

Efate



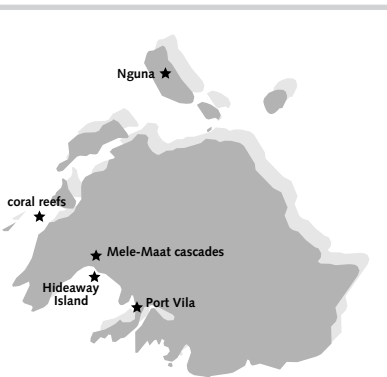
Gourmet restaurants, top diving, world-class game fishing, a relaxed tropical lifestyle and the rich culture of Melanesia. This is part of Efate. Look too at the surroundings: secluded beaches, cascades, jewel-like islands, deep-water anchorages, an international airport and Vanuatu's capital, bustling little Port Vila. Efate is this, and so much more.

Port Vila is Vanuatu's principal tourist destination, so there are dozens of tours, fabulous accommodation, feasts, museums and quaint little back streets to explore. But don't stop there. Go for some of the extreme sports like abseiling and parasailing, take treks, kayak or jet-ski over the ocean blue, walk, swim, hang out by the wharf; sit in a café, by a pool, on a mountain. Then there's the sheer delight of just being here, jumping on and off the buses, not wearing seat belts, wandering through the markets, eating strange-looking fruits or even ground oven-baked slices of *laplap* (doughy mix filled with meat or fish) and finding the rhythm of Vanuatu time, which means things happen hours early, hours late, or somewhere in between. Seafood, organic beef, organic veg, organic coffee, organic fruit. After a few minutes in this tropical, laid-back, quaint and cute little town you become grounded, the rules and regulations from back home become irrelevant, and hey, next thing you're smiling broadly at all the happy people smiling at you.

Bring the kids and watch them spark up as they shake hands with the locals, get their hair braided, spend their vatu at the market, or sit up the front of a bus. It's a kids' paradise too.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkelling or **diving** (p54) on colourful coral reefs and coral-encrusted wrecks
- Quaffing kava in a **nakamal** (p74), then doing your own tour of Vila's **culinary delights** (p72)
- Watching the would-be dolphins **swimming** (p66) across to Iririki, then trying it yourself
- Chilling out on **Hideaway Island** (p77) or getting adventurous on **Nguna** (p81)
- **Abseiling** (p67) down into stunningly clear, aquamarine water at the **Mele-Maat cascades** (p77)



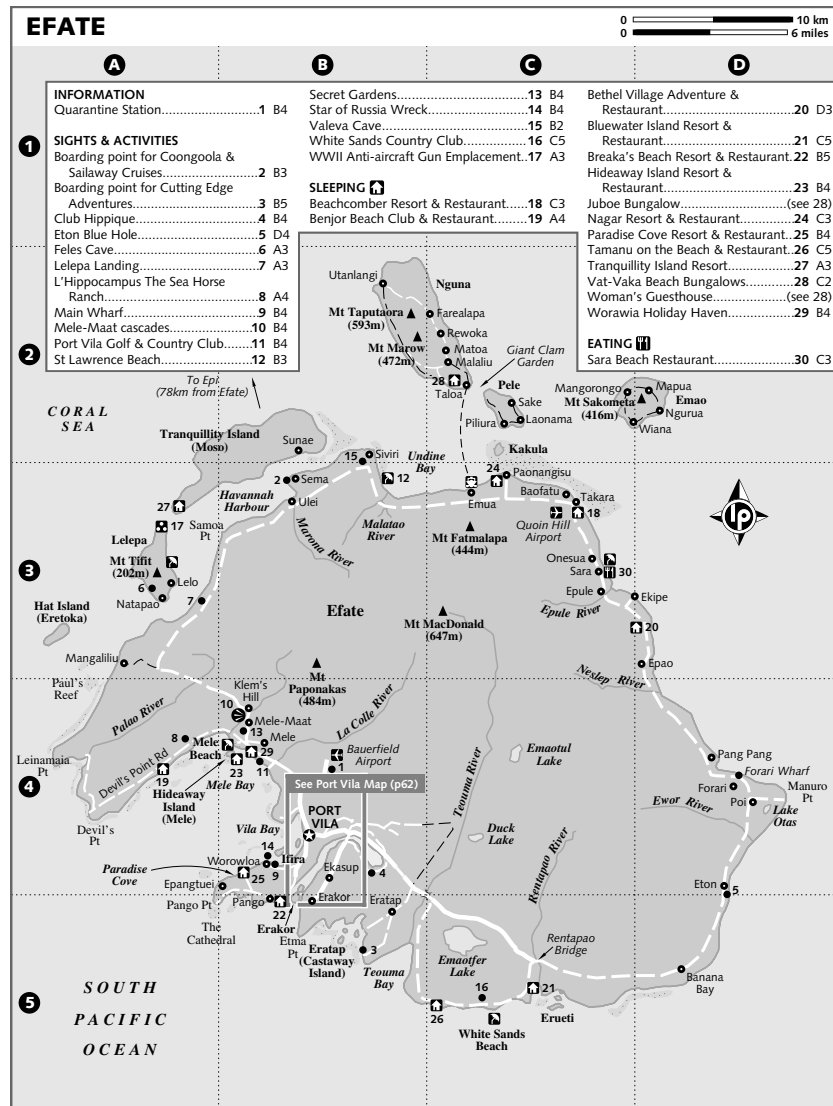
■ POPULATION: 45,000

■ AREA: 915 SQ KM

HISTORY

People of the Lapita culture settled here about 1200 BC. European settlement began with the arrival of whalers, but in September 1842, an American sandalwood expedition under Captain Henry sailed into Havannah Harbour with 60 Tongan sailors on board. The Tongans quarrelled with the

Efatese, shot some of them and drove others into caves. They lit smoky fires by the caves and the people in them suffocated. After that, the locals attacked trading ships and killed crewmembers. HMS *Havannah* was dispatched in 1849 to control the situation; several British warships did a turn of duty there in the 1850s.



Meanwhile, Christian missionaries were arriving and enjoyed some early successes but many died of malaria.

By the mid-1860s, there were 30 European settlers, mostly British, growing cotton on the flat coastal plains of Havannah Harbour. When French agents arrived and bought up large parcels of plantation land from local chiefs that the British settlers reckoned they owned, there were fierce arguments. Britain refused to register or protect its citizens' land claims so many British planters sold up and left.

In 1886 French troops landed at Havannah Harbour – then the site of the main European settlement on Efate – and refused to withdraw. This embarrassed Britain and forced the government to register its citizens' land claims, and British settlers, mostly from Australia, returned. Finally, in 1906, the French and British governments decided to rule their wrangling nationals jointly.

Back in Europe in 1940, France was occupied by Germany, and Britain took full control of Vanuatu's administration. Two years later a US fleet arrived and bases were constructed at Havannah Harbour and Port Vila. Over 100,000 service personnel passed through the island en route to the North Pacific.

In the 1970s Efate became the centre for Vanuatu's independence movement, but remained calm despite the violence on Santo and Tanna. Since then the capital has grown enormously as people from other islands come to seek employment.

PORT VILA

pop 38,000

Built around Vila Bay, Port Vila spreads up steep hillsides that offer stunning views over its beautiful harbour, sculpted with inlets, lagoons and islets. In combination with its faded French atmosphere, rambling streets and café scene, it makes Vila one of Oceania's most attractive towns.

HISTORY

Port Vila was initially overshadowed by the settlement at Havannah Harbour. After a long drought in 1882 and several malarial outbreaks, however, Efate's commercial centre moved to Vila Bay.

In 1906 Vila was declared the national capital and the seat of the newly proclaimed Condominium government. Its main street was a bush path connecting the warehouses belonging to Burns Philp (British) and the Société Française des Nouvelles-Hébrides (SFNH; French). It was a seedy town, much favoured by beachcombers and freed convicts from New Caledonia.

Vila's original hotel, long gone, was an absolute bloodhouse in the 1920s. Drunken plantation owners gambled using the 'years of labour' of their Melanesian workers as currency. Islanders would be lined up along the wall, at the mercy of the employers' dice. Long after America's Wild West was tamed, Vila was the scene of gunfights and public guillotining.

By the 1930s life had quietened down for the Europeans, who now numbered 1000. The British Resident Commissioner held weekly cocktail parties for the British elite; the French planters and their wives preferred tennis and social drinking.

The ni-Vanuatu, however, were only allowed to live in Vila if they were employed there; otherwise they were given 15 days to leave. There was a curfew: if they were on the street after 9pm they faced a night in the lockup.

The establishment of the tax haven in 1970 fuelled a construction boom: ramshackle colonial dwellings were replaced by concrete structures, streets were paved and when the main wharf was built in 1972, 40 cruise ship visited each year, starting Vila's role as a tourist destination.

ORIENTATION

Vila's main shopping precinct follows the shoreline for about a kilometre, so it's easily explored on foot. Lini Hwy, the main street, winds parallel to the waterfront. Rue Carnot is lined with Chinese shops, and there are more around the corner in Rue de Paris, so it's known as Chinatown. You'll find anything from Japanese stereos to straw hats, Chinese cigarettes and balls of wool.

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

Maps

The **Drug Store** (☎ 22789; Lini Hwy) sells the 1:200,000 map of Vanuatu published by South Pacific Maps, distributed in Australia through **Hema Maps** (☎ 07-3340 0000). The **Vanuatu Tourism Office** (VT0; ☎ 22813; Lini Hwy) has free maps of Efate and Port Vila.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Centrepoint Supermarket (Lini Hwy) For French magazines and newspapers.

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

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 25566, 22112)

Fire brigade (☎ 22333)

Police (☎ 22222)

Internet Access

Two almost-open and interesting places to check out are DXGrand and Nambawan Market & Café, on the waterfront. They will both have wireless connections.

Cyber Village (☎ 22728; cyber@vatu.com; Nambatu; ☎ 7am-10pm) A large complex with a snack bar, café and wireless technology. Get 24-hour access to a prepaid hotspot. There are shower facilities for tourists.

Naviti Internet Café (☎ 26525; per min 20Vt; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) A crowded little spot, but popular, with half-price access after 7pm.

Tour Shop (☎ 25609; www.tourvanuatu.com; tourshop@vanuatu.com.vu; per min 15Vt; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) The e-tourism centre has a bank of good computers with fast connections. Spend 10,000Vt on artefacts or tours and get 30 minutes' free access.

Laundry

Ezy Wash (☎ 24386; Rue Bougainville; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, to noon Sun) A 5kg wash and dry costs 850Vt. There's a same-day dry-cleaning service.

Pacific Wash & Dry (☎ 26416; Lini Hwy; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Same rates as Ezy Wash.

Libraries

The Alliance Française, behind the French Embassy, and the New Zealand High Commission have libraries with major newspapers and magazines.

Port Vila Public Library (Lini Hwy; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) Has French- and English-language lending sections, a good Vanuatu and Pacific reference section and a newspaper reading room.

Medical Services

Drug Store (☎ 22789; Lini Hwy; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat, 8.30am-noon Sun) This well-stocked pharmacy is tops. The pharmacist gives good advice.

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

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

PORT VILA IN...

