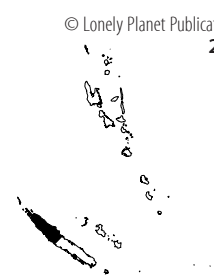


Northern Grande Terre



Mountain ranges run all the way up the middle of this island, separating the northwest coast, with its pastures and hills, from the northeast coast, with its lush vegetation and long white deserted beaches.

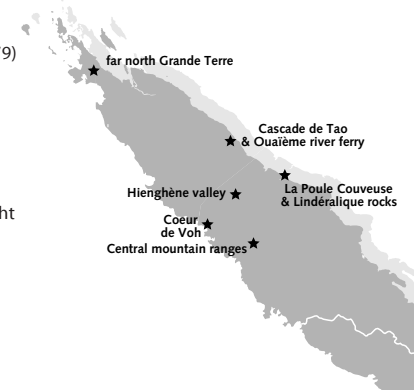
In northwest-coast towns Caldoche farmers wander down the street in jeans and cowboy hats or drive past in 4WD pick-ups. On the northeast coast Kanaks walk casually along the road in shorts and flip-flops.

In the Hienghène and Koné region a visit to a remote *tribu* (small Kanak settlement), strung out along a narrow valley or perched on a steep mountainside, is a memorable experience. Your Kanak hosts will be happy to share their folklore and culture with you. They will guide you to ancient petroglyph sites, show you their yam plantations, saddle up a horse and take you trekking in the mountains, and prepare a steaming-hot *bougna* (traditional Kanak meal) in the evening.

On the northwest coast you can stay on a Caldoche farm and get a taste of convivial Broussard culture. Many farms organise horse trekking, including overnight trips across the central ranges to the northeast coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tucking into a delicious *bougna* (traditional Kanak meal) at a **Kanak homestay** (p279) deep in the Hienghène valley
- Kayaking around **La Poule Couveuse** (p279) or beneath the **Lindéralique rocks** (p278)
- Going back in time on the old **Ouaième river ferry** (p281) then trekking through a rainforest to **Cascade de Tao** (p281)
- Flying over **Coeur de Voh** (p287), a heart-shaped mangrove formation, in a microlight
- **Trekking on horseback** (p287) into the central mountain ranges for panoramic coast-to-coast views over Grande Terre
- Experiencing Broussard life on a **Caldoche farm** (p288)
- Making a catch in the far north of Grande Terre, a famous **sportfishing** (p285) destination



History

Human settlement in the north of Grande Terre goes back to around 1700 BC. These first inhabitants of New Caledonia are known as Lapita. The first Lapita site was discovered near Koné on the northwest coast. It was also in the north that Europeans made their first appearance. Captain James Cook landed at Balade on the northeast coast in 1774, and in 1853 France officially took possession of New Caledonia there.

French settlers and freed convicts established farms on both the east and west coasts. In the 1980s many Europeans chose to leave their properties and the land was redistributed among the original Kanak owners.

Getting There & Around

A tour of the north can be done as a circular trip from Bourail across to Houaïlou and up the northeast coast to Pouébo. You can then head back to the west coast past Ouégoa. The circuit can also be done in the opposite direction; the views are just as stunning either way. You'll need to put aside at least five days to do the entire circuit. It can also be broken into smaller segments. In three days you could travel up the northeast coast to Hienghène then back over the Koné–Tiwaka (RPN2) and down the northwest coast.

AIR

Air Calédonie operates a couple of flights a week between Noumea's Magenta airport

and each of its northern destinations: Koné, Koumac and Touho. For details see p328.

BUS

Bourail, Koné and Koumac are the major junctions on the northwest coast; Poindimié is the northeast hub. There is at least one bus a day between Noumea and these destinations. Buses to Pouébo via Koumac run three times a week, and there are three buses a week between Koumac and Poum. For details of fares and journey times from Noumea to major destinations, see p329.

CAR

It is worth renting a car to do the tour of the north, especially if you are sharing costs between more than two people or if you have limited time. A car will enable you to get to the more remote places and stop wherever you like along the way to admire the scenery.

All the main roads in the north are sealed and in good condition. Between bac de la Ouaième, north of Hienghène, and Pouébo, the road was in the process of being sealed at the time of writing. The winding roads that are strung out between Bourail and Houaïlou (RT3), Koné and the northeast coast (RPN2), and Koumac and Ouégoa (RPN7), right across the central ranges, have spectacular mountain scenery. There is wonderful coastal scenery all the way up the northeast coast, while along the northwest coast the road leads over rolling plains and hills.

NORTHEAST COAST

The northeast coast has lush valleys, a sinuous coastline, steep mountain slopes and wide tranquil rivers. Along this remote coast it feels as if time has stood still for years. Age-old values such as trust still exist and honesty boxes are left beside roadside stalls selling fruit and crafts. Even if you are a total stranger, people will wave in greeting as you drive by.

HOUAÏLOU TO POINDIMIÉ

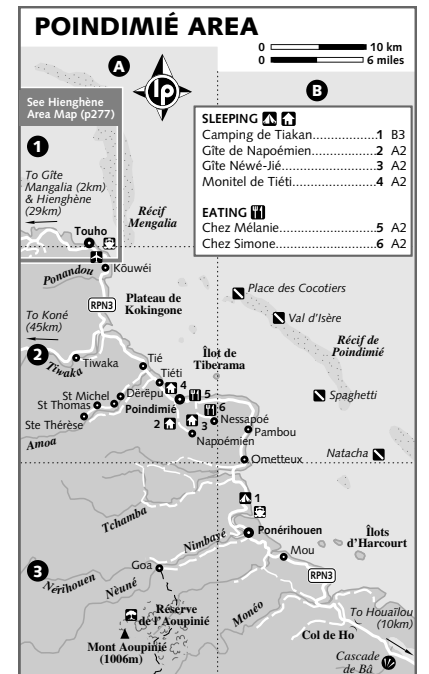
On the east coast the RT3 from Bourail arrives in Houaïlou. To head north, turn left at the roundabout before the village and cross over the long bridge. From Houaïlou

to Poindimié the road winds its way along the scenic coastline, often running beside deserted beaches.

The **Cascade de Bâ** (adult/car 50/100CFP) is located 13.5km north of the Houaïlou bridge. To get to the waterfall, turn left down a gravel track immediately after a bridge at the northern end of tribu de Bâ. The track ends 300m further on, at some factory ruins. There's an honesty box for payment. A path beside the river leads about 100m to an enormous pool at the foot of the falls. It's a great spot to cool off or enjoy a picnic.

You can also abseil down the waterfall with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000CFP). A minimum of two people is required. The rate is cheaper if there are more people.

Shortly before Ponérihouen, 46km north of Houaïlou, the road turns inland for a while. **Ponérihouen**, where lush gardens grow under cool trees, is a small village spread out along the Nimbayé river. A long steel bridge, nicknamed the Eiffel bridge and dating from WWII, spans the river.



To stock up on groceries stop at **Magasin Aou-Teepa** (☎ 42 77 97; 🕒 6.30am-noon daily & 2-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 4-7.30pm Sat), in the village centre near the post office.

You'll find **Camping Tiakan** (Map p273; ☎ 42 85 14; camping per person 500CFP) 7km north of the bridge in Ponérihouen. If it weren't for the tents, this large camp site with its thatched *farés* (shelters) scattered beneath the palms of a coconut plantation could be mistaken for a traditional village. It's a beautiful spot, but only a small part of the beach is good for swimming as a coral platform runs along most of it. It has a touch of luxury in the form of hot showers. For a minimum of four people the owners, who live in the house opposite the entrance, will organise fishing trips or excursions to some small islands. These activities cost 1400CFP per person. It's very popular during New Caledonia school holidays, when it's advisable to book in advance.

A few kilometres north of the camp site is the turn-off to **Tchamba valley**. The unsealed road leads up the Tchamba river valley past cows grazing in grassy pastures and among the raised furrows of old yam plantations. At tribu de Tchamba, at the top of the valley, the road crosses the river and heads back towards the main road on the opposite side of the river. On this side there are several streams to ford and farm gates to open and close. The road arrives at the main road just north of the bridge. During the rainy season (January to March) you may need a 4WD.

Back on the main road, there's a small church in almost every *tribu* you pass through, but the tiny stone **Eglise de St Paul** in Pambou with its twin towers is a gem. It is 11km south of Poindimié.

POINDIMIÉ

pop 4824

The northeast coast's main town, Poindimié, has a cheerful and unhurried atmosphere. It is spread out along the coast with views over the sea past Îlot de Tibarama, a small island just offshore. Inland there are lush valleys to explore.

