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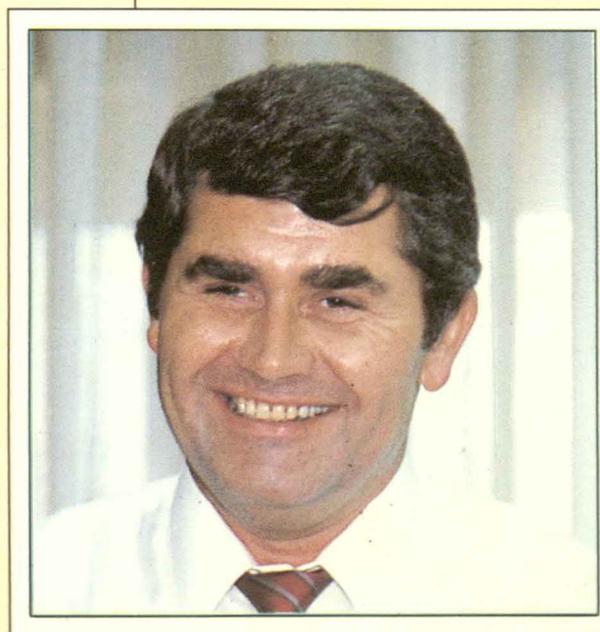
Welcome aboard,

Papua New Guinea's mountain airstrips, perched on ridges and carved into hills, allow people and produce to move freely from communities which were once isolated by distance and terrain.

Highlands dresses for singsings are colorful, spectacular and highly distinctive between tribes. Villagers go to great lengths to preserve the traditional design of body decoration.

Enjoy these and other articles and have a pleasant flight.

Dieter Seefeld
General Manager & Chief Executive
Air Niugini



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General Manager & Chief Executive
Air Niugini

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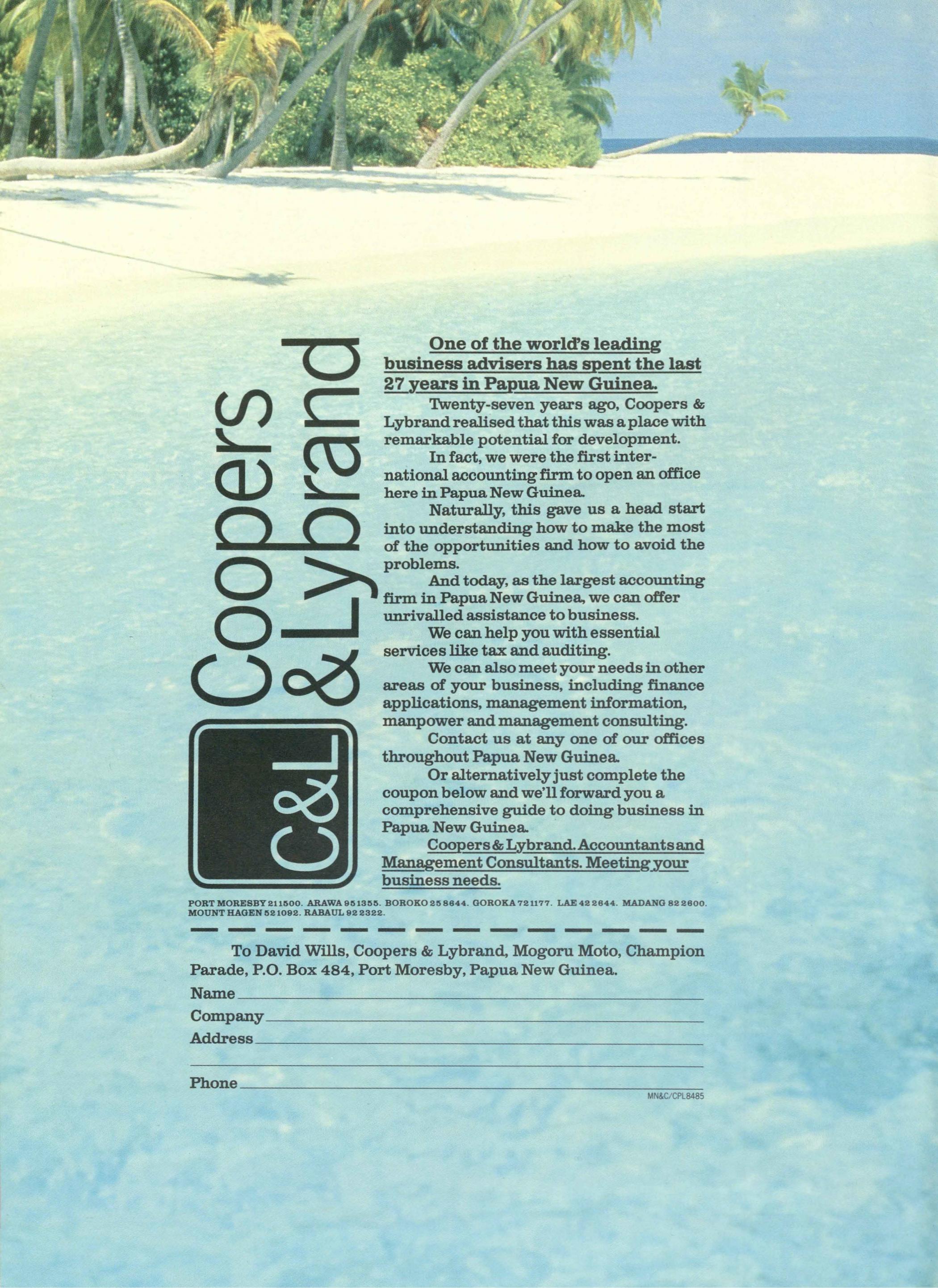
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IN THIS ISSUE:

- 5 CHECKING THE TRAPS**
Mountain airstrips serving isolated Highlands communities.
- 11 THE PIG IS BIG**
Pigs came with the first humans to Melanesia and remain central in life and ritual.
- 17 MEN OF STATURE**
Colorful and spectacular dress distinguish Highlands tribes.
- 23 GONE SURFING IN PNG**
Great oceanic swells breaking on coastal reefs lure surfers.
- 31 ART DECO ON WHEELS**
Jeepneys of the Philippines express the flamboyant individuality of the owners.
- 39 THEATRE OF A NATION**
National Theatre Company is an important teacher of ethics and morality.

Cover: Lizard totem on the face mask of a Gogodala dancer from Balimo, Western Province. Photograph by Kevin Glennon.



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CHECKING

THE

Story and photographs by
Georgie and Ron McKie

TRAPS

Most of the hundreds of airstrips throughout Papua New Guinea are short dirt or grass strips which provide the only link with the rest of the nation. The road network links only major centres and there is no vehicular road linking the north and south coasts. The contact provided by third level airlines is therefore essential to the ongoing development of this young nation. Small aircraft, with short take-off and landing capabilities and an ability to get airborne from high altitude airstrips, are used extensively to service remote settlements. One of the most popular is the Britten Norman Islander, a sturdy little twin engine aircraft introduced several years ago. This has become the backbone of small PNG airlines.

Flights into remote areas are a great way to see more of this fantastic country. They can also provide heart-stopping experiences, particularly if you are used to an Airbus or Boeing 747.

Two regions can be reached easily in a relatively short time out of Port Moresby. The Goilala region takes in the north-west part of Central Province, a mountainous area encompassing the Owen Stanley Range and the Wharton Range. Mt Albert Edward is the highest peak in the province at 3991 metres and some of the airstrips are found at over 2000 metres, often with steep slopes and short runways. Little wonder the aviation industry equates a year of PNG flying to several years in other countries.

The second region easily



Above Fane airstrip in the mountainous Goilala region requires precision flying for takeoffs and landings.

reached from Port Moresby is the 'jungles' run. This covers the airstrips along the Kokoda Trail, a foot track linking Northern and Central Provinces.

Pilots refer to flying the Goilala region as checking the traps. This is always done at first light, when air turbulence and wind are minimal. The flights start from either Waitape or Tapini, with the plane ready to take off at 6am. If the morning is clear, flying at dawn is unforgettable, with the soft pastels of the rising sun washing over

ground mist and hillside. Leaving from Waitape, the aircraft circles to gain height before crossing mountain ridges. Waitape is 1500 metres above sea level, and the plane is heading to Sopo, 2100 metres above sea level.

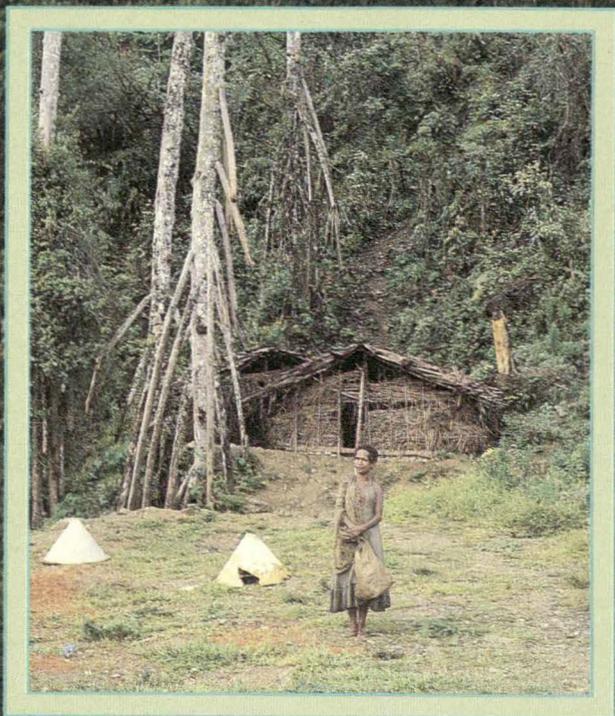
Sopo strip is along a sharp ridge. It is steep, with a sheer drop at the take-off end. We pick up a load of pandanus nuts to take to the market at Tapini. After take-off we bank to the left and fly through a spectacular canyon, reminiscent of Skipper's Canyon on the South Island of

New Zealand. Little vegetation can cling to the mountain sides, but a foot track can be seen. From the end of the canyon we bank right and land at Tapini.

Tapini is the district headquarters for the Goilala area with a road link to the capital. This makes it an ideal drop-off point for freight such as peanuts and pandanus, which go on to Port Moresby markets by road. The airstrip at Tapini has frequent visits from the Royal Australian Air Force, with pilots gaining experience flying Caribou air-

craft into mountain airstrips. Tapini strip slopes up-hill and planes must bank sharply to the right after take-off because of a mountain across a river gorge at the end of the runway.

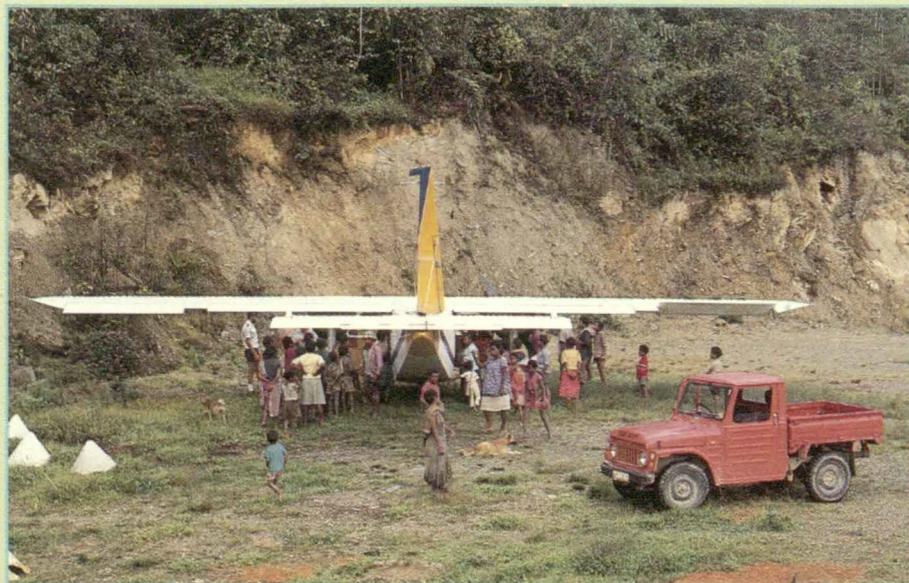
From Tapini we slowly climb to slip across a pass at 2600 metres. It is here that pilots decide whether to attempt landings at strips on the far side of the range. We approach Guari, 2065 metres with a 6 per cent slope. From here we can see two other strips, one of which we are due to visit. The pilots joke



Inset above Cones mark the end of the runway at Kamuli, as does the jungle-clad mountain side.

Above Steep country around Waitape means land travel is by foot only.

about going through their landing procedure before taking off as flying time between the two is so short. A few years ago the priest from Kamuli arranged for a small bulldozer to be brought in by the RAAF to Guari. It was then driven to Kamuli, making the road as it went. Father Abel spent 7000 hours and 3 tons of gelignite making the strip. The stone taken out of the hillside was used to build a church, which was completed in 1987. Father Abel is known for his ingenuity.



He built a hydro generator from the parts of crashed Japanese Zeros and it ran for 29 years without a break.

Kamuli strip is not used often because it is short, narrow and has a row of trees at one end. Any plane that stops there is greeted by the entire village, as we were. After a brief stop to unload freight we head back to Tapini and Waitape. On the way we land at Fane, about as short and steep a strip as one is likely to find. A little over 800 metres long, and with a 12 per cent slope, the



Top Kamuli villagers welcome an arriving flight. **centre** Passengers and freight await flight from Naoro on the Kakoda Trail. **bottom** Loading a Britten Norman Islander at Sopa.