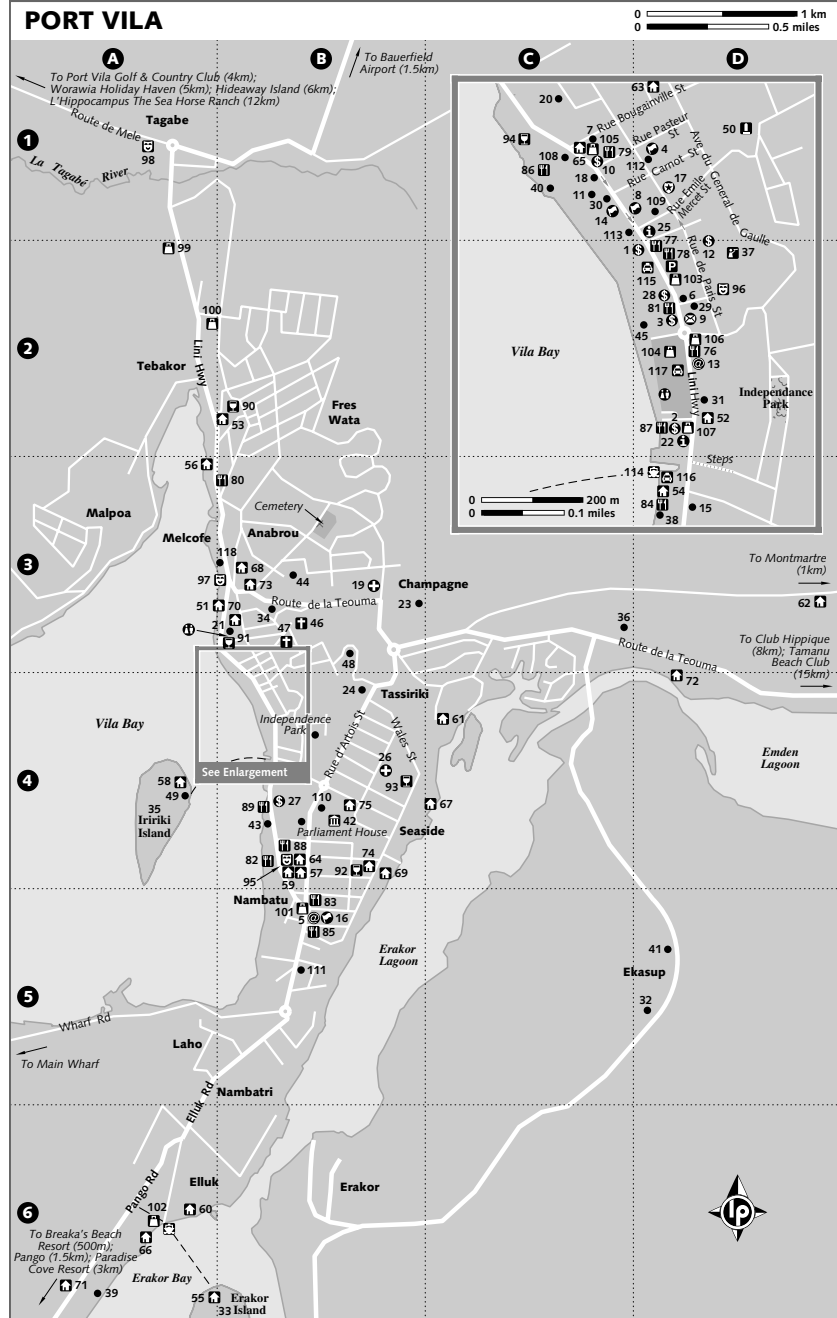
Two Days

Spend the whole first day wandering around the centre. Take a walking tour (p67), eat or have a drink at as many restaurants as you can, check out the notice board at Iririki Island Resort (p74) for the night's entertainment, and laze on the lovely little beach. About 6pm, head to a kava bar (p74) for a shell or two, then cross on the ferry to Roxy's on the Lagoon (p72) at Erakor for dinner.

Next morning, join a day tour on a yacht (p66) for a hit of ozone, gorgeous beaches and great snorkelling. When you return, try a Melanesian feast (p74) for fun food, music and dance.

Four Days

With two more days, get into the wet suit and flippers because it's time to scuba dive (p54). Feeling charged up? An ecotour with Pascal (p67) is the perfect way to see more of nature. Use the afternoons to visit the cultural centre (p64) and Mele-Maat cascades (p77), where you must do an abseil down the waterfall with Edge (p67). Eat at a restaurant with entertainment, like Flaming Bull (p72), then cross the road for some action at Trader Vics (p74). On the last night, dine at a restaurant with great ambience, like Vila Chaumière (p73) or Les Alizé's (p73).



Money

Foreign currency exchange in Port Vila is provided by **ANZ Bank** (☎ 22536; Lini Hwy; ☏ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) and by **Westpac** (☎ 22084; Lini Hwy; ☏ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri). They both have ATMs.

Goodies Money Exchange (☎ 23445; goodies@vanuatu.net.vu; cnr Lini Hwy & Rue Pasteur; ☏ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 8.30am-noon Sun) Generally gives the best rates; check out the great carvings. **National Bank of Vanuatu** (NBV; ☎ 22201; Rue de Paris) can also handle foreign exchange.

INFORMATION

ANZ ATM.....	1 D2
ANZ ATM.....	2 D2
ANZ ATM.....	(see 101)
ANZ Bank.....	3 D2
Australian High Commission.....	4 D1
Cyber Village.....	5 B5
Drug Store.....	6 D2
Environment Unit.....	(see 34)
Ezy Wash.....	7 C1
French Embassy.....	8 D1
General Post Office.....	9 D2
Goodies Money Exchange.....	10 C1
Island Safaris.....	11 C1
National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV).....	12 D2
Naviti Internet Café.....	13 D2
New Zealand High Commission (upstairs).....	14 C1
Pacific Wash & Dry.....	15 D3
People's Republic of China Embassy.....	16 B5
Police Station.....	17 D1
Port Vila Public Library.....	18 C1
Pro Medical & Decompression Chamber.....	19 B3
Radio Vanuatu.....	20 C1
South Pacific Travel.....	(see 89)
Telecom Vanuatu.....	21 B3
Top Shots.....	(see 105)
Tour Shop.....	22 D2
University of the South Pacific (USP).....	23 B3
Vanuatu Cultural Centre.....	(see 42)
Vanuatu Society for Disabled People.....	24 B4
Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO).....	25 D1
Vila Central Hospital.....	26 B4
Western Union Money Transfer.....	27 B4
Westpac Bank.....	28 D2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Adventure Centre.....	29 D2
Coongoola Day Cruise.....	30 C1
Cutting Edge Adventures.....	(see 51)
Destination Pacific Islands.....	31 D2
Ekasup Cultural Village.....	32 D5
Erakor Island.....	33 B6
Georges Pompidou Building.....	34 B3
Iririki Island.....	35 A4
Korman Stadium.....	36 C3
Lookout Point.....	37 D2
Meridian Charters.....	38 D3
Michoutouchkine & Plioko Foundation Art Gallery.....	39 A6
Nambawan Market & Café.....	40 C1
Namo Nana Tradi-Cultural Village.....	41 D5

National Museum of Vanuatu.....	42 B4
Nautilus Scuba.....	43 B4
Old Stadium.....	44 B3
Playground.....	45 D2
Port Vila Tennis Club.....	(see 44)
Porte du Ciel Vietnamese Roman Catholic Church.....	46 B3
Sacré Coeur Cathedral.....	47 B3
Sailaway Cruises.....	(see 29)
Supreme Court.....	48 B3
Tranquillity Island Dive.....	(see 30)
Tropicsports Centre.....	49 A4
WWI Memorial.....	50 D1
Zuma Scooter Hire.....	(see 22)

SLEEPING

Chantilly's on the Bay.....	51 B3
City Lodge.....	52 D2
Coral Motel.....	53 B2
DX Grand Hotel.....	54 D3
Erakor Island Resort.....	55 A6
Fatumarua Lodge.....	56 A3
Hotel Formule.....	57 B4
Iririki Island Resort.....	58 A4
Kaiviti Village Motel.....	59 B4
Le Lagon.....	60 A6
The Lagoon.....	(see 64)
Le Meridien.....	61 C4
Les Alizés & Restaurant.....	62 D3
Malampa Guesthouse.....	63 D1
Melanesian Port Vila.....	64 B4
Olympic Hotel.....	65 C1
Pacific Lagoon Apartments.....	66 A6
Poppy's on the Lagoon.....	67 C4
Room With a View.....	68 B3
Seachange Lodge.....	69 B4
Shefa Guesthouse.....	70 B3
Treetops Lodge & Bungalows.....	71 A6
Vila Chaumières & Restaurant.....	72 D4
Vila Hibiscus Motel.....	73 B3
Whispering Coral.....	74 B4
Wild Pig.....	75 B4

EATING

Au Bon Marché Supermarket.....	(see 87)
Au Pêche Mignon.....	76 D2
Café Deli.....	77 D2
Centrepoint Supermarket.....	78 D2
Daily Pizza.....	(see 11)
El Gecko.....	79 C1
Flaming Bull Steakhouse.....	(see 91)
Harbour View Restaurant.....	80 B3
Jill's Café.....	81 D2
Kanpai Bar & Sushi Japanese Restaurant.....	82 B4
La Pizzeria.....	83 B5
Le Café du Village.....	84 D3

L'Houstalet.....	85 B5
Rossi Restaurant.....	86 C1
Roxy's on the Lagoon.....	(see 55)
Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway.....	87 D2
Tilly's.....	(see 51)
Tropik Bistrot.....	88 B4
Waterfront Bar & Grill.....	89 B4
Wild Pig Restaurant.....	(see 75)

DRINKING

Anchor Inn.....	(see 94)
Crow's Nest Kava Bar.....	90 B2
Office Pub.....	91 B3
Ron's Nakamal.....	92 B4
Sea Side Kava Bar.....	93 B4
Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club.....	94 C1
Wild Pig Sports Bar.....	(see 75)

ENTERTAINMENT

Cine Hickson.....	95 B4
Club 21.....	(see 64)
Fatumarua Lodge.....	96 D2
Palms Casino.....	(see 61)
Trader Vic's.....	97 B3
Wan Smol Bag Theatre.....	98 A1

SHOPPING

AMPM (24-hour alcohol).....	99 A2
AMPM (24-hour alcohol).....	100 A2
Au Bon Marche.....	101 B5
Diana Tam Gallery.....	102 A6
Hebrida Market Place.....	103 D2
La Cave du Gourmet.....	(see 25)
L'atelier.....	(see 103)
Market.....	104 D2
Philippe Metois Photography.....	105 C1
Proud's.....	106 D2
Stop Press Bookstore.....	(see 101)
Tanua Vanuatu.....	107 D2

TRANSPORT

Air Vanuatu.....	(see 12)
Aircalin.....	108 C1
Alliance Française.....	109 D1
Budget.....	110 B4
Discount Rentals.....	111 B5
Hua Chinese Store Truck Stop.....	112 D1
Immigration (upstairs).....	113 C1
Iririki Wharf.....	114 D3
Nautilus Scooter Hire.....	(see 43)
South Sea Shipping.....	(see 88)
Taxi Association & Bus Service Centre.....	115 D2
Taxi Rank.....	116 D3
Taxi Rank.....	117 D2
Unity Air.....	(see 31)
Vanair.....	(see 12)
World Car Rental.....	118 B3
Yachting World.....	(see 89)

Western Union Money Transfer (☎ 23197; Lini Hwy) Handy for emergency funds.

Post

General Post Office (☎ 22000; Lini Hwy; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-11.30am Sat) Poste restante, stamp counter, Internet facilities (25Vt per minute), card-operated phones outside, and private phone and fax booths inside.

