



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM3e - MIDDLE SEPIK, BLACKWATER LAKES AND KARAWARI RIVER EXPEDITION FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS 7 nights ex-Wewak (extendable)

The Middle Sepik villages are rich in animistic cultural beliefs and produce a prolific range of cultural artefacts such as wall masks, figurines, bilum bags, flutes, drums, implements, body decorations and bride-price shell money. Each village has its own unique artistic style.

From the Middle Sepik this tour follows the Korosameri River, a tributary of the Sepik, up into the Blackwater Lakes, a remote area well off the tourist trail where people live a very traditional lifestyle far from civilisation. Blackwater villages have a unique artistic style in their artefacts. From the Blackwater Lakes you will then follow the Karawari River upstream to the renowned Karawari Lodge.

At the end of this tour you will fly out from Karawari Lodge airstrip to Mt Hagen. Regular flights are operated by the owners of the Lodge on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Flights on other days of the week can be arranged on charter basis at extra cost.

This is a remote area trip and there is no public transport so it is necessary to charter a private motor canoe (longboat) for touring along the river. Due to these high overhead costs of travel, this package is more economical for small groups.

PACKAGE COST: (per person)

<i>To convert these costs to other currencies, use the exchange rates quoted on our website home page.</i>	Group of 1	Group of 2	Group of 3	Group of 4
Standard 7-night package	PGK 20,000	PGK 13,214	PGK 11,000	PGK 10,000
Extra nights Sepik River touring* (eg Kaminimbit, Tambanum)	PGK 1200	PGK 840	PGK 720	PGK 600
Extend to Wewak Islands 1 nt	PGK 2500	PGK 1750	PGK 1500	PGK 1250
Extra nights Wewak Islands**	PGK 500	PGK 350	PGK 300	PGK 250
Extra hotel nights Wewak (best available accom, room only)	PGK 500 (single)	PGK 250 pp (twin)	PGK 200 pp (triple)	PGK 250 pp (twin)
Extra nights Karawari Lodge*** (includes accom, meals & tours)	PGK 1300	PGK 1300	PGK 1300	PGK 1300

*Extra nights Sepik River includes motor canoe, fuel, guide, meals, village accommodation, village visitation fees, gratuities.

**Extra nights Wewak Islands includes guide, meals, village accommodation, non-motorised activities, gratuities.

*** Extra nights Karawari Lodge includes single or twin share deluxe bungalow, all meals, half day local tour, but does not include possible additional cost for air charter if your proposed fly-out day is not a Monday, Wednesday or Friday.

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PACKAGE INCLUSIONS:

- meet and greet at Port Moresby and Wewak airports
- welcome kit including maps, destination information, phone calling card and Ecotourism Melanesia polo shirt
- guide for walking tour of Wewak on arrival day if time allows
- one night standard twin-share hotel room with breakfast only at either In-Wewak Boutique Hotel or Windjammer Beach Motel, depending on availability and logistical considerations
- overland transport from Wewak to Pagwi by private vehicle
- packed lunch on Day 2
- Sepik River guide
- private-hire motor canoe with driver and fuel (includes return-to-base costs)
- village tour at each stop en route, village gratuities
- at least one cultural performance (sing-sing) en route
- five nights village accommodation en route, including local-style dinner and breakfast supplemented with some camp food
- bottled drinking water
- camp bedding (tropical sleeping bag, mosquito net, sleeping mat), camp crockery and cutlery, camp shower
- wet weather gear (rain ponchos, umbrellas, tarpaulins)
- other village-based activities (eg fishing, joining in men's or women's activities) as opportunities arise
- one night at Karawari Lodge including accommodation, meals and village tours (as time allows)
- flight from Karawari to Mt Hagen
- meet and greet and transfer or onward flight check-in assistance on arrival in Mt Hagen
- first aid kit and satellite phone for emergencies
- tour monitoring and 24 hour assistance from our office in Port Moresby

EXCLUSIONS:

- airfares
- bar drinks, tips, souvenirs, personal items
- bottled water and first aid requirements
- dinners at Seaview Hotel
- lunches at Middle Sepik villages

ITINERARY:

DAY 1:

WEWAK

On arrival at Wewak airport you will be met by the hotel transfer vehicle and driven to the hotel for check-in. If arriving on a morning or early afternoon flight, our local guide will be available to show you around Wewak town (walking). The hotel is situated close to the main commercial area, market and foreshore. The market has a wide variety of fresh produce and a selection of artefacts for sale.

