



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM201 MT HAGEN SHOW TOUR - AUGUST 2009 - revised 01MAY09

13 nights Wewak, Kairiru Island, Sepik River (Crocodile Festival), Mt Hagen Show, Simbai, Madang

Fully escorted sign-up soft adventure tour, group size minimum 8 maximum 16.

The Mt Hagen Show is Papua New Guinea's largest cultural extravaganza. The Show has its origins in colonial days when colonial administrators sought to reduce tribal fighting by promoting inter-marriage and channelling inter-tribal rivalry into positive forms of competition. Major sing-sing events like the Mt Hagen Show and Goroka Show became opportunities for tribes to gain status without bloodshed, by competing to put on the best cultural performance. The Mt Hagen Show today is still a competition, with tribal groups vying for sizeable cash prizes and of course the honour and glory that first prize at the "Hagen Show" brings to one's tribe.

The Show attracts cultural groups from all over Papua New Guinea, even from Bougainville and the Trobriand Islands. The local crowd of 50,000 mainly flock in from the Highlands provinces plus Madang and Lae as these are the only places with road access to Mt Hagen. In contrast, less than 300 overseas visitors attended the 2008 Show, so it is still definitely a "local" festival and not something put on for tourists. There are also agricultural and trade displays, health awareness programs, sideshow alley and all manner of other activities at the Show which make it the highlight of the annual calendar for the Highlands people. Some very remote villagers come to town only once per year, for the Show, so you will see quite a kaleidoscope of faces just in the spectator crowd, even before you turn your attention to the sing-sing arena.

Tourists and locals with cameras are given special seats with the best view, and you will also have permission to enter the performance arena to take close-ups of the dancers. Apart from the Show itself, our tour group will also attend another, smaller sing-sing on the day before. This is held at Paiya Village about half an hour's drive out of town, is more informal without the huge crowds, and provides an authentic village backdrop for photography, with opportunities for watching the performers putting on their make-up and body decorations before the performance.

Before and after the Mt Hagen Show we visit some interesting destinations in Papua New Guinea's northern and highlands regions: volcanic Kairiru Island, the Sepik River, exotic Simbai and PNG's prettiest town, Madang. The Sepik River leg involves climbing in and out of canoes, a bit of walking, and sleeping in village huts, so a little agility is required. This sector now includes the Sepik Crocodile Festival at Ambunti on the Upper Sepik, since the festival was rescheduled from March to August. This provides an opportunity to attend a rural festival crowded by locals rather than tourists.

*The Sepik Crocodile Festival is an initiative of WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) as part of its sustainable development programs being carried out in the Sepik River basin, which include the establishment of protected areas, sustainable harvest of freshwater and forest species, and the development of ecotourism. The festival draws particular attention to the plight of the two species of crocodile prevalent in the Sepik area: the common saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) and the New Guinea freshwater crocodile (*Crocodylus novaeguineae*).*

Crocodiles play a major part in the cultural heritage of the Sepik people. Crocodiles are animal totems symbolising strength and power. In the Middle Sepik crocodile cult villages of Yentchen, Palembang and Kanganaman, the attributes of the crocodile are so envied that the men even try to make themselves look like crocodiles. The initiation of boys into adulthood involves a painful scarification ritual during which dozens of small cuts are made all over the back from shoulders to hips, and pockets of skin are lifted away from the flesh and filled with charcoal which, upon healing, leaves raised scars that resemble the bumpy

back of the crocodile. Such initiations are carried out in secret only once or twice a year and for modesty reasons outsiders are not normally allowed to witness the cutting ceremony.

These days most of the crocodile population inhabits smaller 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 dinghies and other small boats has scared them back into more remote creeks and swamplands. Very large crocodiles are rare these days and no "monster man-eaters" have been caught in the past 10 years.

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 is educating locals about sustainable harvesting of wildlife resources and encouraging them to turn to alternative sources of income such as ecotourism.

The Sepik Crocodile Festival is scheduled for the second week of August at Ambunti on the Upper Sepik where WWF's conservation activities are focused. The Crocodile Festival celebrates the importance of the crocodile in the lives of the Sepik people and also provides a platform for WWF to conduct conservation awareness with locals who flood in to Ambunti from surrounding villages for the festival. Village groups will perform crocodile-themed traditional dances and dramas. Sepik handicrafts will be available for sale, many with a crocodile theme such as crocodile carvings and crocodile tooth jewellery. The pride and joy of your souvenir collection will be a crocodile-head canoe prow if you can buy one. Sepik canoes normally have an animal totem carved into the prow and when the canoe becomes old or develops unpatchable leaks the prow is sometimes cut off with a chainsaw or axe and sold as a souvenir (about 40 centimetres long by 20 centimetres wide, and weighing about 3kg). Of course, it's not really a tourist souvenir but a genuine cultural artifact. Fumigation and special packing will be required if you want to take a canoe prow home with you.

