Guadalcanal campaign alone six naval battles were fought and 67 warships and transports were sunk on both sides – the stretch of water between Guadalcanal and the Florida Islands became known as Iron Bottom Sound. Although there were more than 7000 US casualties, Japan's losses were devastating. Of more than 24,000 soldiers lost, over a third died from disease, starvation or war wounds, and another 15,000 perished in sea actions.

BIRTH OF THE KOKODA LEGEND

Japanese successes in New Guinea were short-lived. Australian troops fought back an advance along the rugged Kokoda Track, which the Japanese were using in an attempt to reach and take Port Moresby, the only remaining Australian stronghold on the island. In a flanking move, the Japanese landed at Milne Bay but were repulsed after a bloody 10-day battle with Australian troops.

THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT

When Mick Leahy ventured inland in 1930 he was looking for gold. Instead, on that and nine subsequent expeditions during the next five years, Leahy, his brother Dan and Jim Taylor 'discovered' about a million people living in the secluded valleys of the New Guinea Highlands.

New Guinea's white colonialists had thought the area uninhabited, but it was the most densely populated part of the country. In an age of aeroplanes, radio and international telecommunications, the discovery was stunning. It didn't take long for the 'land that time forgot' to be dragged into the 20th century. The Leahy brothers introduced coffee, and before long missionaries and aircraft were also arriving. The Highlanders, who had only known a barter economy, were quick to adapt to cash.

Mick Leahy's meticulous recording of events – in his diary, several hours of 16mm film and more than 5000 photographs – can be seen in the acclaimed 1983 documentary *First Contact*.

For a look at relics from WWII, check out the well-researched www.pacificwrecks.com.

In 1960 John F Kennedy invited two Solomon Islanders to his presidential inauguration in Washington DC. They were turned away because they spoke no English. In 1943 these two islanders rescued 26-year-old skipper JFK and 10 survivors after their boat was sunk by Japanese during WWII.

On 2 July 1937 aviator Amelia Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan left Lae on PNG's north coast and flew off into oblivion.

1767

1768

1790s

1876

1884

1897

Briton Philip Carteret sails to Santa Cruz and Malaita in the Solomons, and establishes that New Britain and New Ireland are separate, naming the latter Nova Hibernia

Louis-Antoine de Bougainville sails through the Solomon Islands and names Bougainville after himself; Choiseul after French diplomat Étienne-François duc de Choiseul; and Buka after an Islander word

The British start exploring the western part of the New Guinea mainland, while sandalwood and bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) traders and whalers sail through the islands of New Guinea and the Solomons

Italian adventurer Luigi d'Albertis charts the Fly River in a tiny steamer, the *Neva*, taking eight weeks to travel 930km upriver and using fireworks to scare off menacing-looking locals

Germany hoists the flag on the north coast of the New Guinea mainland and establishes the German Neuguinea Kompanie at Finschhafen

Britain and Germany trade territories in the Solomons and Samoa, and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) is established

SUMMARY JUSTICE – THE SECRET LYNCHINGS OF WWII

It's been a dark secret until very recently, but Australian WWII troops summarily hanged New Guineans during WWII for cooperating with Japanese troops – perhaps as many as 213. Hundreds of children were made to watch the execution of 17 men in a single day in 1943 near Higaturu in Oro Province to 'learn a lesson' about cooperating with the Japanese. A gallows at this site alone executed 103. Many of the fuzzy wuzzy angels – the New Guinean stretcher-bearers who carried wounded Australian Diggers along the Kokoda Track – were actually press-ganged into service.

A Bastard of a Place (2003) by Peter Brune accurately details fighting on the Kokoda Track and the bitter struggle to recapture the Japanese coastal positions, and criticises some of the senior Australian and American officers.

Through the accounts of Japanese, Australian and American war veterans and Papua New Guinean villagers, *Angels of War* (1982) portrays the plight of villagers who lived through some of the most brutal fighting of the Pacific campaign.

The Japanese came within 50km of Port Moresby, but an unsustainably extended supply line and heroic resistance by Australian soldiers with local help turned the course of the whole Pacific war. By September 1942 the previously undefeated Japanese were in a slow and bloody retreat. Over the next 16 months, Australian and US forces battled their way towards the Japanese strongholds along the north coast, eventually taking Salamaua, Buna, Gona and Lae at a cost of thousands of lives.

The Japanese, however, refused to surrender. It took until 1945 to regain all the mainland from the Japanese but New Ireland, New Britain and Bougainville were not relieved until the Japanese surrender. For years after the end of WWII there were stories about Japanese soldiers still hiding out in the jungle. Many of these stories were apocryphal, but some were true.

Most Melanesians were initially militarily neutral in the conflict, although they were used extensively on both sides as labourers, guides, carriers and informers – sometimes press-ganged by the Japanese. But some were heavily involved with the Allies, operating behind enemy line as 'coastwatchers'. A number of Papua New Guineans and Solomon Islanders were decorated for their bravery. It is estimated that almost a third of Tolais from northern New Britain were killed.

POSTWAR EXPERIENCE

In the Solomons, once Guadalcanal had been secured by the Allies, several thousand islanders, mainly Malaitans, went to serve as labourers and orderlies at the massive US military base at Honiara. The Honiara township was established to service the Henderson air base. This massive WWII relocation of Malaitan people to Guadalcanal was actually the first seed of the devastating ethnic tensions that first erupted in 1999 and around the 2000 coup nearly 60 years later (see p249).

The Melanesian experience of WWII caused a sharp resurgence in cargo-cultism (see p34). The war's sudden arrival and its massive impact could not have been more profound. US soldiers – many of them black – treated locals as equals and shared food with them. This was something that

locals had never experienced from their colonial overlords. The postwar profligacy of the massive US war machine – where boats were scuttled and guns and jeeps were dumped in the sea before the soldiers disappeared in giant transport planes – sent very strange messages to people who were just stepping out of the Stone Age.

Every year, 23 July is commemorated as Remembrance Day for the Papua New Guineans who died in WWII. It's also the anniversary of the 1942 battle between the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the Japanese invaders that took place near the Kumusi River in Oro Province.

TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

Masses of abandoned war equipment was put to use in developing both the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. Even today you can see how Marsden matting is used for fencing and building material, and many WWII-era Quonset huts are still standing. However, the war's main impact proved to be social and political.

An influx of expatriates to PNG, mainly Australians, fuelled rapid economic growth. The expatriate population grew from about 6000 to more than 50,000 in 1971. Today it's about 19,200.

Colonialism wasn't popular in the 1950s and '60s and Australia was urged to prepare Papua and New Guinea for independence. A visiting UN mission in 1962 stressed that if the people weren't pushing for independence, then it was Australia's responsibility to do so. Australia's policy of reinforcing literacy and education was wedded to a concerted effort to create an educated social group that could run government.

In 1964, a House of Assembly with 64 members was formed. Internal self-government came into effect in 1973, followed by full independence on 16 September 1975.

In the Solomons the Marching Rule nationalist movement was crushed by the British in the early 1950s, but self-rule was slowly introduced, culminating in independence on 7 July 1978.

TROUBLED YOUNG NATIONS

Law and order was not a serious issue until the 1990s, when mineral-rich PNG began to develop large-scale mining operations. These fast became the greatest contributors to the economy, but also social, environmental and political burdens that, in the 1980s and '90s, took a heavy toll. First the giant Ok Tedi gold-and-copper mine poisoned much of the Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers, and then conflict over profits from the Panguna copper mine in Bougainville descended into war (see p241). Rebel leader Francis Ona and the Bougainville Revolution Army (BRA) fought for independence from PNG and a homeland state called Mekamui.

In 1965, after 20 years of hiding in the bush after the end of WWII, the last Japanese soldier surrendered on Vella Lavella island in the Solomons. He returned home to full military honours.

Barely recovered from the devastation of WWII, in 1951 the district headquarters of Central Province, Higaturu, was flattened when Mt Lamington erupted, killing more than 3000 people. The new capital, Popondetta, was built further from the volcano.

1906

1914

1930

1942

1963–69

1975

British New Guinea becomes the Territory of Papua and its administration is taken over by newly independent Australia

Australia ceases German New Guinea at the outbreak of WWI and is officially given German New Guinea in 1920 as a mandated territory by the League of Nations

The Leahy brothers walk into and 'discover' the Highlands – and about one million people living completely unaware of the outside world

The invading Japanese establish a base in Rabaul in January, by April they've taken most of New Guinea and the Solomons and by September they've begun their retreat along the Kokoda Track

The Dutch pull out of western New Guinea transferring control to Indonesia subject to a UN-administered plebiscite – the sham 'Act of Free Choice' legitimises brutality towards independence-seeking Papuans

Papua New Guinea gains full independence from Australia on 16 September, with Michael Somare as the country's first prime minister

The Sandline Affair by veteran Pacific correspondent Sean Dorney is an account of the Bougainville war and the disastrous mercenary affair that precipitated its end. Details of the corruption involved are impressive, though the early years of the war are not so well explained.

The 10-year secessionist war in Bougainville claimed an estimated 20,000 lives. Some people have likened the late secessionist rebel leader Francis Ona to Yasser Arafat.

The Bougainville conflict drained resources and divided PNG along tribal lines for years, and strained relations with the Solomon Islands. In 1996 the government of Sir Julius Chan hired mercenaries to try to crush the separatists. What became known as the Sandline Affair was a disaster, but ironically the fall-out brought world attention to the conflict and forced the protagonists to find peaceful solutions with the help of talks brokered by New Zealand and Australia.

The Solomons, meanwhile, had its own war that erupted in early 1999 and this led to a coup the following year. Gwale people from Guadalcanal and ethnic Malaitans squared off and took the country perilously close to becoming a failed state. Twenty-thousand Malaitans were made homeless, Gwalese people fled Honiara and the capital is now a Malaitan enclave. The Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) intervened and brought a cessation of hostilities (see p249) but the enmity between the two ethnic groups persists.

The 1980s and '90s saw PNG face a series of challenges: a volcanic eruption in 1994 buried much of Rabaul (see p222); ongoing border problems involving the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (Free West Papua Movement) strained relations with Indonesia and saw thousands moved to refugee camps in PNG; and a growing level of corruption and government mispending sucked money away from where it was needed most: education and health. All this served as a backdrop to the revolving door of prime ministers and no-confidence motions that characterised politics in PNG and the Solomon Islands.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

In March 2002 the PNG government passed legislation that brought into effect autonomy arrangements of the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) which guarantees a referendum for Bougainvillean independence by 2020. The Autonomous Bougainville Government was sworn into office on 15 June 2005 with Joseph Kabui as its president.

Francis Ona, leader of the BRA and staunch opponent of the BPA, died of malaria barely a month later on 24 July 2006. Ona's supporters continue to defend the so-called No-Go Zone around the abandoned Panguna mine. The proliferation of weapons in the No-Go Zone remains serious. For more on the Bougainville conflict and the Sandline Affair see p241.

The area around Tuno in the No-Go Zone is also where con man Noah Musingku maintains his own fiefdom. Musingku operated an illegal pyramid fast-money scheme called U-Vastrict that left investors all over PNG empty-handed. He fled to Bougainville in 2005 where he feted Francis Ona, proclaiming him King of Papala and then assumed this bogus title himself when Ona died. Musingku hired eight Fijian mercenaries as bodyguards and to train his private army, offering them US\$1 million each. In November 2006 there was armed confrontation between the Fijian ex-soldiers and their

THE MOTI AFFAIR

Julian Moti, a Fijian-born Australian citizen, is currently serving as the Attorney General of the Solomon Islands. He was appointed by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare in 2006 but was arrested in Port Moresby in late September of that year while transiting from Singapore to Honiara to take up his position. Australian authorities asked PNG police to arrest Moti and extradite him to Australia to face charges of child sex abuse for an alleged incident with a 13-year-old girl in Vanuatu in 1997 (a 1999 trial in Port Vila had the charges thrown out). Moti took refuge at the Solomon Islands High Commission in Port Moresby and on 10 October turned up in Honiara aboard a PNG Defence Force plane. He was arrested by Solomons police at the behest of Australian authorities, but then immediately released.

Three senior PNG government officials were suspended over the 'escape' of Julian Moti but they were clearly scapegoats, and confusion reigned over who ordered Moti's release and his clandestine flight to Honiara. A PNG Defence Force Board of Enquiry was obstructed at every turn. It was prevented from collecting evidence in the Solomons, so RAMSI officers raided Manasseh Sogavare's office, and Sir Michael Somare refused to give evidence to the board. He then sacked Defence Minister Martin Aini who had convened the Board of Enquiry and suppressed the release of its findings saying it contained 'untruths' about him.

A copy of the report was leaked to the ABC in Australia and it says that Somare himself ordered Moti's illegal escape from PNG and recommends that the prime minister be investigated and charged with perjury and conspiracy. The report says 'there was a very high level of collaboration and collusion' between Somare and Sogavare over Moti's escape, that the Moti operation breached the PNG constitution and that various government officials lied under oath. Australia's former foreign minister Alexander Downer was one of many people who called for the report to be made public, but Somare said Downer could 'go and get to hell'.

For his part Sogavare steadfastly obstructed every effort to have Julian Moti extradited to Australia, and, amid great controversy, Moti was finally sworn in as the Attorney General of the Solomon Islands in July 2007. Both Sogavare and Moti claimed that the extradition attempt was purely political, pointing out that there has been no fresh evidence presented since the original 1999 trial.

On 13 December 2007, Sogavare lost a vote of no-confidence and one week later Derek Sikua was elected prime minister of the Solomon Islands. Less than a week after that, on Christmas Day, Julian Moti was extradited to Australia to face the music. At the time of writing, Julian Moti is in a Brisbane detention centre awaiting trial.

Back in April 2005, long before anyone had heard of Julian Moti, Michael Somare was at Brisbane Airport and was asked to remove his shoes at a routine security screening. He took offence and sought an official apology, but Alexander Downer refused to apologise. Subsequent protests outside the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby drew hundreds of people demanding compensation and an apology. Relations between Australia and PNG have never been the same since. (The shoes were sold for K11,000 after Somare was persuaded to auction them to raise money for the PNG police band.) In helping Julian Moti escape extradition to Australia Sir Michael gleefully indulged in that most Melanesian *kastom* – payback!

1978

1989

1994

1997

1998

1999

Britain grants the Solomon Islands independence on 7 July with Chief Minister Sir Peter Kenilorea automatically assuming the role of Prime Minister

The first PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) soldiers are killed as civil war breaks out in Bougainville; the following year PNGDF troops are withdrawn from Bougainville and the island is blockaded

Two of Rabaul's volcanoes – Vulcan and Tavurvur – erupt, burying the prettiest town in the Pacific in volcanic ash; the town is all but abandoned and nearby Kokopo becomes the new capital of East New Britain

The Sandline Affair makes headlines world-wide, as PM Julius Chan hires South African mercenaries to put down Bougainville rebels; Chan resigns but the affair hastens negotiation of a peace agreement

On 17 July, 30 minutes after a moderate earthquake, a 10m tsunami hits the coastal region west of Aitape in Sandaun Province, killing more than 2200 people and causing injuries to another 1000

Ethnic tension between Malaitans and Gwale people from Guadalcanal begins to erupt, leading to the ousting of then-PM Bartholomew Ulufa'alu the following year and the RAMSI intervention in July 2003.

trainees on one side, and pro-government Bougainville Freedom Fighters on the other, but to date, all but one have either returned to Fiji or turned themselves over to the PNG police – none received the money promised to them. These bizarre circumstances aside, the UN regards the negotiated peace agreement on Bougainville as one of the most successful anywhere in the world in modern times.