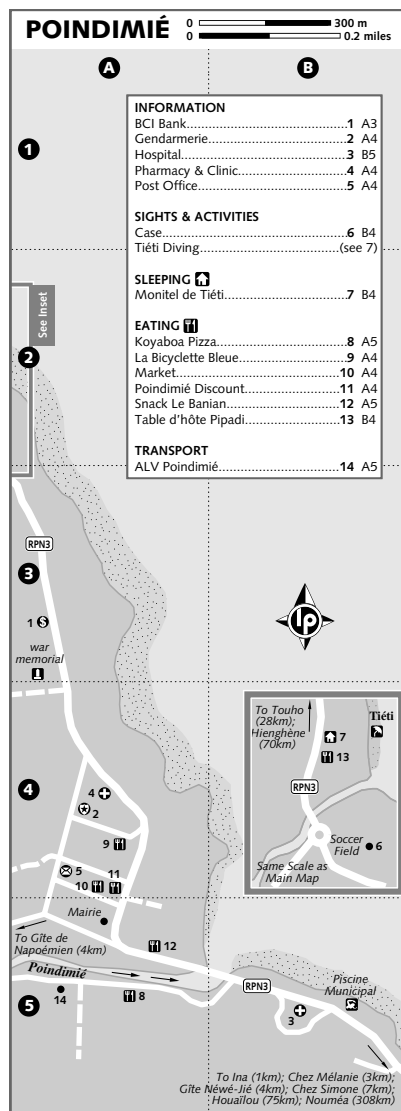
Information

Poindimié has several shops, a post office, a hospital, a clinic and a *gendarmérie*. The **Banque Calédonienne d'Investissement** (BCI bank;

Map p274; ☎ 42 71 13; 🕒 7.35-11.30am & 12.15-3.45pm Mon-Fri) on the main road has an ATM.

Sights

About 5.5km north of the town centre is the serene **Tié Mission** with its whitewashed church and bright red roof. It sits some distance back from the road against a green



mountain backdrop. The mission is on the left, 3.5km north of Tiéti beach, just past the turn-off to the Amoa River valley.

At the northern end of town look out for the attractive **case** (traditional Kanak hut) by the sea on the far side of the football field.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

There are several diving sites near Poindimié (see p221 for more information). Tiéti Diving (see p225) runs dives and also transfers to Îlot de Tibarama (per person 1500CFP), a relaxing spot to while away a morning snorkelling, sunbathing and swimming.

SWIMMING

If you can't get out to Îlot de Tibarama, a good place to swim is Tiéti beach by the Monitel at the northern end of town.

HIKING

There are lots of walking possibilities in Poindimié's Ina, Napoémien and Amoa valleys. In Amoa valley you have the choice of going up the lush southern side or more populated northern side of the river where you can admire the neatly kept gardens in the valley's *tribus*. In tribu de Napoémien, **Jehudit Pwija** (☎ 42 71 01) runs guided walks. He tailors trips to meet your needs and provides interesting commentary.

The turnings to the Amoa valley, before and after the Amoa river bridge, are a few minutes' drive north of town. The turn-off to Ina valley is signposted at the southern end of Poindimié. See Gîte de Napoémien below for directions to Napoémien valley.

Sleeping

Gîte de Napoémien (Map p273; ☎ 42 73 83; fax 42 71 77; camping per tent 1000CFP, r per person 2000CFP) This *gîte* (small tourist hotel) is in the peaceful tribu de Napoémien, which stretches along the tranquil valley of the same name. The rooms have a bathroom and fully equipped kitchenette with fridge. Turn down the street between the *mairie* (town hall) and Poindimié Discount, take the next left, then a right and carry on until you get to the *tribu*. It's about 4.5km from the *mairie*. Children stay here free.

Gîte Néné-Jié (Map p273; ☎ 42 70 74; bungalow s/d 3100/4200CFP, extra person 1000CFP, case per person 2100CFP, baby cot 600CFP) One of the nicest

places to stay is this homestead 4km from Poindimié. The bungalows and *case* all have private bathrooms. The comfortable *case*, which can sleep 10, is usually reserved for large groups as it isn't communal. It's spotlessly clean and bedding is provided but you have to make your own bed. Only breakfast (800CFP) is available but there's a fully equipped kitchen and there are a couple of *tables d'hôte* (family homes offering meals) not too far away. There are nature walks in the vicinity and the cheerful owners often take guests to a *nakamal* (clubhouse) at tribu de Tibarama. There's a playground for children and a few goats and deer that they can pet. To get here, turn at the 'Val-lée d'Ina' signpost 2km south of Poindimié and follow the dirt road (keeping to the left turns) another 2km to the *gîte*.

Monitel de Tiéti (Map p273; ☎ 42 64 00; fax 42 64 01; s/d 6760/7800CFP; 🍴 🍷) There are plans for a major makeover at this beachfront hotel, when it's expected to temporarily close. So check that it's open or enquire about the new prices before you go. It's located on a great beach for swimming. Children stay here free.

Camping at the Tiéti beach, next to the Monitel hotel, is free; however, security is an issue, especially at the weekend when locals often party at the beach.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Monitel de Tiéti (Map p273; ☎ 42 64 00; mains 2000CFP) The hotel has a restaurant that opens to a poolside terrace.

TABLES D'HÔTE

For *tables d'hôte* meals, bookings must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Chez Simone (Map p273; ☎ 42 74 84; ppswc@lagoon.nc; meals from 1800CFP) Guests get a warm welcome and enjoy Kanak cuisine here. Dishes are usually based around spoils from the hunt such as wild deer and pig. The turn-off is 4km south of Poindimié and it's another 3.5km to Simone's in tribu de Nessapoé.

Chez Mélanie (Map p273; ☎ 42 56 30; phil-mela@mls.nc; meals 2390CFP) Mélanie also offers her guests Kanak cuisine. Meals are mainly focused on seafood and are served under a thatched *faré*. The *table d'hôte* is signposted on the main road south of Poindimié at tribu de Tibarama.

Table d'hôte Pipadi (Map p274; ☎ 42 83 45; meals from 3000CFP) Patrick, the Frenchman who runs this place, bases his dishes on French cuisine influenced by subtle spices from north Africa and Saudi Arabia. He also sells jams made from original ingredients such as hibiscus flowers and coffee. It's BYO and reservations are based on a minimum of six. If you call a few days in advance Patrick can arrange a group to dine with. Meals are served on a wooden deck overlooking a small garden.

QUICK EATS

La Bicyclette Bleue (Map p274; ☎ 78 58 69; snacks 350CFP; ☎ 6am-1pm Mon-Fri) This café is the place to come for a cappuccino (400CFP) or to sample its savoury tarts (250CFP). It also serves *panini*, sandwiches, pizza and a selection of sweet pastries. It's in a small shopping centre just off the main road. Turn left as you go up the hill past Poindimié Discount.

Snack Le Banian (Map p274; ☎ 86 64 81; dishes 1000-1700CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) This place is set up under two big banyan trees. It sells steak-and-chips-type meals as well as *paninis*, sandwiches and burgers (750CFP).

Koyaboa Pizza (Map p274; ☎ 42 74 22; 20 route de la Cascade; pizza 1000-2500CFP; ☎ 5-9pm) You can order fabulous pizzas here, to take away only.

SELF-CATERING

The market (Map p274) is held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. Vendors sell fresh fruit and vegies, seafood, flowers and a few arts and crafts. It is up the one-way street past Poindimié Discount.

Poindimié Discount (Map p274; ☎ 42 71 54; ☎ 8am-noon daily & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) This is one of many grocery shops in Poindimié.

Getting There & Around

Cars can be hired from **ALV Poindimié** (Map p274; ☎ 42 58 00, 79 67 97; route de la Cascade; car hire per day from 4300CFP). This is one option to explore the valleys around Poindimié. The company can drop off or pick up cars from the airfield at Touho (4000CFP extra).

There's a daily bus between Noumea and Poindimié (1450CFP, 5 hours, daily).

POINDIMIÉ TO HIENGHÈNE

Fourteen kilometres north of Poindimié the road crosses the Tiwaka river. On the northern side of the river is the turn-off for Koné-Tiwaka (RPN2), the road that cuts

THE KONÉ-TIWAKA

The RPN2, known as the Koné-Tiwaka, links the west coast at Koné to the east coast, 14km north of Poindimié, at the Tiwaka river mouth. The road twists and turns through the ranges, revealing panoramic views of forested slopes and mountain streams.

Roughly halfway across, you can detour through tribu de Bopope. A loop road winds through this mountain tribu where attractive bark and thatch *cases* perch above steep slopes. As you near the east coast, the road runs parallel to the Tiwaka river, which gradually widens and drifts unhurriedly towards the sea, guiding you out of the mountains.

across to Koné on the east coast (see the boxed text, above).

