



Ecotourism Melanesia

Explore Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific

EM208A 2024 SEPIK CROCODILE FESTIVAL AND MT HAGEN SHOW TOUR 15 NIGHTS SUN04AUG-MON19AUG 2024

Sepik Crocodile Festival pre-tour extension 5 nights Wewak/Sepik 04-09AUG USD 2460 p/p + flights
Core tour 10 nights Madang, Goroka, Mt Hagen Show 09AUG-19AUG USD 5825 p/p + flights

This is a fully escorted sign-up (open) small group tour for solo travellers and couples.

The Sepik Crocodile festival is offered as a separate add-on because the very basic accommodation, hot humid weather and “adventure travel” conditions at the Sepik River are not everyone’s cup of tea.

Group size for the festival prelude is limited to 8 because of charter aircraft load limits. If there is enough demand, two parallel groups with separate guides and separate air charters will operate. Maximum group size for the core tour is 16.

The Sepik Crocodile Festival is a small rural festival with amazing local tribal dances that you won’t see at the Mt Hagen Show or other festivals, and very few tourists. The event was originally an initiative of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and aims to promote sustainable harvesting of the wild crocodile population. The Festival takes place at Ambunti a small township on the border of the Middle and Upper Sepik where WWF’s conservation activities are focused, and is scheduled 5th - 7th August each year which falls in the middle of the local “dry” season when there is less rain than other months, and (hopefully) less mosquitoes. Reaching Ambunti overland from Wewak by road and river transport takes about 8 hours which is why a 45 minute flight by light aircraft is much preferred for at least one way. Travel challenges plus the limited, Spartan accommodation options at Ambunti are the main issues discouraging conventional tourists from attending this festival. Consequently less than 100 intrepid visitors make it to the festival each year. Our escorted small group tour is designed for hardy cultural tourists and serious amateur photographers who can cope with basic accommodation, simple local food and the hot humid weather of the steamy Sepik Basin without the comforts of air-conditioning and iced drinks. The payoff is excellent close-up ethno-photography with opportunities for candid portrait, group and action shoots not possible elsewhere as some of the cultural groups from very remote Sepik villages will perform only at this festival once a year.

Apart from the Sepik Crocodile Festival, the core tour itinerary takes in some highlights of Madang and Goroka, ending with the iconic Mt Hagen Show. Accommodation in Wewak, Madang and Goroka is in the best available hotels but due to price gouging by the bigger hotels in Mt Hagen during Show weekend we stay in clean and comfortable 2 star motels.

Note: The Sepik add-on is a “wet foot” tour that involves climbing in and out of motor canoes, some squelching in mud, some scrambling up riverbanks and sleeping in basic accommodation without electricity several nights in a row, so some physical agility and mental resilience is required.



TOUR COST

GROUND PACKAGE

Sepik festival pre-tour extension 5 nights USD 2460 per person twin-share or willing-to-share (single supp \$370)
Core tour ground package 10 nights USD 5825 per person twin-share or willing-to-share (single supp \$1450)

INTERNAL AIR

15 nights itinerary (Core tour + Sepik pre-tour):

Port Moresby-Wewak + Wewak-Ambunti + Wewak-Madang + Mt Hagen-Port Moresby = USD 1200

10 nights itinerary (Core tour only):

Port Moresby-Madang + Mt Hagen-Port Moresby = USD 600

Internal air is priced as a flat rate package and must be purchased from Ecotourism Melanesia in conjunction with your ground package to afford us full control over rebooking / reissuing of flights for the group in the event of itinerary changes or flight disruptions.

Deposit requirements: 25% of the ground package plus 100% of internal air is required at the time of booking to confirm your place on the tour and the balance is due 6 weeks before departure. Pricing is subject to change prior to final payment. Full terms and conditions are printed on page 2 of your quotation.

TOUR INCLUSIONS - SEPIK RIVER PRE-TOUR EXTENSION 5 NIGHTS

- Wewak - two nights 3.5 star hotel with breakfast (In-Wewak Boutique Hotel or alternative)
- Wewak - charter flight to Sepik River (Ambunti)
- Sepik River - three nights village guest house accommodation (1 star twin-share or multi-share with clean bedding, outdoor bathroom, local-style meals, bottled/boiled water, possibly some electricity)
- Sepik River - two days excursions to the Sepik Crocodile Festival with entry pass, guides and bottled water
- Sepik River - motor canoe trip to Kanganamun village with village tour
- Sepik River - motor canoe trip to Timbunke or Kanduanam road head with overland (bus) connection to Wewak
- all fees and gratuities for local guides, helpers, village demonstrators
- accompanying company tour leader to escort and manage daily arrangements
- 24-hour back-up assistance from our office in Port Moresby
- various hidden costs like local permissions, retainers for local area reps, gear and supplies air-freighted from Port Moresby and stored in Wewak, and a tour development levy to recoup our outlays for designing, reconnoitring, organising and monitoring this remote area program