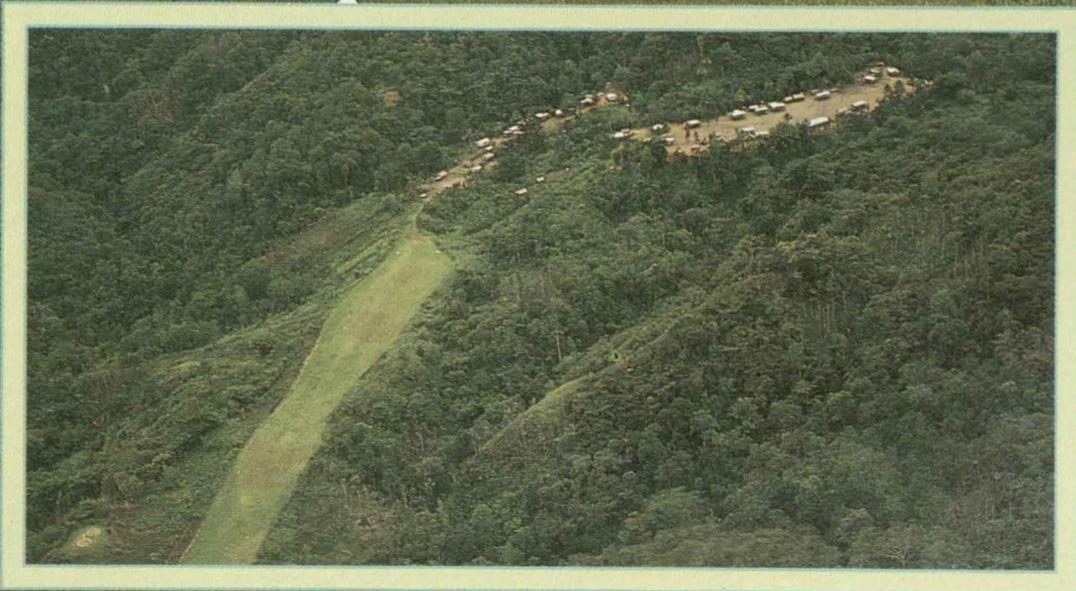
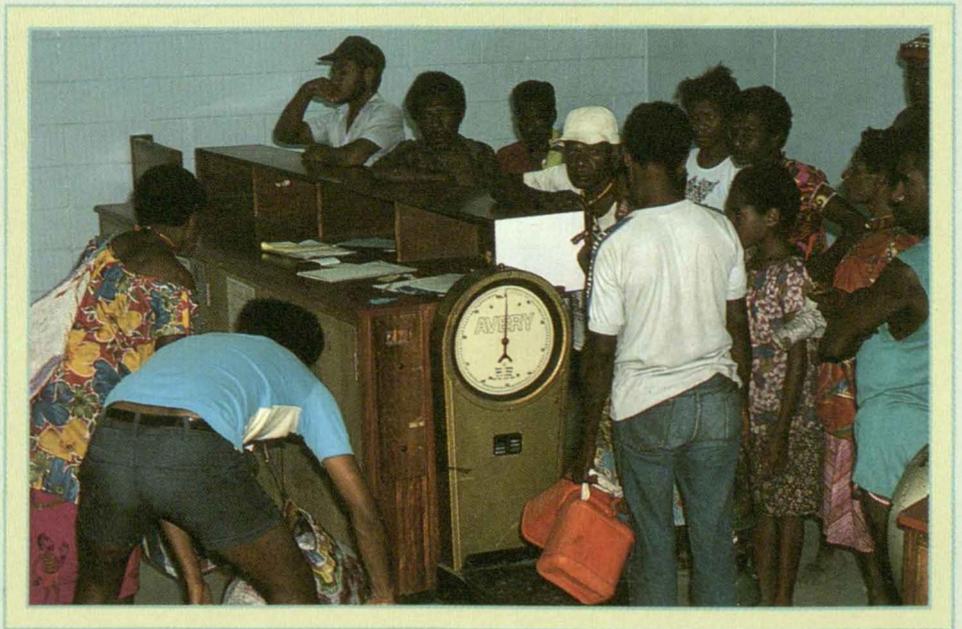


plane stops just short of mission buildings. When taking off it seems that the plane falls off the end of the strip, and then gains height. By the time we return to Woi tape and breakfast, we have made eight take-offs and landings in just under three hours, an indication of the hard work performed by planes and pilots of third level airlines.

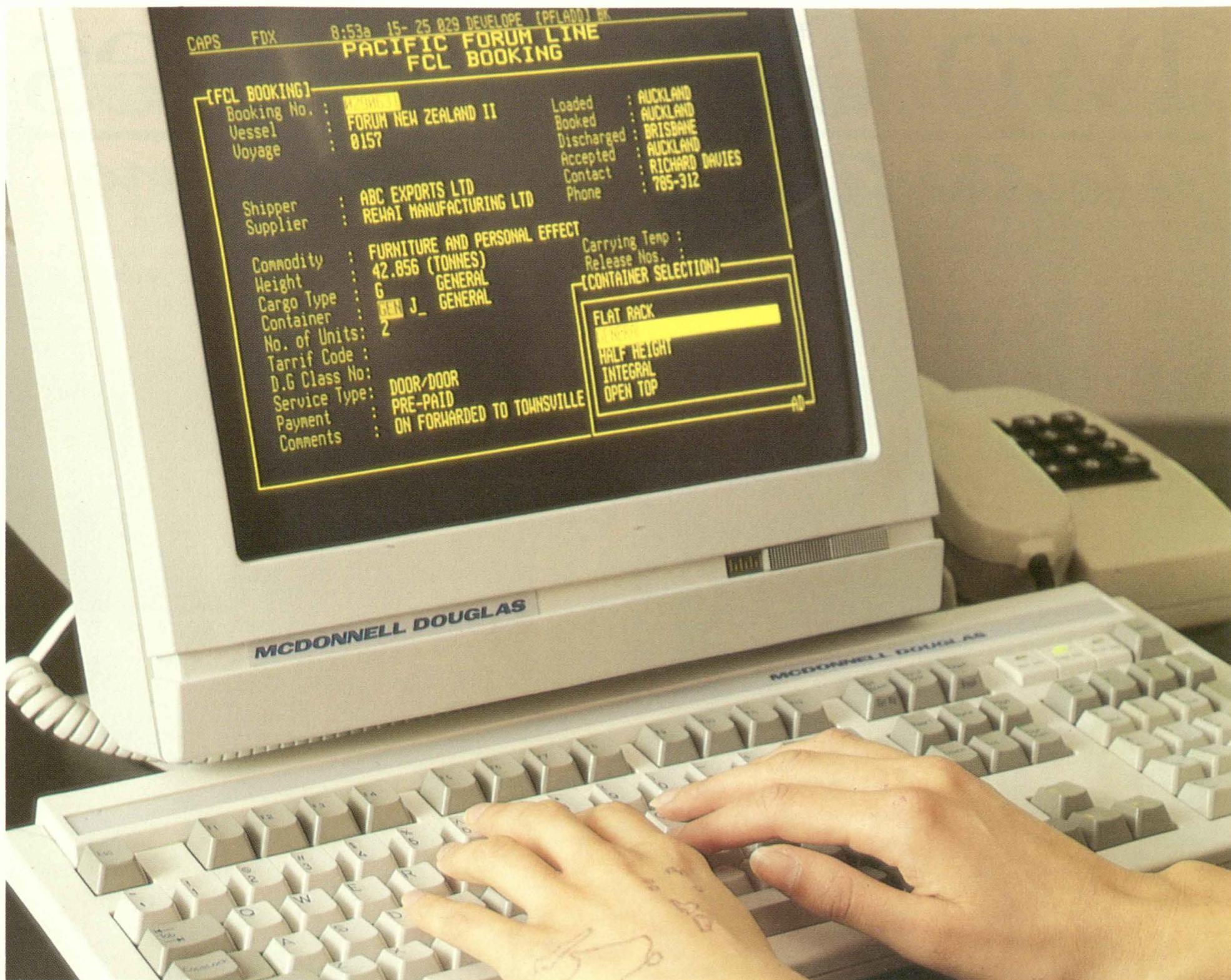
On Sunday mornings, flights service the Kokoda strips as vegetables, fruit and cane are freighted out to Port Moresby. Because of the marshy or

mountainous nature of these strips, payload weights are crucial. Queues of passengers and freight quickly build up, resulting in shuttle-style operations between village and town which continue until the backlog is cleared.

One can't help but admire the tenacity of those who built PNG's airstrips, and the talent of the young pilots who service them, maintaining the essential links of commerce and communication across such a daunting landscape.



Top Right Passengers and freight are weighed carefully before takeoffs in the Highlands. **main photo, above** Scenic Sopo strip is 2100 metres above sea level. **top inset** Unloading produce at Port Moresby terminal. **bottom inset** Efogi One, a typical Highlands airstrip and village.



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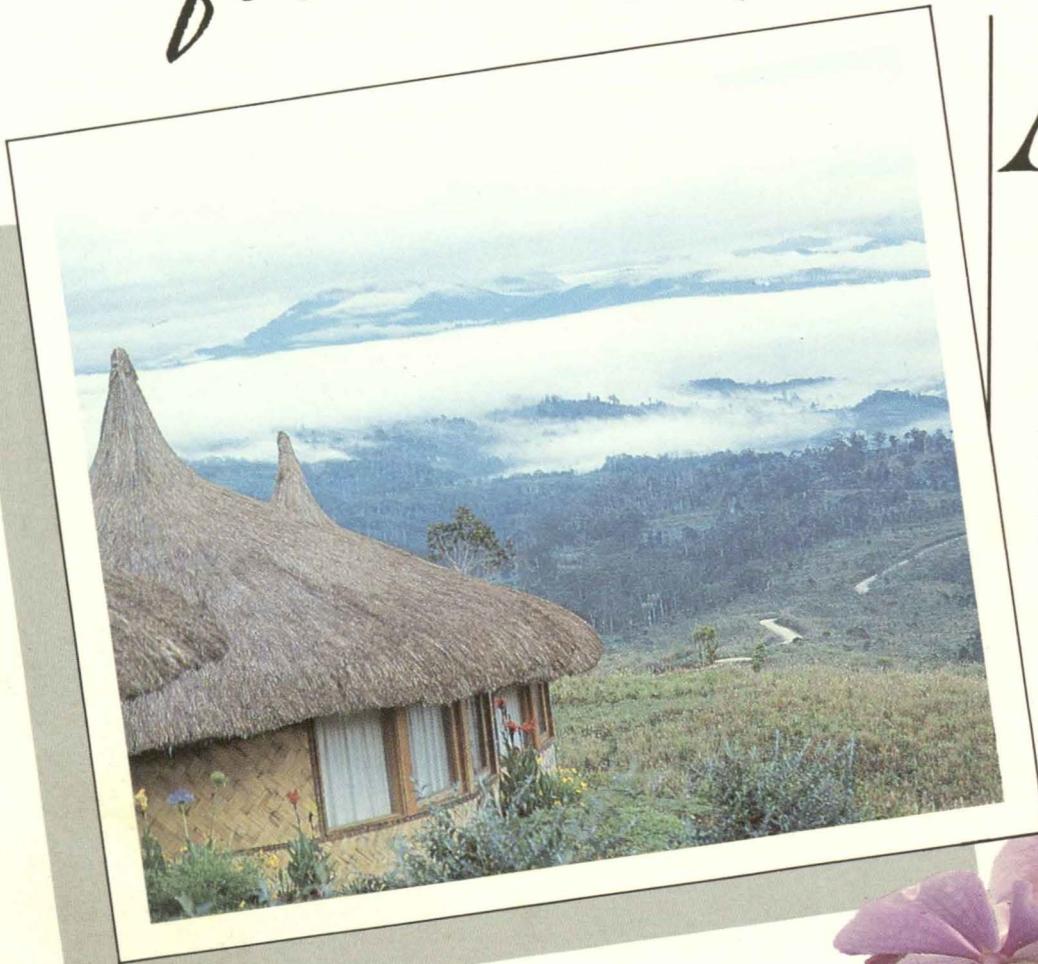


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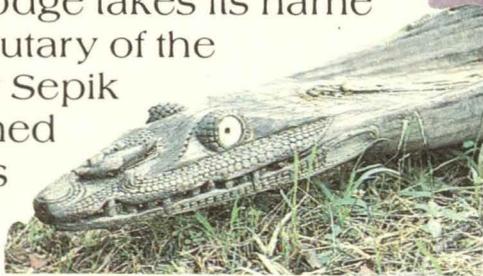
Ambua Lodge, at 7000 feet, has its head in the clouds and looks down on a valley that first saw Europeans less than 50 years ago. Completed in 1985 the lodge has 20 spacious cabins with private modern bathrooms and huge picture windows that look out over the Tari basin. This is home to the Huli people whose body decoration is still a part of everyday custom - bold,



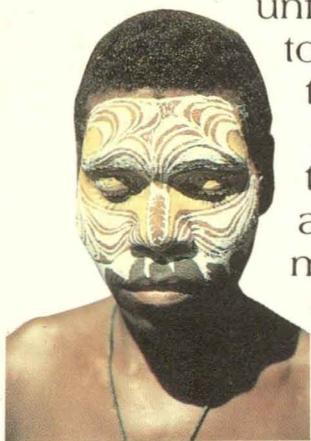
dignified and quite startling. The surrounding mountains are frequented by 13 species of the Bird of Paradise and these can be seen in the orchid studded forests behind Ambua Lodge. Send for our brochure "Papua New Guinea - tomorrow it won't be the same"



