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VOL 6, 2008



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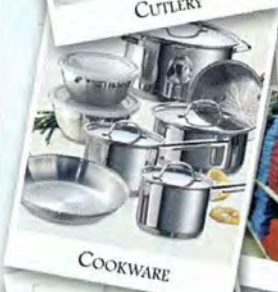
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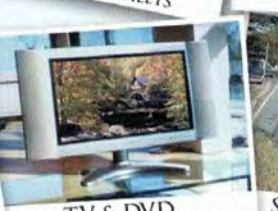
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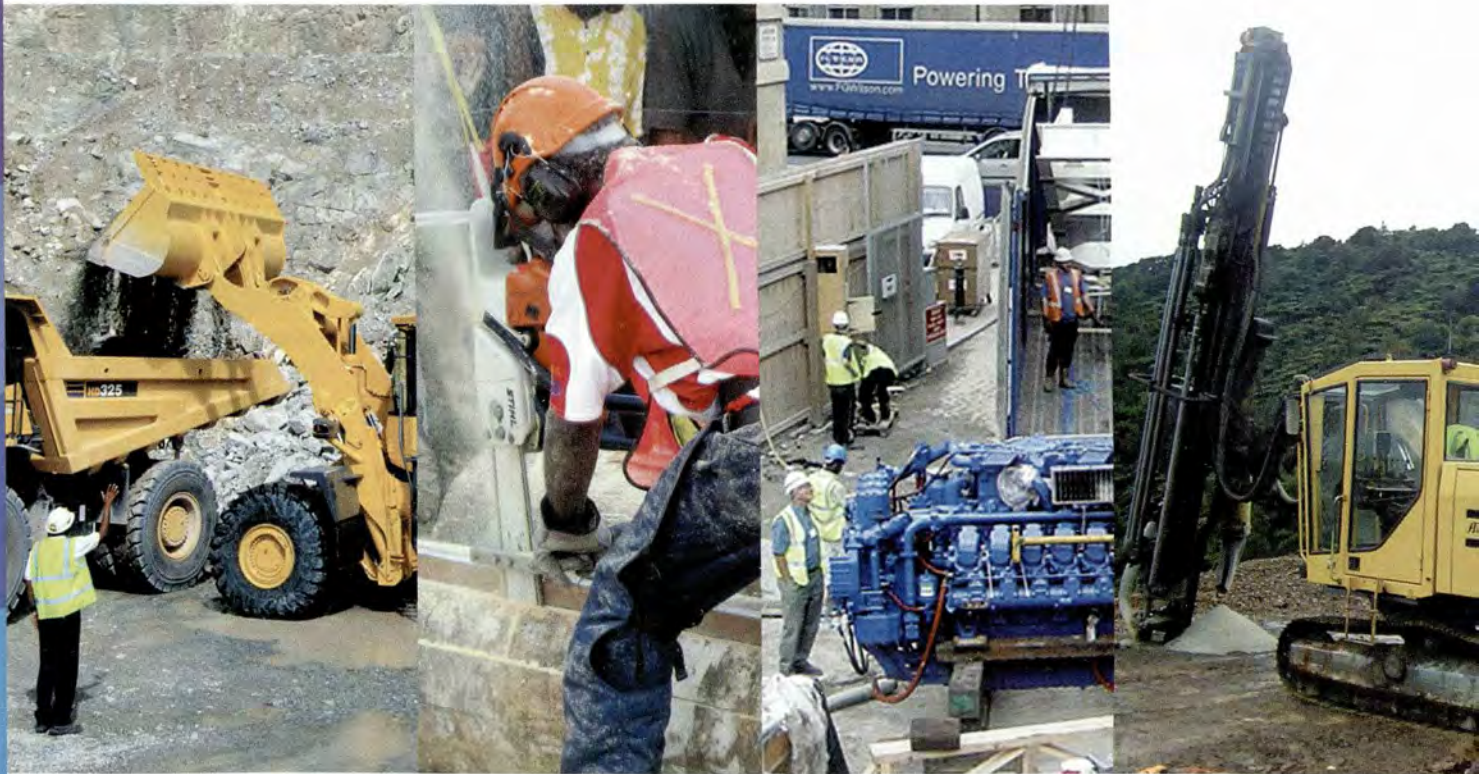
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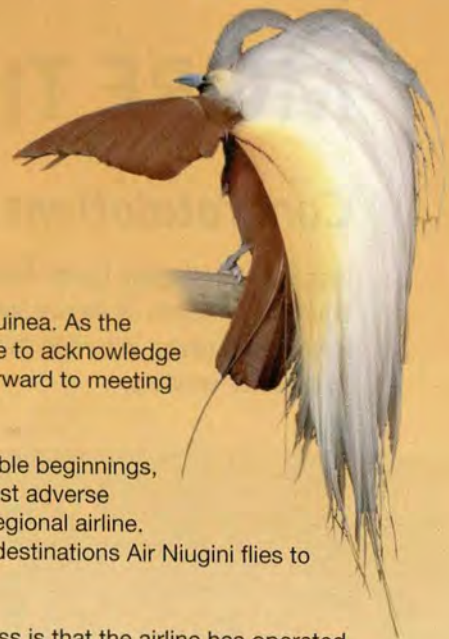
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Chairman's Message



Welcome Aboard

This year marks Air Niugini's 35 years of service in Papua New Guinea. As the airline celebrates its anniversary on November 1, 2008, it is a time to acknowledge such a milestone and reflect on the past and present and look forward to meeting future challenges that comes with growth opportunities.

The highlight of this edition is the evolution of Air Niugini; its humble beginnings, growing pains, struggles, the success stories during even the most adverse times and, of course, where we are heading into the future as a regional airline. Together with telling our story, there are features of international destinations Air Niugini flies to including our latest - Malaysia.

Air Niugini has many reasons to celebrate; one undeniable success is that the airline has operated safely for 35 years in such a difficult aviation environment, has weathered a number of internal and external factors that has impacted on its operations. I am pleased to say, against all odds, the national airline has survived.

For 35 years, our symbol, the Bird of Paradise, is a striking presence at all domestic and international airports. Over the years, the airline has played its role in promoting Papua New Guinea as a tourism destination. Undoubtedly, the airline is a key player in the growth of this country's still small but potentially economically important tourism industry.

Through the introduction of new international services as well as an increase in fleet numbers, equipment upgrade and product incentives in the right markets, the airline has laid a firm foundation for an exciting future. Of course, we at Air Niugini will continue our efforts to meet our customers' expectations and deliver a new era of services to our international passengers and the people of Papua New Guinea.

The festive season is here and as well as celebrating our 35th anniversary, the airline is amidst the busiest time of the year - taking our passengers to and from their destinations for the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

On behalf of the Board, Management and staff of Air Niugini, thank you for your valued patronage throughout the year. As this is the final issue for 2008, I wish you and your families the joy of Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Sir James N. Tjoeng KBE
Chairman



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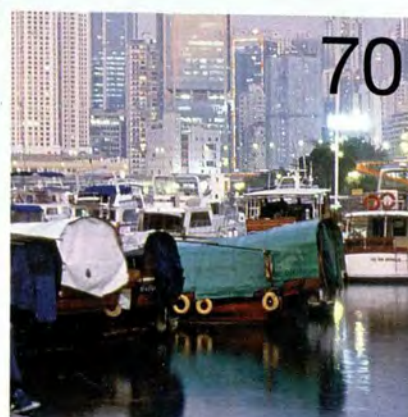
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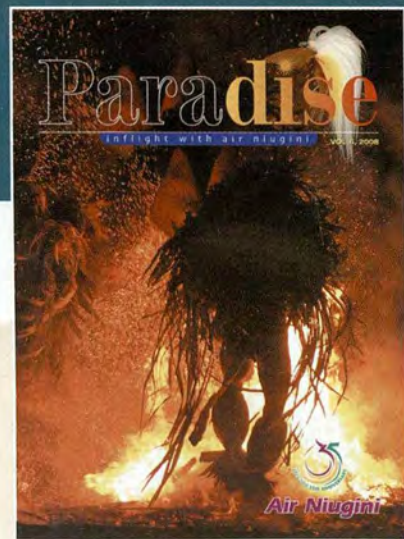
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Baining Dancer

Photo: Rocky Roe Photographics



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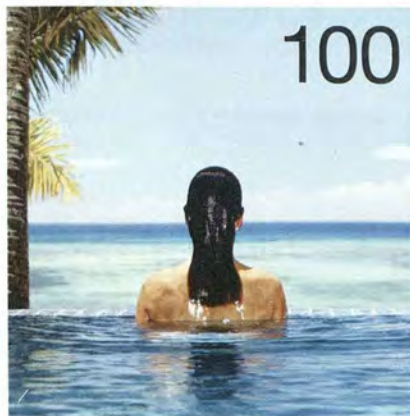
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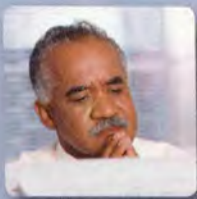
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WELCOME ABOARD



We hope you enjoy our Bird of Paradise In-flight Service

Please ask us

If there is anything our cabin crew can assist you with during your flight, please do not hesitate to ask them.

Hand luggage

Please ensure that your carry on luggage is placed in the overhead locker or under the seat in front of you.

Takeoff and landing

Ensure that your seat is in the upright position during takeoff and landing. Folding tables must be returned to their original position in the seat back or the armrest.

Safety first

Your seatbelt must be securely fastened during takeoff and landing or whenever the seatbelt sign is on. When the seatbelt sign is off you may move about the cabin as necessary. However while seated, keep your seatbelt fastened securely in case of unexpected turbulence.

Electronic equipment

Cellular telephones, TV receivers or radio controlled devices are not to be used at any time on board an aircraft. Electronic devices such as portable computers, compact discs or cassette players and video games can be used only when the seatbelt sign is switched off.

Children and babies

The cabin crew will also be pleased to assist in preparing your baby's food and bottle. Baby food and diapers are also available. Please do not hesitate to ask our friendly cabin crew.

Smoking

Smoking is not permitted on any Air Niugini flight.

Entertainment

A selection of movies and music including classical, modern, country and local are available on international services. Programmes can be found in the in-flight entertainment section of this magazine.

Pillows and blankets

On International flights, pillows and blankets are available on request from our cabin crew.

Cuisine

Our inflight meals have been specially prepared for your enjoyment. If you require a vegetarian meal or you are on a special diet, child or baby food, please inform us when making your reservation.

In-flight Duty Free

During the flight take some time to look through our In-flight Duty Free brochure located in your seat pocket. Duty free purchases can be made after Meal Service. All major credit cards are accepted.

Immigration and Customs Forms

During your flight, our cabin crew will distribute Immigration and Customs forms before each landing point. Ensure that you carefully read and complete these documents and have them ready for inspection with your passport at the Immigration and Customs arrival counters.

Before you leave

Please check your seat pocket and overhead lockers before you disembark to ensure you have not left any items of value. We look forward to seeing you when you next fly with us on our Bird of Paradise Service.





AIR NIUGINI FLEET

B767-300ER



Aircraft type	Length	Wing Span	Power Plant	Cruising Speed	Normal Altitude	Std Seating Capacity	Range
B767-300ER	59.94m	47.57m	2 PW4000	857kph	11,000-12,000m	214 + bags	8100km

F100



Aircraft type	Length	Wing Span	Power Plant	Cruising Speed	Normal Altitude	Std Seating Capacity	Range
F100	35.528m	28.076m	2 Rolls Roys Tay 650	780kph	11,000m	98 + bags	3000km

DASH 8-Q315



Aircraft type	Length	Wing Span	Power Plant	Cruising Speed	Normal Altitude	Std Seating Capacity	Range
DASH 8-Q315	25.7m	24.4m	2 Pratt & Whitney PW123	440kph	7,500m	50 + Bags	1,800km

DHC-8-202



Aircraft type	Length	Wing Span	Power Plant	Cruising Speed	Normal Altitude	Std Seating Capacity	Range
DHC-8-202	22.25m	25.89m	2 Pratt & Whitney	550kph	7,600m	36 + bags	1700km

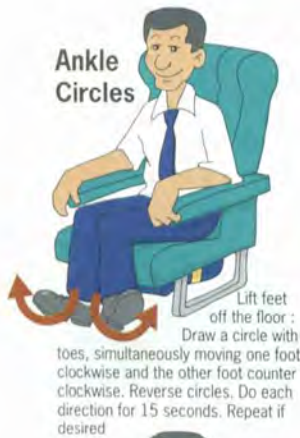




IN-FLIGHT EXERCISES

These exercises are designed to encourage a safe way to enjoy movement and stretch certain muscle groups that can become stiff as a result of long periods of sitting. They may be effective in increasing the body's circulation and massaging the muscles. We recommend you do these

exercises for three or four minutes every hour and occasionally get out of your seat and walk down the aisles if conditions allow. Each exercise should be done with minimal disturbance to other passengers. None of the following should be performed if they cause pain or cannot be done with ease.



Ankle Circles

Lift feet off the floor : Draw a circle with toes, simultaneously moving one foot clockwise and the other foot counter clockwise. Reverse circles. Do each direction for 15 seconds. Repeat if desired



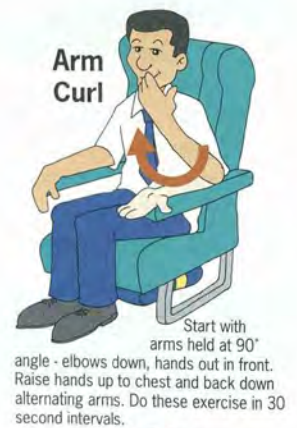
Knee Lifts

Lift leg with knee bent while contracting your thigh muscle. Alternate legs. Repeat 20-30 times for each leg



Shoulder Roll

Hunch shoulders forward, then upward, then backward, then downward using a gentle circular motion



Arm Curl

Start with arms held at 90° angle - elbows down, hands out in front. Raise hands up to chest and back down alternating arms. Do these exercise in 30 second intervals.



Foot Pumps

Foot motion is in three stages

1. Start with both heels on the floor and point feet upward as high as you can.



2. Put both feet flat on the floor.



3. Lift heels high, keeping balls of feet on floor. Continue these three stages with continuous motion in 30 second intervals.



Knee to Chest

Bend forward slightly. Clasp hands around left knee and hug it to your chest. Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Keeping hands around knee, slowly let it down. Alternate legs. Repeat 10 times



Forward Flex

With both feet on the floor and stomach held in slowly, bend forward and walk your hands down the front of your legs towards your ankles. Hold stretch for 15 seconds and slowly sit back up.



Overhead Stretch

Raise both arms straight up and over your head. With one hand grasp the wrist of the opposite hand and gently pull to one side. Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Repeat other side.



Shoulder Stretch

Reach right hand over left shoulder. Place left hand behind right elbow and gently press elbow toward shoulder. Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Repeat other side



Neck Roll

With shoulders relaxed, drop ear to shoulder and gently roll neck forward and to the other side, holding each position about 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times





AIR NIUGINI COUNTRY



PVM1402



YOUR HEALTH IN-FLIGHT

At Air Niugini we care about your comfort and safety. We have included the following information about your health in-flight that we hope you will find helpful and useful.

When you are flying you can be seated and be inactive for long periods of time. The environment can be low in humidity and pressurised up to an altitude of 2240 metres above sea level. Unlike other forms of transportation, air travel allows for rapid movement across many time zones, causing a disruption to the body's "biological clock". Although these unique factors do not pose a health or safety threat to most passengers, there are guidelines you can follow that will improve your comfort level, during and after a flight. We hope the following recommendations will help you have a more pleasant flight today and in the future.

Blood Circulation/Muscle Relaxation

When you're sitting upright in a stationary position for a long period of time, several things can happen:

- The central blood vessels in your legs can be compressed, making it more difficult for the blood to get back to your heart.
- The long inactivity of your body muscles in this position can result in muscle tension, back aches or a feeling of excessive fatigue during, or even after, your flight.
- A stationary position inhibits the normal body mechanism for returning fluid to your heart, and gravity can cause the fluid to collect in your feet. This results in swollen feet after a long flight.
- Studies have concluded that prolonged immobility may be a risk factor in the formation of clots in the legs (DVT - deep vein thrombosis). Particular medication and medical conditions may increase the risk of formation of clots if associated with prolonged immobility. Medical research indicates that factors which may give you an increased risk of blood clots in the legs include:

- Increasing age above 40 years
- Pregnancy

- Former or current malignant disease
- Blood Disorders leading to increased clotting tendency
- Personal or family history of DVT
- Recent major surgery or injury, especially to lower limbs or abdomen
- Oestrogen hormone therapy, including oral contraceptives
- Immobilisation for a day or more
- Dehydration - Heart Failure
- Trauma - Varicose veins
- Obesity - Tobacco smoking

Recommendations

- If you fall into any of these categories or you have any concern about your health and flying, Air Niugini recommends you seek medical advice before travelling.
- Follow our in-flight exercises programme

Jetlag

The main cause of jetlag is traveling to different time zones without giving the body a chance to adjust to new night-day cycles. In general, the more time zones you cross during your flight, the more your biological clock is disturbed. The common symptoms are sleeplessness, tiredness, loss of appetite or appetite at odd hours.

Recommendations

- Get a good night's rest before your flight.
- Arrive at your destination a day or two early, to give your body a chance to become more acclimatised to the new time zone.
- Fly direct to minimise flight time. This allows you to relax more upon arrival.
- Leave your watch on home time if you're staying at your destination less than 48 hours. Also try to eat and sleep according to your home time.
- Change your watch to the local time if your stay is longer than 48 hours, and try to eat and sleep in accordance with the local time.

On longer stays, try to prepare in advance, adjust your meal and rest times to be closer to those of your destination.





Try some light exercise - go for a brisk walk, or do some reading if you can't sleep after arrival at your destination. It generally takes the body's biological clock approximately one day to adjust per time zone crossed.

Cabin Humidity/Dehydration

Humidity levels of less than 25 percent are common in the cabin.

This is due to the extremely low humidity levels of outside air supplied to the cabin. The low humidity can cause drying of the nose, throat, eyes and it can irritate contact lens wearers.

- Drink water or juices frequently during the flight
- Drink coffee, tea and alcohol in moderation. These drinks act as diuretics, increasing the body's dehydration.
- Remove contact lenses and wear glasses if your eyes are irritated.
- Use a skin moisturiser to refresh the skin.

Eating and Drinking

Proper eating and drinking will enhance your comfort both during and after your flight.

- Avoid overeating just prior to and during the flight. It is difficult to digest too much food when the body is inactive.
- Drink coffee, tea and alcohol in moderation. These drinks act as diuretics, increasing the body's dehydration.

Cabin Pressurisation

It is necessary to pressurise the outside air drawn into the cabin to a sufficient density for your comfort and health. Cabins are pressurised to a maximum cabin altitude of 2440 metres. It is the same air pressure as if you were at an elevation of 2440 metres above sea level. The cabin pressure and normal rates of change in cabin pressure during climb and descent do not pose a problem for most passengers. However, if you suffer from upper respiratory or sinus infections, obstructive pulmonary diseases, anaemias or certain cardiovascular conditions, you could experience

discomfort. Children and infants might experience some discomfort because of pressure change during climb and descent.

If you are suffering from nasal congestion or allergies, use nasal sprays, decongestants and antihistamines 30 minutes prior to descent to help open up your ear and sinus passages. If you have a cold or flu or hayfever, your sinuses could be impaired. Swollen membranes in your nose could block your eustachian tubes—the tiny channels between your middle ear chamber. This can cause discomfort during changes in cabin pressure, particularly during descent.

Recommendations

- If you have a pre-existing medical condition that warrants supplemental oxygen, you can order from us. Please give at least seven days notice before traveling.
- To "clear" your ears try swallowing and/or yawning. These actions help open your eustachian tubes, equalizing pressure between your middle ear chamber and your throat.
- When flying with an infant, feed or give your baby a dummy during descent. Sucking and swallowing will help infants equalize the pressure in their ears.

Motion Sickness

This ailment is caused by a conflict between the body's sense of vision and its sense of equilibrium. Air turbulence increases its likelihood because it can cause movement of the fluid in the vestibular apparatus of the inner ear. If you have good visual cues (keeping your eyes fixed on a non-moving object), motion sickness is less likely to occur.