Underwater Post Office (Hideaway Island) Don your diving gear to mail your waterproof postcard 3m below the surface.

Toilets

Public toilets are at the back of the market, and also next to the Office Pub. Both 40Vt; pick up loo paper on the way in.

Tourist Information

See p181 to find sources of more specific information.

Tour Shop (☎ 25609; www.tourvanuatu.com; tour shop@vanuatu.com.vu; PO Box 949) Backpacker specialist that organises accommodation, tours, bookings on outer islands, and scooter, mountain-bike and tent hire.

Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO; ☎ 22813, 22515; www.vanuaturism.com; tourism@vanuatu.com.vu; Lini Hwy) Information about accommodation, activities, tours, and the outer islands.

Travel Agencies

Operators for the outer islands, as well as around Efate, are all found on Lini Hwy. They include the following:

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

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

Horizon Tours (☎ 25053, fax 24275; www.vanuatu tourism.com; horizon@vanuatu.com.vu)

Island Safaris (☎ /fax 23288 or 26779; www.vanuatu tourism.com; islands@vanuatu.com.vu)

SIGHTS

National Museum of Vanuatu

This excellent museum and cultural centre (☎ 22129; www.vanuatu culture.org; vks@vanuatu.com.vu; Rue d'Artois; adult/child 500/100Vt; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat), in a glorious building, has a large and well-displayed selection of traditional artefacts such as *tamtam* (slit-gongs or slit-drums), a massive outrigger canoe, ceremonial headdresses and examples of Lapita and Wusi pottery. There are photographic displays and videos on traditional ceremonies and legends. Temporary exhibi-

tions have included the Silver Jubilee collection, and sculptures by Emmanuel Watt, the first local artist to have an international touring exhibition.

Market

Colourful and busy, Vila's market is open round-the-clock from early Monday through to noon on Saturday. The fruit and vegetables, flowers, jewellery, woodcarvings and souvenirs are in the care of ni-Van women wearing colourful Mother Hubbard dresses.

Prices are rock bottom: coconuts, paw-paws and huge grapefruit can start at 20Vt; a generous slab of *laplap* is 150Vt. Produce is seasonal – look for wild raspberries in September, mangoes in November and passionfruit from March to May. Benches at the back are for diners. The ladies cook interesting meals (250Vt) like herb-coated fish with rice, as you watch.

There's no bargaining. Prices are clearly marked and no one ever hassles you to buy anything. Total bliss.

Waterfront & Nambawan Market & Café

A pleasant path and grassy area follows the harbour wall behind busy Lini Hwy. No Rollerbladers or skateboarders zapping past your ankles. Just a view of harbour activities and moored yachts, a kids' playground, seats and **Nambawan Market & Café** (☎ 44826; café@nambawan.com) where you can get wholesome snacks, wireless Internet access, ice creams, fresh-squeezed juices and a large range of handicrafts.

Independence Park

This large playing field with a lovely old grandstand is where the Condominium was proclaimed in 1906, with the ceremonial raising of the British and French flags. For years, daily checks ensured that the Union Jack was flying at the same height as the Tricolour – so neither was upstaged!

The British Residency, the large, wooden building on the eastern side, is now the Ministry of Home Affairs. On the northern side, the French Residency – the white building with faded red roof – is the Department of Foreign Affairs.

French Quarter & Surrounds

Located just north of central Vila is the French Quarter (Quartier Français), where

the Georges Pompidou Building, a former French hospital, now houses several government departments.

Standing proud on the main street is modernistic Roman Catholic **Sacré Coeur Cathedral** and several French colonial-style houses with wooden-louvred windows. Tucked away on the left is **Porte du Ciel**, a charming little Vietnamese Roman Catholic church, designed to be semicircular in cross section.

There are glorious views from the streets behind the churches, especially from the **WWI memorial**, at the top of nearby Rue Emile Mercet, and from **Lookout Point** on Ave du General de Gaulle.

Vanuatu's **Supreme Court** is the grand pink building higher up the hill from the WWI memorial. It's the former Joint Court of the Condominium.

Iririki

This small island in the harbour is connected to the mainland by a free, 24-hour ferry. Beetle across to the great restaurant (p74), or enjoy a beer and take in the terrific view of Vila, especially at sunset. Kayaks, catamarans and snorkel gear are available for hire at the Watersports Centre.

Erakor Island

Polynesian religious teachers arrived in 1845 and Erakor became a mission stronghold. Between 1872 and 1893 two Presbyterian missionaries, Reverend and Mrs McKenzie, lived and taught here. These days, Erakor is a lovely resort (see p72) but take a quiet stroll around for a tantalising glimpse of what many other islets are like.

There's a free ferry service to the island.

Michoutouchkine & Pilioko Foundation Art Gallery

This Oceanic art gallery and artists' studio (☎ 27753; Pango Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) is on the way to Pango. Named after its two resident artists, Nicolai Michoutouchkine and Aloï Pilioko, it's amazingly, wildly exotic, with Pacific bric-a-brac and artefacts, including ornate carvings and masks by the master craftsmen of southern Malekula.

ACTIVITIES

Camping

Ownership of the land is the structure of Vanuatu society. Everything you touch, cycle

over or swim in is owned by somebody. The **Tour Shop** (☎ 25609; www.tourvanuatu.com) has camping gear for hire, and Reza will give you a map of places you can camp – pay the owner when you arrive. The equipment can be taken to the outer islands, where many bungalow owners allow camping, and Tanna has Boita's Camping Ground (p100).

Cycling

The cycling tours offered by **EcoTours** (☎ 25299, 45596; www.vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu; ecotour@vanuatu.com.vu; half-day from 2500Vt) are grand adventures over grassy pastures, through villages, up to mountaintops, and in and out of outriggers to cross rivers and lagoons. Ask about the outer-island bike tours.

Mountain bikes can be hired at **Zuma Scooter Hire** (☎ 25609, 41000; half-/full day 1800/2800Vt). If you're going to the outer islands, Vanair will carry them for free (take a repair kit).

Jet-Skiing

Sideways slides, fishtails, wheelies – well, not wheelies, but it's all hair-raising and amazing fun, as your stomach shoots through your back on **Vanuatu Jet** (☎ 26426; www.vanuatujet.com; info@vanuatujet.com), as long as you're more than 120cm tall. Available for high-speed transfers too.

Cruises

Sunset cruises are so romantic, whether they go to Mele Bay or up the lagoon. **Meridian Charters** (☎ 25595, 83352; www.meridiancharters.com; meridiancharters@vanuatu.com.vu) takes you on a 60ft motor yacht at dusk – brown sails from distant lands, and on deck, food and French wines; ask about their day or week trips.

Inland Waterway Tour (☎ 45872, 23103) runs a three-hour journey to many of Port Vila's hot spots, and gives a 25% discount on the barge sunset cruise.

Ghostbuster Water Tours (☎ 27006; steve@ghostbuster.com) has a range of fun water activities.

Glass-Bottom Boat Trips

Semi Submarine (☎ 43144; adult/child/family 2000/1200/5500Vt; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sat) provides a view of the sea from a deep viewing chamber – great for families and nonsnorkellers. Leaves from the wharf at Le Café du Village (p73).

IslandDreams Glass Bottom Sea Kayaking (☎ 23050; www.evergreen.com.vu; adult/child 4000/2000Vt; ☎ tours 9am & 2pm) heads out from pretty Mele

SURVIVOR VANUATU

Male and female camps separated by lakes and mountains? Go and look at the patch of sand between the two survivor camps. Note the ni-Vans' vegetable gardens two paces behind, and have a chuckle. That's TV for you. And the volcano in the distance? Well that's actually on Tanna.

Bay to a sand island as marine life passes underneath. Such a buzz. Drinks and fruit as a reward if you get back. Snorkel gear provided.

Sea Trips

For chartering a yacht, see p335. Or kick back with **Sailaway Cruises** (☎ 25155; www.adventurevanuatu.com; sailaway@vanuatu.com.vu; 7900Vt), which offers a fabulous day trip on the *Golden Wing*, a trimaran, to the beaches where *Survivor Vanuatu* was filmed, then magnificent snorkelling or diving at Hat Island (Eretoka) and Paul's Reef. Includes lunch, transfers and snorkel gear. Diving is extra.

A **Coongoola Day Cruise** (☎ 25020; www.southpacdivecruise.com.vu; drewco@vanuatu.com.vu; adult/child/diver 7800/3900/8800Vt) takes you on *Lady of the Sea*, a 23m ketch built in Burmese Teak with Bermuda ketch rigging. The *Lady* was once the mother ship for the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. Two dives at Tranquillity Island, snorkel gear, a wander around the turtle sanctuary and beach barbecue are included.

Cutting Edge Adventures (☎ 22176; cutting@vanuatu.com.vu) offers brilliant half- to 10-day trips in inflatable kayaks around the coast, or river kayaking (half/full day from 3800/7400Vt). Once a week, **Island Gateway** (☎ 51595; amdavies@netspace.net.au; per person 7500Vt) takes *Diepsea* (p184), a powered luxury catamaran, on a day trip around Efate taking in the seven offshore islands. Visit the marine research station and crater lagoon on Emau, snorkel in the marine park at Nguna, stopover on other islands and meet the islanders.

Swimming & Snorkelling

There are small sandy beaches on Erakor and Iriki islands where the snorkelling's not bad, but the best option for snorkelling near to town is Hideaway Island (p77). Every day, people swim across to Iriki from Rossi Restaurant – training, perhaps, for the

Vanuatu Ocean Swim (p69). Join them, and check out the yachts and buoys on the way.

Game & Reef Fishing

Vanuatu's waters, state-of-the-art boats and tackle, and the choices of game, reef and remote-island fishing – half or full-day, and live-aboard – means your time on the deep blue will be memorable. Warm currents attract marlin, sailfish, wahoo and dogtooth tuna; operators tag and release their catch, unless they give it to a village. Make or join a group (shared half-/full-day trips start at around 17,000/32,000Vt).

Some big game operators follow: **Crusoe Fishing Adventures** (☎ 22439, 45490; www.crusoefishing.com.vu; crusoe@vanuatu.com.vu) boat *Horizon A* spacious Capricorn Classic 42ft cruiser, with the latest high-tech equipment, set up for all weather conditions. **Ocean Blue** (☎ 41415; www.oceanblue.com.vu; anthony@oceanbluevanuatu.com) Has a fleet of fishing vessels that include its Black Watch 40s, with first-class seagoing capabilities. **Wild Blue** (☎ 22398; www.nautilus.com.vu/fishing.htm; fishing@vanuatu.com.vu) Has a 28ft Bertram and a 9m Reef Master which allow you to go serious, or to add some swimming and a beach barbecue.

Light-tackle and reef fishing, in which you still get a major adrenalin rush, costs from 7000Vt per person. **Saltwater Fishing Adventures** (☎ 22328) has an 8.5m boat, great for families. **Lelepa Island Fishing Charters** (☎ 22714; www.lelepa.com) operates a 7m Banana Boat; the price includes snorkelling and island tour.

Scuba Diving

DIVE SITES

There are great dive sites, including wrecks, coral reefs, deep drop-offs, chasms, caverns and swim-throughs. See p54 for more detailed information.

DIVE OPERATORS

The dive-tour operators are thoroughly professional and well organised. Introductory dives start around 6500Vt; dives for certified divers are even less.

See p56 for more information.