Overnight hotel, Wewak (standard single or twin room, includes breakfast)

NB Where possible we book the In-Wewak Boutique Hotel which is located on a hill overlooking the ocean. When they have no availability or when it is more practical for boating purposes for you to stay close to the beach, we book the Windjammer Beach Motel.

DAY 2:

WEWAK / MIDDLE SEPIK (YAMOK)

Morning road trip from Wewak to the Pagwi Mission station on the Middle Sepik. Upstream from Pagwi is referred to as the Upper Sepik and downstream from Pagwi is the Middle and Lower Sepik.

Our vehicle and driver will pick you up at the hotel at 7.00am for the 5 hour drive.

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The road is rough and bumpy in places, so bring a travel pillow or bath towel to sit on. Initially the vehicle climbs through the Prince Alexander Range featuring high montane forest, and the road is tar-sealed as far as Maprik (2 hours from Wewak). A half hour stop can be made in Maprik where you may use restrooms and purchase refreshments. There are a number of large haus tambarans (men's spirit houses) which may be inspected here. From Maprik to Pagwi (2½ hours) the road is largely unsealed. The road passes through the Sepik plains, gradually descending in altitude down to the river basin. The vegetation along this sector consists of grassy plains interspersed with light tropical rainforest.

A packed lunch is provided by the hotel, which you may eat en route or on arrival at Pagwi while waiting for your canoe to be fuelled. Pagwi is just a scattering of houses and there are no rest facilities so a roadside comfort stop may be appropriate a few kilometres before arrival.

At Pagwi your guide will assist you to transfer to your motorised Sepik canoe and by early afternoon you will commence your downriver journey to Korogo village. From Korogo, hike inland to Yamok (90 minutes walking), a beautiful traditional Sepik village with 7 spectacular Haus Tambarans (men's spirit houses) and its own distinct style of artefacts and bilums.

At Yamok, you will tour the village and learn about the spiritual beliefs of the people. Tonight a traditional "sing-sing" will be held in your honour.

Overnight village guest house, Yamok (includes dinner and breakfast).

**NB There is an airstrip at Yamok and flying in by chartered light aircraft is a possible alternative to travelling overland via Pagwi. It costs an extra K2500 and it depends if an aircraft is available on the day but is a viable alternative mode of travel for parties of 3 or more.*

DAY 3:

MIDDLE SEPIK (PALEMBEI, YENTCHEN, KANGANAMAN)

After breakfast this morning, you will hike back to Korogo with your guide and your canoe will take you further down river to the crocodile cult villages of Palembang, Yentchen and Kanganaman. These villages all have haus tambarans crammed with carved artifacts. After visiting Palembang and Yentchen and learning about the crocodile scarification rituals which take place once or twice a year, you will spend the afternoon at Kanganaman observing a sago cooking demonstration and perhaps learning to paddle a small dugout canoe in the calm shallows. In the evening you may have the opportunity to join some villagers going out for night fishing (or crocodile hunting). This activity is for the bold and courageous only. The bold and beautiful can spend the evening sitting around the men's spirit house and hear the chiefs and initiated men recount tribal legends and play their bamboo flutes and garamut drums (no TV for evening entertainment here!).

