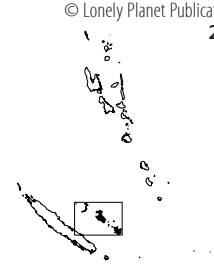


# Loyalty Islands



Arriving on the Loyalty Islands from Grande Terre is like entering another world, as if the islands' physical separation puts them in a different country. Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa, steeped in Kanak culture, are authentic Pacific destinations. They are a world without stress, where people live in traditional *cases* (Kanak houses) by idyllic beaches. There are no crowds and there is no fuss. People are natural, the dress code informal.

The pace is relaxed and you won't see anyone running unless they are dribbling a ball on a football field or chasing runs on a cricket pitch. The Loyalty Islands are no place for hectic itineraries. Come with plenty of time to contemplate the pearly beaches and forested headlands, the setting sun and rising moon. One of the best things to do on these small islands, anchored in the vast emptiness of sea and sky, is to enjoy simply being there. So throw away your list of things to do, take off your watch and let yourself waft along on leisurely island time.

Nengone, Drehu and Iaii (Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa, respectively) will leave you with memories of bright Kanak dresses drying in the breeze, old churches with flaking paint, people chatting in lyrical languages, kids splashing and shrieking gaily in waves of an unbelievable blue and *cases* set in the middle of neat lawns.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Escaping along a rugged coastal track to a hidden sanctuary at **Shabadran** (p305) on Maré
- Exploring secret **limestone caves** (p306) or cooling off in **Trou Bleu d'Anawa** (p316)
- Taking a boat trip to Ouvéa's deserted **Pléiades du Sud** (Islets of the South) and **Pléiades du Nord** (Islets of the North; p313)
- Watching the setting sun slip below the horizon from the beach at **tribu de Mouli** (p315) or the edge of the **Jokin cliffs** (p309)
- Swimming with turtles in the sparkling water at **Luengoni** (p310)



## History

Melanesians have inhabited the Loyalty Islands for millennia. Between the 11th and 18th centuries, though, seafaring Polynesians also arrived and mingled with the Melanesians.

French Admiral Bruny d'Entrecasteaux was the first European to sight the Loyalty Islands in 1793. Later the same year, the English ship *Britannia* passed by Maré. In 1827, Dumont d'Urville was sent to officially chart the islands. He returned in 1840 to complete the task.

The next arrivals were whalers, around 1810. They operated there until 1860 when whale oil, which was used for lighting, was replaced by recently discovered fossil fuels. In the early 1840s sandalwood traders arrived and over the next decade plundered the islands' forests in exchange for iron, cloth, beads and guns. Contact between the Europeans and the locals was mostly friendly, although there was occasional conflict. Unfortunately for the Melanesians, the Europeans introduced diseases such as measles and smallpox.

The late 1840s and early 1850s also saw the arrival of the first protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) on Maré and Lifou, and, in 1856, Ouvéa. Much of the Protestant missionaries' success is attributed to Samoan and Rarotongan catechists who preceded the LMS European missionaries. Catholic missionaries set up missions on the Loyalty Islands in the late 1850s.

In the second half of the 1800s, many Loyalty Islanders were recruited to work on Australian sugar-cane plantations. This period is known as the blackbirding period. Conditions there were hard although recent historical research indicates that Loyalty Islanders fared much better than workers recruited (often forcefully) on other Pacific islands such as Vanuatu. In more recent times many Loyalty Islanders have moved to Grande Terre in search of work or to pursue secondary and/or tertiary education.

## Climate

The Loyalty Islands have a mild, sunny climate with an average temperature of 24°C.

Temperatures are cooler between April and September.

## Information

Tourist information on the Loyalty Islands is available in Noumea where there are two Destination Îles Loyauté offices (see p232).

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There are many great spots to snorkel on the Loyalty Islands but be careful of strong currents.

## ETIQUETTE

Kanak cultural etiquette is observed strongly on the Loyalty Islands. Remember to ask permission before taking photos of, filming or approaching places that are in any way culturally significant, eg a *case*, grave, cave or *trou bleu* (deep rock pool). Also, topless swimming and sunbathing is forbidden. When away from the beaches, dress modestly.

## Sleeping & Eating

All accommodation must be booked in advance. Meals at small *gîtes* (bungalows) must also be arranged in advance. If it is available, local *gîtes* will serve *roussette*, a fruit bat that is considered a local delicacy and is an important source of protein in rural households. It is a protected species and can only be hunted for personal consumption. Its consumption in *gîtes* seems to be accepted.

## Getting There & Away

**AIR**  
**Air Calédonie** (www.air-caledonie.nc) operates daily flights to the Loyalty Islands from Noumea's Magenta Airport. Frequencies vary from island to island but there are at least three direct flights per day to Lifou and two to both Maré and Ouvéa (all cost 9270CFP and take 35 minutes). Twice a week there is a direct flight to Tiga (9270CFP, 40 minutes). For up-to-date schedules, consult with Air Calédonie. See p328 for details on interisland flights.

Note that *gîte* bookings and airport transfers can be organised at the Air Calédonie office in Noumea (p327) when you buy your air ticket (a 1200CFP administration fee applies).

## BOAT

The fast ferry *Betico* operates between Noumea and the Loyalty Islands on average twice a week. The slower cargo vessel *Havannah*, which also carries passengers, does one trip per week. For more information, see p328.

## Getting Around

Without your own transport, getting around the islands isn't easy as there is very little, if any, public transport. A guided tour is one option and hitching is another. The latter is a relatively easy way to travel if you aren't going far and if you are on a main road. On the less-frequented roads, you may have to wait a long time for a car to pass by.

If you are not going too far, cycling is a great way to fully appreciate the scenery. You may have to take extra padding for the saddles. Some hotels and *gîtes* hire out bikes.

Car rental is available on all three islands and should be booked in advance. Rental companies will usually drop off and pick up cars at the airport or wharf at no extra charge. Details of rental companies are given in the respective Getting Around sections later in this chapter.

# MARÉ

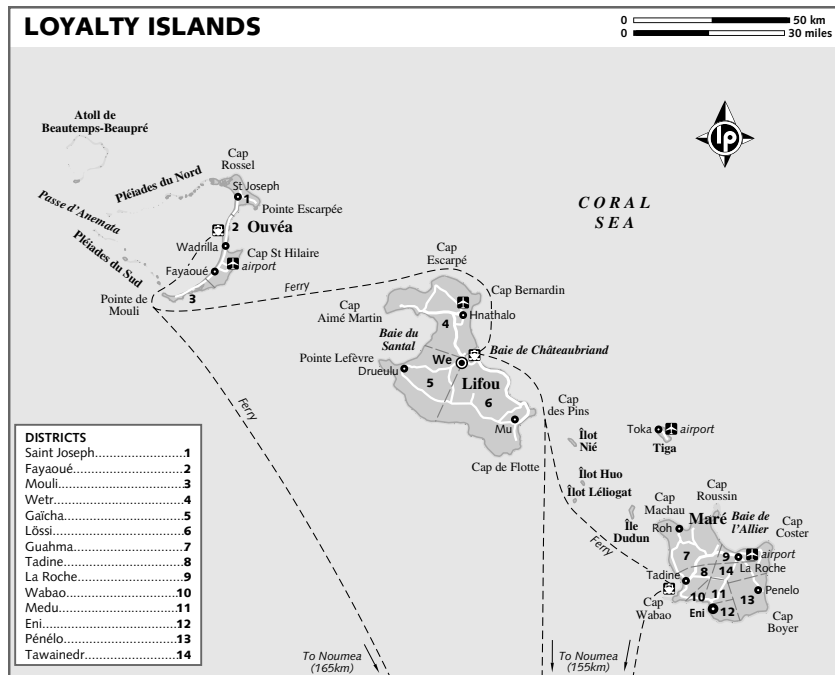
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Maré is an island with a rugged coral coastline and small beaches enclosed by translucent lagoons. The monotony of its low bush-clad plateau gives way unexpectedly to magnificent sea vistas with the land descending abruptly to the picturesque coast. It has gaping *trous bleus*, great coastal walking tracks and welcoming Kanak *gîtes* and homestays serving excellent seafood meals.

## People

Maréans are descended from Melanesians, who originally populated Maré, and Polynesians, who arrived between the 11th and 18th centuries. Maré has eight districts, each administered by a *chef* (chief) under the jurisdiction of one *grand chef* (high chief). The language spoken on the island is Nengone.

In recent years, Maréans have made a name for themselves in the artistic world. The island has produced some very successful artists such as contemporary playwright Pierre Gope and singers including Dick and



Natr Bouama, formerly of the band Gurejele, and Gulan, formerly of OK! Ryos.

## Information

**Syndicat d'Initiative Nengone** (☎ 45 00 10; Tadine; ☎ 7.30am-4.15pm Mon-Fri) At the *mairie* (town hall) in Tadine; has tourist information. The opening hours are not very reliable. It can arrange guided walks.