'Grand Chief' Sir Michael Somare, PNG's 'father of independence', returned in 2002 for a third stint as prime minister and introduced electoral reforms to create a more stable political climate, and in turn to help the economy. Somare was the first prime minister in the country's history to avoid the familiar no-confidence motion and then be re-elected in July 2007 as an incumbent prime minister. However Somare returned to the prime ministership under strained relations with Australia, and it all began over a pair of shoes – see boxed text, p31. For more on the current political state of PNG and the Solomon Islands, see p12.

2005

The Autonomous Bougainville Government is sworn into office on 15 June 2005, with Joseph Kabui as its president

2006

Solomon Islanders riot in Honiara, after the first elections since the ethnic tension install Snyder Rini as prime minister; Chinatown is burnt to the ground and Rini is soon thrown out in a vote of no-confidence

2007

An undersea earthquake triggers a tsunami that strikes the Solomons' Western and Choiseul Provinces in April; 54 people are killed and many thousands are made homeless

The Culture

REGIONAL IDENTITY

The people of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are almost all Melanesians but the background of the population varies greatly, and even those that aren't Melanesians share many Melanesian habits. Increasingly, there's European and Chinese blood in the mix, particularly in the towns.

Some people have typical urban lifestyles with mobile phones and comfortable homes. Others inhabit remote areas and may never have seen a town or a white person. In traditional PNG societies, despite their sophisticated agricultural and maritime skills, tools and artefacts were made of wood, bone, pottery or stone. There was no metalworking, domestic animal power or wheels. Extensive trading networks existed and rare shells were used as currency. People traded widely in pottery, stone tools, obsidian (dark, glassy volcanic rock), dyes, salt, sago and smoked fish. Some people still live this way and, while the hard currency and cash crops have replaced kina shells, traditional valuables still hold value and certain ceremonial objects are revered.

In just a few generations since European contact, the people of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands have found themselves in independent island states in the age of information and the internet. Along the way they've been browbeaten by Bible-thumpers and exploited by colonial power. Most claim to be Catholic but European religion is often blended with traditional beliefs. The primary obligation that Melanesian people have is to their *wantoks* (see boxed text, p37), which is taken very seriously – gift-giving is highly formalised. You might think nothing of giving somebody a small gift but in Melanesian culture that person is then indebted to you.

There's cynicism about politics, especially among those in remote areas (where roads and services are in decline) who regard politicians as corrupt. But PNG has a young demographic (the median age is 19.7 years) and energy and Melanesian optimism emerge in their music, friendliness and ready laughter. One of the things that confounds outsiders is the warmth of people who were forever at war; ritually killing and eating each other. This contradiction no doubt contributes to anthropologists' attraction for this region.

Young, urbanised Papua New Guineans and Solomon Islanders wear Snoop Dogg T-shirts but prefer their own home-grown sounds to the Western pop charts. Many travel overseas and stay with relatives in Cairns and Brisbane. They almost all chew *buai* (betel nut), go to church, worship dead ancestors and fear *masalais* (malevolent spirits).

LIFESTYLE

Melanesians are laid-back, at least on the coast where it's too hot to get overly fussed. Highlanders are a bit more feisty and passionate. Everyone seems to walk slowly, but they've got this climate worked out – cling to the shade, sleep through the midday heat and save physical exertion for village rugby late in the day.

Most rural people are subsistence farmers or growers and traders of cash crops, such as bananas, betel nut and coffee. In the towns and cities, unskilled work pays about K120 to K200 per fortnight; skilled middle income earners earn K400 to K500 per fortnight.

By Western standards most people live very simply. In the bush people have very few possessions and often no cash income. In the cities a number of educated people lead sophisticated middle-class lives, but other people live in squalor in city-fringe settlements. PNG lifestyles range from the

After the great American military machine left at the end of WWII, cargo cults began to sprout. People built runways for imaginary planes to land on and deliver *kago* (material goods). See boxed text, p34, for more information.

rarefied cold-weather climes of the Highlands to life on the coast in stilt houses above the shifting tide.

Both PNG and the Solomons are changing quickly and locals want development. Particularly in PNG, people have married outside their traditional clans and homelands, and *tok ples* (local language, pronounced 'talk place') is increasingly being replaced in the villages with Tok Pisin (the Pidgin language). Isolated communities are suddenly being confronted with huge mining and logging operations. These bring new roads and facilities – remote areas are opened to Western influences, good and bad.

A lot of people drift into the cities from villages looking for work and modern lifestyles – there are no unemployment benefits in PNG and the Solomons, and these people often commit petty crimes to eat. Those who are engineering graduates can't always get work and they, too, fall into gangs of *raskols* just to survive. Poker machines and home-brew alcohol are problems, and AIDS is already a disaster. There's been a strong resurgence in black magic and sorcery in recent years associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the poor understanding that many remote people have of the disease. Far from quaint and curious, black magic is ghastly, violent and an abomination that's inflicted mostly on old women. See the Women in Papua New Guinea & the Solomons Islands section, p40.

Traditional Lifestyle

In the village, *bigmen* or chiefs traditionally presided over the affairs of the clan. Most villages were small, comprising several generations of just one extended family. They were typically isolated and this is why so many distinct languages evolved (there are 70 in the Solomon Islands). One of PNG's features is its extraordinary number of mutually unintelligible languages – 820 living languages and 10 extinct ones at last count – but many are dying out. It is the most linguistically complex country in the world with 12% of the world's living languages and an average of about 7600 speakers of each. Enga

The Phantom (the lycra-clad ghost who walks) is incredibly popular in PNG and has been used to advertise everything from lottery tickets to peanuts with great lines of dialogue like 'Sapos yu kaikai planti pinat, bai yu kamap strong olsem phantom.' Lee Falk's comic strip used to be translated into Tok Pisin in the *Wantok* newspaper.

CARGO CULTS

To many New Guineans, it seems the strange ways and mysterious powers of the Europeans could only have derived from supernatural sources. Cult leaders theorised that Europeans had intercepted cargo that was really intended for the New Guineans, sent to them by their ancestors in the spirit world. One cultist even suggested that the white people had torn the first page out of their bibles – the page that revealed that God was actually a Papuan.

If the right rituals were followed, the cult leaders said, the goods would be redirected to their rightful owners. Accordingly, docks were prepared or crude 'airstrips' laid out for when the cargo arrived. Other leaders felt that if they mimicked European ways, they would soon have European goods – 'offices' were established in which people passed bits of paper back and forth. But when locals started to kill their own pigs and destroy their gardens, the colonial government took a firm stand. Some leaders were imprisoned while others were taken down to Australia to see with their own eyes that the goods did not arrive from the spirit world.

Seeing black American troops during WWII with access to desirable goods had a particularly strong impact. In Manus Province in 1946, a movement started by Paliu Moloat called the New Way, or Paliu Church, was initially put down as just another cargo cult. But Paliu's quasi-religious following was one of PNG's first independence movements and a force for modernisation. He opposed bride prices, for example, and sought to dissuade the local populace's belief in the arrival of actual cargo from the sea.

Paliu was imprisoned in the early days, but in 1964 and 1968 he was elected to the PNG House of Assembly. Paliu Moloat was seen by his followers as the last prophet of the world. He died on 1 November 1991.

KAIKAI BUAI?

Betel nut, the *Areca catechu* seed, takes up at least half of the selling space in every market and people use it as a pick-me-up during the day – a bit like a mid-morning cup of tea. Virtually everybody in PNG and the Solomons (except expats) chews *buai* and most educated professional people (unless they are fervently Christian) will have a quiet chew, too.

Long-time chewers get badly stained teeth – first red and then black. The mild stimulant is brought about by the reaction of the nut, the mustard stick (*daka*) and the crushed-coral lime (*cumbung*)...and it tastes awful! Nuts can vary in potency and a strong one might cause you to sweat and want to lie down for a few minutes. The lime is highly caustic and can cause ulcerated cheeks and mouth cancers.

Yes plis, tenkyu tru!

Take the husked nut between your back teeth and crack it near the stem end. Prise it open with your fingers, pluck out the kernel and chew it in the back of your mouth to one side. You'll suddenly be producing large amounts of colourless saliva and don't swallow it as you can get a bit nauseated – so find somewhere where you can spit.

Next moisten one end of the *daka* in your mouth and dip it into the lime so a few millimetres are 'frosted' with *cumbung*. Bite off the frosted *daka* in the back of your mouth, and chew and spit. Repeat, chew and spit.

This is when your projectiles will turn a vivid red and (with luck) you'll feel the 'rush' come on. It can sometimes be just a little head-spin or it can be stronger – the effect will be largely determined by your technique and you might be disappointed with your first try. Watch how others do it.

Seeing a foreigner *kaikai buai* will bring broad smiles across the faces of local people and you'll immediately make friends. Be warned, however, that until you are practised you'll almost certainly make a mess as the voluminous red spit escapes your mouth, runs down your chin and ruins your favourite T-shirt.

is the most widely spoken with 165,000 speakers, while Turumsa is spoken by fewer than 10 elders of Makapa village in the middle Fly River district.

Ownership in the Western sense didn't exist in traditional societies; instead ownership was a concept tied up in family and clan rights, controlled by the male elder.

In traditional Melanesian culture there are three main areas of everyday importance – prestige, pigs and gardening. A village chief shows wealth by owning and displaying certain traditional valuables, or by hosting lavish feasts where dozens of pigs are slaughtered. *Bigmen* don't inherit their titles, although being the son of a chief has advantages. *Bigmen* must earn their titles by accolades in war, wisdom in councils, magic-practice skills and the secret arts that are *tambu* (taboo) for women. Particularly in the Highlands, people have to be made aware how wealthy *bigmen* are, so ceremonial life in this region focuses on ostentatious displays and in giving things away. There are various ways in which this is formalised; it's part of a wide circle of exchange and interclan relationships. Wealth is never really given away in the Western sense. Your gifts cement a relationship with the receiver, who then has obligations to you. Obligation and payback are deadly serious in Highlands culture; Melanesia has no privileged classes, but individuals still inherit land through their parents (often their mother). Village life in PNG and the Solomons is usually egalitarian, and ownership continues to be a concept tied up in family and clan rights.

Pigs are extremely valuable; they're regarded as family members and lactating women sometimes suckle piglets. People can be seen out taking their pig for a walk on a leash, patiently waiting as the pig grazes and digs

Trobriand Islanders worship yams and build elaborate yam houses many storeys high. Everywhere there is great art and ritual involved in gardening.

by the roadside. Large pigs can be worth K1000. Dogs, on the other hand, are mangy, fly-blown creatures left to scavenge for food.

People in both countries still maintain animist beliefs. Despite the inroads of Christianity, ancestor worship is still important. The netherworld is also inhabited by spirits, both protective and malevolent, and there are creation myths that involve animal totems. This is stronger in certain areas: islanders from Malaita in the Solomons worship sharks while some Sepik River people revere crocodiles. Christianity has a tight grip on most people, but it hasn't supplanted traditional beliefs. They coexist – Jesus is alive in people's hearts and minds without conflicting with their traditional ideas.

Bride price is the formalised gift-giving of money and certain traditional valuables to the father of a would-be bride. It often comprises shell money, but can also include cash, pigs and SP Lager. Part of becoming a man and commanding respect in traditional societies is to work hard and raise a bride price so you can marry. Bride price is common, but these days many men compile their bride price *after* they're married.

Men's cults are widespread throughout Melanesia and involve the ritualised practice of 'the arts' and ancestor worship in men's houses and *haus tambarans* (spirit houses). This can involve the building and display of certain ceremonial objects, song and dance, and the initiation of boys into manhood. It manifests in different ways in different societies, but it is very secretive and deadly serious – in the Sepik boys are cut with crocodile markings as part of their initiation, while Tolais boys are visited by *dukduks* (spiritual costumes) to perform their initiation rites. It's ironic and hard to fathom for outsiders, but while men's business and *haus tambarans* are *tambu* for women, men's cults and their initiation rites are all about rebirthing – the *haus tambaran* is like a womb and in some places its entrance is actually shaped like a vagina.

ECONOMY

About 85% of Papua New Guineans and Solomon Islanders live subsistence agricultural lifestyles in rural villages. Surplus food production is traded in informal cash economies and this makes up the bulk of financial activity in both countries.

Industries that dominate the formal economic sector are the capital-intensive mining and oil industries that employ large numbers of foreign nationals and relatively few locals. They tend to be controlled by overseas interests and thus considerable portions of the profits are taken offshore. In 2005 PNG's total export earnings reached K10 billion (US\$3.5 billion) for the first time. Gold was the biggest foreign-exchange earner with the export of 70.5 tonnes worth K2.8 billion to the national economy. Copper, principally extracted from the giant Ok Tedi mine, and crude oil are respectively the second- and third-highest earning export commodities.

The Solomon Islands mining industry was dealt a mortal blow during the period of ethnic tension – the rich Gold Ridge mine near Honiara had only a year of production before it was forced to close in June 2000. Today it is expected to again produce large amounts of gold and copper. The Solomons' fishing industry is looking to expand again after the economic doldrums of the early 2000s. The Soltai tuna cannery at Noro is one of the biggest in the South Pacific and exports tuna products to supermarkets in Europe and America. It is the country's second-highest export earner (behind timber).

The agricultural sector is more labour-intensive and employs far more PNG and Solomons nationals than the mining sector. Forestry, copra and palm oil again tend to be controlled by foreign interests. Increases in world

THE WANTOK SYSTEM

Fundamental to Melanesian culture is the idea of *wantoks* (meaning 'one talk' in Tok Pisin) and your *wantoks* are those who speak your *tokples* or language – your clan or kinfolk. Every Melanesian is born with duties to their *wantoks* but they also have privileges. Within the clan and village, each person can expect to be housed and fed, and to share in the community's assets. Regardless of whether clanspeople are in Wewak or Warsaw, all *wantoks* can expect to be accommodated and fed, until they can make a more permanent home.

This is a social security system, and the plague of both democratic politics and enterprise. Some say that the *wantok* system is the best and worst thing about PNG and the Solomon Islands. For villagers, it is an egalitarian way for the community to share its spoils. In rapidly changing circumstances, the village and the clan provide basic economic support as well as a sense of belonging.

When these ideas are transposed to politics and social affairs, it becomes nepotism and, at worst, corruption. In the public service, the police, the army and especially in politics, this is a scourge. Candidates don't get to run without the support of their fellow *bigmen*, who expect that when 'their' candidate is elected, their generosity will be repaid. The *wantok* system is also the greatest disincentive to enterprise.

The *wantok* system is a microcosm of the battle being waged between the modern and the traditional in PNG and the Solomons. It is so deeply entrenched that some educated youngsters choose to move away from their families to avoid the calls for handouts. And without it life would be much harder for many others. Just saying 'no' to a *wantok* is rarely an option.

coffee prices have provided direct benefits to PNG growers who are mostly smallholders in the Highlands. In 2006 coffee exports were worth K471 million. PNG rubber exports are also significant.

