

Vanuatu

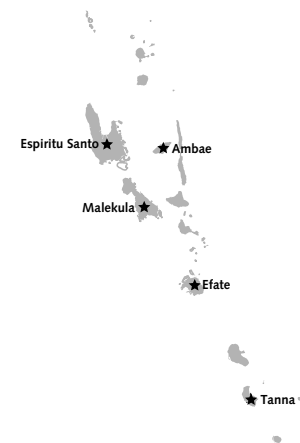
You're heading to Vanuatu? Fantastic. You're going to love it. But it's not just a decadent escape with balmy breezes and gourmet food. It's also home to several best-in-the-world experiences that very few people know about: a luxury liner, like the *Titanic*, shipwrecked in clear diveable water; the world's most accessible active volcano; a giant banyan tree the size of a soccer field; pounding, cascading waterfalls; extraordinary cultural ceremonies and dances; primitive villages where you can witness an ancient living culture; and picture-perfect beaches where there's nobody but you and your snorkel gear – it's also a snorkellers' and divers' Mecca.

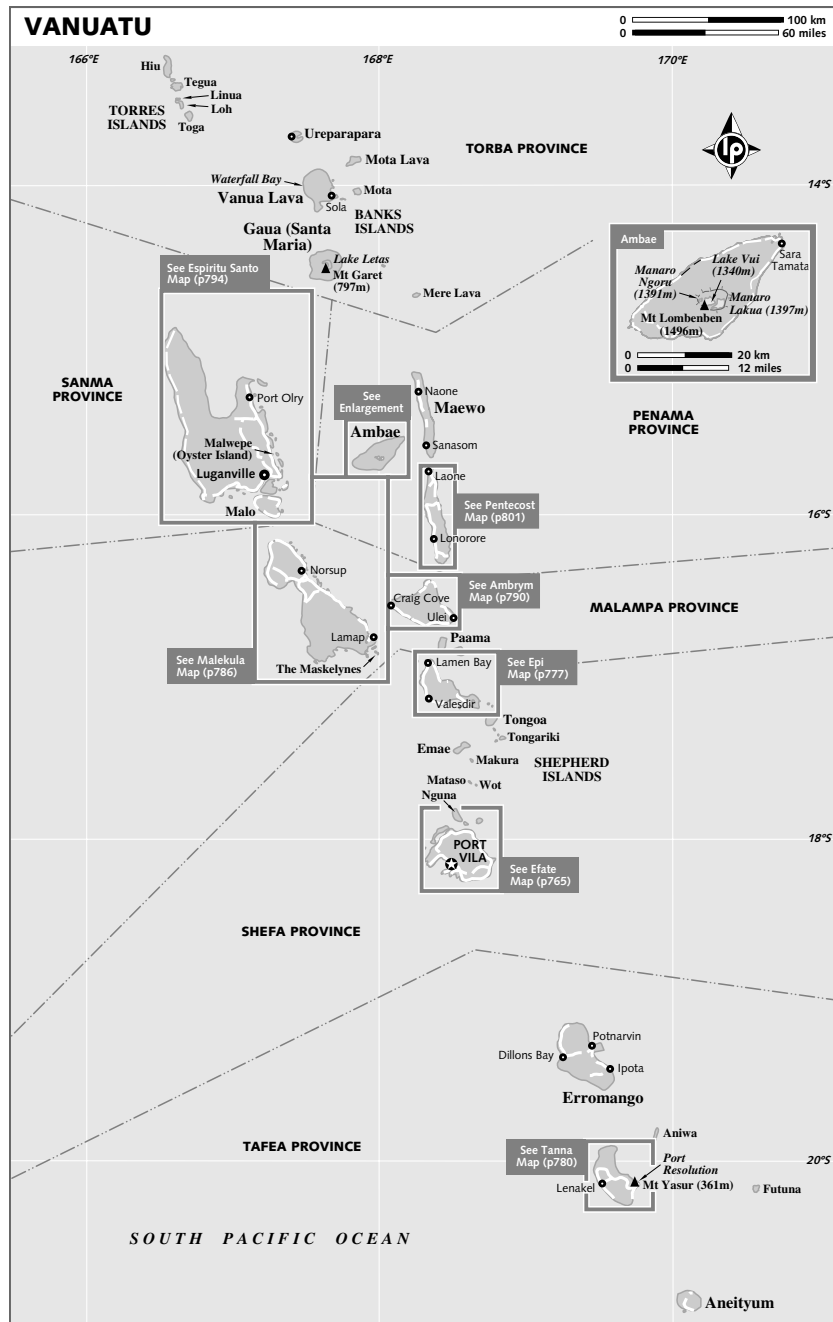
Port Vila, the national capital, buzzes at the centre of Vanuatu's tourist trade, all colonial and cool, with a view for every restaurant, and hotel beds that float you out over lagoons. If you've come on a package deal, you're just starting your adventure. Stay on when it ends to discover a few of the unique things that are Vanuatu, and to try out the sporty options, like abseiling down a waterfall, parasailing over the glorious harbour, zapping out of a cave of stalactites through a ravine on a blow-up float-ring, turning nature-child for the night on a tiny offshore island.

The best thing about Vanuatu, though, is that you feel safe and happy here. The people are a delight. They love their country and want you to enjoy its pleasures, but they aren't after the 'tourist dollar'. There's no bargaining, no hawkers, no pressure to buy. It is so refreshing.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Slither and slosh through cloud-forest at **Ambae** (p803) to enter a mystical world of colourful crater lakes and spouting steam
- Flipper-kick into the wreck of a luxury liner and hack your way through to a cave at **Espiritu Santo** (p793)
- Connect awesome savagery with sublime mysticism at ancient cannibal sites and spirit caves in **Malekula** (p785)
- Wine and dine in romantic settings, then whiz, rip or whirl through tours and activities in **Efate** (p764)
- Go organic, go natural – go for golden sunsets, orange fireworks displays and seriously powerful kava in **Tanna** (p779)





CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Vanuatu's climate varies from wet tropical in the north (over 4000mm of rainfall a year) to subtropical in the south (less than 2000mm), with dry rain-shadow areas in between. The dry season – from May to October – is cruising time: sparkling days and pleasantly cool evenings. This is Vanuatu at its glorious best – festivals and sporting contests are held, beaches call. For walking, the cooler period from June to August is better. Speaking of cool, it's advisable to take some warm clothing year-round.

November to April is the wet season, with higher temperatures, heavier rains, and mosquitoes. December to March is cyclone time. Vanuatu averages 2.5 cyclones a year.

Temperatures in Luganville and Port Vila range from 27°C in July to 30°C in January. Lenakel (on Tanna) is a degree or two cooler. Winter nights in Vila can drop to below 12°C.

HISTORY

In July 2004, an archaeological dig at Teouma, near Port Vila, unearthed Lapita pottery (see p39), and the skeletal remains of nine Lapita people, chickens and pigs, dating back to 3200 years ago. The first people to settle, establish crops and have domestic animals, they had crossed the sea from the Solomon Islands.

Between the 11th and 15th centuries AD, Polynesians arrived from the central Pacific in sailing canoes holding up to 50 people, live animals, and gardens growing in the boats. Vanuatu's traditions tell of cultural heroes arriving around this time from islands to the east, bringing with them new skills and customs.

Ancient Vanuatu

The people lived in small, clan-based villages, each with its own language, that were separated by impassable mountains, jungle and rocky coastlines. Everyone lived in the shadow of their ancestors' spirits. Some spirits were benevolent, but others were hostile – famines, cyclones, enemy attack and other misfortunes could result if they became displeased. Magic was the main defence against angry spirits.

Inter-island trade networks were well established, with large sailing canoes venturing

VANUATU FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Port Vila (Efate)
- **Population:** 206,000
- **Land area:** 12,200 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 678
- **Currency:** Vatu (Vt)
- **Languages:** Bislama, English, French and over 100 local languages
- **Greeting:** *Alo* (Bislama)
- **Website:** www.vanuatutourism.com

as far afield as New Caledonia. Otherwise, villagers regarded their neighbours with deep suspicion.

Skirmishes between villages were frequent and usually the victor captured one or two males for the men of high rank to eat. It gave a chief great status to present a victim, ready for the pot, to chiefs of other villages. The victims' relatives would mount reprisals, so hostilities continued indefinitely.

Alongside this, the culture is steeped in agriculture. Yam cultivation decides the cycle of the year, and months are named after yams.

European Explorers

The first Europeans to visit Vanuatu, in May 1606, were members of the Spanish expedition led by Pedro Fernández de Quirós, who was convinced that in Santo he had found the fabled *terra australis incognita*. It was not until May 1768 that Louis-Antoine de Bougainville sailed between Malekula and Santo, thereby proving that Vanuatu's largest island was not *terra australis* after all.

James Cook arrived in Vanuatu on 16 July 1774, on his second Pacific expedition. He drew the first charts of the region and named the places he visited. Many of these names are still in use today, including Tanna, Erromango, Ambrym and the Shepherd Islands.

In 1789, shortly after the famous mutiny on the *Bounty*, William Bligh sailed through the northern Banks group in his longboat. He sighted several previously unrecorded islands, and returned three years later to confirm his discoveries.

Missionaries & Traders

The first Christian missionary on the scene was the Reverend John Williams from the London Missionary Society (LMS). In 1839 he stepped ashore on Erromango, and was promptly eaten. After this inauspicious beginning the church decided to send Polynesian teachers from Samoa, hoping they would be more acceptable than Europeans. However, a number of them were also killed, or died of malaria.

In 1848 the Reverend John Geddie arrived on Aneityum and made it the headquarters for the Presbyterian mission in Vanuatu. Presbyterianism eventually became the major Christian denomination, particularly on the islands south of Efate. The Anglican Diocese of Melanesia followed in 1860 and became influential in the northern islands, while Catholicism arrived in 1887.

Meanwhile, traders heard about the sandalwood trees on Erromango. There was great demand for the wood in China, where it was used for incense, so there were enormous profits to be made. Islanders traded tree trunks for guns, tobacco, or men from enemy villages to be eaten at ceremonies. Sometimes they would persuade the traders to use their ships' guns to lay waste to their enemies' villages. The best study of the turbulent times of the 19th-century sandalwood trade is Dorothy Shinberg's *They Came for Sandalwood*.

Blackbirding developed as the sandalwood was depleted. Cheap labour was needed for the sugar-cane industries, coconut plantations and nickel mines of nearby countries. Blackbirders kidnapped shiploads of ni-Vanuatu (Vanuatu people), many of whom died at sea in the overcrowded boats, or were killed for trying to escape. The missionaries stepped in, campaigning relentlessly until the practice was banned.

European Settlement

The first European settler was a cattle rancher who arrived in 1854. Others followed, lured by the chance to produce cotton during the US Civil War. Intense rivalry existed between the French and English. There was no law and order, so brawls were commonplace, as were clashes between settlers and ni-Vanuatu, who resented the loss of their land.

As elsewhere in the Pacific, the local inhabitants were decimated by European diseases.

Some say Vanuatu's population was about one million in the early 19th century, but in 1935 only 41,000 ni-Vanuatu remained.

Condominium

In 1906, seeing the Germans becoming influential in the region, the English and French governments, in an awkward moment of togetherness, established the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. Vanuatu would be ruled equally by the two colonial powers.

Cynics called the Condominium 'the Pandemonium', as the dual administration produced a bizarre duplication of authorities. There were two education systems, two police forces and two currencies. Road rules were an issue, as the English drove on the left, the French on the right. Anglo-French rivalry reached new extremes of farce, as the height of each flag up each ministerial flagpole was measured every morning. At least the food was edible in the French jail.

To Kill a Bird with Two Stones by Jeremy MacClancy is available at the National Museum in Vila. It's an excellent history from Vanuatu's earliest beginnings through the Condominium period (the 'two stones' of the title).

WWII

Japan's advance through the Pacific had reached the Solomon Islands by early 1942, when US forces arrived in Vanuatu and constructed bases, first at Havannah Harbour and Port Vila on Efate, then in southeastern Santo.

With Japan's defeat in 1945, the US Forces withdrew, leaving behind huge quantities of surplus equipment. Some of this was sold and the remainder was dumped into the sea near Luganville on Santo, at Million Dollar Point.

Cargo cults appeared on several islands as ni-Vans sought to secure the kind of wealth they'd seen in the camps – they believed that if they acted like Europeans, then 'cargo' would come their way. Most of these cults waned when the riches failed to materialise.

Independence

Land ownership had become Vanuatu's major political issue by the mid-1960s. It was the spark that spurred the country to seek independence.

At this time white settlers 'owned' about 30% of the country's land area. A *kastom*-oriented movement called the Nagriamel sprang up under the leadership of the charismatic Jimmy Stevens. Operating from Santo, its aims were to protect ni-Vanuatu claims to their traditional land. By the late 1960s, Nagriamel had expanded to other islands in northern Vanuatu.

Another great leader, Father Walter Lini, formed the New Hebrides National Party in 1971. It was later called the Vanua'aku Party. His book *Beyond Pandemonium: From New Hebrides to Vanuatu* tells of the lead-up to his country's independence.

The Condominium authorities agreed to hold the country's first general election in November 1979. The Vanua'aku Party were clear winners. Independence was fixed for mid-1980.

Serious threats of secession were being made on Santo and Tanna in early 1980; late in May matters came to a head. An insurrection on Tanna split the island between government supporters and rebels. On Santo, secessionists seized Luganville and hoisted the flag of the Independent Republic of Vemarana.

Several other northern islands proclaimed their own secessions during June. They merged and announced a Provisional Government of the Northern Islands, under Jimmy Stevens.

Order was not restored until the new government brought in soldiers from Papua New Guinea following independence on 30 July, after which the secessionist ringleaders were arrested and the rebellion collapsed.

New Nation

Since independence, the ni-Vanuatu government has established diplomatic relations with over 70 countries, signed the General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade (GATT), and declared the country a nuclear-free zone. Its desire has been for development that benefits everyone equally, while preserving customs and traditions.

Government affairs have stabilised lately, after a few years with too many political parties, much infighting and some high-profile scandals. President Kalkot Matas Kelekele and Prime Minister Lini have led a quiet revolution in the higher ranks. Kelekele's book *New Hebrides: the Road to*

Independence includes contributions from young ni-Van writers and provides a broad look at the issues the country faces.

In 2005 Vanuatu qualified for the **US Millennium Challenge** (www.mca.gov) – the only South Pacific country to do so. For this, they will receive a US\$40 million grant for infrastructure, which will probably go towards repairing roads (so those excruciating Disney rides called roads may become a whole lot smoother).

Of major significance was the police mutiny trial in 2002, where eight high-ranking police and Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) officers stood trial for the unlawful arrests of 15 public officials, among them the attorney-general and police commissioner. The trial was postponed several times, and had still not been heard in early 2006.

THE CULTURE

There is huge variety in Vanuatu's culture and customs. Dances, funerals, weddings, initiations, systems of authority, artistic styles, and animal and crop husbandry all differ from island to island. Yet there are common themes, particularly the obligation to pay for all services rendered, and the finality of any area labelled *tabu*, which means 'sacred' as well as 'forbidden'. If a part of a traditional ceremony, a section of beach, a cave – anywhere at all – is *tabu*, it must be respected.

The lavishly illustrated *Arts of Vanuatu*, edited by Joel Bonnemaïson et al, is a fabulous introduction to the diversity of Vanuatu's culture, connecting historic and contemporary influences.

The National Psyche

Ownership of ancestral land, sea and reefs, and everything that comes from them, is fundamental to ni-Vanuatu life. It is held by ni-Vans for the future, and the rhythm of the seasons dictates how those resources are used. They viewed with horror the European way of using the land; disputes over use and ownership are still serious issues. It's wise to carry at least 500Vt with you, to any activity, as you never know when a villager will ask you to pay the fee for swimming, fishing, or looking at or walking on a property. This is despite the fact that ni-Vans are very hospitable and generous. It is a matter of respect for the value of the resource.

LAWYER OF THE DANCE *Ian Byles*

I had certainly expected to find dancing on Vanua Lava, one of the Banks Islands. Among the most northerly islands in Vanuatu, the Banks Islands are known for their customary Melanesian dancing. Swish resorts in Port Vila hire troupes of Banks Islanders to perform every Thursday night outside bars, with five minutes afterwards for 'me with the dancers, Vanuatu' photographs and video footage. But not ballroom dancing.

One Sunday I attended a farewell ceremony for a foreign anthropologist, who'd spent the last year in the village. A cow had been slaughtered for the communal lunch. The day before I'd seen its head, suspended from a pole, being carried away, an improbably long tongue swinging pendulously from its mouth. The flesh had been boiled in several large vats and baked in earth ovens overnight.

That afternoon, each family laid a bowl of some description on the ground around the cooking vats, creating a motley carpet of battered plastic, aluminium and glass bowls into which villagers, with an acute eye for equality, ladled the cooked meat. Within half an hour it was gone and the dancing began.

Most dancing in the Banks is neither extravagant nor passionately dramatic; its patterns are simple and iterative, lulling the participants into abandonment with subtly developing percussive rhythms and the shared swaying of bodies. There were dances for men and dances for women, followed by 'public' dances where all joined in the heady, giddy tumult that continued until dusk.

Then the tone changed. After dark a group of youths set up a 'string band' – tea-chest bass and homemade ukuleles and guitars that ply a very limited range of chords in strict four-four time.

I expect that when the anthropologist asked, out of the blue, whether I had ever learned ballroom dancing, she wanted to relieve the monotony rather than conduct an impromptu survey of cultural affiliations. Doubtless, she didn't expect me to reply that I had. Possibly she regretted asking, for having established that we could get up and take to the floor, there was now the uncomfortable feeling that we probably *should*.

One song ended. We stood and moved into the lamplight. All talking ceased, replaced by excited whispers and much gesturing in our direction. The locals remained silent for barely a moment after we started a foxtrot, sweeping (we hoped majestically) across the packed earth, then as one they erupted into laughter. They laughed and laughed. Their laughter brought others from the village until there were hundreds of people around the dancing ground, falling over, holding themselves, collapsing against each other. It was the most rewarding sound I have heard. No ridicule or malice, just untrammelled delight that two white people would be prepared to do their own bizarre custom dance on the mud, under a mango tree, by the light of a kerosene lamp.

Volunteering in Vanuatu has brought many challenges. Accomplishing spin turns on slippery mud on Vanua Lava was one of the easier ones. While we were struggling to execute a poised quickstep – and many more times since – a quote from Nietzsche came to mind: 'We should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.'

Ian Byles worked as a case investigator with the Office of the Ombudsman in Vanuatu through Australian Volunteers International (see the boxed text, p771).

Everyone has a role to play in society. Each village is run by a chief who acts as a justice of the peace and as a delegate for the village. His word is law. Even politicians must do what the chief says when visiting their home villages.

When Mother Nature provides for all of your needs, society has to develop new challenges. In many areas, chiefs achieve their rank through *nimangki* (grade-taking) ceremonies, which include

a lavish feast. Villagers who eat at the feast are then indebted to the chief, becoming a party of supporters who look to him for leadership and guidance. Each step up the village social ladder is accompanied by the ritual killing of pigs, so only men who have acquired enough pigs can hope to reach society's highest levels.

A young man needs a wife to care for his pigs, but he cannot look for a wife until he has built himself a house.

Lifestyle

Life in a Vanuatu village is much as it has always been. The centre of village life is the *nakamal*, a men's clubhouse and clan museum, where men meet to discuss village and national issues.

A traditional *nakamal* was always strictly *tabu* to women, and tourists may still be barred from entering in *kastom*-oriented areas. However, these days they are often open to anyone. Women have their own meeting house, where they produce goods for sale, like woven sections of roof.

Women spend many hours in the family garden and watching over the husband's pigs, while men tend their cash crops, fish, hunt, build boats, carve artefacts and discuss council matters. While the women prepare the evening meal, the men talk in the *nakamal* and drink kava.

There are strict rules in every village regarding dress. Islanders do not wear scant or revealing clothing, and women's thighs are always covered.

Overall, the most pressing problem for all ni-Van families is finding the money to pay their children's school fees each quarter.

Population

Vanuatu's population is almost entirely ni-Vanuatu. (Melanesian, although some islands have a strong Polynesian heritage.) There are a few Europeans, Asians and other Pacific Islanders.

Mostly everyone lives in rural areas, in villages of less than 50 people, along narrow coastal strips or on tiny offshore islets. There is a drift into towns, particularly Vila, by ni-Vanuatu in search of work. One village had no fish to eat after the fishermen formed a string band and left for Vila to play at hotels.

ARTS

Given that the population is spread over 83 islands, it's not surprising that Vanuatu's art and traditions vary from island to island; this diversity contributes to the country's unique cultural identity.

The most common subject matters in ni-Vanuatu arts are the human form and traditional interpretations of what ancestral figures looked like. The most important artefacts are made for *nimangki* ceremonies (see opposite).

Vila's National Museum of Vanuatu (p767) is an excellent place to learn more about art and culture in Vanuatu.

Carvings

While wood is the main carved material, objects are also made from tree fern, stone and coral. Serious carving is almost entirely created for ceremonies, while items for sale to tourists are usually small copies of the real thing.

The best carvings come from northern Ambrym. Items to look out for:

- carved bows and arrows, and traditional ceremonial spears
- war clubs made to designs attributed to ancestral cultural heroes
- pig-killing clubs shaped like mattocks, with two stylised faces carved on either side
- large platters and bowls in which yams and kava are pounded, or in which *laplap* (Vanuatu's national dish) is served
- model canoes, some with figureheads, others with sails made from dried pandanus leaves
- statues made from tree ferns, representing ancestral figures

Cinema

Wan Smol Bag Theatre in Vila has produced several excellent videos that are for sale around Vila. It uses a light-handed approach to sensitive issues, as in *Pacific Star*, a musical comedy about a remote Pacific island and the chaos caused when tourists arrive. It's a total romp. More serious is *Vanua-Tai of Land and Sea*, a film about turtle conservation in north Efate.

Dances & Ceremonies

Traditional dances in Vanuatu require constant rehearsals. The timing is exquisite and the movements regimented, everyone turning, leaping and stomping together. Thus harmony and cooperation develop between people and villages. There are two major styles of dance: impersonation and participation. Impersonation dances require more rehearsal, as each dancer pretends to be an ancestor or legendary figure and wears elaborate masks or headdresses, such as in the Rom dances of Ambrym (see p791). In participatory dances, several people – or even several villages – take part to enact

traditional themes such as hunting, war and death, as in the Toka dances of Tanna.

Literature

There are some fabulous reads, guaranteed to put you in the mood for your visit to Vanuatu.

James Michener's novel *Tales of the South Pacific* depicts life in Santo when US forces were garrisoned there during WWII. *Beachmasters* by Thea Astley has many interesting parallels to the events of the 1980 Santo rebellion. Gwendoline Page's very readable *Coconuts and Coral* is a detailed and often amusing account of life in the New Hebrides during the 1960s as seen by a young English family.

The Talking Tree by Fepai Kolia is a poetry book that takes a stark look at ni-Van life. *The Story of the Eel & Other Stories* are delightful myths and local legends from Uripiv Island. *Pacific* by Judy Nunn is a tale of love and passion that tracks the lives of two women in Vanuatu, one a WWII heroine, the other a young Australian actor.