## Getting There & Away

The airport is at La Roche. **Air Calédonie** (☎ airport 45 55 10, Tuo office 45 42 77; www.air-caledonie.nc; ☎ 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) has an office in Tuo on the main road between La Roche and Tadine, plus a desk at the airport. For more information, see p301.

The *Betico* and *Havannah* dock at the wharf in Tadine. For more information, see p328.

## Getting Around

There is no public transport on Maré but the *gîtes* and hotel can arrange airport and wharf transfers as well as tours of the island. Tours cost about 2000CFP per person. Some places to stay, including Chez Léon

Duhnara, rent bikes (per day 1000CFP) to guests. The following places hire vehicles: **Hôtel Nengone Village** (☎ 45 45 00; Cengéité; scooter hire per half-/full day 2500/4000CFP, bike hire per half-/full day 600/1000CFP) There is an additional 4% tax. **Jacques Wiako** (☎ 45 42 67; car hire per day 6240CFP) **Jema Location** (☎ 45 44 06; car hire per day 5760CFP) **Maré Île de Beauté** (☎ 45 43 75; car hire per day 6500CFP)

## TADINE

Tadine, in the west, is the main village on Maré. There is a wharf where the *Betico* and *Havannah* dock. Tadine has a couple of shops, a **Banque Calédonienne d'Investissement** (BCI bank; ☎ 45 40 62; ☎ 7.15am-noon & 1.15-4pm Mon-Fri), pharmacy, medical centre, *gendarmerie* (police station) and post office. There is an ATM inside the bank.

Tadine's **market**, next to the *mairie*, is held on Tuesday and Friday mornings. It sells local produce and is an interesting place to visit for its local atmosphere.

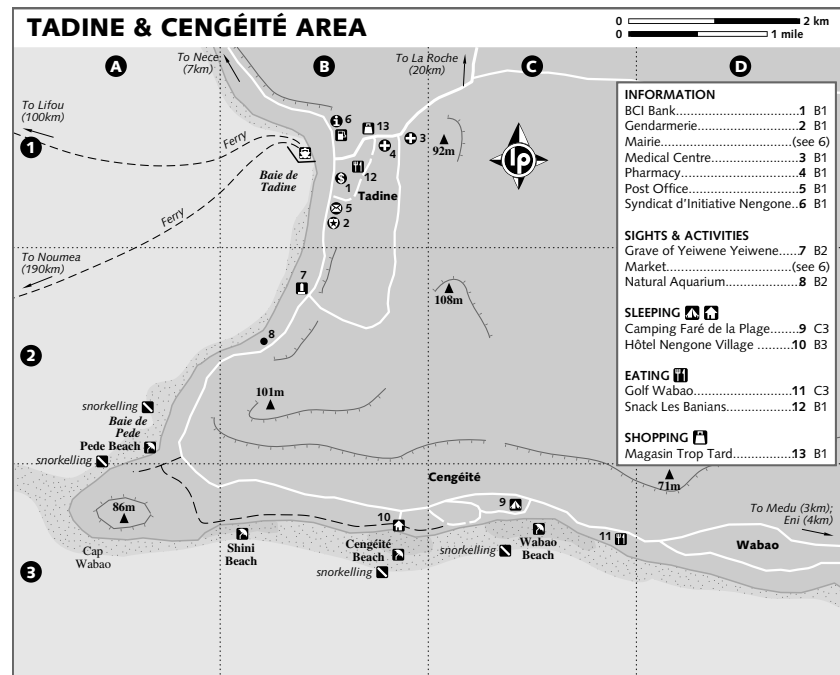
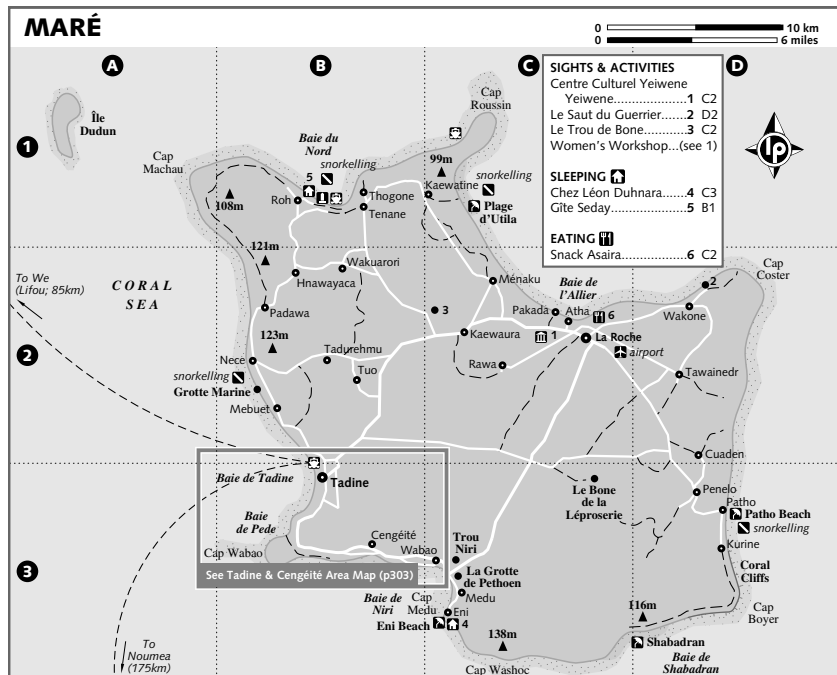
Two kilometres south of Tadine is the roadside **grave of Yeiwene Yeiwene**, who was assassinated with Jean-Marie Tjibaou on

in its clear waters. It is linked to the sea by channels beneath the rock. It's located about 3km south of Tadine, signposted by a parking area beside the main road.

## BEACHES

There is a fabulous beach where Cengéité and Wabao overlap. It is enclosed by a small lagoon where you can swim and snorkel around the coral formations, and is a great spot to while away a few hours. North of here is another beautiful but exposed beach at Hôtel Nengone Village.

**Pede beach**, between the natural aquarium and Hôtel Nengone Village, at the southernmost end of the road, are the best beaches on Maré from which to watch the sun set. They are both sheltered and on windy days are warmer than the Wabao or Nengone Village beaches. From Eni beach, the southernmost end of the road, are the best beaches on Maré from which to watch the sun set. They are both sheltered and on windy days are warmer than the Wabao or Nengone Village beaches. From Eni beach, you may see humpbacked whales in baie de Niri between July and September. Pede beach, surrounded by bush and protected by the headland at Cap Wabao, is very secluded. Yachts often anchor in this bay. To get there, leave the main road where it



veers west at Cap Wabao about 2km south of the natural aquarium. Go through the farm gate, across the paddock and down to the beach.

### COASTAL WALK

There is an enjoyable coastal walk between Hôtel Nengone Village and baie de Pele. It is a shady 6km walk and is suitable for children as it is mainly flat. The track starts at the northern end of the hotel grounds and follows the coast past sheltered beaches to Cap Wabao, where it turns inland. Across the headland it passes through a forest that is fenced off to keep in grazing cattle. On the other side of the headland, the track emerges at beautiful baie de Pele with its white beach and aquamarine lagoon sheltered beneath the headland's high cliffs.

### TROUS BLEUS

Just before you arrive in Medu there is a *trou bleu* near the road known as **la grotte de Pethoen**. It is hard to spot the path that leads to it through the undergrowth and in any case it is best to ask permission to go there. The pool, where you can see the dark shape of eels swimming in the depth, is at the bottom of an overhanging cliff. Ask anyone in Medu for permission and directions. If you are staying at Chez Léon Duhnara in Eni, the owners can show you the way.

Between Medu and La Roche there is another *trou bleu* known as **Le Bone de la Léproserie**. There was once a leper hospital nearby, which explains the name. This impressive hole sunk in the limestone rock is hidden by thick vegetation. From the edge, it drops vertically to a well of still, dark water. It contains around 350,000 cubic metres of water and is considered one of the largest drowned cavities in the world. You won't see it until you are almost at the edge. Watch out as there is no railing and the ground around the edge can be slippery. On the road to La Roche from Medu, turn right at the roundabout. There is a signposted turn-off along this road. It is 1.5km down a dirt track beside some solar panels.

### NORTH OF TADINE

North of Tadine, the road follows the coast past quiet *tribus* and through thick vegetation at the bottom of craggy limestone cliffs to a tiny school beside the road at Padawa.

After the school it climbs steeply to the plateau. There is a view over the forest and cliffs to the sea where a couple of islets dot the horizon. From here the road continues north to the small fishing *tribu* of Roh. This is where the first missionaries, from the London Missionary Society, arrived in the Loyalty Islands; a monument at the end of the road commemorates this event.