From Tiwaka river there is a picturesque coastal drive to Touho. There are viewing points by the roadside where you can contemplate waves breaking on the coral coastline. The main road (RPN10) passes through **Touho**, a small village curled around a bay, 28km north of Poindimié. The east coast's only **airfield** (☎ 42 63 80, 42 87 87) is at the southern end of the village. Air Calédonie operates two flights a week between Noumea and Touho. There is a **tourist information counter** (☎ 42 88 07; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1pm-4pm Mon-Fri) at the *mairie*.

If you decide to break your journey in Touho, **Relais Alison** (Map p277; ☎ 42 88 12; s/d 4680/5200CFP; ☎), on the main road, has a small restaurant (dishes 1800CFP to 2500CFP, lunch and dinner Monday to Saturday) and five bungalows with bathrooms. The free **Camping Gastaldi** (Map p277; ☎ 42 88 14) about 3.5km north of the village is a much better camp site than the pay one in the village. It's by the sea about 1km from the main road. Ask for the keys to the toilets at the shop 200m before the camp site.

It's another 45km to Hienghène, past picturesque coastline and over low single-lane bridges straddling tiny streams. If you are interested in carvings, visit the **Kanak sculptor** (Map p277) about 300m south of the Tipindjé river. About 10km before Hienghène, the scenery dramatically changes to black cliffs towering over startling green water.

HIENGHÈNE

pop 2627

Hienghène (*yen-ghen*), with its many *accueil en tribu* (traditional homestays), is a great place to discover Kanak culture. La Poule Couveuse, the 'brooding hen', is one of New Caledonia's best-known landmarks. The rocky outcrop sits at the entrance to the tranquil baie de Hienghène. Opposite sits a less famous but just as impressive rock known as the Sphinx. Hienghène is also famous as the birthplace of the charismatic Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who was assassinated in 1989. See the boxed text, p278, for more on Tjibaou.

History

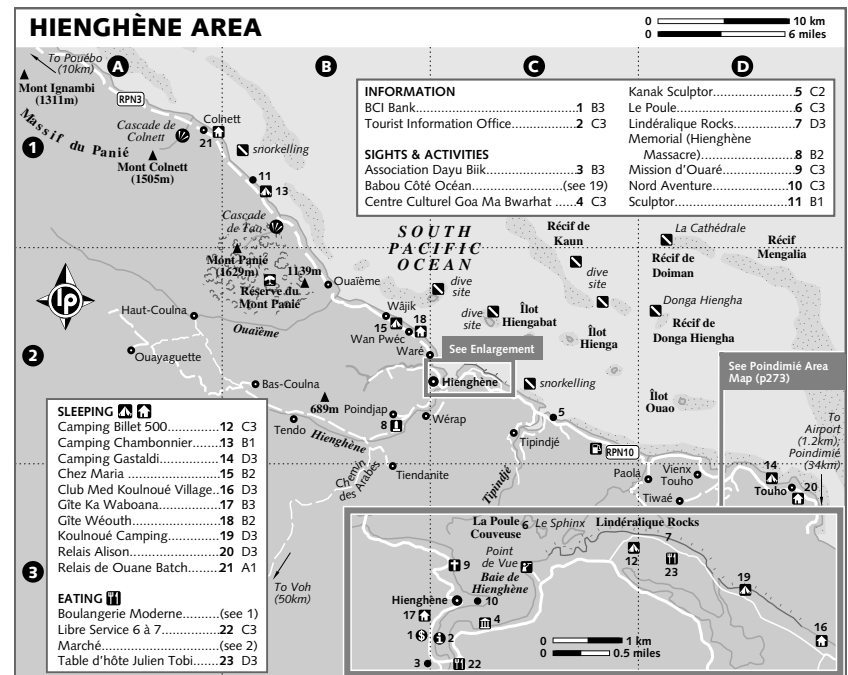
When missionaries and French settlers came to Hienghène in 1843, they were given a hostile reception by local Kanaks. As a result the *grand chef* (main chief) of the area was exiled to Tahiti in 1854. The colonial governor brought him back six years later in an attempt to establish calm. However, forced land acquisition by the French in the late 19th century, as well as the recruitment

of Javanese workers in coffee plantations, eventually led to another Kanak rebellion in 1917. After WWII an independence movement gradually emerged, culminating in the election boycott of 1984. Shortly after, 10 Kanaks, including two of Jean-Marie Tjibaou's brothers, were massacred by a group of local (mixed-race) settlers in an ambush. The murderers were put on trial in France but were amnestied soon after. In 1989 Hienghène again went into mourning when Tjibaou himself was assassinated.

In recent years a lot of development has taken place in Hienghène, including the construction of a junior high school, sports gymnasium, marina and tourist information centre. 'Cultural tourism' has evolved and the area is attracting more and more visitors with its traditional Kanak homestays.

Orientation & Information

The village centre nestles beneath densely forested hills at the edge of the Hienghène river where it runs into baie de Hienghène. On the south side of the river is the cultural centre and, before the bridge, the turn-off to



JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU

Born in tribu de Tiendanite in Hienghène, Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–89) went to university in Lyon to study sociology, as a young Catholic priest in the late 1960s. He abandoned the priesthood on his return home. 'You cannot take up a stand for your brothers without questioning the role of the official church,' he explained. He worked with young people in training programmes and promoted Kanak culture. In 1975 he organised Melanesia 2000, a landmark cultural festival in Noumea that gathered Kanaks from clans all over New Caledonia.

In 1984 Tjibaou was elected first president of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS). This pro-independence political front called for immediate independence and was prepared to act more radically than any of those in the past to achieve it.

Tjibaou's signing of the historic Matignon Accords in 1988 brought relative peace to the troubled territory, but in May 1989 he was assassinated with his deputy, Yeiwene Yeiwene, by a fellow Kanak. Tjibaou was buried at Tiendanite. The Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Noumea is named after him.

Tjibaou was often described by journalists as a 'spiritual man, a visionary'. One correspondent wrote: 'No matter how turbulent and violent the events around him, he seemed an oasis of calm and inspiration. He was determined to achieve independence...but with the least sacrifice for his people'. Today he is regarded as something of a legend and is frequently quoted.

Tjibaou is survived by his wife Marie-Claude and four sons. Marie-Claude Tjibaou is still heavily involved in many sectors of development, including the Agence de Développement pour la Culture Kanak (ADCK), the managing agency for the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

tribu de Wérap (10km). The turn-off to tribu de Poindjap (7km), Tiendanite (20km), Tendo (24km), Bas-Coulna (35km), Haut-Coulna (45km) and Ouayaguette (50km) is on the north side.

Further on is the **tourist information office** (☎ 42 43 57; hienghen-tourism@mls.nc; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat), in a modern building with a traditionally inspired design. It sits on the river bank above the marina. It books accommodation in *tribus* and manages the marina. Yachties can arrive in and depart New Caledonia from here. They must give 48 hours' notice of their arrival. Opposite the marina in a small shopping complex there is a **BCI bank** (☎ 42 77 10) with an ATM. There is also a pharmacy, post office and *gendarmerie*.

At the time of writing the nearest petrol station was 7km south of Hienghène but a new petrol station was under construction in the village.

Sights

Hienghène's sights are mainly outside the village. The following are listed from south to north.

LINDÉRALIQUE ROCKS

As well as their interesting black jagged outlines, the limestone rocks at Lindéralique are famous for featuring on the 500CFP

note. The rock in question has come to be known as the 500 francs note rock. It's near the Grotte de Lindéralique, on the beach by the suitably named Camping Billet 500 (500 note camp site). Not surprisingly, you have to pay (100CFP) to take photos of the rock from the camp site, but a little further on you can photograph it for free.

These rock formations actually begin about 10km south of Hienghène and end in baie de Hienghène. However, they're most accessible at Lindéralique, where you can kayak or take a Club Med pirogue trip (see p280) on the Lindéralique lagoon at the base of the rocks.

GROTTE DE LINDÉRALIQUE

At this **cave** (adult/child 200/100CFP) you can walk right through from one side of the cliffs to the other. A path from the road leads between two houses to a wide lawn where a statue of the Virgin Mary protects the entrance to the immense cavern. On the serrated cliff tops above, sharp rocks balance at precarious angles. In addition to attracting tourists, the cave is used as a place of worship and a theatre. Free jazz, choral and classical concerts are held here about once a month. Inquire at the cultural centre for the programme. The signposted turn-off on the RPN10 is 2.5km south of Hienghène. It's another kilometre to the cave.

LA POULE COUVEUSE & LE SPHINX

For a close-up view of Hienghène's famous brooding hen turn off the main road at the Point de Vue (lookout) at the top of the hill 2km south of the village. If you look at the rock facing the hen on the opposite side of the bay you can make out the sphinx. There's also a view over the deep green bay to the village nestled into the hillside. Another good lookout with a better profile of the sphinx is about 1.5km north of the village on the main road.