Music

String bands developed during WWII, when ni-Vans heard the US soldiers playing bluegrass. The singing is done with a pinched throat, forming that high-pitched lyrical note. Musicians are getting recognition, and sound studios and training rooms are being established on many islands. You're bound to hear the big hit *Jewel in a Crown* by the Nauten Boys of Tanna, who sing a mix of reggae, country and rock, with an off beat that is a typical Toka dance rhythm – Vanuatu is the jewel.

The *tamtam* (slit-drum) is Vanuatu's most interesting musical device. *Tamtam* are carved logs with hollowed-out slits. They typically have a representation of a human face carved above the drum part.

Painting & Sand Drawing

Petroglyphs and rock paintings are the country's most ancient forms of pictorial art. The former are common and widespread, although their meanings have been lost and their main significance these days is to archaeologists. Several islands have caves where the walls are decorated with hand stencils and simple paintings of animals.

Styles of painting include bark art in the Banks Islands. Body painting is also popular throughout the country as part of various traditional ceremonies.

Ni-Vans create beautiful sand drawings, making many delicate loops and circles without raising their finger, to leave messages or illustrate local legends, songs or ceremonies. The most elaborate and picturesque versions are made in Ambrym. Drawings may be public or sacred, and they have World Heritage status.

Traditional Dress

In *kastom*-oriented parts of Tanna and Pentecost, men still wear *namba* (penis sheaths) every day, while women dress in grass skirts. On Santo, the men wear *mal mal* (loincloths), while some women wear an apron of leaves. In southern Malekula, women of the Small Nambas people traditionally wear raffia skirts woven from banana-tree fibres.

In other parts of Vanuatu, grass skirts are fashioned from the bark of the *burao* (wild hibiscus). Once it's stripped, the bark is placed in sea water, dried, measured into lengths and, if necessary, dyed.

However, most ni-Vans only wear traditional dress to attend ceremonies, when elaborate headgear is also worn. Masks are usually made from tree-fern material and represent the faces of demons and ancestral spirits. Others are constructed out of clay reinforced with coconut fibres and layered onto a wickerwork frame.

Painted tree-fern face-masks in southern Malekula are decorated with feathers and carved pigs' tusks.

Weaving

Baskets and mats are made throughout the country, as are traps for fish, birds and shellfish. Weaving is done mostly by women, using pandanus leaves and *burao* stalks. Wicker, coconut leaves and rattan are used when a more robust item is required.

LANGUAGE

Bislama, a form of pidgin English, is Vanuatu's national language. English and French are also widely spoken, and schools teach in French or English. But Vanuatu also has the highest concentration in the world of different local languages per head

of population. There are 106, and 81 are still actively spoken. It's extraordinary to meet young people who are illiterate (schooling costs heaps) yet can speak a dozen languages fluently.

Bislama basics

Hello.	<i>Alo.</i>
Hello (to a group).	<i>Alo olgeta.</i>
Good morning.	<i>Gud morning.</i>
Good night.	<i>Gud naet.</i>
Goodbye/See you.	<i>Bae/mi lukem yu.</i>
How are you?	<i>Olsem wanem?</i>
Good thanks.	<i>I gud nomo tankyu tumas.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Tankyu tumas.</i>
Yes.	<i>Olaet.</i>
No thank you.	<i>No. I olraet tankyu tumas.</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>Yu tok tok Engglis?</i>
Sorry, I don't understand.	<i>Sore, mi no save.</i>
My name is...	<i>Nem blong mi...</i>

ENVIRONMENT

Vanuatu lies squarely on the Pacific Ring of Fire, so it gets frequent earth tremors, and rises or subsides by up to 2cm per year in some areas. There are nine active volcanoes (seven on land), and fumaroles and thermal springs are found throughout the archipelago.

Animals

Cats, dogs, cattle, horses, pigs and goats were all introduced to Vanuatu and have since gone wild. Rats are the bane of village life and do much damage to the copra industry.

Native land mammals are restricted to four flying-fox species and eight bat species. What Vanuatu lacks in native mammals, it makes up for in marine life, with over 300 species of coral and more than 450 species of reef fish. The country's largest resident mammal is the dugong, or sea cow, which is the world's only herbivorous marine mammal.

Of Vanuatu's 121 bird species, 55 can be found in Santo, which is home to the biggest variety, including all seven of the country's endemics. One very interesting species is the mound-building, fowl-like megapode (*namalao* in Bislama). It uses the warm volcanic soils to incubate its eggs. See p558 for more details.

There are 19 native lizards, all small skinks and geckoes, and one land snake, the harm-

less Pacific boa, which grows to 2.5m. While the yellow-bellied and banded sea snakes are both extremely venomous, their small mouths and teeth aren't at all suitable for savaging humans.

The saltwater (or estuarine) crocodiles that live in Vanua Lava have probably swum down from the Solomon Islands after losing their bearings during cyclones.

Plants

About 75% of the country is covered by natural vegetation, including rainforest and rain-shadow grasslands. Cyclones tear at the jungle regularly, renewing it. Logging and subsistence farming hacks into a bit, but much of the country is a botanical wonderland.

BEST EATING

Thanks largely to its French influence, Vila is well known in the Pacific for its international cuisine. The main supermarkets all carry a good range of local and imported food and drink. For an exquisite dining experience with a mix of picturesque surroundings, rippling water and fantastic flavour treats, start with these Vila restaurants.

- Right on the harbour, the Waterfront Bar & Grill (p774) has a great alfresco atmosphere.
- Vila Chaumières Restaurant (p774) offers romantic waterside dining.
- Le Café du Village (p774), on the sea wall, is a peaceful spot with French cuisine.
- Paradise Cove Italian Restaurant (p774) serves delicious meals.
- Overlooking the water, Sunset Bungalows Restaurant (p774) offers great food in a stunning building.

Outside Luganville and Vila, a restaurant is a small room where women serve one meal all day, flavoured with fresh herbs and coconut. Larger villages have general stores selling guitar strings, tinned mackerel and biscuits, but there's excellent bread everywhere. Most places have markets, so if you're cooking, look for the excellent *Island Edibles* by Judy MacDonnell.

The lord of most forests is the *banyan*, whose crown can be 70m or more across. Forests of mighty *kauri* trees are found on Erromango, while cloud forests dripping with moss and moisture are a magnificent feature of many highland areas.

Vanuatu has around 20 species of palm, of which 14 are endemic. Orchids festoon the trees in many areas; there are 158 orchid species.

Less enchanting are the introduced weeds. Lantana and the widespread American 'mile-a-minute' vine are the worst. The latter was brought from the US as a camouflage plant during WWII, but it's been left to overrun everything.

Conservation Areas

There are four official conservation areas: Vatthe (p800) and Loru (p800) on Santo, the *kauri* reserve (p784) on Erromango, and the cloud-forest area around Lake Manaro on Ambae (p803). For information on these areas, contact the **Environment Unit** (☎ 25302; fax 23565; PMB 9063, Georges Pompidou Bldg, Port Vila) in Port Vila, or its **Luganville office** (☎ 36153).

Local chiefs and *kastom* landholders often proclaim conservation areas as a means of protecting some valuable resource, such as turtles or coconut crabs, from overexploitation.

EFATE

pop 45,000 / area 915 sq km

This is Vanuatu's heart, a central island that buzzes with activities – tourist, commercial, industrial and educational. Its varied coastline offers bays and inlets, islands and islets, cliffs and crevices. Efate is the tourists' soft option, unlike the other islands, where the adventures are wild and woolly. It has two of the best deep-water anchorages, Vila Bay and Havannah Harbour, the principal airport, and the national capital, Port Vila.

Port Vila – the face of Vanuatu, better-known around the world than Efate or even Vanuatu itself – is a tourist treasure-trove. It's a pretty town with a great climate, spectacular views, gorgeous hotels and restaurants, and an exciting range of activities and events.

EFATE IN...

Two Days

Spend the whole first day wandering around the centre. Take the walk (p767), eat or have a drink at as many restaurants as you can, and check out the notice board at Iririki Island Resort (p773) for the night's entertainment. At about 6pm, head to a kava bar for a shell or two, then go outside the city, to Tamanu perhaps, for dinner.

Next morning, join a day tour out on a yacht. When you return, try a Melanesian feast at one of the cultural villages.

Four Days

With two more days, some scuba diving and an ecotour (p770) with Pascal are unmissable. Use the afternoons to visit the cultural centre (p767), and Mele-Maat Cascades (p769), where you must do an abseil down the waterfall (p771). Eat at a restaurant with entertainment, like Flaming Bull Steakhouse (p774), then cross the road for some action at Trader Vic's (p774). On the last night, dine at a restaurant with great ambience, such as Roxy's (p773) on Erakor or Sunset Bungalows Restaurant (p774).

One Week

You have three more days? Great. First take a day tour around the island (p771). If you can, extend it to spend a night on Nguna, for a great village experience. Spend another full day out fishing and your last day back in town, shopping at the markets and duty-free shops.

Maps

The **Drug Store** (☎ 22789; Lini Hwy) in Port Vila sells the 1:200,000 map of Vanuatu published by South Pacific Maps, distributed in Australia through **Hema Maps** (☎ 07-3340 0000). The **Vanuatu Tourism Office** (VTO; ☎ 22813; Lini Hwy) has free maps of Efate and Port Vila.

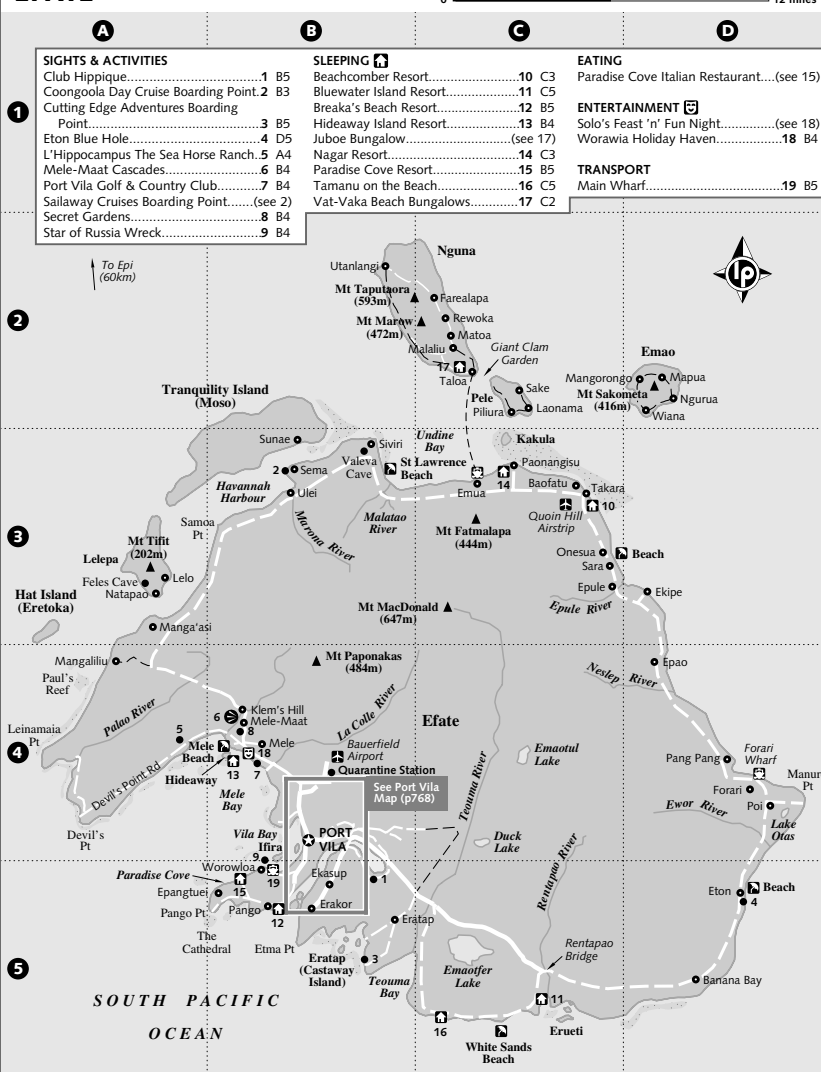
INFORMATION

The following are all in Port Vila; see the map, p768.

Bookshops

Centrepont supermarket (Lini Hwy) For French magazines and newspapers.

EFATE



Stop Press (☎ 22232; Au Bon Marché, Nambatu; stoppress@vanuatu.com.vu; ☎ 6am-7.30pm) For Australian and British newspapers and magazines, paperbacks, reference and travel material.

Internet Access

Cyber Village (☎ 27728; cyber@vatu.com; Nambatu; Internet per min 15Vt; ☎ 7am-10pm) An attractive

complex with a fish pond, salad bar, café and wireless technology. Get 24-hour access to a prepaid hotspot. There are showers for tourists and cheap international phone calls.

Tour Shop (☎ 25609; tourshop@vanuatu.com.vu; per min 15Vt; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) The e-tourism centre has a bank of good computers with fast connections.

Medical Services

Drug Store (☎ 22789; 🕒 7.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, to noon Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun) This well-stocked pharmacy is tops.

Pro Medical (☎ 25566) A 24-hour paramedic service with Vanuatu's decompression chamber.

Vila Central Hospital (☎ 22100) Has a dentist, private practitioners and a dispensary; it's open for outpatients during business hours.

Money

Foreign exchange is provided by **ANZ** (☎ 22536; 🕒 8am–3pm Mon–Fri) and **Westpac** (☎ 22084; 🕒 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri). They both have ATMs.

Goodies Money Exchange (☎ 23445; goodies@vanuatu.net.vu; cnr Lini Hwy & rue Pasteur; 🕒 8am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–4pm Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun) Generally gives the best rates. Check out the great carvings.

National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV; ☎ 22201; rue de Paris) Can also handle foreign exchange.

Post

Post office (☎ 22000; Lini Hwy) Poste restante, stamp counter, Internet facilities (25Vt per minute), card-operated phones outside, and private phone and fax booths inside.

Tourist Information

Tour Shop (☎ 25609; PO Box 949; www.tourvanuatu.com; 🕒 8am–8pm Mon–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun) Backpacker specialist for accommodation; tours; bookings on outer islands; and scooter, mountain bike and tent hire.

Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO; ☎ 22813, 22515; www.vanuatutourism.com; 🕒 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) Information about accommodation, activities, tours and the outer islands.

Travel Agencies

Tour operators offering information and bookings for Efate and the outer islands are along Lini Hwy. They include:

Adventure Centre (☎ 22743; fax 27763; www.adventurevanuatu.com)

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu)

Island Safaris (☎ /fax 23288, 26779; www.vanuatu tourism.com/)

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Around

See p808 for details of airline and shipping services to and from Vila.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Airport shuttle buses cost 400Vt per person to/from Vila, and taxis offer rates from 600Vt to 1000Vt (shared). If you don't have much

luggage, you can catch a minibus (100Vt) from outside the domestic terminal.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Vila's car-hire companies include **Avis** (☎ 22570; Olympic Bldg), **Budget** (☎ 23170; rue d'Artois, Nambatu) and **Discount Rentals** (☎ 23242, 24475; Lini Hwy, Nambatu). A four-seater vehicle costs around 6500Vt (including VAT and insurance) a day.

Scooters can be hired through **Nautilus Scooter Hire** (☎ 22398; Lini Hwy) and **Zuma Scooter Hire** (☎ 25609, 41000; Lini Hwy). Prices are typically 4100Vt a day. You will be given a map showing the boundaries between public roads and tracks that are private property.

MINIBUS & TAXI

The main roads are usually thick with minibuses between 6am and 7.30pm. Fares are a uniform 100Vt in town. To travel further afield to, say, Hideaway Island costs 200Vt. There are also many taxis offering a competitive service (p808).

Vila's main taxi stands are beside the market and Iririki Wharf.

PORT VILA

pop 38,000

Climbing steep hillsides around horseshoe-shaped Vila Bay, Port Vila offers stunning views around every corner. It was declared the seat of the newly proclaimed Condominium government in 1906, so it has some charming colonial buildings. With its faded French atmosphere and beautiful harbour, Vila is one of the South Pacific's most attractive towns.

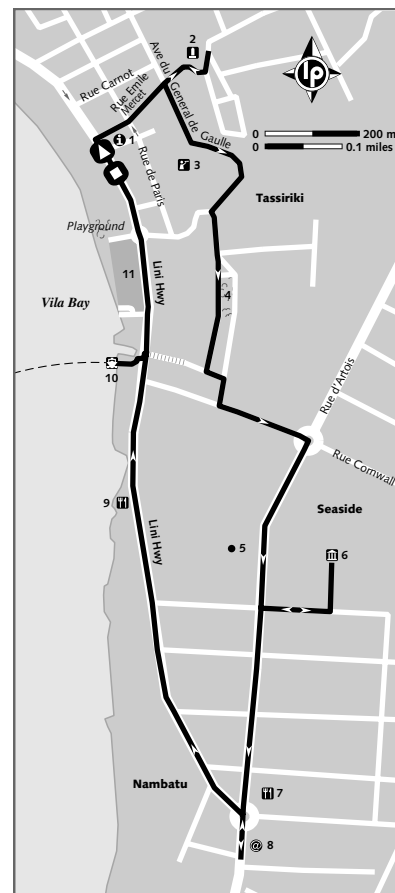
Orientation

Vila's main shopping precinct follows the shoreline for about 1km, so it's easily explored on foot. Lini Hwy, the main street, winds parallel to the waterfront. Rue Carnot and rue de Paris are known as Chinatown. You'll find anything there, from Japanese stereos to straw hats, Chinese cigarettes and balls of wool.

During WWII, US forces established radar stations known as Numbers One, Two and Three. Number Two and Number Three have been preserved in Bislama; Nambatu and Nambatri are now among Vila's plush residential areas. 'Nambawan' is Independence Park.

Port Villa Walking Tour

From **Vanuatu's Tourism Office (1)**, head north along Lini Hwy to the next street, rue Emile Mercet. A gentle stroll up the hill leads you away from the hustle and bustle to the lovely **WWI Memorial (2)**. There's a stunning view from here. Go back down and turn left into Ave du General de Gaulle. A short distance along is a **Lookout Point (3)**, where you can



WALK FACTS

Start Vanuatu Tourism Office
Finish Vanuatu Tourism Office
Distance 3km, plus ferry
Duration Two to three hours

consider the view from a different angle. Continue along the avenue, past **Independence Park (4)** on your left. At the T-junction, turn away from the harbour, east up to the roundabout at rue d'Artois. Turn right into rue d'Artois and follow it for a block. Note **Parliament House (5)** on your right. Turn left and then left again. The stunning building ahead is the **National Museum of Vanuatu (6)**. Spend some time in the museum. It's a small, friendly place, where you'll get some fascinating insights into the local culture.

Back on rue d'Artois, enjoy a shady walk in this lovely tree-lined street, typical of Nambatu, until you reach **La Pizzeria (7)**. Drop in for a drink, or lunch, and a chat. Refreshed, cross the road and visit **Cyber Village (8)**, behind the little fish pond: it has Internet access, an art shop and a salad bar. Return to the V-junction and head downhill along Lini Hwy to sparkling new (burnt down and just rebuilt) **Waterfront Bar (9)**, a top spot for another drink. You can edge your way along the sea wall, deciding which yacht you'd like to sail away on, then walk back to Lini Hwy and down into Vila. On your left is the **ferry to Iririki (10)**. Head across for an island and water connection. Back on the mainland, go to the glorious **outdoor market (11)**. Spend the rest of your time here, then continue along Lini Hwy back to the tourism office.

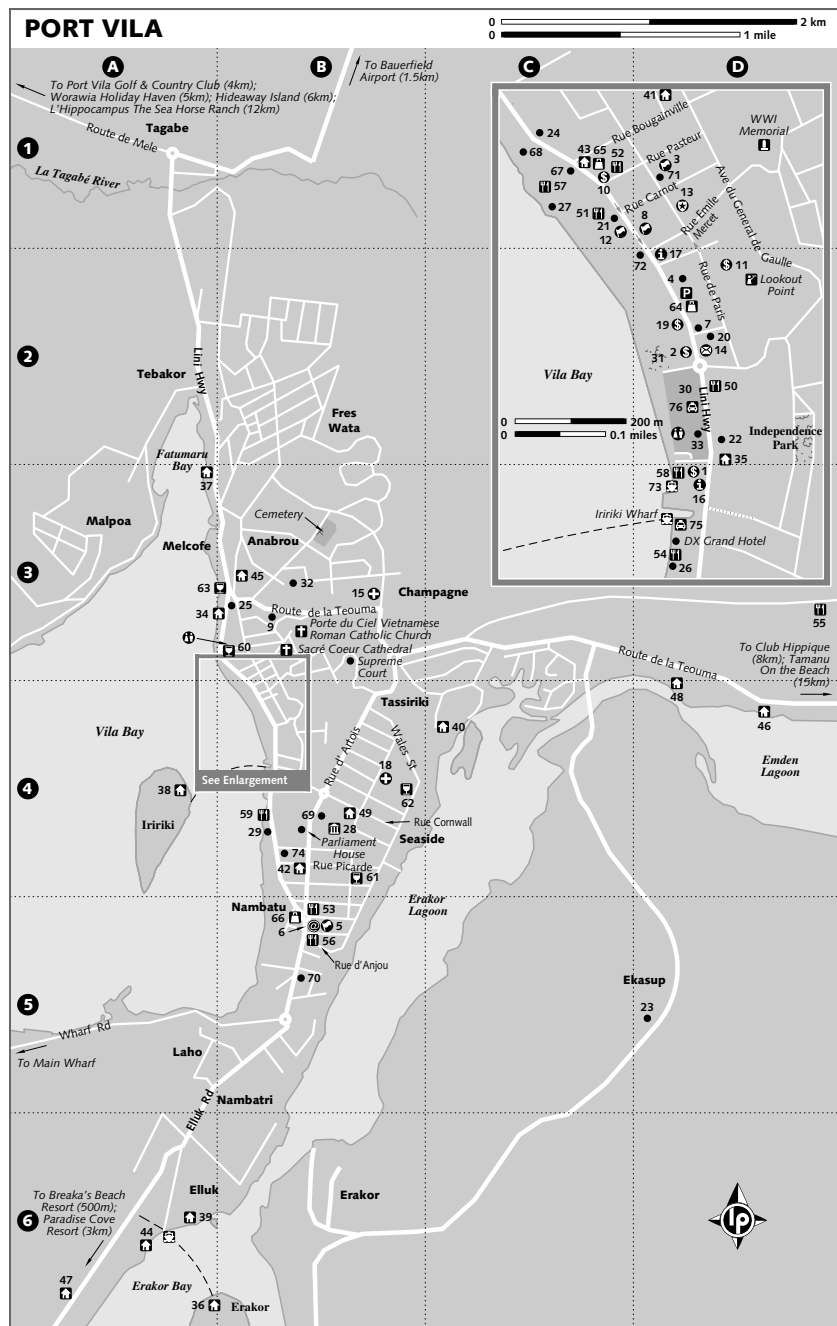
Sights

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF VANUATU

This excellent **museum and cultural centre** (☎ 22129; www.vanuatuculture.org; rue d'Artois; adult/child 500/100Vt; 🕒 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, to noon Sat) is home to a well-displayed selection of traditional artefacts, including items such as *tamtam*, massive outrigger canoes, ceremonial headdresses and examples of Lapita and Wusi pottery. There are photographic displays, and you can watch videos about traditional ceremonies and legends.