Ambunti is a small district "station", normally a pindrop-quiet little township with a number of small government offices, a few small shops and churches, an airfield and one or two minor cottage industries. There are no streets, just grassy lanes between houses and other buildings that are used by a few tractors with open trailers for hauling loads around the station - the rest of the time, people walk because nowhere is far from anywhere at Ambunti station. The township normally seems asleep during the hot days, but comes alive in the late afternoon when various football games sprout on the airstrip runway and other open spaces and draw small social crowds. There is a small "hotel" called Ambunti Lodge which caters for tourists, plus a few other little guest houses run by the churches and other locals. Our tour group will aim to be inconspicuous and go with the flow of the festival. At the festival you will mingle with locals and probably make some lifelong friends.

A member of our 2008 tour group (Julie from Australia) has mounted a photo slide show of her trip on the internet which you can view at http://www.kodakgallery.co.uk/l.jsp?c=1iigdztz.2rju8aw2x&x=0&y=b8j9pw&localeid=en_GB She has taken some fantastic pictures and added some poignant and funny captions. There are just under 200 images in the slide show. Once you arrive at the website, the images take a minute or so to load and then if you click Play the Slideshow it will take 10 minutes to see all the pics. Alternatively you can just hit the next (arrow) button or click on the first picture itself to go to the next picture. NB last year's Mt Hagen Show tour did not include the Sepik Crocodile Festival or Simbai so there are no images of these locations in her collection.

TOUR COST: PGK 18,546 = USD 6862 = AUD 9087 = EUR 4981 per person, twin-share, 13 nights, includes internal air)

Single supplement (6 nights Wewak, Mt Hagen, Port Moresby) is 20% surcharge.

Truncated tour option: PGK 12,911 per person twin share if you exit the tour on Monday 17 August after the Mt Hagen show (ie skip Simbai and Madang). Single supplement 20%.

To convert the tour cost to other currencies, use the current exchange rate listed on our website home page. Tour price is subject to change due to air component. However clients paid-in-full are protected against any price rises.

TOUR INCLUSIONS (13 nights):

- domestic airfares Port Moresby-Wewak and Madang-Port Moresby
- meet and greet at Port Moresby airport with check-in/luggage assistance for connecting flight to Wewak, and short city tour if time allows
- tour welcome kit including welcome gift, souvenir polo shirt, maps, country information
- 1 night standard twin-share hotel room in Wewak (In-Wewak Boutique Hotel or best available alternative) with full breakfast. Single supplement available.
- Water transfers to and from Kairiru Island by open speed boat
- 1 night village guest house accommodation at Kairiru Island (twin-share or multi-share with basic bedding, basic bathroom), including local-style meals, village tours and cultural entertainment
- road transfer from Wewak to the Sepik River including lunch
- water transfers along the Sepik River by motor canoe (life jackets supplied) - Pagwi-Ambunti-Timbunke plus side trips
- 2 nights best available twin-share guest house accommodation and meals at Ambunti
- 2 half days attendance at the Sepik Crocodile Festival
- half day excursion to the Wagu Lakes
- 2 nights village guest house accommodation in Middle Sepik villages (Yamok and Kanganaman) - twin-share or multi-share with basic bedding, basic bathroom, including local-style meals supplemented with camp food and bottled water. Includes village tours.
- charter flight from Timbunke (Sepik River) to Mt Hagen
- 4 nights twin-share hotel room at Mt Hagen (Highlander Hotel or best available alternative) with 4 full breakfasts. Single supplement available.
- 1 full day Paiya Village sing-sing tour with lunch
- 2 full days at Mt Hagen Show, including transfers, guides, tourist pass and packed lunch
- charter flight from Mt Hagen to Simbai
- 2 nights twin-share basic guest house accommodation and meals at Simbai
- 2 days village cultural tours and sing-sing performance, Simbai
- freight and fares flight from Simbai to Madang
- half day tour of Madang town including hotel lunch
- 1 night twin-share hotel room in Port Moresby (Gateway Hotel or best available alternative) - includes buffet dinner and drinks, full breakfast
- ad hoc shopping or sightseeing in Port Moresby on last day
- departure check-in assistance and farewell at Port Moresby Airport
- all fees and gratuities for local villages, guides and helpers
- all transfers throughout the tour

TOUR EXCLUSIONS

- international airfares
- bottled water (except where stated as provided)
- any meals not stated as not included, or described as "pay as you go"
- tips (not expected, and only appropriate for exceptional service)
- souvenirs and items of a personal nature
- bar drinks
- visa fees
- visa assistance

ITINERARY

DAY 1: FRI 7 AUG 2009

PORT MORESBY / WEWAK

Arrive Port Moresby and connect through to Wewak.

Arriving flights:

Air Niugini flight PX393 from Singapore arrives 05:00

Airlines PNG flight CG101 from Cairns arrives 08:55

Air Niugini / Qantas flight PX6/QF351 from Brisbane arrives 13:00

Airlines PNG / Pacific Blue flight DJ191 from Brisbane arrives 13:05

Air Niugini / Qantas flight PX93/QF381 from Cairns arrives 13:25

NB International airline schedules may change over time so please check airline websites or agents for latest information. www.airniugini.com.pg or www.apng.com

On arrival in Port Moresby Ecotourism Melanesia staff will greet you with a smile and a surprise gift ☺ and you will be transferred to check in for our connecting flight to Wewak.