The Solomon Islands timber industry is its single biggest export earner, but the country's forests are seriously over-harvested. The industry is dominated by Asian multinationals and many of their practices have been environmentally disastrous and sometimes illegal. Some estimates suggest that Solomons' timber will be logged out in as little as five years if felling continues at the current unsustainable rate.

Both PNG and the Solomons have poor economic infrastructure, which makes the cost of doing business very high. Except for the PNG's Highlands Highway that connects Madang and Lae to the major population centres in the Highlands, neither country has any significant road network. PNG's mountainous mainland and the many islands in PNG and the Solomons means that communities are isolated from each other and the internal transportation systems comprise mostly light aircraft and informal trade-boat routes. (It is interesting to note that domestic aviation was born in PNG.) Both countries lie off the major shipping routes and thus sea-freight costs are high and services to and from the rest of the world are infrequent. There is almost no manufacturing base in PNG or the Solomons, so just about everything is imported (mostly from Australia and Asia) and everything is expensive.

Productivity growth is also restricted by poor education at one end of the human-resources spectrum and a significant 'brain drain' at the other. In PNG fewer than 60% of children complete 6th grade and only about 10% enrol in secondary school, while many of the best and brightest of the professional class leave for better-paid employment overseas.

Between 1960 and PNG independence in 1975 the economy on average was growing at more than 5.5%, thanks in large part to a substantial and productive Australian expatriate community and the Panguna copper mine in Bougainville, which began operating in 1968. The Panguna mine accounted

Shark-calling in Malaita in the Solomons involves boys handfeeding sharks and riding on their backs. See boxed text, p237.

Village on the Edge (2002), by Michael French Smith, is a thoughtful book about a village on a volcanic island, and the changing lifestyles as it confronts modernity.

for 40% of the country's income and its closure in 1989 led to a sharp decline in GDP. Between 1975 and 2004 the PNG economy grew at an average 2.3%, although the last couple of years have seen stronger growth due to strong commodities prices and high minerals yields.

Foreign aid remains an important component of both economies. In 2007 PNG received K880 million (US\$310 million), although the amount has been falling in recent years. Through AusAID, Australia contributed about 78% of that amount, with the balance made up of contributions from Japan, the EU, New Zealand, China and the USA. Foreign aid (mostly Australian) to the Solomons was worth about S\$930 million (US\$122 million) in 2007 and 70% of that was directed at the programme of RAMSI civilian activities.

POPULATION Papua New Guinea

PNG people are closely related to people from other parts of the Pacific. There are Papuans, the first arrivals; Melanesians, who represent 95% of people and are related to people from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia; Polynesians, related to New Zealand Maoris, Tongans, Samoans and Hawaiian islanders; and Micronesians, related to people in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Nauru.

Only 15% of people live in urban areas, while most of the rest are subsistence farmers. Nearly two million people live in the Highlands, the most densely populated part of the country. Most cities have many people who weren't born there. Many Highlanders migrate to Port Moresby and elsewhere, but few coastal people move into the Highlands. Melanesian people still identify more strongly with their clan links and their origins than with the people they come to live with, so enclaves exist in the settlement areas of the big cities, and there is a traditional distrust between Highlanders and coastal people. During the Bougainville war, dark-skinned *bukas* (Bougainvilleans) used to be harassed and vilified around PNG, but this doesn't happen now.

Only Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen have a real big-city crush. The other provincial capitals are not as crowded (except on provincial show day). Land pressures have caused people to leave the villages and seek work, and great urban squatter settlements have appeared around many major cities. In 2002 Madang authorities burnt down a huge Sepiks' settlement on the outskirts of town after giving the residents some resettlement compensation.

Solomon Islands

The Solomons people are 94% Melanesian and otherwise made up of Polynesians, some relocated Micronesian communities and a few expatriates.

Malaita has more than twice the population of rural Guadalcanal and only Honiara has many people. Here, too, land pressures have forced locals to move, most notably Malaitan islanders to Guadalcanal, and this in part brought on the ethnic tensions that began boiling over in 1999. Since then 20,000 people have been coerced into returning to Malaita, exacerbating its overpopulation problems.

Expatriates

In both PNG and the Solomons there are relatively large numbers of expats, but this is in decline. There are about 20,000 non-citizens in PNG, down from a 1971 peak of 50,000, and about a quarter of these are West Papuan refugees living in border camps.

Most expats are Australians, Brits and Germans, but there's a large Chinese community that has been in PNG for a long time and it has intermixed with the local population more than any other group. Around Vanimo there are significant numbers of Indonesians and Malaysians.

Expats fall into three groups – those who are in PNG and the Solomons for a long time or even a lifetime, expat workers who come in on lucrative two-year contracts with international companies, and younger people who come in for a period as volunteers, aid workers and NGOs.

There are no more *mastas* (white colonials) in oversized shorts and knee-length white socks building empires with cheap local labour. Today's expatriate community is a varied group; some are involved in the fledgling tourism sector as hotel proprietors or scuba-diving instructors. There are religious zealots, people fleeing broken marriages or dodgy business activities, obsessed scientific nerds studying insect larvae, and adventurers.

When independence came to PNG in 1975, many Australian and Chinese residents were eligible for PNG citizenship, on the condition that they renounced their original citizenship. Many did and some now hold positions of considerable political and economic importance.

SPORT

Organised sport is in its infancy in PNG and the Solomon Islands. Papua New Guineans are proud of their nationals doing well in sport overseas. Swimmer Ryan Pini became an instant national hero in PNG when he won the gold medal for the 100m butterfly at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. Dika Loa Toua won a silver for the women's 53kg weightlifting at the same event.

Mal Michael is a successful Australian Rules footballer who was a three-time premiership-winning full-back with the Brisbane Lions before (controversially) changing to the Essendon Football Club for the 2007 season.

Rugby league is PNG's national sport and Marcus Bai is a rugby league superstar and perhaps PNG's most successful sporting export. He played in Australia for the Gold Coast Chargers and Melbourne Storm, and in England for Leeds Rhinos and Bradford Bulls. PNG has produced several first-grade rugby-league professionals who are plying their trades in overseas leagues including Tommy O'Reilly, Keith Peters, Omphalus Kua, Stanley Gene and John Wilshere. Another PNG player, Adrian Lam, played 14 State of Origin matches for Queensland and captained PNG at the 2000 World Cup.

Stanley 'The Headhunter' Nandex from Erave district in Southern Highlands Province was the world super-middleweight kickboxing champion before retiring in 2005.

Melanesian people love sport, and ball games of all kinds fit into their communal outdoorsy culture. There are raggedy volleyball nets in many villages and impromptu rugby games are played in village *singsing* grounds. Local netball and rugby competitions are played on weekends in parks and fields everywhere. Soccer and softball are now popular.

Televised sport is of paramount importance and everybody aligns themselves fiercely (and seemingly arbitrarily) to the Blues or Maroons for the Australian Rugby League's state-of-origin match between Queensland and New South Wales. The fervour for this big event sees a rash of T-shirt sales and vast amounts of money wagered on the outcome.

If you get to the Trobriand Islands (p118), make sure you take in a game of Trobriand cricket. Cricket was introduced in 1903 by Methodist missionaries to reduce ritual warfare, and has since been adapted to include many local rules as well as magic, war paint, feasting and ritual.

'Papua New Guineans are proud of their nationals doing well in sport overseas'

Penis gourds are still *de rigueur* for many men in PNG's remote parts.

MEDIA

The media is vigorous and fair-minded in PNG and the Solomon Islands. Many people read newspapers and are well informed and highly opinionated about current affairs, writing to newspapers to express free opinions.

There are two main daily newspapers – the *Post Courier* majority-owned by Murdoch, and the *National* owned by Malaysian logging giant Rimbunan Hijau. A third local daily, *Wantok*, is published in Tok Pisin by a Christian organisation. The content is not overtly churchy, but still conservative in matters of religion and anything strongly sexual. PNG's only locally owned paper is a weekly launched in 2006. There's thorough national coverage in the daily newspapers, as well as a reasonable amount of overseas news.

There are several FM radio stations in each town that play local music and two government-funded national radio broadcasters – Karai on the AM band, and Kalang on the FM band. Local content is strong. In addition there are several commercial national broadcasters, and the biggies are NauFM ('now') broadcasting in English, and YumiFM ('you-me') broadcasting 24 hours in Tok Pisin.

The one Solomons daily is published and owned by local John Lamani. There are two new bi-weekly papers that are locally owned.

For more information on TV media, see p42.

RELIGION

Both the PNG and Solomon Islands constitutions declare that they are Christian countries. The churches have played an important role in developing the countries' health and education services, as well as infrastructure. But they have also sought to repress traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

In PNG, about 28% of people are Catholic, 23% Evangelical Lutheran, 13% belong to the Uniting Church, and there are significant numbers of followers of the Evangelical Alliance, Seventh-Day Adventist, Pentecostal and Anglican churches. In the Solomons 35% are members of the Anglican-affiliated Church of Melanesia and 20% are Catholic. Regardless of where people align their Christian beliefs, they retain many of their beliefs in traditional religion and customary practices.

In most areas of PNG and the Solomons traditional life continues, but Christian churches are extremely influential. American hellfire fundamentalists come to save the lost souls. They have seminars and give public speeches in the marketplaces of Port Moresby and Honiara. Local soapbox preachers, common in many towns, give the word of God in Tok Pisin, which can be quite interesting.

WOMEN IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA & THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Sexual politics is complicated in traditional Melanesian society. In some places in the Highlands husband and wife don't live together at all, and sexual relations are not to be taken lightly. Some Melanesian men have two or more wives. In many belief systems women are considered dangerous, especially during menstruation. Women often live in a house alone with the young children, or with sisters and their nieces and nephews. In many places land rights pass through the mother, and older women can wield great power in the villages.

The display of women's thighs in Melanesian culture is sexually provocative but in the villages women will only cover their breasts when foreigners are present. There's a distinct difference between the way local people see themselves and how they expect Westerners to see them, and this harks back to the way Christian missionaries and conservative *mastas* expected

women to cover themselves – it is not an indigenous custom. We see more and more waitresses in the big city hotels and restaurants wearing uniforms that incorporate short skirts. They look very uncomfortable and this can only be a dress-code stipulation from ignorant expatriate managers with no cultural sensitivity who want their wait-staff to look 'pretty'.

Women carry *kago* (cargo) in *bilums* (string bags) home from the market while the man walks unburdened. Women do most of the food gardening, although men grow magnificent decorative gardens. Traditionally, men practise arts that are exclusively their domain and, although these can sometimes be shown to women travellers, they are still *tambu* for local women.

Domestic violence is a major problem. A World Health Organization report into PNG in 1998 claimed that 56% of women have been victims of domestic violence, and this means that PNG has the second-highest level of violence against women in the world after Uganda. In 2006 UNICEF estimated that around one million children in PNG live with violence either at home or in their community. Traditional Melanesian societies are patriarchal and the payment of bride price often leads to the belief that the husband has a right to beat his wife. Public awareness campaigns in recent years have really brought the issue to the surface, but unless police are prepared to enforce tougher laws the problem won't go away. Although alcohol is banned in parts of PNG, home-brew alcohol – sometimes 90% proof – and resulting violence is a major problem.

Women, particularly those in rural parts, have poor health outcomes. In 2002 the UNFPA claimed that about 700 women die of childbirth or pregnancy-related causes each year, and that only 50% of births were attended by trained health personnel. Women have lower life expectancies, educational achievements and incomes, and their rates of literacy are poorer.

Physical dislocation and poverty drive some women into prostitution and this is particularly noticeable in Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen. The spread of HIV/AIDS in recent years is so serious that it's regarded as a genuine epidemic in PNG, which has the highest incidence HIV/AIDS in the Pacific. Many women are infected by their husbands who are often promiscuous. Once infected, HIV/AIDS sufferers are ostracised from their communities, and infected children are abandoned. The rise of HIV/AIDS has coincided with a resurgence of black magic and witchcraft, and people in remote parts of PNG and the Solomons who have poor understanding of HIV/AIDS have inflicted unthinkable cruelties on sufferers – particularly women – in the name of exorcising demonic forces. Reports continue to surface about people infected with HIV/AIDS being tortured, brutalised and even buried alive.

PNG's only female Member of Parliament is Australian-born Dame Carol Kidu. The Solomon Islands has none.

ARTS

Papua New Guinea's arts are regarded as the most striking and varied in the Pacific, and Solomon Islanders, being great carvers, are part of the same cultural tradition. The lack of contact between different villages and groups of people has led to a potent array of indigenous art.

Contemporary art is also vividly expressed – the death of Mathias Kauage, PNG's world-famous painter, in May 2003 was a great national loss (see boxed text, p45).

In traditional societies, dance, song, music, sculpture and body adornment were related to ceremonies. Art was either utilitarian (such as bowls or canoes) or religious. Since European contact, art has become objectified. There have always been master carvers and mask-makers, but their role in

In *Beyond the Coral Sea* (2003) Michael Moran retraces the steps of some famous early visitors to PNG and offers some thoughts on the modern country. A fine book.

Bill Bennett's *In a Savage Land* (1999), filmed in the Trobriands, is about couple of anthropologists in the 1930s and their take on the 'Islands of Love'. Australian musician David Bridie's soundtrack won a bunch of awards.

traditional cultures was to enable the ceremonies and rituals to be performed correctly, and to serve the clan and chief.

The production of artefacts is itself often ceremonial and ritualistic. On some of the islands, secret men's societies build *dukduks* or carve *malangan* masks (totemic figures honouring the dead). Women are forbidden to look upon a *dukduk* or *malangan* until it is brought to life in a ceremony by a fierce anonymous character.

Cinema & TV

Despite the fact that there's no local film production, there's a rich tradition of documentary films made in PNG – and in the Solomons to a lesser degree. Errol Flynn spent time in PNG and more recently Madang's north coast was the setting for Pierce Brosnan's portrayal of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Australian Mark Worth was born in PNG and spent most of his professional life there as a pioneering 'guerrilla' journalist and film maker. While shooting his 1995 film *Raskols*, Worth got embroiled in a Highlands tribal war. He had just finished making *Land of the Morning Star*, about the struggles in West Papua, when he died in Jayapura in 2004.

EmTV is PNG's national broadcaster in PNG. The Solomons launched its own local One Channel TV service in 2006, broadcasting news in English for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, in Honiara only for the time being. Satellite dishes in both countries pick up CNN, BBC World and Australian programmes, as well as other subscription TV. EmTV is very

See the documentary *First Contact* (below) before you die.

TOP DOCOS

Bob Connolly and the late Robin Anderson made a trilogy of excellent documentaries about Papua New Guinea.

First Contact is an extraordinary film, using footage shot by the Leahy brothers when they went into the Highlands in 1933 in search of gold. Instead they found 100,000 people living in the Wahgi Valley who had no idea that the outside world existed. It's truly brilliant cinema, made from old scratchy black-and-white images showing amazing scenes of Highlanders in traditional gear. They look completely bewildered when the Leahy brothers land a plane, play music on a wind-up gramophone and when they see themselves in little mirrors.

Joe Leahy's Neighbours shows a traditional society slowly coming to terms with the modernised world. Joe is the son of Mick Leahy (with one of his Highlands concubines) and his profitable coffee plantation in the Highlands sets him apart from the neighbouring Ganiga clanspeople, whose subsistence lifestyles remain almost unchanged.