Horse Riding

Offering everything from bareback swimming treks to rainforest rides, gentle beach walks or sunset trails, two places – both a 10-minute bus ride from town – have acres

of forest and beach for you to explore. **L'Hippocampus the Sea Horse Ranch** (☎ 25152, 40102; lhippocampus@vanuatu.com.vu; ☎ 11am-5.30pm except Mon; 1hr/full day from 2500/8500Vt) has fun trail rides and major adventures. **Club Hippique** (☎ 23347; lenakel@vanuatu.com.vu; ☎ 11am-5.30pm except Mon; 1hr/full day from 2500/8500Vt) offers rides through rainforest and coconut plantations above Emden Lagoon.

Sporting Centres & Clubs

Korman Stadium and the Old Stadium have facilities for a wide range of sports such as netball, volleyball, soccer and athletics. Call the **Youth & Sports Department** (☎ 23766) for information.

Port Vila Tennis Club (Cercle Sportif; ☎ 22437; Route du Stade), beside the Old Stadium, has five hard courts, two squash courts, beach volleyball, aerobics classes and a gym. There are yoga classes at every level with **Françoise Passard** (☎ 22592; fran.pas.yoga@vanuatu.com.vu; class from 700Vt).

Port Vila Golf & Country Club (☎ 22564; www.vanuatu.com.vu/~pvgc; Route de Mele) is a challenging course with palm-tree and oceanfront hazards, and an excellent 19th hole overlooking Mele Bay. **White Sands Country Club** (☎ 22090) is a championship course in a coconut plantation. They charge 3500/5400Vt respectively for 18 holes and club and buggy hire.

There are smaller golf courses at **Le Meridien** (☎ 22040; www.lemeridien.com) and **Le Lagon** (☎ 22313; www.lelagonvanuatu.vu) resorts.

If you're interested in a game of cricket, head up to Independence Park on the weekend and join in.

Walking

Discover the coconut plantations and lush rainforests with Pascal Guillet, a local **Eco-Tours** (☎ 25299, 45596; www.vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu; ecotour@vanuatu.com.vu; half-day from 2500Vt) expert who will lead you into all sorts of adventures, along off-road tracks, through farms, down cascades, into rock pools and along riverbanks. Especially enjoy Pascal's quirky bits of information about plants, land diving, anything to do with Vanuatu. Bring your hat, sturdy shoes, sunblock, towel and water bottle.

Abseiling & Parasailing

Let us take you over the edge, say the signs advertising the **Edge Abseiling Adventure Tour**

PAMPER YOURSELF

So you don't want to hike up a volcano? Let a hot volcanic rock massage be your volcano experience. Eaten enough tropical fruits? Have a fresh coconut scrub instead. Scruffy after a week of scuba diving? How about a tropical oil hair treatment, finished with braids and beads. There are plenty of ways to enjoy the unique sense that is Vanuatu. Head to the excellent indoors-and-out **Erakor Island Resort Spa** (☎ 26983) for everything from a Micronised Marine Algae Body Wrap to a hydrotherapy spa (from 3000Vt). Or go local at **Rina's Island Spa** (☎ 25035, 41783; Melanesian Port Vila) for a relaxing Melanesian massage (from 1500Vt).

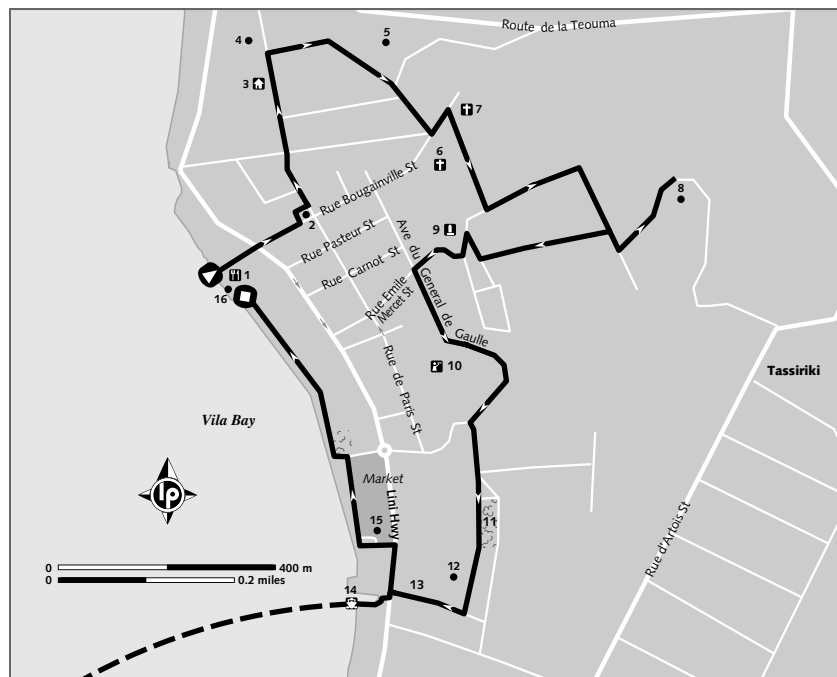
(☎ 53153; www.edgevanuatu.com; sales@edgevanuatu.com; 8000Vt). So go, it's totally fantastic. Look at the views as you walk up – you won't be looking on the way down. Practise descending into a little secret pool, then it's 35m down the Mele-Maat cascades to the rock pools. And yes, you get wet. Age is no barrier and you get a photo for proof (1000Vt).

The Edge team also has a 55m abseil into a canyon with an exit through a tunnel (10,000Vt including lunch, 7 hours), a Tyrolean Traverse on Ifira (6500Vt, 4 hours), and a kayak and abseil adventure at Siviri (14,000Vt including lunch, 8 hours).

Nautilus Parasailing (☎ 22398, 43288; www.nautilus.com.vu; 7000Vt) takes you out over the sparkling waters, so you can think you're a bird or prepare to go to heaven – although the retrieval is so easy you land back on the boat.

WALKING TOUR

See map p68. Breakfast at **Rossi's (1)** is the best way to start any walk. From there, cross Lini Hwy and head up Rue Bougainville, past the Olympic Hotel. In the next block, turn left at the lovely **Government Building (2)** where businesses are registered. Notice the elegant **Green Gates (3)** of Shefa Guesthouse and the **President of Vanuatu's Residence (4)**. Veer right now, until you reach the **Georges Pompidou Building (5)**. Mmm. Bemused, head down Rue Bougainville towards the magnificent **Sacre Coeur Cathedral (6)**. Hidden over on your left is lovely little **Porte du Ciel (7)**. Go up the hill behind the cathedral, then left through the French sector until you come to the gloriously pink



Start Rossi Restaurant
Finish Nambawan Market & Cafe
Distance 2.5km + ferry
Duration 2 hours

Court House (8). You can go inside to see fabulous timber doors and a sweeping staircase. Head back downhill to the **WWI Memorial (9)**. Take a rest on the bench and admire this magnificent view.

Back on your feet, wander down Rue Emile Mercet, turn left into Ave du General de Gaulle and have another panoramic rest at **Lookout Point (10)**. It's an easy stroll past **Independence Park (11)** and the **Pikininis' Kindergarten (12)**. Is that a cute name or what! At the end of this road, go right, down the **Steps (13)** and across Lini Hwy to the **ferry (14)**. Cross to Iririki for a swim perhaps, or check out their island path. Return to the mainland, walk through the **market (15)** and along the waterfront to the **Nambawan Market & Cafe (16)** for a fresh-squeezed *pamplemousse* drink (250Vt).

PORT VILA FOR CHILDREN

Children love Port Vila. First there are the submarine boats (p65), where they sit in the glassy bottom and watch the fish. The market is a kids' adventure world. Give them a few vatu and watch them shop, or have their hair braided. After, there's drinks on the top floor of Sea View Restaurant & Takeaway (p73), with cargo boats below. Refreshed, they'll enjoy the playground on the waterfront.

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

Erakor Island (p65) is a top spot. Enjoy the great ferry ride across and have a coffee on the little curved beach while your anklebiters sit in wet sand and build castles, surrounded by water and starfish. Or go to a resort with a pool and eat lunch poolside.

Mele-Maat cascades (p77) and the Secret Gardens (opposite) will interest kids. So will the sharks at Bluewater Island Resort (p78). If they're old enough for kayaks and snorkelling, go out to Hideaway Island (p77) for the day (it's no good for littlies as they can't walk on the coral and rock beach).

Best of all is watching your children enjoy the warm friendly attention of the locals. Before you come, teach them to shake hands, touch palms without gripping or squeezing, and watch the ni-Vans beam when their own hand-touching greeting is returned.

TOURS

There are many tours, and tour operators. The VTO has a fairly comprehensive list at www.vanuatutourism.com/vanuatu/cms/en/activities/tours.html.

Cultural Tours

Namo Nana Tradi-Cultural Village Experience

(☎ 29042, 44052; adult/child 3500/1750Vt; 🕒 tours 9am, 11.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm Mon-Sat) Ni-Van cultural activities include rainmaking, hunting, fishing, gardening, weaving and secret customs from the past. See *kastom* dancing and listen to the village string band.

EcoTours

(☎ 25299, 45596; www.vanuatu-ecotour.com.vu; ecotour@vanuatu.com.vu; half-day from 2500Vt) Pascal's cultural tours include a visit to the excellent Catholic museum, where you will see historic photos, artefacts, traditional dress, a *nakamal* and so much more.

Ekasup Cultural Village (☎ 24217, 46734; adult/child 3825/1910Vt; 🕒 9am & 2pm Mon-Fri, 9am Sat) Futunan islanders demonstrate and talk about various aspects of their traditional lifestyle and give you tastes of local bush tucker. Original local music and *kastom* dancing shows off their colourful costumes.

Secret Gardens

(☎ 26222; adult/child 600/300Vt; 🕒 9am-4.30pm) Enjoy the historical and cultural photos and reports; walk through different natural environments, a cannibal house, and exotic plants; see and touch a coconut crab, or a bright green banded iguana; and visit bungalows from around the archipelago, showing building details.

Air Tours

Unity Airlines (p184) provides scenic tours in a twin-engine plane, including a Tanna Day Tour (all inclusive 33,900Vt) to see the mighty volcano. Choose your own time and destination.

Tours Around Efate

To get a broad look at the delights around Efate, a day tour is the way to go. You'll probably swim at beautiful Eton beach, cruise up Epule River, see fire walking, check out the mysterious Valeva cave at Undine Bay, or be entertained by villagers. You will be picked up/delivered to your hotel and prices range from 4000Vt to 7000Vt (lunch included). Operators include the following:

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

Ha! Friendly Tours (☎ 41000; PO Box 379) Offers three different tours around Vila and beyond.

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

Narasaed Adventure Tours (☎ /fax 27555; Lini Hwy; narasaed@vanuatu.com.vu, beachcomber@vanuatu.com.vu) North Efate locals have a great range of tours (p79) out of Vila.

Offshore Island Tours

Get a tempting taste of the outer islands quite close to home. The offshore islands are owned by the local villagers, so if you're doing your own thing, ask an operator, or at the VTO, to arrange permission. However, tours are low-key fun events with lots of local goss thrown in.

Destination Pacific Islands (☎ 22595; www.destinationpacific.vu; grant@destinationpacific.vu) A day on Pele, with superb beaches, a great coral reef, entertainment and good food. Snorkel gear, outrigger canoes and kayaks provided.

Lelepa Island Day Tours (☎ 22714, 42714; www.lelepa-tours.com; lelepatours@vanuatu.com.vu) Snorkel gear, kayaks, fishing charters and outrigger canoes available.