Between meeting flights our driver/guides and vehicles are available to take you on a familiarisation drive around Port Moresby city. If you are arriving on a morning flight, you may also have time to visit the national museum and botanical gardens during the day.

15:25 Depart Port Moresby on Air Niugini flight PX920 for Wewak via Madang boarding 14:55.

17:50 When our flight arrives in Wewak, we transfer to our hotel for check-in.

(Domestic schedules are also liable to change so be aware that this itinerary may require amendment at some point. Your domestic air tickets are provided by Ecotourism Melanesia as part of the tour package and will be delivered to you on arrival or e-mailed in advance).

Overnight In-Wewak Boutique Hotel (standard room, includes breakfast only)

(Pay-as-you-go for lunch and dinner today. Snacks are available from various outlets in Port Moresby and at the airport for lunch, and dinner is available at the hotel, pay by cash or credit card).

DAY 2: SAT 8 AUG 2009

WEWAK / KAIRIRU ISLAND

After breakfast, an open speed boat will transfer us from the Wewak foreshore (located just a few minutes walk down the hill from the hotel) to Kairiru Island which is a 45 minute speed boat ride offshore from Wewak. At Shagur Village on the seaward (north) side of Kairiru Island the village people will await us with an enthusiastic traditional welcome.

Shagur village is literally a tropical paradise situated amidst luscious 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

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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.

This morning we take a familiarisation walk around the village and a short hike to the waterfall for a refreshing splash. This is followed by a tropical lunch and a rest on comfortable mats placed under shady trees picking up the sea breeze, while locals sit and chat to us.

In the afternoon we take a scenic hike around the western shores of the island 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. (If you are not a hiker you may hitch a ride on the pickup boat direct to Victoria Bay instead). From Victoria Bay we return by speed boat to Shagur Village.

Tonight we are treated to an 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: SUN 9 AUG 2009

KAIRIRU ISLAND / WEWAK / SEPIK RIVER

A lot of travelling today, so we start with an early breakfast at 7.00am then transfer by boat from Kairiru Island to Windjammer Beach near Wewak town and board our 25-seater bus with trailing luggage vehicle, and commence our 4-hour drive from Wewak to the Sepik River, via Maprik. Climbing initially through the cool tropical highlands of the Prince Alexander Range, we descend into the tundra and savannah grasslands of the Sepik basin. A packed lunch is provided to eat en route and fresh fruit is available from roadside markets during comfort stops.

Arriving at Pagwi on the Middle Sepik by early afternoon we transfer to our waiting motor canoes and head up-river approximately two hours to Ambunti, the sleepy "capital" of the Upper Sepik.

Ambunti is a pindrop-quiet little township with a number of small government offices, a few small shops and churches, an airfield and one or two minor cottage industries. The population is less than 500. There are no streets, just grassy lanes between houses and other buildings that are used by a few tractors with open trailers for hauling loads around the station - the rest of the time, people walk because nowhere is far from anywhere at Ambunti. The township normally seems asleep during the hot days, but comes alive in the late afternoon when various football games sprout on the airstrip runway and other open spaces and draw small social crowds. There is a small "hotel" called Ambunti Lodge which caters for tourists, plus a few other little guest houses run by the churches and other locals. Our tour group will stay at whichever accommodation is available at the time of booking. We will aim to be inconspicuous and go with the flow of the festival. At the festival you will mingle with locals and make some new friends.

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Overnight Ambunti Lodge or church guest house (includes meals)

DAY 4: MON 10 AUG 2009

AMBUNTI (SEPIK CROCODILE FESTIVAL AND WAGU LAKES)

Morning: attend the Sepik Crocodile Festival activities. You can stick with our guide or move around by yourself, in which case you will probably be "adopted" by some locals who will proudly shepherd you around. For lunch today, either buy some local fare from the various food stalls or make your way back to the guest house.

Afternoon: Excursion by motor canoe to the Wagu Lakes to see water birds and and experience a slice of pristine tropical jungle on a short bush walk.

Overnight Ambunti Lodge or Pacific Islands Mission Guest House (includes meals)

The Sepik Crocodile Festival is an initiative of WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) as part of its sustainable development programs in the Sepik River basin. These programs include the establishment of protected areas, sustainable harvest of freshwater and forest species, and the development of ecotourism.

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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 is educating locals about sustainable harvesting of wildlife resources and encouraging them to turn to alternative sources of income such as ecotourism.