Overnight village guest house, Kanganaman (includes dinner and breakfast)

DAY 4:

MIDDLE SEPIK / CHAMBRI LAKES

This morning your motorised canoe will transport you through narrow waterways that connect the main Sepik River to the Chambri Lakes. The Lakes may be semi-dry in the middle of the dry season (July/August) or filled to capacity and even flooded during the wet season (December to February).

You will see a lot of bird life today, and locals fishing with nets. One of the lakeside villages, Aibom, is renowned for its clay pottery. You can see potters at work and purchase fired pottery. Next stop, Kirimbit village has an airstrip and a mission radio, which is reassuring in case you fall ill during the first part of the trip and

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decide to fly out early.

The villages along the shores of the Chambri Lakes have a distinct culture and artistic style - you will be able to purchase some of the unique local art. Few tourists visit the Chambri Lakes as it is off the main river so you will "have the place to yourself".

Overnight Aibom or Kirimbit village guest house (includes dinner and breakfast).

DAY 5:

CHAMBRI LAKES / BLACKWATER LAKES

After breakfast, you will depart the Chambri Lakes via the Kumalio canal back on to the main river for half an hour down to Mindibit village then turn south up the Korosameri River for about two hours before arriving at Tungambit village in the Blackwater Lakes. This village has a little guest house from where you can base yourself while spending the rest of the day exploring the various hamlets at the edge of this ragtag collection of lakes whose shorelines change from year to year after flooding. Sangriman village next to Tungambit has a unique carving style and since tourists hardly ever make it this far so you are sure to stumble across something interesting to purchase.

Overnight Tungambit village guest house (includes dinner and breakfast)

DAY 6:

BLACKWATER LAKES / KARAWARI RIVER

Spend the morning at Blackwater then motor back down the Korosameri River to the confluence with the Karawari River then up the Karawari for two hours to a small family hamlet near Manjamai village. There is no guest house here and your overnight on the riverside here will be a more intimate home stay experience with a local family known to your guide.

Overnight village homestay, Karawari River (includes dinner and breakfast)

DAY 7:

KARAWARI LODGE

Just an hour further upstream is Karawari Lodge where you will spend your last night. This award-winning wilderness lodge is owned by Trans Niugini Tours based in Mt Hagen, who also operate the Ambua Lodge near Tari in the Southern Highlands. This is 3 star accommodation out in the middle of nowhere ! Upon check-in at Karawari Lodge this morning you will say farewell to your guide and canoe crew and they will commence their 10-hour journey back to Pagwi. After lunch, Karawari Lodge staff will offer you a choice of excursions for birdwatching, plants and flowers or local village study. A sago-making demonstration is an interesting experience that you may care to request. The Lodge stocks a good range of local artefacts so you may want to spend some time browsing for items that you were unable to buy en route.

Overnight Karwari Lodge (single or twin-share bungalow, includes lunch, dinner and breakfast)

DAY 8:

KARAWARI LODGE / MT HAGEN

After breakfast this morning it is a short walk to the airstrip to wait for the lodge's private aircraft for a half hour flight to Mt Hagen. On arrival in Mt Hagen, Trans Niugini Tours will assist you to check in for your onward flight, or transfer you to your next hotel or tour experience.

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ONE-NIGHT EXTENSION TO WEWAK ISLANDS (This can be programmed as Day 2 prior to departure for Sepik River on Day 3. Seven nights package becomes eight nights).

DAY 2:

WEWAK / WEWAK ISLANDS

The two Wewak Islands are Kairiru and Muschu. Kairiru is a mountainous, forest-covered island with waterfalls and hot springs - the Japanese had an operations base here during World War 2. Muschu is a flat island with coconut plantations encircled by pretty beaches with great snorkelling reefs.

Our local guide will meet you at the hotel or airport and transfer you by open speed boat 30 minutes from Wewak to the offshore island of Muschu for some beachwalking, swimming and snorkelling (mask and snorkel is supplied). Village people at Muschu Island will provide coconut juice and fruit for your lunch or afternoon snack. From Muschu it is another 20 minutes by boat to Shagur Village on the seaward (north) side of Kairiru Island. Here, the village people will await you with an enthusiastic traditional welcome.