TOUR INCLUSIONS - CORE TOUR 10 NIGHTS

- Port Moresby - meet and greet, assist with arrival connection
- Madang - meet and greet, transfer to accommodation
- Madang - three nights 3.5 star accommodation with breakfast (Madang Resort Hotel or alternative)
- Madang - full day town and harbour tour as per itinerary or similar (possible snorkelling) with lunch
- Madang - full day seaside village and rainforest trip with lunch
- Goroka - two nights 3.5 star accommodation with breakfast (Bird of Paradise Hotel or alternative)
- Goroka - full day sightseeing and village tours as per itinerary or similar with lunch
- Goroka - scenic road transfer to Mt Hagen with village stops and lunch
- Mt Hagen - four nights 2 star accommodation with breakfast (Hagen Travellers Inn or alternative)
- Mt Hagen - full day local tour as per itinerary or similar with lunch
- Mt Hagen - full day excursion to Paiya village private sing-sing with lunch
- Mt Hagen - two days excursions to the Mt Hagen Show with tourist pass and light lunch
- Port Moresby - one night 3.5 star accommodation with breakfast (Holiday Inn Express or alternative)
- all hotel / airport transfers
- all fees and gratuities for local guides, helpers, village demonstrators
- accompanying company tour leader to escort and manage daily arrangements
- 24-hour back-up assistance from our office in Port Moresby

EXCLUSIONS

- hotel dinners (pay as you go)
- bar drinks including bottled water at your hotel (pay as you go)
- tips (not expected, and only appropriate for exceptional service)
- souvenirs and items of a personal nature

TOUR ITINERARY - SEPIK CROCODILE FESTIVAL PRELUDE 5 NIGHTS

DAY 1: SUN 04 AUG 2024



ARRIVAL AT WEWAK (town tour)

Arrive in Port Moresby by air from Cairns, Brisbane, Sydney, Singapore, Hong Kong or Manila. Staff from Ecotourism Melanesia will meet you on arrival and assist you to transfer to your domestic connection to Wewak, hopefully arriving in time for lunch. **Available connections to Wewak today (we will ticket):**
CG1624 0830/1125 or PX128 0850/1215 or PX120 1120/1240 or PX140 1505/1625

On arrival in Wewak you will be met by the hotel shuttle and our local guide for transfer to the hotel for lunch (included).

After lunch if time and weather allow our local guide will take you for a drive around Wewak town area then 14km west of Wewak town to Cape Wom (Wom Beach) which is the site of the Wom Memorial Park, the location of the official Japanese WW2 surrender in New Guinea. At Wom are also the overgrown remains of the Wom WW2 airstrip, some caved in Japanese tunnels, and some preserved field guns.

Overnight In-Wewak Boutique Hotel or alternative, Wewak includes breakfast

DAY 2: MON 05 AUG 2024



WEWAK / AMBUNTI (Sepik Crocodile Festival)

06:00 Early breakfast in the restaurant and check out of your room. Large bags not required on the tour may be stored at the hotel reception until you return.

06:30 Transfer by hotel shuttle to Wewak airport, MAF charter terminal.

07:30 MAF light aircraft charter (Cessna C208 Grand Caravan 10 seater) departs for Ambunti airstrip on the border of the Middle and Upper Sepik.

08:30 On arrival at Ambunti airstrip carriers will help store your bags in a safe place while you take an orientation walk around the little township then settle in at the festival venue to watch part of the first day's program.

Although the 5th August is officially the first day of the festival it is usually taken up with speeches, games of tug-of-war, races for school children and other community events. The sing-sing program (traditional dancing) usually commences in earnest on the second day.

In the afternoon after watching some of the activities and having a boxed lunch supplied by the hotel you will make your way to the riverside and board your waiting motor canoes for the trip 30 minutes downstream to Avatip village.

Avatip is one of the largest villages on the Sepik and has a traditional style village guest house. Tour the village and settle in to your accommodation and enjoy some evening entertainment before and after dinner.

Overnight Avatip village guest house, Middle Sepik includes dinner and breakfast

NOTE: Mosquitoes are not usually too bad along the Sepik in August because it is dry season which prevents breeding in the brackish water that they prefer, but the situation can vary from year to year and from place to place so no promises ☺ and you should bring plenty of "nuclear strength" repellent and take a course of presumptive treatment for malaria before you travel home (we can supply).