The Sepik Crocodile Festival takes place at Ambunti on the Upper Sepik where WWF's conservation activities are focused, and is scheduled in August, the middle of the dry season, when the festival is least likely to be disrupted by rain. The Crocodile Festival celebrates the role of the crocodile in lives of the Sepik people and also provides a venue for WWF to conduct conservation awareness with locals who flood in to Ambunti from surrounding villages for the festival. Village groups will perform crocodile-themed traditional dances and dramas. Sepik handicrafts will be for sale, especially crocodile carvings and crocodile tooth necklaces of course. The pride and joy of your souvenir collection will be a crocodile-head canoe prow if you can buy one. Sepik canoes normally have an animal totem carved into the prow and when the canoe becomes old or develops un-patchable leaks the prow is sometimes cut

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off with a chainsaw or axe and sold as a souvenir (about 40 centimetres long by 20 centimetres wide, and weighing about 3kg). Of course, it's not really a tourist souvenir but a genuine cultural artifact. Fumigation and special packing will be required if you want to take a canoe prow home with you.

Overnight Ambunti Lodge or church guest house (includes meals)

DAY 5: TUE 11 AUG 2009

WEWAK / MIDDLE SEPIK RIVER (YAMOK)

Morning: attend the Sepik Crocodile Festival activities.

Afternoon: depart Ambunti by motor canoe down-river to the Korogo Fishing Lake, an ox-bow lake formed by a cut-off river bend. Here we leave our canoes and walk for an hour through light rainforest to Yamok village. In the past, Yamok was a riverside village but changes in the course of the Sepik River over the past century have now left Yamok well inland. The hike to Yamok is easy walking, mainly flat ground, and mud will be the only inconvenience if the ground is wet but this is the dry season. Porters will hump your bags and our other supplies so you won't have to carry anything. Visiting Yamok is well worth it as this village is probably the most beautiful on the Sepik and has seven Haus Tambarans (mens spirit houses) which is more than any other Sepik village. Very few tourists visit this village so we are assured of a warm welcome.

On arrival at Yamok, we will tour the village. Special permission will be given for the women in our tour party to enter the Haus Tambarans, which are strictly off-limits to local women.

Tonight a traditional "sing-sing" will be held in our honour.

Overnight village guest house, Yamok (includes meals).

DAY 6: WED 12 AUG 2009

MIDDLE SEPIK RIVER (KANGANAMAN)

This morning we spend a little more time looking around Yamok then we hike back to the Korogo Fishing Lake and board our motor canoes, and continue motoring downstream to Kanganaman village (about half an hour's ride) where fresh fruit, dried fish and cooked sago will be awaiting us for lunch.

After leaving our bags at the village guest house we take a tour around Kanganaman, especially the Haus Tambaran which has sacred artefacts. In the afternoon we will scoot across the river in our canoes to Kanganaman's sister village, Palembang.

Kanganaman and Palembang are the heart of the Middle Sepik "crocodile cult".

Crocodiles play a major part in the cultural heritage of the Middle Sepik people. Crocodiles are animal totems symbolising strength and power. In the Middle Sepik crocodile cult villages of Yentchen, Palembang and Kanganaman, the attributes of the crocodile are so envied that the men even try to make themselves look like crocodiles. The initiation of boys into adulthood involves a painful scarification ritual during which dozens of small cuts are made all over the back from shoulders to hips, and pockets of skin are lifted away from the flesh and filled with charcoal which, upon healing, leaves raised scars that resemble the bumpy back of the crocodile. Such initiations are carried out in secret

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only once or twice a year and outsiders are not normally allowed to witness the cutting ceremony.

Back at Kanganaman, in the late afternoon we will observe sago being extracted from the pith of sago palms, and learn 20 ways to cook sago.

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 ☺. Otherwise we 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.

Overnight village guest house, Kanganaman (includes meals).

A supply of dry groceries - flour, sugar, biscuits, coffee/tea etc - will be supplied by the tour company to supplement food provided in the villages, plus an adequate supply of bottled drinking water. Accommodation will be twin-share or dormitory style in village guest houses built in native style. Sleeping bags, inflatable mattresses and mosquito nets are supplied. We strongly suggest you bring your own battery-operated personal fan to cool yourself when sleeping under mosquito nets.

DAY 7: THU 13 AUG 2009

MIDDLE SEPIK / MT HAGEN

After breakfast we depart Kanganaman and motor 2 hours downstream to the Timbunke catholic mission station which has a grass airstrip. From here our group will be airlifted direct to Mt Hagen by charter flight.

If time allows on the day (depending on the scheduled time of our charter flight) we may make a stop at other villages en route, or motor via the Chambri Lakes.

From Timbunke to Mt Hagen is a 45 minute flight. We will be met at Mt Hagen airport by our local agent Mr Pym Mamindi and transfer to our accommodation at the Highlander Hotel, Mt Hagen's best hotel. After a late lunch the rest of the afternoon is at leisure. It is a short walk to the shops but ask one of our staff to accompany you if you wish to leave the hotel because the town will be very crowded due to the impending Show.

Overnight Highlander Hotel, Mt Hagen. (Your tour package includes room and breakfast only - there will be a choice of buffet or a la carte dinner available.)