Melanesian Tours (☎ 26847; www.melanesiantours.com; melanesiantours@vanuatu.com.vu) Stay overnight in a bungalow on Nguna with delicious local food included. Bring sunscreen, a torch and reef shoes.

Outer Island Safaris

Have your grand adventure organised for you, including flights, transfers, accommodation, sights and activities. For example, a three-day trip to Tanna to witness nature's fireworks or to Santo for scuba diving, a five-day excursion to Ambrym to beat your way through jungle to the volcanoes, an overnighter on Epi to swim with the dugong, a whole week in paradise at a distant Torres island. Talk to a travel agent (p64).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The VTO (www.vanuatutourism.com) has a calendar of events, and posts dates as they come to hand. For national festivals see p178.

JUNE

Vanuatu Ocean Swim (www.pacificswims.com/vanuatu_about.html) Over 140 swimmers compete in two swims (3.2km and 1.5km) from the Rossi Restaurant, around Iririki and back, with the record time being 37.01 minutes.

Jazz in Paradise (www.vanuatutourism.com) A week of great jazz bands, excellent venues, fun entertainers and many jam sessions.

JULY

Around-Island-Relay (www.vanuatu-tourism.com) A unique running experience over 138km of tar, coral and dirt, through rainforest, villages, plantations and rivers. Teams of 10 are formed through the VTO.

Melbourne to Port Vila Ocean Yacht Race (www.orcv.org.au) Across the Tasman, through the South Pacific Ocean and into the Coral Sea.

PKF Charity Cup A week of social events and a great race-day atmosphere at Mele Track with fashion, brass bands and a motor-bike race as well as eight horse races including a cross-country event and the PKF Cup.

AUGUST

Vanuatu Agriculture & Trade Show A colourful display of produce, animals and entertainment.

Vanuatu Golf Open (www.vanuatugolfopen.info) At Port Vila Golf & Country Club, a full week of social activities, and a purse of A\$40,000 that attracts top players.

La Piste Bleue A 25km race with over 700 competitors.

SEPTEMBER

Musket Cove Regatta (www.musketcovefiji.com/yacht_clb_event.html) Hundreds of yachts arrive from Fiji in this fun race.

OCTOBER

Fest'Napuan (www.furtherarts.org) Traditional, gospel and modern song for four days, with over 50 bands from Vanuatu, Australia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and New Caledonia. Top sound and lighting adds to the occasion.

SLEEPING

Vila and its surrounds have a dizzying variety of accommodation. You will find more alternatives on the websites of the **VTO** (www.vanuatu-tourism.com) and **Vanuatu Hotels** (www.vanuatu-hotels.vu). Always ask about discounts in the off season or for longer stays.

Budget

Two budget places with clean, airy rooms, shared facilities and good kitchens are **Shefa Guesthouse** (☎ 22752; beds 2000Vt) and **Malampa Guesthouse** (☎ 23137, 48502; beds 1500Vt). Both have pleasant garden areas.

Treetops Lodge & Bungalows (☎ 22944, 42944; sweadcons@vanuatu.com.vu; dm/s/d incl breakfast from 1500/3000/4000Vt; 🏠) It's relaxed, rustic and rusty with a great communal kitchen/living area set up on the veranda and views of Erakor Bay in the distance. There are also gorgeous two-bedroom bungalows, one with a mezzanine, available (6000Vt). If Karl, your host, is around at breakfast lis-

ten to his tales of the Condominium days or local politics.

Vila Hibiscus Motel (☎ 28289; vilahibiscusmotel@vanuatu.com.vu; dm/s/d 1500/2500/5000Vt, self-contained s/d from 3900/4500Vt) Fresh and cheerful, five minutes' walk north of town, with sprawling gardens and patio areas; the huge family units are particularly good (8800Vt for four guests). If staying in the dorms, ask for a room that doesn't have through-traffic.

Whispering Coral (☎ 26505; whisperingcoral@hotmail.com; B&B 2600Vt; 🏠 📺) More like an inviting family home in a lovely garden with attractive bedrooms, two spacious bathrooms along the corridor and a book exchange in the comfy sitting room. Laundry is 300Vt, transfers are free, and local buses pass the front gate.

Wild Pig (☎ 23696; www.wildpighotel.com; gm@wildpighotel.com.vu; PO Box 1515; dm with breakfast 2500Vt, r with ensuite/balcony/air-con 7000/8000/10,000Vt; 🏠 📺 📺) The communal areas are excellent: spacious dining room, sports bar, lounge bar, sparkling big pool with gazebo, communal kitchen and barbecue area. There's a small family room with shared facilities for 4000Vt.

City Lodge (☎ 26826; www.citylodge.com.vu; citylodge@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d 3800/4700Vt) Location, location. If you're busy in the city, you'll find it's ideal to stay here. Plus the rooms are minimalist, the ensuites are crisp and

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Fatamaru Lodge (☎ 23456, 41576; www.fatamaru.com; fatamaru@vanuatu.com.vu; studio/family apt 14,000/22,000Vt; 🏠 📺 📺) This is fun. Your apartment is an outer island; ask for the Pentecost room and your bed is a land-dive tower. Timber shutters fold back so you're afloat on Fatamaru Bay yet surrounded by exotic teak furniture. It's tropical luxury at its best in a garden perfumed with night flowers. Have a picnic on the little jetty, or laze on your private deck. Your hosts, Patricia and Pascal, will happily join you for a drink by the pool, to story on about Pacific island delights. Children love it here, with the pool, safe beach, TV room and big play room, where adults play too. It's a quick trip on the bus or a gentle stroll into town. Kayaks are available – row to game-fishing boats or snorkelling spots. Check out the discounts too.

clean, and it's quiet, despite being so central. Ask for room 111, which has a clear view of the market.

Room With a View (☎ 23703, 51327; www.vanuatu-tourism.com; roomvw@yahoo.com.au; cnr Renee Pujol; PO Box 889; s/d/tr with breakfast 4000/5000/6500Vt) This lovely colonial building has a balcony with the best views. Everyone eats the excellent breakfasts out here, so you meet a fascinating range of people from businessmen to peace corps workers. Mountain bikes and babysitters available.

If you want to be on an island, both Hideaway Island Resort (p78) and Erakor Island Resort (p72) offer fabulous dormitory-style accommodation (beds 2280Vt and 2900Vt respectively).

Midrange

Pacific Lagoon Apartments (☎ 23860; www.members.optusnet.com.au/pla32; pla@vanuatu.com.vu; Pango Rd; PO Box 827; 4-person lagoon/garden apt 14,500/12,000Vt; 🏠 📺 📺) Really attractive two-bedroom apartments, set around two large grassy areas fronting the lagoon, each has a sunny bathroom with atrium, spacious lounge, and shiny-clean kitchen. There are kayaks, barbecues, and a laundry service. The bus passes, and it's a minute's walk to the ferry to Erakor. Add friendly staff, who are great babysitters, and you're set for a trouble-free holiday.

Hotel Formule (☎ 29930; www.vanuatu-formule-holiday.com; hotelformuleholiday@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr 5500/5500/6500Vt; 🏠 📺) This colourful place was once one large boat-building shed. It's blossomed into gardens, a bamboo breakfast room and a range of attractive bedrooms, most with a double bed and a single bunk above it. All have phone and ensuite. There's a good communal kitchen. It's a quick bus trip or easy stroll downhill to town. Transfers are 500Vt, breakfast 600Vt, groups can stay for 2000Vt per person and under-12s are free.

Coral Motel (☎ 24755; coralmotel@vanuatu.com.vu; Lini Hwy; r down/upstairs 5900/6800Vt; 🏠 📺) Cheerful spacious studio apartments with private balconies set between palms and poinciana bushes. Each has a kitchen with large fridge, posh bathroom and in-house DVDs. From the top floor you can see the lagoon. Your charming hosts are Beth, Tony and fluffy little Bickie. Buses pass by the door every minute, or it's an easy walk into Vila.

Olympic Hotel (☎ 22464; olympichotel@vanuatu.com.vu; Lini Hwy; PO Box 1537; standard s & d 6500Vt, studios with kitchenette 7200Vt; 🏠 📺) Right in the centre of town, and quietly comfortable. Ask for room 6 where you look over both streets and the harbour. You'll even hear the brass band practising across the road if you're lucky. There's a one-bedroom apartment (9000Vt) and under-12s stay for free. Outside the rooms is a grand patio with lounging chairs; pop down the back stairs into El Gecko for coffee and meals.

Kaiviti Village Motel (☎ 24684; www.kaivitimotel.com; kaiviti@vanuatu.com.vu; Lini Hwy; PO Box 152; self-contained s/d/tr 8400/8800/9900Vt; 🏠 📺 📺) Downstairs studios open to the pool-side bar area; the balconies upstairs are made for sitting and looking at Vila Bay (ask for studios 16 or 32 for the largest balconies); the two-bedroom apartments (four/six people 13,500/15,500Vt) are spread over two floors. Great. Manager Joy and the staff are delightful; your children will love to have them babysit. There's a barbecue, library, laundry and office services.

Les Alizés (☎ 24306; www.vanuatu-alizes.com; alizes@vanuatu.com.vu; d/tr 9000/11,500Vt, superior d/tr 11,500/14,000Vt; 🏠 📺) Come into the hills with lovely forest and water views stretching way into the distance. Very tranquil. The apartments are self contained and you can hire the little jeep for 5000Vt per day while you're a guest. It's all just a few minutes from town (transfer 200Vt) and the airport (600Vt).

Vila Chaumières (☎ 22866; vilchaum@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr 12,500/12,500/15,500Vt; 🏠 📺) No wonder it's child-free. This is way too romantic for the pitter patter of tiny feet. Absorb the ambience in the rambling gardens, on the rustic timber deck, on your own sun-drenched balcony or in a kayak paddling on the lagoon.

Seachange Lodge (☎ 26551, 47106; www.seachangelodge.com; seachange@vanuatu.com.vu; apt 8625Vt, cottage d/tr/q 12,000/16,000/19,000Vt, chalet s/d/tr/q 14,000/14,000/17,000/21,000; 🏠 📺) A perfect place to relax, with your own little jetty and catamaran, motorised dinghy and outrigger canoe, plus mountain bikes if you'd rather be land-based. The bus is at the gate and the garden is a delight. It's all modern, with well-equipped kitchens. There's a DVD library, in case you tire of looking at the lagoon from your bed or the spa.

Poppy's on the Lagoon (☎/fax 23425; www.poppys.com.vu; poppys@vanuatu.com.vu; 1-/2-/3-bedroom

ste 16,200/19,000/31,500Vt, studio/bungalow 13,000/15,000Vt; ☎) On its own white-sand beach, new-look Poppy's spreads along Erakor Lagoon. All rooms have a kitchen and balcony; some have disabled access. The family cottages are magnificent with soaring ceiling and loads of space. Sea kayaks, outrigger canoes, books and games are free; babysitting and massage available. It's a 10-minute walk into town; transfers are included.

Top End

You're likely to get substantial discounts and special deals for most of these places.

Erakor Island Resort (☎ 26983; PO Box 24; www.erakor.vu; resort@erakor.vu; dm 2900Vt, superior/deluxe bungalows from 24,000/27,000Vt) Walk along a lantern-lit path to your interesting bungalow that opens onto its own bit of waterfront. You're on one gorgeous 16-acre island, with catamarans, outrigger canoes, snorkel gear etc (for hire or free for guests), or try the Get Wet Watersports – scuba diving and fishing. The lodge has spacious bunkrooms, a large kitchen and separate shower blocks; no matter what your budget you can enjoy Erakor.