CENTRE CULTUREL GOA MA BWARHAT

The **cultural centre** (☎ /fax 42 80 74; culturehienghene@mls.nc; museum adult/child 1500CFP/free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri & Sat, 9am-noon Sun) has an exhibition room, a multimedia library and a museum. Access is free except for the museum. In the grounds there are sculpted wooden totem poles, two *cases* and a woodcarving workshop. The carver has flexible hours and isn't necessarily there during the centre's opening hours. The centre publishes a monthly theatre and concert programme that includes the schedule for concerts at Grotte de Lindéralique (see p278).

TIENDANITE

Like most of the *tribus* in the Hienghène valley, Tiendanite has an atmosphere of peaceful isolation. What sets it apart is that it's the *tribu* of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the universally respected Kanak leader who is buried here. His grave is near the church in the middle of the village. Just beside the church are the 10 graves of the men killed in the Hienghène massacre (see p277). Tiendanite is inland, 20km from Hienghène. The last 11km are unsealed. The turn-off is signposted on the northern side of Hienghène river. About 8.5km from the turn-off the road goes past a clearing containing a Kanak flag and the wrecks of two small trucks covered in lengths of cloth. This is the site of the Hienghène massacre. Four kilometres further, turn left off this road and over a bridge to Tiendanite. The *tribu* has a camp site (camping per tent 1000CFP) and traditional homestay accommodation (see right).

MISSION D'OUARÉ

Just after the bridge over Tanghène river 3km north of the village is tribu de Ouaré, where Hienghène's Catholic mission is based. To

get to the church turn down the road opposite the small cemetery. The church, with its old red-and-white colonial-style presbytery next door, is by the beach behind the sphinx at the northern end of baie de Hienghène. From here you can see across the bay to the distant backdrop of the Lindéralique rocks.

Activities

DIVING

Babou Côté Océan offers various boat excursions, as well as diving from its dive centre Babou Plongée (see p224). It's at Koulnoué camp site in tribu de Koulnoué, 1km past Club Med. See p220 for more on dive sites in this area.

HIKING

Association Dayu Biik (☎ 42 87 77; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) organises guided treks in the mountains of the region, including to Mont Panié, New Caledonia's highest mountain (for further information see p281). Other good trekking areas are around tribu de Haut-Coulna and Cascade de Tao. Guided treks cost around one/two days 12,000/18,000CFP. Rates are based on a maximum of four. The association can arrange transport to Haut-Coulna (four people 8000CFP).

KAYAKING

To kayak around the limestone formations or up the Hienghène river, go to **Nord Adventure** (☎ 42 84 28; nord.adventure@canl.nc; kayaks per hr/half-day/full day 1000/3750/5000CFP; ☎ 7.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat & Sun) on the beach behind the *gendarmerie*. A popular tour is to kayak across baie de Hienghène to La Poule Couveuse. An ideal excursion with children is on the sheltered Lindéralique lagoon where the water is shallow. The operator can meet you by the main road beside the lagoon. It's an extra 1500CFP per hour for a guided trip. Nord Adventure also organises 4WD excursions (half-day per person 5000CFP).

Sleeping

ACCUEIL EN TRIBU

For an authentic cultural experience Hienghène has a well-established network of **accueil en tribu** (accueil chez l'habitant; per person around 800CFP, breakfast/dinner/bougna 400/1200/1500CFP). Book through the tourist information office at least three days in advance. The staff will advise you on the most suitable *tribu*

A WARM WELCOME

To learn about Kanak culture first-hand this experience is hard to beat. The welcome is always outstanding. Visitors can observe everyday life in a *tribu*, go shrimp-fishing in streams, or try weaving or woodcarving. The *tribus* offer varying levels of comfort. Visitors are usually lodged in a *case*, where they sleep on mattresses or mats on the floor. They may have the luxury of using a flush toilet or have to make do with a bush loo. Upon arrival visitors are encouraged to participate in *la coutume*, a custom ceremony. A small gift is presented to the chief, following the custom in Kanak culture. This may be a length of cloth and a 500CFP note, which is close to the traditional gift, or any small present of your choice. The gift for *la coutume* is in addition to paying for accommodation and meals.

depending on your preferences. See the boxed text, above.

GÎTES

Gîte Wéouth (bungalows/r per person 1200/1000CFP) This place, about 7.5km north of Hienghène, has rustic concrete and thatch bungalows and a restaurant. You need to order meals (1800 CFP) in advance. It's in a *tribu* where you can watch people come and go but a row of houses in front of the *gîte* blocks off the sea view. Book through the tourist information office.

Gîte Ka Waboana (☎ 42 47 03; fax 42 47 03; bungalows d with/without kitchenette 7280/6720CFP, extra person 1000CFP) You can't miss this *gîte* with its red, green and blue bungalows on the hill behind the tourist office. It has three comfortable nonself-catering bungalows with views over the river. Just off the main road are a few more with kitchenettes. They all have a fridge and there's also a restaurant (dishes 1000CFP) and bar.

HOTELS

Club Med Kouloué Village (☎ 42 81 66; clubmed.kouloue@offratel.nc; bungalows d/extra person 10,300/2750CFP; case for 4 people/extra person 10,300/1800CFP; 📞) This hotel has 50 *case*-shaped concrete bungalows arranged in clusters, and five large traditional *cases*. It's in a coconut plantation beside an open stretch of beach.

The bungalows have private bathrooms. Both bungalows and *cases* have tea- and coffee-making facilities and fridges. The restaurant serves buffet meals (lunch and dinner 3100CFP) and the breakfast buffet (1500CFP) is fabulous. There's a wide range of free activities such as tennis, kayaking and minigolf, as well as horse riding (2500CFP per hour), mountain biking (500CFP per half-day) and pirogue excursions on the Lindéralique lagoon (1700CFP to 2300CFP per person depending on numbers). The turn-off is 8.5km south of Hienghène on the RPN10 and it's another 1.25km to the hotel. Children stay here free.

CAMPING

South of Hienghène there are three beach-front camp sites to choose from, including Kouloué Camping and Camping Billet 500. To get there take either the Club Med turn-off or the Grotte de Lindéralique turn-off (it's a loop road). There are two more options north of Hienghène before the Ouaième river ferry – Gîte Wéouth and Chez Maria. It's not necessary to book, but if you have any queries, inquire at the tourist information office.

Kouloué Camping (☎ 42 83 59; camping per person 400CFP) You'll find this camp site 1km past Club Med. Babou Côté Océan, the diving club, is based here. You can hire a tent for 1000CFP.

Camping Billet 500 (☎ 42 33 07; per tent 800CFP) This camp site is at the foot of the 500 francs note rock. It's 500m from the main road at the Grotte de Lindéralique turn-off.

Gîte Wéouth (camping per tent 1000CFP) The *gîte* has a camp site but there's no beach and the shore is rocky so it is not a great swimming spot.

Chez Maria (camping per tent 800CFP) Maria is very welcoming. Her camp site is in a sheltered place and has a sandy beach, which makes it a great place for swimming. It's 3km north of Gîte Wéouth.

Eating

Table d'hôte Julien Tobî (meals 2500CFP) Enjoy a local meal in a lush forest setting at this *table d'hôte*, on the loop road near Grotte de Lindéralique. Book 24 hours in advance through the tourist information office.

Boulangérie Moderne (☎ 42 88 42; 🕒 5.30am-noon Mon-Sat) This bakery in the shopping

complex sells bread, pastries and some savoury snacks.

Marché (🕒 7am-noon Tue & Fri) The market near the tourist information office sells fresh fruit and vegetables.

Libre Service 6 à 7 (☎ 42 72 32; 🕒 6am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) This shop's a good place to stock up on supplies. It's on the south side of the bridge.

There are a couple more shops on the north side of the bridge.

Getting There & Away

Bus stop between the market and tourist information office. There's a daily bus between Noumea and Hienghène (1650CFP, 6½ hours, Monday to Saturday).

HIENGHÈNE TO POUÉBO

This section of road is one of the most picturesque on the northeast coast: on one side waterfalls cascade down rocky cliffs; on the other is the sea. Here the coast is more rugged than further south. At the time of writing the road between Ouaième river and Pouébo was gravelled but there were plans to have it sealed.

The bac de la Ouaième (see the boxed text, right), an antiquated river ferry, is one of the highlights of the journey. It's near the Ouaième river mouth, where a wide sand bar separates the shadowy green river from the clear blue sea.

The bus stops outside the post office in Pouébo. One option is the twice-weekly Pouébo–Poindimié bus (1000CFP).