MARKETS

Vila's colourful **outdoor market** is open round the clock from Monday to noon on Saturday. You can buy fruit and vegetables (at rock-bottom prices), flowers, jewellery, woodcarvings and souvenirs. A pleasant grassy area follows the harbour wall past the playground to **Nambawan Market & Café** (☎ 44826; café@nambawan.com), where there's wireless Internet access, snacks, ice creams and handicrafts.



INFORMATION

ANZ ATM.....	1 D3
ANZ Bank.....	2 D1
Australian High Commission.....	3 D2
Centrepoint Supermarket.....	4 D2
Chinese Embassy.....	5 B5
Cyber Village.....	6 B5
Drug Store.....	7 D2
Environment Unit.....	(see 9)
French Embassy.....	8 D1
Georges Pompidou Building.....	9 B3
Goodies Money Exchange.....	10 C1
NBV National Bank of Vanuatu.....	11 D2
New Zealand High Commission (upstairs).....	12 C1
Police Station.....	13 D1
Post Office.....	14 D2
Pro Medical & Decompression Chamber.....	15 B3
South Pacific Travel.....	(see 59)
Tour Shop.....	16 D3
Vanuatu Tourism Office.....	17 D2
Vila Central Hospital.....	18 B4
Westpac Bank.....	19 D2

Nautilus Parasailing.....	(see 29)
Nautilus Scuba.....	29 B4
Outdoor Market.....	30 D2
Playground.....	31 D2
Port Vila Tennis Club.....	32 B3
Sailaway Cruises.....	(see 20)
Vanuatu Cultural Centre.....	(see 28)
Vanuatu Jet Departures.....	33 D2

Roxy's on the Lagoon.....	(see 36)
Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway.....	58 D3
Vila Chaumières Restaurant.....	(see 48)
Waterfront Bar & Grill.....	59 B4
Wild Pig Restaurant.....	(see 49)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Adventure Centre.....	20 D2
Coongoola Day Cruise.....	21 C1
Destination Pacific Islands.....	22 D2
Ekasup Cultural Village.....	23 D5
Evergreen.....	24 C1
Horizon Tours.....	25 B3
Island Safaris.....	(see 21)
IslandDreams Glass Bottom Sea.....	(see 24)
Meridian Charters.....	26 D3
Nambawan Market & Café.....	27 C1
National Museum of Vanuatu.....	28 B4

SLEEPING

Chantilly's on the Bay.....	34 B3
City Lodge.....	35 D2
Erakor Island Resort.....	36 A6
Fatumaru Lodge.....	37 A3
Iririki Island Resort.....	38 A4
Le Lagon.....	39 A6
Le Meridien.....	40 C4
Malampa Guesthouse.....	41 D1
Melanesian Port Vila.....	42 B4
Olympic Hotel.....	43 C1
Pacific Lagoon Apartments.....	44 A6
Room With a View.....	45 B3
Sunset Bungalows.....	46 D4
Treetops Lodge & Bungalows.....	47 A6
Vila Chaumières.....	48 D4
Wild Pig.....	49 B4

DRINKING

Office Pub.....	60 B3
Ron's Nakamal.....	61 B4
Sea Side Kava Bar.....	62 B4
Trader Vic's.....	63 B3
Waterfront Bar & Grill.....	(see 59)

SHOPPING

Hebrida Market Place.....	64 D2
L'atelier.....	(see 64)
Philippe Metois Photography.....	65 C1
Stop Press.....	66 B5

TRANSPORT

Air Vanuatu.....	(see 11)
Aircalin.....	67 C1
Anchor Inn.....	68 C1
Avis.....	(see 43)
Budget.....	69 B4
Discount Rentals.....	70 B5
Hua Chinese Store Truck Stop.....	71 D1
Immigration (upstairs).....	72 D2
Nautilus Scooter Hire.....	(see 29)
Old Wharf.....	73 D3
South Sea Shipping.....	74 B4
Taxi Rank.....	75 D3
Taxi Rank.....	76 D2
Vanair.....	(see 11)
Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club.....	(see 168)
Zona Scooter Hire.....	(see 16)

IRIRIKI, ERAKOR & HIDEAWAY

Great fun are the free ferry rides (which run 24 hours a day) out to these islands. The first ferry runs across to Iririki, just 300m from Vila's waterfront. The second leaves from a small jetty just south of Le Lagon resort out to Erakor, one of the island jewels of Vila. The third leaves from Mele Beach, about 9km north of Vila, and takes you out to buzzy little Hideaway (admission 500Vt). These islands all have small white-sand or coral beaches and lovely resorts. You're welcome to walk around the islands during the day, or to hire kayaks, catamarans or snorkelling gear from their watersports centres. Check out the fabulous restaurants, bars and massage centres, or go scuba diving at Hideaway to the **Underwater Post Office** (www.vanuatupost.vu) and visit bright coral reefs.

MELE-MAAT CASCADES

You see these beautiful **cascades** (Map p765; adult/child 1000/500Vt) as you drive along the road towards Klem's Hill. Shaded by rain-forest, pool after pool of stunningly clear

aquamarine water is ranged around a 35m waterfall. A little path with the guide ropes wobbles up to the top. There are toilets and change rooms at the entrance. **Evergreen** (☎ 23050, 42005; www.evergreen.com.vu; tours 2600Vt; ☎ 9.30am & 2pm) offers tours that include Mele-Maat Village and the Secret Gardens (below), drinks and tropical fruit.

SECRET GARDENS

About 1km south of the cascades, this **reserve** (Map p765; ☎ 26222; adult/child 600/300Vt; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) features different natural environments, a cannibal house and exotic plants. You can see and touch a coconut crab or a bright green banded iguana, and see samples of the different building styles used in bungalows. The historical and cultural anecdotes are a great read.

EKASUP CULTURAL VILLAGE

Futuna islanders demonstrate and talk about their traditional lifestyle at their **kastom vil-lage** (☎ 24217, 46734; adult/child 3825/1910Vt; ☎ 9am & 2pm Mon-Fri, 9am Sat). Original local music and

VANUATU

VANUATU



kastom dancing show off the colourful costumes. The **feast nights** (adult/child 3100/1550Vt; ☎ 5pm Fri) include a few shells of kava, fun entertainment and interesting food.

Activities

BOATING

The following options are available:

Coongoola Day Cruise (☎ 25020; www.southpacificcruise.com.vu; adult/child/diver 7800/3900/8800Vt) A great day on *Lady of the Sea*, once the mother ship for the Sydney–Hobart yacht race. Dive or snorkel at Tranquility Island (Map p765) and see the turtle sanctuary.

Cutting Edge Adventures (Map p765; ☎ 22176; cutting@vanuatu.com.vu) Got muscles, will travel. Brilliant half- to 10-day trips in inflatable kayaks around the coast, or river kayaking (half/full day from 3800/7400Vt).

IslandDreams Glass Bottom Sea Kayaking (☎ 23050; www.evergreen.com.vu; adult/child 4000/2000Vt; ☎ 9am & 2pm) Head out from pretty Mele Bay to a sand island, as marine life passes underneath.

Meridian Charters (☎ 25595, 83352; www.meridiancharters.com) Takes you on a 60ft motor yacht at dusk. Food and French wines; very romantic.

Semi Submarine (☎ 43144; adult/child/family 2000/1200/5500Vt; ☎ 9am–3pm Tue–Sat) See the sea from a deep viewing chamber. Leaves from the wharf at Le Café du Village (p774).

Vanuatu Jet (☎ 26426; www.vanuatujet.com) Sideways slides, fishtails – hang on tight. It's available for high-speed transfers too.

GAME & REEF FISHING

Vanuatu's waters and the available choices (game and reef, liveaboard, remote island) mean your time on the deep blue will be memorable (shared half-/whole-day trips start at around 17,000/32,000Vt).

Some operators (all meeting-point arrangements are made when you book) include the following options:

Crusoe Fishing Adventures (☎ 22439, 45490; www.crusoefishing.com.vu) *Horizon* is a spacious Capricorn Classic 42ft cruiser, with the latest hi-tech equipment, set up for all weather conditions.

Lelepa Island Fishing Charters (☎ 22714; www.lelepatours.com; whole day from 7000Vt) Operates a 7m Banana Boat; includes snorkelling and Lelepa Island tour.

Ocean Blue (☎ 41415; www.oceanblue.com.vu) A fleet of fishing vessels that includes Black Watch 40s, with first-class seagoing capabilities.

SCUBA DIVING

Efate's dive sites include wrecks, coral reefs, deep drop-offs, caverns and swim-throughs,

such as the Cathedral, a warren of underwater holes, stipples and tunnels; Paul's Reef, with sheer walls of coral down an extinct submarine volcano; and the *Star of Russia*, an iron-hulled schooner with masts and hull still intact, home to thousands of colourful fish.

Introductory dives start at around 6500Vt; dives for certified divers are less. Operators: **Hideaway Island Marine Sanctuary** (☎ 22963; www.hideaway.com.vu) On the beach at Hideaway Island, in front of the resort (Map p765).

Nautilus Scuba (☎ 22398; www.nautilus.com.vu; Lini Hwy) Great resources. Ask about the bunkhouse accommodation for divers at the site, which is included in the dive package.

Sailaway Cruises (☎ 25155; www.sailawayvanuatu.com; trips 7900Vt) A fabulous day trip on the *Golden Wing*, a trimaran, for snorkelling or diving at Hat Island (Eretoka) and Paul's Rock. See the map, p765, for the meeting point.

HORSE RIDING

Rainforest rides, gentle beach walks and sunset trails (from 11am to 5.30pm except Monday, one hour/full day from 2500/8500Vt) are offered by:

Club Hippique (Map p765; ☎ 23347; lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu)

L'Hippocampus the Sea Horse Ranch (Map p765; ☎ 25152, 40102; lhippocampus@vanuatu.com.vu)

SPORTING CENTRES & CLUBS

Port Vila Tennis Club (Cercle Sportif; ☎ 22437; Rte du Stade) Has five hard courts, two squash courts, beach volleyball, aerobics and yoga classes, and a gym.

Port Vila Golf & Country Club (☎ 22564; www.vanuatu.com.vu/~pvgcc; Rte de Mele) A challenging course with palm-tree and ocean-front hazards, and an excellent 19th hole overlooking Mele Bay. It's 3500Vt for 18 holes, including club and buggy hire.

WALKING & CYCLING

Pascal Guillet of **EcoTours** (☎ 25299, 45596; www.vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu; half-day tours from 2500Vt) will lead you along off-road tracks, through farms, down cascades, into rock pools and along riverbanks. Cycling tours are grand adventures through villages, in and out of outriggers to cross rivers and lagoons, and up to mountain tops. EcoTours also offers outer-island bike tours. When you book, Pascal will make arrangements to pick you up for the tour.

THE PLAY'S THE THING *Zayne D'Crus*

On a wooden stage in a crowded theatre, four young women tell the stories of their lives. The first is a sex worker, the second a family woman, the third views life through the filter of her religion, and the fourth is regularly beaten by her husband.

Through their stories, the mixed audience comes to understand the changing roles of men and women in ni-Vanuatu society, the hopes and expectations people bring into relationships, and how hard it is for women to make something of their lives in a patriarchal society.

This play, *Solid Sistas*, is presented by Wan Smol Bag Theatre (p761). Over the last two years, this community organisation has used theatre, drama, film and radio to raise awareness of issues such as HIV/AIDS, women's rights, health, and the environment, and to effect social change in Vanuatu.

South Australian Vita Maiorano is one of Wan Smol Bag Theatre's project managers, on a two-year assignment with Australian Volunteers International (AVI). Her role involves managing and dispensing funds spent on new projects and reporting to Wan Smol Bag's many local and international donors.

Vita, 33, is one of 20 AVI volunteers working in Vanuatu. While her role includes projects such as environmental management, river health and HIV/AIDS awareness, other AVI volunteers work as pharmacists, sports coordinators, accountants and nurses.

For Vita, volunteering offers the opportunity to settle down in a place and culture; to come to know it intimately. 'It took me six months to feel comfortable here, but now it certainly is home', she says, 'I'm always learning here, and I find out different things about myself each day'.

'To be successful as a volunteer, you need adaptability, resourcefulness, a bit of independence, a smile and a sense of humour!'

For information about Wan Smol Bag call ☎ 27119 or email reklaw@vanuatu.com.vu.

About Australian Volunteers International

Australian Volunteers International (AVI) is an international development organisation working in Asia, the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. AVI volunteers empower local people by exchanging skills and supporting organisations that deliver essential services to communities.

For more information visit www.australianvolunteers.com, or call ☎ 1800 331 292 from within Australia.

ABSEILING & PARASAILING

The team at **Edge Abseiling Adventure Tour** (☎ 53153; www.edgevanuatu.com; tours 6500–14,000Vt) takes you down the Mele-Maat Cascades, into a canyon, on a Tyrolean traverse on Ifira or on a kayaking and abseiling adventure at Siviri. **Nautilus Parasailing** (☎ 22398, 43288; www.nautilus.com.vu; 7000Vt) takes you out over the sparkling waters. Like wow!

Vanuatu for Children

Children love Port Vila. The market is a kids' adventure world. Give them a few coins and watch them shop. Just across on the grass is the playground, then there are the submarine boats (opposite), where they sit in the glassy bottom and watch the fish.

Catch a bus to anywhere. Kids are so happy on the buses, and you'll quickly discover how much the ni-Vanuatu love children.

Erakor (p769) is a top spot. There's a great ferry ride across, and you can have a coffee on the little curved beach while your ankle biters sit in wet sand and build castles, surrounded by water and starfish.

Mele-Maat Cascades and the Secret Gardens will also interest the kids. So will the sharks at Bluewater Island Resort (p775). If they're old enough for kayaks and snorkelling, go out to Hideaway (p769) for the day – it's no good for littlies, as they can't walk on the coral and rock beach.

Then head off to Tanna (p779) – the flight is such an adventure, and Mt Yasur Volcano will absolutely fascinate them. They'll talk of little else for months.

Tours

There are many different tours; operators offer half-day to five-day trips. Go around Efate to swim at beautiful Eton beach,

cruise up Epule River, stop off to see fire-walking, or check out the amazing Valeva Cave at Undine Bay. Alternatively, visit Efate's small offshore islands for superb beaches and great coral reefs – snorkel gear, outrigger canoes and kayaks are provided. Witness a little of Vanuatu's culture on an overnight tour to an island bungalow.

Best of all, have a grand adventure to the outer islands, like a three-day trip to Tanna to witness nature's fireworks, to Santo for scuba diving, or overnight on Epi to swim with the dugong.

The comprehensive **VTO list** (www.vanuatu-tourism.com/vanuatu/cms/en/activities/tours.html) includes the following operators; make arrangements to be picked up from your hotel when you book.

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu)

Horizon Tours (☎ 25053; horizon@vanuatu.com.vu)

Lelepa Island Day Tours (☎ 22714, 42714; www.lelepatours.com)

Melanesian Tours (☎ 26847; www.melanesiantours.com)

Sleeping

Vila and its surrounds has wonderful accommodation options. Many places offer free accommodation for children under 12, so always ask. Most rooms have a fridge.

BUDGET

Room With a View (☎ 23703, 51327; www.vanuatu-tourism.com; cnr Renee Pujol; PO Box 889; s/d/tr incl breakfast 4000/5000/6500Vt) This lovely colonial building has a balcony with the best views. Everyone eats out here, and you meet a

fascinating range of people from businessmen to Peace Corps workers. Mountain bikes and baby-sitters are available.

City Lodge (☎ 26826; citylodge@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d 3800/4700Vt) Location, location. If you're busy in the city, you'll find it's ideal to stay here. Besides, the minimalist rooms are bright and new, the en suites crisp and clean, and it's quiet, despite being so central.

Wild Pig (☎ 23696; www.wildpighotel.com; PO Box 1515; dm incl breakfast 2500Vt, r with bathroom/balcony/air-con 7000/8000/10,000Vt; ☎ ☑ ☑) The communal areas here are excellent: spacious dining room, sports bar, lounge bar, sparkling big pool with gazebo, communal kitchen and barbecue area.

Treetops Lodge & Bungalows (☎ 22944, 42944; swedcons@vanuatu.com.vu; dm/s/d incl breakfast from 1500/3000/4000Vt; ☎ ☑) It's relaxed, rustic and rusty with a great communal kitchen/living area set up on the veranda and views of Erakor Bay in the distance. Two gorgeous two-bedroom bungalows (6000Vt per night each), one with a mezzanine, are also available.

Note that Hideaway and Erakor Island Resorts offer excellent budget accommodation. For a seriously budget place with airy, clean rooms, good kitchen, and pleasant garden, try **Malampa Guesthouse** (☎ 23137, 48502; beds 1500Vt).

MIDRANGE

Fatumaru Lodge (☎ 23456, 41576; www.fatumaru.com; studio/family apt 14,000/22,000Vt; ☎ ☑ ☑) Your apartment represents an outer island – timber shutters fold back, so you're afloat on Fatumaru Bay. It's tropical luxury at its best. Children love it here, with the pool, safe beach, TV room and big play room, where adults play too. It's a quick trip on the bus or a gentle stroll into town. Kayaks are available.

Olympic Hotel (☎ 22464; olympichotel@vanuatu.com.vu; Lini Hwy, PO Box 1537; standard s/d 6500Vt, studios with kitchenette 7200Vt; ☎ ☑) It's nothing exotic, but if you'd like to be right in the centre, the Olympic is quietly comfortable and spacious, with views over the main streets and harbour. Pop down the backstairs into El Gecko (p774) for coffee and meals.

Hideaway Island Resort (Map p765; ☎ 22963; fax 23867; www.hideaway.com.vu; dm/d 2875/7500Vt, studio/1-2-bedroom bungalow 13,800/18,750/30,000Vt; ☎ ☑) This place buzzes as divers, snorkellers and

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pacific Lagoon Apartments (☎ 23860; www.members.optusnet.com.au/pla32; PO Box 827; Pango Rd; 4-person lagoon/garden apt 14,500/12,000Vt; ☎ ☑ ☑) This is perfect for families, with attractive two-bedroom apartments set around two large grassy areas fronting the lagoon. Sunny bathrooms have little rock gardens, lounges are spacious, and kitchens are shiny-clean. There are kayaks, barbecues, great baby-sitting and a laundry service. The bus passes the end of the lane, and it's a minute's walk to the Erakor ferry.

boats come and go. The standard rooms open onto a wide veranda where everyone kicks back. The shared facilities are good, but there's no communal kitchen. The bungalows are spacious and open, with views over the water.

TOP END

Erakor Island Resort (☎ 26983; PO Box 24; www.erakor.vu; dm 2900Vt, superior/deluxe bungalows from 24,000/27,000Vt) Walk along a lantern-lit path to your interesting bungalow opening onto its own bit of waterfront. You're on one gorgeous 6.5-hectare island, with catamarans, outrigger canoes, snorkel gear etc (for hire or free for guests), or try the Get Wet Watersports – scuba diving and fishing. The lodge has spacious bunk rooms and a large kitchen; no matter what your budget you can enjoy Erakor.

Melanesian Port Vila (☎ 22150; fax 22678; www.melanesianportvila.com; orchid room 18,800Vt, self-contained studio/1-2-bedroom apt 16,000/21,000/22,400Vt, Presidential ste 24,800Vt; ☎ ☑ ☑) This place is delightfully tropical and great for families; spacious rooms open onto a fun pool and bar area. There are two restaurants, three bars and special nights: barbecues, kava tastings and cultural performances. All rates include breakfast.

Paradise Cove Resort (Map p765; ☎ 22701; www.paradisecoveresort.net; 1-2-bedroom bungalows 19,300/23,300Vt; ☑) An elegant spot with gorgeous traditional bungalows – with every luxury of course, like a little kitchen, too nice to use. Breakfast is served until early afternoon – honeymooners stay here. Snorkel gear is available, and diving if you're certified. The

resort is tucked away near Pango Point, but it's an easy trip into town.

Chantilly's on the Bay (☎ 27079; www.chantillysonthebay.com; Lini Hwy, PO Box 279; studio/apt/sunlover d 18,000/20,000/22,000Vt; ☑ ☑) A sparkling boutique hotel, its nautical-influenced building sitting prettily on Vila Bay with its own private jetty. All 20 rooms have balconies with terrific bay views, kitchenette and satellite TV. Be totally decadent and ask for the sun-lover apartment with extended deck. Children are welcome; baby-sitters are available.

Then there are the Big Three, offering a full range of facilities in lovely grounds. **Iririki Island Resort** (☎ 23388; fax 23880; www.iririki.com/) is child free. **Le Meridien** (☎ 22040; www.lemeridien.com/vanuatu/port_vila/hotel_vu1668.shtml) and **Le Lagon** (☎ 22313; www.lelagonvanuatu.vu) have casinos and good accommodation deals for children under 13. See their websites for the bigger picture and package-deal details.

Eating

Dining out in Vila is a delight, with great food, friendly staff and glorious views. The following is just a taste.

QUICK EATS

Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway (☎ 27207; takeaway food from 200Vt, upstairs mains 990-1550Vt; ☎ 6am-10pm) This is the best place for fast food. Upstairs, the restaurant is gorgeous, especially at dusk when lights twinkle on the water. The lunch meal and Tusker specials are always excellent.

Au Pêché Mignon (☎ 27271; meals 500-700Vt; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) A very French patisserie with mushroom pizza you'll keep going back for and cheesecake you should order in advance in case it sells out.

Daily Pizza (☎ 26907; Nangaria House; dishes or pizzas 550-1450Vt; ☎ 6.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) An interesting variety of fresh meals is on offer here, including pizzas and Vietnamese shrimp rolls and dumplings.

RESTAURANTS

Rossi Restaurant (☎ 22528; www.therossi.com; mains 1450-3500Vt; ☎ 6am-late) A Vila institution, the Rossi is like a towering atrium with glass doors opening onto the harbour. The food is excellent: always reliable, always tempting you to return.

Roxy's on the Lagoon (☎ 26983; mains 1450-2250Vt; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) Sit in this gorgeous restaurant

PITTER-PATTER

These three totally gorgeous child-free places are way too romantic for the pitter-patter of tiny feet. Absorb the ambience in rambling gardens, on a sun-drenched balcony, in a lazing pool or paddling on the lagoon.

Breaka's Beach Resort (Map p765; ☎ 23670; www.breakas.com; garden/beachfront bungalow 21,000/25,000Vt; ☑)

Sunset Bungalows (☎ 29968; fax 29970; www.sunset-bungalows.com; superior/ste bungalows 28,700/35,000Vt; ☎ ☑)

Vila Chaumières (☎ 22866; vilchaum@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr 12,500/12,500/15,500Vt; ☎ ☑)

and gaze out over the lagoon as you enjoy the chef's best. It has an extensive menu and pleasant surroundings; check out the special nights.

L'Houstalet (☎ 22303; meals 1300-2700Vt; 🍴 dinner) Famous for 30 years for its flying fox and wild pigeon, L'Houstalet offers much more: a great atmosphere, large, comfortable armchairs and an exciting menu.

La Pizzeria (☎ 24763; mains 400-1350Vt; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This simple little place has great comfort food, such as the best osso buco or fish curry you've ever had. It's a popular spot with expats, and for pizza (eat in or take away).

Flaming Bull Steakhouse (mains 1000-1600Vt; 🍴 noon-11pm) The steak here is impossible to beat. Add the big hug from the waiter and the outrageous atmosphere, and you too will keep coming back. Local bands play love songs for you.

Waterfront Bar & Grill (☎ 23490; mains 1500-2900Vt; 🍴 11am-late) This is *the* place for yachtsies, and everyone who loves good food. Right on the harbour, the Waterfront has a fun atmosphere and live music.