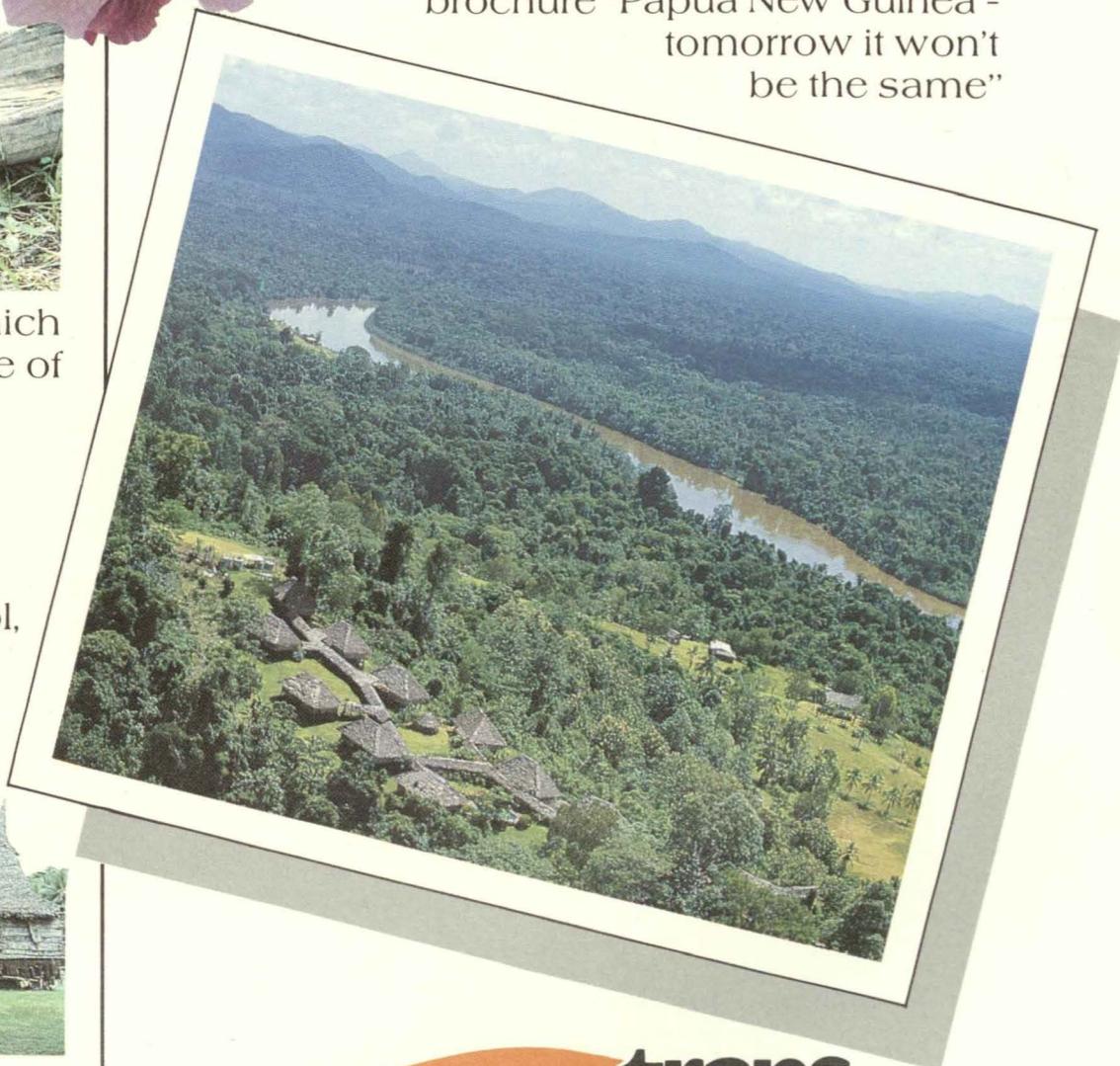
Karawari Lodge takes its name from a tributary of the legendary Sepik River. It is renowned the world over as a luxurious base occupying an



unforgettable setting from which to explore the unique culture of the Sepik basin. The main lodge is designed as a traditional haus tambaran and guests enjoy all the modern comforts of bar, dining and swimming pool, etc. amid stunning examples of Sepik sculpture and folk law.

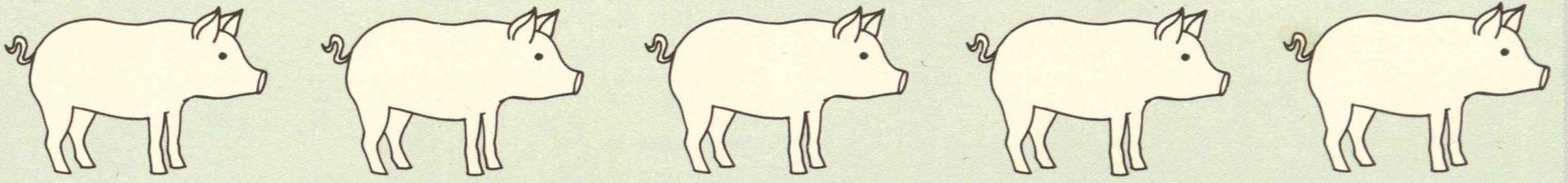


Karawari is built on a ridge, high above the river, the view goes on forever. Each of the 20 guest rooms have private bathrooms and verandahs - the ideal place for early morning tea with fresh cinnamon rolls. The river is your roadway to villages and people who delight to show you their culture and skills - a glimpse of life generations from the 20th century.



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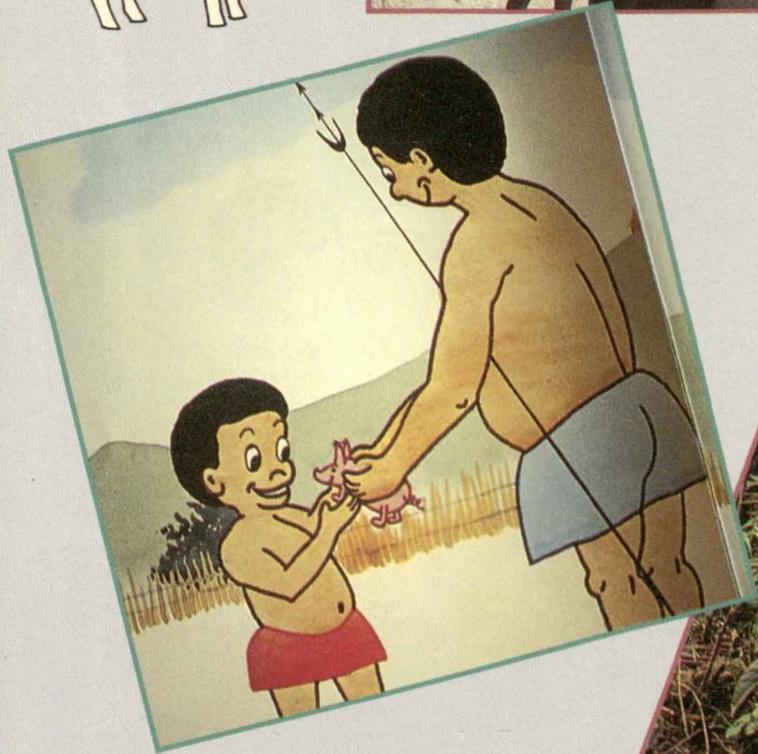
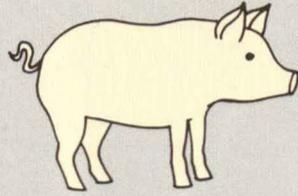
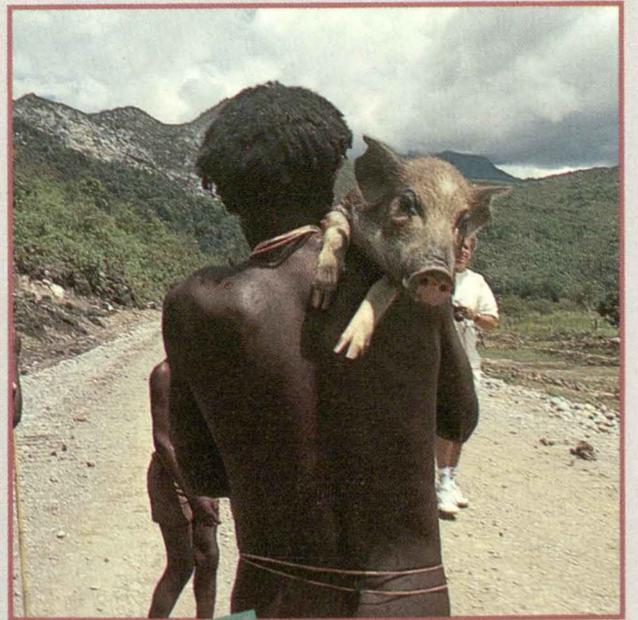
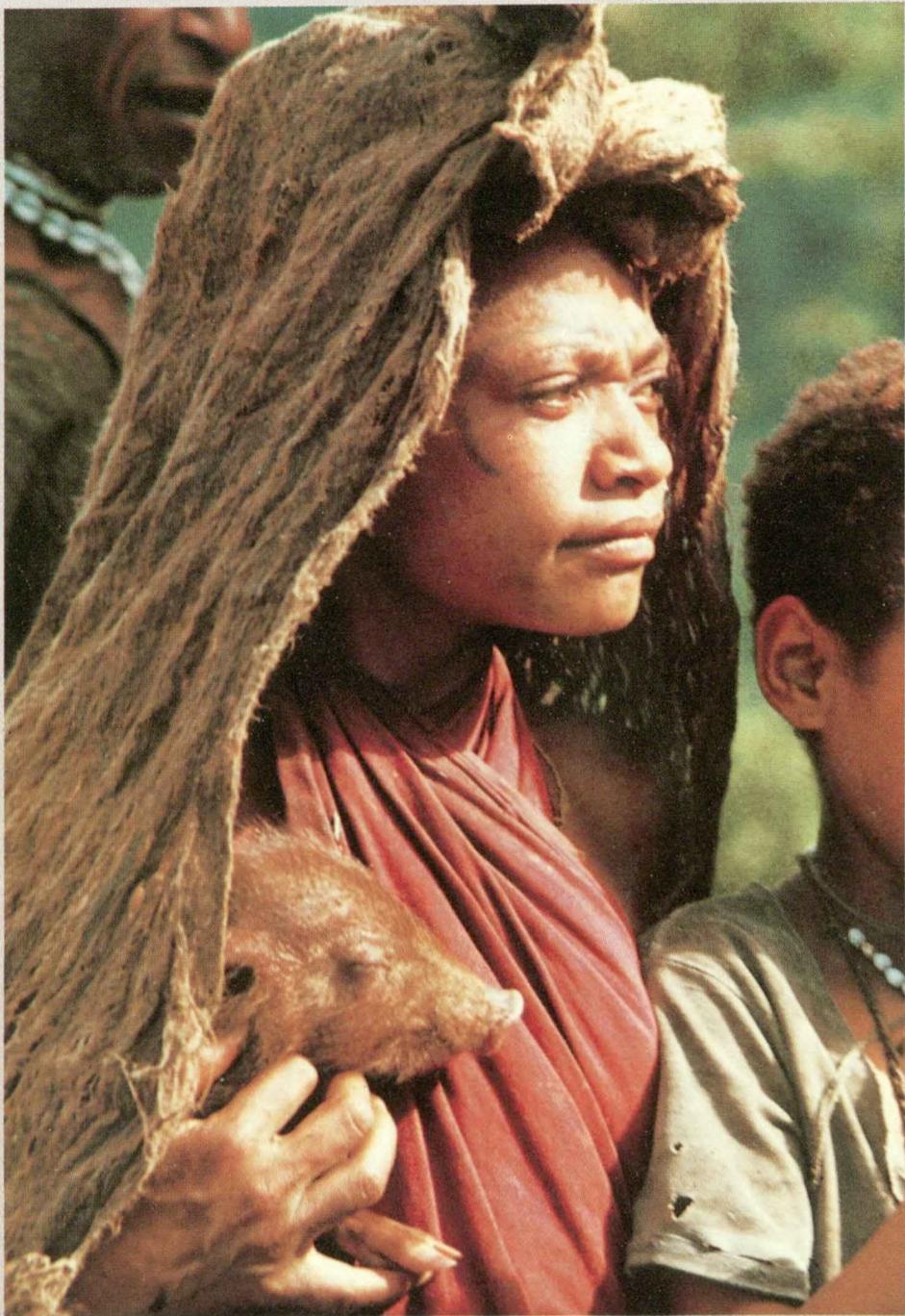
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Story by Patsy Coverdale. Photographs by Liz Thompson

THE PIG IS BIG !

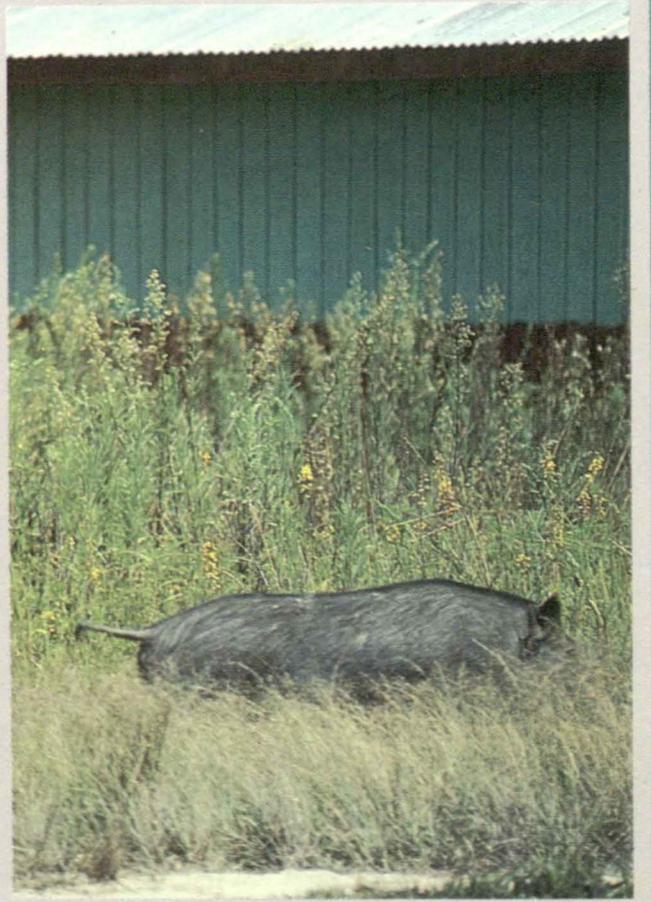
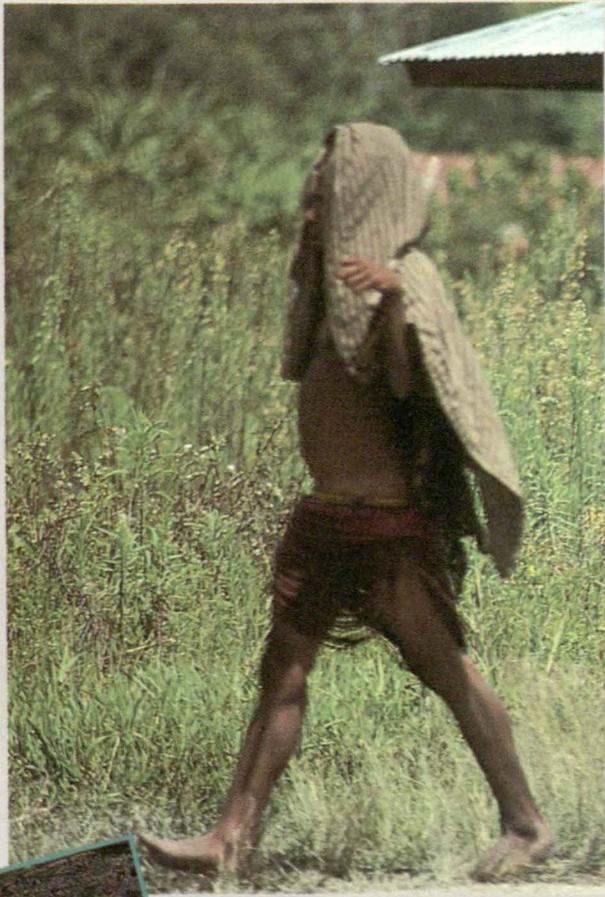
This page, clockwise from left Pigs often live with humans in their first year; they feature in children's stories; and as they grow, learn to forage for themselves.



