



# Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

## EM60 - SIMBAI REMOTE TREKKING PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS 4 nights Simbai district villages

*This package involves 4 days of challenging trekking through rugged terrain between remote villages of the [Kalam tribe](#) in the Simbai district, an isolated part of the Highlands with no roads in or out. There are only light aircraft links to Mt Hagen and Madang via a number of small rough airstrips. The itinerary features challenging but rewarding walking, with spectacular mountain scenery, a plethora of wild orchids and other exotic flora growing at the sides of the walking trails, and regular sightings of birds of paradise and native mammals (possums, cuscus, tree kangaroos). You'll also enjoy candid encounters with the mountain people in their little hamlets and along the walking trails as they go to and from their gardens and hunting areas. Your chances of meeting another tourist out here are nil. The hiking difficulty is rated as 3/5 and although there are plenty of ups and downs each day the net gradient is downhill. You will fly in to Dusin airstrip (-5.1891S, 144.4165E) high in the Bismarck Ranges at an elevation of 1700 meters and after 4 days walking you will fly out from Tsendiap airstrip in the Jimi Valley (-5.3599S, 144.4462E) which is only 400 meters above sea level. The trekking involves between 5 and 7 hours of walking daily, broken up with as many stops as you want. There is no rush, you can walk at your own pace, but don't attempt this itinerary unless you are a physically fit, experienced hiker. If you don't keep up with the itinerary you might miss your flight out. You will be accompanied on the trek by our local guide who lives at Simbai, and one porter per trekker to help carry your personal backpack, some food supplies and some camping gear including lanterns and sleeping bags. We can supply a sleeping bag for you on request or you can bring your own. There won't be any mattresses in the villages: you'll be sleeping local-style on woven mats with only the padding in your sleeping bag to provide a little comfort. The meals during the trip will be a mixture of local food and camp food. Let us know if there is anything that you don't eat. Drinking water is collected from mountain spring sources along the route - absolutely as clean as nature can get, but bring your own water purifying tablets if you have any concerns. (Sorry but it's impractical to carry supplies of bottled water for such a long walk). We'll provide you with a suggested packing list for other items to bring.*



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**PACKAGE COST: (per person, includes MAF service flights in and out)**

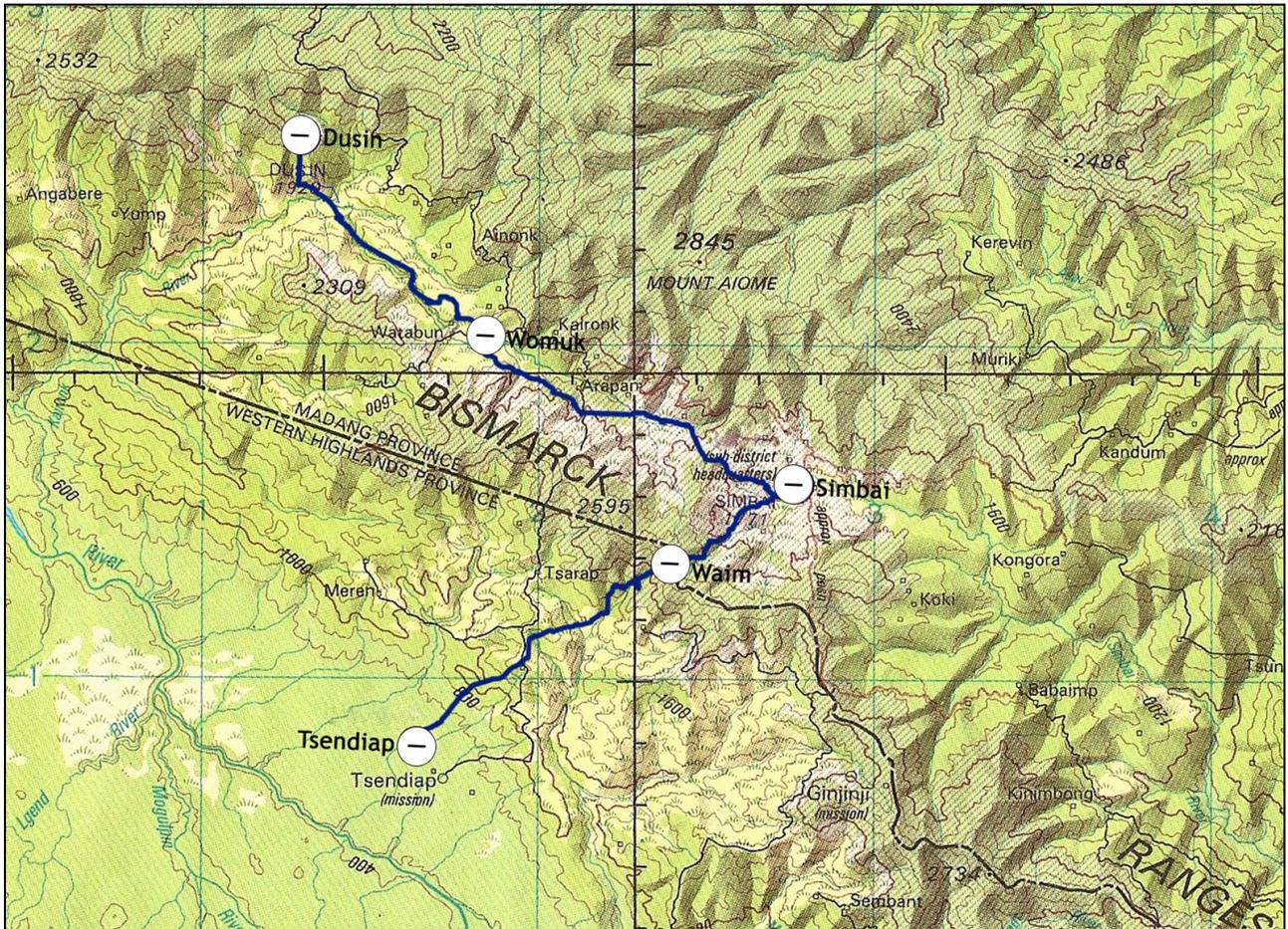
	Group of 1	Group of 2	Group of 4	Group of 6+
Standard 4-days 4 nights trekking package* (Dusin to Tsendiap)	USD 2550	USD 2150	USD 1950	USD 1850
Short 2-days 2-nights trekking package** (Dusin to Simbai)	USD 1850	USD 1300	USD 1250	USD 1200
Extra day/night of trekking***	USD 300	USD 200	USD 150	USD 100
Surcharge for charter flight drop-off OR pick-up	Ex-Hagen USD 1000 Ex-Madang USD 1800	Ex-Hagen USD 500 Ex-Madang USD 900	Ex-Hagen USD 250 Ex-Madang USD 450	Ex-Hagen USD 300 Ex-Madang USD 500
Hotel accom Madang or Mt Hagen (per nt room only)	USD 200	USD 100	USD 100	USD 100
Budget accom Madang or Mt Hagen (per nt rm only)	USD 100	USD 50	USD 50	USD 50