DAY 8: FRI 14 AUG 2009

MT HAGEN

After breakfast, we will take a scenic drive out through typical highlands countryside to Paiya Village where a sing-sing is held the day before every Mt Hagen Show. Arriving early before the sing-sing commences you will be able to watch the performers adorning themselves with feathers, shells and ochre paints in preparation for dancing. This is an experience that is in many ways more fascinating than the sing-sing itself because it gives you an opportunity to meet the dancers before they perform. They will be happy to explain their traditional dress ("bilas") to you and pose for photographs. About 20 dancing groups will perform, including highlands, Sepik, coastal and Islands cultures. Some of them are groups that will perform at the Mt Hagen Show tomorrow.

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The Paiya Village sing-sing includes lunch cooked at the village and a tour of the cultural displays in the village including the men's spirit house and the ancestors' skull house. The chief and his three wives will be introduced to you and some traditional customs like courtship behaviour and marriage rituals will be demonstrated.

After the conclusion of the Paiya Village sing-sing, our group will take a drive through coffee and tea plantations of the fertile Waghi Valley to view the magnificent orchid gardens at Haus Poroman Lodge, about 20 minutes drive out of Mt Hagen town.

Late in the afternoon, as Mt Hagen town fills and overflows with village people in town for the show, we return to the hotel - you might like to enjoy a quiet sundowner and a game of snooker by the crackling fire before dinner - cold nights here, in contrast to the muggy weather of the Sepik.

Overnight Highlander Hotel, includes breakfast only.

[In previous years our tour groups commented that they enjoyed the Paiya Village sing-sing even more than the Mt Hagen Show itself, because the village setting made the experience (and the photography) more natural and the smaller crowd from just the one village area was easy to socialise with. This was the first year that the Paiya Village sing-sing had been held the day before the Mt Hagen Show, and it was a real winner with visitors.]

DAY 9 SAT 15 AUG 2009

MT HAGEN SHOW

At 8.00am we depart the hotel for the show grounds for an early arrival to take a look at the stalls and displays before settling into the grandstand before the major crowds arrive. Performances commence around 10am and wind down around 3pm.

The tourist grandstand has good views of the performance area and you have blanket permission to enter the performance area if you wish to take close-up photographs. Special toilets for tourists are situated near the grandstand. A number of local guides will accompany our group in the grandstand today to interpret the performances for us. Guides can also run errands for you to buy drinks and snacks. A packed lunch is supplied by the hotel today. Late afternoon, return to the hotel.

Overnight Highlander Hotel (breakfast only included today).

DAY 10: SUN 16 AUG 2009

MT HAGEN SHOW

Second day at the Mt Hagen Show, same program as yesterday.

Overnight Highlander Hotel (breakfast only included today).

DAY 11: MON 17 AUG 2009

MT HAGEN / SIMBAI

07:00 Check out and transfer to Mt Hagen airport.

08:00 Depart on charter flight for Simbai.

08:45 On arrival at Simbai airstrip we are met by our local guide with a few extra guys to help carry bags. From the airstrip it is a 30 minute walk to the Kalam Guest House.

Simbai is an isolated government station 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 station - 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 have yielded samples of Lapita indicating that occupation of this area by the Kalam people goes back thousands of years. The dialect spoken in this area is one of PNG's most unusual languages, characterised by glottal stops. The traditional culture is also unique among Papua New Guinea's thousand-odd 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 exotic head-dresses - the largest in Papua New Guinea - decorated with animal skins and furs, and the exoskeletons of hundreds of luminescent green beetles. Just a few minutes walk from the government station brings you into satellite villages where 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.

After settling in at the guest house we begin our first foray into Kalam territory. Our guide will lead us on a walking tour of satellite villages surrounding the Simbai station, where we will meet local people living in small family hamlets of less than 20 people. Due to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle the Kalam people have always lived in small, sustainable family groups although today they also plant garden crops and raise domestic animals, especially pigs. During the day we will also visit the tiny Kalam Culture Museum which has displays of traditional tribal artifacts, and the orchid gardens which feature high-altitude orchid species. Tonight, the culture will come alive with a traditional Kalam tribal sing-sing featuring the huge exotic head-dresses.

Overnight Kalam Guest House, Simbai (includes meals)

DAY 12: TUE 18 AUG 2009

SIMBAI

Today there is a choice of activities depending on your interests and your hiking ability. If you are fit to hike for about two hours out and two hours back you can join our guide on a scenic hike through some more remote village hamlets in the Kaironk River valley, stopping to meet and talk to locals you meet on the way. There will be spontaneous opportunities to observe or join in with locals doing their gardening, hunting, building houses and other day-to-day activities. If you are not much of a hiker there is plenty to see around Simbai and its nearby satellite hamlets. Take a foray into the nearby forest with a guide who will point out wild orchids, medicinal plants and perhaps a shy tree kangaroo or cuscus. Sit with village women as they prepare traditional foods, and let the men show you their "bride price" heirlooms, and demonstrate how they make their trademark head-dresses.