Melanesian Port Vila (☎ 22150; fax 22678; melanesian.vanuatu.com.vu; orchid room 18,800Vt, incl breakfast self-contained studio/1-1/2-bedroom apt 16,000/21,000/22,400Vt, presidential suite 24,800Vt; ☎) Delightfully tropical and great for families; spacious rooms open onto a fun pool and bar area. There are two restaurants (24-hour Gino's is famous for its pizzas), three bars and special nights: barbecues, kava tastings and cultural performances. Long-stay discounts will entice you to stay for weeks.

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

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

package deals. **DXGrand Hotel** (www.dxinone.com), right on the waterfront and very big, has been the talk of town for several years. You may find some details on the website.

EATING

You're spoilt for choice when eating in and around Vila – excellent food, great ambience, views to die for, fabulous service, happy waiters. People say it costs as much as back home, and that's right. Most restaurants are licensed and some are BYO.

Restaurants

Kanpai Bar & Sushi Japanese Restaurant (☎ 26687; dishes 200-1500Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) It's new and it's great. Japanese tranquillity with Vanuatu exotica, an interesting view of the bay, and a great range of food. Try the lunch box to explore the variety.

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

Harbour View Restaurant (☎ 23668; Lini Hwy; mains 880-2680Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) A lovely outdoor setting, and a large selection of Cantonese cuisine, but stick to the sizzle plates or bird's nests to avoid the gluggy sauces.

Roxy's on the Lagoon (☎ 26983; mains 1450-2250Vt; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) Erakor's gorgeous restaurant. Gaze out over the lagoon, as Chef Matthew Lambert prepares the best seared yellowfin tuna. There's an extensive menu and pleasant surroundings; check out the special nights.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Flaming Bull Steakhouse (mains 1000-1600Vt; hnoon-11pm) Among so many great places to eat, one expects to choose some fab French cuisine. But Flaming Bull's eye fillet on mash is impossible to beat. Add the big hug from the waiter and the outrageous atmosphere and you too will keep coming back. Vanuatu beef is good – organic, from contented cows that graze around coconut plantations – but then the seafood is straight from the water to you, so the coconut-crumbed prawns are tempting. There's live music later, with local bands playing mellow love songs.

L'Houstalet (☎ 22303; meals 1300-2700Vt; ☎ dinner) Famous for 30 years for its flying fox and wild pigeon, it offers much more than that, with great atmosphere, large comfortable armchairs, and irresistible feathery omelettes stuffed with lobster.

Tilly's (☎ 27079; mains 1450-2400Vt; ☎ 7am-10pm) Built around Chantilly's sunny foyer. Drink in superb bay views, or take your meal, maybe baked poulet on crispy potato roast with papaya and lime dressing, out onto the private jetty. There's also a great tapas menu (plates 650Vt).

Rossi Restaurant (☎ 22528; www.therossi.com; mains 1450-3500Vt; ☎ 6am-late) A Vila institution, the Rossi celebrated its 25th birthday in 2005. It's like a towering atrium, glass doors opening onto the harbour. The food is excellent – always reliable, always tempting you to return. Vegetarians will love the pasta Rossi. Go try.

Wild Pig Restaurant (☎ 23696; mains 1400-1600Vt; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The chef here is famous for his beef Wellington – quite the best you'll ever have. But then there's his lobster bisque and steamed fish in champagne. Yumm.

Waterfront Bar & Grill (☎ 23490; mains 1500-2900Vt; ☎ 11am-late) It's the place for yachties, but it burnt down in late 2005. The new restaurant will be better than ever, with the same hours, same prices, and hopefully the same excellent menu with specialties like beef ribs, vegetarian *manicotti* (pasta shells), Mexican dishes and fab Tahitian fish salad.

Tropik Bistrot (☎ 26484; mains 1690-2300Vt; ☎ 6pm-late Mon-Sat) Its nondescript exterior belies a quaint candlelit interior. The food is French and very rich.

Les Alizé's Restaurant (☎ 24306; mains 1700-2200Vt; ☎ 7.30am-9pm) Up here in the hills is the best seafood *casoulet* topped with grilled scallops. Magic. Stay on after the kitchen closes, listening to the evening sounds, watching the lights of Port Vila twinkle. If you book, you will be picked up and returned for free.

Vila Chaumières Restaurant (☎ 22866; mains 1800-3750Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) Sits romantically over the waters of palm-fringed and floodlit Emden Lagoon and serves delicious meals, like chicken with green peppercorn sauce, or fab fish curry (*fis long sel kokonas*). The fare is mostly French with some English staples. Be sure to book, and ask for a waterside table.

Cafés

Café Deli (meals 450-900Vt; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) A spacious casual lunch venue with salads, sushi, baguettes, pies, and imported chocolates and cheeses. Watch out for the curry nights.

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

Jill's Café (mains 550-800Vt; ☎ 7am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1.30pm Sat) Try one of Jill's famous American-style breakfasts at a table out the back and watch the boats, because you may be here a while – service is slow.

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

Le Café du Village (☎ 27789; mains 1300-2000Vt; ☎ 8am-10pm) Housed in pretty French colonial buildings against a sea wall. Be tempted by Mediterranean and French meals, just kick back with a drink, or come for the champagne and lobster breakfast and watch the activity on the bay as the day gets underway.

Quick Eats

Centrepoint Supermarket (Lini Hwy) Has rock bottom-priced takeaway lunches such as beef stew (180Vt) and rolls with various fillings (from 150Vt).

Market (meals 250Vt) At the ocean end are benches where chicken or fish meals are cooked on the spot.

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

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

Self Catering

There are numerous supermarkets and corner stores in Vila. The larger ones, such as Au Bon Marché and Centrepoint, carry an

excellent range of local and imported food, beer and wine. Most are open seven days a week from 7.30am.

Delicious fresh bread can be bought anywhere. For fresh fruit and vegetables, you can't go past the market.

DRINKING

Vila's nightlife is not exactly buzzing, although there are a few good bars. Not to worry – after a few kava shells it will all seem amazingly interesting.

Bars

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

Waterfront Bar & Grill (☎ 23490; ☎ 11am-late) Great place down among the boats, all freshly rebuilt with live music playing well into the night. But is the cat still there, ringing the ship's bell?

Anchor Inn (☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, to 2am Sat & Sun) A great beer garden that buzzes, especially when international sports are on. Look out for meal specials, like queue-up barbecues. It's home to the Vanuatu Cruising Yacht Club (www.vanuatucruisingyachtclub.org), so you'll hear all the yachting goss.

Wild Pig (☎ 23696) Fun sports bar with special nights: Tuesday trivia, Wednesday pool comp, Thursday live entertainment and Friday all-day happy hour.

Kava Bars

There are over 100 kava bars or *nakamal* in Vila. The **Sea Side Kava Bar** (behind the hospital) is pleasant, with great views. You'll get a good-quality drink here that uses only rainwater. **Ron's** (Nambatu) is always popular, as is **Crow's Nest Kava Bar** (near Coral Motel). The going rate is 50Vt for a small 'shell' and 100Vt for a larger one.

Many expats take along their own bowl, in case the shell isn't washed properly, though it's hard to imagine anything nasty surviving in kava.

ENTERTAINMENT

Apart from feast nights there's not a lot that most Westerners would consider 'entertainment'. That is, until you discover kava...

Melanesian Feasts

Many places offer feasts on set nights which include kava tasting, string bands and *kas-tom* dancers.

Solo's Feast 'n' Fun Night (Map p59; adult/child 2500/1225Vt; ☎ 5pm Thu) Out at Worawia Holiday Haven, Mr and Mrs Solomon from the local village prepare traditional food in a ground oven, unfolding and explaining the dishes while you try some kava. Then join in the dancing. A great night.

Ekasup Village Feast (adult/child 3100/1550Vt; ☎ 5pm Fri) Another traditional evening, with a few shells of kava, fun entertainment and interesting food.

Nightclubs & Gaming Lounges

Trader Vics (☎ 26800; Lini Hwy; ☎ 4.30pm-3am Tue-Sat) Touted as the premier bar/nightclub, it's one grand beer garden, with a steaming disco room off the sports-bar area. Live bands, massive T-bones (1500Vt) and Wednesday prawn night (2500Vt). Foxtel shows all sports, and there's a pool table, darts, and wait for it – karaoke. The army jazz band plays once a week. Age at the R&D disco is mainly late teens to 30s. Females, take a friend. Fights tend to start after 2am.

Palms Casino (Le Meridien; ☎ 11.30am-3.00am) Happy hour is in the Lobby Bar from 5pm to 6pm. Play at the gaming tables for free on Friday and Saturday night.

Club 21 (Melanesian Port Vila; ☎ 5-11pm) There are pokies here and a pool table.

Iririki Island Resort (☎ 23388; fax 23880; www.iririki.com) Ozone, a ni-Van group, plays on Monday, Friday and Saturday night.

Club Vanuatu (☎ 22615; Rue de Paris St; ☎ 9am-4am) Drinks are cheap, and the disco on Friday and Saturday night attracts people of all ages, with reggae and zuch till 4am.

Cinema & Theatre

Drama groups associated with the Alliance Française de Port Vila and Club Vanuatu put on several shows a year.

Wan Smol Bag Theatre (☎ 27119; reklaw@vanuatu.com.vu; Route de Mele) Has performances sometimes during the dry season. Posters go up announcing a show.

Cine Hickson (☎ 22431; adult/child 400/200Vt) Shows Hollywood films dubbed into French nightly except Thursday (7.30pm, 2.30pm Sun). It's an interesting experience even if you don't speak French.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For information about Wan Smol Bag call (678) 27119 or email reklaw@vanuatu.com.vu.

About Australian Volunteers International

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

For more information visit www.australianvolunteers.com, or call 1800 331 292 from within Australia. For information on other volunteering organisations, see p182.

Club Vanuatu (☎ 22615; Rue de Paris St; ☎ 9am-4am) Shows flicks constantly from 11am via cable TV (100Vt per film) on the 1st floor at the back of the building.

SHOPPING

Words of wisdom: many local shops increase their prices on cruise-ship days. Vanuatu's traditional and contemporary handicraft (p42) outlets are in Vila. Buy woven baskets and mats, pottery, jewellery, headdresses, and bows and arrows. Items carved from wood include masks, miniature canoes, animals, pig-killing clubs, walking sticks and spears. Woodcarvings from northern Ambrym have the best reputation.

Quarantine and import laws in your home country shouldn't be a problem. Sculpted tree ferns, woven mats, anything with soil on it, or fresh borer holes in it can be fumigated at your point of entry (probably free),

at the **Quarantine Station** (Map p59; ☎ 23130; from 800Vt), or ask your speciality shop to arrange it. Plain feathers can't enter another country, but most are dyed which is OK.

You'll require a CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) exemption form for objects made from tree ferns. If the seller can't organise this, go to the **Environment Unit** (Map p62; ☎ 25302) in the Georges Pompidou Building to apply.

The export of all magic stones and artefacts more than 50 years old is banned. Make sure you get a certificate to prove that purchases that look old are in fact recently made.

Hebrida Market Place (Map p62; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) An exciting spot, jam-packed with hand-painted clothes, woven bags and mats.

L'atelier (☎ 23654) Alongside Hebrida Market Place, a good spot for wooden carvings and handicrafts.