Recommendations:

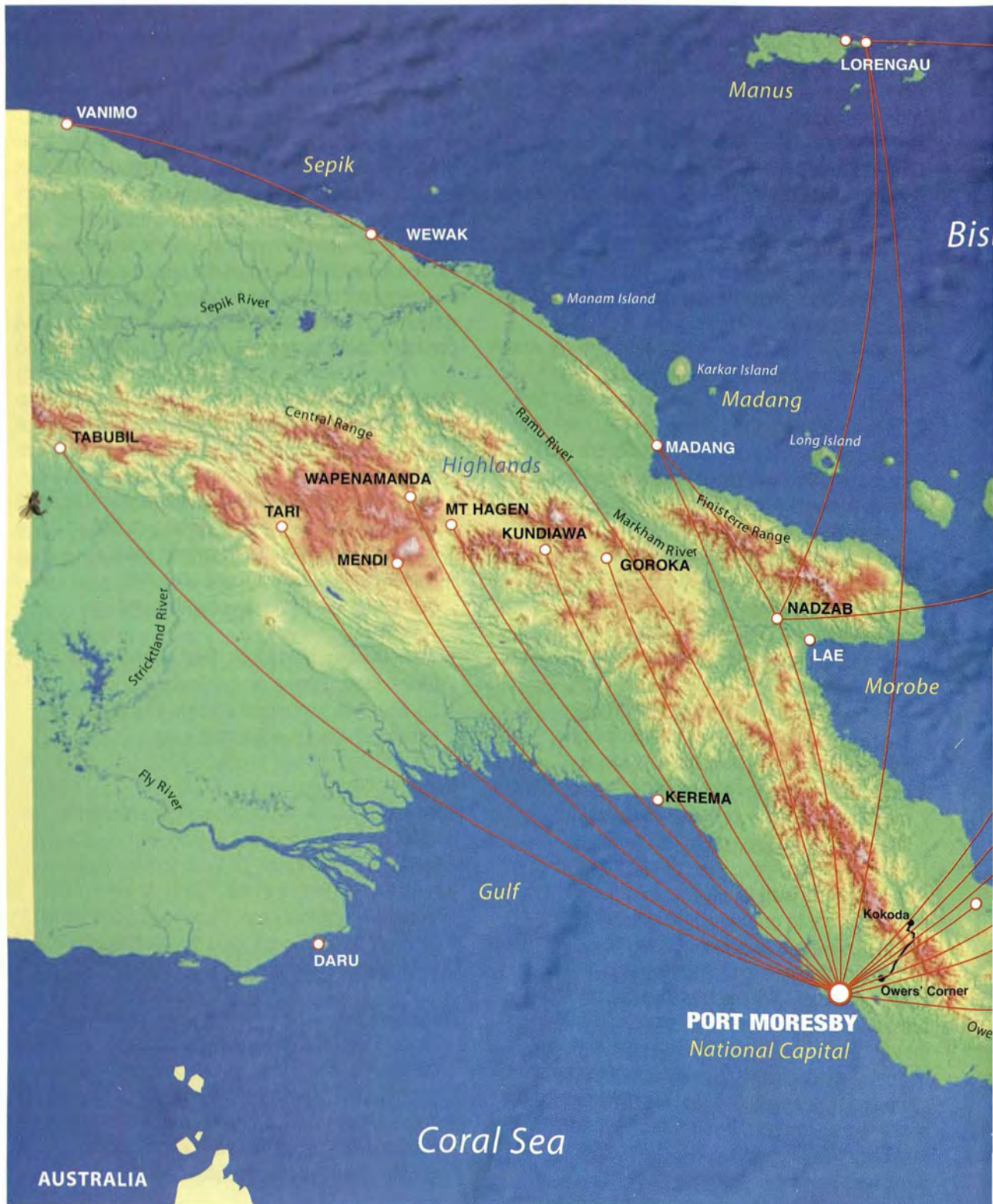
- When weather is clear and you can see the ground, sea or horizon, you are less susceptible to motion sickness.
- You can buy over the counter medications but we recommend that you consult your doctor about the appropriate medications.

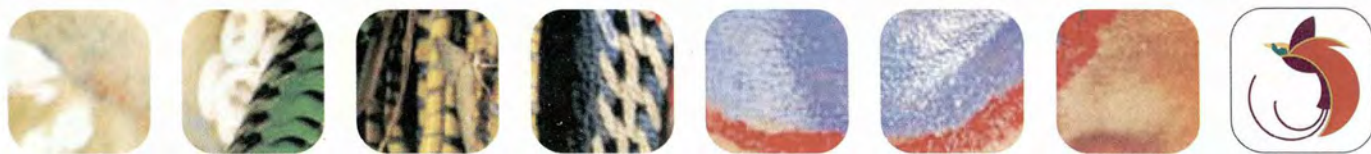
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Air Niugini:



Arrival of the airline's flagship, B767.

Celebrating 35 years of service

By James Sinclair

Air Niugini commenced scheduled services on 1 November, 1973, when a Fokker F27 Friendship lifted off Jackson's Airport on a flight to Rabaul via Lae and Kieta. Today, 35 years on, Air Niugini survives in a bitter aviation era which has seen most of the other small Pacific carriers go under; a time when the world aviation scene is dire with spiralling and uncontrollable fuel costs, manpower problems and other issues that threaten the survival of many of the world's most revered airlines.

The airline today has a staff of approximately 1,300, and provides international services to Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns, Honiara, Nadi, Narita, Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, with domestic flights to Alotau, Buka, Goroka, Kavieng, Kimbe, Kundiawa, Lae, Lihir, Manus, Madang, Mendi, Mt Hagen, Popondetta, Rabaul, Tabubil, Tari, Vanimo, Wabag and Wewak.

It needs to be emphasised that in its 35 years of operations in what is universally acknowledged as one of the world's most challenging aviation environments, the airline has not had a single fatality or major accident.

It is doubtful whether any other airline in the world can make such a claim. This result has been achieved through strict

operating standards, high levels of maintenance and training, and risk curtailment. When Air Niugini is criticised for delays and cancellations, the travelling public must appreciate that safety is of paramount importance to the national airline.

No country is more reliant on aircraft than PNG. Few of the major towns are linked by roads; the national capital, Port Moresby, still exists in isolation from the rest of the country. Without air services, PNG would scarcely be able to function.

PNG is a huge, rugged, mountainous country with a relatively small population, but it has a secure place in the history of world aviation. As has many times been recorded, the four big Junkers G31 tri-motor freighters operated by Guinea Airways Ltd broke world freight records in the 1931-32 period, during the epic uplift of sectionalised gold dredges from Lae to Bulolo for the great mining company, Bulolo Gold Dredging Limited.

Hard as it may be to believe today, for several months during those years, the Junkers G31s lifted more freight than was carried by the airlines of USA, Germany, France, Great Britain and other countries, put together.

Aircraft played a vital part in the battles fought in PNG during the Pacific War, and it was with war-surplus aircraft that post-war air



Air Niugini

It needs to be emphasised that in 35 years of operations in what is universally acknowledged to be one of the world's most challenging aviation environments, the airline has not had a single fatality,...

services resumed. Qantas introduced the first Australia-PNG service, using Douglas C47 military freighters converted to DC3 configuration.

The Douglas DC3, a truly immortal aircraft, did more than any other single type to develop air services throughout the country. When the Australian companies - Ansett and Trans-Australia Airways - commenced operation within PNG, they too, initially employed the DC3. It is fitting that a DC3 is today displayed near Air Niugini Haus; it is named after veteran DC3 Captain Larry Blackman.

The formation of Air Niugini was traumatic, the birth pains brief but fiercely intense. By the early 1970s, it was obvious that independence for PNG was fast approaching.

The question of a national airline was one of the first major issues to arise. For most of the post-war era, a Liberal-Country Party Government had been in power in Australia, but a bipartisan policy on PNG affairs was followed by the Government and the Opposition Labor Party.

The preparation of PNG for independence had been proceeding in a generally stress-free manner, free from Australian domestic politics.

In September 1972, it was announced that a national airline would be formed, with the PNG Government, Qantas, Ansett and TAA as equal partners. Qantas - which had earlier withdrawn from internal PNG operations - would manage the airline, while national executives were in training.

Australia's Department of Civil Aviation would remain responsible for the maintenance of technical and operational safety services until the transfer of responsibility to PNG, some time before full independence.

All domestic services operated by TAA and Ansett would be taken over by the new airline, Air Niugini, while Ansett and TAA would continue to operate the essential and very profitable services between Australia and PNG.

When Air Niugini was fully established, TAA and Ansett would withdraw and the international services would be run jointly by Qantas and Air Niugini.

So far, so good. But then the Australian political scene changed dramatically. In December 1972, the Labor Government came to power under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Whitlam had earlier made



The DC3 named after Captain Larry Blackman displayed outside Air Niugini Haus in Port Moresby.



In the first year alone, Air Niugini lifted 350,000 passengers - 85,000 more than the taskforce had estimated and more than what TAA and Ansett combined had carried the previous year.

several controversial visits to PNG as Opposition Leader and had made it abundantly clear that if Labor gained power, Australia would rapidly withdraw from its colonial role - whether PNG liked it, or not.

Labor was ideologically opposed to "big business" - and Sir Reginald Ansett, in particular. Sir Reginald wanted a bigger stake in Air Niugini than originally opposed, and following hard lobbying, cabinet agreed to a new arrangement giving Ansett, the PNG Government and Qantas-TAA one-third each. This agreement was reached in the dying stages of the outgoing Australian Government.

The new Minister for Civil Aviation, Charles Jones, was an abrasive and insensitive man, with little understanding of PNG affairs and personalities that had been so carefully built up over so many years. He refused to even consider giving Sir Reginald a greater share of Air Niugini than Qantas and TAA. He delivered an ultimatum that amounted to virtual blackmail.

The previous Australian Government had undertaken to provide funds in excess of \$10 million for the upgrading of Jackson's Airport and the proposed new Nadzab Airport, out of Lae. Unless PNG accepted the original proposal, or negotiated a new one, PNG would be left to pay for its own airport development.

Matters deteriorated thereafter. PNG's leader, Michael Somare, announced bitterly that PNG would decide the pace of constitutional development, not the Australian Labor Government.

Prime Minister Whitlam was forced to intervene, announcing a fresh round of talks to be held in May 1973. Then another problem arose. By this time Ansett and TAA were employing between them 127 captains and first officers, as well as engineers and other staff. They were obviously concerned about their future. Their services would be vital to the successful launch of Air Niugini. TAA staff served in PNG on secondment from the parent airline; they had a career to return to in Australia. Ansett staff were not so fortunate; they were employed in PNG with no right of return to the parent airline. This contentious issue was not resolved until the eve of the May talks.

After long discussions, an agreement was finally reached between the PNG and Australian Governments. The new national airline would take over all domestic services and would also compete on the vital Australia-PNG route.

PNG would own 60% of Air Niugini, Qantas-TAA 24%, with the remainder offered to Ansett. Ansett and TAA would each sell Air Niugini four Fokker F27 Friendships, which had been in service since the 1960s, and six old DC3s, for virtually giveaway prices.

An immense amount of work had to be done before services could begin, for setting up a new airline is an incredibly complicated business. A myriad of details had to be ironed out and a taskforce was formed to make the necessary hard, basic decisions. Ralph Conley, a senior TAA executive seconded to Qantas, was appointed the first general manager of Air Niugini. Operations were planned to begin on 1 November, 1973.

Years later, Conley recalled: "It was really quite extraordinary. What looked like a mammoth task, that could be expected to take at least six months, was actually made effective within the period August to November...we set up a progressive critical path board - a huge thing.

"We wrote up everything that came into our heads in the first couple of weeks: hostess uniforms, shoe styles, pilots' wing designs, pilots' cap badges, styles of tickets...telephone extensions, houses, tools, jigs - anything that came to mind was written up on the board and priorities determined as necessary."

One of the major decisions, of course, was the question of aircraft. What types and numbers would be required? Should they be purchased, or leased? The airline could hardly afford to buy new aeroplanes, and it was eventually agreed that Ansett and TAA would each sell Air Niugini four well-used Fokker Friendship aircraft, and six even more ancient DC3s. These were duly delivered - and then another set of problems were revealed; TAA and Ansett had different flight deck configurations, the instruments and their locations varying in almost every individual aircraft. The operations manuals, too, differed in many significant ways, and had to be re-written.

All these thorny problems were eventually solved, and Air Niugini's 20 aircraft were duly painted in the new colour scheme: a white upper fuselage, a yellow and black speedline and a bird of paradise emblem on the tail. Applications were called for F27 and DC3 pilots with a minimum of 3,000 hours, with command experience preferred. Many TAA and Ansett pilots accepted positions with the new airline,



Launching of Dash 8-300. From left: Minister for Public Enterprise, Arthur Somare; Chairman of Air Niugini, Sir James Tjoeng; and Air Niugini CEO, Wasantha Kumarasiri.



Captain Aria Bouraga.

and others were recruited from overseas. A seniority system had to be worked out and agreed, a matter little understood by laymen, but of deep concern to airline pilots.

And so on 1 November, 1973, Chief Minister Somare (soon to become PNG's first Prime Minister) formally cut the ribbon at Jackson's Airport, and saw the dispatch of Air Niugini's first flight.

There were many who gave this brash new airline - cobbled together in such a hurry and operating a collection of aged aeroplanes - little chance of success. But Air Niugini confounded them. In the first year alone, Air Niugini lifted 350,000 passengers - 85,000 more than the taskforce had estimated and more than what TAA and Ansett combined had carried the previous year. The airline's F27 and DC3 aircraft flew a total of 27,000 hours that year, some 5,000 more than what was projected. New domestic routes were soon added, and Air Niugini's aircraft were seen in the skies all over Papua New Guinea.

All new national airlines hanker for international recognition, and Air Niugini was no exception. By the end of 1974, the airline was leasing Boeing 727 aircraft from Ansett and TAA, and employing them on services to Brisbane. A Boeing 707 was wet-leased from Qantas for a weekly service to Manila and Hong Kong. The 707 and the 727s were later replaced by a Boeing 720B, leased from Tempair. A Fokker 27 service was begun between Port Moresby and Cairns, in North Queensland.

Conley returned to TAA in March 1977 after a job well done. He was replaced as general manager by the dynamic Bryan Grey. It was Grey who was responsible for the introduction of one of the most important types to be used by Air Niugini: the F28 Fellowship pure jet.

The first two F28s were purchased from Air Nauru and another pair in 1979, from Transair, Canada. The F28 rapidly established itself in internal operations, bringing a new standard of service onto domestic routes. An inevitable consequence was the disappearance of the airline's venerable DC3 aircraft, for their day was over. They were withdrawn in July 1977.

Another Boeing 707 was leased in 1976, to provide additional flights to Australia, and to service a new route to Kagoshima, Japan. Qantas and TAA shares in the airline were purchased and there were a number of other initiatives: construction of a large cargo terminal at

Jackson's and a new administration complex; the introduction of an ICL 2903 ticketing/reservations computer; commencement of work on a housing estate; and the reconstruction of the terminal. Rights to service Hong Kong and Japan were secured.

From the beginning, Air Niugini emphasised the training of national pilots and engineers. History was made in September 1978, when Captain Minson Peni took command of the first all-national crew in a Fokker 27. His First Officer was Lekwa Gure, today the airline's Flight Training and Standards Manager.

In 1979, Air Niugini opened routes to Honolulu and Singapore via Jakarta. New facilities were established at Jackson's Airport, and sales offices opened in Hong Kong, Tokyo, Europe and the United States. The lease of the Boeing 720B was terminated, and a pair of Boeing 707s were added to the fleet.

Grey departed Air Niugini in March 1979. He left an airline that was soundly established and operating at a profit, although with problems looming. A year later, Air Niugini was in near chaos, the centre of political uproar, its reputation blackened and staff morale shattered.

How this came about is a long, involved, sad story of bickering, political chicanery, point-scoring and buck-passing - now pointless to repeat. Briefly, Grey was replaced as general manager by Gerald Fallscheer who had extensive experience in the technical side of aviation. The job was a virtual poisoned chalice. The entire world aviation scene was in crisis during 1979-80, largely because of the dread factor which is again devastating the industry today: sharply escalating fuel costs.

Almost overnight fuel-guzzling early generation airliners of the class of Air Niugini's Boeing 707s became uneconomic nightmares. Great international airlines suffered horribly from the fuel price jump, and little Air Niugini could hardly expect to be immune. Fallscheer inherited a situation over which he had no real control.

The effect of the fuel cost rise coupled with a number of decisions taken before Fallscheer took over drove Air Niugini into an operating loss. Fallscheer did his best to cope with an impossible situation, but in the end, Conley was briefly called back to save the day.

Fallscheer left, and was in turn replaced as general manager by the former Director of Civil Aviation, Joe Tauvasa. He was the first



The first Fokker 100.



CEO Wasantha Kumarasiri.

national to fill this important post. The other main candidate for the position was the equally distinguished Bart Philemon, who had previously served as acting general manager.

The fever ultimately subsided and Air Niugini, though badly shaken, survived. In September 1981, the first of three DHC Dash 7 aircraft came into service, and the Fokker F27s were gradually phased out. Built by De Havilland, Canada, the four-engined Dash 7 had advanced STOL capability and was thus well suited to the challenging PNG aviation environment. Although an undoubtedly capable aircraft, the Dash 7 was expensive to operate.

The acquisition of the three Dash 7s resulted in much controversy at the time, for they were purchased by the then Civil Aviation Minister, the fiery and unpredictable lambahey Okuk, without authorisation from cabinet and ignoring technical advice from Air Niugini. (The Dash 7 did prove its worth in Highlands' operations and was used to service the vital Ok Tedi mining project when drought dropped the water levels of the mighty Fly River. All three were later sold off.)

Better days, however, were ahead. A new service was begun in 1982, linking Auckland, Port Moresby and Hong Kong in a tripartite agreement with Air New Zealand and Cathay Pacific. The arrangement lasted for some two and a half years. An event of far-reaching significance was the conclusion of a three-year management agreement with the famous Dutch airline, KLM, which took effect on 1 February, 1983.

During this year, computerisation of the reservation system was completed at a cost of K2 million. Philemon, now chairman of the National Airline Commission, pressed the button to activate the new system on 5 May, 1983. Tauvasa stepped down from the CEO position in 1984 and took over from Philemon as chairman of the National Airline Commission. Masket Iangalio assumed the CEO position.

November 1984 saw another milestone in Air Niugini's progress. A modern wide-bodied Airbus A300 was leased from TAA, and the two old Boeing 707s were sold to European buyers. The Air Niugini fleet now consisted of five F28-1000s, the three Dash 7s and the leased Airbus, which was replaced by a later version early the following year. The A300 bore a most attractive Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise livery and was a hit with passengers. Iangalio resigned to successfully enter national politics. In October 1986, he was succeeded as general manager and chief executive by Dieter Klaus Peter Seefeld, a highly experienced Lufthansa executive. After Seefeld took over, the KLM

management team departed, their task completed - Seefeld needed no assistance.

One of his first decisions was to introduce a new, cool livery for Air Niugini's aircraft - white overall, with a striking bar of turquoise on the tail bearing a stylised Bird of Paradise.

The new design was used on everything from tickets, baggage tags and stationery to vehicles and offices. New uniform designs were prepared, all part of Seefeld's desire for a good, modern commercial image for Air Niugini. A new flight magazine of high quality, *PARADISE*, was introduced, which almost immediately began to garner awards for excellence.

In January 1989, Air Niugini took delivery of a new Airbus A310-300, christened it as City of Port Moresby and was used on international routes from Port Moresby to Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, Brisbane and Sydney.

Two senior national pilots, Lekwa Gure and Grainger Narara, achieved command status on the A310, an event rightly called "a milestone", and a tribute to the success of Air Niugini's long-standing national pilot training programme.

The developing crisis on Bougainville that ultimately resulted in the suspension of the operations of Bougainville Copper Limited and the outbreak of armed resistance on the island had an inevitable effect on Air Niugini's operations, and on the economy of PNG. Domestic and international (Cairns and Honiara) F28 flights into Kieta were shut down. The next few years saw a steady expansion of Air Niugini's route network and the acquisition of more aircraft. The fleet at this time stood at eight F28s and two Dash 7s. These included F28s, now the mainstay of internal operations. A second A310-300 was delivered and services to Hong Kong - suspended in 1985 - were resumed. In January 1993, a sophisticated new computer system controlling a wide range of services was installed, which gave Air Niugini entry to the STA global communications network centred on Atlanta, USA, which linked more than 180 countries and territories of the world aviation community.

In 1993, the first F28-4000 joined the fleet. Larger than the F28-100, and with 14 more seats, the new Fokker was used on the Cairns, Port Moresby, Mt Hagen and Lae route. At a time when some of the world's major airlines were in financial difficulties, Air Niugini continued to report modest profits.



Service with a smile.



Captain Daniel Waitma.