Black Harvest completes the trilogy, showing Joe Leahy's coffee plantation expanding in partnership with the Ganiga clan. Just before the first harvest (after a five-year maturation), international coffee prices plummet and clan warfare breaks out.

In 2000 Russell Hawkins made *Since the Company Came*, about logging Rendova Island in the Solomons, land disputes and clan troubles.

Dennis O'Rourke's *The Shark Callers of Kontu* is justifiably famous. O'Rourke's film explores the ancient New Ireland art of shark-calling. He also looks at the bewildering dichotomies for Kontu villagers between their traditional ways and the impact of a rapidly arriving 21st century.

Also set in a New Ireland village is Chris Owen's splendid documentary *Malangan Labadama*, which depicts the preparations, rituals and festivities surrounding the death of the village *mimi* (elder and chief) Buk Buk in the island's Mandak region. It provides a wonderful insight into Malangan culture.

Owen, an expat Australian, also created *Bridewealth for a Goddess* in 2000, which tells the story of Amb Kor, a goddess who comes to Highlander chief Ru Kundil in a dream, and his attempts to woo her through elaborate rituals. Owen's most recent film is *Betelnut Bisnis* made in 2004.

Ronin Films (www.roninfilms.com.au) in Australia distributes many of these titles.

watchable – for a little while. It has its own news and sport programmes, cheesy local ads in Tok Pisin, local music-video shows and some lightweight 'lifestyle' programmes, which mostly advertise outdoor furniture from Brian Bell stores. Otherwise it carries Australian programming. Watching EmTV is a good way to pick up some Pidgin language skills. The conservative influence of the church ensures that TV carries no overtly sexual content (but violent Rambo-style vigilante movies are very common and popular).

Music

Melanesians are incredibly musical people and some local artists have had international success. They are great singers – listen to the church singing early on a Sunday morning – and natural guitar and ukulele players.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

In recent years there's been some revival of traditional music, but the impact of missionary workers has meant many traditional musical forms have been lost. The *kundu* drum is the most widely used traditional instrument, shaped like a tall, narrow egg-timer and covered with lizard skin. Many cultures use *garamuts* (hollowed-out logs from wrist size up to tree-trunk size). *Garamut* drummers play astonishing rhythms in hierarchical ensembles where the senior drummers play the trickiest patterns. The rhythms are specific to the region and are very complex.

Shells and bamboo panpipes are blown, while rattles are made from gourds and bundled banana leaves. Highland flutes (simple throwaway bamboo tubes) are played in pairs and do an eerie call-and-response routine. Sepik flutes are highly decorated and hollowed from solid timber. Jew's harps are also indigenous to PNG. Other instruments include bull roarers and ceramic whistles from the Highlands.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

It's exciting that countries as small as PNG and the Solomons can support such strong local music scenes. Local radio is very supportive of local music (which is readily for sale as cassettes and CDs). Stringband music is played by four or five guitarists and a ukulele player and based loosely around a 12-bar blues structure. The guitars are tuned in unorthodox ways and are often played with an arpeggiated, hammer-on action. The stringband sound has a real swing to it in a lazy South Pacific kind of way, but it varies widely from the bright and happy Tolai (East New Britain Province) sound to the more dirge-like and sombre Manus stringband music. Virtually every village has its own stringband and most PNG pop music comes out of this tradition. Reggae is also a strong influence in modern pop music.

In the '70s and '80s Sanguma was a pioneering band that fused jazz-rock with indigenous sounds – and had some international success. Another artist, **George Telek** (www.telek.com) has been touring and working in Europe and Australia. Ben Hakalitz and Baruka Tau performed with **Yothu Yindi** (www.yothuyindi.com) in stadiums in Brazil and to close the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

In the Solomons Sharzy is still the top pop performer. He's a DJ on Z FM. **Narasirato** (www.narasirato.com) mix classic Malaitan panpipe music with contemporary beats. They've toured Australia and Japan.

Theatre & Dance

There are community-based drama groups as well as those associated with the universities and colleges. National funding for theatre has dried up, and some great initiatives have had to stop. Theatre groups commonly work on local-legend themes and stories, bringing to life traditional stories.

The Wantok Musik Foundation (www.wantokmusik.org) is an Australian-based not-for-profit organisation and record label that releases and promotes music from Melanesia and indigenous Australia.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

- George Telek's *Serious Tam*, recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios, is an evocative record that features Telek's extraordinary voice. His 1999 album *Telek* won an Australian ARIA Award and he recorded *Amete* in Melbourne 2004. Telek is a Tolai from Rabaul.
- Hausboi from Manus are the most interesting new act, and their *Diriman* CD is great. Crosby, Stills & Nash harmonies meet stringband rhythms via some boy-band soul and a little hip-hop (with traditional flutes and *garamuts*). Highly recommended.
- O-Shen (www.o-shen.com) grew up near Lae and in America. His father was a doctor and his mother a teacher, both from the US who worked in PNG while O-Shen was growing up. He's the current superstar of PNG music. His music is a fusion of American hip-hop and Hawaiian and Melanesian islander sounds. *Kanaka Pasifika* was a huge hit and his new record *1 Rebel* was released in 2007.
- *Tabaran* was a collaboration between Australia's Not Drowning Waving (www.notdrowningwaving.com) and Rabaul-based musicians at Pacific Gold Studios (pre-volcanic eruption days), including George Telek. A great mix of cultures and music, this 1988 recording is a classic and pre-dates the worldwide explosion of 'world music'. Stringbands and funeral chants meet arty atmospherics, electric guitars and wall-of-sound percussion. *Tabaran* was reissued in 2007.
- Litol Rastas are from the Solomons and have a few clips on YouTube. Their *Dollar Man* CD features terrible cover art but some terrific contemporary islander reggae sounds.
- *Maiae* by Solomons band Tipa is another good CD that mixes string-band parts with strong vocal harmonies.
- Also recommended – *Tumbuna Man* by Khris Kassimis from Manus, and *Tei Doh is Bad* by Wali Tribe from Madang.

The Raun Raun Theatre (p157) in Goroka occasionally has performances by the resident ensemble. The Kaikuali Theatre Group in Alotau is another long-established group of performers. **Drum Drum** (www.drumdrum.com.au) is a music, dance and theatre collective based around the Ingram brothers from Gaba Gaba near Port Moresby. The group works out of Darwin in northern Australia.

Architecture

Modern architecture is a relatively new concept in PNG and the Solomons. *Haus tambarans* were the traditional expression of formal architecture and there are incredible *haus tambarans* in the Sepik and in the Highlands. Yam houses in the Trobriands are another interesting traditional form. An emerging style blends traditional forms and materials into modern structures on a large scale. The towering façade of the PNG parliament house takes its shape and big decorated prow from Sepik *haus tambarans*. Another individual piece of architecture is the Raun Raun Theatre in Goroka. On a smaller scale, some of the upmarket lodges around the country exhibit this building style quite successfully, such as Ambua Lodge in the Southern Highlands (p174) and Karawari Lodge (p199) in the East Sepik Province.

Painting & Printmaking

PNG painting is typically 'flat', with no sense of perspective or receding backgrounds. Themes often explore the collision of traditional and modern cultures or the illustration of local legends, such as the shark or turtle spirit. Printmaking evolved from the Melanesian tradition of tapa cloth production and textile design is often reminiscent of tapa designs. Silk-screening is common and Papua New Guineans do fantastic T-shirt art (although this seems to be less common than a decade ago).

The Faculty of Creative Arts (also known as the National Art School) was established at the University of PNG in Port Moresby in 1972. With a strong emphasis on printmaking and painting, some of its graduates have earned international reputations. Mathias Kauage, Jakuba, Cecil King, John Siune and Akis have works hanging in overseas galleries; Kauage, in particular, became world famous (see boxed text, below).

Pottery

The village of Aibom, near the Chambri Lakes, is virtually the only place on the Sepik that specialises in pottery. Aibom pots are noted for their relief faces, which are coloured with lime and made by the coil method (as opposed to using a pottery wheel).

Other interesting pots can be found near Madang, in the Central Province, made by the Porebada people, and at Wanigela in Oro Province. The Amphlett Islanders in Milne Bay also make delicate pottery. Pottery is not glazed in Melanesia and is often poorly fired – it can be extremely fragile.

Carving

Carving is the main art of Melanesians and is what they are renowned for. It can take many forms from tiny pieces to giant *garamut* drums.

BOWLS & STOOLS

The Trobriand Islanders are prolific carvers of everything from stylised figures to decorated lime gourds and beautifully made bowls. The bowls are generally carved from ebony or rosewood and laboriously polished with a pig's tusk. The rims are patterned, often featuring a fish or turtle.

The Tami Islanders near Lae are renowned for their carved bowls. Further offshore the Siassi Islanders carve deep, elliptical bowls that are patterned with incised designs coloured with lime.

Trobriands stools are wonderful, carved from a single piece of timber and incorporating intricate detail.

SHIELDS, BOARDS & PROWS

Some of the most interesting Pacific art manifests in shields, canoe prows and Sepik storyboards. Trobriands splash boards and canoe prows are magnificent and have a unique design. Traditionally, shields were often thought to be inhabited by dead ancestors who brought power and protection to a warrior in war. These days, shields are produced for

Contemporary Art in Papua New Guinea (1997), by Susan Cochrane, is an excellent book showing how powerful Melanesian creative energy has produced great painters like Kauage and Siune.

MATHIAS KAUAGE *Rowan McKinnon*

I met Mathias Kauage in 1997 – he was asleep on the concrete path outside a Port Moresby hotel, his head resting on his folded forearms. His paintings were laid out near the door with a pebble on each corner, all for sale. They were very striking and filled with vivid images of helicopters and planes with huge faces in the windows. I vacillated for ages before buying two.

A self-taught artist from Simbu, Kauage started painting in the '70s and was so successful that many artists copied his style, and eventually there was a 'school' of Kauage-style naive-primitivists.

In 1994, when Kauage was invited to exhibit his work at the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art and a London gallery, he was granted an audience with Queen Elizabeth II. He presented her with the portrait *Misis Kwin*, in which she's depicted with a tribal headdress and a bone through her nose – it hangs in Buckingham Palace. He was awarded an Order of the British Empire in 1998, and died in 2003 aged 66. *Oi binatang blong PNG* (All PNG's Small Animals) hangs in my lounge room. His paintings are now seriously collectable.

decoration and are often too unwieldy to stave off an incoming spear or arrow.

MALANGAN & GOGDALA CARVINGS

In New Ireland, master carvers create *malangan* figures for mortuary rites. *Malangan* refers to more than just the carvings – it's a complex system of spiritual beliefs and rituals. There are a few master carvers on Tabar Island and Libba village near Konos. These are spectacular pieces but often large and terribly fragile.

In the Balimo area Gogodala pieces are also unique, carved like a totem pole. They can represent humans and spirits, crocodiles and snakes.

CULT HOOKS & SKULL RACKS

Classic Sepik pieces, cult hooks make good souvenirs. The small ones are called *Yipwons*, while larger ones are *Kamanggabi*, and they're carved as hunting charms. Food hooks hang *bilums* of food from the roof to keep them away from rats, but they also have a spiritual significance.

Traditionally, the skulls of both enemies and relatives were kept, over-modelled with clay and decorated. Ancestors were worshipped and enemy skulls were war trophies – both had spiritual power. Skull racks were traditionally made to display the skulls, but they're quite beautiful objects in their own right.

NGUZUNGUZUS

The Solomons' most famous carved motif is the ubiquitous *nguzunguzu* (pronounced 'noozoo-noozoo'). These can be very beautiful objects and were originally made to be placed on the prows of canoes, especially in times of war – *nguzunguzus* ward off water spirits and strengthen the raiding party. Native to the Solomons' Western Province, *nguzunguzus* have been adopted as a national symbol and embossed on the one-dollar coin.

Masks & Headdresses

Masks in PNG are generally used for decoration rather than something to be worn. They are prevalent along the Sepik River, but also in other parts of the country. The Chambri masks from the villages on the Chambri Lakes are the most contemporary of the Sepik masks – recognisable by their elongated design and glossy black finish with incised brown-and-white patterns.

At Korogo, in the Sepik region, masks are made of wood, then decorated with clay in which shells, hair and pigs' teeth are embedded. Other distinctive Sepik mask styles are found at Kaminabit and Tambanum, and masks from the Murik Lakes have an almost African look. At Maprik the yam masks are woven from materials such as cane or rattan, but they are also carved at Kiwai Island, near Daru on the southern Papuan coast.

Some masks and headdresses are made of woven wicker-style material – middle Sepik people produce the most famous ones. Baining fire dancers wear a mask made of bark sewn to a wooden frame, often with huge eyes and a duck-like beak.

Jewellery

A form of jewellery that figures in traditional ceremonies from Kavieng down the islands to Makira in the Solomons is the *kapkap* – open-worked tortleshell over a white shell disk worn on the forehead. Teeth and tusks are

Arsegras is Tok Pisin for that bit of grass or tanket leaves that covers your arse. Your *maugras* is your beard.

Aspiring Huli wigmen can spend four years at hair school learning the fine arts of wigwork. See boxed text, p173.

highly valued and worked into various forms of jewellery. Highlanders especially invest great value in large kina and baler shells worn on the chest.

Textiles & Weaving

The weaving loom was unknown in the Pacific before European contact, but there has been a long tradition of Melanesian tapa cloth produced by women. Tapa cloth is coarse paper made from soaked and beaten tree-bark and decorated with various designs. Some tapa is very sacred and highly valuable.

Other Crafts

The Chambri Lakes carvers produce decorative spears that are very similar to their masks. In the Highlands, the ceremonial Hagen axes are half-tool, half-iron; there you'll also see lethal cassowary-claw-tipped Huli picks, while in the Sepik region you will find equally nasty bone daggers.

Bilums are colourful string bags which are made in many parts of PNG. They are enormously strong and expandable. They are time-consuming to make since the entire length of string is fed through every loop. *Bilums* are now also made of synthetic cords which can be garish and sometimes beautiful. There's a variety of styles – Highlanders make big 'woollen' ones made of cuscus fur. Highlanders also make Highland hats, essential headwear for Highlands men.

Buka baskets, originally from Buka Island in Bougainville, are the finest baskets in the Pacific. Wicker-work figures of various types are made around Murik Lakes, the Yuat River and the Trobriand Islands.

Shell money of Bougainville and the Solomons is made from rare pink deep-water shells cut into tiny discs and threaded on to a string. It's still precious and deeply meaningful to the culture. Expect to pay about K50 per metre.

Environment

Tim Flannery

The island of New Guinea, of which Papua New Guinea is the eastern part, is only one-ninth as big as Australia, yet it has just as many mammal species, and more kinds of birds and frogs. PNG is Australia's biological mirror-world. Both places share a common history going back tens of millions of years, but Australia is flat and has dried out, while PNG is wet and has become mountainous. As a result, Australian kangaroos bound across the plains, while in PNG they climb in the rainforest canopy.

PNG – A MEGADIVERSE REGION

PNG is one of earth's megadiverse regions, and it owes much of its diversity to its topography. The mountainous terrain has spawned diversity in two ways: isolated mountain ranges are often home to unique fauna and flora found nowhere else, while within any one mountain range you will find different species as you go higher. In the lowlands are jungles whose trees are not that different from those of Southeast Asia. Yet the animals are often startlingly different – cassowaries instead of tapirs, and marsupial cuscus instead of monkeys.