DAY 3: TUE 06 AUG 2024



AMBUNTI (Sepik Crocodile Festival)

Today is the second day of the festival which is usually the best day of cultural programs and there will be performances in both the morning and afternoon. After breakfast board your motor canoe for transfer from Avatip back to Ambunti. Our local guides will escort you to the festival venue and help you navigate the crowds, hold your stuff for you while you chase the best shots with your camera, and “gopher” your food and drink on request. The tour leader will have bottled water available at the venue but no organised lunch is provided today - you can buy and try local foods from the many food stalls at the venue which will include fresh fruit, cooked fish and vegetables, scones and puddings, local style donuts etc. Be prepared for rain to interrupt the program. Late afternoon, return to Avatip.

Overnight Avatip village guest house, Middle Sepik includes dinner and breakfast

NOTE: Much of your canoe travel will be in blazing hot sun (and/or rain !) so wear long sleeves, plenty of sunscreen, a hat, sunglasses and even hold an umbrella to keep the sun off you while sitting in the canoe. Beware also of the sun's reflection off the water.

DAY 4: WED 07 AUG 2024



AMBUNTI (crocodile festival) / KANGANAMUN

This morning you'll enjoy the morning program of the last day at the crocodile festival. Lunch once again is pay-as-you-go at the venue.

In the afternoon your motor canoe will transfer you downstream 2 hours ride to Kanganamun village in the heart of the latmul tribe territory where the men identify themselves with their tribal animal totem - the crocodile - by scarring their bodies to look like crocodile skin.

Tour the village which boasts the largest Spirit House on the Sepik where you will see many tribal artifacts - some are made for sale while others are tribal heirlooms not available for sale.

At the Spirit house you'll hear local guides talk about life along the river and especially the crocodile animist religion.

Some men may show you the “crocodile skin bumps” on their backs and some young men who have recently been initiated may show you their fresh scars. Here at Kanganamun Spirit House you will also hear flute and drum players perform and have a local style lunch.

Overnight Kanganamun village guest house, Middle Sepik includes dinner and breakfast



DAY 6: THU 08 AUG 2024



KANGANAMUN / WEWAK

This morning motor another hour downstream to Kaminabit. Some years ago the old spirit house at Kaminabit slipped into the river due to erosion of the riverbank but the beautifully carved support poles were rescued and used as the foundation for a new spirit house built a safer distance back from the shoreline which you'll be able to visit. Another attraction at Kaminabit is Bowie's Art Centre, a small artefact shop owned by a local villager that offers a wide range of Sepik carvings, woven crafts and crocodile tooth necklaces at very good prices (cash only of course). Being located near the junction of the Sepik with the Korosameri River leading up to the Blackwater Lakes and Karawari River, Kaminabit is something of a trade crossroads which enables Bowie's to purchase traditional art from a number of different Sepik tribal peoples passing by on their way to either Pagwi or Angoram. Another hour downstream you will stop at the "carving factory" village of Tambanum then onwards to the road head at Timbunke or Kanduanam (depending on which road is passable at the time) where you will switch to your waiting vehicle for the overland journey back to Wewak (4 hours)

Overnight In-Wewak Boutique Hotel or alternative, Wewak includes breakfast

DAY 7: FRI 09 AUG 2024



WEWAK / MADANG

Check out of your hotel and transfer on the hotel shuttle to Wewak airport for your flight to Madang
PX129 1240/1330 or CG1603 1435/1535
Depending on the actual flight time on the day, lunch will be at the hotel, in flight (boxed lunch provided by hotel) or on arrival at Madang.

On arrival in Madang, commence Core Tour Itinerary

TOUR ITINERARY - CORE TOUR 10 NIGHTS

DAY 7: FRI 09 AUG 2024



ARRIVE MADANG

"Core tour only" clients joining the tour today:
Arrive in Port Moresby by air from Cairns, Brisbane, Sydney, Singapore, Hong Kong or Manila. Staff from Ecotourism Melanesia will meet you on arrival and assist you to transfer to your domestic connection to Madang.
Available connections to Madang today (we will ticket):
PX128 0850/1100 or CG1602 1000/1235 or PX112 1520/1650

On arrival in Madang you will be met by the hotel shuttle and our local guide for transfer to the hotel in time for lunch (included).
If time and weather allow our local guide will take you for a familiarisation drive around Madang.

Overnight Madang Resort Hotel, Madang includes breakfast

DAY 8: SAT 10 AUG 2024



MADANG (town and harbour tour)

07:00 Breakfast at the hotel

08:00 Commence today's exploring of Madang town and surrounds.

First up see a fine array of Madang handicrafts at the Madang Resort carver's hut and orchid gardens then stop at the town centre for a browse through the fresh produce market. A poke around in a typical Chinese store is also a must! Also in the town centre you will see Madang's resident flying fox colony, a love-them-or-hate-them crowd of noisy bickering creatures that inhabits a copse of trees in the town square.