But the situation changed dramatically in the last quarter of 1997. Air Niugini recorded losses for five straight years, between 1994 and 1998. The Asian financial crisis, a severe drought that temporarily halted shipping on the Fly River, the dramatic Sandline Affair, political turmoil and a sharp fall in the value of the kina combined with many other factors to precipitate a crisis in PNG affairs.

By late 1999, the country was virtually bankrupt, foreign exchange almost exhausted and interest rates at a ruinous rate, approaching 29% at the worst stage of the crisis. Every element of the economy suffered, and Air Niugini was of course not immune.

Air Niugini had been under-capitalised from the beginning. The airline was totally unprepared for losses which in the latter part of 1997 were so large that the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation had to provide emergency working capital to avert total disaster. In November 1998 the PNG Government came to the rescue of its beleaguered national airline with a capital injection of K50 million, the largest since the formation of Air Niugini. It was sufficient to save the airline from collapse.

During the rationalisation of operations which followed, unprofitable international routes to Japan, Hong Kong and Sydney were reduced, and the Manila service was cut to one flight per week. Off-line sales offices in Frankfurt, Los Angeles and Hong Kong were closed down, and staffing streamlined. A new budget was prepared, which was approved by the Board of Directors in February 1999. The budget was framed to produce a bottom-line profit of K7.844 million.

The second major step in the rationalisation process was the adoption of a Corporate/Operational Plan, to be implemented by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu as project managers. Domestic operations were restructured to improve efficiency, and there were more staff reductions. Activities not directly related to airline operation were hived off to outside sources.

PNG survived. Prime Minister Bill Skate was replaced by the economically literate Sir Mekere Morauta, who took immediate steps to restore sanity. But PNG still faced an uncertain future when the new 21st century dawned. Despite a responsible government, the economy remained depressed, with a weak kina and high inflation and interest rates, for the third successive year. Fixed capital investment was at a historic low, prices of PNG's principal agricultural exports fell sharply and the nation remained unhealthily dependent on expensive imported foreign goods. It was, indeed, the nadir of PNG's brief life as an independent state.

Politically unpopular measures taken by the Morauta Government ensured the survival of the PNG economy in 2001, despite a further plunge in coffee and copra prices. Foreign reserves recovered and inflation fell. But the kina remained weak and interest rates high. Along with other statutory agencies like Teklikom, PNG Power and Post PNG, Air Niugini was forced to raise its charges.

The decline continued in 2002, the kina falling to new drastically low levels, inflation rate climbing and agricultural and mineral commodity prices slumping. National elections were held in June 2002. Although the Morauta Government was highly regarded, it fell and a new coalition government headed by the veteran Sir Michael Somare gained power. Philemon had left Air Niugini and entered politics. He became Finance Minister and Treasurer. The Somare Government was returned to power in the July 2007 elections.

There followed a period of political and economic stability not seen in PNG for many years. Prices for PNG's primary products rose, the kina recovered and interest rates steadily fell, reaching historically low levels in 2005. A number of major mining projects went into development, and by 2008, PNG was in a strong financial position. Many problems remained. The law and order situation remained serious, the Public Service was over-large and inefficient, corruption remained a serious issue, and rural infrastructure and services were in a deplorable state. But for the first time in years, PNG was facing a more certain future.

All these developments, of course, had impacted the performance of Air Niugini. The introduction of two advanced DHC Dash 8-200s to the fleet heralded the adoption of a re-fleeting plan covering 2003-2006. The second phase of the plan called for the introduction of a new jet service between Port Moresby and Cairns, and the last phase the replacement of the F28s with a combination of modern jets and turbo-props.

Several CEOs were at the helm during the troubled years. During Peter Roberts' term as Chief Executive between September 2000 and June 2002, Air Niugini acquired a Boeing 767 as the flagship of its fleet which included seven F28s and three Dash 8s. A mutually advantageous code-sharing agreement was in place with Qantas, which remains a major contributor to Air Niugini's income stream.

In April 2004, the F28 ceased operations into Cairns and the Fokker 100 was begun. The airline was then flying to 18 domestic ports and eight cities in six overseas countries, with further overseas services being planned. During the previous year, Air Niugini had carried 125,000 international passengers and 570,000 domestic passengers,



Air Niugini

with a 6% increase forecasted. The domestic fare structure was undeniably high, but by 2006 Air Niugini had actually cut many fares and was working on a new fare structure.

Nelson left in January 2006 and on the 23rd of that month, Wasantha Kumarasiri took over as Chief Executive Officer. A Sri Lankan by origin and now an Australian citizen, Kumarasiri had been in charge of Air Niugini's finances since August 2004. There were some who criticised the appointment of a financial officer rather than an airline administrator to the top position. But Kumarasiri was a highly experienced manager, whose proud claim is that he had already been a CEO in Sri Lanka at the tender age of 28.

Under his stewardship, and the new Board chaired by Sir James Tjoeng as well as the confidence of the shareholder behind the airline through financial commitment, Air Niugini has prospered. In today's harsh economic climate, it is perhaps a good thing to have a financial expert running the airline. Since assuming the position, Kumarasiri has developed and put into effect ambitious plans for the future of the national airline. In a recent interview he said:

"The most important thing is the safety of our travelling public. I am glad to be able to say that Air Niugini has operated as one of the safest airlines in the world. This is a tribute to past and current Board and management, and I am sure that future Board and management will carry forward that tradition. To Air Niugini safety is paramount. We will never compromise safety for commercial considerations.

"I faced a real challenge when I took over as CEO. When I took over we had eleven aircraft: one wide-body 767, two Fokker F28-1000s, four F28-4000s, and four Dash 8s. Some of these were very old. Now, we have eighteen aircraft in our operation: six Fokker 100s, eight Dash-8s, one Boeing 757, one Boeing 767, one Embraer 190 under a lease arrangement and an Embraer 145 on a wet-lease short-term arrangement, because three of our Fokkers are undergoing back to back checks at the moment.

"All these have happened in a very short period of time. Some critics say we don't know what we are doing. We listen to constructive critics, we hear them out, we take their comments on board, consider them, and include them in our assessments, but we keep our focus on the job we have on hand. We are one of the few airlines to have dropped our local and international airfare levels over the last two years, and have introduced new products. And we have seen significant improvements in the passenger uplift. As at the end of December 2007, our total passenger numbers was close to one million mark and experienced a 15% growth in domestic traffic and close to 10% growth on our international route.

"Like all airlines today, we are facing many problems. One of the most critical is the world-wide shortage of pilots and aircraft engineers. Air Niugini traditionally had a salary structure where the base salary was the same for all pilots, but the expatriates got exchange rate adjustments which meant they were getting more pay than national pilots, who were doing the same work in the cockpit.

"At the same time, we were giving priority to the promotion of national pilots, which I think was the fair thing to do, after all Air Niugini is the national airline. In the recent past, there has been a huge worldwide shortage of pilots, so we had a situation where some of our senior citizen pilots left us to go to other countries for higher wages than what we could pay. Expatriate pilots also left because they were stuck in our promotion system which gave preference to our national pilots."

A few of the old Air Niugini hands have stayed on. The General Manager Flight Operations and Chief Pilot, Captain Daniel Wanma - who came to Air Niugini from the PNG Defence Force - has been with the company for many years. Captain Lekwa Gure is Flight Training and Standards Manager; Captain Paul Kodor, Fleet Manager B767; Captain Moses Padigaga, Fleet Manager Fokker 100; Captain Rod Marsland, Fleet Manager Dash 8; and Captain David Innes.



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Air Niugini



Flight Safety Manager. There are only ten staff remaining who have served since "Day One". These include Captains Roy Materne and Aria Bouraga, Flight Operations; Kae Maub, Lucien Wapion, Tapalo Wari and Kewa Tai, Service Delivery; and Mark Unduahn, Martin Togel, Michael Dambui and Sile Lubini, Engineering and Maintenance.

Such staff members form the very backbone of a successful airline operation. The temptation to go overseas is very great, both for pilots and for Air Niugini's skilled aircraft engineer staff. The fact that Papua New Guineans pilots and engineers are in demand overseas says much for the success of the airline's training programmes.

This was one of the challenges faced by Kumarasiri. "I'm pleased to say that as we were entering into our 35th year of operation, these root problems have been addressed," he says. "We've had a series of discussions with our expatriate and national pilots, and we have come to a single level salary and promotion structure. Promotions are now based on merit and seniority.

"And I have personally reviewed our route schedules to address gaps and fix problems. Tourism is one of the major areas we are focused on. The public seems to believe that airfares have been the major hindrance to tourism development, but airfares are only a part of the overall cost. We have contributed a lot to tourism. If Air Niugini had not been there over the past ten years or so, we would not have had Japanese tourists coming in. And we lost a huge amount of money over that time. The land cost component of a tourism package in PNG is between fifty and seventy percent of the overall cost, with the airfare element only about thirty percent. Generally this is supposed to be

50-50.

"Tourists expect proper infrastructure. They want to come to PNG, but at the same time they want to know they will be safe. They want to be sure that if they fall sick, there are hospitals to care for them. They want reliable tour operators, who are licensed and with credibility. They want to know where they can go, what they can see. There are huge opportunities in tourism just waiting, but they have to be developed, they don't just happen on their own. I don't think that PNG is the country for the first-time traveller; it will be for the mature tourist who is looking for a change from all the usual tourist things they find in Asia, Europe or America.

"What Air Niugini can do is to provide airfares, capacity and proper connecting services. And we are doing this. Air Niugini has developed the product where the tourist can buy whilst they are at home, they can travel to several places in the country on the one airfare. They can buy a ticket overseas to go to a local destination as a through fare. We need other stakeholders in the industry to be aware of what Air Niugini is doing. As far as the future is concerned, from 26th October we commenced our new schedule; we have two aircraft in our international operation, we are flying directly to Hong Kong; previously we were flying to Hong Kong via Manila, and we commenced our direct service to Kuala Lumpur on 29th October. We have ordered a Boeing 787 and we expect delivery in 2011-2012, subject to current Boeing delivery issues. When that comes in it will be another significant challenge. As we will be one of the early recipients of the aircraft, we will have to train pilots and engineers, and develop the supporting infrastructure. The aircraft has great range, it can go from Port Moresby to Los Angeles

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direct. Like all airlines, we are going through a very painful time with soaring fuel costs. We have not transferred the total cost of this to the domestic travelling public - we have carried some 110 million kina that has not been passed on by fuel surcharge.

But the position became unbearable, and like all other airlines we have been forced to increase the domestic surcharge to recover increased fuel costs.

"One of our greatest problems is the inability of existing infrastructure to meet our needs. Some airports are unavailable for Fokker service. One Fokker can carry more than two Dash-8 loads. And if the airport can't accept the jet, we have to fly several Dash-8s, and we are short of pilots. So sometimes we are forced to cancel services at very short notice, and of course, the travelling public does not understand why this happens. We endeavour to give the best service to the public. Over the past two years, the Government has twice given us

assistance and another K70 million was allocated in the recent Budget.

"Air Niugini has good equipment, good resources, our systems and processes are very good. There are a lot of improvements yet to be made, and we are determined to follow through with continuous improvement.

"We need to seriously lift the capacity and skill levels of our staff. And at some stage, subject to the agreement of our Board and Government, we need to segregate our domestic and international operations, so that we can even better serve the needs of the travelling public.

"We need to maintain public loyalty and win loyalty from those who choose others for their travel. Every person associated with Air Niugini must work very hard to get that public creditability and loyalty back. I feel certain we can do this and go on delivering good service to the travelling public in the years ahead."



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CAIRNS

The best tropical city in the world

By John Brooksbank

...So says Val Schier, Cairns newly elected mayor, whose unequivocally positive statement echoes the feelings of most residents of the city, which prides itself as being the capital of the Far North Queensland.

Although this moniker would probably be challenged by Townsville, four hours' drive to the south, Cairns is certainly the major gateway to the many attractions this part of tropical Australia has to offer.

Unlike its somewhat dry and industrial southern rival, Cairns always seems to be on holiday - with its informal laid-back attitude and streets thronged with tourists of every hue and tongue.

This cosmopolitan feeling is partly a result of the city being a hub for eight international

airlines whose routes fan out into Asian ports to the north of Australia, along with six domestic airlines.

The innumerable Cairns hotels and motels fit all budgets, from backpacker room sharing to exotic suites of the specialised apartment complexes such as Sebel Harbour Lights and the Cairns International, Cairns Hilton, Holiday Inn, Shangri-La and Sofitel Reef Casino hotels.

To service the more than 2 million people that visit the city annually, there are also a correspondingly ethnically diverse range of restaurants and a plethora of al fresco coffee

shops that seem to sprout from almost every street corner.

Although rising interest rates and a strong Australian currency have dampened the economy in recent months, the explosion of Cairns over the last 20 years has seen its population rise to more than 150,000.

So what do visitors to Cairns come for? Looking out at the sea of pale European flesh that carpets the grass adjacent to The Esplanade's man-made beach & lagoon pool on a daily basis, one could be forgiven for thinking that all people want to do is lie semi-naked in the sun.

Esplanade Lagoon, marina and wharves now sit on many metres of reclaimed land.





Aerial view...Central Cairns.

But then maybe these are just survivors recovering from the deprivations of a night spent in the many city CBD bars and clubs.

Offshore, there is the world-famous Great Barrier Reef with a number of fixed pontoons on various interesting reefs such as Oyster, Agincourt and Norman and Michaelmas and Upolo cays.

The offshore reefs, sand cays, Fitzroy and Green islands are serviced by many tour operators who offer scuba diving, snorkelling, glass bottom boats, game fishing, humpback whale watching and even crabbing cruises.

For those who wish to stay more in touch with the land, there are destinations and activities that can be easily reached within a day, so one can be back at one's hotel bar by nightfall.

These include champagne hot air balloon flights on the Atherton Tablelands and further west, the spectacular caves at Chillagoe, and the unique lava tubes at Undarra.

One can travel by bus, train or aerial cable car to the picturesque village and markets of Kuranda, perched on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the coastal flood plain.

Port Douglas, a more up-market destination, is just an hour's drive away to the north, along a memorably scenic coast road that passes numerous beaches should one feel the need to take their clothes off and lie



Global Palace...backpacker hotel.



Cairns...paradise for tourists.

down again! A little further north is the world famous Daintree Rainforest, Cape Tribulation and Cooktown.

For the more adventurous, there is whitewater rafting down local rivers, sky-diving, bungee jumping, helicopter flights or beach horse riding.

Cairns wasn't always as urbane a town. Its location amid the mangrove swamps adjacent to Trinity Inlet was so mosquito-ridden and unhealthy that the local Aboriginal people of the Yirkandji, Yidindji and Kongkandji tribes usually maintained fishing encampments there but lived elsewhere.

Cairns was established because of the need in the 1870s for a port to service the newly discovered Hodgkinson goldfields.

It was proclaimed in October 1876 and named after the then Governor of Queensland, William Wellington Cairns. The township site was a mass of low-lying sand ridges and mangrove swamp - evidenced until recently by the regular flooding of the bottom end of Abbot and Spence Street - near the present Sofitel Reef Casino.

This part of town, including the Esplanade Lagoon, marina and wharves now sit on many metres of reclaimed land. Today, there are still many Aboriginal people living in the city although many live across the inlet at Yarrabah and in and around Kuranda - the main centre

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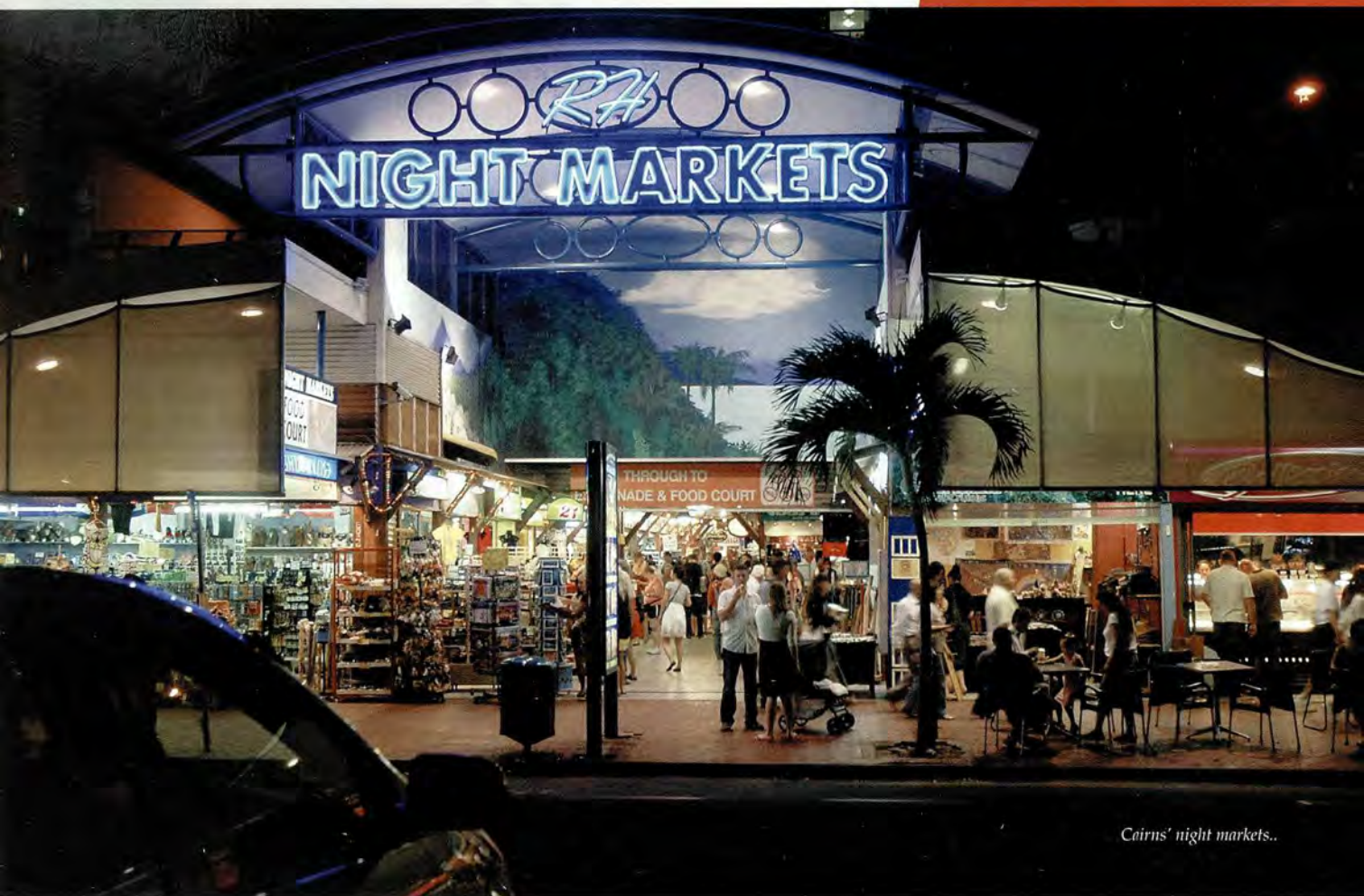
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Cairns' night markets..

in the land of the Djapukai rainforest people.

Many Aboriginal people are active participants in the tourism-oriented cash economy, in theatre companies or manufacturing artefacts for sale.

The Tjapukai Dance Theatre, now located on the coast at Smithfield although originally formed in Kurranda, will only accept Djapukai speakers to perform in its cultural shows.

After the demise of the goldfields, Cairns became a sleepy port much like many others along the eastern seaboard of Australia, servicing the sugar cane farmers and was home to a local fishing fleet.

The first sign that Cairns was a little different from other coastal towns was when it was 'discovered' by Americans such as Lee Marvin - as a base from which to make sorties into the Coral Sea in search of elusive black marlin. During the 1960s, the city quickly gained somewhat of a cult status as a tropical centre for game fishing.

All major hotels and information centres overflow with colourful brochures of the various pastimes that one could fill one's time with - both active and more passive in nature.

Apart from the more mainstream tourist activities, Cairns is home to the Royal Flying Doctor Service whilst the Esplanade boardwalk is renowned as a premier place to watch key intertidal bird species.

There is always the beautiful Cairns Botanical Gardens, Cairns Tropical Zoo, Wildlife Safari Reserve, colourful Rusty's Markets and art galleries.

For something really different, one could visit Goliath, the huge saltwater crocodile, and other creatures in the Cairns Wildlife Dome above the Reef Hotel Casino!

For those in need of retail therapy, there are many outlets in the city




Ships at the marina.

and suburbs. For example, in the vast Cairns Central Shopping Centre alone, there are four major stores and more than 180 speciality shops.