Vila Chaumières Restaurant (☎ 22866; mains 1800-3750Vt; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Sitting romantically over palm-fringed and flood-lit Emden Lagoon, Vila Chaumières serves tasty French meals with some English staples. Be sure to book, and ask for a waterside table.

Le Café du Village (☎ 27789; mains 1300-2000Vt; 🍴 8am-10pm) Housed in pretty French-colonial buildings against a sea wall, Le Café has tempting Mediterranean and French meals.

Paradise Cove Italian Restaurant (Map p76; mains 1250-2400Vt; 🍴 7.30am-9pm) This place spreads under a soaring natural roof. After a delicious meal, take your drinks down to the gazebo – it's great at sunset.

Sunset Bungalows Restaurant (☎ 29968; mains 1700-2200Vt; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Sit out over the water to eat an entire lobster drizzled with a sweet chilli concoction. Oh, yum.

Wild Pig Restaurant (☎ 23696; mains 1400-1600Vt; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The chef here is famous for his beef Wellington. Quite the best you'll ever have. Eat in the splendid restaurant or out in the gazebo.

Les Alizé's Restaurant (☎ 24306; mains 1700-2200Vt; 🍴 7.30am-9pm) Up here in the hills, it's magical to watch the lights of Port Vila twinkle below. Meals are magic, too. If you

book, you will be picked up and returned for free.

El Gecko (☎ 25597; mains 1100-1550Vt; 🍴 6am-10pm Mon-Sat) Here it's relaxed courtyard dining with fabulous food, a great menu, and such friends for waiters. Try the garlic and brown sugar on poulet with *kumula* (sweet potato) mash and veg.

Drinking

Vila has a few good bars and an abundance of kava bars.

Office Pub (📞 11.30am-3am Tue-Sat, from 5pm Sun & Mon) The town's only true pub has a cosy atmosphere: booths, wooden sculptures and an old English bar where people chat. Outside is the Flaming Bull (left) and live music.

Waterfront Bar & Grill (☎ 23490; 🍴 11am-late) Live music plays well into the night here. It's just been rebuilt, so does the resident cat still ring the ship's bell when it wants attention? Go and check.

Anchor Inn (📞 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, to 2am Sat & Sun) A great beer garden that buzzes, especially when international sports are on. It's home to the **Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club** (www.vanuatucruisingyachtclub.org), so you'll hear all the yachting gossip.

Trader Vic's (☎ 26800; Lini Hwy; 🍴 4.30pm-3am Tue-Sat) Touted as the town's premier bar/nightclub, Trader Vic's is one grand beer garden, with a steaming disco room off the sports-bar area. There are live bands, Foxtel showing all sports, a pool table, darts and karaoke. Age at the R&D disco is late teens to 30s. Women should take a friend.

The sunset kava cup (small/large 50/100Vt), served in a coconut shell or plastic bowl, is a ritual. Try it out at **Ron's Nakamal** (Nambatu) or the Sea Side Kava Bar (behind the hospital).

Entertainment

Many places offer feasts on set nights which include kava tasting, string bands and *kastom* dancers. Try **Solo's Feast 'n' Fun Night** (adult/child 2500/1225Vt; 🍴 5pm Thu), out at **Worawia Holiday Haven** (☎ 25498; www.resort-vanuatu.com), near Mele town. Mr and Mrs Solomon from the local village prepare traditional food in a ground oven, unfolding and explaining the dishes while you try some kava. Then join in the dancing – it's a great night.

Shopping

Hebrida Market Place (Lini Hwy) This fun place is jam-packed with hand-painted clothes, hand-made souvenirs, and woven bags and mats.

L'atelier (Hebrida Market Place) The perfect place to start looking for wooden carvings and handicrafts.

Philippe Metois Photography (Lini Hwy) Buy Vanuatu captured at its best – unframed prints start at 1250Vt, framed at 10,000Vt.

There are a number of shops selling duty-free products on Lini Hwy between the market and the northern end of the central business district. In general, these are reasonable for alcohol, perfume, fine china and jewellery, but not so great on electrical goods.

AROUND EFATE

It's a pleasant, somewhat bumpy road north, mainly following the coast and passing coconut plantations, cattle stations and rocky inlets. There are superb views from Klem's Hill, 200m above sea level.

Stores are scarce outside Vila. Most people live off their own garden produce, which you can sample at roadside stalls – just leave your money in the box.

If you are hiring a car, watch out for the slalom moments in the northwest and water-logged sections in the south – fill up before you go. There are no petrol stations.

White Sands Beach

East of Vila, just past Teouma River (Efate's largest), a right-hand turn takes you down to the coastal road.

White Sands Beach, fringed with screw-trunked pandanus palms, is rather exposed but does have a few good **snorkelling** and **swimming** spots.

Tamanu on the Beach (☎ 27279; fax 24470; www.tamanuonthebeach.com; planters/beachfront d incl breakfast 16,500/19,000Vt; 📺) This small resort is gorgeous: five luxurious French-colonial cottages with magnificent polished boards running out to little love-nest porches. Use the bikes, then swim in rock pools or the Pacific Ocean. The restaurant's good reputation is definitely deserved, with great food (mains 2050Vt to 2650Vt) and a pleasant setting, right on the beach. It's open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Rentapao River

Cutting Edge Adventures (p770) offers excellent half-day **kayaking** trips here. If you're game, you can get in and swim with fish and massive sea turtles in Bluewater Island Resort's open-air **aquarium** (nonguest adult/child 850/425Vt). In a separate pool are beautiful reef sharks.

The large development of 49 shiny and modern bungalows at **Bluewater Island Resort** (☎ 27606; www.bluewaterisland.com; garden/river/lagoon d 9500/11,000/12,000Vt; 📺 📺) is wrapped around a blue lagoon. The resort has kayaks, snorkel gear and sports facilities; transfers are free. There's also a lodge with double rooms and a communal kitchen (doubles cost 4000Vt). The double rate includes accommodation for two adults and a child, as well as breakfast.

Eton Blue Hole

Continue on around to the east coast and you'll find this lovely **swimming and snorkelling spot** (admission per person 300Vt) near Eton. There are toilets and a change room.

Takara

The waters out from **Takara**, with the prevailing southeast winds, offer ideal conditions for **kitesurfing**. Ring ☎ 23576 for daily weather reports.

Two **US WWII fighter planes** lie in the shallows close to nearby Baofatu. They ran out of fuel coming in to land at Quoin Hill. **Matanawora WWII Relics** (Takara) is a dusty but fascinating little display. Ask about the local **store** where artists work and exhibit their tapestries, carvings and hand-painted goods. Alternatively, visit a **cannibal site**, watch men walk on fire or dive off cliffs, or see a floating stone island that's the size of a house.

Narasaed Adventure Tours (☎ /fax 27555; narasaed@vanuatu.com.vu) takes you on a range of very unusual experiences, plus more standard ones, such as fishing, kitesurfing and kayaking. **Horizon Tours** (☎ 25600; adult/child 4200/2100Vt) arranges tours that include swimming and snorkelling around one of the WWII planes.

Allen Noppert runs the great **Beachcomber Resort** (☎ 23576; fax 26458; beachc@vanuatu.com.vu; Takara; lodge s/d 4400/6800Vt, bungalows from dm/s/d/tr 3000/5300/9000/9600Vt; 📺), which has a hot mineral pool alongside a cold swimming

pool – hydrotherapy fun. Sprawled well apart along the shoreline are a range of Western bungalows – some are self-contained (single/double/triple cost 7000/11,500/11,700Vt). The atrium restaurant (mains 1300Vt to 2100Vt; open from 7.30am till late) has its own hot pool and waterfall – swim to your plate of nibbles.

Paonangisu

This village is the best place to ask about a speedboat ride across to Nguna. The boats usually leave from nearby Emua and should be arranged in advance – either through Nagar Resort (see below) or a tour operator – to suit the tides.

Chief Joel of Emua village takes you on a **kayak adventure**, paddling across to Nguna for a Melanesian lunch, then returning in his motorboat. Contact **Island Stream Getaway** (☎ /fax 26445, ☎ 24786, 42702; kayak trips 5000Vt).

Nagar Resort (☎ 27986; fax 24936; s/d incl breakfast 5000/7000Vt, 2-bedroom f 9500Vt) is very relaxed on a quiet white-sand bay with Nguna and Pele as a backdrop. The tiny rock-base bungalows are really basic, but the family bungalow is a rambling affair with a bathtub! Bikes are available, and you can camp in the grounds. Transfers are 5000Vt. The licensed restaurant (mains 850Vt to 1450Vt; open for lunch and dinner) is a great place to stop for lunch on a round-island trip; eat al fresco under the trees.

A taxi to here from Vila costs 5000Vt.

Siviri

At Undine Bay is white-sand **St Lawrence Beach** (300Vt), isolated and inviting, fringed with palm trees. Nearby is pretty **Siviri** known for its fragrant flowers. Explore **Valavea Cave** (admission per person 100Vt) in a kayak (1000Vt). It has chambers and tunnels and a beautiful underground lake. The villagers will show you the massive limestone boulder that was somehow moved by people, and the strange footprints engraved in the rock floor.

NGUNA

pop 1200

This little island has a very pretty traditional village, **Talooa**, that's waiting, with lots of accommodation and tourist attractions, to give you a taste of island life just a short hop from Vila. Locals reckon they run their

village successfully beyond of standards established by New Zealand (NZ) missionary Peter Milne.

Sights & Activities

Nguna has a long **white-sand beach** and a marine-protected area, with a labelled **snorkel trail** that follows past rich exotic coral gardens with all sorts of fish.

Guided hikes take you through village gardens to mountain peaks and lakes and to the beautiful **kastom treehouse**, built 20m up a 300-year-old **banyan**. Inside the treehouse is a conservatory of palms, ferns and flowers.

Utlanangi, by a sheltered cove, is the best place from which to climb the extinct volcano **Mt Taputaora** (593m). The climb is long and arduous, but you'll be rewarded with superb panoramas over the Shepherd Islands and much of Efate.

Great fun is going in an outrigger canoe to watch the villagers **turtle tagging**. Sponsor your own turtle, name it, and see it back into the ocean. The **Giant Clam Garden** was inspired by the one at the Maskelynes (p789).

Visit the chief's magnificent **nakamal**, built over 200 years ago. It has huge log supports and a soaring roof, one of the very last of its kind.

Sleeping & Eating

Vat-Vaka Beach Bungalows (☎ 22463, 23120; s incl all meals 2900Vt) It's only a few minutes from the mainland, but these bungalows make you realise you're an entire world away. Quaint and basic, they nestle into the landscape. Lanterns are supplied for light, and walk to the outhouse, where the flush toilet is pretty cute. Ask for Yoan Jay.

Juboe Bungalow (☎ 22219; s incl all meals 2900Vt) Right on the beach, this is one very spacious bungalow – the shower and toilet are in a separate little hut. The meals are yummy, and it's a two-minute stroll into the centre of the village, where you can organise some snorkelling or go on one of the tours. Ask for Emma Tasong.

Getting There & Around

Transport trucks from Vila leave from outside the Hua Chinese Store, near the police station, some time between 12.30pm and 1.30pm Monday to Friday (400Vt). The truck connects with a boat to the island

(400Vt). The return trip is early in the morning.

A taxi from Vila to the wharf at Emua is 5000Vt. Arrange a speedboat to Nguna (3000Vt) through Nagar Resort (opposite) or a tour operator.

EPI

pop 5000 / area 444 sq km

Epi is a fascinating island, just a hop, skip and jump from Efate. Arrive in the south and while away the hours in a rustic lodge watching for whales and dolphins to cross the small bay. Take a bumpy ride up north to Lamén Bay to do the whole watersport thing, including swimming with that loveable dugong, young Bondas, a gregarious dugong. It's an adventure island, where you become part of the village structure. Listen to the local lads pounding the kava ready for you to drink in the dusky **nakamal**; chat to the ladies of the village as they prepare their ground ovens and wrap the **laplap** in banana leaves; walk around to the conservation area,

where megapodes and turtles can lay their eggs in safety; and take long walks along the black-sand beach at Lamén Bay.

Transport

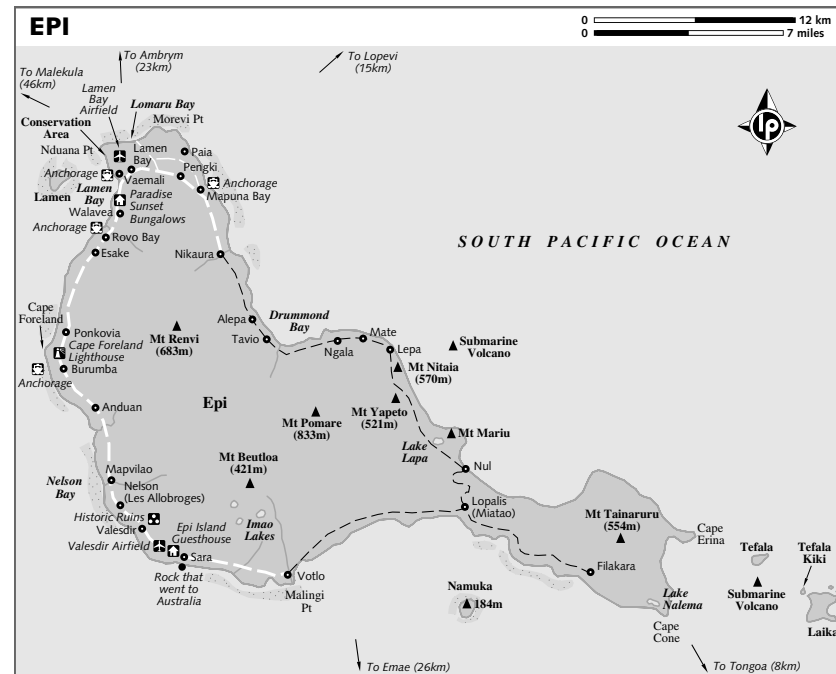
GETTING THERE & AWAY

Vanair (☎ 25025) flies from Vila to Valesdir on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday, and to Lamén Bay on Tuesday and Saturday. Some flights also stop at Tongoa. The Lamén Bay strip gives you a stunning introduction to the island as the plane comes in low over coral reefs and crystal-clear turquoise water.

For information on boats that call into Epi, see p809. There are several good anchorages in north Epi: Lamén Bay, Mapuna Bay, Rovo Bay, Walavea and Cape Foreland. All can be unsuitable depending on the wind direction.

GETTING AROUND

A good plan when visiting Epi is to fly to Lamén Bay, make your way down the west coast by taxi truck (6000Vt) and then fly out of Valesdir (or vice versa). Epi's roads



are basic, and the eastern half of the island only has walking tracks.

Sights & Activities

Lamen Bay is home to massive **sea turtles** and several **dugong**, including Bondas: if you can find him, he'll be happy to let you hang around and rub his tum – not vigorously, as his spiky coat will rip your fingers off. Ask your host about borrowing snorkel gear.

There are a few small stores selling limited groceries, as well as a fish shop behind the bungalows, a cold room selling ice cream and meat (ask for Isabelle's place), and a bakery.

Sea kayaks and outrigger canoes are available, or you can charter a fishing boat (5000Vt) to try your hand at **reef fishing**. **Spear fishing** is especially good at night – the locals will take you out. If you're into **gamefishing**, a small Kiri 8 can take you out trawling (half/full day 15,000/30,000Vt) or deep-sea fishing (15,000Vt per day).

Down south, **Valesdir** includes the Valesdir plantation, which produces copra and beef cattle. There are **historic ruins** of a mansion here. In the 1920s, Valesdir had its own coinage; one coin was marked 'five centimes' on one side, and 'six pence' on the other. For many years, there was a grand race day near the airstrip. Horses came from all over the Pacific.

In the tiny bay is the 'rock that went to Australia'. The locals tell about a boy who was sitting on the rock when he disappeared. He returned two years later with some clothes, a leg of bullock and tales about a trip to Australia.

The cliffs are so steep and the jungle so dense behind the plantations that, at dusk, you might only know you are approaching a village by the boom, boom, boom of

BON ANNÉE

All through January, villagers prepare long flower-embedded posts and set out together to walk as far as they can, dancing along, stopping at each village they pass to sing songs and chant, 'Happy, Happy, Bon Année'. Then they dust their listeners with talcum powder and set off to the next village.

the men pounding the kava in metal pipes; enjoy the twilight in a *nakamal* with a drink. If you can make up a group, enjoy an **island feast** with the local string band and *kastom* dancing.

On the western side of Epi are two **submarine volcanoes** that steam or bubble, and give the evening sky a deep scarlet glow.

Sleeping & Eating

Paradise Sunset Bungalows (☎ 28230; Lamen Bay; s/d incl all meals 5500/7200Vt, camping 500Vt) A relaxed and friendly place right on the bay, just a short walk from the airfield. The rooms and shared facilities are basic, but the food and the bay view are lovely. Tasso has snorkel gear, bikes and outriggers, and he will arrange tours. A truck to the airstrip is 200Vt. The restaurant (meals 1000Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is large and usually full of guests and visitors from the yachts in the bay, which makes for a fun evening.

Epi Island Guesthouse (☎/fax 28225; www.epi-island-guesthouse.com.vu; Valesdir; s incl all meals 8000Vt, camping 1000Vt) Enjoy rural life in total comfort in this arty, rustic lodge powered by a microhydro turbine. The central room is full of fascinating bits like 1865–75 Enfield guns once owned by blackbirders. A library, games and baby-sitting are available, and

THE GENTLE DUGONG

Bondas' fat little snout swishes around on the ocean floor, sending up a cloud of fine sand as he separates out his food. Then he rolls over to get a better look at you and floats up to have his tummy rubbed. The experience is extraordinary – you realise in one mind-blowing moment what conservation is all about.

Dugongs inhabit the warm tropical and subtropical coastal waters of the Indian and south-west Pacific Oceans. But, worldwide, populations of these sweet creatures are declining due to overhunting, drowning in fishing nets, pollution and loss of food resources. In fact, dugong are considered vulnerable to extinction. Fortunately, by being cute and cuddly, they've turned themselves into a major tourist attraction. Hopefully, this will help protect them.

you may see dolphins from the veranda. At Epi Moments Dining Room (meals 1500Vt to 1700Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) gourmet cuisine is whipped up by owner Alix.

TANNA

pop 33,000 / area 565 sq km

The Tannese are passionate about their island – and you will be, too. There are lush undisturbed rainforests, heady night-perfumed flowers, coffee plantations, plains where wild horses run with their foals, mountains, hot springs and waterfalls. Presiding over it all is fuming, furious Mt Yasur, one of the world's most accessible volcanoes. The local chiefs have formed marine and wildlife sanctuaries, and there are gardening, surfing, cycling, walking or volcano enthusiasts everywhere. Note that there are very serious quarantine controls – the island has no nasty bugs, so everything's grown without insecticides, herbicides or pesticides, and the locals want to keep it

that way. Christianity, cargo cult and *kastom* are important, and all natural phenomena have a fourth dimension of spirituality and mystique.

The entire island is a tourists' playground. So, when the volcano has finished working its magic on you, there are horses to ride, forests to trek through, waterfalls to stand under and a kilometre-deep drop-off tumbling with coral to snorkel along. Meet *kastom* villagers wearing *namba* and grass skirts, watch age-old festivals or just laze on a tropical island beach and watch the sun set.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

You can get package deals in Vila that typically include air fares, transfers, accommodation, all meals and visits to Mt Yasur and a *kastom* village (about 35,000Vt).

For boats that call into Tanna, see p809.

THE NEKOWIAR & TOKA CEREMONY

About every three years, come August, a great restlessness spreads across Tanna. The men scour the bush and villages for pigs and kava, counting, calculating. Finally one of the chiefs announces that his village will host the Nekowiar. Hooray. Romance is in the air. It will be a three-day extravaganza of song, dance and feasting during which the leaders of neighbouring villages organise marriages. Negotiations for the marriages continue for months afterwards.

Preparations for the Nekowiar are exhaustive. Three complex dances are practised, and beauty magic takes over. Men, women, boys and girls use powders mixed with coconut oil to colour their faces a deep red, with black and yellow stripes.

Finally, as many as 2000 people assemble while the hosts display around 100 live, squealing pigs, tied by the feet and suspended on poles.

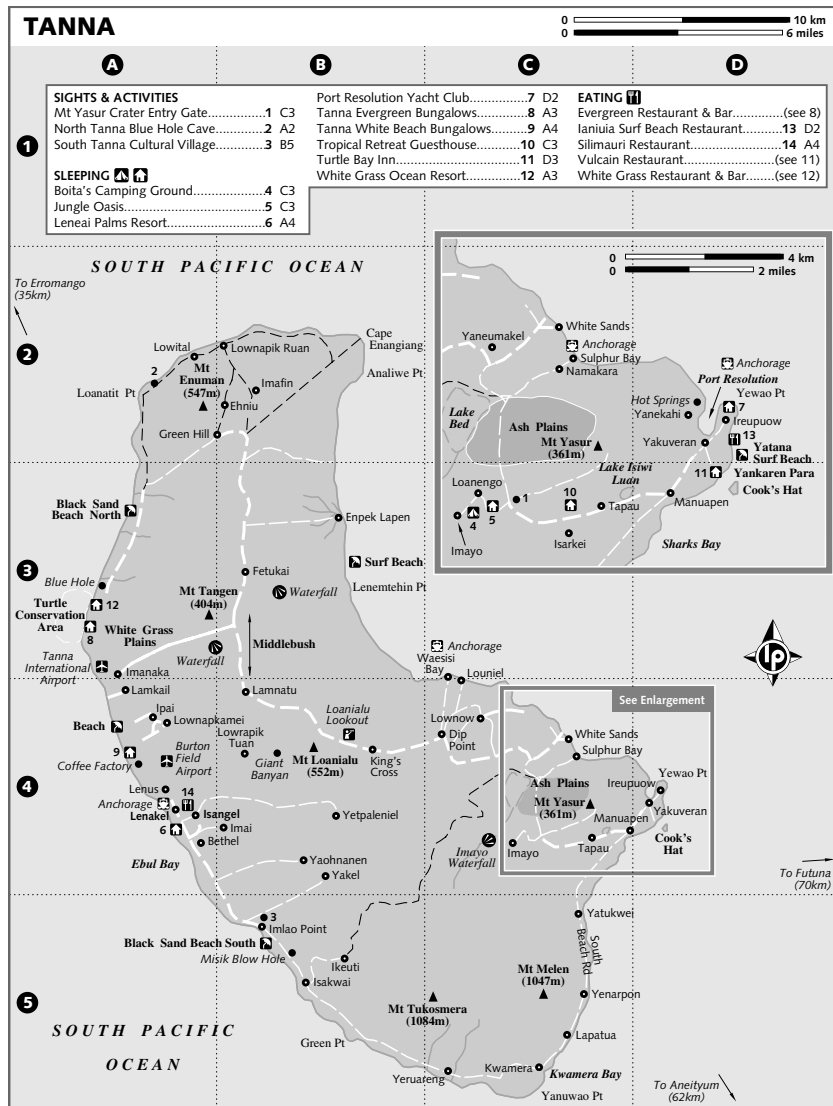
The ceremony begins with the host village's young men dancing an invitation to the women. They respond with the Napen-Napen, a spectacular dance that represents their toil in the fields, and continues throughout the first night.

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

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

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

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



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

GETTING AROUND

All the major attractions are linked by roads to Lenakel, the capital.