Down on the foreshore, stop at the Coastwatcher's Lighthouse, Machine Gun beach, and the lovely tidal lily ponds of the Madang inlet and the Gold Club lily ponds. The Coastwatchers Memorial Lighthouse flashes the Madang harbour signal out to sea at night and is an iconic feature of Madang - somewhat resembling a life-size space rocket - located next to "Machine Gun Beach", a sheltered swimming beach featuring a number of wartime artillery relics

Further out of town, stop at the Madang culture museum (toilets available) and the pretty Balek Grotto (see left) which is a cold water sulfur spring where you can feed turtles and eels - the site was used for some scenes in the Pierce Brosnan film Robinson Crusoe. You can take a short walk through the surrounding tropical gardens and patch of rainforest where you may come across birds and other fauna.

12:30 Lunch at the hotel (included)

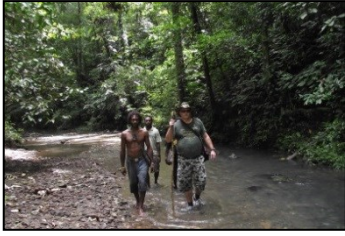
1:30 Board a motor boat for a sightseeing and snorkelling excursion in the Madang lagoon. The tour will take in the Madang inner harbour and port with its sheltered waterways and tidal lagoons and also the giant outer Madang Lagoon which has many small islands, some inhabited by village communities while others are home to birds and crabs only.

Stops can include Alexishafen (German mission station occupied by the Japanese in WW2 then destroyed and rebuilt by the Allies) and Pik Island, a lovely place to swim and snorkel over the colourful reef (gear supplied).

Overnight Madang Resort Hotel, Madang includes breakfast



DAY 9: SUN 11 AUG 2024



MADANG (seaside village and rainforest bat cave excursion)

07:00 Breakfast

08:00am Commence today's tour with a drive out of town past the airport and turn off at the side road up Nobnob ridge to the Nobnob lookout which offers panoramic views of the Madang coastline - Madang town and lagoon to the south east and Karkar Island to the north.

Back on the main road, drive further out the North Coast road to Rempi Lagoon, a picturesque coastal lagoon protected by a line of tiny islands running parallel to the beach. More of the Robinson Crusoe movie was shot here at Rempi Lagoon and in the adjacent rainforest on shore.

On arrival at Wargidan village the locals will welcome you then paddle you out to the little islands in a native dugout canoe and you can do some exploring then paddle back to shore again. Don't hesitate to ask for your turn with the paddle, it's great fun even if you go around in circles ▢ The local dugout canoes have stabilising outrigger arms which prevent them from tipping over. And wherever you see a flash of brilliant colours in the water you can jump out with a mask and snorkel for a spot of reef snorkelling.

Back at Wargidan village a local style seafood lunch is prepared for you with some fish barbequed under hot stones or coals and some local vegetables cooked with coconut and seafood in traditional clay pots.

After lunch, say farewell to the lagoon and head inland 20 minutes drive to the Warwin Creek rainforest.

Here a 2 hour hike through the pristine rainforest awaits you if you enjoy reasonable physical fitness. There is a steep descent to the creek at the start and a steep climb out of the gully at end, with most of the hike following the verdant creek itself - the walking track crosses the creek many times so you will be up to your ankles or knees in water a lot of the time and your shoes will get thoroughly soaked but fortunately there are no leeches or other nasties in the creek as it is quite fast-flowing.

The hike includes a foray into a limestone cave with stalactites and a small stream running through it. The cave is inhabited by thousands of tiny bats which feed off insects. You may even spot a small python lying in wait for a hapless bat. Your guide will provide flashlights for exploring the cave. Further downstream from the cave is a lovely swimming hole with a series of pretty cascades where you can jump in for a fun swim before completing the hike by climbing back up to the road. If you are not a good hiker, a shorter forest walk on flat ground is available, skipping the creek and the bat cave.

Late afternoon, drive back to the hotel in time to catch the tropical sunset before dinner.

Overnight Madang Resort Hotel, Madang includes breakfast



DAY 10: MON 12 AUG 2024



MADANG / GOROKA (scenic road transfer)

07:00 Breakfast and check out

08:00 Board your private car for the 8 hour drive to Goroka, with stops.

The first half of the journey follows the flat coastal highway with Astrolabe Bay on the left and many roadside villages with market stalls to your right.

The road passes through some delicious patches of tropical jungle but these soon give way to the open ground of the Transgogol, a wide river plain enveloping the Gogol and Nuru Rivers and their mess of tributaries which dump mud everywhere during the wet season. Fortunately however the mud is nutritional volcanic soil from upstream and much of the Transgogol floodplain has been planted with hardy oil palms that cope well with floods.

The highway loosely follows the Nuru River south west for fifty kilometres through hilly terrain as far as Usino where the river peters out and the highway takes a wide bend through 90 degrees to follow the Ramu River valley south east towards Lae. The Ramu Valley is an agricultural wonderland with farms galore. Sugar cane fields, cattle grazing country.