Cairns' international accessibility is one of the reasons why the city is a "fly-in, fly-out" residential location for staff of mines and petroleum operations in western Queensland, Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya - such as Freeport, Oil Search, Porgera, Ok Tedi and Lihir Gold. Many of these companies also operate direct charter flights to their operations from Cairns.

Cairns is a paradise for tourists and shoppers alike - where there is always something to do day or night, where stores, restaurants and bars are always open - and all in a nice, warm and informal tropical environment. Cairns is only just over an hour away from Port Moresby.

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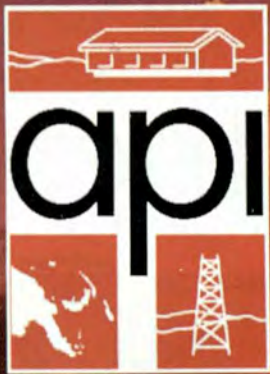


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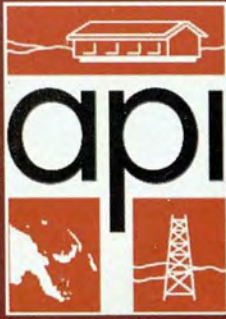
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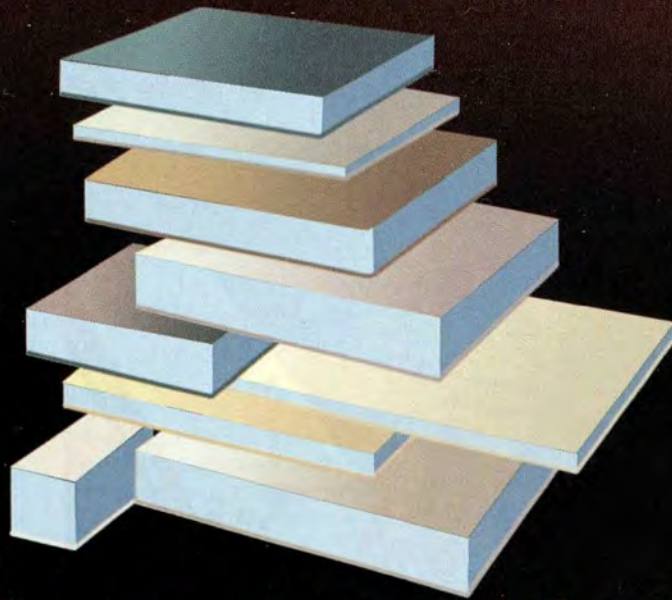
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An Englishman once speculated, as perhaps only an Englishman could, that surfing must be "like having a cup of tea with God". Which may just prove that when you're racing the liquid hoop of a tubing wave, words don't count for much at all. Lost for words you may be, but on Queensland's Gold Coast, never for waves.

QUEENSLAND'S GOLD COAST

By John Borthwick



The Gold Coast has almost 40 kilometres of surf beaches. At the heart of this bounty of sand and swell is Surfers Paradise. There's no ambiguity about "Surfers"; when the place was renamed (from its former, dowdy title, Elston) in 1933, there was never a question of it being called something like "Nine-Pin Nirvana" or "Tennis Limbo". A surfer's paradise it was, and thus, Surfers Paradise it would be.

The name could almost apply to the whole Gold Coast. Its warm waters ensure that at any time of the year you will find surfers flinging their bodies, surfboards, wave skis, malibus, boogie boards, surfboats, windsurfers and wavekites onto anything that resembles a wave.

The simple pleasure of being thrust shorewards by the great free-ride pulse of the ocean is what existence here is, for some, all about.



If it all seems too easy, don't be fooled: that skinny teenager sashaying across the face of a wave might look like a cross between a Nijinsky and a rap dancer, but it took years for her or him to surf that well.

Surf culture permeates the Gold Coast's land life as much as it does the waves. Blonde hair, bikinis and hibiscus prints seem to be the uniform both on and off the beach; surf shops sell far more clothing than surfing equipment. (In fact, surf shops sell far more clothing than most clothing shops.) All this is, of course, just foreplay to the main event, catching waves. If it all seems too easy, don't be fooled: that skinny teenager sashaying across the face of a wave might look like a cross between a Nijinsky and a rap dancer, but it took years for her or him to surf that well.

In 1950, a Brisbane journalist sarcastically called this strip of coast "the gold coast", referring to its soaring land prices. His irony was lost, but the name (and the land prices) remained. Today, sub-cultures thrive on the long, broad beaches of "the Coast", from die-hard surfers (of all ages) and muscle-bound narcissists to honeymooners and the annual invasion of "schoollies".

The latter tribe consists of senior high school

kids who, having just finished their last exams, head to the Gold Coast from all over eastern Australia, there to rage the night away in dance clubs until they fall (often fully clothed) into the ocean at dawn.

Some of the above will inevitably be among the hundreds of swimmers and would-be surfers who each year find themselves out of their depth in these often powerful waves. Many of these folk owe their lives to another surfing sub-culture, one that's far less hedonistic.

The professional lifeguards and volunteer surf lifesavers that are a feature of Australia's beaches often seem more evident - and with more high-tech hardware - here on the Gold Coast than elsewhere. Lifeguards cruise the sands in special beach jeeps and quad bikes, often with yellow rescue surfboards attached, while their motorised "rubber-ducky" inflatable boats wait ready at the shoreline.

Some 25 beaches on the Gold Coast are

patrolled by these dedicated men and women. If it all sounds a bit like "Baywatch", forget the glamour: come rescue time, there's no room here for silicone and soap opera.

So, you wannabe a surfer? For some, body surfing will be thrill enough. Seriously consider starting on a soft boogie board instead of a hard, fibreglass and foam surfboard. Plus, boogie boards are allowed within the patrolled swimming area. If you have the time and determination to learn to ride a surfboard, beg, borrow or rent one, and then get someone to instruct you on a few pointers.

For starters, observe the "No surf craft between the flags" signs - stay well away from the orange and red flagged swimming area. Surf in the company (but not in the way) of others and stay out of the water if it looks too rough. It's worth enrolling for a few days' instruction at a surf school. They're everywhere.

Beginners in surfing are instantly told where



to go - in very robust language - should they "drop in" on a wave on which another surfer is already riding; always stay clear of other riders when they're on a wave. If the linguistic abuse doesn't puncture your ego, consider your body being impaled by a very sharp surfboard. It happens, it hurts.

Then, where to surf? "The Surfari" is one of the great rituals of the Gold Coast. Pile your boards, boogies, block-out (the sun here is like a walk-in microwave oven at midday) and friends into the car and start cruising, the earlier in the day the better.

Surf can be like the turf - a matter of "horses for courses". For instance, the dramatic, right-hand point breaks of the Coolangatta "Superbank" and Burleigh Heads - some

of the most sought-after and heavily surfed waves on the planet - are no place for the beginner. Instead, try Currumbin, a gentler, less crowded wave, that's good for inexperienced riders.

A quick "virtual surfari" of the Coast starts on the Queensland-NSW border (the "Banana Curtain") beside the Tweed River breakwater - at Duranbah, a great spot for hollow, peaking shorebreak waves. Just around a rocky point to the north is Coolangatta and a series of breaks: Snapper Rocks, Rainbow Bay and Greenmount. Collectively known as the Superbank, they are crowded, consistent and hyper-competitive, and home to some of the world's best surfers such as 2007 World Champ Mick Fanning.



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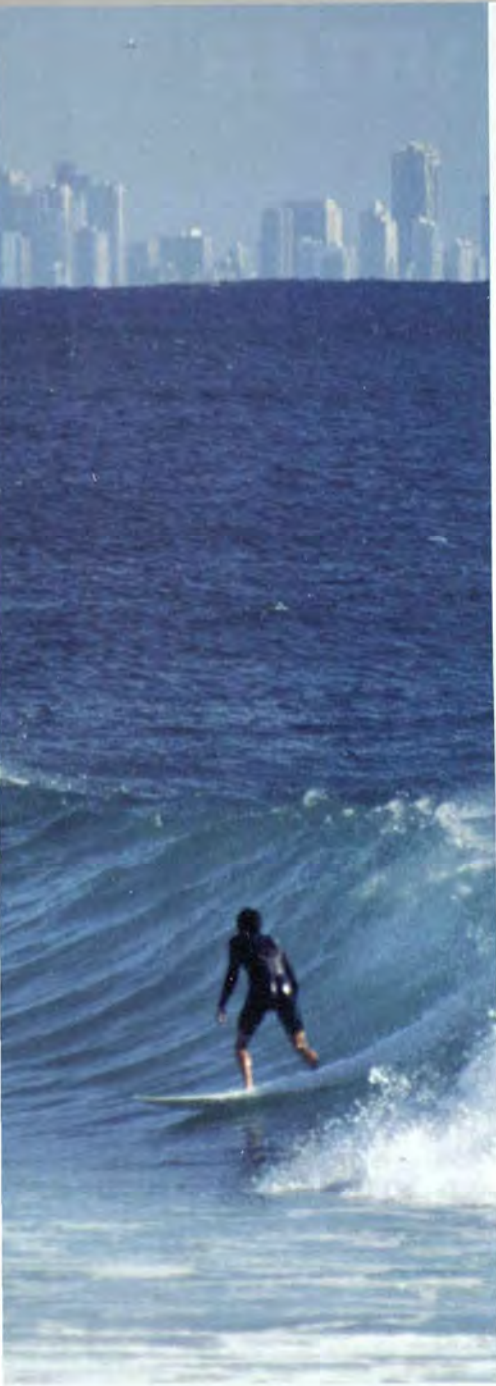
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Further north is Currumbin, then Burleigh Heads, perhaps the most famous wave on the Coast. With a ringside vista from the grassy headland, Burleigh is a great spot for spectators, especially during autumn's pro surfing contests.

Despite its name and lengthy beach, Surfers Paradise itself does not boast the top waves on the coast, having mostly sandbar breaks rather than the classic point waves. Its Cavill Avenue break is fairly consistent, with the street's name honouring James Cavill who started the whole thing when he erected the original "Surfers Paradise Hotel" here in 1925. Today, it all looks more like Surfeit's Paradise.

You can wander north from Surfers along an unbroken strip of beach past Sea World to a tongue of sand simply called The Spit, the tip of which is the northern limit of the Gold Coast. Beach breaks abound along here, but most of the shore is unpatrolled, so once again, this is no place for beginner surfers or swimmers. Good for joggers, fishermen and sun-bakers, this tranquil stretch might be called Non-Surfers Paradise.



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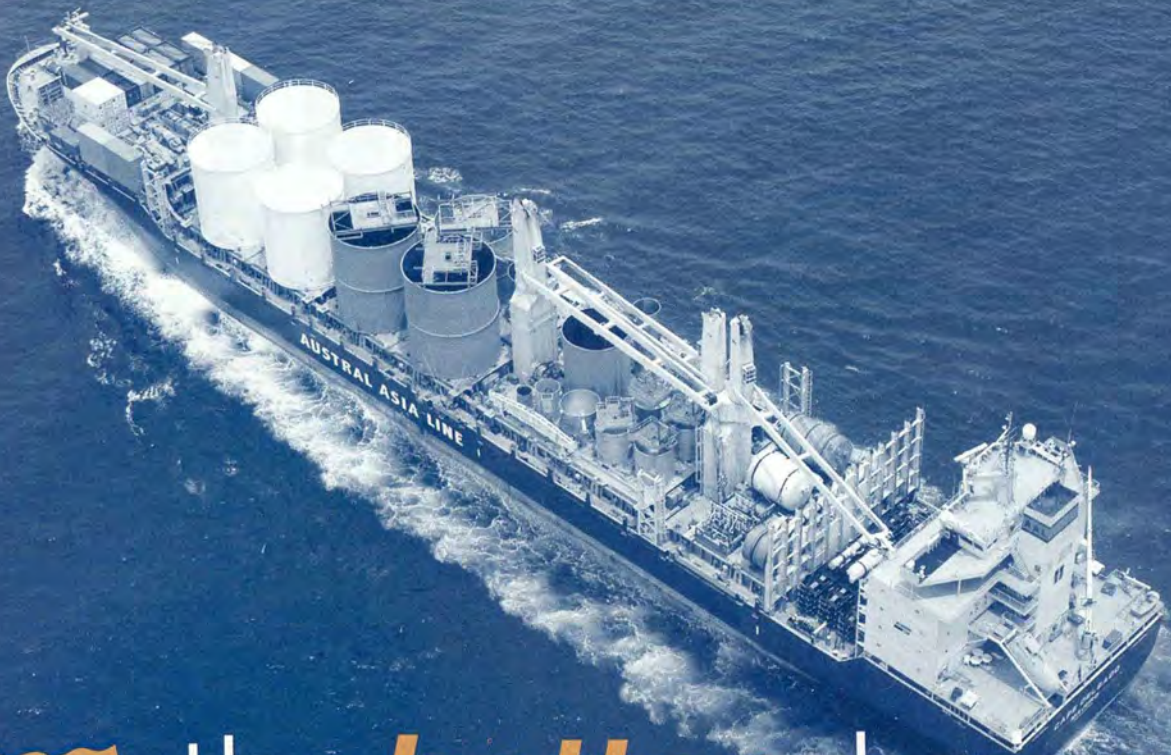
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Pelicans hover sensing beer and chips. It's 11.30am and Merinda II is offloading passengers who are having lunch and picks up passengers bound for Bobbin Head, one of Sydney's beautiful water locations.

Pelicans know the timetable well. Every day for nearly 40 years Merinda II journeys from Sydney's ritzy Palm Beach to Patonga, on the city's northern limits, then to Bobbin Head, where it stops for lunch before returning.



SYDNEY WATERWAYS

Pottering around an unspoilt wilderness

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **JULIE IHLE**



Boats line the bay.

Jaunty little Merinda II is perfectly suited to the ferry cruise crowd. Merinda II combines charm and manoeuvrability, evident as it zips across Pittwater and then weaves through the Hawkesbury, another Sydney waterway.

There's a covered viewing deck upstairs and two outdoor areas on the bottom level with a spacious indoor lounge with tea and coffee bar and two small bathrooms. Freshly painted with blue trim, everything feels squeaky clean and in tip-top condition.

As the ferry chugs down the Hawkesbury, the skipper shows us the points of interest.

The commentary is unobtrusive and genuinely interesting and a relief to have a live commentary rather than a tinned, pre-recorded voice.

He points out the grand beach houses, standing sentential-like by the shore. "Nothing there for under two million", he says.

Along the way we learn that Coal and Candle Creek got its name from an early colonialist, Scotsman Colin Campbell. Colin Campbell Creek proved too much of a tongue-twister and the early settlers renamed it Coal and Candle Creek.

Sydney's first governor, Captain Arthur Phillip made a sortie up the Hawkesbury soon after settlement. He spent a cold wet winter

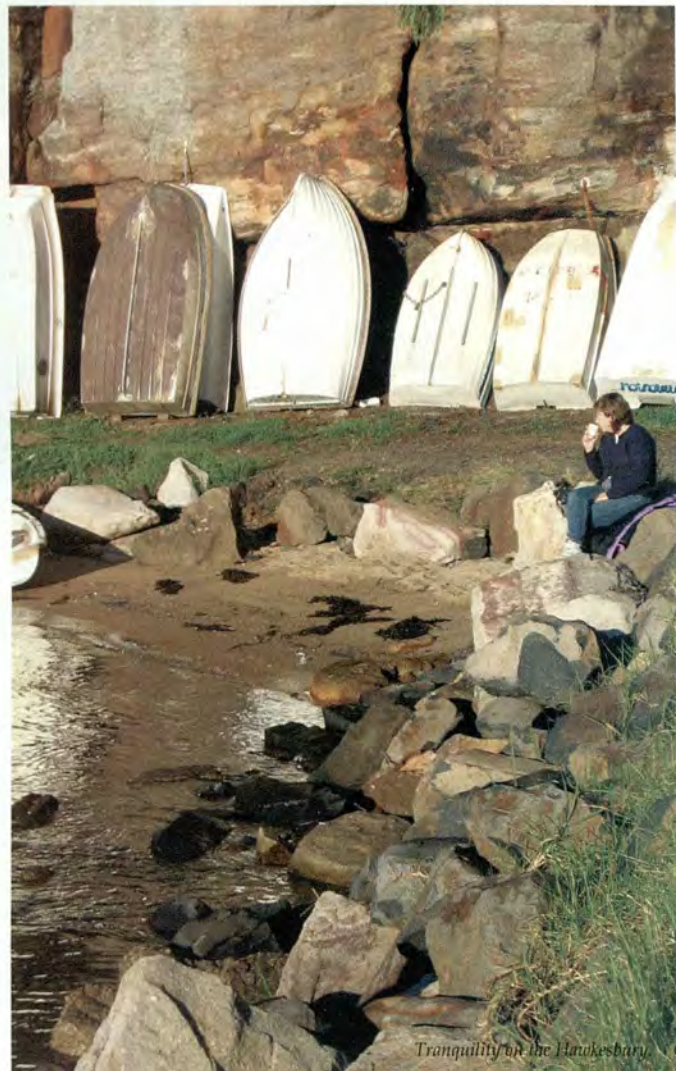
night camped on one of the Hawkesbury's beaches. Names like Challenger Head and Refuge Bay tell a story of hardships the early colonists experienced in the Hawkesbury. Today, pleasure cruisers and yachts tour the waterways and in the distance we can see the waterfront hamlet of Brooklyn, flanked by luxury boats.

By now we are pulling past waterfront

mansions at Cottage Point in the lower Hawkesbury. Some passengers disembark here for lunch at Cottage Point Restaurant, one of Sydney's swankiest restaurants, or to mosey around on canoes hired from the general store. The boat will return to pick them up later. A fire-engine red seaplane zooms overhead and lands pelican-like and passengers disembark for the restaurant.

Jaunty Merinda II.





Tranquility on the Hawkesbury



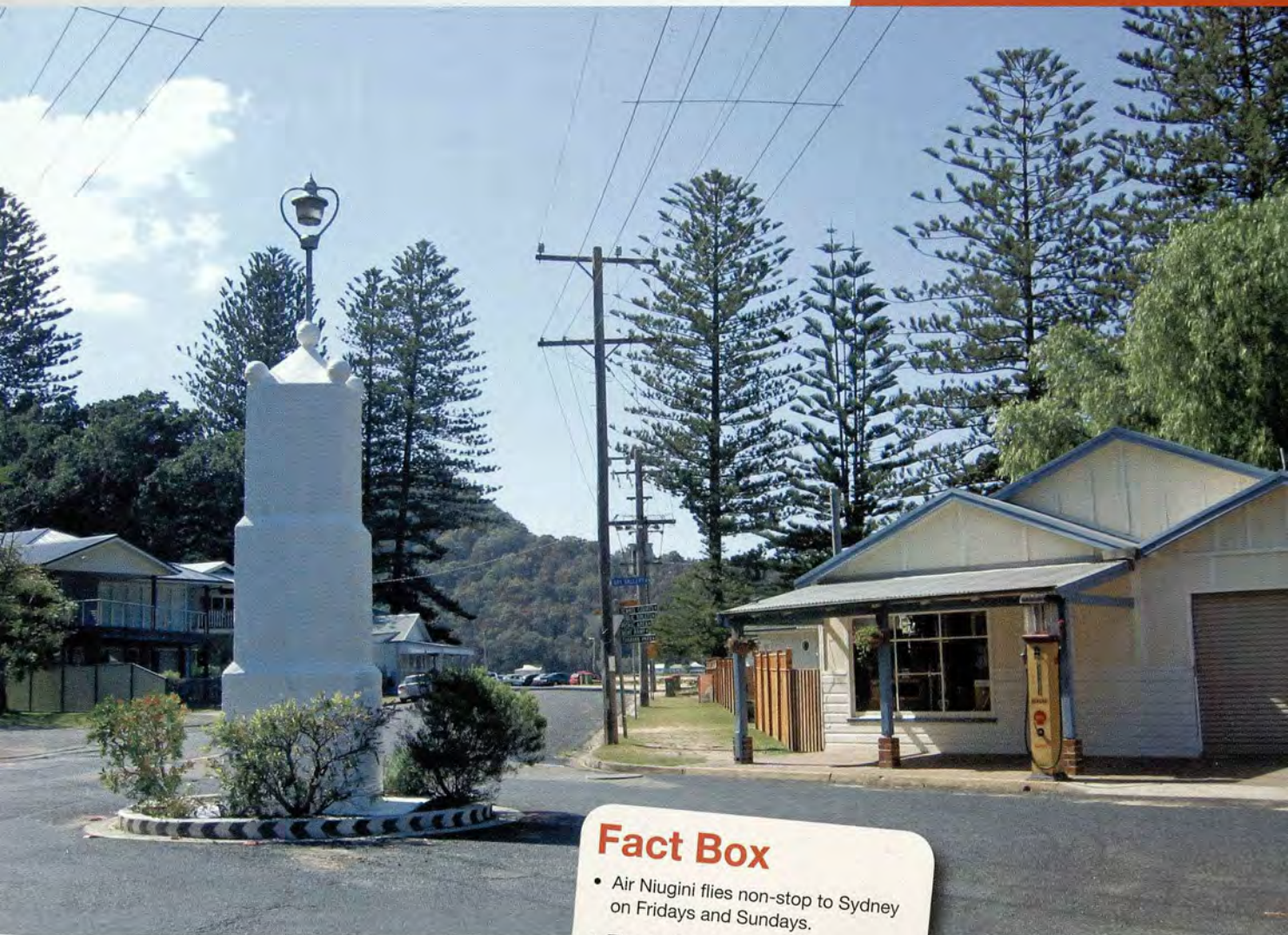
Canoeing at Cottage Point.