The greatest diversity of animal life occurs at around 1500m above sea level. The ancestors of many of the marsupials found in these forests were derived from Australia some five million years ago. As Australia dried out they vanished from that continent, but they continued to thrive and evolve in New Guinea, producing a highly distinctive fauna. Birds of paradise and bowerbirds also abound there, and the forest has many trees typical of the forests of ancient Gondwana. As you go higher the forests get mossier and the air colder. By the time you have reached 3000m above sea level the forests are stunted and wreathed in epiphytes. It's a formation known as elfin woodland, and in it one finds many bright honeyeaters, native rodents and some unique relics of prehistory, such as the giant long-beaked echidna. Above the elfin woodland the trees drop out, and a wonderland of alpine grassland and herffield dominates, where wallabies and tiny birds, like the alpine robin, can often be seen. It is a place where snow can fall and where early morning ice coats the puddles.

Lowlands

Making sense of New Guinea's spectacular diversity is not easy, for the environment is so varied and its animals and plants so abundant that identifying creatures can be difficult. Let's start with a sample of what you might find in the lowlands.

Flying into Port Moresby you'll encounter grassland – a far cry from the eternally wet forests that beckon from the distant ranges. Such habitats exist in a band of highly seasonal rainfall that exists across southern New Guinea, and the fauna you'll see there is much like that of northern Australia. Magpie geese, brolgas and jabirus occupy the floodplains, as do sandy-coloured agile wallabies, Rusa deer (which were introduced a century ago) and saltwater crocodiles.

Where the dry season is shorter, however, the savannah gives way to lowland jungles and there you are in another world. The largest native land animal you'll encounter is not a mammal or a reptile, but a bird – New Guinea's southern cassowary. Weighing as much as a human, they are secretive creatures, but they can be awesome. The males care for the nests and chicks, and if you disturb either, you're likely to hear a sound like a steam

KEEP AN EYE OUT

Papua New Guinea is still very much a biological frontier so it's worth recording carefully any unusual animal you see. A photograph, local name and description of where it was found will help a specialist identify it. In little-visited regions, there's a chance that it will be an undescribed species. There are still lots of species – especially frogs, reptiles and insects – waiting to be discovered.

train bearing down on you; it's the call of an angry cassowary and the creature can burst from the forest with surprising power and speed. Its kicks are what must be guarded against, for on each foot it bears a 15cm-long claw – as wicked and sharp as any stiletto.

It's the nature of rainforests that their inhabitants form intimate relationships, and the cassowary stands at the centre of an intricate web. It eats the fruit of rainforest trees, and it can fit objects as large as a grapefruit down its throat. Its stomach strips the pulp from the fruit but passes the seeds unharmed, and from them new forest trees can grow – unless a sinister-looking parrot is nearby. The vulturine parrot is a cockatoo-sized bird with the colours of an Edwardian gentleman's morning suit – a sombre black on the outside, but with rich vermilion linings. Its head is naked and bears a long, hooked beak, hence its common name. Until recently no-one knew quite why its head was so odd – then one was seen neck-deep in cassowary faeces. The bird specialises, it seems, in picking apart reeking cassowary droppings in search of the seeds, and for such an occupation a bald head (which prevents the faeces from sticking) and a long pincer-like beak are essential requirements.

Cassowaries are reputed by some villagers to be able fishermen. They wade into a forest pond and then, using their loose feathers as a net, walk backwards into the shallows, trapping tiny fish and crustaceans. When they reach the shallows, with a flick of their rear-end, they fling the creatures onto the shore. Among their catch are some of the most beautiful of all freshwater fish, the rainbowfish. Some of these sardine-sized creatures are bright red, others are striped with the colours of the rainbow, while still others are bicoloured, with the front half being entirely different in colour from the rear half.

If you really wish to understand the lowland jungle, smother yourself in mosquito repellent and take up a comfortable post at dusk. The sun sets rapidly in the tropics, and the insect chorus, which has been drumming away all day, alters with the light. An eerier buzzing sound (reminiscent of the sound supposedly made by alien spaceships in B-grade sci-fi movies) announces the awakening of the 'six-o'clocks' – cicadas that sing briefly twice each day, at dawn and dusk. Then, as the harsh sounds of the day die away, the subtle sounds of the night chime in – frogs that sound like bells, crickets that chirrup incessantly, and the low note of the frogmouth, a large owl-like bird with gouty feet and a huge, gaping bill.

By now bats are on the wing, and New Guinea has a huge diversity of them, from the moth-sized, insect-eating Mosia which may flit around you while the light is still strong, to the great flying foxes with wingspans of more than a metre and a weight of 2kg, the largest flying mammals ever to have evolved. Because some species roost in huge colonies near towns, most Papua New Guineans know such creatures well, and indeed have been kept awake at night by their raucous quarrelling during the fruiting season. Many of the smaller, insectivorous bats spend the day in caves. It's best not to disturb them there, both for their own sake and because

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Birds of New Guinea (1986 & 2008) is the only comprehensive field guide to the birds of the New Guinea mainland. This is the visiting bird-spotter's bible.

The grey black-eared giant rat, endemic to New Guinea, grows to 41cm in length...not including its tail!

Jared Diamond has worked as biologist in remote parts of New Guinea. He authored *Birds of Northern Melanesia: Speciation, Ecology and Zoogeography* (2001) with Ernst Mayr. His 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning nonfiction book *Guns, Germs and Steel* was made into a TV series.

Brian Coates' two volume *Birds of Papua New Guinea* (1985 & 1990) is more suited to the coffee-table than the field. It is filled with magnificent photographs and is encyclopaedic.

caves can be unhealthy places (they abound with lung-clogging fungus among other unsavoury micro-organisms). It's worth looking around the entrance of bat caves, however, for you will often find geckos, tree frogs and snakes there. All are waiting for the bats to pass by at dusk, when they will try to grab one or two.

New Guinea's snake fauna includes some extremely venomous species, such as the taipan and king brown snake, which are limited to the savannahs. Generally speaking the higher up the mountains you go, the fewer venomous snakes there are. The largest of New Guinea's snakes are pythons, and some are simply enormous. While they're non-venomous it's wise to give them a wide berth, as they are immensely powerful and have been known to swallow children.

Mountain Forests

The forests of New Guinea's mountains, including its high-mountain elfin woodland, are, on first acquaintance, more sedate places. There is often a distinct chill in the air at dawn, and out of the mist you might hear the pure tones of the New Guinea whippbird, or the harsher calls of any one of a dozen birds of paradise. Just why New Guinea is home to such an astonishing variety of spectacular birds has long puzzled biologists. Part of the answer lies in the lack of mammalian predators on the island. The largest – a marsupial known as the New Guinea quoll – is only kitten-sized. Thus there are no foxes, leopards or similar creatures to prey on the birds, which as a consequence have developed such astonishing colours and spectacular mating rituals as to beggar belief. Some species clear a miniature stage upon which they dance with all the precision of a prima ballerina, while others build metre-tall towers decorated with colourful fruit and flowers to attract a mate. They are living jewels, but to see them you will need to enlist the skills of an experienced New Guinean bushman; these days, such people are often older men who speak no English, for the younger generation spends less and less time in the forest.

If you can get well away from the villages, perhaps by accompanying experienced bushmen on a two- or three-day walk to distant hunting grounds, you might get to see a tree kangaroo. These creatures are relatives of Australia's rock wallabies which, five million years ago, took to the treetops. There are eight species in New Guinea, but in the central ranges you are likely to see just two. Goodfellow's tree kangaroo is a chestnut-coloured creature the size of a Labrador. It has blue eyes, two golden stripes running down its back and a tail ringed with gold. An eater of fruit, it is most commonly found in forests between 1500m and 2500m elevation. Higher up you may encounter the bear-like Doria's tree kangaroo. It is shaggy, brown and immensely powerful, and lives in family groups.

Walking through the mountain forests at night you enter another environment. The trunks of great fallen trees, which by day are invisible under a mass of leaf-litter, are lit up by luminous fungi. You can often follow the shattered trunks through the forest for tens of metres. And everywhere are the glowing green parasols of luminous mushrooms. In the trees you might spy some of New Guinea's marsupials. Among the more common are the cat-sized, coppery ringtail possum. Its name comes from its fur, which appears to be tipped with burnished copper. It's a peaceful leaf-eater, which lives in tree-hollows or even in burrows underground. If you're fortunate you'll see a triok, a black-and-white striped animal the size of a kitten. It has a long, skeletal finger (which it uses to 'fish' for wood-boring grubs), a raucous screech, and it stinks like a skunk.

Tim Flannery's books *Mammals of New Guinea* (revised 1995) and *Mammals of the South-West Pacific and Moluccan Islands* (1995) provide a species-by-species account of all mammals found in Melanesia.

British comedian Bill Oddie, most famously part of *The Goodies* TV show with Graeme Garden and Tim Brook-Taylor, is a highly respected ornithologist who has visited PNG many times. He uses the name WE Oddie for his serious ornithological writings.

There are 42 species of birds of paradise, of which 36 are unique to New Guinea. Two species are found in both New Guinea and northern Australia. The male Raggiana decorates the flag of PNG. Birds of paradise first appeared in European literature in 1522.

Alpine Regions

Where the woodland gives way to the alpine regions another world unfolds. There the tiger parrot calls from stunted umbrella plants. Rhododendron bushes and tufted orchids are covered with flowers, and any woody plants are festooned with ant plants. These relatives of the coffee-bush resemble misshapen bottles more than plants, and are honeycombed with passages that serve as home to colonies of ants. In a perfect example of the intimate ecological relationships that abound in the forest, the ant protects the plant, while the plant provides shelter for its tiny defenders.

You'll see well-worn tracks winding through the alpine tussocks. Some are made by diminutive wallabies, others by giant rats. New Guinea is home to a spectacular diversity of rats, which comprise fully one-third of the mammal fauna. These distant relatives of the laboratory rat are spectacularly varied: some look like miniature otters and cavort in mountain streams, others resemble small, tree-climbing possums, while still others look, and smell, like rats from elsewhere. Among the most spectacular are the giant woolly rats, which arguably are the largest rodents in the world. Several species inhabit the alpine zone, where they eat vegetable matter and live in burrows below the tussocks. They can grow to almost 1m long from nose to tail-tip, and have teeth that could snip a thumb off without trying, yet they are gentle creatures that never attempt to bite unless harassed.

In two of the highest mountain regions in PNG – the Star Mountains in the far west and Mt Albert Edward near Port Moresby – one of the country's most enigmatic birds can be seen. Known as McGregor's bird of paradise, it is a velvet-black bird the size of a large crow which makes a distinctive rattling sound as it flies. Under each wing is a large orange spot, and behind each eye a fleshy, flapping orange wattle of skin. It's a strangely trusting bird, making it easy to get a good look at if you are lucky enough to stumble across one. Although long classified as a bird of paradise, genetic studies have recently indicated that it is a highly specialised honeyeater!

Other Regions

New Guinea's more isolated mountain ranges and islands are biological places of their own. The Torricelli Mountains in New Guinea's Sepik region started out as an island archipelago, but now form part of the mainland. The mountains are home to a unique array of creatures, such as Tenkile, a black tree kangaroo that is one of the rarest creatures on earth. Perhaps just a few hundred survive in the forests south of Lumi, where a conservation programme is based which is trying to protect this last remnant. Even rarer is Weimanke, a relative of Goodfellow's tree kangaroo, which has a white face and golden ears; it is among the most beautiful of all mammals and only a handful survive to the east of Lumi. If you're fortunate enough to hike into the mountain forests that are home to these creatures, you'll find a misty wonderland of abrupt gullies and ridges, the summits of which are adorned with grand palms bearing bright red fruit. Here the black sicklebill dwells, its explosive call of 'blak, blak' drawing attention to this long-tailed creature, whose dark plumage glistens with the colours of the rainbow.

The islands of southeastern New Guinea hold their own wonders. Muyua Island (Woodlark), the most remote of the Trobriands group, is home to a primitive cuscus, each individual of which is – rather like a tabby cat – differently marked. Goodenough, just south of Kiriwina Island, is a huge spire of rock whose mountain forests give refuge to a unique mountain wallaby whose outer fur is black while the underfur is white. It's a long-isolated relic of Australia's Pliocene period of five million years ago, but to see it you will need to climb hard for two days to reach its habitat.

A good place to see PNG's incredible array of giant bugs and butterflies is at Parliament Haus. Under the stairs in the huge entrance hall is a couple of cabinets that display all the country's creepy crawlies.

Mark O'Shea's *A Guide to the Snakes of Papua New Guinea* (1997) and Mike McCoy's *Reptiles of the Solomon Islands* (1980, now also available on CD) are both highly useful.

Tim Flannery's *Throam Way Leg* (1999) is a tremendously enjoyable account of his adventures as a biologist in remote New Guinea. It's rich, rollicking and imbued with an appealing sense of wonder; don't land without having read it.

Australia and New Guinea have the world's only macropods and monotremes. The Agile Wallaby is found in New Guinea and Australia, but most of New Guinea's macropods are endemic tree-kangaroos that are quite distinct to Australian species of kangaroo and wallaby.

David Attenborough's BBC documentary *Attenborough in Paradise* is the definitive work on birds of paradise. You could spend years in the bush and not see some of the behaviours recorded there.

Many people in PNG can't access safe water or toilets. In the highlands Kup Women for Peace is working with Oxfam (www.oxfam.org.nz) and WaterAid (www.wateraid.org.au) to gain the intertribal cooperation necessary to allow water-pipes to cross traditional land boundaries.

The Bismarck Archipelago is home to spectacular fruit bats, including the largest of them all – the great flying fox, whose wingspan can approach 1.5m. The more petite Bismarck flying fox is the size of a pigeon and has a boldly patterned black-and-white face as if it's wearing a mask, and, unusually among mammals, the males' breasts produce milk.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomon Islands represent a whole other environment, for they are an ancient island archipelago that has never been connected to a continent. The cuscus found there only reached the islands a few thousand years ago with people. The true endemics are giant rats, monkey-faced bats, and unusual birds such as the Guadalcanal honeyeater. The giant rats are rare now, but you might be fortunate enough to spot one of the half-dozen species in dense, virgin forest. One of the largest species makes nests like those constructed by eagles, in the tallest rainforest trees. One other aspect of the Solomons fauna is a radiation of frogs that is unique. Some look like dead leaves, others like lumps of moss, while one genus, which is often found in caves, is gigantic, reaching over 20cm long.

NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Land is protected in various ways in PNG. There are few national parks; the most accessible is Varirata National Park (p83), although you may also find yourself in national park areas at Mt Wilhelm and Lake Kutubu (p172). There are also various regional parks, wildlife sanctuaries and, arguably of most interest to visitors, wildlife management areas, such as that at Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area (p160). Rennell (p279) in the Solomon Islands is World Heritage listed.

Creating 'national parks' as such has proved ineffective in Melanesia, largely because the main form of land tenure is clan-based ownership. As a result Melanesian conservationists have now turned to the development of wildlife management areas as the main tool for conserving the environment. In these areas, local landowners have agreed to set land aside for wildlife on the basis that tourism or some other form of income generation will make this worthwhile.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Threats to the environment of PNG and the Solomon Islands are, to the outsider, rather surprising in nature. The media frequently run stories on how mining and logging are the main threats. These differ in their impact, so they need to be treated separately. Mining often has a very adverse local impact, notorious examples being the destruction of the Carstensz Meadow and pollution of the Aikwa River by mining company PT Freeport Indonesia (in neighbouring West Papua) and pollution of the Ok Tedi River by Ok Tedi Mining. Overall, such activities are so limited in scope that they do not threaten the extinction of entire species. Changes in local culture following the advent of mining, however, can have larger impacts. Bulmer's fruit bat almost became extinct in the 1970s when traditional taboos broke down and shotguns became more available in the Ok Tedi area (it is reported that shotguns were given as payment for the company's exploration geologists).