These two days at Simbai will surely be the cultural highlight of the trip. No other tourists. Very little Western influence. Just like a living museum display of the Stone Age.

Overnight Kalam Guest House, Simbai (includes meals)

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DAY 13: WED 19 AUG 2009

SIMBAI / MADANG / PORT MORESBY

09:00 Depart Simbai by light aircraft for Madang. These flights are operated by a local Madang airline on a "freight and fares" basis and do not run on a fixed schedule. Our group may be split over two flights and we may not all arrive in Madang until late morning.

First we check in for our Air Niugini flight to Port Moresby which departs late afternoon then we commence a half day tour of Madang, including a lunch stop at the beautiful Madang Resort Hotel where there will also be time for a swim in the pool and a stroll along the waterfront, so pack your change of clothes in your carry-on bag if you plan to swim.

Our tour of Madang will include a visit to the Balek Wildlife Sanctuary and Sulfur Caves where parts of the Pierce Brosnan movie "Robinson Crusoe" were filmed, the historical Alexishafen mission with German colonial cemetery, and the Coastwatchers lighthouse.

15:30 We arrive back at the airport in time for boarding.

16:40 Our afternoon flight PX143 to Port Moresby departs Madang.

17:40 On arrival in Port Moresby we check in at the Gateway Hotel.

In the evening we share a final buffet dinner and hook up a multimedia projector for viewing some of our trip photographs over a glass of wine.

Overnight Gateway Hotel, Port Moresby (includes dinner and drinks, and breakfast). www.coralseashotels.com.pg

DAY 14: THU 20 AUG 2009

PORT MORESBY / FLY OUT

Departing flights today:

PX003/QF350 to Brisbane departs 06:45

PX090/QF384 to Cairns departs 09:30

PX392 to Singapore departs 15:00

PX5 to Brisbane departs 15:30

CG100 to Cairns departs at 17:30

If you are departing on an afternoon flight Ecotourism Melanesia vehicles and drivers are available for your last-minute touring, souvenir shopping and errands, before we farewell you at the airport. There may be time to visit the national museum which takes about 1 hour to look through. Also recommended is a trip to the PNG Art artifact showroom (okay it's a tin shed) which has the largest range of artifacts, arts and crafts from all over the country. They will pack and ship overseas so you can avoid carrying stuff with you on the plane if you wish.

TOUR ENDS

TRIP NOTES:

- 1. Conditions.** The general terms and conditions applicable to this tour are those specified on your invoice and on the Booking page of our website.
- 2. Change of itinerary.** Destinations are subject to change in response to local conditions. Where travel to a specified destination is contraindicated by local conditions, travel to an alternative destination of similar value with similar activities will be provided where possible, but claims for partial refunds based on quality of substitute activities will not be accepted.
- 3. Hotel accommodation** in the towns transited on this tour are generally of three star standard. Hotel and resort rooms all have private bathrooms, TV and air-conditioning (except in the Highlands), unless otherwise specified. Hotel accommodation in Papua New Guinea towns is very limited. Towns like Wewak, Mt Hagen, Rabaul and Madang only have two or three hotels of 3 star standard or better. While we endeavour to book you into the hotels stated in the tour itinerary, in cases where hotels are fully booked by the time we receive your tour deposit we may have to book you into alternative accommodation. In this situation we strive to book you into the next-best available accommodation and we apologise in advance for any disappointment. No compensation or partial refunds will be paid on the basis of the quality of hotel rooms provided for you while on this tour, because often the wholesale rates offered to us by higher quality tourist hotels are similar to the non-commissionable rates we have to pay lesser quality guest houses when tourist hotels are full.
- 4. Single supplement.** All accommodation included in the tour package quoted is twin-share. On payment of a single supplement of 20%, we will arrange single occupancy for you *wherever single rooms are available at time of booking - on this tour single supplement includes single rooms at Wewak, Mt Hagen and Port Moresby only (6 nights). Single accom cannot be guaranteed at Sepik River or Simbai.* The single supplement charge covers the cost of the extra room and our service fee for the additional arrangements. If you are travelling alone and you do not pay the single supplement you will be roomed with another traveller of the same gender. The 20% charge for single supplement is a flat rate.
- 5. Group size.** The maximum group size for this tour is 16 people plus 1 tour escort (Ecotourism Melanesia staff) due to charter aircraft capacity limits. Where the number of bookings for the tour exceeds this maximum, two parallel tour groups may be operated. Where the number of confirmed bookings for this tour is less than 8 at the booking deadline of two months before the tour, the tour will be cancelled and deposits refunded or alternative customised (ie unescorted) arrangements to an equivalent value will be provided.
- 6. Extras.** Between-meal snacks, any meals not included in the package, and other extras at hotels can be paid for in cash or with credit card direct to the hotel or restaurant.
- 7. Safety and security.** Some activities on this tour require water travel in local boats and native canoes that may not be carrying a full set of safety equipment. We do provide life jackets but if you require a special fitting you should bring your own. Individuals who cannot swim are advised against taking tours like this involving open water travel in small craft. Light hiking activities on this tour require an average level of fitness. Papua New Guinea is sometimes pictured as a dangerous destination, but although street crime is a concern in some urban areas and tribal fights are prevalent in some parts of the Highlands, the vast majority of the country, especially the rural areas, is safe and welcoming. It is very uncommon for a tourist to be a victim of crime in PNG because tourists do not usually visit areas where crime or tribal violence are prevalent. Nevertheless, Ecotourism Melanesia takes the safety and security of our visitors seriously and all tours we offer involve destinations that we rate as safe.
- 8. Climate and clothing.** Coastal and lowland areas of Papua New Guinea, including the Sepik River and Wewak, are perpetually warm-to-hot with high humidity. Nights are cooler but still humid. In the Highlands areas like Goroka, Mt Hagen and Simbai the days are generally warm and sunny with moderately cold nights and mornings. We suggest visitors pack clothes made predominantly of cotton which will allow an evaporative cooling effect in hot humid areas. A battery operated personal fan is useful when travelling in rural areas without electricity. Pack a sweater or warm jacket for wearing in the Highlands in the evenings. Recommended sleeping attire is light track pants and sweat shirt or similar. Papua New Guinea is a conservative country and brief or revealing clothing worn by foreigners is frowned upon.
- 9. Packing suggestions.** We suggest that your packing list include: a small flashlight with spare batteries, rain poncho, a small bath towel, your favourite soap in a leakproof container, two rolls of your favourite toilet paper, a one-litre water bottle, a small first aid kit. We recommend valuable personal items (camera, travel documents etc) be packed in ziplock plastic bags to protect them from the wet (rain, sea spray). Suitable footwear for this tour includes boat shoes/tennis shoes/sneakers, and a pair of sandals/thongs/flipflops. Bring