The last of the Cottage Point holiday homes drift past and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park reverts to bush. Thanks to weeks of rain, the bush is looking lush, in an almost un-Australian shade of emerald green.

The sandstone cliffs are ringed by rocks that have tumbled down the cliff and lie in state for thousands of years. The water morphs from sapphire blue to jade green in the lower reaches and we see a few kayakers, but by and large we have the place to ourselves.

Angophoras line the river banks, their prehistoric arms waving to us, pale rose trunks performing aerodynamic leaning over the water while rooted to the river banks. On the hills, grass trees sprout profusely, their spiky leaves swaying gently in the breeze.

Sandstone boulders pushed to the limit by eons of evolution lie where they crashed probably thousands of years ago. This is classic Sydney sandstone country - dry orange cliffs and deep blue water against an arc of blue sky.



Fact Box

- Air Niugini flies non-stop to Sydney on Fridays and Sundays.
- **The cruise:** Merinda II departs every day from Palm Beach and Patonga to Bobbin Head return, with optional side trip to Cottage Point.
- **Contacts:**
W: www.sydney scenic cruises.com;
T: + 61 414 466 635

Patonga...on Sydney's outskirts offers a laid-back atmosphere.

Bobbin Head...port of call.

The water is so green now that we see schools of fish gathering below us. Birds of prey circle above, looking for an easy bite. The river narrows as we arrive at Bobbin Head.

The marina pathway is being upgraded so it resembles a drag racing circuit and it feels noisy and chaotic after the peace of the river. We have an hour for lunch at Bobbin Head. Some head for a quick fish and chips at the café and others munch on a picnic lunch and stretch their legs.

On the way back, the weather turned dull but gave us a chance to check out the waterway in less glamorous lighting. It resembled an impressionist painting: greys turned to charcoal and greens became khaki against the flinty blue water.

In the great Australian tradition of BYO, two people have brought beers on board and quietly sit downing their beer and drinking in the dreamy scenery.

Back at Patonga, the sun is staging a comeback and passengers are lining up for the late afternoon journey back to Palm Beach. Pelicans hover expectantly as fishing boats chug back into shore.

As for Sydney Harbour - it may be one of the world's greatest harbours, but for a potter around an unspoilt wilderness, it doesn't come close.



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CRUISING THE SOLOMONS WITH ORION

Difficult to explore yet attractive to visit

By Michael Corbett

Looking up towards the surface from a depth of 37 metres I see the generously rounded stern of the 150-metre long Japanese World War II transport ship Toa Maru silhouetted above me.

Still remarkably intact and resting on her starboard side (sunk as a result of a United States attack), we have seen the torpedo entry point, dropped deeper to swim through superstructure and enter various holds to reach the stern - now looming above us.

Handicrafts for sale...tourists undecided what to buy.



Artifacts still remain for divers to hold, admire and leave behind, as found. This is exciting stuff and it is hard to slow one's rate of breathing down, for gently wiping the soft marine growth from a ceramic plate reveals still-glistening blue calligraphy.

Our dive guide from Dive Gizo passes me a saki bottle for closer inspection, remarkably intact after surviving the sinking. Elsewhere, we see the remains of medical supplies, rounds of ammunition and larger objects, a Type 21 two-man Japanese tank, lying on its side yet recognisable and complete, with new brown camouflage of soft and hard marine growth. Moving on reveals a motorbike and some unexploded bombs...perhaps it is time to surface.

No wonder this popular World War II shipwreck, just a 20-minute boat ride from Gizo, the second largest town in the Solomon Islands, attracts scuba divers from around the world to experience diving at its best.

Unlike the cold stonewalls of a European castle that reach back hundreds of years or more, this is true modern history, a palpable reminder of a war just over 60 years young.



A tourist enjoying Kennedy Island with a local tour guide.

History our fathers and grandfathers were involved in, but rarely talked about. The Solomon Islands is littered with such reminders above and below water.

After a clearing shower, the afternoon is idyllic. We spend it on nearby Kennedy Island, one of over 900 scattered islands that form the Solomon Islands, the third largest archipelago in the South Pacific.

Renamed to reflect the exploits of one John F Kennedy, this island is so beautiful one wonders just why Kennedy and the survivors of PT 109 were in a rush to leave. Perhaps, it was the lack of sun protection cream and fresh water on the island. We had no such problem.

The ever-thoughtful staff from the Orion, a 106-metre long purpose built expedition cruise ship, had plenty of sun protection and liquid refreshments on hand for her guests.

We also had a small group of local Gizo residents set up shop on the island to offer an enticing range of wooden and stone carvings, woven bags and baskets and it was soon apparent that it was worth their short trip to intercept us.

Before long, many of Orion's guests were actively negotiating for a wooden carving - including those who earlier in the day had also succumbed to the enticement of the carvers market set up on Gizo's main street. Betelnut and Colgate smiles all round.

The following day dawns and Orion is stationing herself offshore from what James A Michener described as the eighth wonder of the world, Marovo Lagoon. No anchor point here for Orion as the reef wall plunges vertically 200 metres down and then continues.

Captain Sven Gaertner spends the day manoeuvring Orion to hold her position in the ink-blue waters, while a continuous shuttle of the ship's Zodiacs ferry guests between the ship and Uepi with a side trip to the tempting crystal waters of Mateana for swimming and snorkelling.





Busy Gizo market...with local produce on sale.

On Uepi, more exquisite carvings are available for purchase, minimising any possibility of returning to Australia within the airline maximum allowable baggage weight.

Laden with purchases of exquisite inlaid bowls, carved walking sticks and stone statues guests wander through Uepi Resort, stopping to capture the thrilling sight of shark feeding from the small jetty - a place where a pack of frenzied black tipped reef and grey whaler sharks snap at each other as well as the fish remains thrown to them.

Later, in the afternoon, I see Uepi Resort guests snorkelling in the same area. Obviously the well trained sharks are able to discern between human finger-food and more delectable fish bits.

I am off again for another dive known locally as The Elbow. This is an extraordinary wall dive, well up on the world's-best scale, with

Shark feeding...at Uepi.



Marovo Lagoon...described as the eighth wonder of the world.

reef sharks, concentrations of fish, sponges and corals, numerous overhangs, crevices and swim-throughs.

A few fellow Orion guests in our dive group manage over an hour underwater, squeezing every last cubic centimetre of air out of our tanks in order to spend the last 15 or so minutes just hanging around in the 28 degree Celsius waters, happy to be in one enormous tropical fish tank.

Scattered islands, dense tropical rainforests and rugged terrain conspire to make the Solomons difficult to explore yet attractive to visit.

There is good news, for expedition ships such as Orion bring visitors who otherwise may not come - and the ship, being self contained, provides the necessary transport, accommodation and infrastructure.

Two groups in particular are especially attracted to the Solomons - young adventure seekers lured by world class scuba diving and new, unspoilt, surfing destinations such

as the left hander at Titiana Village and the right hander at Paeloge (Gizo), while the other group, larger and more affluent, is generally 50 plus years of age.

These are well educated, self-employed or senior managers and self-funded retirees visiting the Solomons as part of a boom sector of the travel industry, expedition cruising, a cruise sub-category that now spans the globe.

The most recent arrival is Orion Expedition Cruises, with Australia's only purpose-built 5 star expedition cruise ship, Orion. Constructed in Germany, launched in late 2003, Orion was custom-designed from the start. Purpose-built for strength and stability, with design features that include oversize stabilisers, shallow draft and bow/stern thrusters to help her access places larger ships simply could not attempt to reach. Orion is the perfect base for those seeking adventures in this paradise and nearby tropical islands.



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Causeway Bay...at night.

THE EMPORIUM OF THE WEST

Hong Kong: Where East meets West

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **TAN HOO CHWOON**

*'East is East and West is West,' declared Rudyard Kipling,
'and ne'er the twain shall meet.'*

*Amongst the many nuggets of wisdom in his tome of pithy
observations, none has been more brusquely overturned
than this in Hong Kong where East truly meets West at the
confluence of compelling contrasts and contradictions.*

The first light in Hong Kong peels away the darkness of the night to reveal the slithering movements of Tai Chi Chuan in the parks.

In tadem, sharply dressed commuters slice through the blush of the cold morn, some on their way to rake in a princely sum, others just to eke out a living to put a roof over their heads and have three square meals on the family dining table.

For some, it is a quick bite at the double arches of the 'American Embassy'; for others, it is a long-drawn affair dotting the hearts with a widespread of dim sum accompanied by a twittering bird in a cage and a form book detailing the hottest horse-racing tips.

Every day, a noon-day gun is ceremoniously fired from a colonial bastion of commerce, booming across a sea of bobbing Chinese junks, sampans and pleasure craft.

CENTRE OF COMMERCE

Elsewhere in a smokey Chinese temple, there goes rattling a click-a-clack-click rhythm as pious devotees, with heads bowed in the act of propitiating the gods and placating the spirits, tumble fortune sticks out of a bamboo canister.

Que Sera Sera? Who says, 'Whatever will be, will be'? You can enhance your fortune or thwart your misfortune with the counsel of the feng shui master who calibrates his advice with the aid of his laptop.

As the afternoon draws on and shadows lengthen under the slant of golden rays, it is for some, English tea-time by a window which commands a harbour view as the strains of a string quartet grace the notes of light classical pieces; for others, it is a plate of tong part lart (sesame cake smothered with crushed groundnuts and sugar) and a bowl of kwai leng kou (black herbal jelly drizzled with honey) amidst the raucous gratings of Canto-pop, often-times rendered to a familiar English tune.

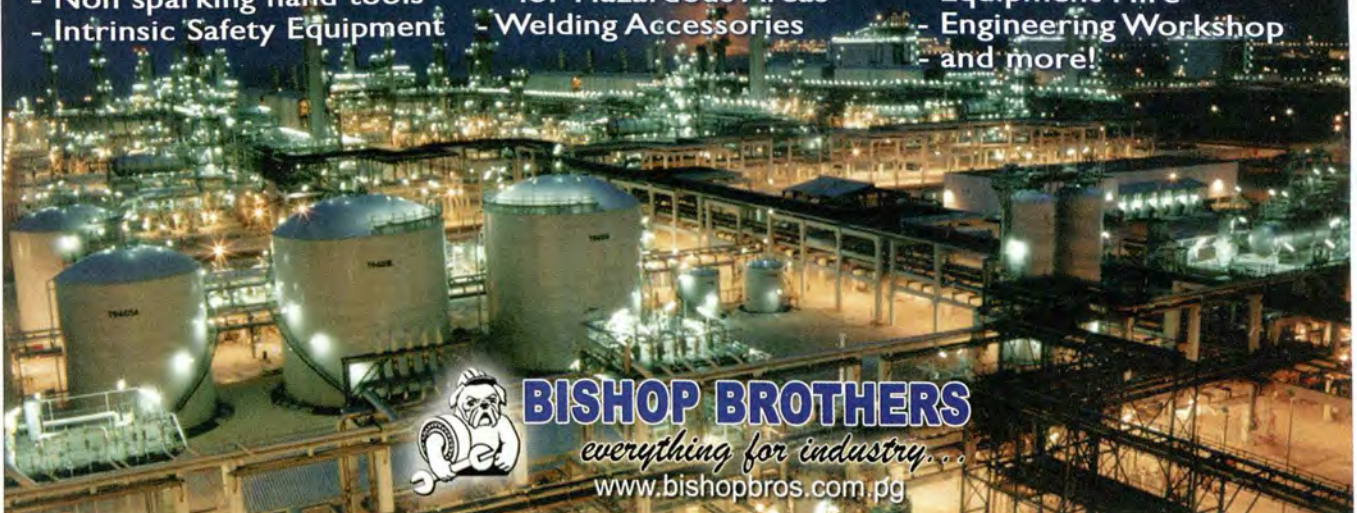
As the sun dips, the streets roar with traffic while neon hoardings fire their scintillation as harbingers of the night, proclaiming the greatest and the latest on the consumer market.



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Hong Kong...a shopping paradise.

It is that happy hour after a day's toil at the office: to each his own pleasure - slurping a piping hot bowl of snake broth flavoured with dried mandarin orange peel or quaffing a jug of bitters at a Lan Kwai Fong or Nathan Road pub with eyes riveted to a telecast of rugby sevens or cricket, that English gentleman's game, a throwback to the heady days when Britannia ruled the waves.

In the deepening dusk, this multi-faceted city transmogrifies its vivacious daytime hues to the iridescent tints of screeching neon.

A rainbow of colours fleck its spectacular harbours where water traffic threads its sinuous crossings between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula.

On centrestage, the Star Ferry chugs tirelessly between the two technicolor waterfronts, packed to the gills with passengers on their way to business or pleasure - or quite possibly a combination of both.

DINING

Dinner could be a juicy steak between trickles of red wine or steaming hot hairy crabs dunked in wine and lathered with chopped ginger.

And to strut the forever young night away, there is a choice of trampling the disco floor to a lambada beat under the psychedelic lights or watching with bated breaths horses stomping round the track and charging to the finishing post on a race course amidst shrieks of Fai Tee! Fai Tee! (Faster! Faster!). Oooooohhh! It is so exciting!

Sandwiched between the boutiques selling clothes fashioned after the latest sartorial cuts of the West are Chinese medical halls, herbal brew restaurants and bird shops.

Round the corner, a soothsayer peers through a huge magnifying glass to better read the lines of a palm in order to foretell the whims and wiles of Lady Luck.

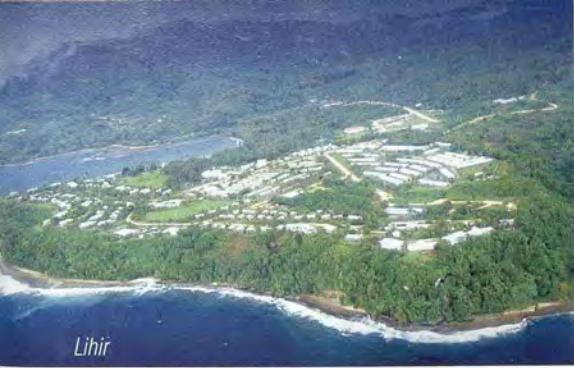
Up a dinghy, creaky stairway, an aged

Dancing the night away...in a Hong Kong nightclub.

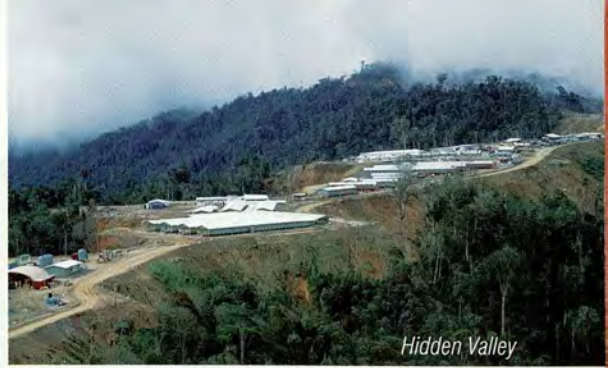
kungfu sifu takes a break from his pugilistic class to doctor a sprain with the arcane art of osteopathy, his mo kwoon (martial arts school) pungent with the smells of concocted ointments.

Next door, an aerobics class is in full flow. Ladies clad in leotards groove to the beat of a blaring CD as the instructress barks her exhortations: "Now, repeat after me everyone: "I must, I must, improve my bust!""





Lihir



Hidden Valley



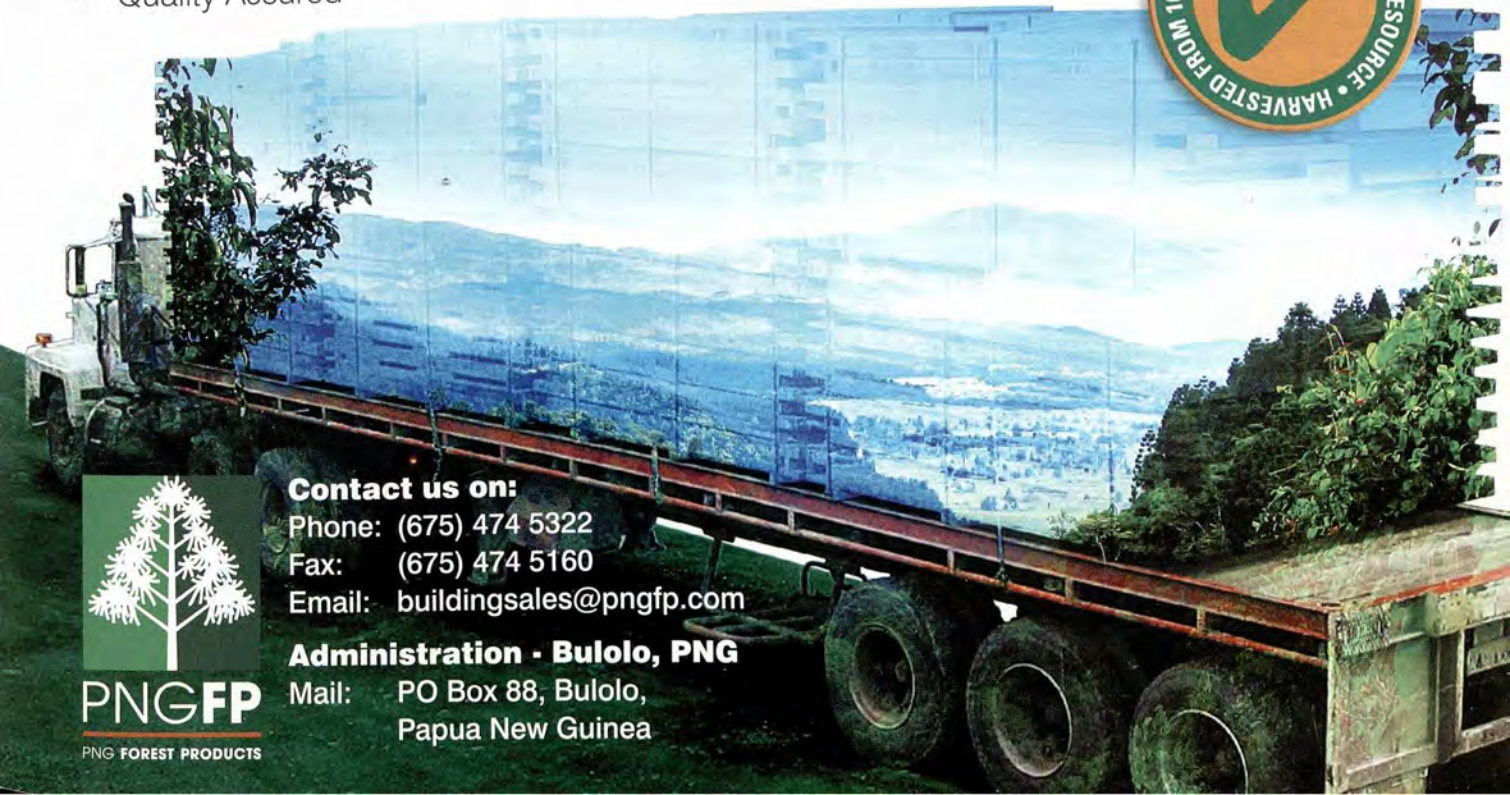
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SHOPPING PARADISE

And Hong Kong is a shopping paradise with a splendiferous array of goods from the East and the West. It is said that if you can't get it in Hong Kong, you don't have to waste time hunting for it elsewhere: the thing, in all likelihood, does not exist. Hence, it is not for nothing that Hong Kong is known as 'The Emporium of the East'.