Logging has a more widespread impact, but is mostly limited to lowland areas. Because New Guinea's lowlands are extensive, and log quality is generally poor when compared to forests elsewhere, logging has not as yet directly threatened species with extinction. In the Solomon Islands, logging is much more of a threat, both because more of the land area is slated to be logged and because some species depend on very large areas of virgin forest.

WILDLIFE SPOTTING

Good places to see wildlife:

- **Ambua Lodge** (PNG; p174) In comfort; in the Tari Gap, Southern Highlands.
- **Kumul Lodge** (PNG; p169) Specialist birders' lodge in Enga Province, 40 minutes from Mt Hagen.
- **Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area** (PNG; p160) For the more adventurous; in the Southern Highlands area.
- **Karawari Lodge** (PNG; p199) In pristine lowland rainforest in the foothills of East Sepik Province.
- **Walindi Plantation Resort** (PNG; p227) Walindi is famous amongst divers, but also attracts lots of birdwatchers.
- **Labu Tali Conservation Area** (PNG; p135) Huge hawksbill and leatherback turtles nest here between November and March.
- **Wau Ecology Institute** (PNG; p139) Butterflies bred here supply collectors all around the world.
- **Ohu Butterfly Habitat** (PNG; p146) This community conservation project breeds butterflies, including PNG's huge birdwing varieties.
- **Jais Aben** (PNG; p146) Easy access for divers and snorkellers to a stunning variety of marine wildlife.
- **Kau Rainforest Museum & Wildlife Area** (PNG; p147) Pioneering wildlife management area operated by the Didipa people.
- **Tep Tep Guesthouse** (PNG; p150) High up in the Finisterre Range. Near the guesthouse is a tree kangaroo conservation program.
- **Bensbach Wildlife Lodge** (PNG; p208) Situated within the Tonda Wildlife Management Area in a vast floodplain that's home to Rusa deer, crocodiles, wallabies, wild pigs, birds and giant barramundi.
- **Wilderness Lodge** (SI; p269) Crocodile-watching excursions are organised here in the southern part of Marovo Lagoon.
- **Uepi Island Resort** (SI; p267) Great for seeing giant monitor lizards and coconut crabs.
- **Maravagi Resort** (SI; p262) This is a good place to see manta rays gliding by in Sandfly passage.
- **Tetepare Island eco-lodge** (SI; p266) Famous for its turtles and turtle breeding grounds.
- **Kuila Village Stay** (SI; p263) This is a great place for seeing Savo's megapodes.

So what are the main threats to Melanesia's biodiversity? An inexorable growth in human population, especially in the Highlands, has already caused the extinction of many populations of larger animals and without doubt represents the most immediate threat. This has occurred in concert with a breakdown in traditional taboos that previously protected many species. Tree kangaroos, harpy eagles and other larger animals have declined precipitously in recent decades and many are slated for extinction unless something is done. In the Solomons this has been exacerbated by the introduction of cats, black rats and other exotics that have caused extinctions. The recent establishment of macaques in West Papua may threaten a similar wave of extinction in New Guinea.

The greatest long-term threat to Melanesia is global warming. Most of the region's biodiversity lives in the mountains, so when the earth warms these, species will be pushed off the mountain summits, a process that could destroy

The New Guinea cuscus is closely related to Australia's possums. Traditionally cuscuses are eaten and their fur is still used in making Highlands hats and *bilums*. Cuscuses are endangered – products containing their fur are confiscated by Australian customs.

RAINFORESTS & THE RISE OF ECOTOURISM

Tropical rainforests are vital to the communities of PNG and the Solomon Islands, supplying local people with clean drinking water and an array of fresh food. Forest, river and marine resources provide a substantial portion of the basis for subsistence living, and the immense biodiversity of their forests is central to the economic, cultural and social wellbeing of local communities.

International demand for cheap tropical hardwood is driving a lucrative timber trade in the rainforests of both countries, with minimal local economic benefit and damaging flow-on effects. In PNG the timber industry's power extends into the finance sector, travel and shipping and, most concerning for open, public debate on the issue, parts of the media. Much of the timber trade is illegal and run by well-organised international syndicates, fuelling corruption and in some cases violence and human-rights abuses. In the Solomon Islands a large proportion of the country's valuable forests have also been exhausted without improvement to sustainable community living or human development.

Fortunately, there are ways you can visit and enjoy the incredible natural environment of PNG and the Solomons without being part of the problem.

Increasingly, communities are looking for ways to generate income without destroying their natural heritage. This is happening in many places along the coasts, in the mountains and on the islands, by communities setting up conservation areas and ecotourism ventures. After witnessing the impact of seven years of damaging logging on their land, the Simbukanam people of Madang Province decided to put aside 1000 hectares of intact rainforest as a protected conservation area. They have since seen an increase of wildlife in their forests and have seen fish return to rivers that had been polluted by erosion, silt and chemicals from logging. The Didipa clan, also of Madang, set up the Kau Rainforest Museum and Conservation Area (p147), where visitors can learn about traditional food and bush medicine, and might see rare insects and butterflies in their natural habitat.

Many villages are not yet set up for visitors, but by staying in those listed in this guide, many of which are owned and operated by local communities, you directly support that community's (often difficult) decision to choose ecotourism over logging or oil palm plantations. You also give yourself the best chance of seeing a birdwing butterfly, a leatherback turtle, a 30cm stick insect or a 30m waterfall. And staying at locally run guesthouses is one of the best ways to meet and get to know Papua New Guineans and Solomon Islanders, away from the distractions of urban areas, in the relaxed atmosphere of the village.

You can find out more at www.acfonline.org.au/bulldozingprogress and www.ecoforestry.org.pg.

Lee Tan, Australian Conservation Foundation

20% or more of the region's biodiversity. Conserving Melanesia's biodiversity begins in your home; by using less electricity or sourcing power from renewable sources, you can do something towards curbing global warming.

It's important that initiatives such as wildlife management areas gain support, as they are Melanesia's best chance to conserve its wildlife in the long term.

Diving in Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands

Many professional underwater photographers rate diving in PNG and the Solomons as the acme of their career – evidence that both countries have a strong visual appeal below the surface. Think a resplendent tapestry of hard and soft corals, colourful fish life, dizzying drop-offs and a smorgasbord of historic WWII ship and plane wrecks, all enveloped in warm waters year-round.

Rounding off the picture are the almost complete lack of overdevelopment, the magnetic beauty of the islands and the coast, and well-established dive operations offering personalised service. There's also the thrill of exploring virtually uncharted territories aboard live-aboard dive vessels.

You don't need to be a strong diver to sample such variety. Sure, a number of sites are accessible only to advanced divers, but you'll also find a profusion of relaxing, uncomplicated dive sites.

It's not the cheapest place on earth to dive, though. However, diving in a forgotten paradise is a priceless privilege.

DIVING CONDITIONS

Average surface sea temperatures vary between 25°C and 30°C. You won't need anything more than a 3mm wetsuit. Both PNG and the Solomons are diveable year-round although conditions vary according to the season, the prevailing winds and the tides. Visibility varies a lot, from a low of 10m at certain sites to a maximum of 40m.

DIVE CENTRES

Both PNG and the Solomons boast highly professional dive shops which employ well-trained instructors. Most dive centres provide personalised

HOW MUCH?

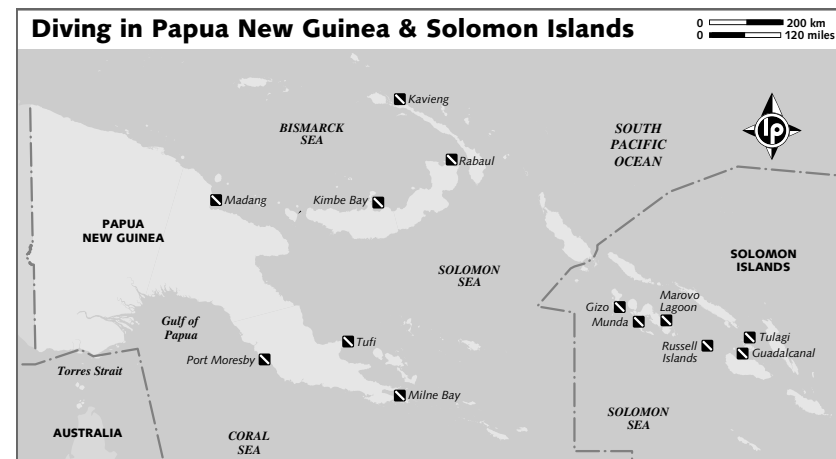
Introductory dive: US\$100
(not including equipment rental)

Single dive: US\$55-75
(not including equipment rental)

Two-tank dive: US\$120-140
(not including equipment rental)

Equipment rental: US\$20-40 daily

Open-water certification: about US\$600



attention and favour small groups. They offer a whole range of services and products such as introductory dives, night dives, exploratory dives, and certification programs. Most dive centres are PADI-, SSI- or NAUI-affiliated, three certifying agencies that are recognised internationally. Centres welcome certification from any training agency, but may ask you to do a check-out dive to assess your skills.

In the Solomons, most operators are land-based. In PNG, you can choose from live-aboard dive boats or land-based operations.

Diving in PNG or the Solomons is expensive in comparison to most destinations in Asia or the Caribbean. Generally, prices don't include equipment rental, so it's not a bad idea to bring at least part of your gear if you plan many dives. Most dive shops accept credit cards.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea offers truly world-class diving. The marine biodiversity is exceptional, incredibly healthy reefs look like an underwater Garden of Eden and the absence of crowds on the sites is a prime draw. And as on land, there's a sense of adventure to spice up the diving. Another clincher is the mind-boggling array of wrecks – of ships, aircraft and even submarines, mainly from WWII.

You will find excellent diving facilities in Port Moresby, Madang, Milne Bay, Rabaul, Kavieng, Kimbe and Tufi, among other places. Or you could get away from it all and explore remote areas aboard a live-aboard dive boat.

MADANG

Madang's outer reefs support diverse marine life. Hot favourites include **Pig Island** and nearby **Barracuda Point**, **Magic Passage** and **Pig Passage**. You'll likely come across aggregations of barracuda, trevallies and sweetlips, as well as photogenic barrel sponges and a variety of soft and hard corals. Some sites are subject to powerful currents, depending on tidal changes.

Much closer to Madang is **Planet Rock**. This perennial fave features a submerged seamount around which barracuda, tuna, snappers, jacks and whitetip reef sharks whirl.

YOUR FIRST FINSTROKES

Both PNG and the Solomons are great places to learn to dive, with year-round warm waters, glittering blue seas, experienced instructors, shallow reefs, and the guarantee to see tropical species and fantastic wrecks: all this set against idyllic backdrops.

Just about anyone in reasonably good health, including children aged eight and over, can sign up for an introductory dive (from US\$100). Dives typically take place in shallow (3m to 10m) water and last about 30 minutes (the whole session lasts about three hours). Divers are escorted by a divemaster.

If you enjoy your introductory dive, you might want to enrol in an Open Water course. Expect it to last about four days, including a few classroom lectures and open-water training. Once you're certified, your C-card is valid permanently and recognised all over the world – it's like a driving licence.

In PNG, the greatest variety of instruction is found around the Port Moresby area, where many of the expats get certified. In the Solomons, Guadalcanal, Munda, Marovo Lagoon and Gizo are the best places to learn to dive.

One proviso: take note that it's probably more economical to get initial certification at home prior to coming to PNG or the Solomons as instruction here is not cheap.

The dive sites presented are only a sample of the dozens available. For more information about diving in PNG, see Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkelling Papua New Guinea*. It details 115 dive sites, with full-colour photos throughout.

ALL ABOARD!

For hardcore divers, there are live-aboard dive boats operating out of various locations in PNG and the Solomons to access remote locations. They usually schedule seven- to 14-day cruises. Check out their websites for itineraries. Some boats and their base ports:

Barbarian II (www.niuginidiving.com) Lae, Morobe.

Bilikiki & Spirit of Solomon (www.bilikiki.com) Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Chertan (www.chertan.com) Alotau, Milne Bay.

FeBrina (www.febrina.com) Walindi, New Britain.

Golden Dawn (www.mvgoldendawn.com) Port Moresby.

Marlin 1 (www.marlin1charters.com.au) Alotau, Milne Bay.

Moonlighting (www.blueseacharters.com) Madang.

Spirit of Niugini (www.spiritofniugini.com) Milne Bay.

Star Dancer (www.peterhughes.com) Kimbe, New Britain.

Telita (www.telitadive.com) Alotau, Milne Bay.

To the north, just off Wongat Island, the tugboat **Henry Leith** sits upright in 20m and makes for an easy dive, while the coral-encrusted **B25 Mitchell** aircraft lies in less than 15m.

See p142 for dive centres in Madang.

PORT MORESBY & AROUND

Port Moresby has probably the best diving of any capital city in the world, with a wide variety of dive sites easily accessible from the Dive Centre (p76) based on Loloata Island (p90). A few minutes' boat ride from your bungalow is a WWII aircraft wreck, the **Boston A20 Havoc**, resting in 18m on a silty bottom. Further south is another prime wreck, the 65m-long **Pacific Gas**, formerly a liquid-gas carrier, which was scuttled in 1986 for recreational diving. Depth ranges from 14m at the bow to 43m at the propeller.

More classic dives can be found around Horseshoe Reef, especially the **End Bommie**, famous for its fish life and healthy corals. Another wonderful site (further west) is **Suzie's Bommie**, with a big pinnacle rising from the sandy floor to about 12m below the surface – an oasis of life.

Loloata is also noted for its superb muck-diving potential. A few finstrokes from your bungalow, **Loloata Island Jetty** features lots of tiny critters and bizarre fish, from mantis shrimp to dwarf lionfish.

Nothing's perfect, though. One weak point is visibility, which sometimes doesn't exceed 10m.

Other highly regarded sites in the area:

Big Drop An impressive drop-off, with marauding sharks and rays.

Nadine's Passage Huge fields of soft corals and spectacular walls.

Pai A 25m-long fishing trawler, with lots of resident species.

TUFI

Tufi (p107) is pure bliss if you're looking for variety. Fancy muck diving? Try **Tufi Wharf**, which is just on your doorstep. In the mood for wreck dives? The scattered remains of two PT boats can be seen at 40m directly down the Tufi Wharf. Too gentle for you? Make a beeline for the **S'Jacob**, a Dutch merchant ship that was sunk during a Japanese air raid during WWII; this ship is for experienced divers only (she lies in 60m). And there are fabulous offshore reefs, including **Cyclone Reef**, **Veale Reef**, **Mulloway** and **Stewart Reef**.

See p108 for the dive centre in Tufi.

There's a decompression chamber for divers in Honiara and in Port Moresby. DAN (Divers Alert Network; www.danseap.org) provides insurance and emergency evacuation for travelling divers.