Shagur village Island is literally a tropical paradise situated amidst lush green rainforest. The houses are all traditional style, made of bush materials only. This contrasts with the inland areas of the Sepik River where the topography is fairly flat and dry, despite the presence of the watercourse, and cultural entertainment is not as energetic due to the more regular tourist visits. As Ecotourism Melanesia is currently the only tour company arranging visits to Kairiru, the number of visitors going there is relatively small and each visit is special and personal for both the village people and the visitor. The people here have a well-prepared repertoire of cultural dances, songs and drama to perform for visitors - one of the best village cultural experiences anywhere in PNG.

After a familiarisation walk around the village you'll be led on a short hike east of the village to the waterfall for a refreshing splash, then hike around to the west of Shagur to explore tidal caves, ending up at Victoria Bay where there is a nice beach and a small bubbling hot spring emanating from a rocky outcrop on the sand. The hot spring empties into the sea which makes for a great mineral spa. From Victoria Bay, return by speed boat to Shagur Village. (If you are not a hiker you can be transferred by boat to and from Victoria Bay instead).

Tonight you will be treated to a cultural entertainment extravaganza with all manner of traditional singing, dancing and drama skits portraying the island legends - be prepared to split your sides over some great slapstick comedy even if you can't understand a word of what's going on! Dinner tonight will be an island-style feast.

Overnight Polen guest house, Shagur village, Kairiru Island (basic twin or multi-share accommodation - all bedding and netting supplied - includes meals).

DAY 3:

WEWAK ISLANDS / MIDDLE SEPIK (YAMOK)

Transfer by speed boat direct to Wewak foreshore and board your vehicle for morning road trip from Wewak to the Pagwi mission station on the Middle Sepik.

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TRIP NOTES:

- 1. Flexibility.** The tour itinerary is designed to be flexible to accommodate your interests. At each village your guides will be happy to follow your lead and provide the activities you prefer. If your interest is in art, the guides will show you through the Haus Tambarans (men's spirit houses) with their unique collections of Sepik spirit art, and give you time to inspect the artifacts for sale at each village. (NB Some villages do not allow females inside their Haus Tambarans). If your interest is in flora and fauna the guides will take you on a nature walk at each village to view local flora including wild orchids and wild vanilla, plus a huge variety of rainforest and river birds including possibly the shy cassowary and birds of paradise. If your interest is in walking your guides will take you on hikes inland from the river to visit settlements that receive hardly any outsiders and here you will see a more candid view of traditional Sepik village life.
- 2. Warnings.** The Sepik River is a remote area where there are no hospitals and the availability of medical care is very limited. Medical evacuations may be difficult to arrange. The Sepik River area is renowned for mosquitoes: be prepared with repellent and anti-malaria medication. Some activities on this tour require water travel in native canoes that do not carry safety equipment. Individuals who cannot swim are advised against taking this tour. This tour involves light hiking requiring an average level of fitness.
- 3. Tour variation.** Due to prevailing weather conditions there is a 50% chance that some aspects of this tour will have to be modified at short notice. Airfields in this area are mainly grass strips which cannot be used after heavy rains and this will prevent flying in or out by air if you have booked this. Rains may also cause localised flooding in some riverside villages rendering them unsuitable for visitors. Accordingly this tour may be modified at short notice by (i) rearranging the specified destinations, (ii) substituting different villages not specified in the above itinerary. Such variations to the advertised itinerary will be at the discretion of the local tour operator in accordance with safety considerations and operational limitations.
- 4. Accommodation** at village guest houses is spartan but you'll survive. Bedding may be a clean woven mat on the floor or a rubber mattress covered with a bedsheet. Aim to bring your own small rubber pillow or inflatable one. Mosquito nets will always be supplied. Toilets are long-drops, (sit-down or squat). BYO toilet paper. Also, bringing a battery-operated personal fan to help you sleep in the still air under the mosquito net is a MUST.
- 5. Meals in villages** will be based on:
 - breakfast: tea with fresh scones and fresh fruit, sago cakes
 - dinner: boiled foods or baked vegetables and fish wrapped in leaves and cooked under hot stonesVillage people in the Sepik do not normally prepare lunch. Rather, they graze on fresh fruit, smoked fish and breakfast leftovers during the day. You should bring a supply of small change for purchasing fruit and fish from village markets during the day - otherwise bring your own supply of daytime snacks.