spare batteries for your digital camera because batteries seem to go flat more rapidly in the humid climate are not obtainable in all stores here.

10. **Accommodation in rural areas.** Village guest houses offer very basic accommodation in village-style huts accommodating two to four people per room. Bedding consists of rubber or inflatable mattresses which will have clean sheets (or sleeping bag) and pillows, set up under mosquito net "tents" inside the hut, sometimes set on a woven mat on the floor, sometimes set on a raised bed frame. Lighting is provided by kerosene pressure lamps and flashlights. There is usually an outdoor bathroom and toilet - the toilet will usually be a sit-down pedestal over a pit latrine and the outdoor shower will consist of a screened-off area of grass or pebbles with a drum of water that you can use to scoop water over yourself. In some villages there is a nearby stream that you can bathe in. When bathing in public places such as a stream it is appropriate to bathe in your clothes and change into dry gear once back inside your room. Male visitors may bathe in shorts. Ladies should bring a sarong or quick-dry shorts and top to wear for bathing.

11. **Meals.** At village guest houses and rural lodges local-style food is served consisting of a variety of fresh fruit and fresh vegetables cooked in coconut milk, plain boiled or baked in banana leaves under hot stones (known locally as mumu). For breakfast they provide tea with fresh scones or pancakes, and fruit. At village guest houses and small hotels where there is limited menu choice, or where set-menu meals are provided, these are included in the tour package. At larger hotels where a good menu is available, lunches and dinners are usually not included in your tour, to give you some freedom of choice. Such hotel meals may be paid for in cash or by major credit card. Your tour itinerary clearly states which meals are included in your tour package price, and which meals which are pay-as-you-go (PAYG).

12. **Water.** Town water supplies in Papua New Guinea are treated and officially rated as safe to drink. In the villages, drinking water is usually collected in rainwater tanks or carried in containers from clean water sources. However to prevent discomfort from drinking from a different water supply every day as you progress through your tour, we recommend you either drink bottled water, carry and use water purification tablets, or drink boiled water. There is also a battery-operated product called Steripen that some visitors have highly recommended - it uses UV radiation to kill bacteria in any cup of water. You may be able to buy this from camping stores. Village guest houses should routinely offer you drinking water that has been boiled and cooled. In the villages you can also ask for coconut water from young coconuts which is always sterile and safe to drink.

13. **Visas.** Tourist visas are available on arrival at Port Moresby airport for citizens of designated countries including Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and western European countries. The cost is PGK100 which must be paid in local currency. There is a bureau-de-change in the Customs area and immigration officers will allow you to walk over and exchange your money prior to paying for your visa if you would like to pay in local currency, but this will be time-consuming so it is better to arrive with enough local currency to pay for your visa. Getting your tourist visa issued will be quick and easy if you have a copy of your tour itinerary handy to show the immigration officer. Please note your passport must have at least 6 months validity left on it in order to be issued a PNG visa. Please check your passport to make sure the expiry date is at least 6 months away from the time you plan to enter PNG. Passport-holders of central and eastern European countries, Middle Eastern countries, African and Caribbean countries must normally apply for a visa at least 6 weeks in advance, from their nearest PNG diplomatic mission (ie London, Brussels, Washington DC, Canberra, Singapore, Manila). However we can usually arrange for such visas to also be issued on arrival to avoid the risk of sending your passport away. For assisting with visa matters we charge an additional fee.