In early May, Nece, between Tadine and Padawa, hosts the **fête de l'avocat** (avocado festival). It is a weekend event where the island's many types of avocado and other produce are on sale. **Cultural events**, including *coutume* (custom) ceremonies, and dances are also held.

The people who run Gîte Seday (see p306) can arrange a **coastal walk** to Tenane as well as **sculpture workshops**.

Heading from Roh towards La Roche is **le trou de Bone**, a deep hole with echoing sides sunk in the limestone rock. The sandy bottom is covered in trees and a pool where the sun reflects the translucent blue of the water. It is not signposted and is easier to find coming from the main road between Tadine and La Roche. Take the Tanane turn-off, from where it is 1.5km. The *trou* is on the other side of the silver guardrail on the right. There is no security railing around the *trou* so be careful as you explore here.

### LA ROCHE AREA

The village of La Roche (the rock) gets its name from the massive rock, known as Titi, that dominates the area. The *tribu* is spread out at the foot of the rock, which dwarfs the attractive Catholic church with its tall, red steeple.

It is possible to climb the rock at La Roche but you need to ask permission first and go with a local guide, with whom you should negotiate the price. Inquire in the *tribu*. From the summit the view extends over the surrounding area and ocean. There are also the remains of an ancient fortress where the local tribe took refuge in times of war.

About 7km from La Roche, past tribu de Wakone, is **le Saut du Guerrier** (the warrior's leap), a 5m-wide gap in the cliffs. According to legend, a warrior once leapt the gap to escape his enemies. Had he not succeeded, he would have fallen 30m onto the sharp rocks in the foaming sea below. The stark cliff tops covered in scrub vegetation contrast strik-

### THE HNAENEDR WALL

The stone wall of Hnaenedr dates back to AD 250. Similar walls have been found on the Marquesas and other western Polynesian islands.

Archaeologists believe there were originally four sides, each 1m to 2m high and 1m wide, with a perimeter of 600m. At either end was an entrance where the walls were 8m to 12m wide and about 4m high.

According to local legend, two warring tribes agreed to construct walls, which they were due to begin at the same time, to provide protection for their people. But the tribe at La Roche cheated and started early, and that's why La Roche's rock is much higher than the rock wall at Hnaenedr.

ingly with the mesmerising blue water at the base of the cliffs. To get there from La Roche, follow the road east towards Wakone and Cap Coster as far as it goes. It is a short walk to le Saut du Guerrier.

There is a small exhibition on Kanak artefacts at the **Centre Culturel Yeiwene Yeiwene** (☎ 45 44 79; 🕒 7.30-11.30am & 1-4pm Mon-Thu). Behind the cultural centre are the remains of the Hnaenedr wall, an ancient rock fortification (see above). The cultural centre is also open on Friday but closes early. It is by the main road about 2km west of the La Roche turning. Next to it is the **women's workshop** (🕒 7am-4pm Mon-Fri) where a women's association sells arts and crafts.

If you arrive at the airport on Wednesday morning you can visit La Roche's market opposite the terminal.

### SHABADRAN

The coastal walk to Shabdran is one of the most rewarding walks on the Loyalty Islands. It begins with a long tramp through a coconut grove to the foot of coral cliffs. If you have a high-clearance vehicle you can drive to the cliffs. You then clamber up the steep cliffs from where you can see for miles along the rugged shoreline. Eventually you descend to a flat plain that ends at Shabdran, where the most exquisite beach awaits. It sweeps down to a small lagoon enclosed by a reef that keeps out the fury of the crashing surf. In this enchanting location there is a secret waiting to be discovered.

You need to be relatively fit to enjoy the walk. The sharp, uneven coral cliffs are not easy to walk on and you will need sturdy footwear. It is a two-hour walk to Shabdran. You can only go with a **guide** (☎ 45 05 96; per person 2000CFP). Overnight trips are possible but you need your own camping gear.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Book accommodation well in advance if you plan to visit during the *fête de l'avocat* in early May. Most places to eat are attached to places to stay.

### Tadine

There is nowhere to sleep in Tadine.

**Magasin Trop Tard** (☎ 45 43 95; 🕒 6am-noon daily & 2-7pm Mon-Fri, 3-7pm Sat & Sun) A large shop on the road that turns inland towards La Roche. A good place to stock up on groceries or buy provisions for a picnic.

**Snack Les Banians** (☎ 45 08 11; dishes 900CFP; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri) This *snack* is behind the post office. It serves simple but filling meals including rice with chicken or fish.

### South of Tadine

In *cases*, guests sleep on mattresses on the floor.

**Camping Faré de la Plage** (Map p303; ☎ 45 42 24; cases per person 1100CFP, camping per tent 1100CFP) This camp site and restaurant (meals from 1200CFP) are on idyllic Wabao beach. The restaurant is in a large open *faré* (shelter) but meals are often served at tables under trees on the beach. There is a *case* behind the restaurant and campers can pitch a tent near the restaurant. The owners hire canoes (per hour 300CFP) and arrange airport (1000CFP) and wharf (600CFP) transfers.

**Chez Léon Duhnara** (Map p302; ☎ 45 43 70; cases per person 1500CFP, camping per tent 1000CFP) This homestay sits on a smooth lawn among tropical plants, a short walk from the beach at Eni. It has a couple of *cases* and lots of space for camping. It is across the road from the rocky shoreline of baie de Niri where the family operates a *nakamal* (clubhouse; kava shells 100CFP). Guests can relax with a shell or two of kava as they watch the sunset over the bay. During the school holidays the family's daughters entertain guests with dances before dinner. The restaurant (meals 1500CFP) is known for its seafood. Meals are more expensive for nonguests. Activities include

bike hire and island tours (see p302). Airport (2000CFP) and wharf (1500CFP) transfers are available and guests can hire the home-stay's car (per day 6000CFP).

**Hôtel Nengone Village** (Map p303; ☎ 45 45 00; nengone@canl.nc; bungalows 9500CFP; 🍽️ 🚿) This comfortable hotel located at Cengéité is Maré's top accommodation option. It sits above a beautiful white beach but it is often very windy. There is a small pool as well as free kayaks for guests. The hotel runs airport (2200CFP) and also wharf (550CFP) transfers. Breakfast is 1300CFP, dishes 1800CFP to 2400CFP, set menu 2750CFP.

**Golf Wabao** (Map p303; ☎ 45 42 89; 🕒 6.30-11am & 2.30-7.15pm Mon-Fri, 2.30-7.15pm Sat, 6.30-11am Sun) This big shop on the main road at Wabao sells a wide range of groceries.

### North of Tadine

The best place to stay north of Tadine is in Roh.

#### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Gîte Seday** (Map p302; ☎ 45 02 25; cases per person 1500CFP, camping per tent/person 1000/100CFP) This welcoming *gîte* in the quiet tribu of Roh sits in a coconut grove on the rocky coast. It has simple thatch-and-concrete bungalows that the owners refer to as *cases*. They sleep between four and six people on mattresses. The charming honeymoon bungalow is built on a rock in the water with access by gangplank.

There's no beach; you can sunbathe or admire the ocean view from a large wooden platform on the rocks above the water. Beneath the rocks you can swim or snorkel and you might even bump into a turtle.

The *gîte's* cheerful owners Jacques and Suzanne are wonderful cooks. They serve delicious meals (1500CFP) that are usually based around fish accompanied by home-grown vegetables. You can order seafood, *bougna* (traditional Kanak meal), or, if it is available, *roussette* or wild pig. These cost more than the standard meals. The restaurant is under a thatched *faré* by the sea.

Jacques is a sculptor and shares his skill with visitors. Other activities include fishing and walks. They are free for guests; non-guests pay 500CFP per person. Airport and wharf transfers cost 2000CFP per person.

### La Roche

**Snack Asaira** (Map p302; ☎ 45 05 18; dishes 850CFP; 🍽️ 🚿 lunch Mon-Fri) is popular with local civil servants. It is on the road to Wakone.

## LIFOU

### pop 10,300

Lifou's unspoiled beaches, cliff top vistas and limestone caves will leave you breathless. The island has a fascinating culture blending the traditional and modern. There is always a *case* or two among the grouping of houses on family properties. Its beautiful beaches are usually deserted. Even in We, the Loyalty Island provincial capital, you will have the beach almost entirely to yourself. In the early morning or evening along its southeast coast you can watch turtles swim near the shore. Away from the coast, its inland roads stretch endlessly through dense bush. Almost everywhere you go on Lifou you will be surrounded by the peaceful solitude of nature.

### People

Although considered Melanesian, the population of Lifou is quite a melting pot. The original Melanesians mixed with Polynesian settlers between the 11th and 18th century and, later, Anglo-Saxon whalers and sandalwood traders. Many words in Drehu, the local language, are of English origin, a legacy of the island's early Protestant missionaries.

