



# Ecotourism Melanesia

Explore Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific

## EM3B SEPIK RIVER WEEKENDER OR EXTENSION 2 nights (extendable)

### PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS

#### 2 nights Sepik River (+ one or two transit nights in Wewak depending on flights)

This soft adventure package is a great introduction to the rituals and secrets of the Sepik River. The trip features two overnights in basic village guest houses along the river and may also require at least one transit night in Wewak due to flight schedules.

The trip to the river begins with a four hour road transfer from Wewak to either Kanduanam, Timbunke or Pagwi which are the main jumping off points for water transport along the Lower Middle Sepik. The road trip is followed by motor canoe transfers to various Iatmul tribe villages where you will be able to explore the culture and lifestyle of the people of the "crocodile cult".

*NB This is a "wet foot" remote area tour that involves climbing in and out of small boats, some walking, and overnights in local-style village guest huts without electricity, so some physical agility and mental flexibility is required. Note that this is an original itinerary designed and reconnoitred by Ecotourism Melanesia.*

#### TOUR COST (per person twin-share)

	Group of 1	Group of 2	Group of 4	Group of 6+
Core tour 2 nights Middle Sepik	USD 3200	USD 2000	USD 1500	USD 1100
Extra day/night touring Middle Sepik*	USD 640	USD 360	USD 300	USD 220
Extra day/night Muschu, Kairiru or Yuo Island**	USD 640	USD 360	USD 300	USD 220
Day trip to Muschu or Yuo Island	USD 640	USD 360	USD 300	USD 220
Hotel transit accom Wewak (per night room only)	USD 200	USD 100	USD 100	USD 100
Budget transit accom Wewak (per night room only)	USD 100	USD 50	USD 50	USD 50
Optional airfare supplement POM-WWK-POM****	USD 600	USD 600	USD 600	USD 600

\* eg side trip to Chambri Lake or Yuat River including canoe hire, fuel, guide, village fees, accom, catering

\*\* minimum 2 nights stay, includes boat transfers, guide, village fees, village accom, catering, beach activities / jungle hiking, WW2 relics

\*\*\* flat rate, economy fares, includes our booking fee

Prices subject to change.

#### INCLUSIONS FOR CORE TOUR (2 nights):

- Private road transfers from Wewak to Sepik River with guide
- 2 nights Sepik River canoe trip including motor canoe transport, Sepik River guide and helpers, village entry fees, guest house accommodation, all meals (a mixture of village food and camp food), all bedding and other basic camping gear, bottled or boiled or treated water, toilet tissue and soap, insect killer, umbrellas
- 24-hour tour monitoring and emergency assistance from our Port Moresby office

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## EXCLUSIONS

- airfares (extra cost)
- transit accommodation in Wewak (extra cost)
- meals and drinks in Wewak (pay as you go)
- tips (not expected, and only appropriate for exceptional service)
- souvenirs and items of a personal nature
- Personal items. Bring your own favourite munchies, favourite bath soap, favourite toilet paper, small quick-dry towel, personal medications and first aid kit, personal hygiene requirements, brimmed hat or cap, “amphibious footwear” (sandals or quick-dry canvas shoes), insect repellent, sunscreen, personal flashlight, battery-operated personal fan.

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1:



### PORT MORESBY / WEWAK / SEPIK RIVER

Morning flight Port Moresby to Wewak or fly in the day prior and overnight - depending on available flights for your travel date.

Pick up at Wewak airport or your transit accommodation. Our local guide will drive you by private four wheel drive vehicle to either Kanduanam, Tambanum or Pagwi depending on weather and road conditions. The roads from Wewak are unsealed most of the way and quite bumpy. Your guide will provide water and snacks. On arrival at the river you will settle into a waiting motor canoe and head up or down river to the first village which may be Tambanum, Kaminabit or Korogo depending which jumping off point you have arrived at. Spend the next two days visiting a number of villages of the Middle Sepik crocodile cult region. Very few tourists visit this area - (most head straight Ambunti where the only hotel on the main Sepik River is located). At each village your guide will take you on a walking tour of the village to meeting local people outside their huts doing their usual late afternoon chores - chopping firewood to smoke fresh fish and cook sago for dinner before it gets dark (there is no electricity here and the people can't afford kerosene for lamps). You'll visit one or more men's spirit house and see artisans at work carving weaving and sculpting.

Overnight village guest house at Kaminabit, Kanganaman or Korogo (includes local style meals and bottled or boiled water).

*Your mosquito net or dome tent will give you refuge from insects but the air trapped inside your net or tent quickly becomes hot and stuffy which makes it hard to sleep. Bringing a battery operated personal fan or tent fan is highly recommended.*



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## DAY 2: SEPIK RIVER (village touring)



Areas to be explored today include the twin villages of Palembang and Kanganaman which are located on opposite banks of the river. Palembang is actually about 30 minutes hike inland from the south bank and is located on low-lying savannah which floods easily during the wet season so if the water is up you'll have to reach the village by motor canoe or paddle canoe instead, depending on the water depth. Palembang has two spirit houses containing many old artifacts. Normally only initiated men (with crocodile scars on their skin) may enter the spirit houses but an exception is made for tourists (male and female) since they are outsiders not under tribal law.



Across on the north bank is Kanganaman village, located on higher ground less subject to flooding. There is only one spirit house at Kanganaman but it is actually the largest spirit house on the Sepik, a towering structure with a very steep ladder that is quite a challenge to climb. Underneath the spirit house is a cool sitting area where the initiated men gather to socialise, beat their log drums and play their large bamboo flutes. Other villages you may visit today depending on your jumping off point are Korogo and Kaminabit.



*Much of today's 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. Beware also of the sun's reflection off the water which can burn your face and neck.*

A few 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.



The other major attraction at Kaminabit is Bowie's Art Haus, 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.

Overnight village guest house at Kaminabit, Kanganaman or Korogo (includes local style meals and bottled or boiled water).



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## TRIP NOTES

### 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 Kairiru.

### 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. A roll-away single bed can be set up in the room if twin share is required. [www.inwewak.com](http://www.inwewak.com)

### 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 novaeguineas*). 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, Palembangi 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

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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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