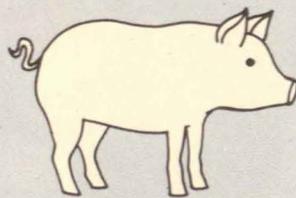
The arrival of the pig on the island of New Guinea from South-east Asia was an event which has had vast cultural, ritual and economic significance for its people. The animal's growth and sacrifice, and the distribution of the flesh, regulate the way families and tribal groups relate to each other throughout Melanesia.

Pigs are often treated as members of the family and are sometimes suckled by women. In some places they accompany women to the gardens daily when they are weaned. They live with humans until eight or 12 months of age. Then they get a stall nearby, where they are petted and fed. Pigs are killed to appease the angry spirits in times of illness or misfortune, or for celebration such as the end of the school year or the workers' return. This provides high-protein food at a time of stress when it is most needed.





Above A modern iron-roofed building is background to a traditional trackside scene of a pig grazing. **left** A whole pig carcass about to be covered in an earth oven. **below left** Preparations for whole roast pork. **below right** Opening an earth oven.

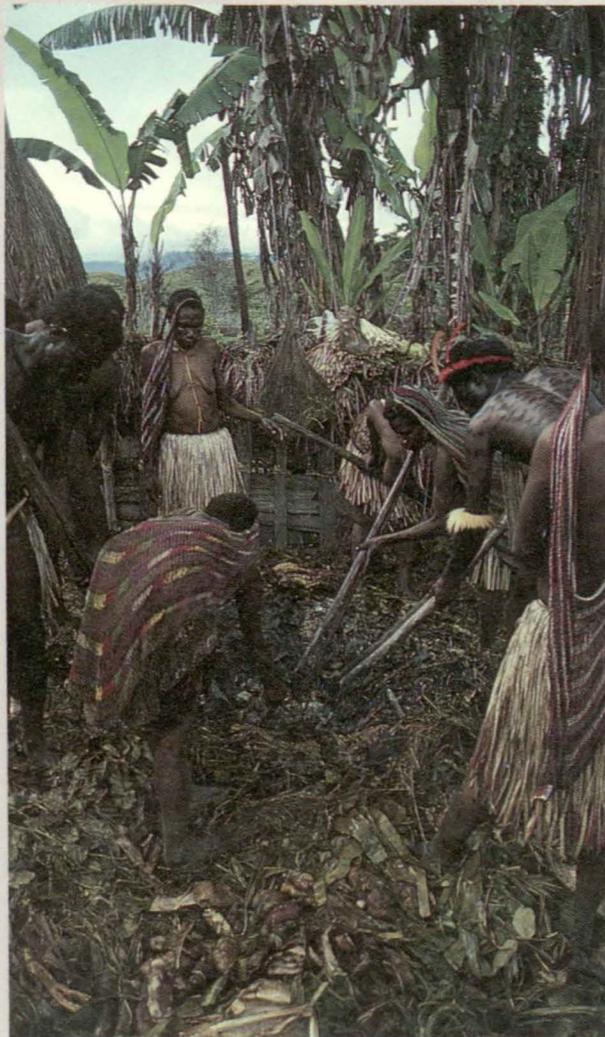
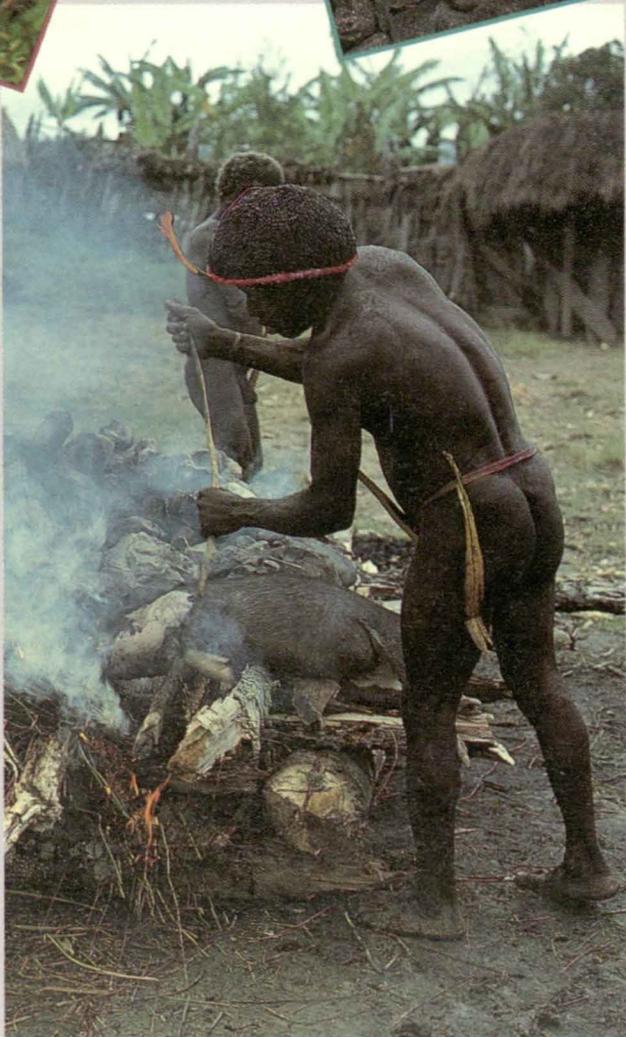


Some pigs are killed for taboo, spite or for trampling gardens.

From the discovery of a jawbone archaeologists estimate the pig arrived about 6500 years ago. While many other peoples of the world were still hunter and gatherers, PNG people had begun to garden. Perhaps they recognised the value of root crops by observing pigs.

Human beings had come to Sahul Land, which was a land mass which included New Guinea and Australia, before the end of the last Ice Age. They may have arrived by boat or bamboo raft at low swampy areas from the Philippines across only 80 kilometres of water. Human remains have been dated at around 45,000 years ago on the Huon Peninsula. A date of 26,000 years ago was determined at the Highlands site of Kosipe, and one tantalising tooth of a pig at Kiowa has been dated at 10,000 years.

At Kuk, near Mt Hagen, a shallow basin with an associated stakehole is thought to be a hollow formed by a tethered pig. A layer of volcanic ash directly above the hollow has been radio-carbon dated as 6,000 years old. A cultivation drainage channel is associated with the basin and it may indicate that pigs were brought to the Highlands as a husbanded animal.

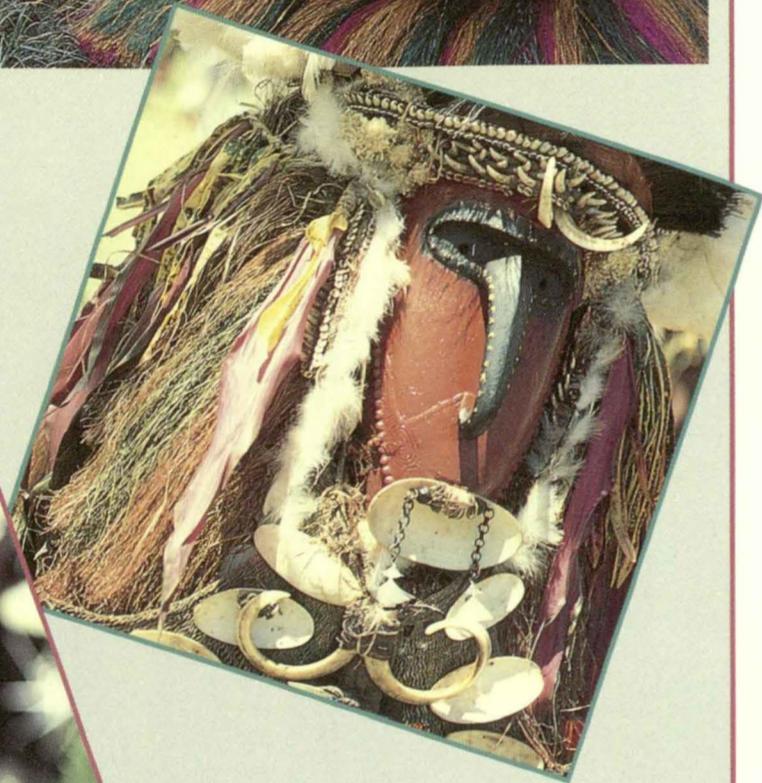
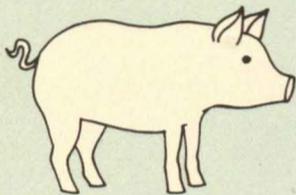


Today, at weddings in Tsembaga, the Maring people dedicate pigs to the groom's ancestors. They are eaten by that family. The bride-price is then presented to the bride's kin in pigs. Large numbers of pigs are usually included in the negotiations for bride-price and compensation.

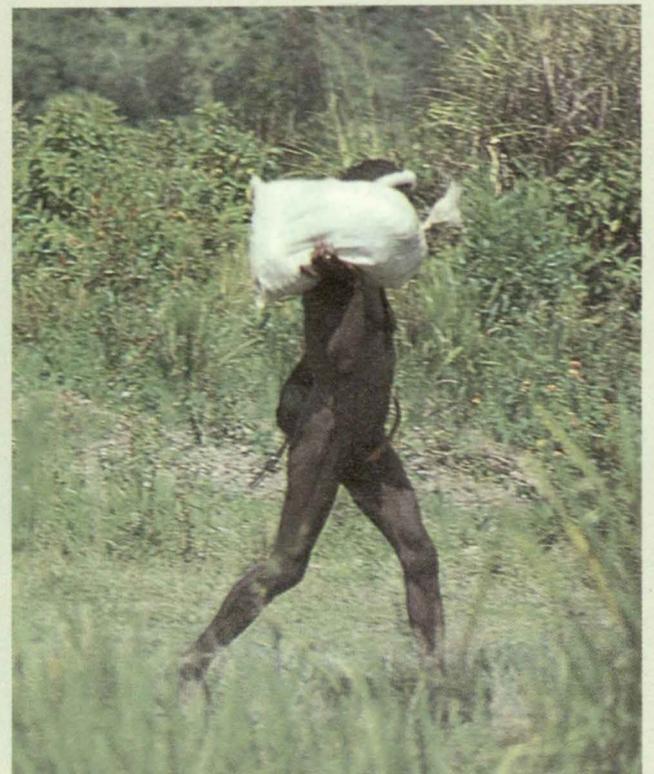
Because of such feasts the normally vegetarian population eats huge amounts of undercooked pork in a short time, often resulting in a mysterious disease called 'pigbel', which can be fatal.

In PNG, horticulture is an adaptation from the time when larger game animals were not available to the early hunters. These animals remained on Sunda Land, comprising the Malay Peninsula, the Indonesian islands of Sunda, Java and Borneo and parts of the Philippine archipelago. Food fauna remains recovered from the palaeolithic layers of Niah cave in Borneo include orang-utan, two-horned rhinoceros, elephant, wild buffalo, giant pig and bearded pig, wild ox, deer, snake, frog, riverine turtle and fish. But these animals did not cross Wallacea, the biological dividing zone in glacial times. They were cut off from Sahul Land by the rising sea.

So horticulture and the domesticated pig were the major food sources for the original human inhabitants of PNG, augmented by the hunting of mostly small game.

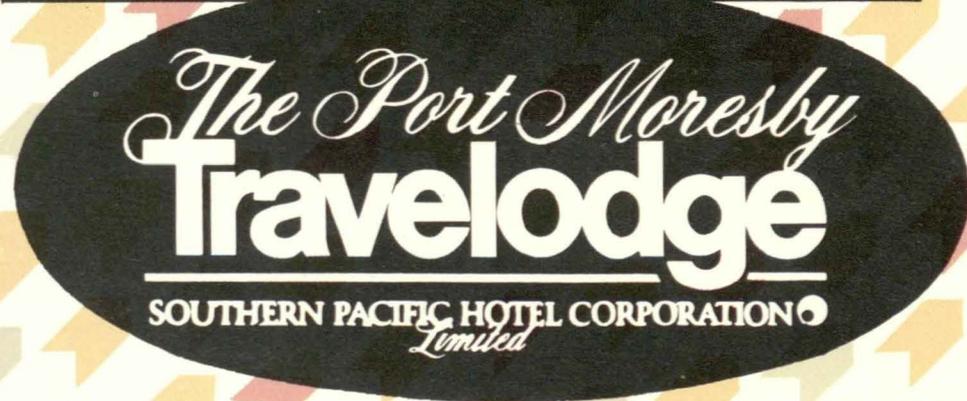
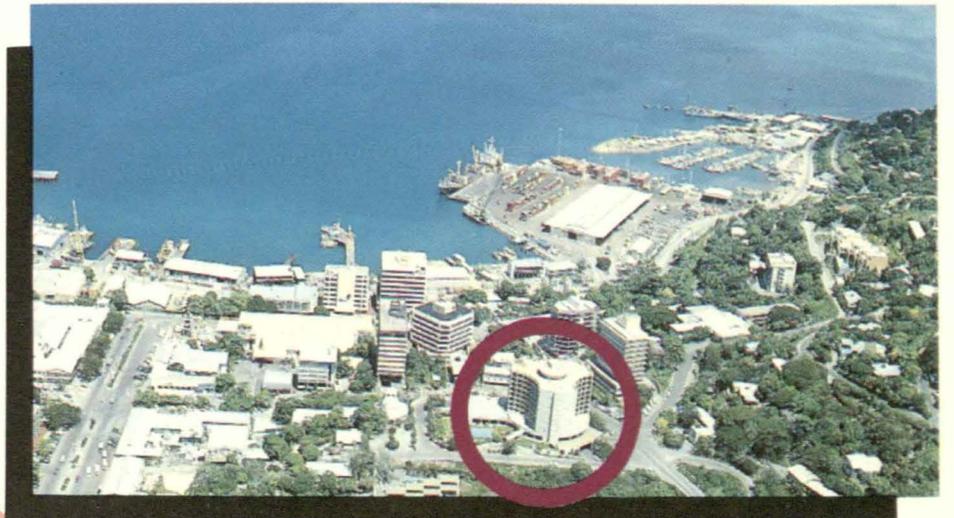


Above and left Pig tusks decorate woven masks, are turned into jewellery and are used to enhance body ornamentation. **below** A family pig follows a man home from market.



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MEN OF

STATUE



Left A Temboka warrior from the Western Highlands displays his distinctive apron, breastplate and headdress.