As on Maré, Lifou has produced a fair amount of musical talent. The cultural troupe, *Wetr*, was one of the first traditional Kanak cultural groups to tour abroad in Europe and the Pacific in the '90s. *Mexem*, a successful Kaneka (popular Kanak music) band of the late '90s and early 2000s, hails from Lifou. Edou, its leader, has also recorded some solo albums.

Lifou is divided into three districts, each ruled by a chief.

### Information

The village of We has tourist information and shops, banks, Internet access, and a clinic and *gendarmerie*. See p308.

### Getting There & Away

The airport is at Wanaham in the northern part of the island. **Air Calédonie** (☎ airport 45 55 20, We office 45 55 50; www.air-caledonie.nc; 🚗 730-

11.30am & 12.30-5.15pm Mon-Fri, morning Sat) has a main office on the main road in We, plus a desk at the airport. For more information, see p301.

The *Betico* and *Havannah* dock at the wharf in We next to the marina. For more information, see p328.

When P&O's cruise liners visit, they anchor in baie du Santal for the day.

### Getting Around

All *gîtes* and hotels arrange airport and wharf transfers. Prices depend on the distance. Some places to stay, including Oasis de Kiamu and Faré Falaise, rent **bikes** (per half-day 500-1000CFP, day 1000-1500CFP). Drehu Village charges the same amount but its bikes are reserved for hotel guests.

Lifou has a handful of car-rental companies. They usually drop off or pick up vehicles at the airport or wharf at no extra cost.

**Aéro Location** (☎ 45 04 94; per day from 6500CFP)

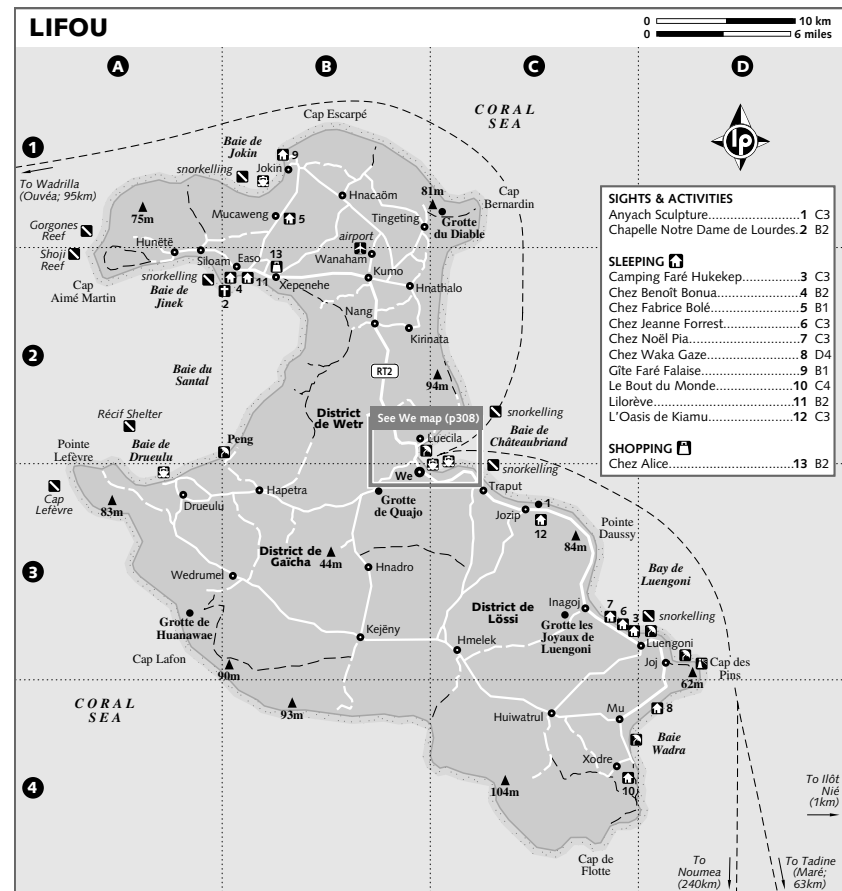
**Alizée Location** (☎ 45 07 67; per day from 5500CFP)

**Loca V** (☎ 45 07 77; per day from 5500CFP)

**Someltrans** (☎ 45 14 78; someltrans@cyberdidact.net; tours per person 2500CFP) Runs north and south tours of the island. It also runs return transfers between *gîtes* and hotels, and Luengoni and Peng beaches (2000CFP).

### WE

Lifou's main town, We, is spread out along the waterfront at baie de Chateaubriand. The main road runs beside the sea at the southern end of town and is just a couple of hundred metres inland at the northern



end. Although it is the capital of the Loyalty Islands province, We's buildings are modest and its atmosphere is laid-back. Apart from stocking up on supplies, there is not much else to do so why not amble down to the beach to frolic in the waves or snooze in the shade?

## Information

We has a post office, clinic, pharmacy, *gendarmierie*, Internet café, shops and banks.

**BCI bank** (☎ 45 13 32; 🕒 7.20am-noon & 1-3.45pm Mon-Fri) At the northern end of We; has an ATM.

**Cyber@** (☎ 45 09 04; Internet per 30min 210CFP; 🕒 8.30am-noon daily & 1-7pm Mon-Fri, 2.30-5.30pm Sat) Opposite the Loyalty Islands provincial offices.

**Marina** (☎ 45 10 62; dae@loyalty.nc; 🕒 6am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) This modern marina at the south end of We has customs and immigration clearance.

**Tourist information office** (CEMAID; ☎ 45 00 32; cemaid@cyberdidact.net; 🕒 7.30-11.30am & 12.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) A small office in front of the *mairie* in We. It is not exactly dynamic but it distributes informative tourist maps and information on accommodation options and guided walks. It has a desk at the airport, which is open during times when flights arrive and depart.

## Sights & Activities

On the waterfront south of the roundabout two large **churches**, one Protestant and the other Catholic, stand side by side. The over-stated architecture of the Catholic church is eye-catching, to say the least.

At lunchtime on weekdays the locals picnic under the shade of the trees that grow along the edge of the long white **beach** between Hôtel Drehu Village and Lucila. On calm days this beach is blissful and, despite its proximity to the town centre, it is practically deserted.

**Lifou Marine** (☎ 45 19 98; www.lifoumarine.nc) runs fishing charters. For up to four people it costs 57,200/72,800CFP per half-/full day. Price includes fishing gear hire.

## NORTH OF WE Hnathalo & Tingeting

East of Kumo and 3km southeast of the airport is Hnathalo, home to the chief of We. A **Catholic church** with twin spires sits imposingly near the chief's house, a modern and extravagant building. To the rear of the chief's modern house sits the chief's tra-

ditional **grande case** enclosed by a wooden palisade. You can visit the church on your own, but ask permission to visit the *case*.

The spectacular **Grotte du Diable** (Devil's Cave; ☎ 45 17 93; adult/child 800/400CFP) has three large, interconnected limestone rock caverns. It is about 3km from Tingeting where Adrien Trohmae, who takes guided tours, lives. From the airport it is 6km northeast to Tingeting. At Tingeting, turn right after the church and follow the signs to Adrien's house.

## Jokin & Muaweng

Jokin sits high on the cliffs at the very north of Lifou, overlooking a vast bay. From the cliff top you can spend ages admiring the view or watching the sun sink into the sea. The cliffs are at the end of the road behind the church. Between the church and cliffs is a large, attractive *case*. Ask permission before taking photos.

Around to the left of the church there is a footpath to a cove where you can snorkel among the coral formations. For information on activities see the boxed text, p312.

A lovely forest drive links Jokin to Easo on the northwest coast. About halfway sits Muaweng, a *tribu* known for its vanilla plantations. Vanilla plants were first brought to Lifou by English missionaries. One vanilla grower, Félix Bolé, shows visitors around his plantation for a small fee. It is in a forest where the green vanilla vines cling to the trees. Visitors can sample vanilla tea or coffee at the end of the tour. The farm is down the track next to the white water tower in Muaweng.

## Easo, Hunëte & Xepenehe

With its diverse land and seascapes, the Easo Peninsula is one of the most picturesque places on Lifou. It has interesting architecture, a sheltered bay where snorkelling is amazing, and a magnificent view over vast baie du Santal and baie de Jinek. Between July and September you can sometimes see whales. This lovely peninsula is a place cruise-ship passengers can discover when their ships anchor in baie du Santal.

There are some great diving spots around this part of the island; see p222 for more information.

Antoine Geihaze runs **guided walks** (☎ 45 18 13; per person 1500CFP) in the forest around Easo. The two-hour walks include visits to caves

and explanations of the traditional significance of the flora and fauna. He lives at the junction of the Muaweng and Xepenehe roads. He also hires kayaks at baie de Jinek.