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

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

Orientation

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

Spectacular South Beach Rd is its own amusement park ride, with stunning ocean and cliff views at every turn. Make sure you've reached the end before dusk, as you'll never find the disconnected road sections in your headlights.

Tanna's centre is a fertile, dense forest, aptly called Middlebush, with coconut, coffee, vegetables and fruit grown here for export. Kava is a major cash crop.

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

Information

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

Ambulance (☎ 68659)

Emergencies (☎ 112)

Hospital (☎ 68659) At Lenakel.

Internet access (per min 25Vt; ☎ 7-11.30am & 1.30-5pm) At Lorakau Computer School next to the market.

Police (☎ 68658) At Isangel.

MT YASUR

This **active volcano** (admission 2250Vt) is one of the world's most accessible. In fact, 4WD vehicles can get to within 150m of the crater rim.

Mt Yasur's ash-laden smoke has smothered the vegetation, reducing the landscape to an alien prehistoric desert, with the gaunt shapes of surviving pandanus palms adding to the surrealistic view. The track from the entry gate then enters a gully on the southern slopes. Tree ferns crowd in on either side, a lush contrast to the desolation of the plains.

The level of activity within Yasur fluctuates between dangerous and relatively calm, but when it's hot it's hot. Along the path to the crater rim, there are whiffs of sulphur and whooshing, roaring noises. Ahead is a

silhouette of people on the rim, golden fire-works behind them. Then you're looking into a dark central crater where three vents take turns to spit rockets of red-molten rock and smoke. The ground trembles and a fountain of fiery magma shoots up and spreads against the sky. All turns quiet, except for the thudding of boulders as big as trucks somersaulting down into the vast campfire.

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

Some visitors find Yasur terrifying; it's definitely unforgettable.

Don't go up to the rim when the volcano is reaching levels 3 and 4. And buy some special singed cards to post at **Volcano Post** (www.vanuatu-post.vu), the world's only postbox on top of a volcano.

WEST TANNA

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

Sights

Around 1000 people live in **Lenakel**, which has mains electricity, several stores, excellent bakeries, and colourful markets on Monday, Thursday afternoon and Friday. The kava bars provide a meeting place. (Tanna's kava is potent, probably the strongest in the country.)

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

At **South Tanna Cultural Village** (South Beach Rd; admission 1500Vt; ☎ Mon, Wed & Fri or by arrangement), a young *kastom* villager drums you through the forest to displays of food preparation, *kastom* medicine, how to catch wild animals and much more. Finally, the men perform the famous, expressive Toka dances. There are handicrafts for sale.

Visit **Yakel** or **Ipai**, where life hasn't changed in centuries, or Imai, a small Jon Frum settlement (see p783). There's *kastom* dancing, colourful *namba* and grass skirts, *laplap* and artefacts. Hundreds of people gather nightly under a huge *banyan* at Yakel to drink kava, and dancing nights occur on a regular basis.

Activities

Horses and guides are available at **Lenakel Cove Resort** (☎ 68860, 23759; Lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu; village/banyan tour 2000/3500Vt); jungle trails take you past villages to a **giant banyan** as big as a soccer field. It's near Lowrapik Tuan.

Sea kayaks are available at several resorts. Guided walks take you through rainforest and coffee plantations, among the wild horses, along stunning coastlines and under two grand waterfalls. And there's a two-day trek around the top of Tanna.

There's excellent **snorkelling** right along the west coast, with the reef face cascading down for 100m. **Surfing** at the black-sand beach north of Louniel is fun. Boogie boards are available, or try riding the local outrigger canoes – that'll test your balance.

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

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation on the west enjoys 24-hour electricity. In the east, it's generally available till 9pm. These are a few of the excellent options.

Tanna Evergreen Bungalows (☎/fax 68846, ☎ 68774; tevergreen@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 9; budget s/d 3500/5500Vt, garden s/d/tr/q 4500/6500/8000/9000Vt, camping 1000Vt; 📺) These bungalows hide coolly in the lush forest. Some have en suites, others ocean views (500Vt extra). Snorkel gear, baby-sitting, laundry, massage, glass-bottomed kayaks, a full range of tours – it's all here. Rates include breakfast; transfers are 200Vt. Visa, MasterCard and travellers cheques are accepted.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Leneai Palms Resort (☎ 68750; leneaipalms@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 106; 📺) An amazing spot, down on the bay, where grand bungalows with lounging rooms and shuttered windows open onto sea views. There are expansive lawns and homemade ice cream – all great, especially for families. The coast is dotted with protected rock pools, so snorkelling is fun. Snorkel gear and board games are available, or you can get a volleyball game happening and then enjoy a cold drink at the spacious bar.

White Grass Ocean Resort (☎ 68688; fax 68677; www.whitegrassvanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 5; s/d/tr incl breakfast 13,000/19,000/22,500Vt; 📺) A cosy resort where bungalows look out onto tiny rocky inlets, linked with timber bridges. There's a bar, tennis, *pétanque*, and a three-hole golf course. Snorkel gear, mountain bikes, kayaks and golf clubs are available. Rates include transfers. Visa, MasterCard and Amex are accepted.

Tanna White Beach Bungalows (☎ 68866; tanna_whitebeachbungalow@yahoo.com; PO Box 83; s/d incl breakfast 2875/4600Vt) A rambling track through the forest opens suddenly onto an inviting clearing around a huge shade tree. This fabulous place is owned and run by the local villagers (ask for Erick). Here you'll find a big traditional dining room, sparkly new bungalows and modern bathrooms. There's a white-sand beach with a rock pool. Snorkel the drop-off (bring your own gear), borrow the canoes, lounge under the trees – you'll never want to leave.

Silimauri Restaurant (meals 300Vt; 🕒 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) This place hides prettily under vines as you turn into Isangel Rd. Dorah prepares a different dish each day and closes when it has all sold. If you're in luck, she'll be serving her fish in coconut cream with pawpaw and rice.

Other options:

Evergreen Restaurant & Bar (☎ 68774; mains 1000-1800Vt; 🕒 6am-10pm) At Tanna Evergreen Bungalows; serves great meals on a wide deck.

White Grass Restaurant & Bar (☎ 68688; meals 800-2500Vt; 🕒 lunch & dinner) At White Grass Ocean Resort, this is a great place to eat, overlooking rock pools, reef and ocean – a spread of light and colour at sunset.

EAST TANNA Sulphur Bay

This **Jon Frum Village** (admission 500Vt), built around a square ceremonial ground, used to be the cult's major centre (see opposite). The church to one side houses the movement's most sacred red cross. Beside it, an unpainted post dedicated to Christ is used to heal backaches. Ask for permission to use the hot spring on the black-sand beach: it's hydrotherapy, jumping out of the spring into the surf.

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

THE JON FRUM MOVEMENT

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

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

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

Port Resolution

Tanna's best anchorage is this beautiful bay with its magnificent cliffs. The village, **Yakoveran**, has pretty bungalows and a market with handicrafts, fruit and vegetables. Wide flower-lined paths lead to the beach: one comes out near the bay at Yewao Point to a **marine sanctuary**. The water is calm just before the coral reef finishes, offering excellent snorkelling.

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

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

Sights & Activities

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

Horses are available at Jungle Oasis (right). Head across the ash plains, up the volcano, and down to Port Resolution and Sharks Bay. Alternatively, you can board-ride down Yasur's ash plains. It's a quick trip down after a long walk up.

Cultural concerts are held in a clearing near Tapau, where narrow paths lead to magical fire-walking, animal traps, luminous mushrooms and handicrafts. String bands play and little kids sing and dance on a small stage.

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

Sharks Bay attracts dozens of yellow reef sharks. Stand on the cliff top to watch them (admission 500Vt), then walk a way along the stunning coastline.

Sleeping & Eating

Tropical Retreat Guesthouse (☎ 68899, 68000; PO Box 85; adventure@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d incl breakfast & dinner 1700/2300Vt) This is a peaceful spot, even with old Yasur roaring. Spacious bungalows are set in an unusual, meandering garden.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

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

There's a flush toilet and a shower, and a nearby cave has turned into a natural sauna (250Vt). Ask for Philip Joel.

Port Resolution Yacht Club (☎ 68791, 68061; fax 68676; werry_narua@yahoo.com.au; PO Box 877; s/d/tr incl breakfast 3200/4800/5300Vt, camping 1500Vt) Set on a cliff top, each bungalow has a marvellous view of rugged Mt Melen. There's electricity in the evenings, a warm shower and a flush toilet. The dining room (meals are 500Vt to 1200Vt) has cold drinks – even beer. Transfers cost 3100/5700Vt for one/two people.

Turtle Bay Inn (Relais Baie de Tortues; ☎ 68850; fax 68885; info@vanuatu-paradise.com; PO Box 873; s/d incl breakfast & lunch 6850/11,200Vt, camping 1000Vt) This very French place (with electricity) is the absolutely perfect location if you want

seclusion alongside island-style luxury. Walk from the spacious bungalows directly through to the coral beach – there's surf behind the reef – or lounge to your heart's content in a soothing hot-water spring. Visa, MasterCard and Amex are all accepted.

Boita's Camping Ground (☎ 68676, 68000; s incl all meals 1000Vt) Bring your own tent, or stay in a bamboo-and-palm-frond *kastom* tent. Whichever, it's a glorious way to camp, moulded into the jungle. A tiny clearing with a pipe from a spring is your natural bathroom.

Ianiua Surf Beach Restaurant (☎ 68061; Port Resolution; 3-course buffet meal 650Vt; ☎ by arrangement) This gorgeous beach has the sweetest

little bamboo restaurant, where Chef Lea attends a ground oven. The aromas as she opens it up are yum. Choose from a laden table of tasty dishes using local produce, fresh herbs, flair and finesse. Order lobster in advance and the lads will go diving for them (extra 600Vt).

Vulcain Restaurant (☎ 68850; set 3-course meals 1800Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) Located at Turtle Bay Inn, Vulcain serves French and local cuisine.

MALEKULA

pop 25,000 / area 2023 sq km

Shaped like a sitting dog, Malekula has two highland areas connected by 'the dog's neck'. The uplands are extremely rugged and inhospitable, rising to over 800m and crisscrossed by narrow valleys.

Two of Malekula's major cultural groups are the Big Nambas and Small Nambas, named because of the size of the men's *namba* (penis sheath). Small Nambas men wear only one leaf of dried fibre wound around their penis and tucked into their bark belt. Their semi-*kastom* communities are built around a central dance area with up to five *tamtam*.

Big Nambas men wind large purple pandanus fibres around their penis, securing the loose ends in a thick bark belt and leaving the testicles exposed. They had such an awesome warlike reputation that no foreigner dared venture into their territory. Even police expeditions, which came to punish them for killing traders, were ambushed and dispersed. They kept a stone fireplace where unwelcome outsiders were ritually cooked and eaten. You can see cannibal sites at Unmet and near Sanwir.

Big Nambas *ernpavet* (grade-taking) ceremonies are preceded by lengthy rearsals. The men cover themselves in charcoal and coconut oil, tie nut rattles around their ankles and wear feathers in their hair. At the highest level, a man has the powerful characteristics of a hawk, and a hawk dance is performed by a spirit man. The outfit, the movement and the spirit are stunning and unforgettable.

There's no malaria in Malekula's mountainous central region, whereas the coast is infested with it.

Information

There are no ATMs and all places accept only cash. The NBV bank in Lakatoro will change travellers cheques and Australian dollars, but you can't access cash through your accounts, so take heaps of Vatu.

The **tourism officer** (☎ 48491; malpc@vanuatu.com.vu) is based at the council offices and can help with any aspect of tourism in the province. There's a **hospital** (☎ 48410) at Norsup, on the northeast coast.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

At least twice a day **Vanair** (☎ 25025) lands at Norsup on the Vila/Luganville route. Three times a week flights also stop at Lamap. Planes fly to South West Bay when required. A twice-weekly loop links Norsup with Ambrym, Paama and Epi.

For boats that call into Malekula, see p809. A chartered speedboat ride from Wala in northern Malekula to Luganville in Santo costs around 18,000Vt.

GETTING AROUND

Roads run from Norsup around the north coast and down the east coast to Lamap. The roads are rough and rutted and ford many river beds, so in the wet season they are often closed.

It costs 300/100Vt by taxi/minibus from Norsup airport into Lakatoro, but at week-ends there aren't many around. Boats often arrive at Litslits in the early evening, and a taxi then is also unlikely, so try to hitch if you see a vehicle. Otherwise you may have to walk, which is not easy in the dark.

A **truck** (☎ 48594) operates along the east coast between Lakatoro and Lamap (1000Vt) on week days, leaving Lamap at 5am and returning from Lakatoro at 1pm. At weekends you need to charter the truck (16,000Vt). Trucks/taxis run more frequently between Lakatoro and Veturah in the north (200/900Vt).

Most public transport leaves Lakatoro from the **MDC General Store** (☎ 48443). For details, see p787.

All inhabited islands are linked to the mainland by speedboats or canoes. You can get to Uripiv and Uri (see p787) by canoe or speedboat from the Lakatoro jetty. There are plenty of canoes going across between 4pm and 4.30pm, when it costs 100Vt for

SOME OTHER SOUTHERN ISLANDS

Mystery Island

'Welcome to Paradise', the pilot will say as you clamber out of his tiny plane onto Aneityum's grass airstrip on Mystery Island. And it's true: this beautiful sandy islet is surrounded by a broad sand bank and dazzling coral in an azure sea, just like in the movies. Garden paths crisscross the island, many leading to little thatched loos. **Snorkelling** is fantastic off the end of the airstrip, as the island is a marine sanctuary. Aneityum people believe Mystery Island is the home of ghosts, so no-one will live there.

Cross to **Anelcauhat**, Aneityum's main village, to see fascinating ruins of whaling-industry equipment, missionary Geddie's church and old irrigation channels. Take stunning walks from Anelcauhat to picturesque **Port Patrick**, impressive **Inwan Leleghei Waterfall** or to the top of **Inrerow Atahein** (853m), an extinct volcano.

Mystery Island Guesthouse (☎ 68896, 68672; beds 2250Vt) has three bedrooms and a kitchen. Someone will come over from Aneityum each day to bring supplies, but it's a good idea to bring extras. Except on cruise-ship days (about every six weeks), you'll probably have this paradise to yourself – actually, you can book the whole island for 6750Vt, just to make sure!

Erromango

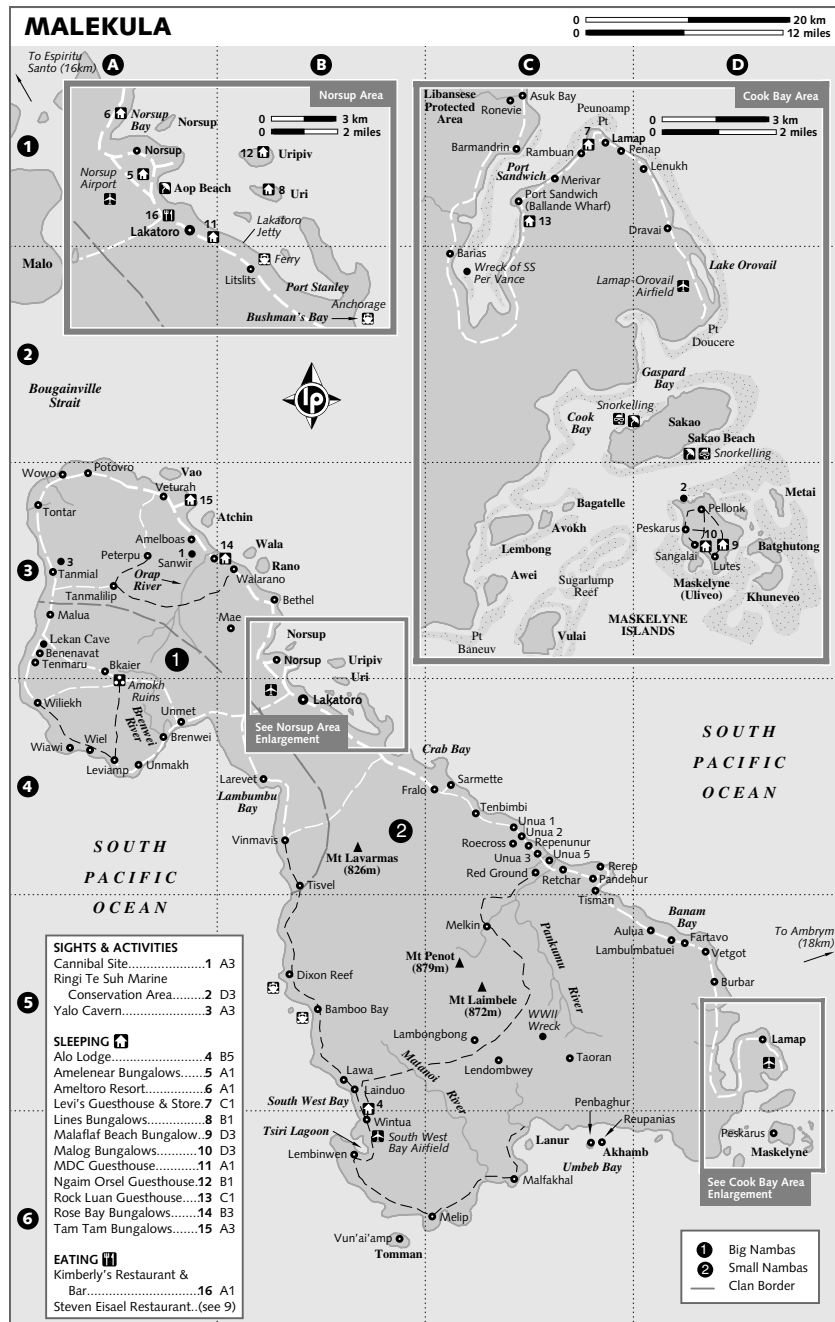
The 'land of mangoes' is mountainous, with almost all the people living in two main villages on its rugged coast. Each village has a fertile eco-garden, where taro, tomato, corn and sweet potato thrive among huge mango, coconut and pawpaw trees.

Dillons Bay is Erromango's largest settlement, with a huge crystal-clear **swimming hole** formed by the Williams River as it turns to the sea. Sandalwood trees still grow in the rainforest and a rock shows the outline of Williams, the first missionary here. They laid his short, stout body on this rock and chipped around it prior to cooking it.

Guided walks from Dillons Bay include trips to the **kauri reserve**, to see the ancient 40m-high trees, and a three-day walk down south and across to Ipota. There's magnificent scenery as you drop in and out of deep, fjord-like valleys, pass taro gardens, carve through tropical rainforests and trek down a 300m-high escarpment to scenic **Pongkil Bay**. Then you follow the coastal cliffs to a final steep descent to **South River**, beside a picturesque estuary. Boulder-hop and ford South River as you follow it to the Ipota road.

A guide costs about 1500Vt per day, plus food.

At the mouth of the Williams River, **Meteson's Guesthouse** (☎ /fax 68792; islands@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d B&B 4200/5600Vt) has been extended to sleep 10. Chief William arranges tours, transport and guides. Meals are 350Vt.



a ride. Otherwise, a speedboat charter is 1500Vt. If you're staying on Uripiv, ask your host about borrowing a canoe for snorkelling, or to arrange permission to paddle across to Uri.

THE DOG'S HEAD Sights & Activities

Take your bloodthirsty self on a demanding half-day return walk to the Big Nambas **cannibal site** deep in the forest behind Sanwir – it's complete with a stone fireplace, stone tables where corpses were dismembered, and many bones.

The **two-day trek** across the rugged 'dog's head' takes you from Rose Bay Bungalows in Sanwir to Malua, on the west coast – return by transport. This trek has been documented by the Australian Heritage Foundation as it combines natural and cultural treasures with magnificent scenery, caves, waterfalls and *kastom* villages.

Tours go to Small Nambas **kastom dancing** on Rano, or at Amelboas; to Big Nambas dances at Unmet and Mae; and to the spectacular **Yalo Cavern** near Tanmial. Other tours go out to the islets of Wala and Vao.

Sleeping & Eating

Rose Bay Bungalows (☎ /fax 48602; rosebay@vanuatu.com.vu; B&B dm 2480Vt, s/d incl all meals 4000/8000Vt) A charming group of traditional bungalows with en suites, set in gardens on a small black-sand bay. The food is good, but bring your own drinks. Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

Tam Tam Bungalows (☎ 48926; Veturah; s/d 1500/3000Vt) Here the bungalows are linked by flower-lined paths around rock pools of coral. Owner Jean-Michel has bikes and snorkel gear; a speedboat and spear fishing can be arranged. There's power until 9pm, a store selling crafts, and a grand *nakamal* for drinking kava. Meals are 500Vt.

EASTERN MALEKULA

Norsup's commercial activities revolve around Plantations Réunies de Vanuatu (PRV), whose **coconut plantations** border the town. Just beyond the airport terminal is sandy **Aop Beach**, whose palms and turquoise water make it a pretty spot to wait for your plane. A long stretch of beautiful coral reef stretches southwards from Aop Beach to Litslits, the main port for this area.

Lakatoro

Set on two levels divided by a steep slope, this attractive place with many shady trees is Malampa province's administrative capital. On the top level are the **Council Offices** (☎ 48503) and the **Cultural Centre** (☎ 48651), which has fascinating exhibits and photos. On the bottom level, at the northern end of town, are the LTC Co-op, NBV bank, post office, bakery and Vanair office. Half-way along the bottom road is the charming **Seven Leven** (☎ 5-10pm). It's a kava bar and *nakamal* set out like a miniature resort, with soft music and an electric grinder for the kava. The southern end has the MDC General Store and market. Ask here about hiring fishing boats or taking a boat out to Uripiv and Uri islands.

Lakatoro has mains electricity.

Sleeping & Eating

Ameleneer Bungalows (☎ 48773, 53962; Norsup; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt) New bungalows with en suites just at the end of the airstrip. Sit on the porch and look across the ocean to Lakatoro, or walk along to attractive Aop Beach – the best place to swim. Tours from here include a trip to see the giant clams and *kastom* dances at Uri Island.

Ameltoro Resort (☎ 42724; Norsup; B&B per person 3000Vt) Cute egg-shaped bungalows, sparkly new, each with a pretty en suite. They're in a peaceful garden, right on the water – you can look across to Norsup and Norsup Island. A restaurant (set meals 350Vt; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner Monday to Friday), Rona blends flavours to bring the best of French influence to island foods in a lovely tropical atmosphere.

MDC Guesthouse (☎ /fax 48445; Lakatoro; r with fan/air-con 2500/5000Vt; ☎) At the southern end of town, this is actually a motel (two stores!) with spacious rooms and shared kitchen and facilities. Davina will look after you very well.

Kimberly's Restaurant & Bar (☎ 54312; Lakatoro; meals 200-350Vt; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat) A cute place with colourful tablecloths and resident geckoes for luck. The drinks are cold and Kimberly's cooking is excellent.

Uripiv & Uri

Both these islands have a **marine reserve** proclaimed by the chief. The sanctuary at Uri is designed to protect the mangroves and reef,

and there's the rare opportunity to see colourful giant clams. The reserves have everything for the snorkeller – beautiful coral, small colourful fish, and turtles.

Ngaim Orsel Guesthouse (☎ 48564; Uripiv; PO Box 62; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt) This very friendly place is set in the middle of an old *nat-saro* (dance area) filled with exotic plants. There's a bungalow, a library and a quaint house with three bedrooms, kitchen, lounge and electricity when needed. Kalki will arrange trips to the marine reserve (600Vt for canoe, guide and fees) or an island feast with a string band (300Vt) for a group.