Shortly after the Ramu Sugar Factory the highway crosses the Ramu River for the first time and enters the Morobe Province for about 10 kilometres until the highway forks with one prong heading straight down to Lae and the right turn taking you up through the precipitous Kassam Pass to the Yonki Dam. As your car climbs up into the PNG Highlands you may notice the change in atmosphere as you pass through the temperature inversion layer from the steamy coastal tropics to the cool dry air of the highlands.

Lunch today will be a boxed lunch provided by your hotel (included) and you are welcome to stop the car at any point to buy any goodies you see at roadside markets.

Your driver will make a lunch stop at the Yonki Dam where you can eat your packed lunch (if you have not already devoured it in the bus!). Apart from the lunch stop your guide will schedule a few other comfort stops during the journey but don't expect anything flash (or flushing) ☺

16:00 On arrival in Goroka settle into your accommodation then your guide will lead you on a leg-stretching walk around the nearby streets to check out any lingering markets and visit a shop for any needful things.

Overnight Bird of Paradise Hotel, Goroka includes breakfast



DAY 11: TUE 13 AUG 2024



GOROKA (town and villages tour)

07:00 Breakfast at the hotel

08:00 Meet up with your guide at reception and commence some sightseeing around Goroka town including:

- Mt Kiss lookout (see most of Goroka town and the adjacent Asaro Valley)
- JK McCarthy Museum of Highlands Culture (if open)
- fresh produce market (vegetables, pigs, chickens)
- handicrafts market (woven bilum bags are the best buy)

Later drive 30 minutes out of town to the Asaro Valley, home of the famed Asaro mud men. Here you will be treated to a private mud men performance - a little corny but a lot of fun and great photography. The Asaro people have long had a tradition of crafting fierce looking clay helmets worn during tribal fights in the old days to frighten the enemy. The helmets are also worn for traditional dancing and drama performances demonstrating how their ancestors confronted enemy tribes wearing their scary mud helmets, their bodies smeared with grey mud, looking like evil ghosts. After the dance (or "prance") you'll be shown how the clay helmets are made, and you'll have an opportunity to try one on yourself. An added bonus will be a cane-swallowing ritual performed by men from the Bena tribe. Lunch (if you can stomach it) will be served at your guide's home at Asaro - meat and vegetables roasted in bamboo

From Asaro, drive 30 minutes further to Kenadi village where the people live an even more traditional lifestyle in round huts made of bush materials. The village is a typical rural highlands community with smoky cooking fires and pigs wandering around. At the village you'll be welcomed by locals in traditional dress and walk by a number of homes to see locals engaged in different daily chores and activities including cooking, house building, making and using bows and arrows, weaving "bilum" string bags, fashioning "kundu" hand drums from hollow logs and a special demonstration of funerary rites. On the land around the village you'll see people engaged in vegetable gardening (the highlands climate is perfect) and tending their coffee crops. Organic coffee grown on smallholder blocks is the major local cash crop.

17:30 Return to hotel

Overnight Bird of Paradise Hotel, Goroka includes breakfast



DAY 12: WED 14 AUG 2024



GOROKA / MT HAGEN (road transfer with village stops)

08:00 Check out of the hotel and load your bags in our charter bus for 08:30 departure to Mt Hagen Goroka. Normally the drive takes 4 hours but today's transfer will take the whole day with sightseeing and lunch stops en route. The Highlands Highway runs west from Goroka, passing first through the fertile Asaro Valley then up a winding mountainside to Daulo Pass, a high altitude biodiversity hotspot where the road curls through swirling mists past giant tree ferns and trickling waterfalls. Near the peak of the pass, you will leave your vehicle at the road side and a village guide will lead you on a 30 minute walk through the moss forest, still enveloped in morning fog and dripping with condensation. The forest is populated by flowering trees and tree ferns which form a substrate for the growth of a wide variety of saprophytic native orchids, green mosses and colourful fungi, lichens, liverworts and leafy epiphytes. From Daulo the highway continues climbing in a westerly direction, across the border into Chimbu (Simbu), an alpine province where the people are jokingly said to have one leg longer than the other to enable them to work in their gardens on the steep hillsides. One of the first Chimbu villages encountered is the "snake village" where locals have a penchant for keeping snakes in cages as pets and, yes, taking them out of their cages to play with them. Some of the snakes are venomous so it seems like a rather risky pastime to us. You'll have an opportunity to watch the people handling their snakes and talk to them about their unusual pets, or, if serpents are not your thing, you can cover in the tour vehicle ▢

Around noon, stop at the "pub" (hotel) in Kundiawa town for lunch (included) - there is a basic short-order menu available including toasted sandwiches, fish and chips, roast chicken with salad, curry chicken etc.