14. **Money.** The best way to obtain PNG currency is by withdrawing a credit card cash advance on arrival. Automatic teller machines operated by major banks in PNG will accept Mastercard and Visa Card but there is an ATM withdrawal limit of PGK2000 (about USD\$700) per day. Larger amounts can be withdrawn over the counter in bank branches located in major towns. There are now ATMs located at Port Moresby airport that you can access on arrival. The Travelex currency exchange booths at major Australian airports including Brisbane and Cairns always have PNG Kina currency in stock (banks and currency exchange booths in the city centres may not), but don't change large sums of money there because the exchange rate for purchasing kina is better here in PNG than in Australia.

15. **Costs.** To give you an indication of the costs of hotel meals, at hotels in Port Moresby fish and chips costs USD\$8, a medium pizza is USD\$10, T-Bone Steak is USD\$15 and a local beer is USD\$3.

16. **Health.** The major health risk in PNG is malaria. Preventive medication must be taken while visiting PNG (see information below). Minor health risks for which tourists are advised to update their vaccinations include

typhoid, cholera and hepatitis B. Your personal first aid kit should include fabric sticking plasters (eg Elastoplast, not plastic strips), paracetamol, treatment for insect bites (eg Stingose or Calamine lotion/cream), antibiotic cream or powder (not antiseptic - Dettol etc is useless for preventing infection in the tropics, you have to hit skin wounds with antibiotics straight away - ask your doctor to prescribe it for you, eg tetracycline ointment), and prickly heat powder.

There are hospitals and doctors available in all major towns in PNG which can provide urgent medical care, but when visitors require serious medical attention we would normally contact their travel insurer to arrange a medical evacuation to Australia - this can be accomplished in a matter of hours as there are several medivac companies operating in PNG that are on 24 hour standby with fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. However availability of medical care in some rural areas visited as part of your tour is limited and medical evacuations may be difficult to arrange in some locations. You must be aware of this risk especially if you have a pre-existing health condition that may flare up and require medical attention. While we are on-tour our office in Port Moresby is on 24-hour alert to provide assistance but we cannot guarantee to be able to obtain 24-hour attention from other service providers.

17. **Malaria.** Before arriving in PNG you must see your doctor or traveller's medical centre for anti-malaria medication, which you will take during your time in PNG. No anti-malaria medication is 100% effective against malaria but taking something is better than not taking anything. If you are taking effective anti-malaria medication your chances of actually contracting malaria are quite low (but not zero). There are a number of recommended anti-malaria medications that can be taken weekly (eg Lariam) or daily (eg Doxycycline). Doxycycline is actually an antibiotic and it was only in recent years that people discovered, quite by accident, that doxycycline is also an effective anti-malaria medication. The advantage of taking daily doxycycline to prevent malaria, if you can be sure to remember to take it every day, is that your blood remains saturated with a broad-spectrum antibiotic and this also prevents cuts and scratches from becoming infected, and may stave off chest coughs and other internal infections that might otherwise spoil your vacation. If your doctor suggests you take chloroquine as anti-malaria medication please query this because nowadays much malaria in PNG is resistant to chloroquine and it is not recommended as an anti-malaria medication for visitors.

Even if you are infected with malaria you are unlikely to fall ill during your visit here as the incubation period for the malaria parasite is a minimum of seven days so even if you get bitten by a malaria mosquito on your first day here you are unlikely to experience malaria symptoms until you are back at home. Thus, if you fall ill after returning home you must seek immediate medical treatment and inform the doctor that you have been in PNG. Early malaria symptoms include body aches and pains, diarrhoea, headache, high temperatures and general "sick" feeling. Symptoms are almost identical to flu. As the illness advances without treatment you will experience fever and chills (feeling cold while your body is actually hot). The only way to correctly diagnose malaria is with a blood test. If laboratory facilities are not available, health workers in PNG generally treat patients presumptively. In your country, your doctor or hospital will probably insist on waiting for a blood test result before treating you and you might suffer for up to 24 hours before beginning treatment. Pharmacies in small towns in your home country may not stock medications for malaria and other such "exotic" illnesses. Therefore we recommend you either treat yourself with a presumptive course of malaria when you leave PNG, or take a box of the pills home with you and take them presumptively if you fall ill.

The medication recommended by the World Health Organisation for presumptive treatment of malaria in Papua New Guinea is a combination of artemether and Fansidar tablets. This treatment is available over-the-counter from pharmacies (five days artemether with Fansidar on the third day). Artemether has no known side effects or interactions with other medications so there is no harm done in taking the presumptive treatment if your symptoms are not caused by malaria. If you are female and you may be pregnant, some anti-malarials will not be suitable for you.

The Sepik River area is renowned for mosquitoes. Although it will be the dry season and mosquitoes will not be in plague proportions, be prepared with insect repellent and anti-malaria medication.