



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM63 - SIMBAI SIDE TRIP PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS

1 or 2 nights (extendable) ex-Mt Hagen

This package enables non-trekkers to visit the remote Simbai district in the highlands and learn about the culture and hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the exotic Kalam tribe. Based at the simple but comfortable Kalam Guest House near Simbai airstrip, visitors can go for half day walking excursions to “stone age” villages where local people still live very simple lifestyles due to the lack of development in the area - there are no roads in or out.

Light aircraft can drop into Simbai airstrip in the mornings after the early fog has cleared.

In past years MAF operated “service” flights to Simbai on an almost daily basis from both Mt Hagen and Madang but due to a post-COVID pilot shortage the service flights now operate only once or twice a week when there is sufficient demand, and only from Mt Hagen. There is no guaranteed weekly schedule and proposed service flights may be cancelled at the last minute if there is insufficient passenger and cargo loading on the day. There have previously been several instances of tourists being stranded at Simbai when service flights have been cancelled or rescheduled at the last minute.

Accordingly we now offer Simbai trips using charter flights only which are more reliable though still subject to weather delays and disruptions. Unfortunately this means Simbai is now only an economical trip for groups.

PACKAGE COST: (per person)

	GROUP OF 1	GROUP OF 2	GROUP OF 4	GROUP OF 6+
1 NIGHT GROUND PACKAGE includes accom, meals, singing, village hike and tour	USD 500	USD 400	USD 300	USD 250
2 NIGHTS GROUND PACKAGE includes accom, meals, singing, village hikes and tours	USD 800	USD 600	USD 450	USD 350
Return charter flights	USD 3200	USD 1600	USD 800	USD 550
Extra nights Simbai *	USD 300	USD 200	USD 150	USD 100

*Extra nights includes village guest house accommodation, meals, extra village hike and tour. *Prices subject to change.*

PACKAGE INCLUSIONS

- Return charter flights Mt Hagen-Simbai-Mt Hagen
- Village guest house accommodation with local-style meals plus some packaged food and bottled or boiled water.
- Hiking excursions to Kalam tribal villages near Simbai - includes guide, village gratuities.
- Kalam tribal sing-sing at Simbai
- Ecotourism Melanesia tour monitoring and contingency support



ECOTOURISM MELANESIA LTD

ITINERARY

DAY 1:



MADANG / SIMBAI or MT HAGEN / SIMBAI

06:30 transfer on your hotel shuttle bus to the MAF terminal at the airport and check in for your light aircraft charter flight to Simbai

On arrival at Simbai airstrip you will be met by our local guide who will help carry your bags 30 minutes walk to the Kalam Guest House.

On arrival at the guest house you will be welcomed by a traditional Kalam tribal sing-sing procession with men wearing their trademark head-dresses decorated with green beetle shells and women wearing animal furs and orchid stem necklaces. As they dance and sing they beat small "kundu" hand drums fashioned from small hollowed logs with a lizard or mammal skin stretched over one end creating a tympanic membrane.

After the sing-sing you will be able to meet the performers and examine their costumes and body decorations, describe how they are made and applied, and talk about their cultural significance.

12:00 Lunch is served at the guest house and will be your first opportunity to sample some local fruit and vegetables including sub-tropical varieties of banana, yam and sweet potato. Starchy vegetables are usually served with cooked greens such as watercress and long beans, or salad vegetables like tomato and cucumber.

In the afternoon your guide will take you on a half day walking excursion to a Kalam tribe village about 1 hour walk from the guest house along a centuries-old footpath passing through grasslands, wooded areas, mountain streams and tiny hamlets of grass huts. At the destination village you'll be introduced to one or two families of Kalam people living a traditional subsistence lifestyle here, using only basic hand tools for gardening and bow and arrows for hunting possums, birds and wild pigs.

The people will be happy to open a window into their lives for you and show you how they survive each day in a non-cash economy, producing their own food and bartering with their neighbours.

Overnight 1 star accommodation at Kalam Guest House, Simbai - includes local style meals and bottled or boiled water



DAY 2:



SIMBAI

If you are flying out today your guide will walk you to the airstrip and wait with you for your charter aircraft.

If you are staying on for another night, today you'll have the opportunity to take a full day walking trip to an even more remote village and spend the day with the people there.

This morning you'll hike 3 hours through light scrub, across open grasslands and crossing bubbling brooks to get to a more remote village where the people live a very traditional lifestyle. You will have an opportunity to watch them unpack a "mumu" feast which has been prepared in your honour this morning while you have been walking. Various local vegetables and fruits that have been prepared and wrapped in bush leaves and cooked under hot stones in a fire pit, a style of cooking known in PNG as "mumu". By the time you arrive in the village the mumu will be just about ready and you'll be able to watch while the stones are taken out of the pit revealing the parcels of cooked food underneath. As each leaf parcel is opened you'll enjoy the smoky smell of dry-roasted meat and vegetables.

The villagers will spread banana leaves on the ground and you'll sit down with them and enjoy the meal together - eating with your fingers of course, and drinking coconut juice straight from the nut or wild orange juice that you'll squeeze from the fruit yourself.

After lunch the locals will show you around their modest huts and surrounding gardens to give you some insight into how they survive off the land with only a few items purchased from the little shops at Simbai station with the small amounts of money they make from selling excess food crops, wet coffee beans or the occasional unlucky wild pig.