Story and photographs by Kevin Glennon



After a steep climb up into the Bismarck Range on May 26, 1930, two Australian gold prospectors, Michael Leahy and Michael Dwyer, set up camp on the edge of the Eastern Highlands in the then Mandated Territory of New Guinea. As daylight faded, they noticed flickering firelights along the grassy, open valley. They realised that the area they were moving into was heavily populated, not uninhabited as was commonly thought. That the mountainous interior of New Guinea was inhospitable and unpopulated was one of the widely accepted myths among colonial officials and missionaries early this century.

After seven weeks the party reached the south coast of Papua, having traversed one of the main highland valleys and encountered large populations. Driven by the search for gold, Michael Leahy and his brothers spear-headed the exploration of the remaining highland valleys over the next four years.

Today a similar feeling of adventure can be experienced from the comfort of a motor vehicle. The similarities with the early exploratory trips quickly fade as one drives on into the Highlands. The road is a black ribbon flung out along the rolling grasslands and the signposts of Western impact are soon frequent. In the space of 60 years, broad expansive coffee plantations have appeared, and townships with trade stores, markets, airstrips, schools, offices, and residences have been built. But this is all blended in a distinctly PNG way, with Highlands women wearing colorful string bags thronging



Left A mudman from Asaro in the Eastern Highlands with his earthen mask and bamboo claws. **top right** Western Highlands women display necklaces of sea shell traded from the coast and cuscus fur headbands. **bottom right** Temboka tribesmen from Western Highlands armed with bows and arrows.



the markets, the slightly ramshackle appearance of trade stores and offices, and a decidedly frontier atmosphere.

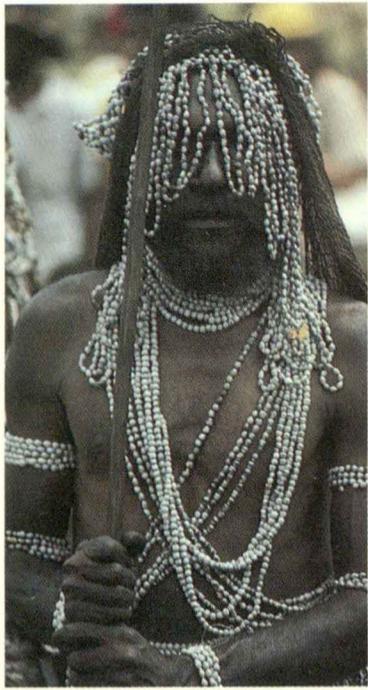
The Highlanders of Papua New Guinea are at their most colorful during singsings or festivals held as part of their elaborate ceremonial exchange systems. These are known as moka in the Mount Hagen area, tee in Enga, and mok-ink in parts of the Southern Highlands. It is at these festivals that men demonstrate their wealth by giving it away. The receivers are then placed in debt which they must repay at a later exchange festival. Compensation payments for the death of an enemy tribesman may also be made.

The body decorations consist of bird plumes and feathers; wigs and aprons; animal pelts, furs, bones and insects; cane, bark, leaves, grasses, shells, oils and paints. There is also nowadays the use of plastic beads and powdered paints bought from trade stores as well as an assortment of western objects such as tags, tinsel and drink tops. But bird plumes and feathers remain the main features of body decoration in the Highlands today.

In the Tari region of the Southern Highlands, Huli tribesmen paint their faces a vivid yellow, fashion a crescent-shaped wig from their own hair cuttings, place the iridescent blue breast shield of the superb bird of paradise as a centrepiece of their wig and frame this with red and yellow parrot feathers. On the back of their neck is hung the large beak of a Blythe's hornbill. As a finishing touch they hang tufts of cuscus fur near their temples and crown the lot with

Top left Whole birds and individual feathers make this spectacular headdress. **bottom left** Huli wigmen from Southern Highlands with characteristic yellow face adornment. **right** Melpa tribesman displays feathers from three species of bird of paradise, human hair wig, cassowary bones, pig tusks, sea shells and croton leaves. **far right** A woman from Pangia in Southern Highlands with cane waist bands, bead necklaces and woven headdress.



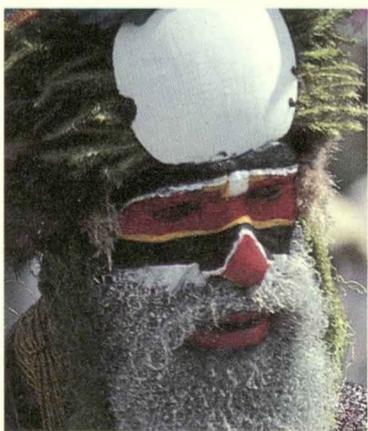


the brilliant tail feathers of the Raggiana bird of paradise. The total effect is striking.

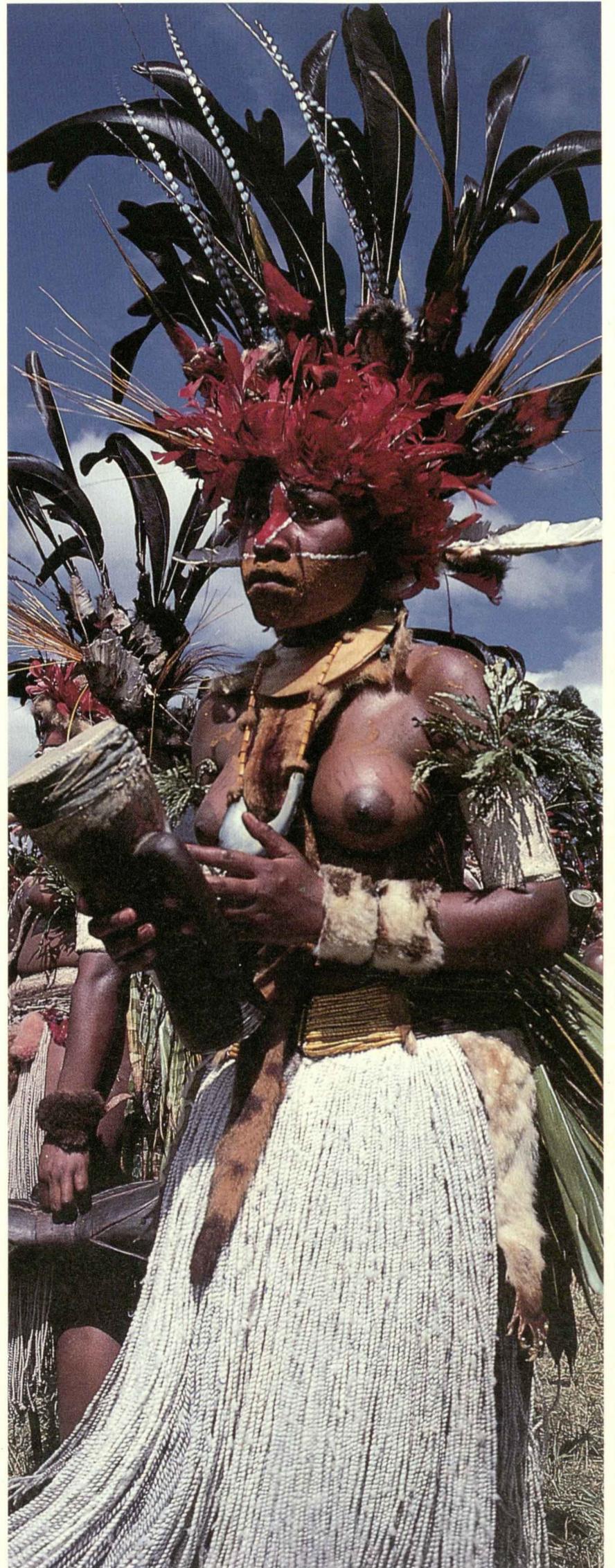
Because of the well-noted isolation of the PNG tribes, there is interesting variation in the forms of body decoration within short distances. In the upper Wahgi Valley around Mount Hagen, Melpa tribesmen have their wives or close female relatives make long, sweeping bush string aprons. Across a well oiled chest they hang a crescent of pearl shell and above that is hung bamboo tally sticks. Leaves and grasses are tucked into cane armbands. Faces are painted black, red, yellow and white and at the front of the headnet-covered wig a segment of baler shell is fixed. Not content with this, a headdress is worn consisting of bird of paradise plumage. The crown plumes of the King of Saxony bird of paradise divide a rectangular frame into three sections with feathers of the blue bird of paradise on either side and red parrot feathers in the middle. Crowning the headdress are red tail feathers of the Raggiana bird of paradise. An awesome and impressive sight.

Further variations occur as one travels east down the Wahgi Valley into the Chimbu area and into the Eastern Highlands, then north into the Jimi Valley, or west to the Enga and the Southern Highlands.

With easier communication and travel, it will be interesting to note the degree of homogenisation that occurs in the body decoration between different tribes. But clan and tribal associations remain strong and with the maintenance of local dialects and languages it is unlikely that customs will change in relation to singsings.



Top left Strings of seeds called Job's tears cover an Eastern Highlander. **bottom left** A Western Highlander with a white-painted baler shell head-piece. **right** A dancer from Mintima, Simbu, sports long black plumes of the Princess Stephanie bird of paradise, red parrot feathers and a tree kangaroo pelt.



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Tiger



Story by Mark Worth
Photographs by Peter Crawford

Gone Surfing in PNG.

Above New Ireland pipeline with surfer Paul King emerging from the tube.



Top left Arriving at Kavieng, New Ireland, by Air Niugini. **top right** In search of waves at Aitape, West Sepik. **above** World War II wreck, West New Britain. **right** Willing hands help with gear at Paup village, West Sepik.

“**T**here’s no surf in New Guinea,” was a familiar cry over the years as I wandered PNG with my board in search of perfect, uncrowded waves. Yet, as a youth, I remember surfing with New Guinean friends on the beaches of Manus Island. Seventeen years later I led successful surfing tours to Wewak, Aitape and Kavieng.

Most people think surf breaks best on sandy beaches, but this is generally not the case. Like its Pacific neighbors of Bali, Hawaii, Fiji and the Philippines, PNG’s best waves break on coral reefs.

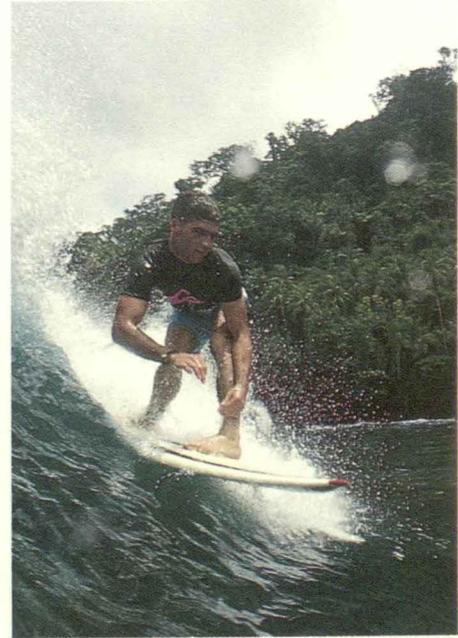
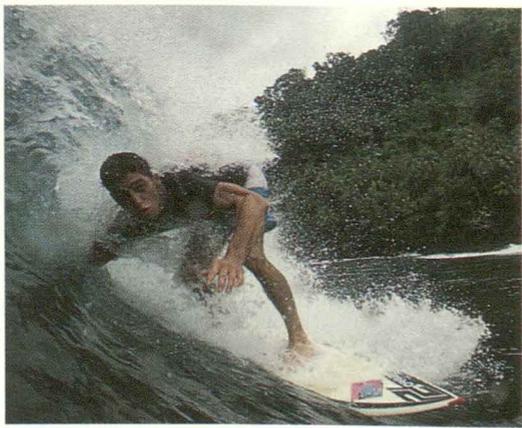
What makes PNG different is the ideal shape of the reefs surrounding small islands and points on its coastlines. They create waves which are excellent for surfing.

Opportunities abound, limited only by seasonal swell conditions. The best time for surfing in PNG is during the north-west monsoon, from November to April. Low pressure systems move east across the Bismarck Sea and generate swells that wrap around the reefs and points of the northern mainland and islands.

The most popular spot for surfers in PNG has always been

Wewak, because of its fine sandy beaches and extreme points that pick up swell from any direction. Wewak once boasted a surf club with a strong membership led by Mark Stoker who says that Forok, Boram and the reefs off Mission Point were the favorite spots. Mark can still be found today catching waves with local children who ride their wooden planks at Wewak.

Air Niugini recently invited a small group to explore and document the surfing potential of PNG. The team consisted of myself, water photographer Peter Crawford, surf tour operators Paul King and Phil



Top left Dave Smith at Kairiru Island, Eastern Sepik. **top centre** Smith again in early morning surf, Kavieng, New Ireland. **top right** And again at Kairiru Island. **left** Demonstrating why his nickname is "Aerial". **above** Paul King on a long ride at Kavieng.

Abrahams and surfer Dave 'The Aerial' Smith.

Our trip began at Wewak where we encountered one-metre beach breaks at Forok and Mission Point. Next day we chartered a cargo boat and visited the island of Kairiru, where we found excellent 1.5-metre waves breaking in front of a village on a coral reef.

That night, over a few cold beers at the Sepik International Beach Resort, we planned a four wheel drive trip to Aitape, checking out breaks along the way. Next day the swell remained constant and we headed west.

Aitape was a magic spot after the comparative hustle and bustle of Wewak and we spent some of the day exploring the town and some islands.

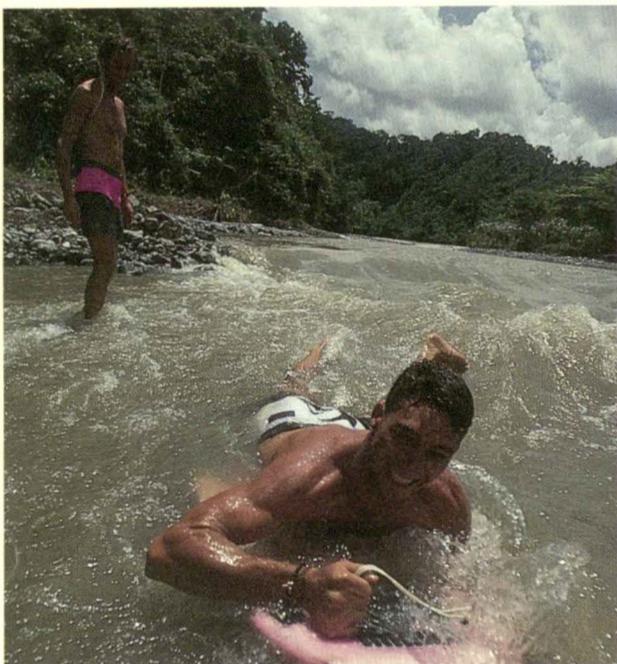
Next day we boarded the Air Niugini F28 for Lae with a changeover at Rabaul then on to Kavieng. For me, Kavieng held great promise because of its northern proximity to monsoonal swells.