The food that will be offered to you at the village guest houses will be freshly harvested and cooked vegetables, freshwater or saltwater fish, possibly some chicken or pork or crocodile tail - take it or leave it! There is no electricity in the villages and leftover food is given to the village animals at the end of the day and not kept for the next day so you are unlikely to experience food poisoning. If you feel the village diet may be too bland for you, you are welcome to bring additional favourite food items with you - village people will not be offended. Dehydrated packet pasta, tinned meats, baked beans etc that you bring with you can be prepared for you by your hosts and served with your meal. A variety of food items is available from supermarkets in Wewak and Port Moresby. Your guide will carry a stock of basic foodstuffs for the trip including tea, coffee, powdered milk, sugar, flour, cooking oil.
- 6. Drinking water.** You will not be given murky river water to drink. Village water supplies are piped from clean springs or rainwater tanks and are generally safe to drink. However any change in water composition can upset your gut (even drinking the water supply from two different towns in your home country). Therefore to prevent the inconvenience of diarrhoea during your trip you may wish to take your own stock of bottled water with you from Wewak. Bottled water from Wewak supermarkets is cheap and there will be plenty of room in the vehicle and the canoe for as much water as you wish to take. Alternatively you can ask your village hosts to boil and cool water for you to drink, or ask for green coconut juice to drink as this is always sterile (and yummy). There is also a new product on the market called "Steripen" which is a battery operated UV water steriliser similar in size and shape to a penlight. Stirring it through a glass of water for a few seconds sterilises the water with ultraviolet light. Steripen (or similar product) is available from most camping stores.
- 7. Climate.** The Sepik area is always hot and humid. Only rainfall provides some variation in the weather. 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. We suggest you pack several changes of all-cotton quick-drying clothes, and a battery operated personal fan for relief from steamy humid weather, especially under your mosquito net at night.
- 8. Personal gear.** For this trip we suggest you pack personal items in ziplock plastic bags to protect them from rain and canoe wake splash. Personal gear should include three or four changes of clothes, light hiking boots, plastic sandals for wearing in the canoe (shoes may get wet). Four pairs of cotton/wool blend hiking socks, a pair of light tracksuit pants or sarong to sleep in, hat with wide brim to keep sun and rain off your face, waterproof torch with spare batteries, rain poncho, quick-dry towel, your favourite soap in a leak-proof container, two rolls of your favourite toilet paper, a two-litre water container to carry with you, and your personal first aid kit. Your personal first aid kit will contain Band-aids, wound dressings, antibiotic cream (not antiseptic) for applying to cuts and scratches, antimalarial tablets, anti-

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diarrhoea tablets, paracetamol, Deep Heat or other muscle linament and the all-important insect repellent (some visitors say "Rid" is more effective). For sleeping, a woven mat or rubber mattress and mosquito net are provided at each destination in this tour but you should bring your own tropical sleeping bag, empty quilt cover or a bed liner of the type used at youth hostels.

9. **Bathing.** During this tour you will bathe in creeks and rivers, usually in front of other people. Bathing without clothes may offend villagers. Male visitors may bathe in shorts. Ladies should bring a sarong or quick-dry shorts and top to wear for bathing. Village guesthouses and homestays may also provide drums of water behind a privacy screen where you can bathe by scooping water over yourself.