The whole day will be one continuous magnificent photo opportunity as you fishbowl the daily lifestyle of this self-sufficient people living a stone-age lifestyle just a short flight and short walk from the modern towns of Madang and Mt Hagen.

Mid-afternoon you'll start your 3-hour hike back to the Kalam Guest House.

Overnight 1 star accommodation at Kalam Guest House, Simbai - includes local style meals and bottled or boiled water

If you are unable to hike this distance today you will have the option of staying back at the guest house and take a shorter hike to another village closer to the guest house - less primitive and remote and but also less walking.



DAY 3:

SIMBAI / MADANG or MT HAGEN



After breakfast, walk to the airstrip and wait for your charter flight out. On arrival at Mt Hagen Airport, walk across to the main terminal to check in for your onward flight or meet up with our local guide for assistance with your next arrangements.



TRIP NOTES:

ABOUT SIMBAI

Simbai is an isolated district in the highlands. It is located approximately halfway between Mt Hagen and Madang. Administratively the area falls within the Madang Province but culturally the people of the Simbai area are more similar to the highlands tribes than the coastal peoples of Madang. The area surrounding Simbai airstrip - the Simbai River valley to the east and the Kaironk River valley to the west - is populated by the Kalam tribe. Archaeological digs in this area indicate that the Kalam people have occupied the Simbai area continuously for more than a thousand years. The dialect spoken by the people here is one of PNG's most unusual languages, characterised by glottal stops. The traditional culture here is also unique among Papua New Guinea's eight hundred tribes. Native houses have a trademark irregular hexagon shape, men's initiation ceremonies feature nose-piercing and pig-killing, and on special occasions the initiated men wear huge cane-framed head dresses - the largest in Papua New Guinea - decorated with animal skins and the exoskeletons of thousands of luminescent green beetles collected from the forest. Just an hour's walk from the airstrip brings you to primitive villages where time has stood still and the local people still live in grass huts, still wear traditional dress and still hunt game and harvest fruit and vegetables from the forest for their diet.

ABOUT KALAM GUEST HOUSE

Kalam Guest House at Simbai is a rustic but clean and comfortable facility built in local style, operated by the local community. The guest house has ten twin rooms with single beds and clean bedding. A mosquito net is also provided although there are no malaria mosquitoes at Simbai due to the high altitude (Anopheles species do not breed above 300m). However the net keeps dust and other insects off your bed. Food at the guest house will be mainly fruit, vegetables and rice with some tinned fish and meat, cooked in stovetop pots. Bottled or boiled water is supplied for drinking. Bring your own water purification tablets if you have further concerns. The shared bathroom has running water and a sit-down toilet, however it is unlikely that there will be any other guests staying apart from yourself and/or your tour party so you will probably have the bathroom to yourself. Electricity is sometimes supplied at night by a small generator but is unreliable and not suitable for charging devices - bring your own spare batteries or power banks.

ABOUT SIMBAI FLIGHTS

Flights operate subject to weather patterns.

The small 10-seat aircraft which fly between Mt Hagen and Simbai operate under visual flight rules (VFR) and cannot take off from Mt Hagen unless the weather at Simbai is known to be clear.

On some days Simbai is clear first thing in the morning and aircraft can fly in early. Other days there is morning fog and flights cannot land until the fog lifts. On most days cloud cover closes the airstrip again mid-afternoon but sometimes earlier, leaving a daily clear weather window normally between 09:00 and 14:00. Since the departure time of your flights in and out of Simbai cannot be guaranteed in advance, all you can do is get to the airport or airstrip early and be prepared to fly either first-up or later in the morning once there is clear visibility at Simbai. There is a 10% risk that the flight will not operate at all if the weather at Simbai is particularly bad or if the aircraft has a technical problem. This means there is a risk that you may be one day late getting to Simbai, or one day late coming back. You need to be aware of this risk when deciding whether to take this tour, and when planning your follow-on travel. If you are indeed stranded at Mt Hagen or Simbai for an extra night due to flight cancellation, Ecotourism Melanesia will pay for your extra night accommodation and meals and try to arrange some alternative activities for you. If the side trip has to be cancelled altogether due to unsuitable flying weather, the package is fully refundable less the cost of any alternative or transit arrangements in Mt Hagen.

Weather restrictions affecting flights is one of the reasons why other tour companies do not offer Simbai as a touring destination, despite its obvious appeal. If you decide to go, this will work in your favour as the small visitor numbers have hardly had any impact on the Simbai culture so far, leaving it well preserved for you to enjoy, and you will not have to share your experience here with other tourists. Almost all visitors to Simbai say it was the absolute highlight of their trip to Papua New Guinea and is not to be missed. Ecotourism Melanesia considers the 10% risk of flight disruption acceptable and manageable.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. The weather at Simbai will be warm by day (20-25 Celcius) and cool at night (5-10 Celcius). Please bring a sweater and warm underwear, and a rain poncho. The rainy season is December to March but the “dry” season also has regular rainfall, so you are probably going to get wet at some point during this trip one way or another.
2. Simbai is a remote area where there is no hospital and the availability of medical care is very limited. Medical evacuations may be difficult to arrange.