One hour's drive further west brings you to Mindima village. The people here are of the Omo Masalai tribe and, like the Asaro mud men, have a tradition of painting their bodies with clay to frighten their enemies. But the Mindima version of clay body painting is all about skeleton art.

Both men and women paint macabre skeleton designs on their bodies and even have a number of dances to go with the image.

The Mindima skeleton dancers are very popular at the Mt Hagen and Goroka Shows (festivals) each year and often walk away with the top prizes in the sing-sing competitions. Today you'll experience an exuberant performance of skeleton dancers who will also be happy to pose for some great photography, and also see a demonstration of the tribal courtship tradition called "karim leg".

Back on the highway you'll soon cross the border into Jiwaka, a rather nondescript province that is dominated by the Waghi River valley with its market gardens, coffee and tea plantations of the Waghi Valley. This valley is often called the "food bowl" of PNG because of the intensive agricultural activities and in fact at the village of Kuk near Mt Hagen archaeologists found evidence that the area has been planted with food crops for thousands of years.

Finally you arrive at Mt Hagen a busy inland city thronging with crowds during the day but surprising quiet at night after all the market sellers and loiterers have gone home to their surrounding villages.

Overnight 2.5* hotel, Mt Hagen includes breakfast (Hagen Travellers Inn or similar)

DAY 13: THU 15 AUG 2024



MT HAGEN (full day excursion)

Commence today's touring with a drive out the Kuminga back road past peri-urban villages, roadside markets, market garden plots and coffee plantations to Mt Ambra which offers scenic views of Mt Hagen then around the back of the airport past the Show Grounds to the Highlands Highway and east to Kindeng farming community. Here you'll have candid opportunities to mingle and chat with local people engaged in small scale agricultural activities such as marketing gardening, fish farming and raising livestock. Families from a number of different areas of the highlands have settled at Kindeng which makes it quite a diverse community.

From Kindeng you'll drive back into town and turn south on the Kum Road out to Rondon Ridge for a guided walk through the magnificent orchid gardens and adjacent forest reserve. The Raggiana bird of paradise is common in this area and there is a good chance of seeing or at least hearing one in the wild (they have a very loud call).

After a lunch stop (TBA) visit Moika or Ogelbeng village and take a walking tour of the village and gardens, go inside a family hut, meet local people and children doing their everyday thing and photograph some villagers in full costume and body paint. You'll also see a display of tribal "treasures" which have been passed between families for generations for the settlement of marriages and conflicts, including "moka kina" mother of pearl, cowrie shells transported from the coast, animal bones and teeth, brilliant bird feathers (and even sun-dried whole birds!), stone and shell "money".

Return to the hotel before the afternoon rain begins.

Overnight 2.5* hotel, Mt Hagen includes breakfast (Hagen Travellers Inn or similar)

NB If you have a particular interest in birds you may wish to buy a copy of "Birds of New Guinea", available in Port Moresby from major hotel gift shops.



DAY 14: FRI 16 AUG 2024



MT HAGEN (Paiya village sing-sing)

07:00-07:30 Pick up at your accommodation for the scenic drive through typical highlands countryside to Paiyakona (Paiya) village where a private sing-sing performance for overseas visitors is held the Friday before each Mt Hagen Show. Arriving before the sing-sing commences you can watch the performers adorning themselves with feathers, shells and ochre paints in preparation for dancing. The performers will be happy to show and tell about their traditional dress (“bilas”) and pose for photographs without expecting payment. About 10 different dancing groups will perform, mainly from the Highlands, including the Huli wigmen, the Melpa tribe stompers and the Enga tribe with their wide black wigs. Some of the groups will also perform at the Mt Hagen Show on the weekend.

The Paiya sing-sing includes a “mumu” lunch cooked under hot stones at the sing-sing grounds, and a tour of the cultural displays at Paiya village including the men’s spirit house and the ancestors’ skull house which really is an ossuary full of dozens of skulls. Some traditional customs like courtship ritual and mourning rites may also be demonstrated.

The advantage of attending this private sing-sing in addition to the Mt Hagen Show itself is the village environment which makes the experience more authentic, the smaller crowd from just the one village area is easy to socialise with, and the photography in the bush setting without buildings, fences and advertising signs in the background is much more rewarding.

If the afternoon rains hold off after the sing-sing your tour bus will drive you further west along the Highlands Highway as far as the border between Western Highlands and Enga Province, then return to Mt Hagen. On the outward drive please note any photo stops you’d like to make on the way back and notify the guide or driver.