Philippe Metois Photography (Map p62; ☎ 23 361; worldofwondervu@vanuatu.com.vu) Close to Goodies (p63); has gorgeous photos of Vanuatu for sale – unframed and framed, souvenir prints and artwork.

Diana Tam Gallery (Map p62; ☎ 23038; www.diana.tam.info; Pango Rd; ☎ 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-4pm Sat) Signposted off the road to Pango, this delightful studio/gallery has original oil paintings, prints and glassware. See examples on the website.

Vanuatu Cultural Centre (Map p62; ☎ 22129; www.vanuatuculture.org; vks@vanuatu.com.vu; National Museum, Rue d'Artois; adult/child 500/100Vt; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Has videos about ni-Van legends and festivals, plus CDs including *Ol Voes Blong Vanuatu* (Voices of Vanuatu, 2300Vt), that make great mementos.

Tanua Vanuatu (Lini Hwy; tanua@vanuatu.com.vu) The *tamanu* nut is indigenous to Vanuatu – it tastes a bit like a chestnut. The oil is used in a range of products from the medicinal to antimosquito products, shampoos and soaps.

Vila is the country's only duty-free port and prices are on par with other duty-free places around the world. Most shops selling duty-free products are on Lini Hwy: La Cave du Gourmet sells alcohol, cigarettes and gifts; Proud's sells perfume, cosmetics, jewellery (including South Sea pearls) and fine porcelain.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

International flights (see p332 for airlines) arrive at Vanuatu's international airport, Bauerfield, 6km from Port Vila where there's an ANZ ATM, an NBV bank, a café, and duty-free shopping (but it's cheaper in town). If you haven't organised accommodation, **Vanuatu Standby Accommodation** (www.vanuastandbyaccommodation.com), in a booth at the airport, can arrange it on the spot.

Vila is a port of entry for boats. **Yachting World** (yachtingworld@iname.com) at Waterfront Bar & Grill contacts all authorities for yacht clearances, and collects the clearance fee (3000Vt). The authorities follow:

Customs (☎ 24544)

Immigration (☎ 22354)

Quarantine (☎ 23130)

See p335 for shipping services.

Vanair has scheduled flights to the outer islands and Unity Airlines has scenic tours or

VANAIR NOTICE

Yu no mas raet long eni samting long plen from em properti blong Vanair. Sapos yu no respectim law ia, bae mifala i putum long hand blong of polis.

charter trips. See p182 for internal flights and p184 for boat travel to the outer islands.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Getting from the airport into town is easy. If you're on a package deal you'll be assigned to a transfer coach. Otherwise, walk out to the waiting shuttle buses and taxis. Tell them your destination and you'll be taken to your door. Shuttle buses and taxis cost around 400Vt per person. If you don't have much luggage, you can catch a minibus from the bus stop for 100Vt.

Car & Motorcycle

Vila has a number of car-hire companies including **Avis** (☎ 22570; Olympic Hotel), **Budget** (☎ 23170; Lini Hwy, Nambatu), **Discount Rentals** (☎ 23242, 24475; Lini Hwy, Nambatu) and **World Car Rental** (☎ 26515; PO Box 1050; Lini Hwy, Anabrou). A one-day hire of a four-seater costs around 6500Vt, including value-added tax (VAT) and insurance, and the companies are open from 7.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday, to noon on weekends. Petrol generally costs about 130Vt per litre.

Scoters can be hired through **Budget** (☎ 23170), **Nautilus Scooter Hire** (☎ 22398; Lini Hwy) and **Zuma Scooter Hire** (☎ 25609, 41000; Lini Hwy). Prices are typically 2800Vt for a half-day and 4100Vt for 24 hours. You will be given the Adventure Map, showing the boundaries between public roads and private tracks.

Minibus

The cheapest way around Vila is to travel by minibus (p185). The main roads are packed with them between 6am and 7.30pm. Flag one down, give your destination and 100Vt, and you'll be dropped at the door.

Taxi

The main taxi stands are beside the market and Iririki Wharf. Just ask what your trip will cost – you'll be given a very fair price.

There are over 200 taxis in Vila, and the service tends to be competitive (p186).

Walking

Traffic drives on the right, so Aussies, Brits and Kiwis should look carefully before crossing the street. Most of Vila's streets are poorly lit at night, and some of the potholes are like tank traps; carry a torch (flashlight) if you're going to be out late.

AROUND PORT VILA

It's easy to get out of Vila. Buses and taxis cost from 200Vt to 1500Vt; Erakor and Hideaway islands both have free ferries.

IFIRA

Ifira is a 10-minute speedboat ride from central Vila. The island covers only 0.5 sq km, yet has 1000 people living on it. They are known for their fine handicrafts, which include canoes, bows and arrows, and fishing spears.

Most of the population is Polynesian and contend that their ancestors reached southern Efate before any Melanesians did. Some Ifirans are descended from Samoan missionaries.

Boats travel between Iririki Wharf and Ifira (200Vt return) throughout the day. There's a secluded and charming beach on the island's southern coast, but, as elsewhere, visitors should ask the chief for permission to swim or explore.

PANGO

This village gets its name from the Samoan missionaries who arrived here in the 1840s from Pago Pago (pronounced 'pango pango'). Pango people were less prepared to accept Christianity than Erakor and Ifiran islanders. They preferred time-honoured traditions, which included killing and eating a trading party of Moso islanders in 1852.

The main cottage industry is weaving mats and bags from pandanus leaves. Fishing is another important activity – you'll see large bamboo fish-traps jutting out from the shore.

The surf is good here and there are usually surfboards for hire, but watch out for reefs. Ask the villagers or the people at Breaka's if you want to ride the waves.

A track cuts northwards across the peninsula to Paradise Cove, a popular sunbathing and snorkelling spot for charter-boat groups. Ask the villagers for directions.

MELE-MAAT

In 1951, Ambrym's volcanoes were looking ready to blow. So 300 villagers from Maat in southeastern Ambrym were resettled in this village, donated to them by the people at Mele.

You see the beautiful **Mele-Maat cascades** (adult/child 1000/500Vt), tumbling and twisting, as you drive along the road towards Klem's Hill – pool after pool of stunningly clear, aquamarine water shaded by rainforest around a 35m waterfall. A little path with guide ropes wobbles up to the top. There are toilets and change rooms at the entrance. **Evergreen** (☎ 23050, 42005; www.evergreen.com.vu; 2600Vt; ☎ 9.30am & 2pm) offers tours that include Mele-Maat Village and the Secret Gardens (p69) as well as drinks and tropical fruit.

HIDEAWAY ISLAND (MELE)

Barely 200m across the water from Mele Beach is Hideaway Island (free ferry; entry 500Vt). It's a fun place with a dive centre (p56) and the world's only **Underwater Post Office** (www.underwaterpost.com). Hire snorkel gear at the sports desk (per day 800Vt), take a ride over the reef in a glass-bottom boat (adult/child 1000/500Vt), or hire a kayak/catamaran (per hour 1000Vt/1500Vt). The small coral beach gets very crowded some days and you need reef shoes to walk into the water and swim.

SLEEPING & EATING

Worawia Holiday Haven (☎ 25498; www.resort-vanuatu.com; admin@resort-vanuatu.com; dm/s/d with breakfast 3300/6500/9000Vt; ☎) Self-contained bungalows, all green and white woven bamboo, sit around a fun pool with a swim-up bar. It has a comfortable atmosphere, great for families. Cook for yourself or order from the tiny canteen (meals 580Vt to 1200Vt, open breakfast, lunch or dinner). The dormitory-style bungalow, with four bedrooms around a large sitting area, is perfect for groups. It's an easy amble to a black-sand beach, or Hideaway's ferry. Airport transfers are free.

Benjor Beach Club (☎ 26078; www.benjor.vu; benjor@vanuatu.com.vu; Devils Point Rd; spa villa 21,120Vt, 1-5-bedroom villa 16,960/33,920Vt) A pretty drive

then 13 hectares of gorgeous gardens. Open spaces, swimming holes, along a beachfront with sculpted outcrops and shade trees. And no kidding, an adults-only cove. How coy. Then the villas, glorious like the coast. Soaring shapes, alcoves, atriums, big beds, kids' corners. Transfers are 800Vt.

Paradise Cove Resort (☎ 22701; www.paradisecove.resort.net; paradisecove@vanuatu.com.vu; 1-/2-bedroom bungalow 19,300/23,300Vt; 🏠) A delightful spot with gorgeous traditional bungalows – with every luxury of course, like a little kitchen, too nice to use. Breakfast is served until early afternoon – honeymooners stay here. The resort is tucked away near Pango Point but it's an easy trip into town.

Paradise Cove Italian restaurant (mains 1250-2400Vt; 🕒 7.30am-9pm) Spreads under a soaring natural roof. Take your drinks down to the gazebo, great at sunset, or to your private veranda. Snorkel gear is available, and diving if you're certified.

Breaka's Beach Resort (☎ 23670; www.breakas.com; breakasresort@vanuatu.com.vu; garden/beachfront bungalow 21,000/25,000Vt) Celebrate Vanuatu's traditional architecture: bungalows like little pumpkins, soaring ceilings elsewhere, surf pounding at the edge of the pool. The 'no-one under 15' policy keeps the pool tranquil, while the adults use the toys – surfkite, surfboard, snorkel gear, scuba gear, sailboats, jetski, waterski, bocce, tennis and table tennis.

Hideaway Island Resort (☎ 22963; fax 23867; www.hideaway.com.vu; dm/d 2875/7500Vt, studio/1-/2-bedroom bungalow 13,800/18,750/30,000Vt; 🏠) This place buzzes as divers, snorkellers and boats come and go. The standard rooms open onto a wide veranda where everyone kicks back. Shared facilities are good but there's no communal kitchen. The bungalows are spacious and open with views over the water.

Hideaway Island Restaurant & Bar (mains 1300-1800Vt; 🕒 7am-9pm) By the water's edge. Bruce, the chef, is famous for his curries, and Thursday night's Melanesian feast features a local string band. The ferry comes at night if your bus flashes its lights.

Breaka's Bar & Restaurant (mains 1500-2100Vt; 🕒 7am-11pm) Even if you're not vegetarian you should try the baked *kumula* salad with toasted *nanagae* nuts and honey. The spacious gazebo in the garden is a great place for a drink.

Benjor's Officers Club Bar & Restaurant (mains 1800-2200Vt; 🕒 8am-9.30pm) The food is a fla-

vor treat, like Moroccan spiced chicken on scented couscous. And the desserts – *île flotante*. Well! Interesting New Zealand and French wines to boot. If you're looking for a drinking spot, there's a very happy hour on Friday and Saturday.

AROUND EFATE

SOUTH

Teouma River is Efate's largest river, which drains from Mt MacDonald in the island's north. Rentapao River is southeast of Port Vila, across the Teouma, where the coastal road meets the main road for the second time.

Sights & Activities

Deep water at the bridge makes **Teouma River** a popular swimming spot.

Cutting Edge Adventures (p66) offers excellent half-day kayaking trips on **Rentapao River**.

The **White Sands beach** is fringed with screw-trunked pandanus palms. It's rather exposed but does have a few good snorkelling and swimming spots.

Near Eton, **Eton Blue Hole** (entry 300Vt) is a lovely swimming and snorkelling spot with shade trees, toilets and change room.

Game fishing (per hr 4000Vt) can be arranged through **Bluewater Island Resort** (☎ 27606; www.bluewaterisland.com; info@bluewaterisland.com).