We arrived in Kavieng at dark and were greeted by puzzled looks that said: 'There's no surf in Kavieng'.

Next morning we headed for the coastline. Our first view of Utu showed a two-metre swell

pushing on to the north coast, but the wind direction was wrong and the reefs too shallow. We decided to give the coast a miss and see what swell was hitting the points and islands around Kavieng Harbor. There we found world-class waves and much appreciation from a local audience which had never seen surfing before.

After lunch we were back in the boat with Paliau, our Manus boatman, speeding across the harbor to Nago Island, a former Japanese tuna fishing port and home of countless shark stories. As we neared the north end of Nago, we spotted glassy waves



Top Dave Smith gets the feel of the break at Kavieng. **left** Shooting river rapids on a belly board in Western Sepik. **above** Lunch break at Kairiru Island.

peeling around another beautifully shaped reef. Paliau pulled us up close to the main peak and we all paddled furiously into the flawless long lefthanders.

After an hour we headed west for several islands in the distance. The best waves were on the tiny coral quay called Ral with near-perfect, 1.5-metre waves breaking. But the reef was extremely shallow and littered with staghorn coral which caused some nasty cuts.

We decided to head back up the bay towards the mainland. Past the harbor mouth we found two-metre waves peaking and pitching powerfully on to the

shallow reef. This time everybody was a little cautious as the waves were larger and the reef quite exposed. True to form, Dave Smith was first in the water and put on another display of aqua and aerial acrobatics. It turned out to be a great session with good size gutsy waves giving us a challenge and providing Peter with some fine photographs.

Back in the Kavieng Hotel that night there were some very contented and happy surfers raving about the quality and quantity of waves in PNG. There were also some surprised locals who had never envisaged

the possibilities of surfing over coral reefs. "Who said there's no surf in PNG?" we asked.

Since that exploratory surf trip I have run several successful surfing tours to Kavieng and stayed in Wewak throughout the monsoon season. For three to four months there were consistent waves to ride and on some days I saw 3.5-metre swells breaking perfectly on points and reefs, without another surfer in sight.

PNG remains one of the surfing world's best-kept secrets and offers an unspoiled challenge for those seeking the perfect wave.

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ART DECO



Above Manila's Jeepneys stretch the boundaries of automotive decoration and styling.

London may have its red double-decker buses and Melbourne its trams, but the Philippines take the prize for imaginative public transport. Born out of a desperate need for mobility after World War II, the Jeepney evolved from war surplus American jeeps modified to carry up to 10 passengers in sardine-can comfort.

The Jeepney is unique. Few road authorities would permit the protruding ornaments bolted to the bonnet, grill and bumper bars, nor the profusion of slogans, signs and stickers plastering the windscreen. The individualism and chauvinism of the Filipino male is expressed in his art-deco creation on wheels.

In a country where road etiquette is measured by the blast of the horn, pity the poor pedestrian attempting to avoid being impaled on a statue of the Virgin Mary or permanently embossed with the bald eagle of an American military emblem.

This is Manila, a crowded city of eight million where the struggle for survival is entwined with a need to express an individual personality. The Jeepney owner-driver has an opportunity to do so, and whereas his thoughts may be less on safety, he certainly knows how to create a unique form of transport.

It is doubtful if any of the original former US Army jeeps still exist, yet the basic model

Story and photographs by Peter Stone

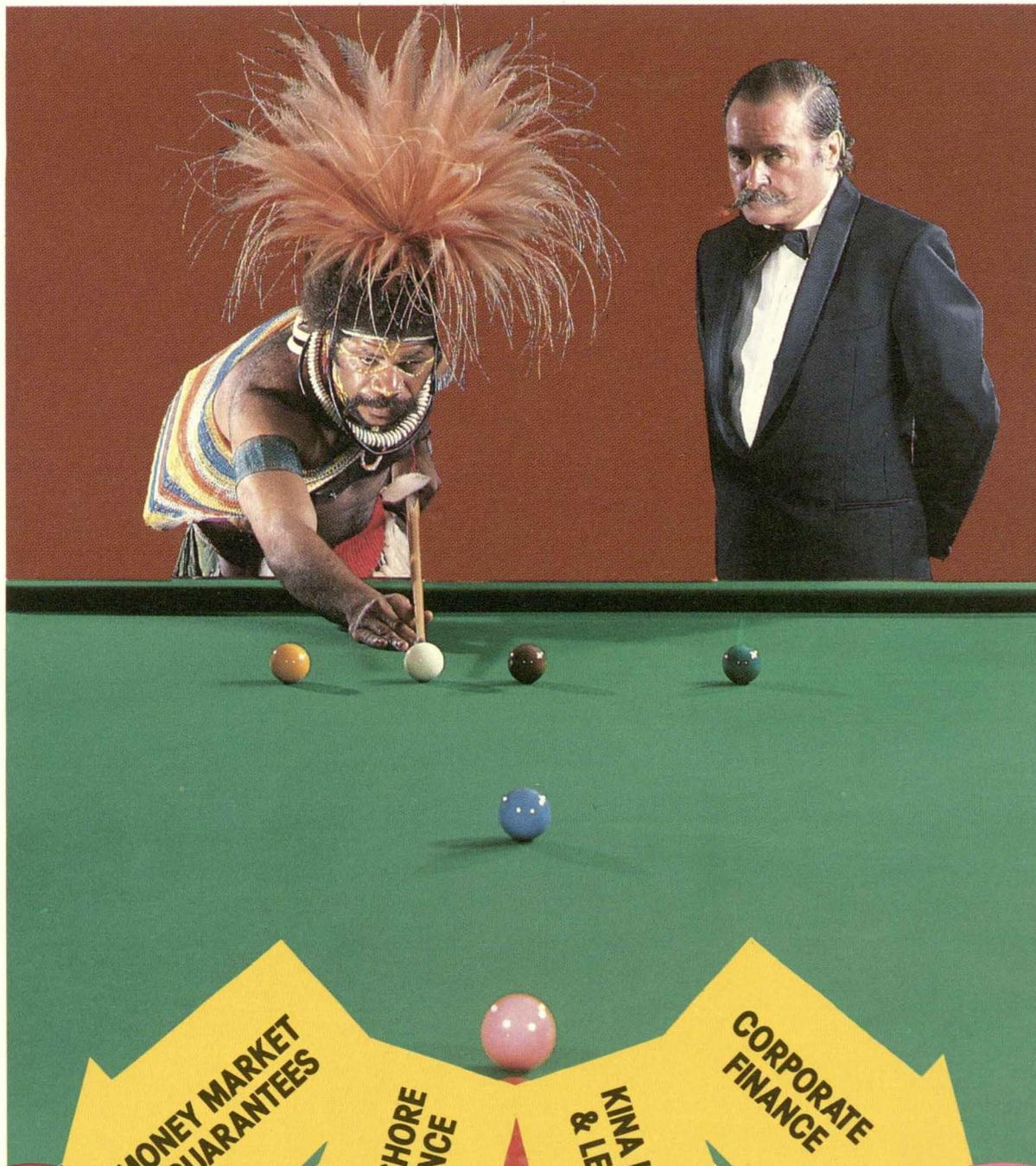
On Wheels





Above Banks of fog lights on this Manila Jeepney but fog is unknown in the city.

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Left Religious themes are common and no two Jeepneys are the same. **centre** Rainbow hues and friendly drivers are the norm. **Bottom** Borrowed Mercedes Benz symbols on the radiator cap go almost unnoticed on this Jeepney.

The best seat is in front with the driver but not next to him where the gear lever can cause some discomfort. Up front you can at least see partly where you are going, perhaps through a windscreen covered with music cassettes stacked on the dashboard. It takes some nerve to prevent yourself from leaping from the cabin at some impending collision with another vehicle which appears imminent

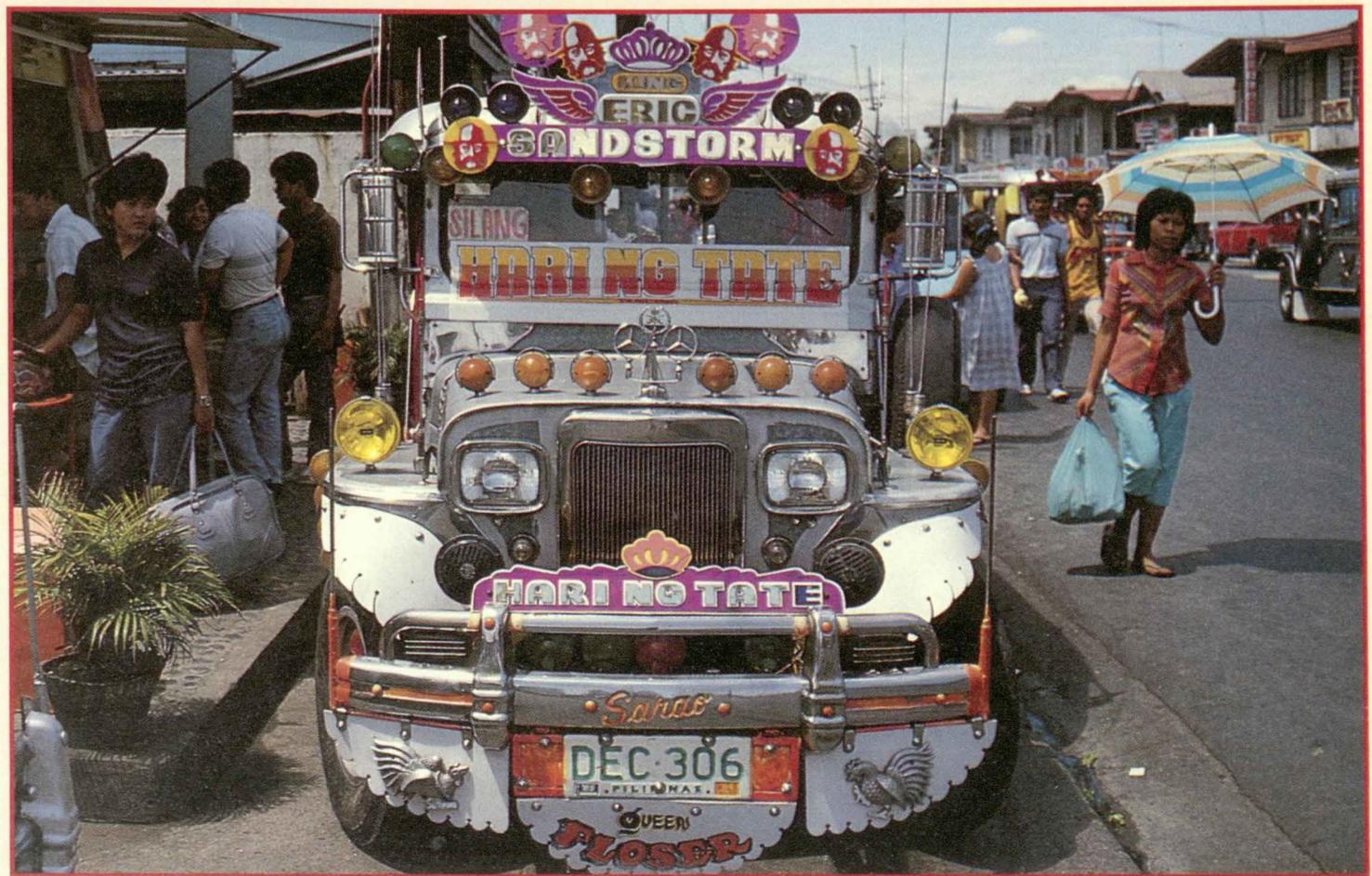
continues to be manufactured at the Sarao factory in Las Pinas, 20 kilometres south of downtown Manila. Visitors are most welcome. Bare, bright and shiny jeepneys are handed over to their new operators who immediately emblazon the vehicle with their own personality. No two Jeepneys are alike.

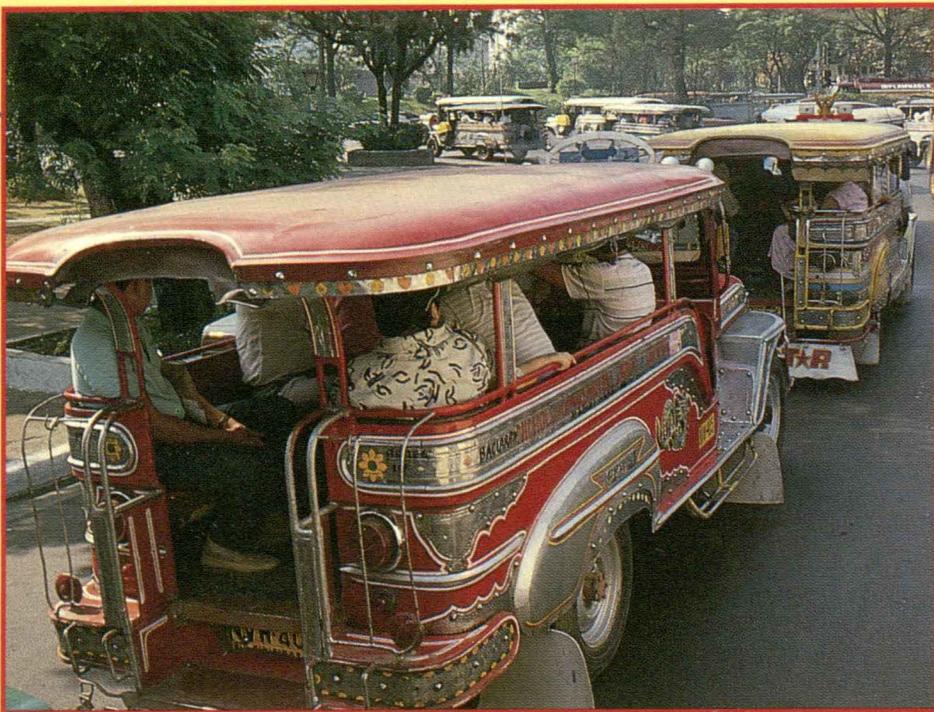
Most drivers are young men, so macho motifs and religious icons dominate. Mary stands virginal with the slogan, 'Blessed Are We', next to a reflective red and silver sign expressing the driver's thoughts on life and love. Silverpainted horse statuettes bolted to the bonnet are a symbol of endurance.