Potter around the streets and you will see the shops honeycombed with a kaleidoscopic spectrum of herbs that are highly prized in traditional Chinese medicine, jade pendants ward off evil, tea leaves to lower cholesterol, electronic products and other James Bond-like gizmos that you never dreamt existed or thought you would ever need - until the slick salesman sweet-talks you into packing it into your shopping bag. Don't worry, payment is easy. Just flick out your credit or charge cards.

And the icing on the cake: Hong Kong offers more dash for the cash because its free port exerts no prohibitive duty and sales tax which have largely accounted for the massive savings on the goods. But alas, escalating rents (extracted by land scarcity), rising wages and worldwide spiralling costs have lifted the prices of some goods. Still, the window-dressed temptations are proving very difficult to resist.

But for those who want the adventure of a bargain-hunting spree, Stanley Market, Sai Yeung Choi Street (Ladies' Market) and Temple Street (Men's Street) are cheek-by-jowl treasure-troves, shorn of pretentious crowd-pulling window displays, which vend haberdashery, factory overruns and seconds decked out on racks and rails. Three-piece suit or silk cheongsam? Take your pick. All going for a song.

Indeed, from sunrise to sundown, from dusk to dawn, multitudinous and multifarious are the attractions and distractions on the many-jewelled face of Hong Kong: colonial architecture, theme parks, outlying islands, sandy beaches, fine cuisine and a pulsating nightlife.

It offers a rich tapestry of contrasts: old versus new, harmony in the midst of disorder, the yin intricately intertwined with the yang and an exciting blend of the Oriental and the Occidental eked by the forces of a flourishing trade which have branded on the diverse cultural elements that coalesce at its Fragrant Harbour: Gateway to China and Window on the West. It manifests itself sometimes subtly, other times stridently, the diametric opposites that converge, clash and consummate on its bed of blissful harmony.

In its kaleidoscopic blaze, you will easily find something for yourself - be it a simple sensory delight or your very heart's desire. 

 Air Niugini flies to Hong Kong every Monday.

Checking out the jewelleryes in a ladies market.



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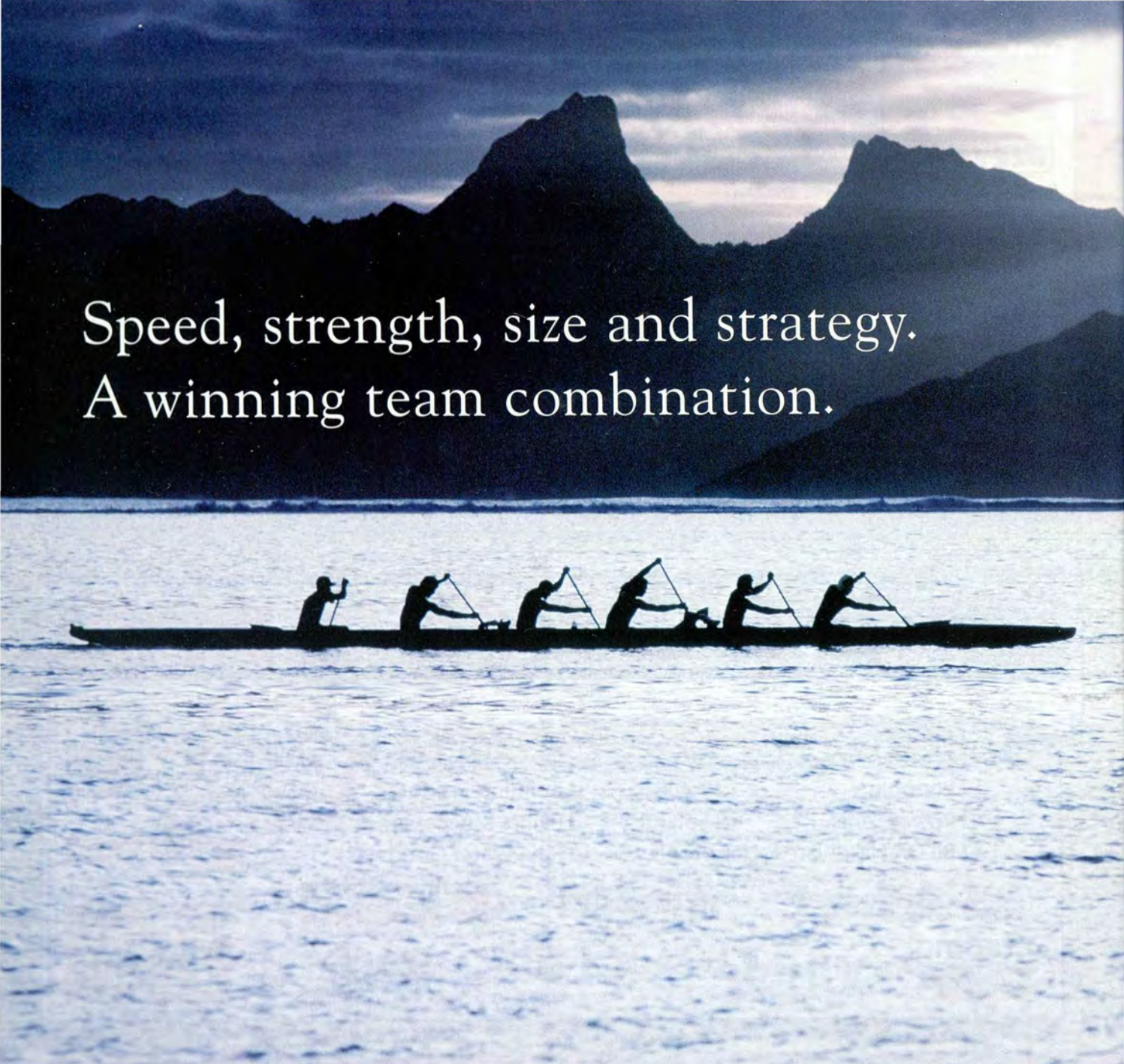
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Searching for a beach holiday away from large resorts, I stumbled upon Pulau Perhentian, a small group of islands, located in the South China Sea in north eastern Malaysia. This turned out to be an excellent find as RHODA BENNETT writes.

PERHENTIAN

The perfect 'stop-over'

Perhentian' when translated from the Malay language means 'stop-over', but we didn't have any trouble staying for a week!

Perhentian does not offer five-star luxury. Any lack of creature comforts, however, is made up for with picture perfect beaches punctuated by massive granite outcrops. Crystal clear water is fringed with drooping coconut palms.

The finest white sand slips into a warm salty sea.

The Perhentian islands are under the protection of the Marine Park of Malaysia. There are lots of places to stay, but it is far from crowded even in the busiest months of July and August. We began our 'stop-over' at the Tuna Bay Island Resort which lies on the big island of Pulau Besar.

Here, there are no roads and not many paths, so it can't help but be peaceful. The first thing

we did was put our shoes away as we didn't need anything more than flip-flops here. None of the chalets at Tuna Bay are more than 40 metres from the beach; many are just metres from the water.

What to do?

Lounge on a reclining chair in the sand and read a book. Slurp an icy watermelon juice. Then don mask and snorkel and wade onto the house reef. The vast array of colourful marine life right in front of the resort was amazing. I even spotted the resident Titan trigger fish, Big Harry, feeding on the spiny needles of sea urchins. Like the weather, the sea is balmy so you can stay submerged until your skin wrinkles if you want to. Then you can dry out while lounging on the beach again with an icy ginger tea.

In Malay style, the staff at Tuna Bay are friendly and efficient. The resort includes a full buffet breakfast in the tariff and the open-air

restaurant is open for meals all day with tables overlooking the sea.

The food is good value for money and there are dishes to suit both western and Asian palates. The chicken satay was the best we tasted in Malaysia.

If you are desperate to catch up with the world, there is a TV in the bar, but the barman is likely to talk you into trying one of his delicious mango daiquiris.

The rooms are not large, but very clean with an ensuite bathroom, crisp sheets, air-conditioning and hot shower. Fresh beach towels are provided daily.

Internet is readily available at Perhentian. We strolled down the beach to check emails at Kamamoto's hut, where he popped outside to hook up the satellite connection. It must be the first time we've checked emails with sand squishing through our toes.



Pulau Besar...yet another beautiful bay.

For the more active holidaymaker, the Perhentian islands are a hotspot for diving, which you can arrange through various operators on the islands.

We prefer to stick to snorkelling and were thrilled with the quantity and variety of fish, corals and sea life so busy below the surface.

We saw blacktipped reef sharks, shy pufferfish, titan triggerfish, blue-ringed angelfish, barracuda and lots of anemone fish. Perhaps the most impressive experience was floating above a group of 22 huge blue-green humphead wrasse, so graceful in their grazing.

At Shark Point, we swam through gorges of granite and coral with colourful reef fish darting around every corner, hiding in every crevice. An eel slipped into a crack. There were clams of every colour. Coral which appeared to be splashed bright pink by mistake. Schools of slender needlefish cruised past our heads.

Tuna Bay faces the small island of 'Pulau Kecil' with its only village Kumpung Pasir Hantu, which has a mini market, police station, school, clinic and mosque, but no bank. The level of development was surprising for the size of these islands.

This makes Tuna Bay somewhat of a hub for motor boat traffic, which although a little noisy,

makes it very easy to take a water taxi for a snorkelling trip or to access a more secluded beach or walking track across the island.

We decided to explore the interior a little by foot.

Doused with insect repellent and loaded up with water, we walked south down the beach to a camping ground before heading up over a hill.

This was in fact the only place on the island that mosquitoes were a problem. The track led us to yet another beautiful bay on the south

side of Pulau Besar, where we spotted white bellied sea eagles.

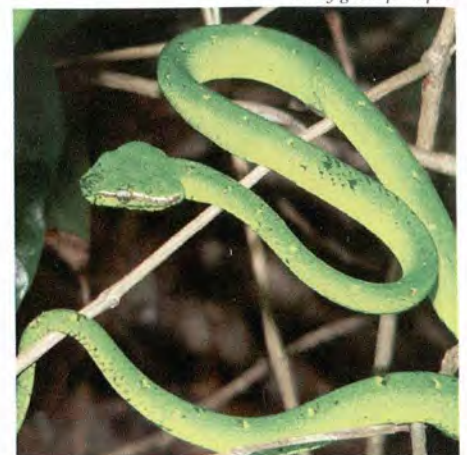
From there, we turned inland and walked on an easy track through the centre of the island, coming across truly breath-taking spiders, monitor lizards, squirrels, huge ants and finally a troop of the indigenous monkeys called Dusky Langurs.

As we walked back along the coast, dotted with small resorts, some friendly locals pointed out a fiesty green pit viper on the side of the track.

Dusky Langurs...indigenous monkeys.



Fiesty green pit viper.



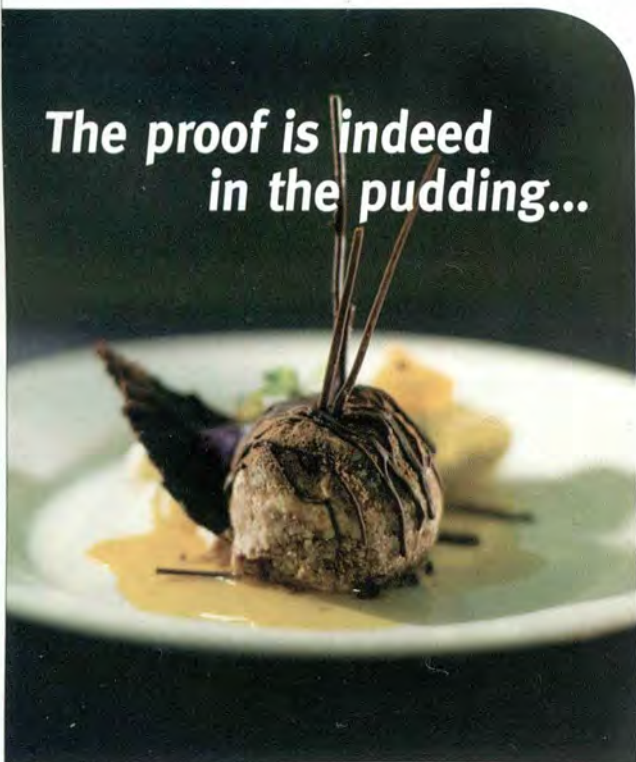


After four nights at Tuna Bay, we caught a water taxi for the five-minute trip across to the small island of Pulau Kecil.

The Watercolours Resort and dive centre is a quiet spot nestled on the side of a hill on the south west coast. The rooms are huge, if a bit old and tired.

But that didn't matter because the comfy chairs on our balcony lured us into sitting outside for hours, gazing out at the sea through the jungle. Surrounded by birdsong and butterflies. Watching playful squirrels zip around the trees. This place was the definition of restful.

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Telak Puah Bay.

Every evening we watched the pied imperial pigeons come home to roost. And then the sun would go down over the sea.

Here the resort staff put tables on the sand for romantic candle-lit dinners.

The food portions are huge and we discovered pisang goreng (deep-fried bananas) as the perfect way to finish a meal.

While rooms do have ensuite bathrooms, electricity is generally turned off during the day and the cheaper rooms up the hill have views but no hot showers. The cold water was refreshing!

Dean, the resort manager, organised a particularly good snorkelling tour for us. The boat driver took the two of us to three very different spots in three hours for just RM35 each.

The highlight for me has to be swimming with a green turtle in the crystal clear waters of the beautiful Teluk Pauh Bay. Twice!

He seemed curious to have me gliding alongside, but allowed me an incredibly close-up experience.

After a week on Perhentian, we were happily relaxed and refreshed. I would love to go back and do it all over again.

Fact Box

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies to Kuala Lumpur every Wednesday. From Kuala Lumpur, you can fly with Malaysia Airline, Air Asia or Fireflyz to either Kuala Terengganu or Kota Bharu (45minutes). After arriving at the airport, you can take either a bus or taxi to Kuala Besut jetty.

Most resorts on Perhentian will arrange a car or coach transfer to the port of Kuala Besut, or you can catch a taxi.

This one-hour long drive is a window into rural Malaysian life as you pass by small farms, houses and villages and cross a number of rivers full of fishing boats.

At Kuala Besut, climb into a water taxi for the 30-minute speed boat ride to the Perhentian islands. The moment your feet hit the sand you are on the resort beach.

Take just a few steps to check-in and then you are ready to relax. For more information, go to <http://www.perhentian-island.com>



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PROLIFIC PALAWAN A NEST OF DREAMS

By John Borthwick

The Philippines' Palawan islands are a nest of dreams. Strange dreams, to be sure, some of them. As I weave amid them in a banca boat, these upstart coral creations rise like an anarchist's wedding cake, all mad marble pinnacles and wild jungle tiers.

But that's Palawan. Always a place of dramatic beauty, such as at dusk when a million bats exit the caves high on an El Nido cliff like a huge dark wave washing across the sky, heading for the moon.

For a cluster of 1,770 islands, Palawan is a well-kept South-East Asian neighbourhood secret. Its slender archipelago stretches some 650 kilometres down the South China Sea with its centrepiece, Palawan Island being the Philippines' fifth largest island. In many ways, this province is a world apart even from the Philippines.



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A banca boat moored at sunset, off Lagen Island, El Nido, Palawan.



A visitor snorkels in an El Nido crystal lagoon, Palawan.

The northern Palawan archipelago is the creation of a profligate god - a realm of sunsets and washed by incandescent moonrises. Its celebrated region known as El Nido ("The Nest") offers scuba diving sites, a trove of lagoons, limestone cliffs and a handful of good resorts. Initially opened to tourists as a diving destination in the mid-1980s, El Nido Marine Reserve and its adjacent mainland are an encouraging example of how responsible tourism can preserve rather than trash its own nest. By using local staff and services, small resorts like Miniloc Island and the more luxurious Lagen Island have brought a sustainable, alternative income to many villagers.

Aleen Gonzalez, the enthusiastic co-coordinator of guest activities at my resort, shows me her domain of limestone isles whittled by the sea, ancient burial caves, tiny half-moon beaches and those vertical, namesake cliffs that spider-men scale for precious swallows' nests. For two days we island hop through a world where jungle-clad islets jut from the sea in an untamed topiary of witch's hats and mitre caps. Amid the architecture of some prehistoric Gaudi, we snorkel where piers of coral, undercut by the tide, balance on the sea like ballerinas on a jade stage. Sometimes as we swim, Aleen scatters bread and soon a whirlpool of thousands of fish obscures the water around us.

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Sea kayakers amid El Nido's ancient limestone upthrusts

Swapping our outrigger boat for kayaks, she points the way beneath a low coral archway that is passable only at mid-tide. We glide into a hidden lagoon walled by pandanus-topped cliffs. Within this silent grotto nothing moves but our paddles. Then a black heron drops from the treetops, swoops across the water and arcs up to a limestone crag. A stingray mirrors the bird's trail, scudding rhythmically across the lagoon floor.

Lagen Island Resort sits in Bacuit Bay, surrounded by a lei of some 45 limestone isles that hide tiny beaches and soaring cliffs. The 310-hectare island takes its name from the local word for "stone stove" because its shape resembles a primitive stove with funnels. There's a terrace overlooking the ocean where, come dusk, I like to slurp a San Miguel.

Just one beer, but even by night the gods of El Nido seem incapable of calming their profligate palette. By full moon, the shallows still glow as green as old jade.

My fellow resort guests are a mix of Western tourists, expats, Filipinos and honeymooning Korean couples. You know you're getting old when the honeymooners look too young to even vote, let alone take vows. One evening, as I survey the lush dinner buffet - will I have sashimi, chicken adobo or beef satay? - I notice a young Korean looking perplexed. Spoiled for choice by the gourmet overload, perhaps? He has a worried word with the headwaiter. A chef soon hurries from the kitchen to present him and his bride with their young hearts' desire - instant noodles-in-a-cup.



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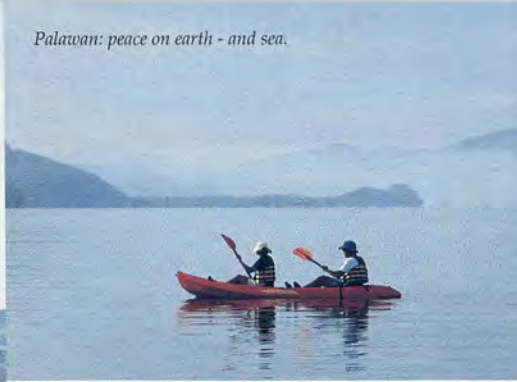


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Palawan: peace on earth - and sea.

Southern Palawan is less spectacular than El Nido - but so are most places on earth. Its main town (and Palawan's provincial capital), Puerto Princesa, has several pretty offshore islands in its Honda Bay, but its main claim to fame is the spectacular Underground River, the longest navigable sea cave in the world.

From Puerto Princesa, it's a bumpy, two-hour jeepney ride to St Paul National Park, then a shorter, less jarring banca journey along a jungle coast until we reach the mouth of the Underground River cave.

Hiring a guide and a canoe equipped with a battery-powered spotlight, we glide into the stygian darkness. This subterranean river ultimately weaves eight kilometres inland through limestone caverns, although we don't pursue it that far.

Courage Mateship Sacrifice Endurance

Kokoda Trail Wall Map

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The Kokoda Trail Souvenir Map has been compiled by Charlie Lynn with data collected during his 48 treks across Kokoda over the past 16 years. It includes data from wartime sketches in the Australian War Memorial, Australian Army Survey Maps, the PNG National Mapping Bureau and satellite images. Indigenous names of mountains and rivers have been provided by clan leaders from along the track. The Isurava Memorial is embedded in the Owen Stanley Ranges and the words etched in the granite pillars of the memorial: 'Courage, Mateship, Sacrifice, Endurance' are watermarked in the sky as a solemn reminder of the qualities of our diggers, and the PNG 'fuzzy-wuzzy angels', who saved Australia from invasion during the war in the Pacific in 1942. The map measures 850mm X 300mm.

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With his beam, Rogel the boatman points out giant flowstones, encrustations of yellow marble that cascade in frozen blooms from the crevices of the cave ceiling. Bats swirl by like nervous tics. Stalactites drip their minute, millennial extensions. Skittering swiftlets fill the air with clicking sounds until it seems we are in the Cave of a Thousand Geiger Counters.

And then, after 45 minutes, we paddle back into the daylight to be surrounded again by jungle, cathedral trees and skittering monkeys. Plus, a giant lizard waiting for snacks by the picnic tables - the usual anomalies of a day in prolific Palawan.

Air Niugini flies to Manila on Tuesday and Saturday.