Sleeping & Eating

Bluewater Island Resort (☎ 27606; www.bluewaterisland.com; info@bluewaterisland.com; garden/river/lagoon d & child incl breakfast 9500/11,000/12,000Vt; 🏠 🍷) This large development of 49 shiny and modern bungalows wrapped around a blue lagoon has kayaks, snorkel gear, volley ball, football, tennis and a table-tennis table; transfers are free. There's a lodge that has several double rooms (for 4000Vt) and a communal kitchen. If you're game, you can get in and swim with fish and massive sea turtles in the open-air aquarium (nonguest adult/child 850/425Vt). In a separate pool are beautiful reef sharks.

Bluewater Island restaurant & bar (mains 1200-2750Vt; 🕒 7am-10pm) Large and airy with views of the lagoon and ocean; best to book.

Tamanu on the Beach (☎ 22729; fax 24470; www.tamanuonthebeach.com; admin@tamanu.vu; planters/beachfront d with breakfast 16,500/19,000Vt; 🏠) This

small resort is gorgeous: five luxurious French-colonial cottages with magnificent polished boards running out to little love-nest porches. Use the bikes, the DVD library, games; swim in rock pools or the Pacific Ocean.

Tamanu Restaurant (☎ 22729; mains 2050-2650Vt; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Its good reputation is definitely deserved, and it's so pleasant, set on the beach. Have the seafood Thai curry with green pawpaw to cool the palate: a taste treat.

Getting There & Away

Just past Teouma River, the right-hand turn takes you on the coastal road, which reconnects with the main road near Rentapao River. Ask your taxi driver about the fare before you set out – probably about 2500Vt. Resort buses go back and forth as well.

NORTH

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

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

Sights & Activities

The waters out from **Takara** offer ideal conditions for **kite-surfing**. If it calls you, head out. The prevailing southeast winds are perfect – get daily weather reports from **Beachcomber Resort** (☎ 23576).

Two American WWII fighter planes lie in the shallows close to **Baofatu**. They ran out of fuel coming in to land at Quoin Hill. **Matanawora WWII Relics** are located here – contact **Horizon Tours** (☎ 25600; adult/child 4200/2100Vt) to arrange a tour, which includes swimming and snorkelling around one of the planes.

Visit a cannibal sight, watch men walk on fire or dive off cliffs, see a floating island of stone, the size of a house – **Narasaed Adventure Tours** (☎ /fax 27555; narasaed@vanuatu.com.vu) takes you to a range of unusual experiences, plus normal ones, like fishing, kite-surfing and kayaking. Ask about the local **store** where artists work and exhibit their tapestries, carvings and hand-painted goods.

Chief Joel of Emua village runs the **Island Stream Getaway** (☎ 24786, 42702, ☎ /fax 26445; 5000Vt) tour to snorkel around a plane, and a **kayak adventure**, paddling across to Nguna for a Melanesian lunch then returning in his motorboat.

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

Sleeping & Eating

Bethel Village Adventure (☎ 25161, 43432; PO Box 1152; s/d with breakfast 3550/7100Vt) In a peaceful garden of exotic flowers you can experience a traditional way of life, in these small bamboo bungalows. The shared facilities are crisp clean, with hot water. Join in village activities: weaving, herb use and cooking (learn to bake green bananas – they're revolting), or walk through the coconut groves to the Coral Sea.

Beachcomber Resort (☎ 23576; fax 26458; beach@vanuatu.com.vu; lodge s/d 4400/6800Vt, bungalows from dm/s/d/tr 3000/5300/9000/9600Vt; 🏠) At Takara, Allan Noppert has this great place with a hot mineral pool alongside a cold swimming pool. Hydrotherapy fun. Sprawled well apart along the shoreline is a range of Western bungalows – some are self-contained (single/double/triple 7000/11,500/11,700Vt). From your veranda you will see Emao, Mataso's towering pinnacle, smaller Wot Rock on the right, and misty outlines of the rest of the Shepherds Islands.

Beachcomber Restaurant (mains 1300-2100Vt; 🕒 7.30am-late) The atrium restaurant has its own hot pool and waterfall – swim to your plate of nibbles. Or enjoy perhaps spaghetti Bolognese laced with home-grown garlic.

Nagar Resort (☎ 27986, fax 24936; s/d with breakfast 5000/7000Vt, 2-bedroom family 9500Vt) is very relaxed on a quiet white-sand bay with Nguna and Pele as a backdrop. Your tiny rock-base bungalow between the coconut trees and exotic shrubs is really basic, but the family bungalow is a rambling affair with a kitchen and a bathroom with bathtub! Bikes are

available, and you can camp in the grounds. Transfers are 5000Vt.

Nagar Restaurant (mains 850-1450Vt; ☎ lunch & dinner) A great, licensed place to stop for lunch on a round-island trip; eat alfresco under the trees.

Sara Beach Restaurant (meals 1000Vt; ☎ 10am-3.30pm) Sit under a palm-lined roof in a pretty rock garden on a sandy beach. Any luck, the local bush band will be playing. Meals are local seafood, steak and chicken with *kumula* and rice, and home-baked bread.

Bethel Village Restaurant (meals 1200Vt; ☎ 10am-2pm) In a pretty, open room you can enjoy the garden and taste seafood dishes straight from the ocean to your plate. But you must book.

Getting There & Around

You can do a full circuit with a tour operator (see p69), by taxi (about 12,000Vt), or by hire car. If you go by hire car, fill the tank and check the spare tyre because there are no garages. If it's been raining, ask if your vehicle will make it. There are some slalom moments on the steep hills in the northwest, and a bridge near Epao on the east coast is subject to tidal waters.

If you are staying up north, either take a bus (1000Vt) which leaves the Market in Port Vila at 3pm, or a transport truck (400Vt) which leaves from outside the Hua Chinese Store, near the police station, some time between 12.30pm and 1.30pm, Monday to Friday.

The one-way taxi fare to Emua wharf is 5000Vt. Alternatively, charter aircraft fly to Quoin Hill (20,000Vt), a former American WWII airstrip.

OFFSHORE ISLANDS

There are several stunning islands near Efate's coastline, with small traditional villages hidden in the tropical forests. Hat Island (Eretoka), Lelepa and Tranquillity Island (Moso), off the northwestern shore, are famous fishing, diving and snorkelling spots. It's partly the Big Escape from city life in Vila that draws people to the islands.

Nguna, Pele & Emao are high, steep-sided volcanic islands off Efate's north coast. A fourth island – tiny Kakula – is being developed as a very expensive, very luxurious resort.

Because villagers own the beaches and reefs, joining a tour is the best way to see the islands.

HAT ISLAND (ERETOKA)

Guess what. It looks like a hat. This uninhabited island is the burial place of Chief Roy Mata, whose gravesite is marked by stone walls. It is a significant spiritual site, and tourists may visit with an authorised tour company. Enquire at the Tour Shop (p64).

The exceptionally clear waters, large ocean fish, coral gardens, bommies, underwater caves and deep crevasses make for excellent diving and snorkelling – join **Sailaway Cruises** (p57) on its regular tours.

LELEPA

This island forms one side of the entrance to Havannah Harbour. Much of the island's southeastern coast, and part of its northern shore, is fringed by beautiful **coral gardens**. Lelepa's 350 inhabitants live mainly at Natapao on the south coast.

On the northern tip are the remains of a WWII anti-aircraft gun emplacement, with a crashed Corsair a short distance away. There's a classic white beach on the shore facing Mallao Bay in the northwest, with good snorkelling.

Of particular significance is **Feles Cave** (see www.sailawayvanuatu.com), a sizable, deep cavern on the coast west of Natapao; Roy Mata is believed to have died here in about 1265. Decorating its walls are charcoal drawings of men, fish and birds that have been dated to approximately AD 900.

Lelepa Island Day Tours (p69) is run by Lelepa's locals and a good way to experience this island.

TRANQUILLITY ISLAND (MOSO)

Known for its turtle hatchery, the island has some good bushwalks and dreamy beaches at the back. The resort has a busy dive centre (p57). Stay here, or come on a day trip with **Coongoola Day Cruise** (p66).

Tranquillity Island Resort (☎ 25020; www.southpacdiver.com.vu; drewco@vanuatu.com.vu; s/d/tr12,700/22,400/31,400Vt) has rustic cabins set amid the rainforest with your own private piece of ocean. Bush tracks lead to a turtle hatchery, the dive centre and a sprawling dining room. Everyone eats together and discusses whether they saw the dugongs and turtles.

You can fish off the point, or there are kayaks, outrigger canoes and snorkel gear. Scuba diving from here takes in superb reefs, caves and thermal vents. Rates include transfers and meals; you can camp for 1200Vt.

NGUNA

pop 1200

This little island has a very pretty, traditional village, Taloa, just waiting with lots of accommodation and tourist attractions, to give you a taste of outer island life just a hop and skip from Vila. Locals reckon they run their village successfully because of standards established by New Zealand missionary, Peter Milne. Milne arrived in Nguna in 1870. The local chief was going to eat him, but he was so charismatic that the chief put dinner on hold and he stayed on. But it was tense and his son was later killed.

Festivals

March 5 Chiefs' day, with dances all day and *kastom* pig killing.

July 19 Celebration of the life of Peter Milne.

Sights & Activities

Nguna has a long white-sand **beach** on its northwestern side and a marine protected area around the south, with a labelled snorkel trail, past rich exotic coral gardens with all sorts of fish.

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

Utanlangi, by a sheltered cove, is the best place from which to climb the extinct volcano **Mt Taputaora** (593m) – the name is Polynesian for 'sacred grass', as reeds once grew on its flat summit. The climb is long and arduous, but you'll be rewarded with superb panoramas over the Shepherd Islands and much of Efate.

Great fun is going in an outrigger canoe to watch the villagers **turtle tagging**. Sponsor your very own turtle, name it, and see it back into the ocean. Whenever your turtle is seen, you are notified. Wan Smol Bag Theatre (p74) is a major sponsor.

The **Giant Clam Garden** was inspired by the one at the Maskelynes (p117). Clams and trachus spawn in a large concrete hatchery.

MOVING THE DEAD

The Peace Corps worker at the marine laboratory on Nguna noticed a lot of dead batteries on the reef. Not good. So he applied for, and received, a charger and set of rechargeable batteries. He rents the batteries to the villagers. When they go flat (the batteries, not the villagers) he uses his solar panel to recharge them. No more lead on the reef. Now the project is in line to win the World Challenge, where Shell Petrol gives US\$12,000 to help maintain Marine Protected Areas.

You're welcome to spend time in the chief's magnificent **nakamal** that was built over 200 years ago. It has huge log supports and a soaring roof, and is one of the last of its kind.

Sleeping & Eating

Woman's Guesthouse (☎ 22219; s 2300Vt) Two bedrooms and a kitchen open onto a comfortable sitting area; a large veranda looks out onto the little white-rock-lined path. Out on the back veranda is a laundry, shower and flush toilet. Meals (500Vt) are available: chunky fresh bread and jam at breakfast and fried chicken or fish with local veg for lunch or dinner.

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

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

Getting There & Around

Beaches and reefs are owned by the villagers, so it's best to visit with a tour group. Pele can be visited through Destination Pacific Islands and Emao through the Adventure Centre (p64).

Boats to Nguna, Pele and Emao leave from Emua wharf, next to Paonangisu village. Transport trucks from Vila leave from outside the Hua Chinese Store, near the police station, some time between 12.30pm and 1.30pm, Monday to Friday (400Vt). The truck

connects with a boat to the island (400Vt). The return trip is early in the morning.

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