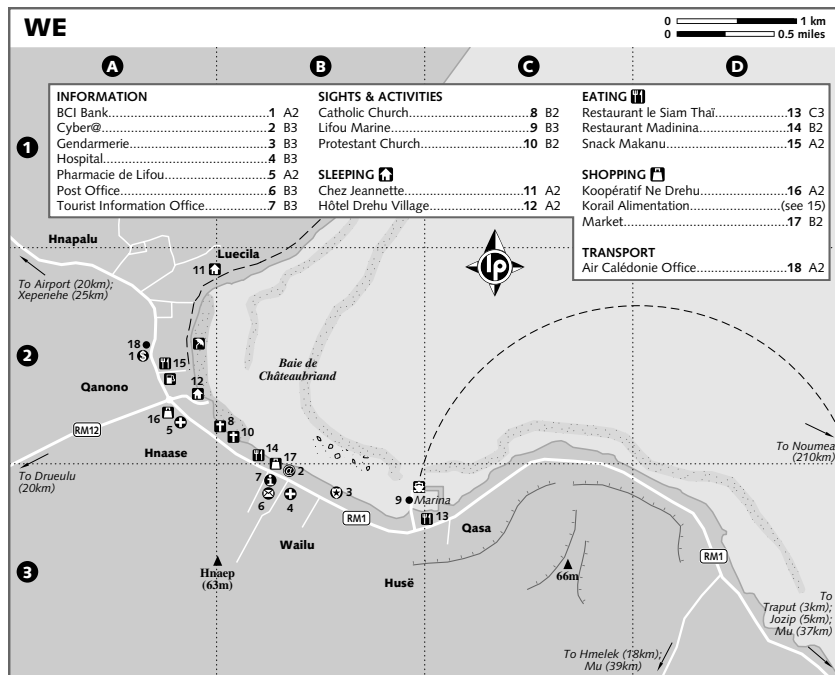
The turn-off to Easo peninsula is at the large white cross near a big white **Catholic church** that dates back to 1898. You can take a quick look inside the church, which has a vaulted roof, stained glass windows and intricately carved doors. It is about 2km from the cross to the end of the road at the chapel.

**Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes** stands at the tip of Easo peninsula. The road there ends at a car park, from where steps lead up to the chapel. From the top of the hill where flamboyant trees and hibiscus bushes splash patches of red across the green landscape, there are fantastic views of baie de Jinek to the west and baie du Santal to the east and south. A weathered silver statue of the Virgin Mary stands on the roof of the chapel. Inside the chapel a smaller statue stands on a concrete altar surrounded by vases of bright artificial flowers. The chapel was built in 1898 to commemorate the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in 1858.

About 200m before the chapel, a road goes down to a grassy area by a wooden platform at baie de Jinek. The bay, with its smooth surface and clear water teeming with small tropical fish, is like a natural aquarium. Steps lead down to the water from the wooden platform built on the sharp coral rocks. It's on the western side of the peninsula.

From Easo, the main road goes to **tribus de Siloam and Hunëte**. **Lifou Nature** (☎ 45 05 56; theophile@lagoon.nc; per person 12,000CFP) runs three-day guided trips in the rugged, uninhabited northwest tip of Lifou. The excursion leaves Hunëte and heads north through the forest then east to the coast. Hikers are then transported south by boat where they join a track that leads east back to Hunëte. If you are interested in the flora of the area you can purchase the *Guide Botanique du Circuit Lifou Nature*, a small pocket-sized botanical guide with colour photographs of plants and flowers found along the circuit. It is available at bookshops in Noumea. You need to book at least 48 hours in advance. Meals are included in the price but hikers must provide their own gear including tents.

Five kilometres east of Easo is Xepenehe (chep-peh-neh-heh), Lifou's second largest town. It is an attractive little place with



## SEA TURTLES

New Caledonia's territorial waters are a noted habitat for turtles. Three species of this reptile frequent these parts: green turtles, which average 1m in length and can weigh 150kg; loggerhead turtles, also found off Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG); and the rarer hawksbill turtle, also found around the Solomon Islands and PNG. They feed on algae, sponges and crustaceans. The females nest on sandy beaches, particularly on the uninhabited dependencies of the Récifs d'Entrecasteaux, far away from human life.

In one night, a turtle can lay 100 or more eggs of table-tennis-ball size, with a texture a bit like paper, in a burrow dug out of the warm sand. In one nesting season (generally November to March), she may come back to shore six or seven times, on each occasion laying another clutch of eggs. It can then be several years before she returns to land again.

The eggs take about two months to hatch. The 5cm-long hatchlings instinctively make their way out of the sandy pit and into the sea. Instinct also tells them that predators are abundant – hovering in the sky, sidling over the sand or awaiting in the sea. The youngsters' numbers are greatly reduced in the first few hours. The young female hatchlings will not return to terra firma until they are ready to lay their first lot of eggs, and it can take 50 years before they're mature enough for that. When they do, they'll return to the same beach where they were born.

Turtle numbers are greatly endangered as a result of hunting. They are killed either for their flesh or, in the case of the hawksbill, for their shell. Many countries, including New Caledonia, have protected them by law, which means they can only be hunted for personal consumption.

Turtles have traditionally been a protein source for Kanaks and, in older times, their prized flesh was the preserve of the clan's chief. These days Kanaks are only authorised to consume them on special customary occasions.

houses surrounded by dry stone walls and a lovely setting on a hill above baie du Santal. Facilities include a shop and petrol station.

## WEST OF WE Peng & Drueulu

Peng is a blissful, secluded, sandy beach on Baie du Santal. Apart from one house, it is quite deserted. It is a beautiful place to spend half a day or more. Someltrans (see p307) runs transfers here. It was once home to a *tribu* but in 1925 leprosy broke out and the whole settlement packed up and moved 4km inland to Hapetra, where an unsealed road leads.

Twenty kilometres west of We is Drueulu, the home of the chief of Gaïca district. The *grande case*, surrounded by a wooden palisade, sits at the western end of the *tribu* by the beach. You can visit the *case* but you must ask permission before entering the grounds.

## SOUTH OF WE Jozip

Craggy limestone cliffs rise above the inland side of the road at Jozip. The *tribu* sits between the cliffs and the rocky coast. On the coastal side of the road is **Anyach Sculpture**

(☎ 45 14 79; admission free; 🕒 7-11am & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 7-11am Sat & Sun), a sculpture workshop. Dick Ukewed and his wife Jacqueline, Lifou's first female sculptor, can show you around their workshop and explain the various carving techniques and woods they use. They have sculptures for sale.

## Luengoni

At Luengoni a long stretch of fine white sand borders a stunning lagoon. Trees and other vegetation grow right to the edge of the beach, giving it a tranquil atmosphere. The sheltered bay is an idyllic place to unwind. Luengoni's calm lagoon is a renowned turtle haunt and it is quite common to see their heads poking out of the water as they surface for air.

North of the beach there are some limestone caves known as Les Joyaux de Luengoni. Chez Noël Pia (p312) operates guided tours here. There are caves both aboveground and underground; the underground caves have deep rock pools. For an unforgettable experience go swimming in the cool, underground pools that shimmer emerald green in the torchlight.

Four kilometres south of Luengoni, a rough unsealed road leads up the hill to

Cap des Pins. You can't drive up but it is an easy half-hour walk to the top, where there is a view over the wild rolling ocean.

## Mu & Xodre

At Mu, the road skirts along beside curved beaches and picturesque bays. It then continues along the wild rocky coast to Xodre, the end of the road. At Mu a road leads across the southwest part of the island, over an inland plateau, to Drueulu.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Places offering accommodation and meals are situated in the north of Lifou and along the southeast coast from We down to Xodre. Unless you are eating at one of the hotels, restaurants or snacks in We, you need to book a table in advance. Most *gîtes* and homestays can prepare *bougna* on request. Most *tribus* have a shop but the best stocked supermarkets are in We.

## We

The market takes place on Wednesday and Friday mornings opposite the provincial headquarters.

**Chez Jeannette** (Map p308; ☎ 83 81 54; cases per person 1500CFP, *pailletes* d 3500CFP, camping per tent/person 1000CFP/100CFP) This Kanak homestay in Lucella is above the beach at the northern end of baie de Châteaubriand. It has thatched *pailletes* (straw huts) with beds and a *case* with mattresses. The homestay only caters for houseguests (meals 1500CFP). Jeannette can organise airport (2000CFP) and wharf (1000CFP) return transfers. To get there, follow the unsealed road in front of the *tribu* along the waterfront.

**Hôtel Drehu Village** (Map p308; ☎ 45 02 70; drehu.vil@canl.nc; bungalows d 9880CFP; 🍷 🍷) This hotel on Châteaubriand beach is Lifou's top-end option. Its comfortable bungalows are set in the garden and along the beachfront. It serves a buffet breakfast (1300CFP), meals (dishes 1800CFP to 2400CFP, set menu 2860CFP), and can arrange return airport (1950CFP) and wharf (700CFP) transfers. Activities include free canoeing and kayaking for guests, as well as bike hire (per half-day 600CFP). It also arranges island tours through Someltrans (see p307).