Overnight 2.5* hotel, Mt Hagen includes breakfast (Hagen Travellers Inn or similar)

DAY 15: SAT 17 AUG 2024



MT HAGEN (Mt Hagen Show)


07:00-07:30 Pick up at your accommodation for the 30 minute drive to the show grounds. Our staff will have already been out there earlier in the morning to set up a marquee and chairs for you. Arriving before the start of the show, you’ll be able to walk among the performers and capture some candid photos as they apply their face paint and body decorations.

The program usually begins around 09:00am with half an hour of speeches followed by a grand parade with all participating cultural groups marching around the arena several times. The rest of day will loosely follow a printed schedule of individual group appearances, usually with three or four different groups performing in different areas of the arena at the same time because with 80-100 different cultural groups attending each year there are too many to fit in a weekend program if performing one by one. Tourist pass holders are permitted to enter the arena to take close-up photographs but do try to avoid getting in the way of other tourists’ cameras. We will have extra guides on hand to describe and explain the dances for you and accompany you around the arena (and side shows) if you need help with your camera gear etc.

Bottled water and a supply of fruit and bakery snacks is supplied for lunch today (fresh lunches cannot be delivered because of the crowd and traffic gridlock outside the show ground gates by mid-morning).

Mid-afternoon as the daily downpour looms, your group will pack up and depart the show before the end of the program in order to avoid the exit chaos. Drop off directly at your accommodation or linger at one of the coffee shops in town to unwind and inspect your photographic loot from the day.

Overnight 2.5* hotel, Mt Hagen includes breakfast (Hagen Travellers Inn or similar)

<p>DAY 16: SUN 18 AUG 2024</p> 	<p>MT HAGEN (Mt Hagen Show) / PORT MORESBY 07:00-07:30 Pick up at your accommodation for the second day of the Show. The program will feature some different cultural groups from yesterday and of course the judgment and prize-giving at the end. However your group will leave at noon or earlier today to beat the traffic gridlock and make it back to your hotel to collect your bags and proceed to the airport for your flight to Port Moresby. Flying out today beats the flight chaos of the Monday after the Mt Hagen Show which typically leaves you 50% likely to experience a cancellation, delay or being offloaded from an overbooked flight. Fly PX187 Mt Hagen to Port Moresby 1445/1545 and on arrival transfer on hotel shuttle to your hotel</p> <p>Overnight 3.5* hotel, Port Moresby includes breakfast (Holiday Inn Express or similar)</p>
<p>DAY 17: MON 19 AUG 2024</p>	<p>MT HAGEN (Mt Hagen Show) / PORT MORESBY Transfer on the hotel shuttle to Port Moresby airport for your onward flight. Staff from Ecotourism Melanesia will be on hand at the airport to assist and farewell you.</p> <p>TOUR ENDS</p>

TRIP NOTES - SEPIK RIVER

ABOUT WEWAK

Wewak town (population around 50,000) is the jumping-off point for the Sepik River and the Wewak Islands. A smaller town than Madang, Wewak is less tourist-oriented and the local economy is mainly based on commercial fishing and agriculture. There are three medium sized 3 star hotels and a number of smaller motels and guest houses. From Wewak there are two roads leading to the Sepik River - one to Pagwi on the Middle Sepik and one to Angoram on the Lower Sepik - and charter aircraft operate from Wewak airport to airstrips along the river at Ambunti (Upper Sepik), Timbunke (Middle Sepik) and Karawari (a tributary of the Sepik). From the Wewak waterfront open speed boats travel less than an hour to the offshore Wewak Islands, Muschu and Kairuru.

ABOUT IN-WEWAK BOUTIQUE HOTEL

Situated on a cliff top overlooking the Bismarck Sea the In-Wewak Boutique Hotel is a recently built plantation-style property featuring white-painted rooms with sterile clean bathrooms, white stucco facade, and wide verandahs with stiff sea breezes in the afternoons. By far the best hotel in Wewak, this hotel offers international-standard comfort and service in a small boutique package. The restaurant serves superb local seafood and the a la carte menu is a match for any of the larger hotels in Port Moresby. Breakfast and lunch are served in the café and represent good value. Dinner is served in the larger fine dining restaurant. Dial-up internet, though very slow, is available from user terminals near reception. There is a small but no beach access due to the clifftop location. All rooms are air-conditioned and fitted with a queen size or king size bed or twin beds. www.inwewak.com

ABOUT PAGWI

Pagwi was originally established as a mission station but is now a small rural township with a population about 1,000. There are a couple of trade stores and fuel depots, a small guest house and a police post. The road from Wewak to Pagwi is the lifeline of the Middle Sepik.