Lines Bungalows (☎ 48939; Uri; s incl all meals 1500Vt) On your own beach on Uri, you have two bungalows to choose between, outside loo and shower, and tank water for drinking. Walk around to Uri village, but ask permission from the chief before entering the village. Bring snorkel gear to see the giant clams in the marine reserve.

THE SOUTHEAST COAST

Pankumu River is Vanuatu's longest watercourse outside Santo. The river has repeatedly changed course, leaving a large wetland of oxbows and bayous. It is a great spot for bird-watching. The chestnut-bellied kingfisher is widely distributed on the island, as is the emerald dove or *sot leg* (in Bislama).

Libanese Protected Area

This **forest and beach area** at Asuk Bay is totally beautiful, with a backdrop of mountains and a wide crystal-clear river overhanging with tropical trees and vines. Take a great **half-day tour** (☎ 48594; admission 1000Vt) that starts with a greeting in **Ronevie**, and then continues with

a canoe trip up the river. Dive in the clear waters to see eels and fish, bushwalk, and have lunch with the villagers. Afterwards, you can snorkel in the **marine sanctuary** (admission 200Vt). In Asuk Bay, speak to Bongman James or Chief Philip Dalley (☎ 48594).

Port Sandwich

Malekula's safest **anchorage** was named after the Earl of Sandwich, a British prime minister, and is favoured by touring yachts. At the wharf, a small golden beach may tempt you in for a swim. Don't do it! Don't even paddle. This is the worst place for shark attacks.

Rock Luan Guesthouse (☎ 48663; beds 1500Vt), overlooking the bay, is big and beautiful, with several bedrooms around a large sitting area. Rock is an expert on all things local and will entertain you with great stories over a cold beer.

Lamap

Lamap is where you organise taxis and speedboats. The truck for Lakatoro (1000Vt) leaves each weekday at 5am. Ask at the store attached to Levi's Guesthouse.

The **Roman Catholic mission** is a large, modern church with interesting wall paintings modelled on traditional sand-drawing designs (see p762). A three-day **art festival** rotates around the area every two years. A celebration of local culture, song and *kastom* dances, it will next be in Lamap in 2008. Contact the **Area Council Secretary** (☎ 48470) or the **Provincial Tourism Officer** (malpc@vanuatu.com.vu) for details.

Behind Levi's store, the very basic **Levi's Guesthouse** (☎ 48663; beds 1500Vt) has six beds in three rooms, and a large kitchen. There's

electricity in the evening. One-way transfers from Lamap airfield are 500Vt.

THE MASKELYNES

The road from Lamap ends at a sandy beach, **Point Doucere**, where canoes and speedboats head out to the Maskelynes. It's a 20-minute walk from the airport through coconut plantations.

The Maskelynes are just gorgeous. Most islands have coral reefs with excellent **diving** and **snorkelling**, especially at Sakao Beach. But be very careful of strong currents between the islands. Some of the islands are very rugged; others have patches of mangrove-lined coast, or sandy beaches. The main island, **Maskelyne (Ulivo)**, is a friendly, busy place; watch the villagers make canoes, weave, string necklaces and planters, and hunt for edible sea creatures when the tide is out.

Take a tour to **Ringi Te Suh Marine Conservation Area**, a 100-hectare protected reef where you can snorkel over the beautiful giant clams and picnic on a manmade island.

A **Mangrove Discovery Tour** will teach you about this ecologically rich resource.

Sleeping & Eating

Malog Bungalows (☎ 48930, 48519; islands@vanuatu.com.vu; Peskarus; s/d incl breakfast 2750/5000Vt; camping 500Vt) Has three all-traditional rooms on the shore between the mangroves. Go in an outrigger to an excellent reef for beginners' snorkelling; it's shallow, clear, still and pretty. The restaurant (meals 400Vt to 1900Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is in a tropical pagoda, and Nina's menu includes lobster just caught that morning.

Malafaf Beach Bungalow (☎ 48458; Lutes; s/d incl all meals 3000/4000Vt) This new two-bedroom bungalow has its own sandy beach on a crystal-clear lagoon with a coral reef. Further along is the cookhouse, where your host creates interesting meals that you can eat right on the beach while watching the sunset.

Steven Eisael Restaurant (mains 900-2700Vt) Out on the point at Lutes, this great little place sits over the water, so enjoy the view while you enjoy your fish and chips, or lobster extravaganza.

Getting There & Around

Trucks run from Lamap or its airport to Point Doucere (1500Vt), from where it's

a pleasant boat trip across to Peskarus (2500Vt). On arrival, your boatman will introduce you to a member of the council, who'll show you around.

SOUTH WEST BAY

The ancient traditions of the Small Nambas people are well preserved in south-western Malekula. *Nakamal* and dancing grounds are being opened to tourists, and grade-taking is on the increase.

Wintua

This village looks out over South West Bay from behind forested hills. You can do a day walk into the hills to three mainly *kastom* villages (5000Vt for a *kastom* dance). There's safe **swimming** off the western end of the airstrip, and a canoe trip to the **fish nursery** at Tsiri Lagoon is available. A three-hour **waterfall walk** takes you through rainforest to a deep plunge pool, the home of large eels.

Alo Lodge (☎ /fax 48659; B&B s/d 4300/5800Vt), near the airport, has four bedrooms, and a veranda covered in grand artwork. Owner George Thompson arranges transport, guides, deep-sea fishing and tours out of Wintua.

There are Vanair flights to South West Bay if the airfield is not under water.

AMBRYM

pop 13,500 / area 680 sq km

Ambrym (also called the Black Island because of its dark soils) has amazing twin volcanoes, Mt Marum and Mt Benbow, which magnificently spew ash and gases, and keep vulcanologists all over the world on the alert.

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

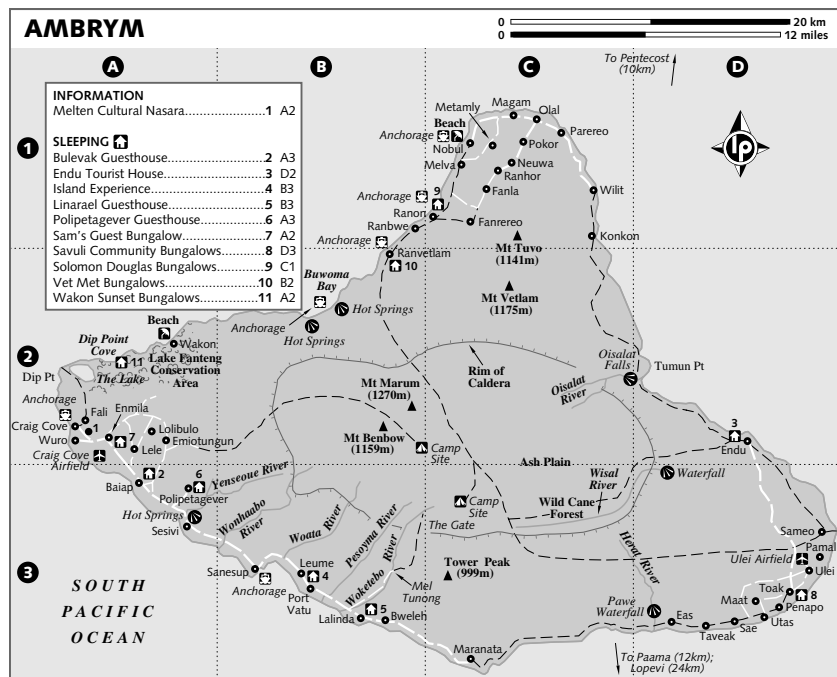
Ambrym is also the island for sand drawings, with 180 sand designs, each referring to a specific object, legend, dance or creature.

The **Back to My Roots Festival** is a week of celebrations in August each year; an extravaganza of cultural demonstrations and

THE MANBUSH WALK

A fantastic walk starts from the bush track, heading inland from the road, about 200m north of the Pankumu River at **Retchar**. First ask at Unua 3 for Elijah. He can arrange your homestay in Melkin, his family village. Drive up to Red Ground, behind Unua 5, then it's a 10km, two-hour walk along the Pankumu as it narrows into winding channels, isolated pools and a series of minor cascades. **Melkin** has the head *nakamal* for the Small Nambas, but you can't look at it. There are dancing grounds, *tamtams*, drums and stone carvings. It's *kastom*, right in the centre of Manbush (a southern *kastom* area). Everyone also attends bible studies twice a day.

The walk continues next day with a seriously gruelling six-hour climb to **Lambongbong**, an old trading centre where you could exchange goods for pigs. Up here, villagers still make fire by rubbing sticks together. It's so beautiful that it's seriously worth the agony. Then there's an easier six-hour walk over mountains and past waterfalls to **South West Bay**, where you can fly to Lamap or go north by boat.



ceremonies, fashion shows, Rom dances, magic, and cooking lessons. Accommodation (1500Vt) is organised for tourists, crafts are for sale, stalls are heaped with food, and there are tour guides and explanations of dances. For details, check with the **Vanuatu Cultural Centre** (☎ 22129; vks@vanuatu.com.vu) in Port Vila or with **Sowany Merani** (☎ 48631).

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

Some tour companies in Vila offer volcano adventure flights to Ambrym. For boats that call into Ambrym, see p809.

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

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

GETTING AROUND

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

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

VOLCANOES

The dark, brooding outlines of Mt Benbow and Mt Marum are 1km or so apart. Usually shrouded in smoke and cloud, they dominate the vast, grey ash plain that lies within the old caldera. At night, the sky above them glows red.

White smoke pours from Mt Benbow's vents, but it dumped half its side in on itself, plugging up its central crater, in 2005. It's not certain how long it will be before it blows the plug. You can look over the smoky gullet of Mt Marum and see the red-hot magma boiling way below. She's been spewing molten rock and dense black smoke from her vents.

THE ROM DANCE

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

It's *tabu* to see a Rom costume being made. Only men who have paid for the right to enter the *nasara* (chief's private area) may be involved; certainly not women or tourists. Anyone who disobeyed this taboo would be fined a pig and have their backs whipped with *nanggalat* (a native plant) – it burns your skin for days – or wild cane. Wild cane also marks the entrance to the taboo area. Be careful!

Both volcanoes are being closely monitored and evacuation plans are ready.

To go up you have to be fit and used to walking on steep terrain, and you need a good guide to hack your way through jungle, cross glassy strips of old lava, push through wild bamboo forest and trudge along steamy gorges. And when you reach the caldera the hard work starts.

There's no shade, just wave after wave of barren grey ridges. Skin protection and plenty of drinking water are essential. The slopes around both volcanoes are covered with a dry slippery crust, so your boots need to be strong enough to kick toe holes. Ankle support is also necessary as there's some boulder hopping. Between the mountains, the walk over the razor-backed ridge gets very narrow and snakes nastily upwards, and vents all around spurt smelly smoke. Mother Nature does her best to be daunting.

Access Points

The best idea is to go up one way and down another (different guides will meet you on the caldera). Trek prices depend on variables such as the distance travelled by truck, local fees, whether you stay overnight and number of guides, but they start from about 6000/9500Vt north/south. The sacred custom of the north is that there's no fishing, hunting or other activities from

September to January – the yam-planting season. Volcano trips are available from the south only during these months.

The four access points:

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

Lalinda The slopes are fierce, but this way is the quickest: a truck trip, then a three-hour slog from the end of the road. The sudden break from forest to ash plain is stunningly beautiful. Lalinda is home to Jimmy Penuel, a fantastic, authoritative guide.

Ranvetlam A complete experience – six-hours of jungle, views, ash plain – and not too excruciating. Many tours continue southwest from the volcanoes to Craig Cove.

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

Volcano Tours

Your tour guides usually have gear (tents, sleeping bags, hard hats, gloves, gas masks) available should you want to hire anything. Trips out of Craig Cove go via Lalinda or Emiotungun. Guides:

Apia (☎ 48450) Arranges truck and trek tours out of Ulei.

Isaiah Bong (☎ 48405) Takes an overnight walk from Ranvetlam down to Craig Cove, climbing both volcanoes (tents and food provided).

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

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

WEST AMBRYM

Ambrym's commercial centre, Craig Cove, has a guesthouse, an NBV bank, and a co-op that sells fresh bread, canned food, alcohol and hardware.

Sights & Activities

Volcano tours run out of Craig Cove, Emiotungun and Polipetagever. A 10-minute walk from Craig Cove airport, **Melten Cultural Nasara** (admission 2000Vt) makes a grand introduction to Ambrym's adventures.

Based in Polipetagever, **West Ambrym Eco-Cultural Tours** Vila (☎ 26160; jbond@vu.peacecorps.gov); Ambrym (☎ 48620) offers fabulous one-/two-day tours. You can visit hot springs, canoe to isolated villages, sleep under the stars or camp on beautiful beaches. Tours include transfers, transport, accommodation, meals, tour guides, entrance fees

and camping gear (from single/family 10,000/19,000Vt). Ask for James Bong in Vila, Sam in Ambrym.

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

Lake Fanteng Conservation Area (admission 500Vt) at Dip Point is a beautiful spot, with many wild ducks and 30 bird species.

Sleeping

Polipetagever Guesthouse (☎ 48991, 48994, 48852; jbond@vu.peacecorps.gov; Polipetagever; s/d incl all meals 1500/3000Vt) Accommodation here is free if you are taking one of the West Ambrym Eco-Cultural Tours (see p791). The quaint guesthouse is built from forest timber that has been planed smooth with axes and tied with vines. If you are staying on the way to the volcano, transfers to the airport/volcano road end are 3000/2500Vt return.

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

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

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

SOUTH AMBRYM Port Vatu

This interesting village is a good place to set out for the **volcanoes** (☎ 48996; guides 3000Vt). The trip takes four hours and the entry fee

isn't included in the price. A taxi is 7000Vt from Craig Cove.

John Tasso has two lovely bungalows at **Island Experience** (☎ 48679, 48996; s incl all meals 2500Vt). You can learn how to make local *kaekae* (food) and build your own house, starting with vines and *natangura* leaves – nestle into your own little mushroom.

Lalinda

The chief at Lalinda is the *kastom* owner of the southern access to the volcanoes (entry fee 1000Vt). Problem is, the village is divided by church affiliations. If you come by truck, take your driver's advice about where to go, but try to find Jimmy Penuel, a very professional guide. He's with the SDA faction, and they have built a new entry road that is quite superior.

Linarael Guesthouse (beds 1000Vt) sleeps six people and has a kitchen, toilet and wash-room; water is available nearby. The locals will cook dinner (500Vt), and there's a baker ready to bake for your journey!

EAST AMBRYM

Ulei has only recently opened as an entry point to the volcanoes. Near the airfield is Toak, a large village where locals will show you very traditional sand drawing, magic, *kastom* stories, dances, caves and waterfalls. Taxi can be hired here.

New and gorgeous **Savuli Community Bungalows** (☎ 48786; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt), made of stone, bamboo and thatch, is set along the black-sand beach – ask for Jeppy. The shared bathroom has a flush toilet and a shower. Transport from the airport is 600Vt.

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

NORTH AMBRYM

Most of Ambrym's northern coast has high volcanic cliffs rising straight out of the sea. The **motorboat journey** from Craig Cove to Ranon (12,000Vt) is fantastic, chugging past sheer angled cliffs, *namaruh* forests, rock caves, turtles, dolphins and wild ducks. Stop at the hot springs for a swim on the way.

The best **Rom dances and magic** (admission 3000Vt) can be seen inland at Ranhor and Fanla. An **island feast** can be prepared for eight or more people.

Chief Joseph at Ranvetlam is the *kastom* owner of the northern approach to the volcanoes; the guides also live in this village.

Sleeping & Eating

Solomon Douglas Bungalows (☎ /fax 48405; Ranon; s/d incl all meals 4500/6700Vt) Charming and traditional; has a flush toilet and a hot-water shower. The bungalows are up a cliff from the bay, with stunning views. Owner Laan arranges tours, guides and Rom dances, and speedboats to Craig Cove and Pentecost.

Vet Met Bungalows (☎ /fax 48405, ☎ 48527, 48687; www.positiveearth.org/vetmet/; Ranvetlam; s/d incl all meals 5100/7200Vt) This place has brightly painted bungalows, a flush toilet, a hot shower and a lovely dining area. It's on a peaceful cliff where you can walk down to a rocky bay. Owner Isaiah Bong arranges volcano tours, provides tents and organises Rom dances at neighbouring villages.

A speedboat fare between Ranon and Ranvetlam is 3000Vt return.

ESPIRITU SANTO

pop 33,000 / area 3677 sq km

It's a top spot for diving, with its healthy reefs and the world's best wreck, as elegant as the *Titanic*, lying in clear, calm, warm water. It's a top spot for adventure, with Vanuatu's four highest peaks, a centre of

impenetrable jungle and extraordinary caves. It's a top spot for swimming, with white-sand beaches and azure water all up the east coast. Besides, the whole island's just gorgeous.

Santo is Vanuatu's largest island. Its fascinating history has been acted out predominantly on the southern and eastern coastal strips, where town-types live and the land is developed for cattle grazing and plantations. Inland a bit, the villages are isolated, and the villagers are totally self-sufficient, even dressing in clothes woven from the leaves of the jungle. As *kastom* demands, there are important *nimangki* ceremonies (see p760) throughout these villages.

Information

Consult the helpful website of the **Santo Rotary Club** (www.santotoday.com/). Dave Cross, president of the Espiritu Santo Tourism Association, will happily answer your queries. Dave can be found at the Beachfront Resort (p798).

Activities

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELLING

You shouldn't come to Santo without trying a dive. The coral's bright and healthy, the wrecks are world class, prices are fantastic and the dive operators are extremely professional. Snorkelling is also excellent. Look at www.aquamarinesanto.com to see some sites, such as Million Dollar Point; *MV Henry Bonneaud*, a haven for flashlight fish, making it one of the world's great night

FROM JUNGLE TO CITY TO DIVING MECCA

Second Channel was the Allies' base for their efforts against the Japanese advance during WWII. For three years to September 1945, more than half a million military personnel, mainly Americans, were stationed here waiting to head into battle in the Pacific. There were sometimes 100 ships moored off Luganville.

Roads were laid. There were 40 cinemas, four military hospitals, five airfields, a torpedo boat base, jetties and market gardens. Quonset huts were erected for use as offices, workshops and servicemen's accommodation; many still stand around Luganville. Over 10,000 ni-Vans came to work for the troops. To them, the servicemen seemed fabulously wealthy and generous.

Unfortunately, the USS *President Coolidge*, a luxury liner turned troop-ship carrier, hit a friendly mine during the war. It became the world's largest accessible and diveable shipwreck.

Once the fighting was over the USA offered the Condominium government the surplus war equipment, but they didn't respond, so the lot was dumped. Everything from bulldozers, aeroplane engines and jeeps to crates of Coca-Cola went into the sea at what is now Million Dollar Point. The coral-encrusted equipment makes the point a popular diving and snorkelling spot.

Luganville at about 5pm. To return, stand by the roadside in Port Olry before 7am.

There are plenty of taxis and public-transport trucks – with a red T on their number plates – operating around Luganville offering competitive rates.

Tours

Tours cost from 2000/4000Vt per half-/full-day. A typical day trip includes a visit to Fanafo, Matantas or Champagne Beach, and the Matevulu Blue Hole. When you book, check where you will go: not all guides have access to Champagne Beach, but you can walk across on a track from Lonnoc Beach.

An absolute must-do is **Millenium Cave** (p799), high in the hills inland from Luganville. Nearby is **Nampauk**. A tour to this fascinating village includes a scary fire-dancing ceremony. Other tours go to beautiful **Port Olry**, to the north, or to the **Vatthe Conservation Area**. Tours can be tailored to suit your interests, for example hiking or WWII touring. Tour operators (who will make arrangements to collect you when you book):

Heritage Tours (☎ 36862, 40968)

Little Paradise of Port Olry (☎ 37661, 37606, 43776; PO Box 115)

Paradise Tours (☎ 37159)

LUGANVILLE

pop 12,200

Vanuatu's northern capital has a wide main street that sprawls along several kilometres of waterfront with interesting views at every corner, two main parks and dozens of dusty shops.

The town has that sleepy tropical feel, as though something is about to happen. You think you belong even if you're only here a week. The council has a beautification programme in action, which will add to its pleasures.

The Luganville to Aore swim (see www.pacificswims.com/espirtu_about.html) is making it big in the grand ocean swims scene. It's a 2.6km swim in pretty tough ocean, held every year in June. People from Fiji, NZ and Australia battle against the locals.

Information

Ring ☎ 36112 for an ambulance, ☎ 36333 to report a fire, and ☎ 36222 to contact police. There's a pharmacy at the hospital

and two small chemist shops in town with a good range of deodorants. Bring anything more serious with you. Luganville is the only town outside Vila with commercial banking facilities. They're all on the main street.

ANZ (☎ 36711; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Has an ATM.

Club de Sanma (☎ 36039; Main St; 🕒 9am-midnight) The money exchange here offers good rates.

Computer Net (☎ 37773; admin@comput.net; Internet per min 25Vt) There are great computers here, with the fastest connections in town.

NBV (☎ 36441; 🕒 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11am Sat) Bank.

Northern District Hospital (☎ 36345) Perched above the town in Le Plateau.

Post office (🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) There's a cardphone outside.

Westpac (☎ 36625; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Bank.

Sights & Activities

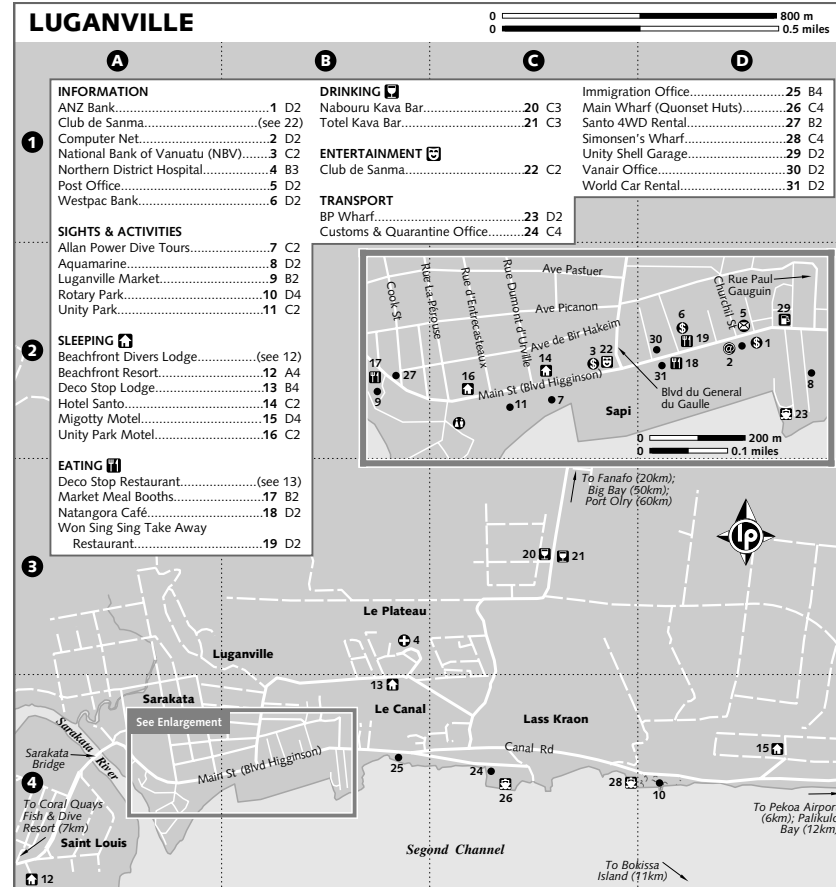
There are lots of **WWII remains** in town, such as the corrugated-iron **quonset huts** at Main Wharf and near Unity Park, and the rusting steel sea walls that are evidence of busier times. Million Dollar Point, where hundreds of tonnes of US military equipment was dumped, now shows its coral-encrusted machinery to snorkellers and divers (admission 500Vt per car).