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

Growing weary of coral reefs, sharks and all the big stuff? Well, it's time to muck dive. This simply means that you concentrate on tiny, exotic and weird-looking critters such as ghost pipefish, pygmy seahorses, manta shrimps, banded snake eels, nudibranchs, flatworms, leaf fish and sand-dwelling species, to name but a few. They are usually found in places which, at first sight, are devoid of interest to divers; sheltered bays, poorly developed reefs, sea grass beds, mangroves, wharves, and wrecks close to the shore. Muck diving is also easier (divers avoid waves and currents) and shallower, allowing longer bottom time – all the better for beginners.

PNG is a muck-diving mecca, especially the Milne Bay area (p111), Tufi (p107) and Loloata Island (p90). All you need is a keen eye...or a good dive instructor to show you the little aliens.

MILNE BAY

Muck diving, great sheer walls, coral seamounts and lots of pelagic action: it's impossible to get bored in Milne Bay (p111). **Nuakata Island** is a prime diving area, with lots of pristine reefs and abundant fish life. Here you're almost sure to see schools of fish in shallow waters, along with marauding pelagic such as grey sharks, tuna and Spanish mackerel. **Boirama Reef**, in the passage between Nuakata Island and Boirama Island, also attracts large fish.

Also accessible on a day trip from Tawali is the **north coast** of the mainland. Get a buzz by drifting along steep walls and keeping your eyes peeled for sharks and other biggies.

A relatively newly opened dive area, **Duchess Island**, a 45-minute boat ride to the north from the Tawali dive centre, boasts numerous untouched sites. Expect coral pinnacles ablaze with fish life, elaborate soft corals and regular sightings of sharks.

Take note that visibility in Milne Bay is highly variable, and currents might be tricky. Best seasons are from September through January and April through June.

Other renowned dive sites:

China Strait A high-voltage drift dive through the strait.

Observation Point An excellent muck dive on a sandy slope.

P38 Lightning Aircraft Wreck A plane wreck in good shape, lying in 27m on the northern side of Basilaki Island.

Samarai Island Superb 'wharf dive'; the structures of a wharf are wreathed with corals.

See p114 for the dive centre in Milne Bay.

RABAUL

Rabaul (p220) has gained a glowing reputation as one of PNG's finest areas for wreck dives, with a collection of shipwrecks lying in Rabaul Harbour. One of the most easily accessible wrecks is the **Manko Maru**, which was sunk in 1943. She sits upright in 35m and the cargo hull can be penetrated. The **Italy Maru** is slightly shallower, with the bow and stern in 33m. Sadly, she's heavily silted and in fairly bad shape. Outside Rabaul Harbour, be sure to bookmark the coral-encased **George's Wreck**, the bow of which rests up on a steep slope in 15m, with the stern deck in about 55m, and the **Zero Fighter**, off a beach to the west of Kokopo. She sits at 27m, upright and in pretty good shape.

Once you've had your fill of wrecks, you might want to explore some good old reefs along the north coast of the Gazelle Peninsula. One of our favourites is **Reimers Reef**: its contoured topography is a feast for the eyes, with overhangs, swimthroughs and canyons; fish life is astoundingly dense and there's a fabulous mixture of hard and soft corals. Another stunner is **Tom, Dick and Harry Reefs**, a string of seamounts that plummet to 50m.

While it's fine to dive soon after flying, it's important to remember that your last dive should be completed at least 12 hours (some experts advise 24 hours) before your flight, to minimise the risk of residual nitrogen in the blood that can cause decompression injury.

Other regularly visited dive sites:

East Point The reefs are wreathed with luxuriant corals in every colour of the rainbow.

Lighthouse Huge coral bommies on the southwest side of Ura Island.

Submarine Base A scenic drop-off at Cape Tawui, easily accessed from the beach.

See p220 for some dive centres in Rabaul.

KIMBE BAY

Flying into Hoskins from Port Moresby or Rabaul you will soon discover what sensational underwater world awaits you in Kimbe Bay (p226). Gaze through the windows; see those coral patches scattered like confetti on the inky-blue waters? They are towering seamounts. Crowned with coral formations climbing out from the continental shelf, they attract an amazing array of marine life – more than 350 types of hard coral and 860 species of fish, from cute pygmy horses to massive hammerhead sharks, vie for your attention. The tapestry of colours and textures is equally fascinating; soft and hard corals, seafans the size of a fridge, giant sea whips and huge barrel and elephant ear sponges compete for every inch of space on the reef.

In the middle of the bay, there's a reef chain running roughly north to south. **Susan's Reef**, **Venessa's Reef**, **Kirsty Jaines Reef** and **Christine's Reef** all feature splendid seascapes, with healthy seafans, sponges and coral gardens. To the west, **Restorf Island** is usually used as a second dive. Further north, you'll dive photogenic seamounts, including **Joels**, **South Emma**, **Inglis Shoal** and **Anne Sophie's Reef**. Wreck diving is not a strong point in Kimbe Bay but a sunken **Zero Fighter** adds a bit of variety, to the north of the bay, close to the shore.

It's not perfect, though. Strong currents and variable visibility (we experienced less than 10m) can cause disappointment. Lengthy boat rides to most sites (45 minutes on average) are another drawback.

See p226 for information on the dive centre in Kimbe Bay.

KAVIENG

Kavieng (p229) used to be dubbed 'the pelagic capital of the country' but sadly it's no longer the case – shark finning has taken its toll and the population of sharks has been drastically reduced. However, the large reef system that stretches between Kavieng and New Hanover offer thrilling dives, especially in the passages. Just outside Kavieng, **Echuca Patch** features a large ridge rising from 45m to 12m. A Korean fishing boat, the **Der Yang**, lies on its starboard side close to Echuca Patch, in about 30m. In the same area, **Blowholes** is very atmospheric, with lots of swimthroughs and fish life.

To the south, **Albatros Passage**, **Kabin Reef**, **Peter's Patch** and **Steffen Strait** won't disappoint. Lots of current means lots of fish life; rays, turtles, barracuda, tuna, jacks and grey sharks can be encountered.

If you're after wrecks, rest easy; there are a few sunken planes in Kavieng harbour, as well as the **B25 Aircraft Wreck** near Albatros Passage.

See p229 for the dive centres in Kavieng.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Let's get one question out of the way: what was the impact of the tsunami that hit the Gizo area in 2007 on the marine ecosystem? Well, large tracts of reefs were battered and a smattering of iconic sites did lose much of their appeal, but overall the level of destruction was relatively low. The rest of the country was not affected.

In PNG, be sure to get a copy of *Niugini Blue* (www.niuginiblue.com), Papua New Guinea's watersports magazine, launched in 2007. It has articles on diving in PNG.

DIVING WITH A CONSCIENCE

Please consider the following tips when diving to help preserve the ecology and beauty of reefs:

- Encourage dive operators in their efforts to establish permanent moorings at appropriate dive sites.
- Practice and maintain proper buoyancy control.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals and avoid touching living marine organisms with your body or equipment
- Take great care in underwater caves, as your air bubbles can damage fragile organisms.
- Take home all your trash, and any litter you may find as well.
- Never stand on corals, even if they look solid and robust.
- Do not buy or collect seashells, and do not buy any turtleshell products.
- Dive with a local dive operator that follows high safety, ethical and professional standards.

In many respects diving in the Solomons is similar to diving in PNG. One main difference is that most dive operations are land-based, whereas PNG is famous for its excellent live-aboard dive fleet. But what really sets the Solomons apart is a sense of 'forgotten paradise' that can't be found anywhere else. PNG may be a better established dive destination, but diving connoisseurs are finding that the Solomons offer great experiences too.

GUADALCANAL

Wrecks galore! With such turbulent history, it's no surprise that Guadalcanal has number of world-class sunken WWII vessels lying close to the shore. Most sites can be reached by car from Honiara.

Rejoicing begins with **Bonegi I & II**, about 12km west of Honiara. Bonegi I, a giant-sized Japanese merchant transport ship, also known as the *Hirokawa Maru*, lies in 3m of water descending to 55m, just a few finstrokes offshore. This 172m ship features just about everything a wreck diver hopes for: great coral growth, lots of atmosphere, excellent fish life, safe penetration, artefacts and a manageable diving range.

About 500m further west, the upper works of Bonegi II, also known as *Kinugawa Maru*, break the surface, a towel's throw from the beach. Its stern reaches down to 27m.

Then comes **Ruanui**, also known as Bonegi III, about 4.5km west from Bonegi II, which features another 140m Japanese transport ship, the *Kyushu Maru*. Average depth ranges from 6m to 45m. Behind the *Kyushu Maru* lie two other wrecks, including the humongous **Azumasen Maru**, said to be the most atmospheric wrecks off Guadalcanal, but they lie deep (beyond 40m). Despite its proximity to the shore, access can be tricky if the sea is choppy (this author got wicked coral cuts when trying to access the site).

At Ndoma, don't miss the wreck of the **US B-17 Flying Fortress bomber** which lies 100m offshore in less than 18m – perfect for novices.

At Veuru, about 42km from Honiara, the Japanese I-class **submarine I-23** is 350m from the shore on a nearby reef, from 5m to 30m. It has largely collapsed but the ballast tanks are still clearly visible and it's a haven for small fish.

Also on the menu, east of Honiara:

John Penn This large US-troop ship was bombed and sunk about 4km offshore, east of Honiara. For experienced divers only. Boat access.

Searpens Not far from the *John Penn*, but closer to the shore, this big ship lies upside down. Average depth is from 20m to 40m. Boat access.

Seminole A US tugboat that lies east of the *John Penn* in 40m, on a sandy bottom. Low visibility due to runoff but lots of fish life.

See p253 for dive centres in Honiara.

TULAGI

There are superb sunken WWII shipwrecks in the vicinity of Tulagi Harbour, including the monster-sized **USS Kanawha**, a 150m-long oil tanker which sits upright, and the **USS Aaron Ward**, a 106m-long US Navy destroyer that's noted for its extensive arsenal of big guns. The catch? They lie very deep (the *Kanawha* lies in 45m and the *Aaron Ward* in 65m) and are accessible to experienced divers only. OK, you want something less intimidating... ask for the **Moa**, a New Zealand minesweeper which rests in less than 40m, or the **Japanese seaplanes**, in less than 30m. Visibility is not the strong point here; expect 10m to 15m on average.

There are also awesome reef dives, such as **Twin Tunnels**, which features two chimneys (in fact two lava tubes) that start on the top of a reef in about 12m and descend to a cavern and exit on the reef wall at about 35m. Strong currents usually mean pelagic action. Another signature dive, **Sandfly Passage** is an exhilarating wall-drift dive – you'll feel as though you're gliding, accompanied by a procession of fish. And there's **Manta Passage**, near Maravagi, one of the Solomons' secret highlights, with regular sightings of huge manta rays – fabulous!

See p262 for the dive centre in Tulagi.

RUSSELL ISLANDS

Shhh... these are the Solomons' best-kept secret. The Russell Islands (p263) have absolutely pristine sites, a dramatic topography and stellar visibility due to regular currents. The only way to dive this sensational world is to sign up for a cruise with the MV *Bilikiki* or the MV *Spirit of Solomon* (www.bilikiki.com). Both live-aboards schedule cruises to the Russells from Honiara.

MUNDA

Munda (p264) offers a good balance of wreck and reef dives. A 25-minute boat ride from Munda, **Shark Point** is a sloping reef that seldom fails to produce good sightings of grey reef sharks, silvertips, devil rays, snappers, batfish and turtles, but you'll have to go very deep (around 50m) to see the marauding sharks. Nearby **Top Shelf** features top-notch coral gardens and varied fish life. In the same area, **Susu Hite** is a relaxing dive on a lively reef in less than 20m – perfect for novices. A few finstrokes from Susu Hite, **The Pinnacle** refers to a massive bommie which acts as a magnet for manta rays and grey sharks.

FRANCK BOULAY'S UNDERWATER PARADISE

A French-Australian citizen and a dive instructor based in the Solomons since 1993, Franck Boulay has dived all over the archipelago and runs a dive shop in Honiara. 'I have never gotten bored in almost 15 years of diving here. What sets the Solomons apart is the unique combination of accessible wrecks and virgin reefs, with the added lures of the warmest waters in the world and a sensational, preserved ecosystem.' His favourite wrecks? 'The *USS Aaron Ward*, for its photogenic perspective, and the *Azumasen*, for the atmosphere and the scenery.' He also raves about the Nggelas: 'There's a site where sightings of big manta rays are almost guaranteed.' Another suggestion, Monsieur Boulay? 'Be sure to tell your readers that it's now perfectly safe here in the Solomons and sites are uncrowded'. Duly noted.

If you're a certified diver, bring your C-card and your dive logbook.

The typical dive plan consists of swimming around the pinnacle. Sadly, most corals at this site were damaged during the tsunami in 2007.

Seasoned divers shouldn't miss the opportunity to sample the **Cave of the Kastom Shark**. Descend vertically through a chimney down to 13m, follow a tunnel and exit at about 25m into the cobalt open water.

Wreck fans will be spoiled here too by the following sites:

Casi Maru A Japanese boat, in less than 20m. Visibility is often very reduced due to silt after heavy rains (logging!).

Corsair A WWII US fighter that rests undamaged close to the shore on a sandy bottom, in about 50m.

SBD Douglas Dauntless Bomber This US plane lies on a sandy bottom in 12m in Rendova Harbour. It's fun to sit in the intact cockpit. It's usually handled as a third dive.

See p264 for the dive centre in Munda.

NORTH MAROVO LAGOON

This is Uepi Island Resort territory. And heaven on earth for a diver. The Kellys, who run the resort and the in-house dive shop, have done a wonderful job in promoting this exceptional dive area, which has a vibrant assemblage of dramatic walls (on the ocean side), exhilarating passages (especially Charapoana Passage, just on the resort's doorstep) and uncomplicated reef dives, all within close reach of the resort. They also offer daytrips to further dive sites, near Seghe. It's also a good place to learn to dive.

A few favourites:

Bapita Sinkhole, Penguin Reef, Taiyo Fishing Boat Wreck, Lockheed P38 wreck & Dauntless Dive-Bomber Aircraft wreck Four dives that are combined in a not-to-be-missed full-day excursion, near Seghe. The Sinkhole features a vertical shaft that exits at 28m into the deep blue. Very scenic. The P38 is just off Seghe airstrip and is in good condition. Nearby is the Dauntless SPDA22, in only 10m.

BOTCH Stands for 'Bottom of The Channel'. Drift dive on the sandy bottom of Charapoana Passage, just off the dive shop.

Deku Dekaru Three caves that are carved into the reef. A photographer's delight, with much twisting and turning and light play in the caves. Maximum depth is 6m.

Elbow Caves A network of gutters are carved into the reef wall. Sunbeams play through skylights in the caves – magical.

Elbow Point On the outer reef. A magnificent drop-off, lavishly draped with seafans. Good chances to spot pelagics.

Manga Passage A deep-water passage, about 30 minutes by boat north of the resort. Fantastic coral walls.

North Log & South Log Easy dives on the outer reef. Feature a series of overhangs.

Point to Point You navigate across Charapoana Passage, from Charapoana Point to Uepi Point, amid schooling reef species and pelagics. For seasoned divers only.

Uepi Point An iconic dive site, on the ocean side of the passage. Sizzles with electric fish action – sharks, jacks, barracuda, trevallies – with the added lure of an exceptional backdrop of corals, seafans and sponges.