ABOUT SEPIK CROCODILES

Known locally as “pook-pooks”, crocodiles play a major part in the lives of the Sepik people. Apart from their centrality to spiritual beliefs, crocodiles are important for the local diet and the village microeconomy. Everywhere in the Sepik River basin, the crocodile is an occasional source of protein for the village diet, and crocodile skins are sold for cash to outside buyers. The collecting of crocodile eggs in the wild and hatching them in crocodile “farms” is an ongoing threat to the wild population. WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) is educating locals about sustainable harvesting of wildlife resources and encouraging them to turn to alternative sources of income such as ecotourism. The two species of crocodile prevalent in the Sepik basin are the common saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) and the New Guinea freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus novaeguineae*). These days the wild populations of both species are retreating to the more remote tributaries of the Sepik that are furthest from their major predator: humans. It is unusual to see crocodiles along the main human-occupied areas of the Sepik River proper these days, as the constant passage of motorised canoes and other small boats has driven the crocodile population up into the backwaters. Very large crocodiles are rare these days and no “monster man-eaters” have been caught in the past 10 years.

ABOUT THE MIDDLE SEPIK CROCODILE CULT

In the Middle Sepik and Blackwater Lakes, crocodiles are revered as spiritual totems symbolising strength and power. In the Middle Sepik Yatmul tribe villages from Korogo down to Kaminabit including Yentchen, Palembang and Kanganaman, the traits of the crocodile are so envied that the men even try to make themselves look like crocodiles. The initiation of young men into adulthood involves a painful scarification ritual during which dozens of small cuts are made all over the back and chest from shoulders to hips, and pockets of skin are lifted away from the flesh (without any anaesthetic). Upon healing, this leaves raised scars that resemble the bumpy dorsal hide of the crocodile. Such initiations take place once or twice per year in each village and are carried out in private for modesty reasons because the young men cannot wear clothes while their scars are healing uncovered. After the cutting they spend two weeks resting and recovering in a special hut, naked with only healing herbs rubbed on their bodies. Women and outsiders in particular are not normally allowed to witness the cutting ceremony or see the initiates naked although recently some villages have started allowing film crews and wealthy tourists to fishbowl the ritual on paying a sizeable fee. Apparently, and hopefully, the fee goes to the initiated boys and their families to help them pay for hosting several days of feasting at the end of the initiation process. Once initiated, the young men gains status in the tribe and may frequent the Haus Tambaran (men's spirit house) to socialise with other initiated men and participate in pagan cult practises such as communing with the ancestors. Yatmul men who are not initiated (eg due to Christian religious beliefs, due to living in the city and not having the opportunity, or due to being frightened of the pain) are not permitted to enter the Haus Tambaran. However in most villages the initiated men do allow outside visitors, including foreign women, to enter the tribal spirit house because outsiders are not under tribal law.

ABOUT SEPIK MOTOR CANOES

The Sepik River and the neighbouring Ramu River are the only places in PNG where you will find motorised longboats or "motor canoes" still in common use. Although previously found in all large rivers around PNG, fibreglass dinghies are now more common along most other rivers. Up to 10 metres in length, Sepik motor canoes are carved from whole tree trunks and take about 3 months to make. On the Sepik River you will see such canoes carrying up to 30 people or large quantities of fuel drums or other cargo weighed right down to the waterline but for comfort and convenience we load only 4 tourists plus baggage and supplies into a medium sized canoe (6-7 metres with a 30hp outboard motor) or 6 tourists plus cargo into a large canoe (8-10 metres with a 40hp engine). We do not own our own canoes: we hire them from local village operators in support of our responsible tourism policy. Sepik motor canoes are very safe and in all our years of operating Sepik River trips we have never known a canoe carrying tourists to capsize or sink. This is because when the makers carve the canoe they leave the wood at the bottom of the canoe very thick and carve the sides and prow thin. This way the centre of gravity remains low and the canoe tends to remain upright and not tip over. For stability reasons we prefer not to place cane armchairs in canoes for tourists to sit on (as do some other tour operators) because when passengers sit high in the canoe this raises the centre of gravity of the canoe and makes it roll from side to side and increases the risk of a passenger toppling out of the canoe when standing up to stretch a cramp or take a photograph. The local people normally sit cross legged right down in the bottom of the canoe and for safety reasons we prefer our travellers to do the same. We'll try to provide a cushion or rolled blanket for you to sit on for comfort. We do provide life jackets and encourage you to wear one even if you are a strong swimmer because the Sepik River has very strong currents that are hard to swim against. Although none of our travellers have fallen out of a canoe efore, if it does happen to you the best strategy is just to float in the current until you are washed onto a sand bank at the next river bend or until the canoe comes around to pick you up. The biggest danger with Sepik canoe travel is sunburn. Apart from applying sunscreen we recommend you wear long sleeves and hold an umbrella or wear a large wide-brimmed hat while travelling in these open canoes. Normally we provide umbrellas. Despite the brown colour of the river it does reflect a lot of solar radiation upwards under your umbrella or the brim of your hat so it is important to apply sunscreen to the undersides of your face and arms as well.

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