Most people have never seen the elusive Lysepsep people, but spend time in the impenetrable mountains of Central Santo, and you may find them watching you. About 1m tall, they grow their hair very long and use it as a screen. The **Lysepsep Culture Park** (☎ 54491) will show you many of their unusual customs. You need to book a group, at least a day before, through your hotel.

Villagers come from all over to sell their produce at the **Luganville Market** (Main St; 🕒 24hr), near the Sarakata Bridge.

Unity Park spreads along the waterfront to the market. It has a kids' playground and lovely shade trees. Lie on the grass and look at the ocean. **Rotary Park** where boats leave for Bokissa has barbecues and plenty of grass.

The best place for **swimming** near Luganville is at the beach in front of the Beachfront Resort, where you're most welcome. Or head out to the beach on the way to Palikulo Point. A taxi ride out here will cost around 1200Vt return.



Sleeping

BUDGET

There's a fabulous range of places to choose from in Luganville.

Unity Park Motel (☎ 36052; locm@vanuatu.com.vu; Main St; s/d/tr/q 1350/2100/2400/3200Vt, private r from 2400Vt; 🚿) Upstairs are lovely airy rooms along a sparkling hallway (ask for a front one with air-con for 3500Vt). Downstairs is more basic. The shared kitchen and bathroom facilities are tops, and there's a laundry. You can relax in the rotunda in the garden.

Migotty Motel (☎ 36494; migotty@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 40; s/d 3380/4500Vt; 🚿) Hike up the hill, or hop on a bus, because this place is great. The balconies have good coastal views (ask for a front room), all rooms have en

suites, the gardens are pretty, and the bright new swimming pool is inviting. The snack bar serves breakfast (500Vt) and dinner (250Vt to 800Vt).

Beachfront Divers Lodge (☎ 36881; fax 36882; bfresort@vanuatu.com.vu; dm 2500Vt) Custom-built for divers, with a secure wash area, this cottage sleeps eight people and has a kitchen and barbecue facilities. You can camp in the grounds.

MIDRANGE

Deco Stop Lodge (☎ 36175; www.decostop.com.vu; dm/s/d incl breakfast 4300/9500/9500Vt; 🚿) High on the ridge behind Luganville overlooking Segond Channel, Deco Stop has a huge deck floating around the inviting swimming

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Santo (☎ 36250; hotelsanto@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d 6500/7500Vt, upstairs s/d/tr 11,000/12,000/13,000Vt; 🍷 🍷) The place to see and be seen is this retro '70s hotel, with its fabulous huge *tamtam* in the foyer and deep plush lounge chairs. Sit out on the patio with a G&T and watch life come your way. Comfortable, spacious rooms open onto the pool area; more luxurious rooms are upstairs. Guests can hire hotel cars. Visa, Amex and MasterCard are accepted. The restaurant (meals 900Vt to 1600Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is pleasant, old-fashioned and comfortable, with an extensive menu that combines Western and local foods.

pool. There's a great social atmosphere and a large sports facility. Many rooms are set up for divers, with secure wash areas right behind. Transfers are 1200Vt.

Beachfront Resort (☎ 36881; fax 36882; bresort@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr from 4500/6500/8500Vt, family unit 10,000Vt) A friendly, low-key spot with motel-style bungalows, all with kitchenettes. Walk across the lawn to an excellent black-sand beach. It's the best place to swim, even if you aren't staying. Owner Dave Cross (☎ 43911) is the person to talk to about tourist activities.

TOP END

The top-end resorts are all out of Luganville.

Coral Quays Fish & Dive Resort (☎ 36257; www.coralquays.com; s/d incl breakfast from 8500/9800Vt; 🍷) This place has 18 bungalows with soaring ceilings set in a tropical garden. Use the private jetty to snorkel or dive over coral gardens and wrecks – the *Tui Twaite* shipwreck is 800m away. A secure wash and dry room is available. A minibus/taxi from town costs 100/300Vt; transfers are 600Vt. Kayaks, bikes and snorkel gear are available.

Aore Resort (☎ 36705; fax 36703; www.aoresort.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast from 16,540/20,360/25,590Vt; 🍷 🍷) Spacious bungalows with fabulous timber floors look out over moored yachts. Guests can use the snorkel gear, kayaks and mountain bikes (visitors can hire them). The restaurant (mains 950Vt to 1450Vt; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is a grand, open area with views and friendly staff. Transfers

are 2500Vt. The resort ferry leaves from BP Wharf in Luganville – ask for the schedule when you book. Nonguests are welcome at the resort (1000Vt a day), but the rest of the island is privately owned.

Bokissa Eco Island Resort (☎ 36913; fax 36855; www.bokissa.com; s/d incl all meals 10,000/20,000Vt; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The traditional bungalows are fluffy-white-towel luxurious. But you're out early because 10 footsteps away is astounding snorkelling over plate corals piled high, branches of soft coral, and anemones with their Nemos. The hammock calls from the shady trees, but there's kayaking up a river, diving, walks, turtle watching and a pool with a swim-up bar. Transfers from the mainland (3000Vt return) leave from Simonsen's Wharf in Luganville.

Eating

Coral Quays Resort (☎ 36257; mains 1600-2400Vt; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) At Coral Quays Fish & Dive Resort, this restaurant has a broad veranda that's a good spot to enjoy the gourmet food that the chef is famous for. You sit at timber tables made locally from natural wood. Some buses run into town till 11pm; prearrange transport if you come for dinner.

Won Sing Sing Take Away Restaurant (mains 200-850Vt; 🍷 7am-3pm) Bench tables under a grand traditional roof give this little café a happy atmosphere. The chef is very good – check out the cakes! Come for breakfast. It will set you up for a cheerful day.

Natangora Café (☎ 36811; Main St; meals 350-700Vt; 🍷 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Specialises in breakfast, house-roasted coffee, hamburgers, salads, sandwiches and cakes. Sit out the back for garden and canal views. The pleasant alfresco setting and reasonable prices make it popular with local expats and ni-Vans alike.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Deco Stop Restaurant (mains 1500Vt; 🍷 7am-9pm) You're on top of the world, sitting around the beautiful pool, gazing way out over the channel, and choosing from an excellent menu. But don't go past the poulet fish filllets, with Deco's secret sauce. Try to come for the curry night with magic show.

Market Meal Booths (meals 300Vt; 🍷 7.30am-10pm) Sit at a bright little table beside the market, and a cheery face appears at the booth window. There's a choice of five dishes, but steak's the best. You can watch it being cooked – flick and twist – and the meal is delicious.

Drinking & Entertainment

Apart from the eating-out options, the entertainment scene is pretty light-on in Luganville.

Club de Sanma (☎ 36039; clubdesanma@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 442; 🍷 9am-midnight) There are pool tables, and TV screens show all major international sports. It's a good spot for a beer on the balcony (shame about the poker machines), with happy hour from 5.30pm to 7.30pm. If you want to kick on, it's open till 3am Friday, the jazz and blues night.

Nabouru Kava Bar (☎ 37401) has a pleasant sitting area in a pretty garden, and the kava is fresh and strong. Across the road is Total, if you like a traditional place. You'll be welcome at most of the 40 kava bars around Luganville – look for a red or green light outside.

Getting Around

You'll have no difficulty finding a minibus between 7am and 5.30pm, but it's a different story outside these hours. The standard rate anywhere around town is 100Vt. Ring **Erick** (☎ 42178) or **Simion** (☎ 40718) to organise your own bus.

Taxis and public-transport trucks wait at the market (on market days) or cruise up and down Main St. The market is the best place to find them after 5.30pm, or ring **Kal** (☎ 41287).

AROUND LUGANVILLE

The north road has a good surface and leads out to many top spots.

Matevulu Blue Hole

You must take a plunge here. It's something unique, looking through crystal at your pretty blue legs. Swim across to the old tree, the place to dive. Scuba-diving photography is a buzz here, as the blue filter produces unusual effects.

There are several 'blue holes' on Santo, but this is the largest and best – about 50m across and 18m deep.

Millenium Cave

Trek through the jungle, across creeks and cascades, to this massive cave, some 20m wide and 50m high. Climb down a bamboo ladder to a crystal pool, small cascades, sparkling stalactites and stalagmites, and little bats. Walk through to the sunlight and into the icy water to zap down the rapids on a kid's little floaty thingy past amazing towering rocks, gorgeous rain-forest and waterfalls, then scramble out all wet and shivery and start the climb back up to your bus. It's a totally absolutely grand experience.

Malwepe (Oyster Island)

A track heads down from the main road to a landing area where you catch the boat across to nearby Oyster Island – so named because there are lots of oysters in the waters. It's a charming place to kick back with a drink or enjoy a meal.

Oyster Island Resort (☎ /fax 36283; oysteril@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast 5300/5300/7300/9000Vt) This hideaway has seven cute dumplings of bungalows in a beautiful waterfront setting. Deep-water fishing, lobster fishing and scuba diving are available. The restaurant (mains 950Vt to 2500Vt; open lunch and dinner) is a rambling, rustic place, where the French owner-chef specialises in seafood – you must try the oysters, of course – and Santo beef. Reservations are advisable.

Getting there costs 300Vt by the regular Luganville-Port Olry minibus service (see p795) or 980Vt by taxi (minimum two people). To summon the boat, bang on the gas cylinder.

Fanafo

In 1963, charismatic Jimmy Stevens formed the Nagriamel movement. Then, on 27 May 1980, eight weeks before national independence, he and his supporters staged a coup known as the Coconut Rebellion. Armed mainly with bows and arrows, they occupied Luganville and proclaimed Santo's independence, calling their new country Vemarana. However, the new nation collapsed with Stevens' arrest on 1 September. Take a tour to visit this interesting group of villages where the grave of Jimmy Stevens is only partly filled in, so that his spirit can escape to complete his work.

NORTHEAST SANTO

Loru Conservation Area

Covering 220 hectares, this fine **park** (admission 500Vt) contains one of the last patches of lowland forest remaining on Santo's east coast. There are several excellent **nature walks**, many **coconut crabs** and a **bat cave**, which the villagers use as a cyclone shelter. If you've come without a guide, ask for one at Kole 1 village.

For more details about this project, see www.positiveearth.org.

Lonnoc Beach

In a beautiful coastal setting is this lovely sandy swimming beach, all white and turquoise, with stunning views of **Elephant Island**.

A guide (500Vt) from the village will take you to visit local gardens, to Hog Harbour or to swim at Blue Hole. They can also arrange a canoe for you to fish or view the turtles.

Each traditional bungalow at **Lonnoc Beach Bungalows** (☎ /fax 36678, ☎ 36141; PO Box 293; s/d incl breakfast 3380/5600Vt) has an en suite and a cute porch, but there's no electricity, except at the restaurant. Spend your evenings at the bar, or take a kerosene lamp down to the beach. Tough choice. At **Lonnoc Beach Bar & Restaurant** (mains 400-1200Vt; ☎ 6:30-9pm) the chef combines Western fare with local food – the *kumula* chips are yum. Plus the drinks are cold.

A daily bus service to Luganville leaves at 6:30am and returns at around 4pm (500Vt each way).

Champagne Beach

The road past Lonnoc Beach ends at Champagne Beach, an easy 10-minute saunter across. This is the beach that photographers love to snap. You're likely to have the pretty horseshoe of fine white sand and turquoise water to yourself, but make sure you've paid the entry fee – 400/700Vt per person/car.

Big Bay Highway

This 28km road takes you to Malao village on Big Bay, past the magnificent panorama of the rugged **Cumberland Ranges** as you wind down to the fast-flowing Lape River. The river is often ankle-deep over the causeway – there are some large swimming holes and a picnic spot on the western bank. Hire a car

with a driver, who knows the roads and the danger spots. There are no signposts, and at the edge of a high scarp where you enter the Vatthe Conservation Area is a very steep one-way track. Honk your horn as you descend to warn traffic coming up. The road drops off sharply on the right-hand side and there's nowhere to pull over.

Vatthe Conservation Area

This is one highlight that visitors love or hate, so see what you think. Covering about 45 sq km, it stretches along the coast from north of Matantas to the Jordan River, and inland to the top of a 400m-high limestone scarp. Half of the park is covered by Vanuatu's largest alluvial lowland forest, which was the predominant reason for its protection in 1996.

Forest walks (a two-hour stroll, or a two-day trek to the highest point on the scarp) and **bird-watching** (see most of Vanuatu's native land and freshwater bird species) can be arranged through the information centre, on the left as you arrive. **Vatthe Lodge** (☎ /fax 36153; vatthe@vanuatu.com.vu; B&B per person 2400Vt) is right next door to the information centre. There are several basic but very cute bungalows, with pebble floors, hurricane-lamp lighting and mosquito nets. Meals are 500Vt to 1500Vt.

A transport charter to Matantas from Luganville costs 6000Vt (one way), but if there's a truck going that way it will cost only about 500Vt per person. Contact Vatthe Lodge (above) to inquire.

WEST SANTO

About 5000 people live in tiny villages that interrupt the thickly wooded mountains tumbling abruptly into the sea. There are no telephones and only a few teleradios. *Kastom* reigns supreme from the south-western foothills to Cape Cumberland in the north.

Southwest Santo has Vanuatu's highest mountains: Mt Tabwemasana (1879m), Mt Kotamtam (1747m), Mt Tawaloala (1742m) and Santo Peak (1704m).

Santo Peak

It's a grand trek to the summit of Santo Peak, a misty, cold and wet spot with cloudy views. One route sets out from **Tasiriki**. It's very steep and slippery, and there is no

well-defined path – you follow the guide as he hacks through the vegetation with his bush knife! The return 'walk' takes two to three days.

The route from **Ipayato** takes two days to walk up a path that generally follows a spur to the summit, through mossy cloud forest.

Regardless of which village you start from, allow at least a day there to organise your guide. Carry warm clothing, wet-weather gear, a sleeping bag and a tent.

PENTECOST

pop 15,500 / area 438 sq km

Pentecost has the *naghol*, the most remarkable custom in all of Melanesia, where men make spectacular leaps of courage from high towers as a gift to the gods, to ensure a bountiful yam harvest. It also has great scenery and lots of festivals and ceremonies – local rainmakers invoke rain for all the festivals, causing a high rainfall. Sceptical Westerners say it's high because the island's mountainous spine catches the southeasterlies, causing precipitation.

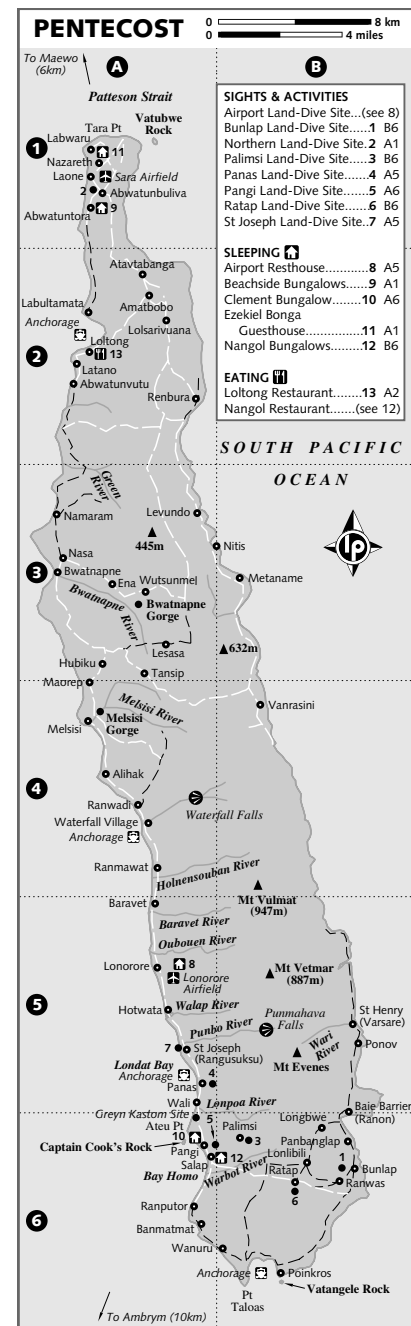
Penama Day is celebrated on 15 September, with *kastom* dances and feasts. Dances are great fun with feathers, exotic headgear, and fange-seed anklets that make rhythmic rattles. Small red pandanus mats are worn and are also used as currency, as presents at births or funerals and when grades are taken.

South Pentecost has many land-diving sites. Two in the hills behind Bay Homo are mainly for tourists, with jumps each Saturday during April and May. Southern men have also built a site in the north near Laone.

Many tourists come on day trips during the *naghol* season. Packages (one/three day from 45,000/70,000Vt) are available through travel agents in Vila (p766). The VTO (p766) can provide a dive programme, and the Cultural Centre (p767) has information on the very traditional diving at Bunlap.

Transport

Pentecost has two airfields: Sara in the north and Lonorore in the southwest. **Vanair** (☎ 25025) has three return flights each week to both airfields from Vila and Luganville.



THE LAND-DIVERS OF PENTECOST

The men of Pentecost spend many weeks building towers by binding tree trunks, saplings and branches to a tall tree with vines. The towers are the shape of a man up to 35m high. The tower sighs as it bends in the wind; you'll sigh, as you see the men make their spectacular leaps to ensure a successful harvest.

Each diver carefully selects his own liana vines, then an experienced elder checks to ensure that it's strong and elastic enough. The soil in front of the tower is cleared of rocks, then loosened. Fathers teach their young sons to dive from their shoulders. Boys practise diving from boulders into the sea. At age eight they are circumcised; then they can make their first jump.

Between 20 and 60 males per village will dive. Each man prepares in turn while his friends tie his vines. The women sing and dance below. As he raises his hands he tells the crowd his most intimate thoughts; the people stop their singing and dancing, and stand quietly – these could be his last words.

Finally the diver claps his hands, crosses his arms and leans forward. In slow motion, falling, he arches his back. The vines abruptly stop him. Only his hair will have touched the soil, to fertilise the yam crop. The crowd roars its appreciation, dancing, stomping and whistling in tribute.

It is awful to watch – gut-wrenching yet mesmerising. The colour and sounds add to the atmosphere: men wearing small red-dyed *namba*, clearly visible from so high above; women wearing white grass skirts made from wild hibiscus, spinning and twirling – a sea of swirling white grass.

Lonorore airfield is often closed by rain. If you're stuck, you can get to Sara airfield by truck up the west coast road, a set of ruts hanging onto cliff faces (30,000Vt); or to Craig Cove in Ambrym by speedboat (20,000Vt).

For information about boats that call into Pentecost, see p809.

Pentecost has good protection from the southeastern trade winds along the west coast, with many anchorages and landing places. Panas and Lolong are popular.

NORTHERN PENTECOST

Just 1km west of Sara airfield at **Nazareth** is Lini Memorial College, where Vanuatu's first prime minister is buried. There are also stores, an NBV bank and a market. A local disco fires up on Friday and Saturday nights at the Abawuntora Youth Centre.

The **Ezekiel Bonga Guesthouse** (☎ 38388; Nazareth; beds 1800Vt) has pleasant rooms above a shop, but the squat toilet is down through the village. You must bring food, coffee and so on – a kettle of water is supplied. About 2km down the coast, sitting prettily on the white-sand beach, are the **Beachside Bungalows** (☎ 38280; Abwatuntora; s/d incl all meals 2000/4000Vt). Locals strike their canoes with bamboo to make the dolphins leap in play. Be sure to ask for Leslie Rono when you book.

Loltong Restaurant (Loltong; meals 300Vt), in the island's principal administrative centre, sells island-style meals, kava and handicrafts. Loltong has an excellent anchorage, and you can hire taxis here.

SOUTHERN PENTECOST

A sandy beach extends 12km from just before Lonorore airfield south to Ranputor. Coconut plantations occupy the narrow plains between mountains and sea.

There's a snack bar and cardphone at the airport, and a post office and clinic nearby. There's also the very pleasant **Airport Rest-house** (☎ 38356; beds 500Vt), with a flush toilet and washing room, in case you are stranded. A land-dive tower is built on a hill near the end of the runway each year.

For transport around the south, ring **John** (☎ 38444, 38399) or **Clement** (☎ 38814, 38120).

Land-Dive Villages

Two land-dive towers are erected annually on the hills between **Panas** and nearby **Wali**. Another tower is built at St Joseph (Rangusuksu).

Pangi and **Salap** spread along the stony shore of peaceful Bay Homo. Pangi has a kava bar, an ANZ bank, a clinic and John's store, and you can hire taxis and speedboats. **Swimming** and **snorkelling** are safe because of the reef. **Land-diving** (☎ 38444; all inclusive 23,000Vt)

SOME OTHER NORTHERN ISLANDS

Ambae

Ambae has **Mt Lombenben** (1496m) on the rim of a semiactive volcano that is currently rumbling dynamically. A cone rose up out of blue **Lake Manaro Lakua**, one of its famous crater lakes, late in 2005, and it sends white and black smoke shooting high – this was world news. Hot and lime-green **Lake Vuu** also sends vulcanologists into a frenzy whenever it boils. **Lake Manaro Ngoru**, the third crater lake, is dry with a central cold-water spring. All this in a blanket of mist amid the finest cloud forest in Vanuatu. Pretty **Duviara, the Last Stop Bungalows** (☎ 38368, 38378; fax 38335; dpvuu@hotmail.com; beds 2000Vt) offers bungalow and guesthouse accommodation, where Paul Vuhu takes lake treks and walks through the cloud forest. Transfers cost 3000Vt, and meals are 200Vt.

Maewo

The 'Island of Water' has rivers, hot springs, deep cold pools, magnificent waterfalls and water-taro terraces. **Big Water** waterfall is thought of as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Down south, at **Sanasom**, is magnificent **Hole of the Moon cave** and **Malangauliuli**, a cave with spectacular petroglyphs. Sleeping and eating options:

Asanvari Yacht Club Bungalow, Bar & Restaurant (☎ 38239; Asanvari; beds 1000Vt) On a picture-perfect bay and near a 30m waterfall. Chief Nelson arranges tours to the cave and transport from North Pentecost (5000Vt). Meals (500Vt to 950Vt) are served from 7.30am to 7pm.

Lua ete Salgolo Guesthouse (☎ 38342; Naone; s incl all meals 1500Vt) A cute little place from where you can explore Big Water. Ask for Nathaniel.

Sanasom Bungalows (☎ 38353, 38239; Sanasom; s incl all meals 3200Vt) Lovely bungalows run by Chief Jonah, *kastom* owner of the cave. Transport from Naone is around 5000Vt.