Fact Box

HOW TO GET THERE

Palawan can be reached within an hour and five minutes' flight from Manila to the capital city of Puerto Princesa or a 20-hour trip by sea. A choice of regular Philippine Airlines (PAL) or direct chartered flight can be made depending on the desired destination.

PAL flights will take one directly to the heart of the province where connecting trips to nearby premier sites can be made. Charter flights via Soriano Air or Pacific will take one to the Island of desire, be this Cuyo, Curon, Busuanga, or El Nido.

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Balancing act...beach vendor with her fruits.

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MP83136



Vanda Miss Joaquim...this mauve and white beauty is Singapore's national flower.

It was the allure of orchids mainly that drew me to the gardens. Singapore is famous for them. It boasts some 900 species and over 2000 hybrids. They are grown both for the market and for the delight of every eye.

The main commercial centre is at Mandai Orchid Garden on the island's centre north. The orchids simply thrive here with spectacular sprays ballooning out of numerous rows of robust stands.

A highlight is the Vanda Miss Joaquim. It is a hybrid that Miss Agnes Joaquim discovered in her garden back in the late 19th century. This mauve and white beauty has since become the island's National Flower.

If Mandai's patent is profusion, then that of the National Orchid Garden is pure horticultural art. Established within the Botanic Gardens in 1995, it is three hectares of lush orchid-friendly forest. The piece de resistance is the "Tan Hoon Siang Mist House".

Here, a tropically moist atmosphere is maintained in utter stillness. It spawns some dazzling blooms. Among them is the phalaenopsis hybrid, whose deep pink linear markings would seem to be the work of a graphic artist's hand.

Chilly mountain top climes are likewise reproduced in the recently opened "Cool House".

Tropical montane orchids bloom here in profusion and the unacclimatised visitor gets blissfully refreshed with a light cool misty spray.

Endowed with three impressive ornamental lakes, the Botanic Garden proper covers 52 hectares.

SINGAPORE

A green delight of every eye

By Tim Cockrem



Orchids at the Mandai Orchid Garden.

They were established back in 1859, and have since been a favourite with Singapore's nature lovers, early morning joggers and exponents of tai chi.

They serve also as a proving ground for the many new plant species that are introduced to Singapore from other parts of Asia, as well as Europe and Australia.

A perennial drawcard for Singapore's regular visitors is the resort island of Sentosa. It has the theme park for kids, a fabulous aquarium and plenty of rainforest to explore. And there is the spectacular approach.

This begins at Mount Faber in Singapore's far south. From here, you catch a cable car. It

swoops dramatically downwards, traversing Keppel Harbour and tiny Brani Island. Mount Faber too has been copiously greened.

The cable car station is set within a verdant garden park. It is draped for some strange reason with strands of artificial autumn leaves. Oh well, we can forgive one aberration!

Singaporeans, a taxi driver told me, don't go much to the parks. They don't need to. For there are garden parks all around. This may explain why I had the magnificent Chinese Garden to myself.

A little on the kitsch side, some might say, but it's nonetheless a green thumb's delight. It is modelled on a Sung Dynasty imperial garden,

complete with a nine-tiered pagoda, open-sided tea pavilions, imperial-style buildings and waterside pagodas. And these are all fastidiously maintained.

The garden's central lake is spanned by two arched bridges. One of these leads you through palatial Chinese gates to the Suzhou Penjing Garden.

Here, some 2000 "penjing", or "bonsai", are artistically displayed in a series of walled courtyards which interconnect through traditional-style moon-gates and archways.

A soporific retreat most times in the year, the Chinese Garden is shaken rudely from its slumber in the year's eighth lunar month.

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Its job then is to host the popular Chinese Lantern Festival. Night time sees the huge novelty-shaped lanterns all perfectly reflected in the still waters of the lake.

The Okavanga Delta in Botswana! You might almost think that's where you have fetched up as you trek the paths and boardwalks of the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve in Singapore's northwest.

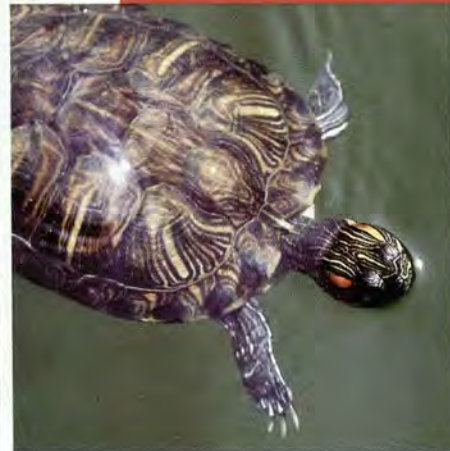
Such is the sensation of wilderness that you get and the profusion of birdlife that's on show - egrets, striated and purple heron, white-breasted water hens and pink-necked pigeons.

The reserve is also home to countless critters of the mangroves - monitor lizards, giant mudskippers, mangrove crabs and lobster crabs among them. And nor has Singapore's rustic human habitats entirely disappeared. They still exist on Pulau Ubin. This is an island that lies in the narrow strait dividing Singapore from the Malay Peninsular.

Most visitors come here to cycle or to hike. There is plenty to explore.

"Street Centre" is a Malay-style portside town, with its timeworn clapboard coffee shops, opera house and temples. And Kampung Melayu is the last authentic rural village in Singapore.

But the main attraction is the forest. It is not exactly primary, but it's big, and does harbour



145 species of birds, a troupe of long-tailed macaques, wild pigs and the red jungle fowl from which all domesticated chickens are said to have descended.

Singapore's city centrepiece is Fort Canning Hill. It's where the colony's founder, Sir Stamford Raffles, built his first bungalow.

The herb garden he established here still thrives. In fact, the entire hill is akin to a huge Botanical Garden, so elegantly swathed it is in shrubbery and trees.

And it has plenty of old military ruins to explore - relics from the British who had their headquarters here until the 1970s.



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Above: Sushou Penjing Garden...in the magnificent Chinese Garden. Left: Happy Chinese Garden workers.

Singapore, I concluded, can now rightfully claim to be "green". The process to make it so was initiated by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew back in 1967. And it was pursued with customary zeal. The 700 hectares then devoted to parklands have since been expanded to 4000. But that is not all. The ambition to create a true "Garden City" has been realised in full.

Every major highway on the island is now lined with glorious shade trees - yellow and red flame trees, rain trees and mahoganies. Median strips have come to resemble giant nurseries, so overwhelmed they are with potted flowering shrubs and cordylines.

Almost every man-made structure - foot-bridge, tunnel entrance and lamp post - has been swathed in flowering vines and bougainvilleas.

Recreational facilities abound. Cycling and jogging tracks have been installed all along the eastern foreshore.

Even busy city streets have been copiously greened. Orchard Road shoppers stroll in the generous shade afforded by the enormous Angsana trees. Palms and ornamentals grace pocket parks and squares throughout the CBD.

I had intended on my three-day stay in Singapore to cover every green space on the island. This, I soon realised, would take the best part of a week.

Awaiting me still are the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (with its 70 hectares of primary growth rainforest), Toa Payoh Park and Sembawang Park.

A mere 200 years ago, Singapore was just a jungle. What is now the "Lion City" was then the habitat of tigers. The big cats may have gone, but not the climes and soils that spawned their habitat. And it's great to see the island's forests fighting back and ironically expanding with the habitats of man.



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Matsumoto Castle, located in the heart of Matsumoto City, rises majestically against a backdrop of the lush green mountain that is the Japan Alps.

Built over 4000 years ago (around 1593) during the Sengoku (warring states) period, it is one of four castles listed as a National Treasure in Japan.

During this troubled period, Matsumoto Castle (then known as Fukashi Castle) was built in front of the manor of the Lord of the land, Lord Ogasawara, to protect him and his household from the enemy.

When the castle compound was breached or in a state of emergency, this is where the Lord and his protectors would make their final stand. It was not built for comfort but rather for protection when under siege and as such, it was intended to be impregnable.

The castle compound covered a total area of 390,000 square metres (around 96 acres).

It was surrounded by three moats and strong ramparts. The area within the first two moats contained the Lord's manor and his people, storehouses for food, munition, valuables and records.



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The area within the third moat contained the homes of the elite samurai - part of the Lord's personal guards and advisors.

This area was surrounded by an earthen wall around 3.5 kilometres in circumference and built to withstand canon fire. There were only two ways in or out of the castle compound - through two heavily fortified gates at the edge of the third moat.

Beyond these gates thrived the castle town of Matsumoto. The town was strategically planned and built to provide added protection for the castle and its occupants.

Even today you will notice there are very few intersections. Most of the roads meet in L or T shapes, so as to draw enemy fire away from the castle compound.

Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines lay to the east, while merchants and lower ranking samurai lived to the west. The merchants and samurai were further divided into middle and lower class neighbourhoods and were separated by a gate.

Today, the castle compound and its castletown make up part of Matsumoto City. Much of the garden areas are now public parkland - a favourite venue for ohanami (cherry blossom viewing) parties in spring.

Looking up at the castle from close proximity, you can understand why it is also commonly known as the Crow Castle - its elegant black and white structure is the only one of its kind in Japan and does indeed look somewhat like a crow in flight.

As is custom in Japan, when you enter the castle, you are expected to take off your shoes. In fact, they will hand you a bag (made of lime and of course 100% biodegradable) to store your shoes in while you walk around in the castle.

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The castle doors are massive, they look like huge wooden gates that loom over you as you enter. You will find that the inside of the castle was built to confuse infiltrators. The staircases between the levels are not connected to each other and are randomly located, making it very difficult for a first timer into the castle to find each one of them. They are also very steep (55-61-degree inclines) and narrow, making ascending and descending extremely difficult for one unaccustomed to it.

As you continue to walk through the castle, you will notice there are holes on the floor and walls. The



castle has 55 square holes on the walls (tempozama) used for firing muskets and small canons; 62 rectangular loopholes for shooting arrows (yazama) and even holes in the floor (ishiotoshi) overlooking the wall beneath the castle. These were used to drop rocks on the heads of infiltrators trying to scale these walls. In addition, from the outside, the castle misleadingly appears to have only five floors but there are actually six as one is hidden and cannot be seen from the outside.

Passing from the minor keep into the main tower (dojon) via a roofed passage, there are stairs going down about a metre. The passages on the first floor of the main tower are much wider than those in the rest of the castle.

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They are known as the samurai running passages and were meant to be wide enough to allow those in full armour to run through, as well as carry and reposition weapons.

The second floor is identical to the first but partitioned into eight sections where the samurai warriors would stay during emergencies.

Today, it holds a gun museum, a donation to the city by an avid collector. Also on this floor are huge latticed windows known as the warrior windows (mushamado) with hinges so as to be easily opened and shut.

The third floor is the hidden floor. It cannot be seen from the outside. In those days it would've been completely dark as there were

no windows on this floor. This floor had a dual purpose. One was for storing food and munitions, and the other was to allow the samurai to ambush infiltrators.

The next floor is completely different from the previous floors in the castle. It is bright and airy with a high ceiling, and appears to have a better finish. Evidence suggests this is where the Lord's chamber would have been.

It is an area partitioned by a bamboo screen. In the case of defeat, this is the most likely place the Lord would retreat to, to acknowledge his defeat by committing hara kiri (Japanese ritualistic suicide by disembowelment).

Fortunately, ever since the construction of the towers, such an incident has never occurred.

Moving on, the next level contains what appears to be a huge conference room with windows facing all four directions.

This was where the leaders of the castle garrison meet to coordinate defences and discuss strategies.

The sixth and final floor stands 22.1 metres/72.5 feet above the entrance and commands a breathtaking view in all four directions from its four huge windows. The view of the city and the mountains in the background are amazing.

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This is where the Lord would sit and look out, passing commands to his leaders on the floor below. From the window on the east side, you can see the blackened outline of the Lord's manor on the grass below. The residence burnt down in the 1700s was never rebuilt.

Up in the rafters of this final floor, is the shrine of the 26th Night Goddess. Legend has it that on 26th night of January 1618, one of the guards patrolling the castle at night happened upon a woman dressed in a beautiful kimono wandering about the castle. She handed him a bag and said that if they remembered her by bringing her a bag of rice on the 26th night of

each month, she would protect the castle from fire and from the enemy.

Having said this she turned and made her way to the top of the main tower, where she vanished. The next day the guard told the Lord what he had seen and the Lord immediately ordered a shrine to be built in her honour. To this day the City fathers still bring rice offerings to the shrine on the 26th night of each month.

Descending the steep stairway is more difficult than ascending. Castle staff members are on hand though to assist those who struggle. It's definitely not a feat for the fainthearted.

Back on the first level but on the opposite side of the castle, is the Moon Viewing Wing. In contrast with the rest of the castle, this is more an entertainment and relaxation area.

It was added during the peaceful period in Japan when the civil wars had ended, and was used by the Lord to entertain his guests. The doors in this wing open out onto a beautiful vermilion balcony and has a very sophisticated living room feel to it.

Moon viewing is a traditional past-time and today, in autumn, this wing is open for this purpose. It is said that you can see the moon three times - once in the sky, once reflected in the moat and once in your cup of sake.



 Air Niugini flies to Narita on Saturdays.

Fact Box

Matsumoto City lies in the heart of Japan's largest island of Honshu in the prefecture of Nagano. Surrounded by the Japan Alps, it attracts many visitors all year round. The city itself is a delightful mix of both traditional and modern Japan without the crowds and noise of the larger cities. It is known as the gateway city to many must see places in Japan - namely the ski resorts of Hakuba; the mountainous highland of Kamikochi; the world's largest wasabi farm; and Lake Suwa - the 24th largest lake in Japan and famous for having a natural hot spring under its surface so when the top of the lake freezes over in winter, the lower waters are still warm and circulating.

GETTING TO MATSUMOTO

Matsumoto is easily accessible by air, road and rail. Take the Narita Express (NEX) from Narita Airport to Shinjuku Station in the heart of Tokyo and you can either get the JR Limited Express Train (2 - 3 hours) or the JR Local Train (5 - 7 hours). Alpico or Keio bus companies run hourly from the Keio Highway Bus Terminal in Shinjuku (approx 3 hours). There are also domestic flights daily - you will need to check these with your preferred carrier or travel agent.

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The island is pure paradise, a place where you can live life in an ecologically respected and protected marine park. With its sandy white beaches and pristine waters lapping onto palm-lined shores, Naisoso Island paradise offers unprecedented levels of privacy and prestige, luxury and well-being - a place of magnificent natural beauty where you can really enjoy life and own your piece of paradise. Tropical, lush and abundant landscaping along the majestic Avenue of Palms merges with the natural beauty of Naisoso Island.

Fiji, with its warm tropical climate without



extremes, is wonderful all year round - just perfect to pursue all the pleasures that Naisoso Island has to offer. Tradewinds bring year long cooling breezes in the late afternoon and early evening.

Then there are indigenous Fijians, who are famous for their natural radiant happiness, welcome you with friendly smiles and genuine warmth. One of the outstanding features of Naisoso Island is their friendly people who add to the charm and ambiance of the scenery with "Bula!" and an accompanying smile.

The island is a short boat ride from Denarau Island and minutes away from Nadi Town and Nadi International Airport. Naisoso Island is easily accessed by a private bridge and by sea. State-of-the-art security - with the island's own trained security personnel - offers you round-the-clock peace of mind.

Nadi is a vibrant town of interest. From the magnificent Sri Siva Subrahmanya Swami Indian Temple, which is very much a part of the local scene, to unique shopping and the Nadi market, which is the hub of the town, with fresh produce and essential spices for Indian cooking.

Fiji is a watersport paradise and has beautiful coral reefs and marine life to explore, daily



cruises to neighbouring islands, a large variety of top restaurants, shopping villages and golf courses.

Architects DBI Design (of Palazzo Versace Hotel and Mirage Resort Hotels, Gold Coast, Australian fame) and Boffa Miskell, a leading New Zealand environmental and design consultancy, have created a world class island master plan. No expense has been spared and absolutely nothing has been overlooked to develop Naisoso Island into a sophisticated and luxurious 5-star resort set amongst an ecologically protected marine park.



Naisoso Island faces west over the beautiful Nadi Bay and boasts three kilometres of white sandy beaches with 44 prime, 2000 sq metres beachfront homesites set above the beach for maximum privacy. The magnificent Ocean Bay beachfront lots have an exquisite view overlooking the picturesque Mamamuca Island group.

Purchasers of these outstanding beachfront homesites are being offered the first choice of a limited number of extremely rare marina berths.

The Mamamuca islands are a group of 20 picturesque islands ranging from the grassy hills of Malolo Island which is the largest island to the smallest coral atolls floating on the aquamarine surface of the Pacific Ocean.

The islands are packed with colourful coral reefs and offer a wonderful tropical playground to indulge in.

The other side of Naisoso island is a boating paradise. The desirable Rivage riverfront homesites face a protected marine park and overlook Fiji's spectacular "Sleeping Giant" mountain ranges.

The large (1700 sq metres average) homesites offer private mooring facilities with marina channel access to the lagoon and the wonderland of white sandy islands and abundant fishing grounds of Fiji. With the beach just a leisurely stroll away via palm-lined

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walkways, these riverfront homesites on the leeward side of the island offer you the best of both worlds.


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The lots are part of a private sanctuary set amongst an exotic, lush tropical landscape of colour with access to the beach via private walkways.

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They also handle lettings and general common area maintenance. Completion of this residential estate will be in late 2009 or early 2010 with a 10% deposit and settlement on completion.



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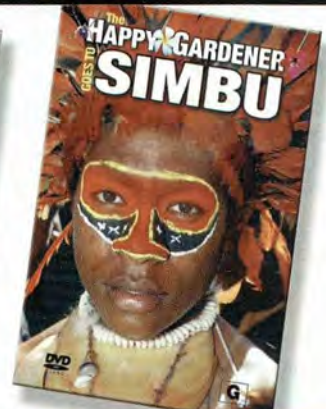
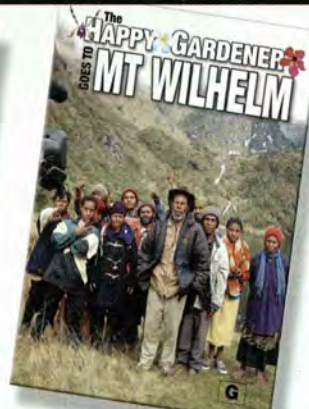
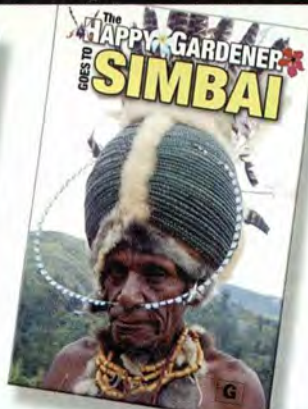
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The brilliance & beauty of PNG ORCHIDS

By Euralia Paine



Dendrobium lineale.



Jewel Orchid...obviously the jewel in the crown at the PNG Orchid Show.

P

apua New Guinea holds many world records - particularly in relation to its rich bio-diversity and unique fauna and flora.

The varieties of orchids especially, have their basis in a rich gene pool that has fascinated botanists, gardeners and hobbyists worldwide.

For the last five years the PNG Orchid Society has brought to the fore the remarkable brilliance and beauty of this gene pool in its annual show at the Sir Rabbie Namaliu Garden, located within the National Parliament grounds, in Port Moresby.

This year's two-day orchid spectacular last month (October) did not cease to amaze. The splash of colours on stems and in pots wowed visitors of all ages. A total of over 5,000 plants were on show and for sale.

Orchids from Thailand and Singapore were displayed amongst an array of local splendour and hybrids. The centre-piece was a bed of moss, laden with petite wild natives small enough to fit in a tea-spoon, originating from the PNG highlands.

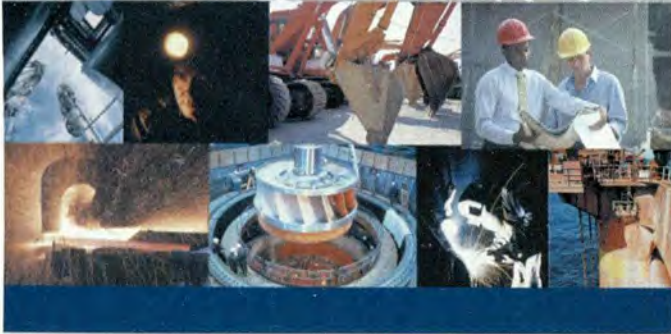
I have attended the Orchid Show every year and at every show, I am awe-struck by the vibrancy of colours and sizes of orchid petals that change like iridescent sparks in a fireworks display.