**Snack Makanu** (Map p308; ☎ 77 76 87; dishes 500-1000CFP; 🕒 7.30am-6.45pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) This eatery is in the small building in the

Korail Alimentation car park north of the roundabout. It has a good range of dishes and fast food. It has a small veranda area with tables and also does takeaways. Sandwiches and *panini* cost 300 to 500CFP.

**Restaurant le Siam Thai** (Map p308; ☎ 45 72 66; dishes 1000CFP; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This Thai restaurant is at the marina at the southern end of We. It serves Thai noodle dishes accompanied by meat or prawns, and also serves steak and fries.

**Restaurant Madinina** (Map p308; ☎ 45 01 88; dishes 1300CFP; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This relaxing waterfront restaurant specialises in West Indian dishes. The West Indian décor runs through to its rustic-looking wooden walls and tin roof disguised under thatch. You can also eat out on its veranda overlooking baie de Châteaubriand.

**Korail Alimentation** (Map p308; ☎ 45 05 70; 🕒 7.30am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) This supermarket north of the roundabout stocks just about everything. There is another large supermarket by the roundabout next to the Mobil station and several small shops along the main road.

**Koopérative Ne Drehu** (Map p308; ☎ 45 02 02; 🍷 mornings & afternoons) If you have a spare minute pop into this small shop next to the pharmacy at the roundabout for a quick look. As well as food, the shelves are packed with all sorts of interesting goods. It has less available than the supermarkets but more of a local atmosphere.

## North of We JOKIN & MUCAWENG

**Chez Fabrice Bolé** (Map p307; ☎ 45 07 69; cases per person 1500CFP, camping per tent 1000CFP) Homestay at a vanilla plantation in a forest setting in Mucaweng. Guests can sample homemade vanilla jams for breakfast (500CFP). The family can show you around its plantation and explain the different stages of vanilla farming, from pollination through to how it is processed. The homestay (set menu 1700CFP) is signposted on the main road through Mucaweng.

## EASO & XEPENEHE

**Chez Benoît Bonua** (Map p307; ☎ 45 90 08; *paillette* & case per person 1500CFP, camping per tent 1000CFP) This place is by the jetty where cruise-ship passengers come ashore in baie du Santal. It has a shady camp site and very

**AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Gîte Faré Falaise** (Map p307; ☎ 45 02 01; bungalows d 5000CFP, case & r per person 1500CFP, camping 1500CFP) This *gîte* (bungalow), perched on the very edge of the cliffs at Jokin, has magnificent sunsets and one of the best views on the island. It has rustic but charming bungalows with bathrooms and wooden decks looking over the bay. Guests can also stay in rooms in the family house or in a *case*. Next to the small restaurant (set menu 1800CFP) there is a large *faré* where lunch is served. The garden around the restaurant and bungalows is imaginatively laid out.

Activities include bike hire (per half-/full day 500/1000CFP), boat trips (per day 1900CFP) and island tours (3500CFP). There are enjoyable walks in the vicinity and through the *tribu*. Close to the *gîte*, some steps lead down to a cove at the base of the cliffs where you can swim or snorkel around the beautiful underwater coral formations. It runs airport (1600CFP) and wharf (2000CFP) transfers and is one of the few *gîtes* where credit cards are accepted.

Faré Falaise is at the end of the road in Jokin, behind the church at the top of the hill.

basic *paillotes*. Dishes are 800CFP. Activities include kayak hire (per hour/half-day 500/1500CFP) and bike hire (per day 1000CFP). It is on the road to the cliff top chapel in Easo.

**Liloreve** (Map p307; ☎ 45 14 23; bungalows s/d 3500/4000CFP, camping per tent/person 1000/100CFP) This place is set on a grassy property sloping down to baie du Santal. It has a view of the cliff top chapel and an exquisite sandy cove that is underwater at high tide. Its attractive thatched bungalows have mattresses on the floor and the shower block is impeccably clean. Set menu is 1800CFP. Activities include bike hire (per half-/full day 500/1000CFP) and tennis but you need to bring your own gear. It is near the junction of the Mucaweng road, just before the dive club.

**Magasin Chez Alice** (Map p307; ☎ 45 12 90; ☎ 6-11.45am & 1.30-7.45pm) This shop is next to the Mobil station at Xepenehe. It's the largest shop in the area so it stocks a few more supplies than you'll find in the tiny shops in other *tribus*.

**South of We JOZIP**

**L'Oasis de Kiamu** (Map p307; ☎ 45 15 00; oasis@canl.nc; dm/d 2000/7900CFP; 🍷) This hotel in Jozip comes close behind Hôtel Drehu Village in the upper midrange bracket. It sits on a flat grassy area beneath towering limestone cliffs. There is a small pool and the rooms have fridges. Set menu is 2400CFP. The hotel is across the main road from the sea where there is a tiny beach on the coral coastline. It runs return airport (2200CFP) and wharf (1200CFP) transfers.

**LUENIONI**

**Chez Noël Pia** (Map p307; ☎ 45 03 09; cases per person 1500CFP, camping per tent/person 1000/100CFP) Noël Pia's place is at the northern end of beautiful Luengoni beach. Noël is possibly the most photographed person on Lifou; chances are you've seen him in a guidebook, in a tourist brochure or on a poster. As well as being photogenic, he is a great storyteller and will regale you with tales. In the mornings turtles swim around the coral rocks behind the camp site. Dishes are 1000CFP. Activities include guided trips to limestone caves (1000CFP) and boat excursions (1000CFP).

**Chez Jeanne Forrest** (Map p307; ☎ 45 16 56; cases/paillotes per person 1800/2000CFP, camping per tent/person 1000CFP/100CFP) Jeanne Forrest lives just down the road from Noël's. Jeanne is a welcoming person and her homestay is an ideal way to experience life in a Kanak family. Dishes from 1200CFP. Her place is on the main road, a little way back from the beach by the blue island province signpost.

**Faré Hukekep** (Map p307; ☎ 45 14 34; camping per tent 1000CFP, paillotes s/d 3000/3500CFP) A peaceful place at the southern end of Luengoni beach: the only sleeping option south of We that is away from the main road. Dishes run from 1000CFP. It has beds and mattresses in *paillotes*. Transfers to the airport (per car 3000CFP) and wharf (per car 2000CFP) can be arranged. To get here turn left down a sealed road shortly after Jeanne's place and follow it to the end. The road, which is easy to miss, is opposite a monument with a cross.

**MU & XODRE**

**Chez Waka Gaze** (Map p307; ☎ 45 15 30; alainderud@mls.nc; paillotes/cases per person 2500/1500CFP,

camping per tent 1000CFP) This place sits under a coconut grove on a long stretch of beach. When it's windy it is very exposed. It is managed by a French couple who offer relaxing aromatherapy massages. Dishes are 1200CFP. For activities including bike hire inquire at the *gîte*. It runs return airport transfers (3000CFP) and island tours (6000CFP).

**Le Bout du Monde** (Map p307; ☎ 45 02 46; some trans@cyberdidact.net; cases per person 1500CFP) This delightful place is perched on the edge of the coral cliffs at Xodre. It has a restaurant above the cliffs and a *case* and *paillote* under a coconut grove enclosed by a stone wall. The cliffs have been terraced smooth in front of the restaurant so diners can eat outdoors where they can look out for turtles in the waves below. Around the side of the restaurant there are steps leading down to a private beach. The only drawback is the hefty price of meals (dishes 1800CFP). Activities include a full-day tour of the *tribu* (5500CFP), which involves a custom ceremony, a demonstration of *bouagna* preparation and a visit to a cave. One-way (2500CFP) airport and wharf (1500CFP) transfers are available, as well as return transfers for twice the price.

**OUVÉA****pop 4360**

If your idea of heaven is a deserted tropical beach and sparkling lagoon, Ouvéa is your paradise. This atoll has a long flat strip of land with a necklace of islets, known as Pléiades du Nord (Islets of the North) and Pléiades du Sud (Islets of the South), encircling an azure lagoon. Its 25km beach seems to stretch endlessly along the western lagoon. The road that runs the length of the island beside the magnificent lagoon and fine white beach is ideal for cycling. On the east coast the island is protected from the open sea by limestone cliffs and high coral rocks, and the forests in the north are home to Ouvéa's endemic and endangered parakeets (*Eumymphicus uvaensis*). Ouvéans are very proud of their parakeet but, unless you are very lucky, you are unlikely to see one of these rare birds on the island. You can see some in captivity at Parc Zoologique et Forestier in Noumea.