Gaua (Santa Maria)

Gaua offers spectacular hikes, including a grand, difficult two-day test that encompasses the island's three major sights – pretty **Lake Letas**, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the Pacific; Mt Gareth (797m), a semiactive volcano; and fabulous **Siri Falls**. Wind and climb up to the lake, where you can canoe across to the volcano, a sulphurous mess that seeps orange into the lake. It's well worth the effort, in an awesome way. Then it's a vicious trek to make it down to the falls, 120m of roaring power pummelling down through the bush to the sea. You can stay at the thatched three-bedroom **Wongrass Bungalow** (☎ 38504; s incl meals 4000Vt), set in a lovely garden. Charles will arrange all of your tours and serve you excellent meals.

Vanua Lava

Sola, the island's capital, is the centre for excellent walks, like the glorious day's walk past Mosina and the plateau overlooking Vureas Bay, through water taro gardens, over streams and rapids to **Waterfall Bay**, one of the Banks Islands' most dramatic sights. Spectacular **Sasara Falls** tumble over the cliff straight into the bay. A speedboat from Sola to Waterfall Bay costs around 18,000Vt return. Sleeping and eating options:

Leumerous Guesthouse (☎ 38556, 38823; Sola; s incl all meals 2500Vt, camping 500Vt) Thatched bungalows set in pretty grounds close to the centre of Sola.

Leumerous Yachtclub (mains 300-750Vt; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Behind the bungalows, this is everybody's favourite spot.

Waterfall Bay Yacht Club (meals 400Vt) In a grand bungalow with artefacts and handicrafts for sale.

Waterfall Bungalow (☎ 38550; Waterfall Bay; s/d incl all meals 2500/5000Vt) Only minutes from the falls, you'll think you've arrived in paradise.

Torres Islands

Dazzling white-sand beaches are the rule, with good surfing, especially when the trade winds are blowing. There's excellent **snorkelling** on most islands: **Linua**, which is unpopulated except for the tourist accommodation; **Loh**, across a tidal sandbank; **Tegua** and **Hiu** to the north; and **Toga** where most of the people live. Everyone gets around in outrigger canoes. Five minutes from the airport, the delightful **Kamilisa Guesthouse** (☎ 38573, 38565; Linua; s incl meals 2000Vt) is in a delicate rainforest, right on the lagoon. Butterfly lovers will find this place amazing.

for tourists occurs twice, in April and May; ask for Chief Willy. Up to 50 men jump.

Ranwas is a charming village perched on a high ridge with distant views of the sea. From here a slippery path heads north to Bunlap and Baie Barrier. **Ratap**, on the way to Ranwas, has very traditional land-diving.

Bunlap is a large, full-*kastom* village on a steep hillside, again with very traditional land-diving, two ceremonial dancing areas ringed with coral stones, and traditional leaf houses that are built so low that their roofs almost touch the ground.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If you're very fit, you can hike from Salap to Bunlap, spend a night at Bunlap, then return along the 4WD road straight across the bottom of the island. Walking conditions are difficult and strenuous – ask in the village for a guide.

Take **adventure walks** to waterfalls and *banyans* and the stone ruins of a feasting hall, where 100 people were killed by the eel spirit. Other tours include visits to villages to see *kastom* dances. Or walk up a river with your host and help him catch river prawns. How fresh will they be!

From Salap to Bunlap costs 4000Vt by speedboat or taxi.

SLEEPING & EATING

Nangol Bungalows (☎ /fax 38448, ☎ 38444; s/d ind all meals 5600/9000Vt, camping 500Vt) Just south of Salap, Nangol has a relaxing setting by the bay with several spacious bungalows and good shared facilities.

Clement Bungalow (☎ 38814, 38120; Pang; s 1500Vt) A very new little bungalow of bamboo and sago palm is on the beach in Pang near the store and restaurants. It can sleep five people. Meals are 500Vt. Ask for Clement and he'll look after you – he also has a truck!

Nangol Restaurant (☎ /fax 38448, ☎ 38444; meals 500-1000Vt; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by the owners of Nangol Bungalows, this place is on the beach. Enjoy bread baked on the open fire. An island feast with a local string band can be arranged for six or more people.

Pangi is the tourist hub of South Pentecost with four **restaurants** (☎ 38120, 38327; meals 150-300Vt; ☺ 6am-9pm Mon-Fri). Each owner cooks the one dish, perhaps curried fish and rice, and stays open till it's all sold.

Transport from Lonorore airfield to Pang by truck or boat is 3000Vt.

VANUATU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

The prices specified in this section are per person per night.

Tanna has the only camping ground (p783), but lots of places are happy for you to use their grounds for a minimal fee.

Guesthouses are usually concrete buildings without much character but with fully equipped kitchens. They cost between

PRACTICALITIES

- The major newspapers are the *Daily Post* (100Vt; available Monday to Saturday) and the *Independent* (200Vt; available Sunday). *Port Vila Presse* is only on the web: www.news.vu/en/. *Pacific Magazine* (www.pacificmagazine.cc), published by Pacific Basin Communications, often has information on Vanuatu; *Islands Business* (www.islandsbusiness.com) covers all the South Pacific islands.
- The country's radio station, Radio Vanuatu, provides trilingual FM, AM and SW services from 6am to 10pm, and offers international and local news bulletins (98 on the FM dial, 1125 on AM). You can also pick up the BBC at 99FM. There are three TV channels: Local TV from 4.30pm to 11.30pm, American gospel, and Chinese news in English. The pubs provide satellite coverage of international sporting events.
- Videos you buy or watch will be based on the PAL system.
- Town power is provided in Vila, Luganville, Lenakel and Lakatoro. A few rural guesthouses have their own generators or use solar power, with electricity available until 9pm. Elsewhere it's kerosene lamps or torchlight. The current in Vanuatu is 220V to 240V, 50Hz AC, using flat two- or three-pin plugs.
- Vanuatu uses the metric system. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

1000Vt and 2000Vt. Bungalows are quaint thatched cubby houses with pandanus-leaf walls, often set in gorgeous surroundings. It's a good idea to bring your own toilet paper, earplugs and torch. Bungalows cost between 1800Vt and 4500Vt and generally include meals.

There's an impressive selection of resorts and hotels in and around Vila, and there are a few on Santo and Tanna. Many lovely hotels cost under 7000Vt for a double, while luxury resorts start at around 18,000Vt per double.

ACTIVITIES

It's easy to be very lazy in Vanuatu, but it's also difficult to ignore the excellent diving, snorkelling, hiking, fishing, sailing and extreme sports. Then it's also great to get immersed in the country's culture and natural environment.

Diving

Vanuatu's scuba sites include several world-class dives. Some are spotlighted in the South Pacific Diving chapter, see p74. Vila has the best range of underwater topography in a small area, while Santo has the best wreck, coral and fish dives. *The Lady and the President*, by Peter Stone, covers the tragedy of war and delights of scuba diving with great photos of USS *President Coolidge*.

For details of dive-tour operators, see the sections on Efate (p770) and Santo (p793).

Fishing

World-standard game fishing, river fishing and spear fishing are on offer in Vanuatu – if it lives in water you can enjoy chasing it, with string and a bent pin or the latest hi-tech gear. Always check who owns the water, though, and pay them first. See p770 and p795 for operators.

Hiking

The country has many fine walks, including strenuous two- to five-day hikes on Erromango, Ambrym, Santo, Gaua and Malekula. You can organise walks yourself using a guide from where you're staying (guides cost between 1000Vt and 3000Vt a day) or through tour operators (see p766).

Always wear long pants in the jungle to protect yourself from stinging plants.

Sandals and runners are not suitable for jungle hiking or volcano climbs.

Swimming

Although the swimming close to Vila is not brilliant, further afield there are hundreds of glorious beaches. Many sandy ones are black, while others are brilliant white. Sharks, stonefish and strong currents are a danger in some areas. Always seek local advice before plunging in.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are generally open from Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 11.30am, and from 1.30pm to 4.30pm, and sometimes on Saturday morning as well. Shops normally begin trading at 7.30am and go through to around 6pm; only some close for the midday siesta. Saturday shopping generally finishes at 11.30am, although Chinese stores remain open all weekend.

CHILDREN

Children will enjoy the freedom of being in this laid-back environment. Encourage them to read *Vanuatu & New Caledonia* by Carol Jones before you go. It's a cheerful book about the region and its people, set out as postcards with lots of maps and photos.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Vanuatu's Diplomatic Representatives

Vanuatu does not have embassies or consulates overseas. Honorary consuls:

Australia NSW (☎ 02-9597 4046); Victoria (☎ 03-9642 8888; australia_vanuatu@dfat.gov.au)

France (☎ 01 40 53 82 25; ambafra@vanuatu.com.vu)

Contact details for other consuls can be obtained from the **Foreign Affairs Department** (☎ 22347; www.vanuatugovernment.gov.vu; Port Vila).

Embassies & Consulates in Vanuatu

All the diplomatic representations to Vanuatu are in Port Vila. High commissions or embassies:

Australia (☎ 22777; fax 23948; KPMG House, rue Pasteur) High commission.

China (☎ 22598; fax 24877; rue d'Auvergne) Embassy.

France (☎ 22353; fax 22696; Lini Hwy) Embassy.

New Zealand (☎ 22933; brian.smythe@mfat.govt.nz; Lini Hwy) High commission.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

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

Yam Festival (April) There's dancing and feasting in the villages to praise the harvest.

Naghol (April-May) A spectacular, impressive land-diving ritual that occurs annually in several villages in Pentecost.

Cross Island Relay (May-June) Teams of seven come from all over the nation. The leaders set out from Lenakel, and the race finishes at Mt Yasur car park. Contact a local resort to join a team.

Horse-Racing Carnivals (July-September) Races are held during winter at old Burton airport and on the Mt Yasur ash plains. Those are an awesome sight.

Independence Day (July 30) Vanuatu's most important annual event. Vila has the widest range of activities: sporting events, a military parade and fun stalls at Independence Park; canoe and yacht races in the bay; string-band competitions; and *kastom* dancing.

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

Mini Games (August-September) Tanna athletes compete at the Lenakel Soccer Stadium for positions in the Tafea Games.

Nekowiar and Toka Ceremony (September-October every three years) A three-day extravaganza of dancing and feasting, while villages cement relationships and arrange marriages. The place and date is only announced close to the time.

Cultural Spirit Arts and Carving Exhibition (October) Local artists and artisans are invited to exhibit their craft in Lenakel, focussing on a different theme each year.

Two useful calendars can be found at: www.vanuatuadventure.com/vanuatu/cms/en/events/calendar.html and www.talpacific.com/vanuatu/guide.htm.

INTERNET ACCESS

You can access the Internet at a few places in Vila, Luganville and Lenakel, and at many resorts, but there are no opportunities to get online on the more remote islands.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Vanuatu A to Z (www.vanuatuatoz.com) All you wanted to know, but didn't know where to ask.

Vanuatu Hotel Directory (www.vanuatu-hotels.vu) A local online booking service, with information about the country and useful links.

Vanuatu News Online (www.presse.com.vu) *Port Vila Presse*, the local rag, went on the web when the paper closed. Get the latest news as it comes to hand.

Vanuatu Tourism Office (www.vanuatuadventure.com) Has stacks of useful information and links to local agents and online booking services.

Volcano Live (www.volcanolive.com) Maintained by an Australian volcanologist and adventurer, it has stacks of info and pictures on Vanuatu volcanoes. Start at Most Active Volcanoes.

Wantok Environment Centre (www.positiveearth.org) Information includes pictures and details of island bungas, tourist attractions, ecotourism projects, and pictures of Vanuatu's birds, with sound recordings of their calls.

Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Vanuatu) The encyclopaedia has in-depth information on all aspects of Vanuatu's history, neatly cross-referenced.

MONEY

Vanuatu currency is the Vatu (Vt), which floats against a basket of currencies including the US dollar, so it is reasonably stable. Exchange rates are given in the following table.

Country	Unit	Vatu
Australia	A\$1	83Vt
Canada	C\$1	98Vt
CFP zone	100 CFP	115Vt
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	212Vt
euro zone	€1	138Vt
Fiji	F\$1	63Vt
Japan	¥100	96Vt
NZ	NZ\$1	70Vt
Samoa	ST1	38Vt
Solomon Islands	S\$1	15Vt
Tonga	T\$1	54Vt
UK	£1	200Vt
USA	US\$1	109Vt

Moneychangers

The three commercial banks in Vanuatu are ANZ, Westpac and the local NBV. All have their offices in central Vila and branches in Luganville. ANZ has a couple of ATMs in Vila, one at Bauerfield airport (just north of Vila) and one at its Luganville branch, while Westpac has one in Vila.

There are also private moneychangers in Vila and Luganville.

Duty-free shops, restaurants and hotels in Vila should have no difficulties with credit cards, or cash and travellers cheques in major international currencies. However,

HOW MUCH?

- **Local newspaper:** 100Vt
- **Hair extensions:** 15,000Vt
- **Waterfront 600 sq m block:** 6,500,000Vt
- **Hand-carved outrigger canoe:** 3000Vt
- **Car hire:** 6500Vt per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol:** 125Vt
- **1L bottled water:** 120Vt
- **Bottle of Tusker beer:** 350-450Vt
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** 350-950Vt
- **Quarter chicken, fries and salad:** 520Vt

the few hotels outside the capital may only accept Australian or US dollars.

Take plenty of Vatu to rural Vanuatu as you won't be able to change foreign currencies or access any accounts.

TELEPHONE & FAX International Calls

The code for international calls from Vanuatu is ☎ 00. Vanuatu's international telephone code is ☎ 678.

There are two zones for international call rates from Vanuatu: neighbourhood (Australia, NZ, New Caledonia and Fiji) which costs 133/108Vt per minute peak/off-peak; and the rest of the world (216/168Vt peak/off-peak). Peak times are 6am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

Many larger hotels have IDD phones, but you cannot make international reverse-charge calls from Vanuatu.

Mobile Phones

Vanuatu is in the GSM digital network but only has coverage around Vila, Luganville and Norsup. It's a bit expensive to use your own SIM card with a roaming facility. You may find it better to buy a SIM card package (9000Vt including 6500Vt of calls) in Vila; consult **Telecom Vanuatu** (www.smile.com.vu), although the site is somewhat out of date.

Phonecards

There are no coin-operated public phones; all phones need a phonecard. Postal agencies

usually sell them, but it's worth buying them in Vila or Luganville (they make excellent gifts anyway), and always travel with a couple of spare ones.

There are six cards available, from 450Vt to 2700Vt.

Local and international fax facilities are available at Vila's post office and the Telecom Vanuatu office in Luganville. The cheapest time (off-peak) to make a domestic call is between 6pm and 6am Monday to Friday and all weekend.

There are no area codes in Vanuatu.

TIME

Vanuatu time is GMT/UMT plus 11 hours. Noon in Vila is 1am in London, 6pm in Los Angeles and 1pm in Auckland.

TOURIST INFORMATION Local Tourist Offices

The official tourism office is in Vila: **Vanuatu Tourism Office** (VT0; ☎ 22813, 22515; www.vanuatuadventure.com). It has a very informative website and includes details of VTO's overseas representatives. The travel agencies (p766) in Port Vila will give you information about the whole country, and arrange your trip if you want. Their websites are packed with images.

Tour operators (p771) offer a great variety of sight-seeing and action-packed activities, mostly around Efate.

Useful websites include **Wantok Environment Centre** (www.positiveearth.org/), for information about the outer islands, and **Vanuatu Adventure Travel** (www.vanuatu-adventure-travel.vu), which is full of ideas for island-hopping safaris.

This chapter simply can't do the country justice. For further details, consult Lonely Planet's *Vanuatu*. Alternatively, contact the Vanuatu Tourism Office and the tour operators.

VISAS

Every visitor must have a passport valid for a further four months and an onward ticket. Entry visas are not required for nationals of the British Commonwealth and EU. Check at www.vanuatuadventure.com/visa_info.htm to see whether you need one. You're allowed an initial stay of up to 30 days, extended one month at a time for up to four months.

Nonexempt visitors should contact the **Principal Immigration Officer** (☎ 22354; fax 25492; PMB 092, Port Vila) to organise their visa application (2500Vt fee). This must be finalised *before* your arrival in the country.

Visa extensions require leaving your passport and onward ticket with the immigration department in Vila or Luganville for about three days.

TRANSPORT IN VANUATU

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The following airlines have regular scheduled flights to Vanuatu.

Air Pacific (☎ 22836; www.airpacific.com; Lini Hwy, Vila) South Pacific Travel in Vila is Air Pacific's agent.

Air Vanuatu (☎ 23848; www.airvanuatu.com; rue de Paris, Vila)

Aircalin (☎ 22019; www.aircalin.nc; Lini Hwy, Vila) The New Caledonian airline.

Pacific Blue (☎ 07-3295 2284; www.flypacificblue.com/; Brisbane, Australia)

Qantas Airways (www.qantas.com.au) Acts as the sales agent for Air Vanuatu in all areas outside Australia, NZ, Fiji and New Caledonia.

Both Air Vanuatu and Pacific Blue operate direct flights from Brisbane and Sydney to Port Vila. Return fares from Sydney start from A\$780/870 in the low/high season; from Brisbane it's A\$670/750.

Air Vanuatu has direct flights from Auckland to Vila, and flights via Nadi (Fiji), Honiara (Solomon Islands) and Noumea (New Caledonia). Return low-season fares start from NZ\$948 for the direct flights. Air Pacific and Aircalin also have flights from Nadi and Noumea. For other Pacific islands you need to get connecting flights in NZ, Fiji or New Caledonia.

Talpacific Holidays (☎ 09-914 8728; www.travelrange.co.nz) is a good South Pacific travel agent.

AIRPORTS

Vanuatu's international airport, Bauerfield, is 6km north of Port Vila. It has an ANZ ATM, an NBV branch for currency exchange, a café and duty-free shopping. If you haven't organised accommodation, **Vanuatu**

Standby Accommodation (www.vanuatustandbyaccommodation.com), in a booth at the airport, can arrange it on the spot, and its website is full of information and useful links.

Sea

MV Havannah (☎ 25225, 23889; Port Vila) runs a monthly service out of Noumea to Vila, Malekula and Santo. Contact Frank Maki.

Vila hosts P&O's *Pacific Sky* and *Pacific Princess* about once or twice a fortnight.

South Sea Shipping (☎ 22205; southsea@vanuatu.com.vu) in Vila is the agent.

The best sources of general information on yachting matters are the **Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club** (☎ 24634; Lini Hwy), at Anchor Inn, and **Waterfront Bar & Grill** (☎ 23490; Lini Hwy).

Touring yachts are not permitted to make landfall in or depart from Vanuatu until they have cleared customs and immigration at Vila, Luganville (Santo), Lenakel (Tanna) or Sola (Vanua Lava), the authorised ports of entry. There are hefty fines for disobeying this rule. There is a landing fee of 7000Vt for the first 30 days and 100Vt per day thereafter.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Vanair is Vanuatu's only domestic air carrier. It offers scheduled flights to 28 airfields using its fleet of 20-seat Twin Otters, a 44-seat ATR and a tiny nine-seat Islander. While the service is generally reliable, major delays are also common, so don't try to make connecting flights on the same day.

Check prices and schedules and book online with **Vanair head office** (☎ 25025; www.vanair.vu; rue de Paris, Vila) or at the **Luganville office** (☎ 36421; Main St, Luganville). Flights booked directly with Vanair receive a 20% discount. Children aged between two and 12 fly half-price. Students get a 25% discount with, for example, an International Student Identity Card (ISIC).

It pays to book your seat well in advance and it's very important to reconfirm your flights.

Land

BUS & TAXI

Public minibuses with a red B fixed to their numberplates operate in Vila, Luganville, eastern Santo and eastern Malekula. They don't run fixed routes but zoom to their

passengers' various destinations. Flag them down by the roadside.

Taxis in Vila and Luganville are mostly conventional sedans, while in rural areas they're 4WD trucks with a red T on their number plates. Charges depend on distance, but also on the state of the road. Ask your chosen driver for a price. It will be honest and reasonable. A short trip in Vila might cost 400Vt, but a day charter will cost between 8000Vt and 12,000Vt. The local taxis meet each flight at bush airfields, but they may not be around on Sunday and public holidays in rural areas.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You can hire cars and 4WD vehicles in Vila and Luganville, and scooters in Vila. The minimum age for renting a car is 23; for a scooter it's 17, provided you hold a valid driving licence.

An International Driving Licence is not needed, however, you must have held your licence for at least a year. There's a speed limit of 50km/h in Vila and Luganville, but once out of town speed is dictated by road conditions (often pretty terrible). Vehicles drive on the right and seatbelts are not compulsory.

Sea

PASSENGER BOATS

Powered catamaran *Diepsea*, operated by **Island Gateway** (☎ 22662, 51595; islandgateway@vanuatu.com.vu), goes to Espiritu Santo via the Shepherds, Epi and Malekula each Friday (7000Vt), returning via Ambae, Maewo, Pentecost, Ambrym and Paama on Saturday (7000Vt). A second loop goes to Tanna (6000Vt) on Monday or Tuesday via Erromango, returning to Vila on Tuesday or Wednesday (6000Vt). Able to carry up to 58 people, the catamaran has comfortable seating, refreshments and onboard entertainment.

Pelsaert (☎ 22743, 49094; fax 27763; adventure@vanuatu.com.vu), a 21m Precision, runs to Tanna twice-weekly, docking at Port Resolution on Tuesday and Lenakel on Thursday (one way 5500Vt, 10 hours). On Friday it goes to Litslits on Malekula (5000Vt, 14 hours), and on to Luganville on Santo (6500Vt). It returns to Vila on Sunday (6500Vt). Reclining upholstered seats cater for up to 70 people.

CARGO BOATS

Travelling around Vanuatu by cargo boat might seem like an adventure, but it can be very long and unpleasant if the sea is rough, which it usually is. Bring a pillow and warm cover, ask if there are beds, and check the food and water situation. Boats leave Vila from the old wharf behind Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway, or the Main Wharf on Wharf Rd.

Information on cargo boats leaving Port Vila to outer islands is posted in the VTO office (p766), or ask about a boat's movements at your local kava bar. Reliable cargo boats that take passengers on their weekly rounds:

Brisk (☎ 36517, 43744; Sealink, Santo) Santo, Pentecost, Ambrym, Epi, Vila.

Dinh 1 (☎ 22865; Dinh Shipping, Vila) Vila, Tanna, Malekula, Santo.

Sarafenua (☎ 24135, 46164; baboak@ifira.com.vu; Ifira, Vila) Vila, Epi, Paama, Santo, Pentecost, Ambrym, Ambae, Erromango, Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Aniwa.

CANOE & SPEEDBOAT

When ni-Vanuatu talk of speedboats, they mean outboard-powered dinghies. Canoes are dugout craft with outriggers, paddle-powered. Speedboat prices are high, so it's best to wait for a scheduled service rather than charter, if you can.

YACHT

You can charter a cruising catamaran with skipper and crew. Contacts:

Adventure Centre (www.adventurevanuatu.com; Port Vila) Has a 42ft trimaran *Golden Wing* (75,000Vt per 24 hours) and a 44ft catamaran *Margarita* (95,000Vt per 24 hours).

Bali Hai Charters (☎ 27202, 46058; balihaicharters@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 1011) Has a 38ft trimaran *Witchitit* (11,200Vt per person per 24 hours). Make meeting-place arrangements when you ring.

Tours

The wide variety on offer includes cultural, diving, bushwalking, bus and boat tours. Operators in central Vila:

Adventure Centre (☎ 22743; www.adventurevanuatu.com)

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu)

Horizon Tours (☎ 25053; fax 24275; www.vanuatu tourism.com/)

Island Safaris Vanuatu (☎ 23288; www.islands vanuatu.com)

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