Cascade de Tao

Seven kilometres north of the ferry is Cascade de Tao. Make this a compulsory stop even if just to admire the waterfall as you cross the Tao river bridge. There's an enjoyable 20-minute **walk** (200CFP) up the river to the foot of the falls. There are rock pools to cool off in along the way. The path starts at the house with a rusted roof on the north side of the bridge.

You can also do a longer circuit to the waterfall, which takes three to four hours. It starts north of Tao bridge, about 100m before a second bridge. This track leads you to the middle section of Cascade de Tao, where you cross over and then head back down to the main road on the other side. From the waterfall there are stunning views of the

BAC DE LA OUAÏÈME

You can't really say you've been to Hienghène without crossing the wide Ouaième river on this noisy old ferry that putters back and forth 24 hours a day. The ferry man patiently changes the propellers from one side to the other as he makes the crossing over and over, contemplating the towering mountains that rise abruptly from the river on its southern side. Before bridges replaced them, such river ferries were a common sight on the east coast. Today the Ouaième ferry is the last remaining one still in use in New Caledonia. It is about 19km north of Hienghène and the crossing is free. If you are only going up the east coast as far as Hienghène, the detour is worth it, especially if you continue a few kilometres further to Cascade de Tao.

sea and reef spread out below rainforest-clad slopes. The track ends about 200m south of Tao bridge. On the way down, another track forks to the left. This takes you to the ruins of a hydroelectricity plant.

Signposts are planned, but if they are absent, it will be hard to find the track. In any case, you must ask permission before doing the walk as the track leads through customary land. Enquire at Association Dayu Biik in Hienghène (p279). You can also abseil down the waterfall with **Guy Quer** (☎ 41 98 41; guyquer@canl.nc; per person 10,000CFP).

Mont Panié

Mont Panié (1629m) is New Caledonia's highest peak. It is within the Mont Panié reserve, one of New Caledonia's most varied ecosystems, with a rich botanical biodiversity. It takes about eight hours to climb to the summit and another five hours to descend. It is best to do the climb in two days. However, before you set off you need to do some paperwork. You must request written authorisation from the **Direction du Développement Economique et de L'Environnement** (DDEE; ☎ 42 72 52) office in Poindimié. The DDEE can fax the authorisation to the tourist information office in Hienghène, where you can pick it up. You then need to organise a guide through Association Dayu Biik (p279).

There are two tracks to the summit: from Tao on the road to Pouébo; and from Haut-Coulna 45km inland from Hienghène. The

easiest route, logistically speaking, starts below Cascade de Tao. It is easier to get transport to Tao and there is a mountain hut at 1300m along this track. Leaving from Haut-Coulna, you need to carry your own tent.

North of Tao

There are several camp sites beside the main road between Ouaième and Pouébo. One of the better-maintained ones is **Camping Chambonnier** (Map p277; camping per tent 1000CFP). It's about 10km from Ouaième, by a small river mouth where a little waterfall feeds a large pool. There's a shelter and tables and it's conveniently near the track to Mont Panié.

Further north there's a **sculptor** (Map p277; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sun) who sells traditional wooden and quartz sculptures. You can't miss the signpost.

Soon afterwards the road enters the Pouébo region. **Relais de Ouane Batch** (Map p277; ☎ 42 47 92; camping per tent/person 800/100CFP, bungalow d/4-person 2000/2500CFP), run by a friendly young family, sits on a long beach 16km north of the Ouaième. It offers camping and bungalow accommodation. The simple bungalows have communal bathrooms with hot showers. Its *table d'hôte* has a reputation for its excellent cuisine. A seafood platter for two is 5000CFP; other meals cost 2000CFP. Meals must be booked 24 hours in advance. Activities include canoe hire (per half-/full day 600/1000CFP) and fishing trips (10,000CFP). There are plans to build comfortable new bungalows.

Three hundred metres past Relais de Ouane Batch is Cascade de Colnett, the last of the northeast coast's waterfalls visible from the road. Shortly afterwards the road turns inland and arrives in Pouébo village, which is spread out along the road for several kilometres.

Pouébo is known for its soapstone sculptures, which are sold at roadside stalls and at the Association Djewero shop beside the main road at the southern end of the village. At the northern end of the village there's a large **Catholic mission**. The church stands in an imposing position above the main road. Inside, there's a marble mausoleum where the remains of Bishop Douarre, who died in 1853, are interred. Bishop Douarre established the first Catholic mission on Grande Terre in 1843 (see the boxed text, right).

POUÉBO TO OUEGOA

At Pouébo the landscape changes from steep mountainsides to rolling hills and plains. European history in New Caledonia begins in **Balade**, a small settlement north of Pouébo. Although there are few Europeans here today, Balade is where they first set foot in New Caledonia. It was here also that the French annexed New Caledonia. The RPN10 becomes the RPN7 at Balade and continues up the coast towards Ouégoa.

On a grassy hill just above the road at Balade, 13km north of Pouébo's church, is the small **church of St Denis**. It has a fascinating history dating back to the early missionary days, so make sure it's on your itinerary. The stained-glass windows near the altar illustrate the first mass at Balade on Christmas Day 1843, the murder of Brother Blaise, the missionaries' escape to the French navy ship *La Brillante*, and the return of Brother Blaise's skull to Bishop Douarre. As you leave the church there's a wonderful view over the tops of coconut palms to the sea. A white concrete slab below the church commemorates the spot where Brother Blaise died. For more information see the boxed text, right.

Not far from the church is **Mahamat beach**, where the first Catholic mass was held on Christmas Day 1843. There is a large white cross and an altar to the Virgin Mary, Notre Dame de Mahamat, under a giant banyan tree whose branches are decorated with pieces of cloth. To get there, turn off the main road 1.5km north of the church of St Denis. About 700m further, turn right at the bus stop onto an unsealed road. The site is 500m further on.

Back on the main road, 4km north of the church of St Denis, a sombre pyramid-shaped monument on top of a small hill commemorates the French annexation of New Caledonia in 1853.

From Balade, the road follows rolling hills on one side and mangrove flats on the other up the coast to Col d'Amos (Amos pass), where it turns inland towards Ouégoa and the west coast.

Where the RPN7 turns inland, there's a dirt road to the right that leads 1km to **Camping d'Amos** (Map p284; ☎ 42 42 11; camping per tent 800CFP). The camp site sits in a picturesque spot under coconut trees. It has a secluded beach bordered by rocks at one end and a small river mouth at the other.

THE FIRST MISSION

Catholic missionaries, led by Bishop Guillaume Douarre, were the first missionaries to arrive on Grande Terre. They landed at Mahamat, near Balade, on 21 December 1843, and were given permission by Chef Païama to construct a shelter for Christmas Mass. Two years later they moved inland to the site of Balade's present-day church.

In 1847 the Balade mission was attacked by local clans who were dying from disease and starvation. Their food reserves had been diminished by the passage of several ships that had taken on fresh supplies at the mission. The missionaries fled to the ship *La Brillante*, which arrived at a timely moment. However, one of their brethren, Brother Blaise Marmouin, didn't escape. His corpse was dragged across the river and beheaded. His head was hung as a trophy at the chief's hut near St Denis until it was returned to the church in 1849.

The missionaries fled to Yaté in the south of Grande Terre, then to Île des Pins. They returned to Balade in 1851. In 1852 the mission expanded, moving south to Pouébo. Within a year Bishop Douarre had converted more than 100 Kanaks and the first baptism ceremonies took place.

In 1863 gold was discovered in the north. Gold-seekers flooded the small mission, installing a *gendarmerie* and taking over Kanak land in their search for the precious metal. In 1866 the Kanaks protested (through a petition) against this land-grabbing, and their chief, Hippolyte Bonou, one of the first Christian converts, was arrested and exiled to Île des Pins, where he died the following year. Shortly after Bonou's deportation, violence erupted and Kanaks killed two gendarmes and several French settlers near Oubatche, about 8km south of Pouébo. In retaliation, a guillotine was installed at the mission and 10 Kanaks were executed. Eventually order was restored and construction of the church of St Denis resumed. It was completed in 1875.

As the RPN7 winds its way up Col d'Amos, look back to the coast and see if you can make out the shark's head with its pointed nose in the reef. The road climbs through hills dotted with *niaouli* trees then descends to Ouégoa, which sits on the banks of the Diahot river, New Caledonia's longest river (90km).

If you're heading north to Poum and the far north of Grande Terre, Ouégoa is a good place to stock up on groceries. There are three shops on the main road, including **Magazin Chez Hompelie** (☎ 47 54 19; ☎ 6am-noon & 1.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 7am-noon & 5-7pm Sun) on the east side of the bridge.