**People**

Ouvéa has a strong Polynesian influence dating back to the 18th century when Polynesians from Wallis Island arrived and settled beside the Kanaks. The name Ouvéa was given to it by these people. The Wallisian language Faga Uvea is still spoken widely on the island. Iaii, a Melanesian language is also spoken.

**Information**

The *mairie* and provincial offices are based at Wadrilla. The *gendarmerie* is at Fayaoué and there is a clinic on the way to the airport. **BCI bank** (☎ 45 71 31; Wadrilla; ☎ 7.20am to noon Mon-Fri, 1-3pm Wed)

**Getting There & Away**

Ouvéa's small airport at Houloop (also spelt Hulup) is 5km northeast of Fayaoué. **Air Calédonie** (www.air-caledonie.nc) Wadrilla office (☎ 45 570 22; ☎ 7.30-11am & 1.30-3.00pm Mon-Fri); airport desk (☎ 45 55 30; ☎ 7.30-10.30am & 1.30-4.00pm Mon-Fri) has an office in Wadrilla and a desk at the airport in Houloop. For information on flights, see p301.

Ouvéa's wharf, where the *Betico* and *Havannah* dock, is 6km north of Wadrilla. For more information, see p328.

**Getting Around**

Most places to stay can arrange airport and wharf transfers; prices vary depending on the location of the accommodation. Some places also arrange island tours. See p316 for exact charges.

A **private bus** (☎ 45 70 77) leaves St Joseph daily except Sunday at 6.30am and goes, via Fayaoué (arriving around 7.30am), to Mouli (arriving around 9am). It then returns, stopping at Fayaoué again (around 10.30am), and arrives at St Joseph around 11.30am. The driver stops anywhere along the route if you flag him down. The fare is 150CFP between St Joseph and Fayaoué and 100CFP between Fayaoué and Mouli.

**Iaii Adventure** (☎ 45 09 77; adult/child per half-day 750/500CFP, full day 1500/750CFP), around 200m south of Gîte Beaupré in tribu de Banout, rents bikes.

Car-rental companies usually drop off or pick up vehicles from the airport, wharf and places to stay for free. Some options: **Loca Sud** (☎ 45 70 13; 79 86 51; car hire per day from 5000CFP) At Mouli, just before the homestay Cocotier.



**Ouvéa Location** (☎ 45 73 77; car hire per day from 4000CFP) At Fayaoué, on the main road 500m south of the airport turn-off.

Hitchhiking is quite common on Ouvéa, although sometimes it takes a while for a car to come along.

## FAYAOUÉ

Ouvéa's main centre is at Fayaoué although in reality, as this settlement is very spread out, there is no real 'centre'. It has a few shops here and there, and accommodation.

**Koïo Drany** (☎ 45 72 87; Fayaoué; per person 6000CFP) does boat trips to Pléiades du Sud.

**Canio** (☎ 45 71 01; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Sat), a few metres south of the *gendarmerie*, is a sailing club. It rents out equipment including windsurfs (per one/two hours 2000/3500CFP), hobby cats (per one/two hours 3000/3500CFP) and kayaks (per one/two hours 1000/1750CFP).

## BAIE DE LEKINY & MOULI

Baie de Lekiny (also spelt Lékine) is a long narrow bay that stretches inland at the

southern end of Ouvéa in Mouli district. Two small channels at its southern end let water in from the open sea. Tall limestone cliffs block off the sea along the eastern side. Stalactites hang down the sides of the cliffs and from a distance, they look like a forest growing along the cliff walls. At low tide you can wade across to the cliffs at the bay's narrowest part and clamber up to the hollowed-out ledges and caves. You must go with a **guide** (700CFP); the trip takes two hours. Inquire at Camping de Lékine (see p317).

The bay is a fishing reserve for tribu de Lekiny. Visitors are prohibited from swimming in it. If you do the cliff tour, you are allowed to snorkel around the pass opposite the bridge. The underwater scenery is amazing, with bright coral formations, fish, molluscs, moray eels and small reef sharks.

**Aquamarina** (☎ 45 00 67; aquamarina-ouvea@yahoo.fr; adult/child 1750/1000CFP) organises glass-bottomed boat trips around baie de Lekiny. If you cannot go snorkelling, this is your chance to see the wonderful marine life of the bay up close. It is a two-hour trip and is run by the managers of Camping de Lék-

ine. Tea and cake are served at the end of the tour.

The long Mouli bridge spans the narrow inlet between the bay and the lagoon. The water under the bridge is a brilliant blue that fans out into the wide flat lagoon edged by dazzling white sand. You can spend hours on the bridge watching sea creatures including sharks, turtles, sea snakes, big fish and little fish, float between the two.

Tribu de Mouli is at the far south of Ouvéa. It has an attractive church with a red spire, which sits on a small rise at the end of a long straight drive about 100m back from the beach.

Ouvéa's long beach stops at the southern end of the *tribu* and the coast becomes rocky. The road continues past the *tribu* to the very tip of the island. When the weather is calm it is a good place to snorkel, but be careful of the strong currents.

North of the *tribu* is **Corderie de Fibre de Coco** (☎ 45 72 37; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), a rope-making factory where ropes are hand-spun from coconut fibre. You can stop by and watch the process. It's best to call before you visit to make sure it is open.

**Charly Aema** (☎ 45 07 60; adult/child 5000/2500CFP), the owner of Mowague, organises excur-

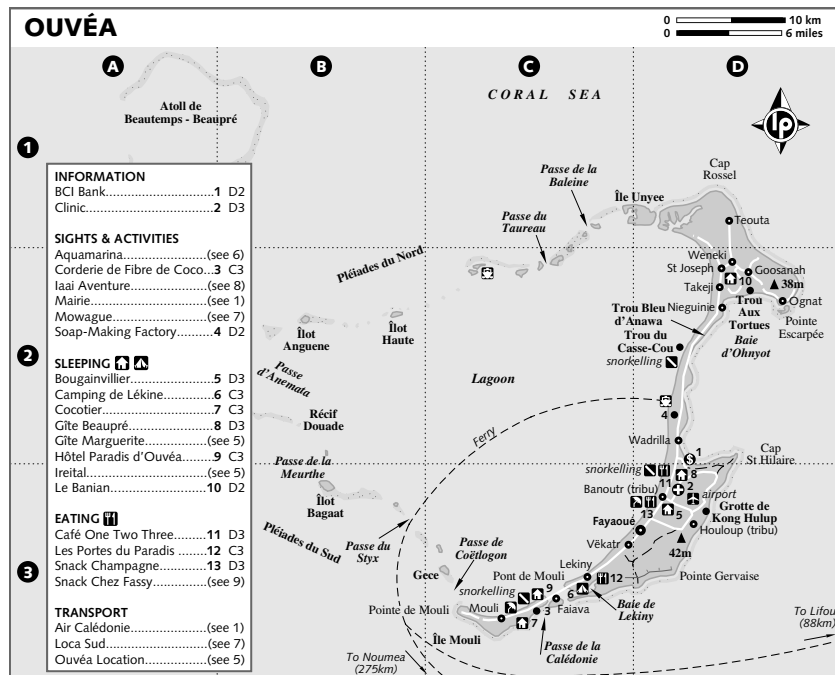
sions in the lagoon and to the Pléiades du Sud. Charly knows these islets like the back of his hand and will share their secret spots with you. Excursions leave from Mouli at 8am. Out on the lagoon, Charly will show you how to catch your lunch, or catch it for you if you are not successful, then grill it over a fire on one of the islets' many beaches. Once you've explored the islet and had your afternoon siesta, it's time to head back home. Excursions leave with a minimum of three people, but no more than five.

## Diving

There are two dive clubs on Ouvéa, both based in Mouli. See p223. They organise dive trips in Pléiades du Sud.

## NORTH OF FAYAOUÉ Grotte de Kong Houloop

Grotte de Kong Houloop is a cave in the bush near the airport at Houloop. It is about 5km northeast of Fayaoué. **Chez Jedyjah** (☎ 45 90 95, 86 59 36; per person 1100CFP) organises guided tours to the cave with interesting commentary on local legends, history and flora. From behind the airport runway, you can drive or walk along a rough track to the



## THE OUVÉA CRISIS

In January 1987 The French government approved a new plan for the territory which involved amalgamating New Caledonia's four regional council boundaries into three and increasing police numbers. An election was set for April 1988, which coincided with the French presidential election. The FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste) wanted the date for the New Caledonia election to be delayed until after the presidential election. Anger at France's persistence led to the Ouvéa crisis. On the day voting began for the presidential election, a group of Kanaks captured the *gendarmerie* (police force) at Fayaoué, and killed four gendarmes. They held 16 hostage in a cave near Gossanah, in the far north.

A large number of soldiers were flown to the island and stormed the cave, which resulted in 21 deaths, only two of them gendarmes. After the cave assault, 32 Ouvéan prisoners, including Djubelly Wea, a local independence movement leader, were flown to France to face trial. This was despite a previous assurance from the French High Commissioner in New Caledonia that trials would be held in Noumea.