For the uninitiated, Jeepney riding can be confusing. Destination signs are covered by words such as 'Rebel', 'Yankee' or 'Sweet Susan' but a hail and a query to the driver will extract the answer with a grin.

Boarding etiquette requires a scramble through the rear entry over a dozen legs to sit in the vacant space near the front. As pop music blares, passengers squeeze onto two bench seats and others keep the driver company. As each passenger alights, the remainder move back a space.

To alight, bang on the roof, whistle, yell out: "Thanks Joe", or the more polite "para salamt" — stop thank you. The driver will yell out the fare, to which you tender the exact amount via a conveyor of hands. Don't expect change. Tourists emerge like blinded moths, pledged forever to taxi travel. But Filipinos accept it as all part of everyday life.



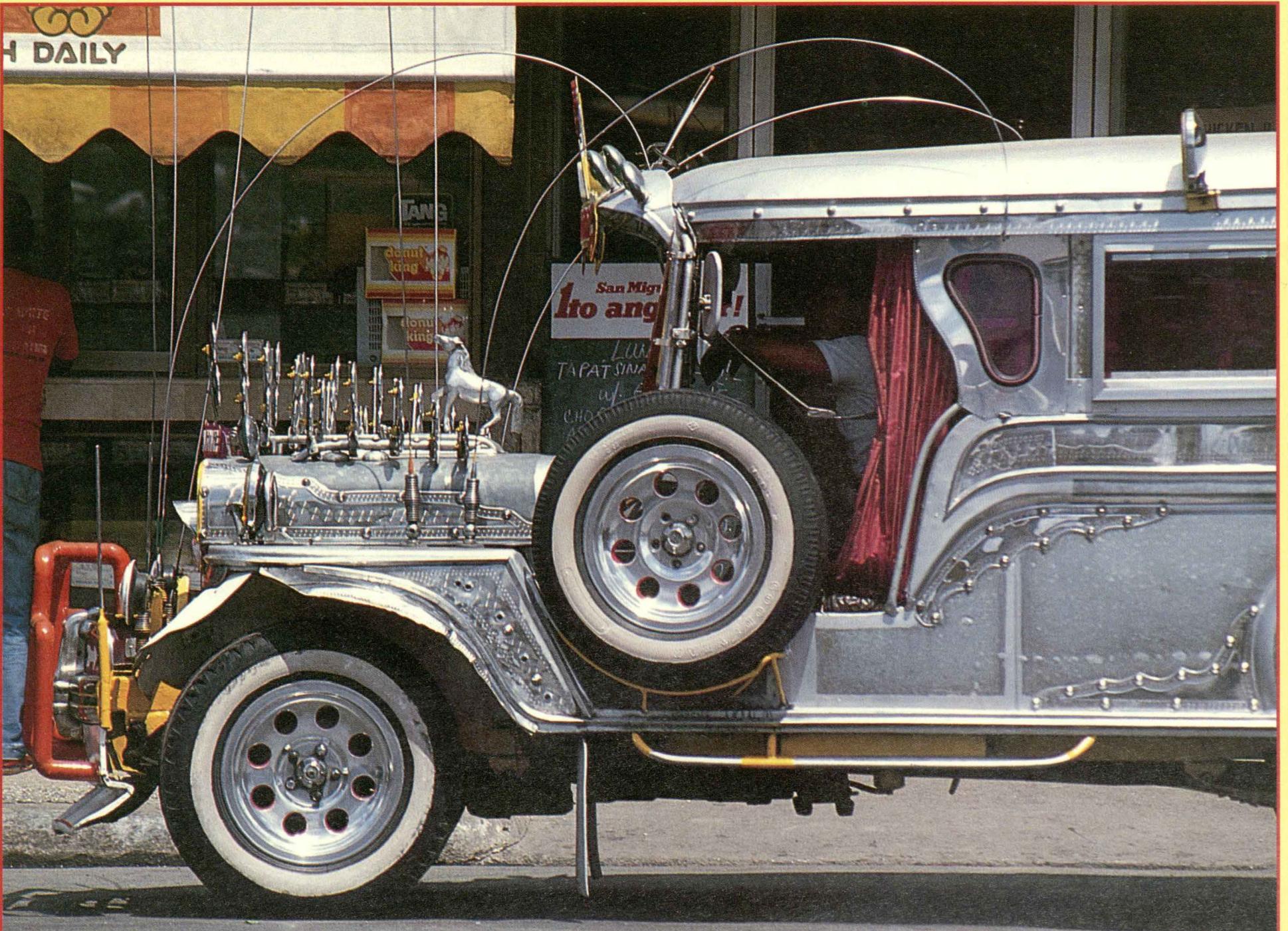
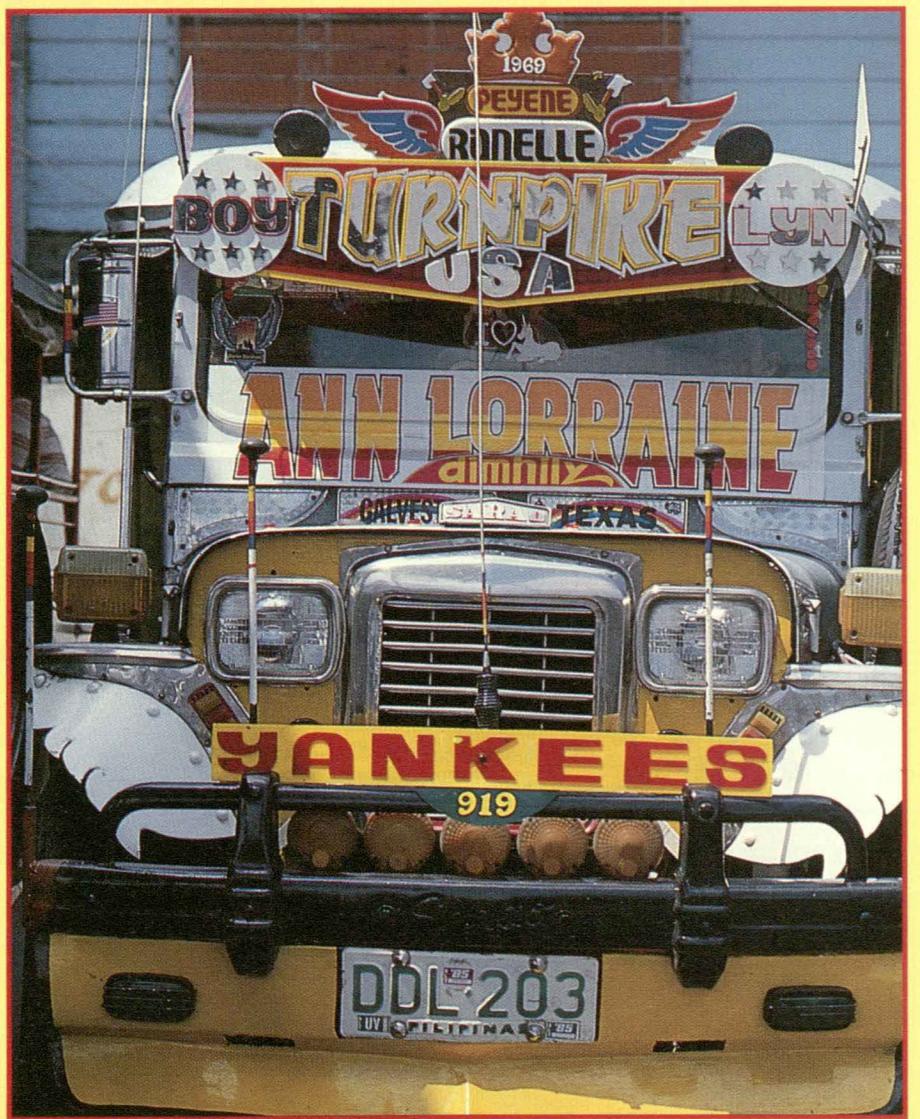


at every intersection. Yet there are few serious accidents.

Yes, a Jeepney ride can be interesting. But don't consider it if you want to do the tourist sightseeing bit. All you will see is a thin slit for a window predominantly obscured by a row of grinning faces. But it is cheap, can be a load of fun, and is a great way to meet the friendly Filipino people.

Air Niugini operates a weekly service between Manila and Port Moresby.

Top left Jeepneys crowd the road in Ermita district, Manila. **right** Many Jeepneys carry decoration with an American influence. **bottom** Silver horses on the bonnet proclaim the owner-driver's physical prowess.





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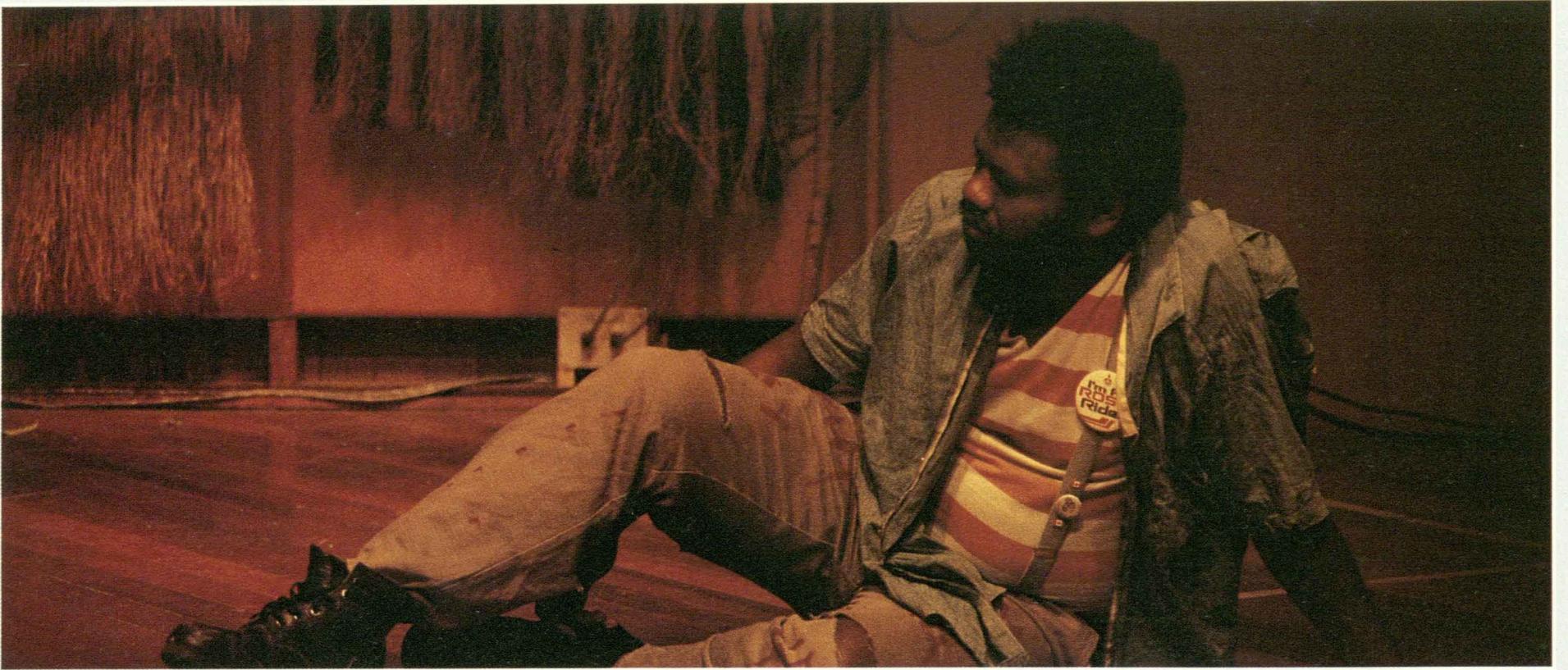


Air Niugini

Theatre of a Nation

Story and photographs by Liz Thompson





Left Scenes from the National Theatre Company's gripping drama of social change, 'The Price of Urbanisation'.

G rass Roots, the comic strip figure who appears daily in the Post Courier newspaper, lies on the floor, overweight, inebriated, his clothes hanging in tatters. He squints through the bright theatre lights, stares at the debris around him and says, with an undisguised degree of poignancy: "This is the price of urbanisation". It is the closing scene of the National Theatre Company's latest production, titled, 'The Price of Urbanisation'. The play examines the social decline occurring in urban areas as squatter settlements grow up and numbers of unemployed youth increase. It touches on police corruption, alcohol and various other issues that confront most societies, particularly those undergoing radical social change, as is Papua New Guinea.

It is a critical self examination, presented in theatrical form, one of the best understood forms of communication in the country. Theatre, performance and dance have always been an integral part of relating moral codes and social mores in a village context. The National Theatre Company is trying to use the same mediums to talk to an urban population about social organisation, morality and ethics. The arts are still one of the most important tools the country has to educate and to

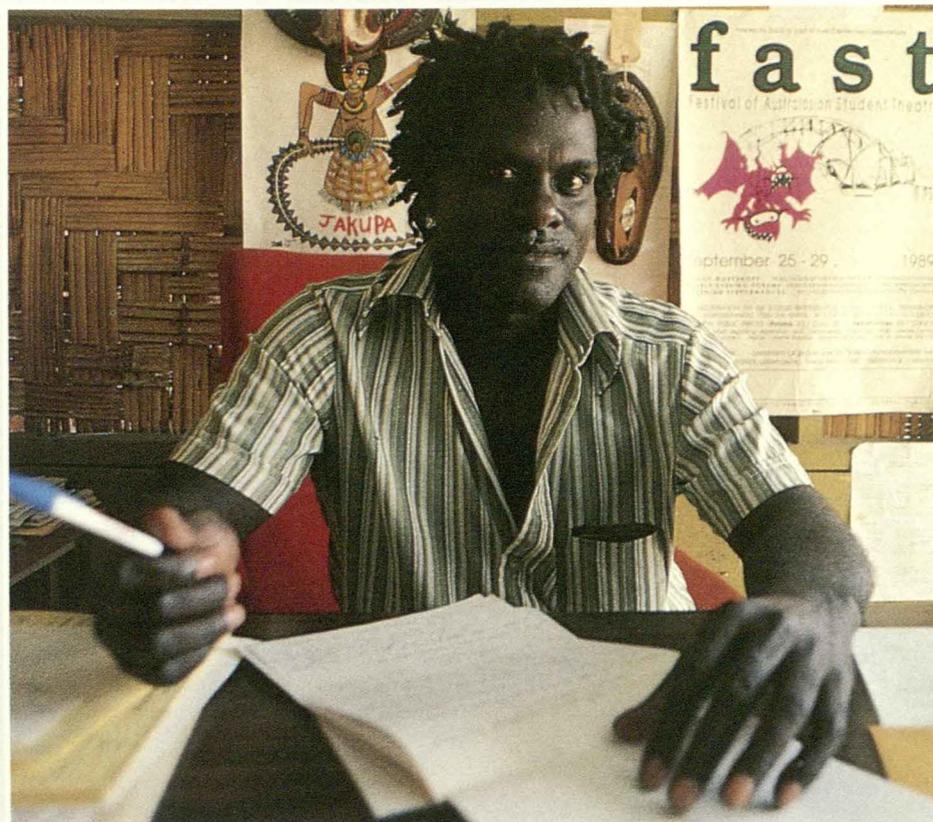
establish a sense of identity. PNG has undergone great change and new senses of identity for new and highly populated urban areas need to be established. Using the arts is the most logical way of going about it.