Of the 30,000 orchid species that exist in the world, 3,200 are found in PNG. The most popular is the epiphytic (grows on trees rather than on the ground) Dendrobium family which has had many artificial varieties bred from it.



Making a grand appearance at the entrance of the Orchid Show were these selection of stunning beauties - Mokara hybrid (orange).

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Dendrobium sutiknoi.

For the last three years one person has dominated the PNG Orchid Show and annual competition as Grand Champion. He is Godfrey Seeto, a Papua New Guinean by birth and a Port Moresby businessman. This year, however, the first prize winner was lawyer Steven Kami, also another adopted son of PNG although of Tongan origin.

Godfrey and Steven are as passionate about PNG as they are about PNG orchids. Both were boys when their paths crossed and have been friends ever since. Within the exclusive PNG orchids family they seemed to have carved themselves a niche where they can feel at home.

Godfrey remembers when he first caught sight of an orchid at the age of about 7 in Rabaul.

His father Sir Ling Seeto had brought home a hybrid flower from Asia and he had thought "Wow", but other than religiously watering the plants as an errand for his father, he really did not take much interest in the exotic specimen. It was only recently, infact about four years ago, that he put his "heart and soul" into orchids when he and his family moved into a house on Port Moresby's Touaguba Hill.

He now has an envious collection of 8,000 plants mostly of Dendrobium section spatulata species and hybrids (Dendrobium lasianthera, gouldii, lineale, alexandrae, anosmum, mibelianum, mussauense).

The foundation for this garden was laid when Godfrey and Steven began driving down the Central province coast to Tubusereia village to buy coconut husks at K5.00 a bag. Then came the trips every weekend to Sogeri mountains and the hinter Owen Stanley foothills in search of rare wild orchids. This turned into trips to far-off Kupiano, Galley Reach, Morobe Province, Lihir Island, New Ireland, Sepik, Bensbach, Daru, etc.

During one of these trips outside Port Moresby, they found the rare



Dendrobium lasianthera commonly known as the Sepik Blue Orchid.

Dendrobium carronii orchid that had not been seen in the country since documented by the famous botanist Andree Miller 50 years ago.

The adrenalin from such a find not only sent Steven and Godfrey into a competitive frenzy; Godfrey's work habits have also changed. Every morning he rises early and after work, he is home early to tend to his orchids. In response to my quizzical look he said; "Orchids are a bit like kids. They are fussy. They have different types of needs and attention. There are some that are of low maintenance and others that need special care."



Grand champion Steven Kamri and Reserve Champion Godfrey Seeto with Patron of the Orchid Society Sir Rabbie Namaliu (second from left) and organiser of the show Justin Tkatchenko (second from right).

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Dendrobium johnsoniae x den convolutum hybrid.

Godfrey received his awards at the PNG Orchid Show for the last three years for *Dendrobium lasianthera* (twice) and *dendrobium gouldii* species while Steven's first prize this year was for a *dendrobium lineale* hybrid which has a subtle mauve bloom and was a hybrid produced by Phil Spence at the National Capital District Botanical Gardens in Port Moresby in the 1990s.

Papua New Guinea has the highest concentration of orchids and has more recorded species than anywhere in

the world attracting botanists and other specialists who travel to PNG regularly to study them.

The predominantly untouched rainforest terrain, the different climatic conditions varying between the cool highlands and the humid lowlands plus a conducive habitat provide a catalyst for the abundance in orchid species.

Godfrey explained; "Orchid botanists have come here, seen our orchids in their natural environment and have gone back and imitated the PNG environment to grow their orchids, for example the Singapore Gardens".

"Ninety percent of the exotic dendrobium hybrids in Malaysia, Singapore and other countries have PNG genes, obtained from our native plants through cross-pollination and breeding," he said.

To protect the country's orchid diversity, the Government introduced a total ban on the export of wild orchids in 1990. It is still illegal to remove adult orchid plants from Papua New Guinea.

Many enthusiasts believe that Papua New Guinea could become the hub of the orchid cut-flower industry, supplying to markets in Asia, Australia, New Zealand and beyond, but such an industry would require support and financial commitment from the PNG Government.

"The PNG Orchid Society is a bunch of amateurs and hobbyists. We need experts to come into the country and show how farming of orchids can be done on large-scale, to produce seedlings; do tissue-culture and propagation so that we can sell orchid flowers to the world;" Godfrey said.

"Don't get me wrong. This (orchids) is our hobby. We help each other, we challenge each other and we love what we do - we have one passion."

After witnessing and being part of the spectacular PNG Orchid Show for several years, Godfrey is convinced that the orchid cut-flower industry could easily be a mums-and-dads business producing flowers from simple plants and bringing in income on a regular basis.

"This could be a sustainable business;" he said. "We have all the right genetic material. We have the largest gene pool. What we need are experts to assist us if the government provides the right incentives."

Godfrey has no doubt about the enormous economic potential of the PNG orchids.

"We have the world at our doorstep and we could compete in the cut-flower industry."

The annual Orchid Show has certainly brought to light a couple of issues - orchids are a national treasure and their rich gene pool should not be exploited without real benefits filtering to the PNG people.

Moreover, PNG orchids are a national asset and can be converted into an enterprising cut-flower venture for grassroots Papua New Guineans, many of whom are horticulturalists by nature.



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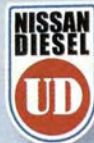


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Air Niugini adds Kuala Lumpur to Asian routes

Air Niugini expanded its Asian routes with the commencement of a direct service to Kuala Lumpur on October 29, 2008. The new service compliments its current services to Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore and Tokyo.

The Boeing 757 will operate from Port Moresby at 1500 on Wednesdays, arriving in Kuala Lumpur at 1910. The return flight leaves 2010 and arrives in Port Moresby at 0420 the following day, allowing smooth connections to domestic ports as well as to Brisbane and Cairns.

Air Niugini Chief Executive Officer, Mr Wasantha Kumarasiri said the Malaysian demand for air service in Papua New Guinea continues to grow at a faster rate over recent years and the new direct service will provide a good opportunity for business travel between the two countries as well as excellent connections for passengers to other Asian destinations and Europe from Port Moresby.

New direct service to Hong Kong

On Monday, October 27, Air Niugini also commenced direct services to Hong Kong, cutting out the previous stopover in Manila. The direct service leaves Port Moresby on Monday at 1630, arriving in Hong Kong at 2040. It leaves Hong Kong again on Tuesday at 2150, arriving in Port Moresby at 0600 the following day. This service connects with Brisbane and Cairns both ways and includes domestic services.

Australian services enhanced

With an expanding fleet to operate its international routes, Air Niugini now offers unrivalled number of services between Australia and PNG with its B767, B757,

E145 and E190. A total of nine weekly return services is offered between Port Moresby and Brisbane with a double daily northbound flights on Fridays and Sundays. The airline also offers double daily services between Cairns and Port Moresby using a mix of the Embraer 145 and the Fokker 100 jet aircraft giving 14 weekly return services. Additionally, the airline also operates the Sydney to Port Moresby route on Mondays and Saturdays with return non-stop services.

New fare structure between Australia and PNG

Air Niugini has overhauled its retail fare product between Australia and PNG. The airline's retail fares now offer both a one way and return component and the taxes and surcharges are now part of the fare and not an additional surcharge. Furthermore, the fares can be combined and offers clients more flexibility and options depending on their travel needs. One Way fare ex POM to Brisbane starts from K485, including all taxes and surcharges.

From Brisbane to Port Moresby One Way fare starts from as little as \$260 and return fares start from \$520 ex Brisbane to Port Moresby.

Reminder: Air Niugini is a proud member of the Qantas Frequent Flyer programme so you can earn points on most Air Niugini fares. Simply quote your Qantas frequent flyer number when making your Air Niugini reservation.

Extra service to Honiara

Air Niugini will soon commence an additional direct flight to Honiara (Solomon Islands) on Wednesdays which will connect passengers from Manila and Hong Kong to Honiara and those from Honiara to Kuala Lumpur.

Air Niugini to continue services to Japan

Air services to Narita will continue for the next 12 months with a subsidy package provided by the national government to the airline.

Following the airline's September announcement that it would suspend the Japanese service as a result of continued non profitability, the national government has stepped in with the subsidy package to ensure the service continues.

The government through the Minister for Public Enterprise, Hon. Arthur Somare, assured the national airline that cabinet was expected to ratify a K12million subsidy package from the K70 million budget appropriation to assist Air Niugini continue its Japanese service.

Japan is an important market source for PNG tourism with substantial benefits to the country's economy; the government's timely assistance is to ensure Air Niugini continues its operation and maintain the bilateral service.

Air Niugini's Chief Executive, Mr Wasantha Kumarasiri said the airline values the Japanese route as important to the growth of the tourism industry in PNG, adding, that despite the mounting losses experienced on the route since the inception of the service, Air Niugini continued to operate, all in the name of tourism.

The airline, however, could not continue absorbing the huge losses each year unless it was assisted with external support. The national government through the umbrella of the state-owned enterprises, the Independent Public Business Corporation (IPBC) in its role as the shareholder, will facilitate the subsidy package, which will cover mainly the airline's direct operating costs. The subsidy will ensure Air Niugini continues operation to Japan for the next 12 months before the next review is carried out on the sector's future service.

Air Niugini launches new-look website

The revamped airline website was launched in October with improved website design and functionality while capturing the "Air Niugini" branding through the use of colours in the overall design, look and feel. Web content is now readily available, using the three click rule enabling ease of use. Content information required by the intended traveller such as check-in times, baggage allowances, restrictions and regulations and security issues have been added including the use of pictorial information for the intended traveller. Incorporation of User-Interactivity has also been addressed by the addition of Specials and Deals with flash animations or buttons on the front page to attract customers to promotional fares and holiday packages.





The longest serving staff members



Captain Roy Materne.



Captain Aria Bouraga.

Only 10 PX staff who served since "Day One" are left with the airline. These include Captain Roy Materne, Captain Aria Bouraga with Flight Operations; Kae Maub, Lucien Wapion, Tapalo Wari, and Kewa Tai, who are with the Services Delivery department; and Mark Unduahn, Martin Togel, Michael Dambui and Sile Lubini in the Engineering and Maintenance department.

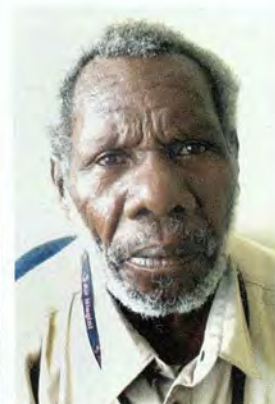
Captain Bouraga is the first Papua New Guinean to get a commercial pilot's licence.



Kae Maub.



Kewa Tawai.



Lucien Wapion.



Mark Unduahn.

Martin Togel.



Michael Dambui.



Sile Lubini.



Tapalo Wari.

Air Niugini e-commerce Website

Concurrent with the launching of its revamped website, the airline also introduced Phase 2 of e-commerce comprising price availability, booking modification and airline to agents' modules. Customers will now be able to have fare options to choose from, book and make changes to their travel itinerary, as well as do cancellations. The airline to agents' module provides a web interface for Air Niugini's travel agents and corporate customers to make bookings online for their customers.



Air Niugini ONLINE BOOKING

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Search > Fare Options > Price Review > Traveller's Details > Travel Confirmation > Booking Confirmation

Flight and fare options

Select your preferred flight and fare combination below and click 'Next' to continue. All prices are per adult and exclude taxes.

Select a flight for your outbound journey, Port Moresby - Brisbane

Flight	From/To	Time	Restricted Economy	Flexible Economy	Flexible Business
Air Niugini PX3	Port Moresby Brisbane International	Sun, 19 Oct 08:28 11:15	PGK 437.00	PGK 1,137.00	PGK 2,175.00
Air Niugini PX6	Port Moresby Brisbane International	Sun, 19 Oct 16:35 19:30	PGK 337.00	PGK 1,137.00	PGK 2,175.00

Select a flight for your inbound journey, Brisbane - Port Moresby

Flight	From/To	Time	Restricted Economy	Flexible Economy	Flexible Business
Air Niugini PX3	Brisbane International Port Moresby	Mon, 27 Oct 09:30 12:30	PGK 637.00	PGK 1,137.00	PGK 2,175.00

Total price including tax: PGK 1,360.20

(!) Indicates a flight operated by a partner airline

Back | New search | Next

Welcome to Papua New Guinea

General Information

Lying entirely within the tropics, barely south of the Equator and just north of the Australian continent is Papua New Guinea, the second largest island in the world. With a total land mass of 473,189sq.km it is the last of a string of Islands spilling down from South East Asia into the Pacific.

Apart from the mainland, Papua New Guinea comprises a remarkable collection of islands, atolls and coral reefs scattered around its coastline. The mainland is divided by the Owen Stanley Range—a rugged central spine with peaks over 4,000 metres high. Great rivers begin their journey to the sea from these mountains—among them, Fly and Sepik waterways. Below the mountain chain, fertile coastal plains, flooded delta regions and mangrove swamps exist alongside broad sandy beaches, sheltered bays and dense rain forests.

The coastal regions are tropical however in generally the climate is warm to hot and humid all year round. Temperatures on the coast vary between 25-30 degrees throughout the year. The Highlands regions enjoy a temperate climate, ranging from 20 degrees during day to as low as 10 degrees during the evenings. Rainy season varies from province to province, however generally the country is driest from May to December.

Fully independent since September 16, 1975, the country has a freely elected democratic government. PNG became the 142nd member of the United Nations on October 10, 1975 and is also a member of the British Commonwealth.

The population is just over 5 million with over a third in the Highlands region of the country. The people are Melanesian though in

appearance they are quite varied.

There are more than 800 distinct “live” languages with Melanesian pidgin and Hiri Motu being the two most widely used. English is the official language in education, business and government circles.

Papua New Guinea has a vibrant and multifaceted economy with two distinct systems operating side by side.

The vast majority of the people live a traditional, non-monetary barter economy that existed long before European colonization began. Co-existing with this is the modern economic system based on mining, petroleum, fishing, forestry and agriculture.

The main exports are gold, copper, oil, coffee, tea, copra, oil palm and forest products.

What to See and Do



Ideal Cruising Experience

The wonders of Papua New Guinea never cease to impress even the most intrepid traveller. Offering a multitude of ideal experiences, the visitors will find a country rich in culture, ethnic diversity and where little has changed over centuries. Cruising Papua New Guinea is relaxing since island life is slow-paced and informal. Rich in cultural and ethnic diversity PNG promises to reward cruise enthusiasts with unforgettable sights and sounds.

Diving

This is home to some of the world's most spectacular diving, dubbed as 'underwater photographer's paradise.' It is said to have twice as many species as the waters of the Red Sea, and up to five times as many as the Caribbean. The waters are a wonderland of elegant reefs, sunken wrecks, brilliantly coloured coral and marine life. The immense diversity of dive sites includes barrier reefs, coral walls (drop-offs), coral gardens, patch reef, fringing reefs, sea grass beds and coral atolls.

Trekking the rugged terrains

Trekking in Papua New Guinea is a challenge which portrays the real meaning of adventure in paradise. An extensive network of walking

tracks covers most mountain areas, and experience bush walkers are well catered for. The most popular is the Kokoda Track which continues to provide challenges and experiences beyond men's imagination. Others include Mt. Wilhelm, Bulolo, Wau and Madang. The Kokoda Trail, so significant to World War II continues to grow in popularity amongst serious trekkers.

Excellent Fishing

The country's reputation for excellent fishing localities and choices of catch is fully boosted by the wonderful climate.

Surfing the waves

Experience an unforgettable wave-riding adventure in the country's wave-breaking shores. From the breath-taking coastline of Vanimo that stretches down Madang, to the sandy beaches of New Ireland Province, where premiere breakpoints and scenic surfing sites are located.

Bird Watching

Bird watching does not only require dead silence, it provides the opportunity for watchers to take in nature's most eerie surroundings and eternal spring whether up in the Highlands or in a typical tropical weather in the coastal areas. Over 700 species of feathered fliers flutter across our island

including 38 of the 43 known species of the exotic Bird of Paradise. Not all the colours of the rainbow have been reserved for our feathered friends as there is an unlimited range of hues and shades to be seen in our 2000 orchids and countless magnificent butterflies including the world's largest, the Queen Alexandra Birdwing.

World War II Relics

Relics of World War II battles are found in most parts of Papua New Guinea's land, underwater, caves and tunnels.

Astounding Volcanoes

Located along the "Pacific Ring of Fire, Papua New Guinea offers distinct views of active volcanoes that captivates a land of tranquility. There exists a number of volcanoes in certain provinces, including the latest 'basaltic statovolcano on Manam Island, Madang Province. Other recent volcanic location include Rabaul's two volcanic cones—Vulcan and Tauruvur—and West New Britain's Mt Pago.

Visitors to our country are guests and hospitality is an honour in our Melanesian culture. Tipping is neither expected nor encouraged.

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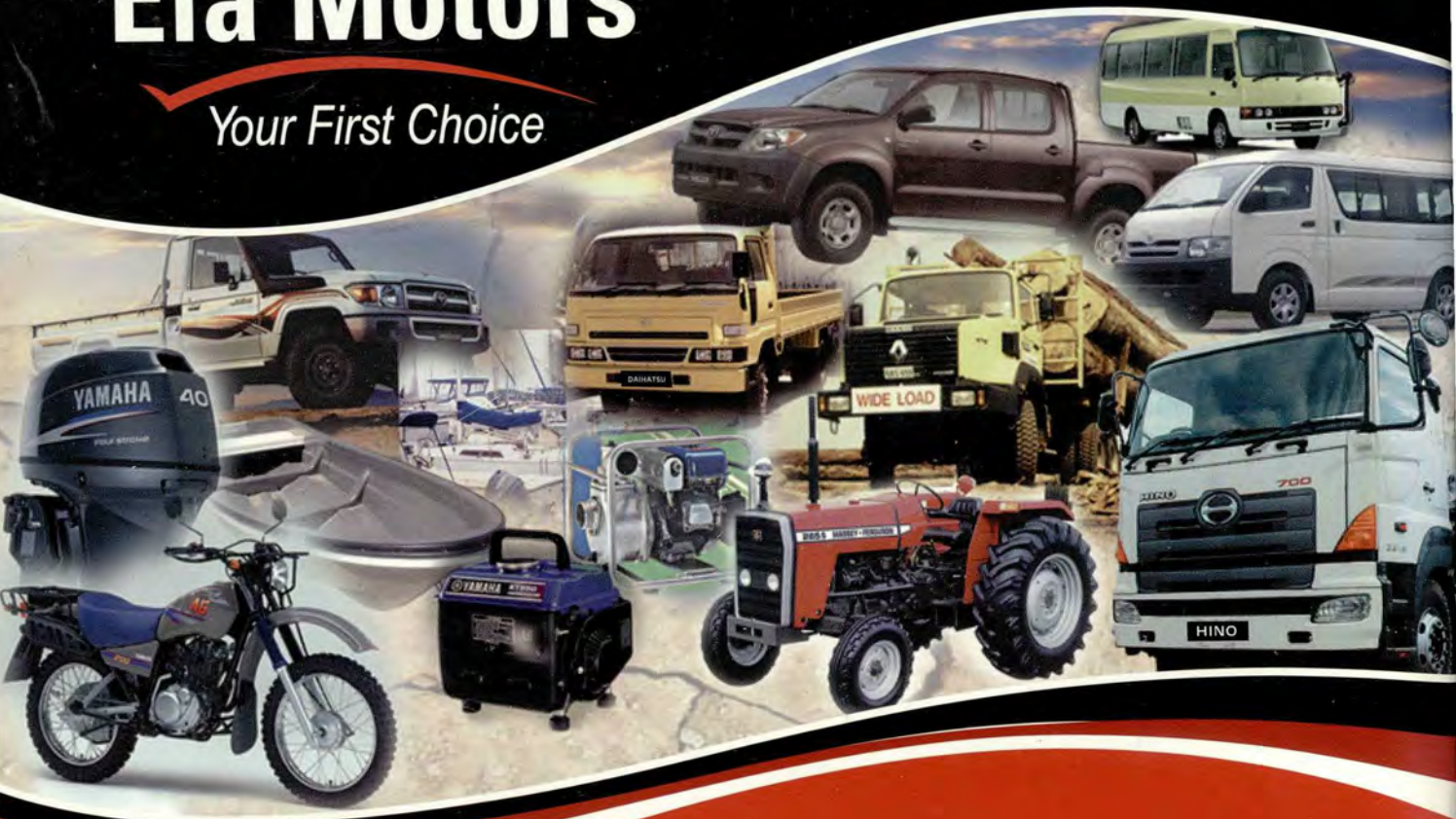


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