Wea was eventually released and the others were given amnesty as part of the Matignon Accords signed in June 1988. The Matignon Accords stipulated that a referendum on New Caledonian independence would be held in 1998. Some Kanaks, including Wea, were unhappy with the agreement, and continued to call for an immediate independent Kanaky.

Exactly a year to the day after the cave assault, FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, and his second in command Yeiwene Yeiwene, went to Ouvéa to attend a ceremony to end the 12 months of mourning for the 19 Kanaks killed at Gossanah. During the ceremony they were approached by Wea, who shot them at point-blank range. Wea was then shot by a Kanak police officer.

In 2004, a reconciliation ceremony took place between the Tjibaou, Yeiwene and Wea families.

bottom of the cliff where the cave is found. There is a short climb up to the cave.

### Wadrilla

At Wadrilla, the island's administrative centre, there is a large white memorial to the 19 Kanaks who died during the hostage crisis in 1988. In 1989 Kanak pro-independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene were killed here (see p315).

Wadrilla is also the site of Ouvéa's desalination plant, which provides drinking water to the island's inhabitants. There are no freshwater sources on the island. Before the desalination plant was built, the islanders relied on rainwater that they stored in large reservoirs. During dry spells, freshwater had to be delivered from Noumea by boat.

Near the wharf, about 6km north of Wadrilla, there is a copra-oil distillation and soap-making factory (☎ 45 10 60, 45 71 11; admission free; ☹ Mon-Fri). The plant processes about 200 tonnes of oil a year. Call in advance. The copra industry is one of the main sources of income on Ouvéa. In the northern part of the island you will see lots of copra (coconut flesh) drying ovens. The copra dryers are usually set in coconut groves. They are covered by corrugated iron roofs and have drying racks placed over wood-burning ovens.

### WADRILLA TO ST JOSEPH

About 3km north of the wharf is Trou Bleu d'Anawa, a deep pool in the coral rock. The water is an intense blue and there are fish and even turtles in the pool, which is connected to the sea underground. You can jump in but the only way out is to pull yourself up its steep sides with a piece of rope. It is behind someone's property (there is a house and a *case*), near the road where it bends sharply away from the coast. Ask permission at the house.

From the *trou bleu*, the road winds up to the little Col du Casse-Cou (in English, 'the reckless pass'), Ouvéa's narrowest point. Once over the col, the road continues to the west coast, as far as St Joseph.

### ST JOSEPH DISTRICT

St Joseph is Ouvéa's northern district. The chief's compound is enclosed by a wooden palisade on the waterfront at tribu de St Joseph. From there, a track continues north beside the beach; it makes for an enjoyable

scenic walk or drive and you can stop off anywhere for a swim. The road east of St Joseph to Teouta in the north or Ognat, also known as St Thomas, at the eastern end of the island, is very scenic. It passes through tidy coconut plantations and beside deserted coast where the beaches are hidden from view by the roadside bush. On the way to Ognat the road goes past Gossanah, where the gendarmes were held captive in a cave during the 1988 hostage crisis.

Enclosing the lagoon to the west of St Joseph are the Pléiades du Nord. **Le Banian** (for 4 people 20,000CFP) organises excursions to these uninhabited islets. For more information, see opposite.

### SLEEPING & EATING

The places to sleep and eat are described from the south to the north. Most places to stay can organise island tours; prices range from 1500CFP to 3500CFP. They usually require a minimum of four people. Most of them also cater for nonhouseguests but, apart from Hôtel Paradis d'Ouvéa, you need to book in advance. For self-catering there are a dozen or so shops on the island. The best-stocked one is Chez Fella in Fayaoué, just after the *gendarmerie* if you are coming from Mouli. The island's eateries all overlook the beach and lagoon.

#### Mouli

**Mowague** (☎ 45 07 60; pailletes s/d 3500/4000CFP) This friendly homestay is about 5km south of the bridge, before the church. The owner, Charly, is famous for the boat excursions he organises to Pléiades du Sud. The homestay (set menu 1200CFP) also serves up coconut crabs, lobster or *bougna* on request for around 3000CFP per person. Return airport or wharf transfers cost 3000CFP.

**Cocotier** (☎ 45 70 40; cases per person 2000CFP, pailletes s/d 3500/4000, bungalows s/d 4500/5000CFP, camping per tent 1000CFP) This is another homestay in Mouli, and lies about 500m north of the church. Like everywhere else, it is across the road from the beach, but you can pitch your tent on the beachfront. Set menu is 1800CFP; you can order lobster or *bougna*, which cost 3000CFP. Return airport/wharf transfers cost 2000/2500CFP. It can arrange an island tour (3000CFP).

**Hôtel Paradis d'Ouvéa** (☎ 45 54 00; hotelparadis@canl.nc; bungalows d with garden/beach view 22,300/

33,800CFP, 4-person villas with garden view 33,800CFP; ☎) This hotel fronts onto the beach just south of Mouli bridge. It has spacious bungalows and a large restaurant; (set menu 2000CFP to 3500CFP) looking out over the beach and a garden area by the swimming pool. There is a Japanese influence in its design, as it was constructed with the aim of attracting a Japanese clientele. Return airport transfers cost 2000CFP.

**Camping de Lékine** (☎ 45 00 67; camping per tent 1500CFP) This camp site is in a lovely spot with lots of shade, beside baie de Lékine, not far from the bridge. Guests cannot swim in front of the camp site but there are kilometres of gorgeous white-sand beach to choose from beside the lagoon just across the road. The rate includes use of the kitchen. It also hires tents (per night 1700CFP). The managers are full of information about the island and run various activities including diving trips to some fantastic sites (p223) and glass-bottomed boat trips (see p314). Return airport/wharf transfers cost 1500/1800CFP.

**Snack Chez Fassy** (dishes 300-500CFP; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri) This place is south of Mouli bridge before Paradis d'Ouvéa. It is the cheapest place to eat on the island. It serves simple meals such as rice and fish.

**Les Portes du Paradis** (☎ 86 41 22; dishes 500CFP; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This small eatery is about 4km north of Camping de Lékine. It looks out over the lagoon and is a favourite choice among locals. The couple who run it are welcoming.

#### Fayaoué

Fayaoué has two friendly Kanak homestays at tribu de Ouassadieu. They are both about 100m from the beach which is a fair distance compared to Ouvéa's other sleeping options.

**Bougainvillier** (☎ 45 72 20; bungalows, pailletes or cases s/d 3000/3500CFP, camping per tent/person 1000/1000CFP) This is the first homestay. It has attractive thatched accommodation and set

menu for 2000CFP. Return airport/wharf transfers cost 800/1600CFP.

**Ireital** (☎ 45 70 56; bungalows s/d 3000/3500CFP, camping per tent/person 1000/1000CFP) Ireital is the second homestay and is very close to Bougainvillier. It also has thatched bungalows, and set menu is 2000CFP. Return airport/wharf transfers cost 800/1600CFP.

**Gîte Marguerite** (☎ 45 73 22; bungalows s/d 6000/6600CFP, camping per tent 1000CFP, set menu 2200-2800CFP) This *gîte*, in the centre of Fayaoué, is opposite the beach. Return airport/wharf transfers cost 1000/2000CFP. It has a good restaurant (set menu 1200CFP), overlooking the lagoon, which specialises in seafood. Its four bungalows are behind the restaurant.

**Gîte Beupré** (☎ 45 71 32; bungalows d/tr 7000/7800CFP, studios s/d/tr 3850/4400/4950CFP) This place, north of Gîte Marguerite, is nicer. It has three wooden bungalows with private bathrooms set in a quiet garden across the road from the beach. The basic studio rooms have shared bathrooms. Set menu is 2000CFP, and lobster 4000CFP. The return airport/wharf transfers cost 1000/1500CFP.

**Snack Champagne** (☎ 45 72 87; dishes 700CFP; ☹ lunch Mon-Fri) This snack bar is under a *faré* by the lagoon in tribu de Banoutr. It sells sausages and fries as well as rice and meat or fish dishes.

**Café One Two Three** (☎ 87 72 27; buffet 1000CFP; ☹ lunch Mon-Sat) This restaurant in tribu de Nimaha between Fayaoué and Wadrilla serves a buffet lunch including dessert. It may also be open for dinner by the time you visit. The owners are big soccer fans and named their place in honour of France's 3-0 victory over Brazil in the 1998 world cup.

#### St Joseph

**Le Banian** (☎ 45 70 63; cases s/d 3000/3500CFP) This homestay is the only accommodation available in the north of Ouvéa. It has three *cases*. The homestay (set menu 1800CFP) can prepare *bougna* (1500CFP) or lobster (3000CFP) on request. Le Banian organises day trips to Pléiades du Nord.

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