Rodney Kove, the theatre's assistant director, wrote this recent play. While often putting on traditional shows, with performers covered in pig fat, wearing bilas and moving to the rhythm of snake skin drums, plays of this kind and stringent social examinations are not new to them. Productions like 'My Brother, My Enemy' focused on the border tensions between Irian Jaya and PNG. 'Conference of the Birds', written by William Tukaku, the current director, was primarily concerned with environmental issues.

The theatre company consists of a few core members and several members of the National Arts School. Their theatre and rehearsal space sits next to the art school. Built of wood and shaped like a rondavel, it fits well into its green surroundings. The company does not work in isolation. It is deeply committed to the development of smaller provincial theatres and encourages various exchange programs. Recently, when a theatre group from Popondetta was visiting, the core members of the theatre company held a variety of workshops, passing on information. Not just ideas for performance but also for the successful management and running of a theatre company.

"New companies are growing up like mushrooms throughout the country," said Mr Kove. "They are helping us with our dreams and when they come to us we feed them more."

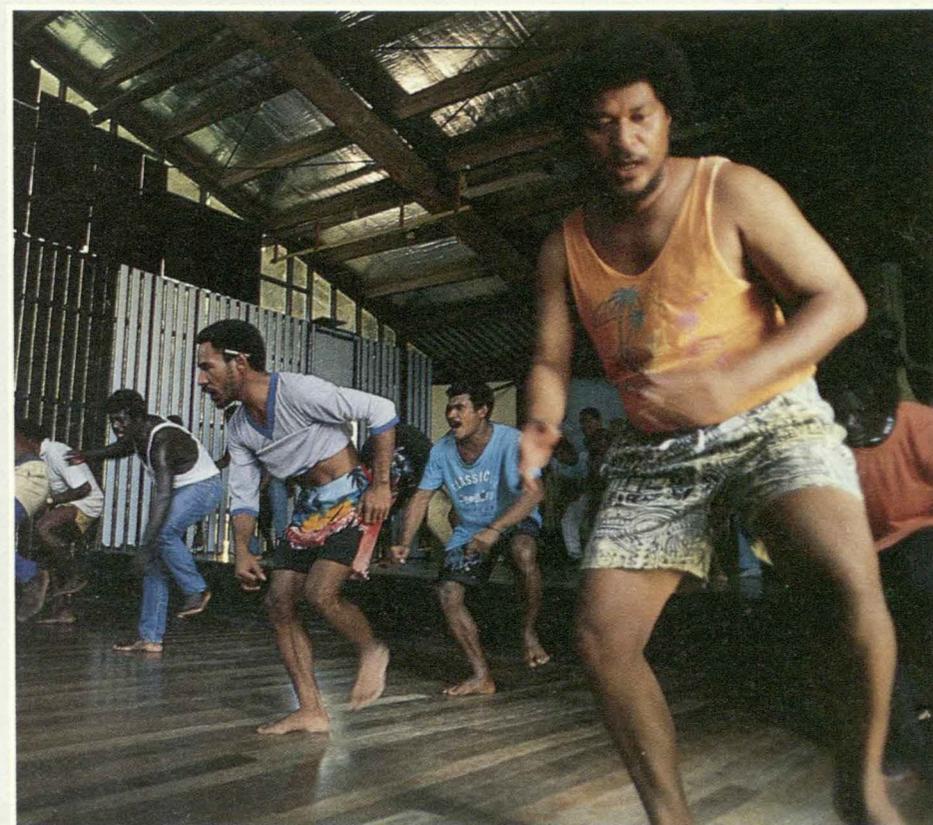
Last year the national company travelled to Sydney to take part in the Festival of Australian Student Theatre, participating in workshops and forums. Subjects included playwriting, Shakespearean performance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and song, comedia dell'arte, agents and casting, lighting design and



promotion and publicity. In addition the various groups put on performances and forums. The National Theatre Company performed in Martin Place Plaza in central Sydney to the great delight of passers-by.

For many members it was the first real exposure to Aboriginal culture. Some suggested that Torres Straits and Islander dancing is similar to theirs. An Aboriginal dance student has recently been working with the theatre company in Port Moresby as part of a cultural exchange program. The company is very keen that this kind of exchange takes place. One PNG dancer worked with a dance company in Harlem, New York, for a while. Recently two actors from the

Above National Theatre Director, William Tukaku, who wrote the play 'Conference Of The Birds'. **below** Members of a theatre group from Popondetta rehearse at the National Theatre.





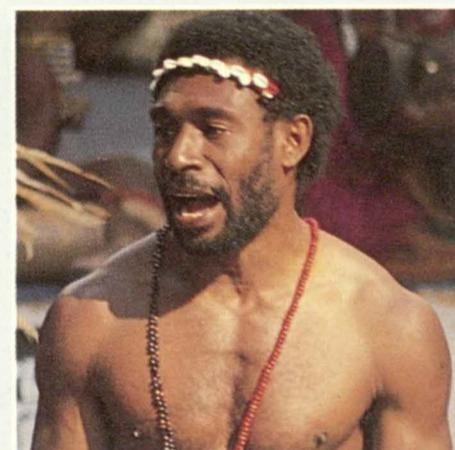
Actors Institute in London visited and the company maintains an exchange programme with Indonesia.

A 'bridge workshop' was developed with the Port Moresby Theatre Group, predominantly expatriate, which went very well. The company recently travelled to Thailand for two months to learn more about the local culture and to put on some of its productions. Mr Kove said they would like to travel further to Europe and America, representing PNG in a positive and creative light, helping people understand what the culture is about and the changes it is experiencing.

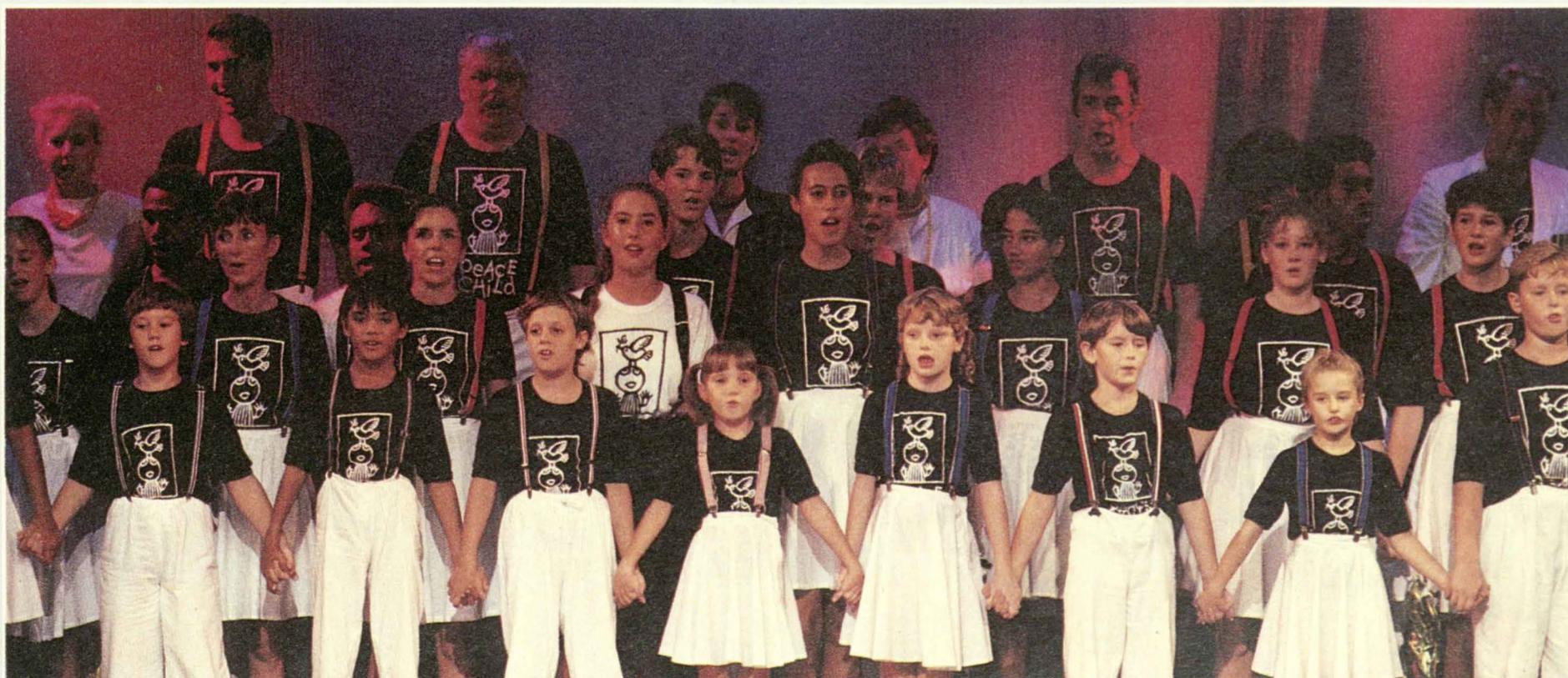
"Theatre in a national

company sense can do a lot to establish a positive image of PNG overseas and contribute to a better understanding," said Mr Kove.

Eseho, head of Performance Department at the N.A.S. feels that a large national dance and theatre troupe would be hugely beneficial to international views of PNG. She suggests something along the line of Ipi Tombi, the African dance troupe which travelled the world putting on an incredible musical extravaganza as it went. Certainly PNG culture has the vitality to do something very similar and the National Theatre Company has the talent and commitment to form its nucleus.



Top National Theatre Company performers in Martin Plaza, Sydney, during the Festival of Australian Student Theatre. **centre** One of the Sydney performers. **below** Scene from 'Peace Child', a joint production between the National Theatre and the mostly expatriate Port Moresby Theatre Group.



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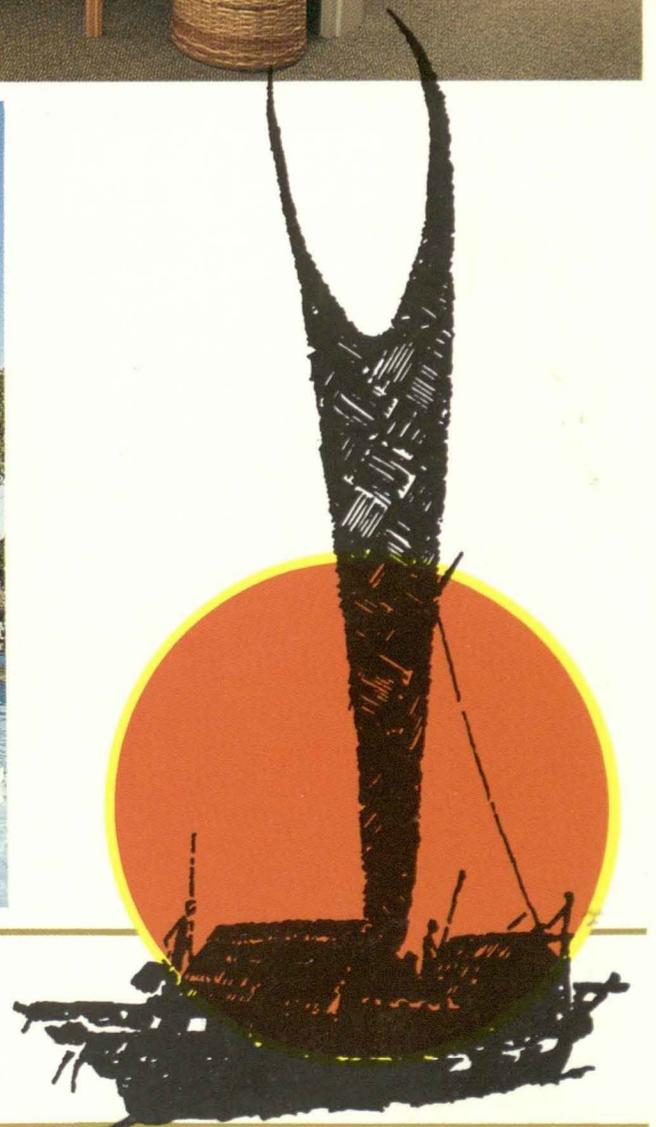
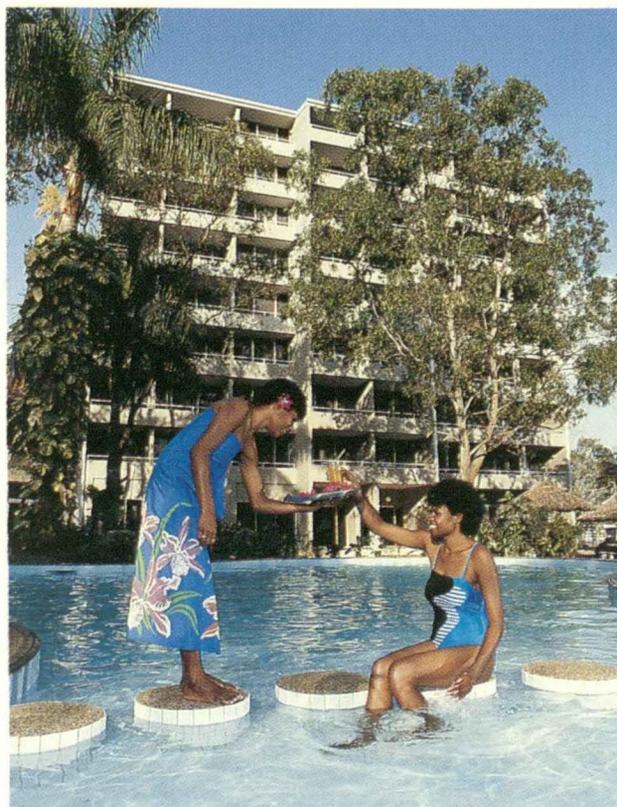
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