See p267 for the dive centre in North Marovo Lagoon.

SOUTH MAROVO LAGOON

Uepi, watch your back! With the launching of a dive centre in Peava village in 2007, the underwater wonders of the southern tip of Marovo are now on the map in diving circles. South Marovo rewards divers with a host of very scenic sites off a cluster of three islands – Kicha, Mbulo and Male Male Islands – all accessible by a 15- to 30-minute boat ride from Peava.

We can't use enough superlatives about **Toana**, off Mbulo Island. What a scenic drop-off! Angelfish, butterfly fish, jacks, cuttlefish, and many other

reef species will keep you entertained while you cruise along the drop-off dripping with luscious corals and seafans. Another highlight is the dramatic underwater terrain, with lots of cavelets and undercuts. Off Kicha Island (the furthest of the lot), **End of the World, Fantastic Fans** and **Picnic** are well worth the 30-minute boat ride. Here again, expect a constant parade of reef tropicals, dramatic drop-offs and scenic ridges. Fantastic Fans says it all: the drop-offs are embellished with seafans the size of an Austin Rover.

Off Male Male Island, you'll strike gold at **Golden Dawn**, which features undulating ridges dripping with golden soft corals, and **Male Male North**, an excellent shallow dive with lots of tiny critters. Surface intervals are usually spent picnicking on one of the islands.

Too good to be true? Well, yes, there are sometimes big swells between the mainland and the three islands, which may make access to the sites tricky. Luckily, there are alternative sites along Nggatokae's shoreline, up to Dovelei Island to the north.

See p267 for the dive centre in South Marovo Lagoon.

GIZO

Unspoiled reefs plus dense marine life plus spectacular wrecks equals memorable dive sites for all levels. On the minus side, the 2007 tsunami did wreak havoc on a few charismatic sites (particularly **Grand Central Station**, north of Gizo, and **Hotspot**, east of Gizo, where huge coral fields were battered), but overall it's not too bad in other places. The local dive centre continues to offer Grand Central Station and Hotspot for their amazing fish life (including sharks), but we found it depressing to hover over coral rubble.

Luckily, the **Toa Maru** is still in good shape. The best wreck dive around, this well-preserved 140m Japanese freighter lies a mere 15 minutes away north of Gizo. Penetration of the hull is possible, and there's still crockery, sake bottles, ammunition, gas masks, medical supplies, anti-aircraft guns, a motorcycle and two small tanks. Lying on the starboard side, the vessel is only 100m from shore and resting from about 18m down at her bow to around 37m at her stern.

Just off Fatboys (p270), **Kennedy Island** is a lovely spot to learn to dive, often with a parade of reef fish to observe on the sprawling reef. There's also a steep wall that will keep advanced divers happy. Nearby **One Tree Island** is another must-see dive, with lots of fish action. In the same area, **Naru Gap, Inside Naru** and **Gap Out** have coral growths (fairly well preserved despite some damage caused by the 2007 tsunami), copious tropical fish and large pelagic creatures. **Yellow Corner**, on the outer reef south of Naru Island, will make your spine tingle, with a parade of biggies and a profusion of yellow-tinged soft corals which enhance the visual appeal of the site.

Rounding out Gizo, we must mention a small **Hellcat** lying on a sandy floor in 9m, to the southeast of Kennedy Island. It's a fun dive that's usually combined with **Secret Spot**, a first-class dive site famous for its schooling fish and atmospheric seascape, with a mix of sandy valleys and a sheer wall.

See p271 for the dive centre in Gizo.

Go to www.pngdive.com for more information on diving in PNG.

In Gizo, the local dive centre offers two-tank dives. You spend your surface interval at Fatboys or picnicking on an idyllic island.

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Food & Drink

While Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are still not primary destinations for the gourmet traveller, the culinary scene has improved markedly in recent years. While wonderful seafood can be found on the coasts and islands, the rest of the traditional diet consists largely of bland, starchy vegetables that become tedious. Which bland vegetable is served depends where you are. In the Highlands, probably it will be *kaukau* (sweet potato), on the islands, it's taro or yam. In some places you might be offered all three. With little to inspire them, locals generally take a 'food for fuel' attitude to eating, though this changes for celebrations so if you get an invite, don't turn it down.

There are no restaurants dedicated to traditional food and you really need to get into a village (or find a local friend in the city) to find it. But in the bigger towns, travellers can expect to eat pretty well in hotels and resorts, and in the growing number of independent restaurants, which are mostly Asian. These Asian restaurants are a good bet for vegetarians, and there's always plenty of vegetables in the villages. However, in some places refusing food can be insulting, so vegetarians at *mumus* (pig feasts) should sensitively suggest *before* the meal arrives that they don't dig pig. Others might find the prospect of a slab of barely cooked blubbery pig-meat pretty hard to stomach even if they're not vegetarian – discretion can be the better part of valour. Remember two things: first, in traditional Melanesian society it is good manners for the host to wait until everyone else is eating before he or she eats (so you can't just sit on your hands and say you're not hungry), and second, in Melanesia good manners are everything!

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

The staple food is *saksak* (sago) in the Sepik and other swampy areas of PNG. *Saksak* is basically pure starch, but where it is too swampy to grow anything else, it is vital. On the Sepik, dry *saksak* is usually mixed with water and fried into a rubbery pancake, but it can also be boiled into a gluey porridge. Mixed with grated coconut it becomes quite palatable, but by itself it is almost tasteless. To make *saksak*, men cut down a sago palm, cut away the bark and pound out the pith, leaving a fibrous sawdust. Women then knead the pith in a bark funnel, draining water through the pith to dissolve the starch. The starch-laden water is collected (often in an old canoe) and the starch settles in an orange, glutinous mass at the bottom. In the Highlands the staple is *kaukau* (sweet potato). In taste, it is virtually indistinguishable from staples elsewhere in the region, which include taro, yams and cooking bananas. The situation is sometimes a little more inspiring along the coast because there is excellent seafood and the cooking makes heavier use of coconut and, increasingly, spices like ginger. *Haibica* is a stringy spinach-like vegetable often served as side dish. It has a sharp, slightly bitter flavour. For recipes that reflect modern PNG cooking (such as chicken taro bake and yam patties), check out www.michie.net/png/info/recipe1.html.

Because of the limited animal life, protein deficiency has traditionally been a problem. In many regions, potential game (reptiles, birds, rodents and small marsupials) is scarce but hunting is still important. Apart from the fresh fish available on the coast and some rivers, pigs are the main source of meat protein, although they are generally saved for feasts (p66). Chicken (*kakaruk*) is also quite popular.

You'll see plenty of coconut husks lying around, particularly in the island provinces of PNG and in the Solomons. The milk from a green coconut is drunk or used in cooking (such as in a *mumu*, p66), and the flesh is also used in preparing food.

A legacy of WWII is the prevalence and popularity of canned meat and fish. Locals prefer tinned fish (*tinpis*) to fresh fish, and whole supermarket aisles are devoted to bully beef (*buli*). Rice (*rais*) is eaten with virtually every meal. Although local cuisine seems monotonous and unimaginative, produce available at markets is varied and excellent. You'll see capsicums, tomatoes, peanuts, avocados and spectacular fresh tropical fruit. In the Highlands you can sometimes get strawberries, cauliflower and broccoli.

DRINKS

Most of the coffee grown in the PNG Highlands is Arabica and it's excellent. Elimbari is grown by smallholders in the Chuave region of Simbu Province and is the best coffee in PNG. Many locals drink Nescafé. In coastal areas of PNG and throughout the Solomons young coconuts are a common source of liquid refreshment.

South Pacific Brewery in PNG produces three very good beers. SP Lager is the everyday drink and comes in a short brown bottle known as a 'brownie'. The more expensive version is South Pacific Export Lager, and comes in a clear bottle or white can. The 'trendy' new brew is Niugini Ice which, at 5.2% alcohol, packs a punch.

Australian wine and spirits are available in hotels and restaurants, though they are not cheap – you'll pay upwards of K45 for cheap and cheerful Aussie red.

The local brew in the Solomons is Solbrew, which is a lager beer; Solbrew SB is stronger.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Where you eat will depend on your budget, your sense of adventure and the size of the place you're in. In towns and cities the ubiquitous *kai* bar will probably lure you in for a snack at least once. *Kai* bars look and taste like Australian milk bars of the late 1970s; that is, they sell meat pies (K2 to K3), sausage rolls (K2), deep-fried dough balls (K0.50) and, probably your best bet, pre-prepared meals of indeterminable Asian origin (about K6). We haven't listed many *kai* bars – just look for people milling around.

The number and quality standards of restaurants is rising, though in both PNG and the Solomons they're found only in larger centres and resorts. Chinese restaurants predominate, ranging from cheap and cheerful places with meals for about K10 to more elaborate affairs where you can spend upwards of K50. There is also the odd Japanese, Korean or Thai place in Port Moresby where meals cost about K45 to K70. Hotels and resorts all have fairly good restaurants, with prices reflecting the quality of the establishment; expect to pay between K35 and K80 per meal. Tipping is not necessary, but most restaurants add 10% VAT to the bill.

Hours can vary considerably, but in general restaurants open for lunch from about 11.30am to 2.30pm and dinner from 6pm or 7pm until 10pm, or whenever the last diner leaves. Where the price of a meal is listed in this book, we are referring to a main dish plus one other course (usually a salad or dessert) and a drink.

In villages you'll eat whatever the villagers eat and pay between K15 and K30. If you're lucky enough to be around for a *mumu* (traditional underground oven) the price will probably rise a bit to cover the cost of meat.

The yam is sacred in the Trobriand Islands but a growing population and limited food source has seen some locals dismiss their local yams in favour of the more flavoursome and plentiful African yam.

Papua New Guineans were banned from consuming alcohol until 1963. Until that time drinking was a whites-only activity. Since then Papua New Guineans have taken to beer drinking with relish.

PNG is the land of the biscuit. Kudu cracker is both a brand and the term for the large, dry biscuits available from trade stores and supermarkets. A good Kudu cracker is so tough you could send it home as a postcard.

Captain John Moresby must have enjoyed the meal he ate when he landed on Samarai Island in 1873, because he promptly named it Dinner Island. Perhaps not wanting to encourage the cannibals nearby, the name was changed to Samarai.

There are some local dishes that might have you hesitating. In the Sepik region frogs are traditionally served up next to mice, spider or snake. Skewered sago grubs, roasted flying fox and python soup are considered good sources of protein.

TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS

- **Asia Aromas** (Port Moresby; p80) The Chinese and Thai food is a perennial favourite and you're likely to be dining with a who's who of PNG's movers and shakers. Apart from great food, there's a friendly atmosphere, good service and fair prices.
- **Eden Restaurant** (Madang; p144) The authentic seafood laksa will make you curl your toes and cry with pleasure. Lunchtime meals are a steal at K12, and dinner courses are ample enough to share with a friend or two.
- **Club Havanah** (Honiara; p256) George, the French chef in this high-class spot in the Honiara Hotel, does first-class French cuisine with a creative islander bent. Excellent fish and meat dishes, and wicked desserts.
- **Capitana Restaurant** (Honiara; p256) The restaurant at Honiara's top-end Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel is renowned for terrific Japanese cuisine and fantastic tuna sashimi.
- **Auong Guesthouse** (Muschu Island, Wewak; p184) Perhaps the best home-cooked reef fish in PNG. You catch the fish and owner George will grill it on an open fire under the stars on a palm-fringed beach.

Self-catering is the cheapest way to eat, and markets are the best and most interesting place to find fresh produce. Outside towns you can buy other ingredients from the small trade stores found in almost every village. The range will probably be limited to rice, instant noodles, tinned fish, bully beef, salt, beef crackers (aka Kundu crackers) and, if you're lucky, SP Lager. Anything more you'll need to take with you. However, most large towns have a good-sized supermarket with a wide range of foods.

Formal drinking venues consist of hotels and resort bars, restaurants and the occasional nightclub. Otherwise, you could do worse than kicking back in a village with beer, a beach and a tropical sunset. Beer outside main towns is warm due to the lack of refrigeration – after a few mouthfuls this doesn't seem to matter.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

Food plays a vital role in many PNG and Solomon Island cultures. For some, pigs are the traditional measure of wealth and even today a pig is preferred to cash. A man's status is often measured by his skills as a gardener: how many yams he produces and how large they are, for example.

The most famous local cooking style is the *mumu*, a traditional underground oven in which fire-heated stones are placed in the bottom, meat and vegetables wrapped in banana leaves are placed on top, and then the pit is sealed with more heated stones, branches and leaves and left to steam. For feasts, the pits may be hundreds of metres long, and filled with hundreds of whole pigs. Such a feast might be held to celebrate the settlement of a tribal conflict.

Most people eat three times a day and meals are often big, especially in rural areas; don't be surprised if your trekking guide eats two or three times as much as you. Most people can't afford restaurants and will eat at home. They probably won't talk too much until the meal is finished, and women will often eat separately to men.

For travellers, it's best not to head out to dinner too late, especially if you're after a cheap feed. *Kai* bars close by 7pm.

Fast-food outlets are becoming common. Every town seems to have a Big Rooster these days.

Ethnographer Miriam Kahn's book *Always Hungry, Never Greedy: Food and the Expression of Gender in a Melanesian Society* (1996) shows how the Wamira people use food to objectify emotions, balance relationships and control desires.

Food Rules: Hunting, Sharing, and Tabooing Game in Papua New Guinea (2000) by Harriet Whitehead is an anthropological look at the role of food in traditional PNG society.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Useful Phrases

Most restaurants have menus in English only, but in smaller places these phrases might be handy:

Is the restaurant open/closed? *Haus kaikai i op/pas?*

Do you have an English menu? *Yu got menyu long Tok Inglls?*

Does this dish have meat? *I gat abus long dispela kaikai?*

I don't eat beef/pork/chicken/ dairy products *Mi tambu long bulmakau/pik/kakaruk/ susu samting*

I'd like... *Mi laikim...*

The bill, please *Mi laik peim kaikai bilong mi*

I enjoyed the meal *Mi laikim tumas dispela kaikai*

Food Glossary

<i>wiski</i>	alcohol
<i>bulmakau</i>	beef
<i>bia</i>	beer
<i>kopi i blak/ret</i>	black coffee
<i>kapiak</i>	breadfruit
<i>kakaruk</i>	chicken
<i>kulau/kokonas</i>	coconut, green/ripe
<i>kuka</i>	crab
<i>kindam</i>	crayfish
<i>kiau</i>	egg
<i>pis</i>	fish
<i>kaikai</i>	food
<i>prai/praiim</i>	fry/to fry
<i>kawawar</i>	ginger
<i>aiskrim</i>	ice cream
<i>abus</i>	meat
<i>susu</i>	milk
<i>karuka/marita</i>	pandanus
<i>popo</i>	pawpaw (papaya)
<i>pik</i>	pig/pork
<i>liklik kindam</i>	prawn
<i>rais</i>	rice
<i>loli wara</i>	soft drink
<i>mumu/mumuim</i>	steam/to steam
<i>kaukau</i>	sweet potato
<i>redim kaikai</i>	to prepare a meal
<i>praiim</i>	to roast
<i>sayor/kumu/kumis</i>	vegetables
<i>wara</i>	water
<i>kopi wantaim susu</i>	white coffee

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