Camping Chez Bouli (Map p284; ☎ 42 76 89, 79 42 98; camping per person 500CFP) is a grassy camp site under mango trees on the banks of the Diahote river. The main reason to stay here is to go on an excursion on the Diahote river with Armand Ogushiku, locally known as Bouli. Bouli organises fun activities on his excursions, such as water skiing and crab fishing. Boat excursions cost from 6000CFP for two people; canoes and kayaks can be hired for 500/2500CFP per hour/day. The camp site is 4km from the village along an unsealed road. Follow the signposts from the turn-off 100m west of the bridge.

Getting There & Away

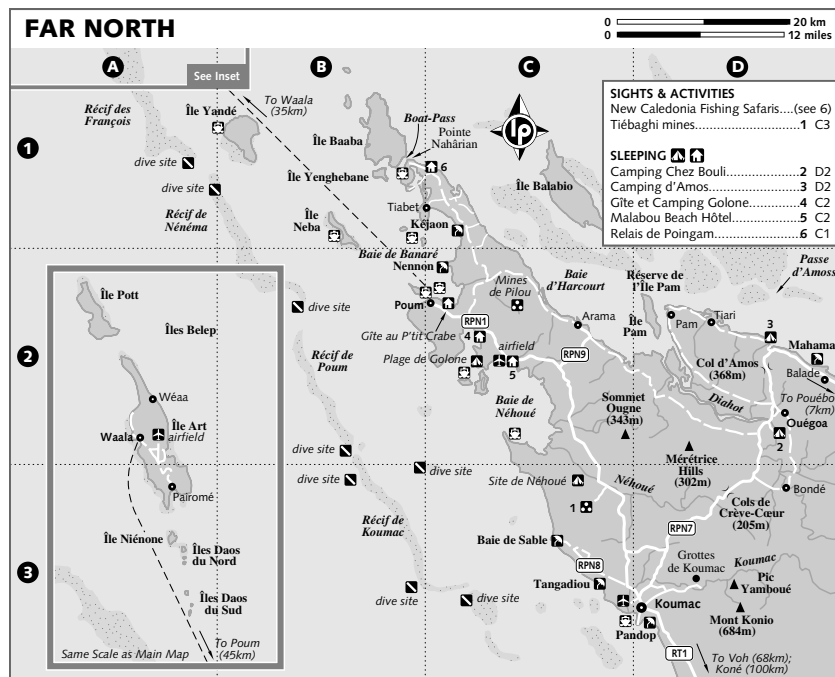
A bus connecting Pouébo and Koumac passes through Ouégoa and Balade four times a week. It runs from Pouébo to Koumac (400CFP, 2hours), Pouébo to Ouégoa (250CFP, 1hour), Pouébo to Balade (150CFP, 20 minutes) on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Buses stop at the post office in Ouégoa.

NORTHWEST COAST

Continuing west from Ouégoa the landscape changes to bare rolling hills punctuated by small green thickets where the occasional stream meanders through the countryside. The RPN7 that cuts across from the east coast ends at the intersection of the north-south RT1 on the west coast. Koumac is only 2km to the south. To the north lies Poum and the isolated far north of Grande Terre. The RT1 becomes the RPN1 between Koumac and Poum.

FAR NORTH

Poum is the only village in the far north. On the way there the main road passes close to **Tiébaghi**, the site of an old chrome mine, which makes an interesting tour. For more



information see the boxed text, right. Poum is also a great destination for divers. The dive club is based at Malabou Beach Hôtel. See p220 for more on dive sites in this area and p224 for the local dive centre.

Poum is one of the P&O cruise-ship stops in New Caledonia, where visitors are ferried ashore to Mwak islet for the day. But visitors arriving by road tend to bypass Poum and head straight to Poingam at the northernmost tip, where the main drawcard is sportfishing.

There are a couple of places to stop for the night south of Poum. About 15km before Poum is **Malabou Beach Hôtel** (☎ 47 60 60; malabeachotel@canl.nc; bungalows for 2/3 people 10,300/13,000CFP, ste for 4 people 20,280CFP; 🚗 🚻 🚰), a large hotel at baie de Néhoué. It has comfortable bungalows and luxury suites overlooking the beach, with a TV, fridge and coffee-making facilities. The hotel has a **restaurant** (breakfast 1500CFP, lunch & dinner dishes 1000-2000CFP) onsite. Free activities include tennis, canoeing and minigolf; half-day boat trips cost 2200CFP per person. There's also a dive club (see p224).

Not far from Malabou Beach Hotel is **Gîte et Camping Golone** (☎ 47 90 78; fax 47 91 81; bungalow d 5000CFP, camping s/d 600/1200CFP), a tranquil camp site at the end of a small headland in baie de

TIÉBAGHI MINE

The Tiébaghi mine was once the largest and richest chrome mine in the world. The old mine is now defunct and the village that rose around it is a ghost town, perched high on the scarred hills about 20km north of Koumac and easily visible from the RPN1.

Copper and chrome were discovered at Tiébaghi in 1877 but it wasn't until 1902 that mining kicked in. The site grew into a real village and by the 1950s there were 1500 people working and living here. A change of fortune forced the mine to close in 1964, but it was revived in the mid-1980s. However, in four years the reserves were exhausted and the mine closed again in 1989.

To visit the old Tiébaghi mine and village, enquire at the Koumac tourist information office.

AUTHORS' CHOICE

Relais de Poingam (☎ 47 92 12; fax 47 92 33; Poingam, 98826 Poum; bungalow d 8500CFP, safari tent d 12,500CFP, camping per person 500CFP; 🚗 🚻 🚰) This small hotel is the final destination for most visitors to these parts. It has six bungalows, four of them with romantic open-air bathrooms. There is also a luxurious walk-in safari tent. There is a long beach to stroll along but the shallow sea is more suited to wallowing than swimming. You'll find deeper water in the saltwater swimming pool.

The restaurant, which opens onto a paved terrace, is renowned for its delicious meals (lunch 900CFP to 2000CFP, dinner 2800CFP). Dinner is served *table d'hôte* style, where guests sit down to a communal meal. The cost includes an aperitif, three-course meal and wine.

In addition to its excellent cuisine, the hotel attracts visitors with its fishing opportunities. The area is internationally recognised for its sports fishing. Other activities include pirogue tours (two hours; per person 1800CFP) and half-day excursions to outlying islets (four people 12,000CFP).

Follow the Poingam signposts from the turn-off 5km south of Poum on the RPN1. It is 23km to Poingam. Only the first 6km are sealed.

Tanlé. There are three bungalows with bathrooms, a camp site by the beach, and a small **restaurant** (dishes 800CFP). Meals must be ordered in advance. The turn-off is about 400m north of Malabou Beach Hotel, from where it's another 5km. It's past the airfield.

Heading north to **Poingam**, you will pass through remote woodland scenery where tracks lead off the main road to hidden beaches. There are very few vehicles on this road. Three kilometres before the road ends at a deserted beach called Boat Pass, is the entrance to Relais de Poingam (see the boxed text, above).

An independent operator, **New Caledonia Fishing Safaris** (☎ 25 19 40; r.bertin@newcaledoniafishingsafaris.nc; per day 2 people 50,000CFP), organises sportfishing tours at Poingam. Tours are usually arranged from overseas as a package including flights to and from New Caledonia. However, independent travellers can also turn up at Poingam for a guided fishing tour. Guests are put up in the walk-in safari tent and rates include full board.

Getting There & Away

It's best to explore this part of Grande Terre with your own vehicle as buses to Poum are irregular.

There is a four-times-weekly Pouébo-Koumac bus (400CFP, 2 hours, Mon, Wed, Thu).

KOUMAC

pop 3003

Koumac is not exactly one of the tourist hubs of the South Pacific but it has a lot of facilities, including supermarkets and

banks, which makes it into a useful place to stop.

Information

Koumac Tourisme (☎ 42 78 42; www.koumac-tourisme.com; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), the tourist information office, is on the RT1 at the northern end of town, opposite the post office. It has a Koumac town map and can arrange various excursions for travellers.

Société Générale bank (☎ 47 61 39; 🕒 7.45-11.30am & 12.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) is at the roundabout. About 2.5km from town is a small marina. Other facilities in Koumac include a hospital, pharmacy, post office and *gendarmerie*.

Sights & Activities

Église Ste Jeanne d'Arc, by the roundabout, is an interesting church both outside and inside. It was built in 1950 out of a WWII American aircraft hangar. Take a peek inside to see its stained-glass windows and traditionally inspired woodcarvings.

Koumac's 3km-long limestone caves **Grottes de Koumac** are 7km east of town. To get there, take Ave Georges Baudoux then follow the road towards Pic Yamoué. You'll need a torch and a good sense of orientation if you'd like to explore. You can visit these caves alone but if you want to venture a fair way inside, enquire at Koumac Tourisme about hiring a guide.

Festivals & Events

The **Foire de Koumac** held at the end of September is the town's major event. There's

plenty of farm produce on sale and a rodeo to conclude the event.

Sleeping

Koumac's hotels are heavily booked by businesspeople and workers, mainly from Monday to Thursday night, throughout most of the year. To be sure of somewhere to sleep, it's best to make a booking.

Tumbala Café (☎ 42 59 20; bungalows s/d/tr 6000/6500/7000CFP; ♿) At the southern end of town, its new green bungalows are clean and comfortable but, like most places in Koumac, the setting is not idyllic.

Monitel Koumac (☎ 47 66 66; monitelkoumac@laagoon.nc; bungalow s/d 6900/7400CFP; ♿) This place has comfortable bungalows with fridges. It's at the southern end of town off Ave Émile Frouin. The onsite restaurant has a set menu for 1950 CFP.

Camping de Pandop (☎ 81 55 87; camping per tent 500CFP) This is a wind-swept camp site 2km from town on the way to the marina.

Eating

Snack de la Gare Routière (☎ 42 83 42; dishes 800-1200CFP; ☎ 7am-1pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri) This snack bar in the orange building at the bus station also does takeaways and pizza.

Tumbala Café (☎ 42 59 20; dishes 1150-2000CFP; ☎ 6am-10pm Mon-Sat) Tumbala offers a good choice of dishes (the salads are great) and some nights there's live music.

Le Faré de Pandop (☎ 42 78 78; dishes 1500CFP; ☎ 9am-10pm) Next to the marina, it serves Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai dishes. It overlooks the sea.

Le Western (☎ 47 54 09; dishes 1950CFP, lunch buffet 1400CFP; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Fri) On rue Georges Beaudoux behind the church, this has an American far-west décor. It has a dance party once a month.

Vival Koumac (☎ 47 61 04; ☎ 5am-8pm Mon-Fri, to noon & 4-8pm Sat, 6am-noon & 4-8pm Sun) This is a supermarket by the roundabout.

Most hotel restaurants are open to the public.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Koumac's small **airport** (☎ 47 62 29) is 3.5km north of town, to the left off the road to Poum. Air Calédonie operates two flights each week between Noumea and Koumac. For details see p327. The **Air Calédonie agent**

(☎ 47 53 90), where you can make or change bookings, is attached to Hôtel Le Grand Cerf, by the roundabout.

BUS

Koumac's **gare routière** (bus station; ☎ 42 54 54) is located on rue Roger Trouillot, about 300m from the roundabout. To Noumea (1650CFP,

5½ hours), there are two buses per day. North to Poum (500CFP, 1½ hours), via Arama (45 minutes), there are three services per week. Heading east to Ouégoa (400CFP, one hour) and over to the east-coast village of Pouébo (650CFP, two hours), there are four buses per week.

KOUMAC TO KONÉ

Heading south out of Koumac, the land slopes gently west to the sea, which moves in and out of view. During the wet season the rolling plains are green and refreshing; in the dry season they turn brown and drab. To the east, exposed mountainsides between Koumac and Koné are evidence of the region's major mining activity.

The small settlement of **Voh**, 68km south of Koumac, is noteworthy for the **Coeur de Voh**, a natural heart-shape in its mangrove. The heart was made famous by Yann Arthus-Bertrand, an internationally renowned photographer, who used it to illustrate the cover of *Earth from Above*, his book of aerial photography. The heart is indeed best seen from above. Depending on their availability, **Alain Nouard** (☎ 47 25 93) or **Pierre Couget** (☎ 47 32 87) from the ULM club in Koné can to fly you there in a microlight for 5000CFP. You must arrange flights as far in advance as possible as the pilots have other professional activities. You can also take a **guided walk** (☎ 47 27 68) or 4WD (see right) to a lookout point in the mountains behind Voh, from where the heart is visible. **Ranch du Carré 9** (☎ 44 21 87; 1-/2-/3-day trip 8000/16,000/22,000CFP) organises an interesting day trip that includes a one-hour 4WD tour to see the Coeur de Voh followed by a five-

hour horse trek stopping for lunch in tribu de Tiéta. Longer treks are also possible. The ranch is 17km inland from Voh. Turn east at the war memorial and continue past tribu de Tiéta.

The turn-off to **Camping de Gatope** (Map p272; ☎ 47 27 68; camping per tent 500CFP) is at the war memorial at Gatope beach. It's 4.5km from the main road. There's a small picturesque beach with a few trees for shade and views of the mountains across the bay. The camp site has shelters and tables.

KONÉ & POUEMBOUT

pop 5971

Contrary to its appearance, the small, unhurried rural town of Koné is the capital of the Northern Province. Its smaller neighbour Pouembout, which in many ways is an extension of Koné, is 8km south on the RT1. The provincial headquarters sit halfway between the two towns. The Koné–Tiwaka (RPN2) junction is opposite the headquarters (see the boxed text, p276). Either town is a good place to stop for lunch, stock up on supplies or experience the hospitality of a *tribu d'accueil* or farmstay. It was near Koné that Lapita pottery was discovered (see the boxed text, p205), but there's nothing to see at the site as the pottery was removed.

Information

Koné has a post office, clinic and *gendarmerie* as well as the following facilities:

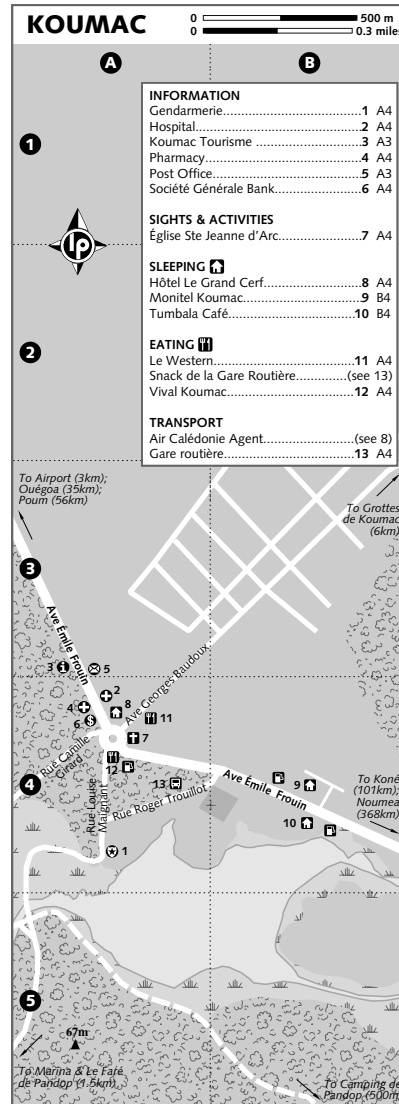
BCI bank (☎ 47 22 43; ☎ 7.35-11.30am & 12.15-3.45pm Mon-Fri) On the main road, has an ATM.

Cybercafé de Koné (☎ 47 17 00; microforma@mns.nc; per 30min/1hr 600/900CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) The only cybercafé in the north at the time of writing. Offers 13 types of espresso coffee (200CFP). It's 50m down the dirt road opposite the market and courthouse.

Sights & Activities

Koné Rodéo (☎ 47 21 51; 1-/3-day trip 8000/24,000CFP) organises horse treks into the mountains and across to the east coast. The day trip includes a *bougna* lunch in a *tribu*. The three-day trip includes accommodation in a mountain refuge and all meals. The stables are 2km north of Koné. They're signposted from the main road.

If you're not on horseback, one way to discover the more inaccessible places is by 4WD. **Excursion Brousse** (☎ 42 46 25; brousse@nsi.nc; per person half-/full day 5000/10000CFP) runs enjoyable



ROADSIDE MEMORIALS

As you travel around New Caledonia, and in particular along the west coast, you will see wooden carvings or posts decorated with lengths of material and artificial flowers. These are memorials marking the sites of fatal road accidents. Tragically, New Caledonia has a very high rate of road deaths, but attitudes to road safety are gradually improving. Seat belts have been compulsory since the early 2000s and the government is investing in information campaigns to try to reduce road accidents.

4WD tours into the mountains from Koné. A day trip includes a picnic lunch.

Le Pigeonnier (the pigeon house), on the main road in Pouembout, is a narrow two-storey stone building built in 1898. The quaint building sits in the middle of a bare garden surrounded by a stone wall. A rusting locomotive keeps it company. A flag flown from the house was once used to signal the arrival of cargo ships. Over the years the house has also been used as a pharmacy, a law firm and a library, but it has never actually housed pigeons.

Activities such as guided walks and horse treks are available at *accueil en tribu* in the surrounding area – see opposite.

Sleeping & Eating

L'Escalade de Koné (☎ 47 21 09; Koné; d large/small 6240/5400CFP; 🍽️) With rooms opening onto a gravel yard, this hotel doesn't have the best of views, but it's clean and comfortable. It costs an additional 1000CFP for air-con. The large doubles have a fridge and TV. The restaurant (dishes 1350CFP, open for lunch and dinner Monday to Friday), which hasn't

been renovated, serves Asian cuisine. It's on a side street near the post office.

Hôtel L'Hibiscus (☎ 47 22 61; hibiscus@canl.nc; Koné; s/d 6250/6750CFP; 🍽️) At the southern end of town is this hotel set around a paved pool area with potted plants. Its standard rooms are slightly back from the pool; poolside rooms are more expensive. The restaurant has dishes for 1750CFP to 2350CFP.

Hôtel Koniambo (Map p289; ☎ 47 39 40; Koné) The Koniambo, north of town opposite the airfield, was undergoing major renovations at the time of writing. It was expected to reopen in July 2006.

Hôtel Le Bougainville (☎ 47 20 60; bougainville@mils.nc; Pouembout; d bungalow/r 6900/5900CFP; 🍽️) There's a beautifully decorated main building at Le Bougainville. It has traditional carved wooden posts at the entrance and a magnificent thatched roof. Its bungalows are set in a luxuriant garden with a pool and children's playground. It's on the main road in Pouembout. Meals (1850CFP) are available.

Paddock de la Boutana (Map p289; ☎ 47 16 17; paddockboutana@mils.nc; adult/child 7500/4250CFP) This farmstay sits in an idyllic clearing by a

stream. The serene atmosphere is enhanced by a warm Broussard welcome and convivial meals on the veranda. The owners used to breed cattle but these days the pastures have been taken over by wild deer. The rate includes half-board, a 4WD farm tour at sunset and a deer-spotting tour after dinner. The owners point out remnants of early Kanak settlement on the property and the place where convicts who worked in the mountain mines once camped. The farm is 20km from Pouembout. To get there pick up a map from the Shell station on the main road. You must book in advance. Children under seven may stay by prior arrangement.

Tumbala Café (☎ 42 44 39; Koné; snacks 250-550CFP, dishes 950-2000CFP; ☎ 6am-11pm Mon-Sat) This bright and popular café offers a wide range of snacks and dishes including *paninis*, burgers, salads, and meat and fish dishes. It has a computer with Internet access (per half-hour 500CFP), though it's not always reliable. It also has live music and entertainment regularly. It's on the main road.

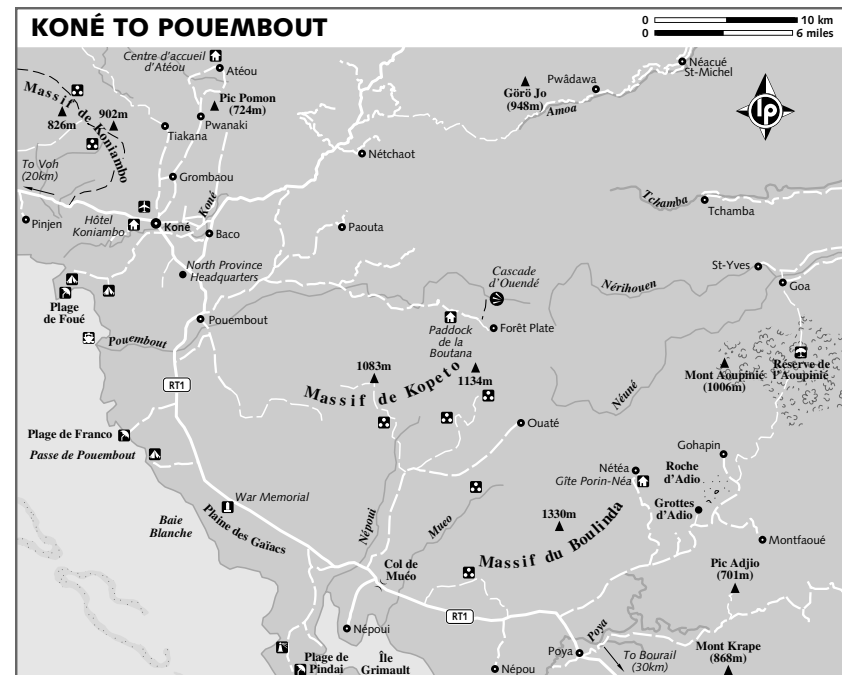
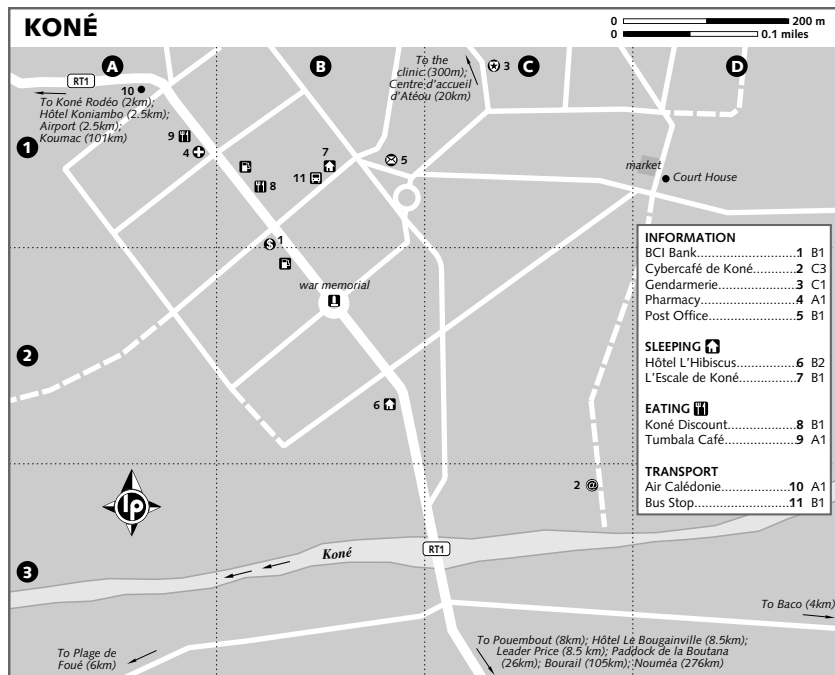
For groceries, **Koné Discount** (☎ 47 30 73; ☎ 7am-noon & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-noon Sun)

in Koné and **Leader Price** (☎ 42 77 76; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-12.30pm Sun) in Pouembout are both supermarkets on the main streets.

ACCUEIL EN TRIBU

Like the northeast coast, the northwest coast is known for its *accueil en tribu*. These are similar to those on the northeast coast, although there are differences such as the scenery and the occupations of the inhabitants.

Centre d'accueil d'Atéou (☎ 47 26 13; per person camping/cabin 600/1000CFP) This centre welcomes visitors to the mountain *tribu* of Atéou. At 430m, this is the highest *tribu* in New Caledonia. It's set on a slope with a view over the lower mountains. Guests sleep on mattresses in a wooden cabin in the midst of the *tribu*. It costs 1600CFP per person to camp if you don't dine at the homestay. You need to order meals (1500CFP), including *bougna*, in advance. Activities include horse riding (per person per hour 1000CFP) and guided walks (per person two/four hours 1000/1500CFP): you can arrange a guided walk or horse trek across the mountains



to Tiendanite or the east coast south of Hienghène. Atéou is 20km from Koné. At the war memorial turn northeast towards the roundabout and continue past the post office. Take the first left after the post office, from where it's signposted. There are 18km of unsealed road. There's another signposted route 300m north of town.

Gîte Porin-Néa (☎ 42 39 51; camping per person 500CFP, dm 1500CFP) This *gîte* in tribu de Nétéa sits in a secluded spot beside a mountain stream. It's in a woodland setting and has a camp site and beds in a large dormitory. It's more a *gîte* than a homestay but its setting gives it a homestay atmosphere. The dining area (meals 1500CFP) under a large *faré* overlooks the stream, where you can cool off in a rock pool. Reine, the owner, can show you around her plant nursery or arrange a

guided walk (per hour per person 500CFP) to a petroglyph site nearby. It's about 20km from the main road. The turn-off to Nétéa and the grottes d'Adio (Adio Caves) is signposted about 2.5km north of Poya, a village 56km southeast of Pouembout on the RT1. At the time of writing the caves were closed to the public (for an update, inquire at the Poya *mairie* on ☎ 47 12 50).

Getting There & Away

On average there are two buses a day between Noumea and Koumac (1650CFP, 5½ hours, daily). They stop in Koné and Pouembout. **Air Calédonie** (☎ 47 20 50; fax 47 21 13) operates two flights a week between Noumea and Koné and between Noumea and Koumac. The airfield is 2.5km north of town. For details of flights see p327.