\* Includes 3 nights villages, 1 night Kalam Guest House Simbai, 1 x Kalam tribe sing-sing performance at Simbai

\*\* Includes 1 night Womuk village, 1 night Kalam Guest House Simbai, 1 x Kalam tribe sing-sing performance at Simbai

\*\*\* diverts the standard itinerary via additional villages such as Koki (Sambi) to lengthen the route to Tsendiap

Prices subject to change but otherwise valid till end 2018.



## PACKAGE INCLUSIONS

- Light aircraft travel in and out via MAF service flights from Madang or Mt Hagen
- English-speaking local walking guide with sufficient porters to carry gear
- 1 night at Kalam Guest House, Simbai (1 star) including prepared meals
- Other nights camping in village huts with basic sleeping and catering gear supplied
- Local-style food provided by villagers (mainly fruit and vegetables) plus some camp food (rice, tinned stew, crackers), including basic food for your porters
- Village entry fees and gratuities for village hosts
- Local goodwill. Ecotourism Melanesia has made a significant investment in building a good relationship with villages of the Simbai district over the past 15 years, such that you will be warmly welcomed everywhere you go. No other tour companies are currently operating treks in the Simbai area.
- Other services included in this tour package include
  - various additional gear that may be required for your safety and comfort in remote areas such as mobile satellite phone, hand-held GPS, tropical first aid kit, mosquito net
  - daily monitoring of your trip by our office using mobile communication with your guide
  - 24 hour assistance from our office (phone 7204 6950 or 7686 8917) if required
  - contingency management in case changes of plan are required during your trip
  - evacuation management in case of accident, medical crisis or other emergency situation (helicopters are available in Mt Hagen and Madang for emergency extraction but this will be at your own cost so make sure you have appropriate travel insurance or credit card funds to cover this eventuality and leave either your insurance policy details or your credit card number with us before you start the trek).

## EXCLUSIONS:

- Internal flights to Mt Hagen or Madang
- Accommodation in Mt Hagen or Madang (see quotes above for extra cost)
- tips (PNG is not a tipping country and gratuities for villagers are included in your trip package BUT you are welcome to reward anybody who provides you with exceptional service)
- Personal items. Bring your own favourite munchies, favourite bath soap, favourite toilet paper, small quick-dry towel, personal medications and first aid kit, personal hygiene requirements, brimmed hat or cap, “amphibious footwear” (sandals or quick-dry canvas shoes for crossing streams), walking shoes or boots, insect repellent, sunscreen, personal flashlight. See also trip notes at the end of this itinerary.



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## ITINERARY FOR STANDARD 4-NIGHT PACKAGE

### DAY 1:



### **FLIGHT FROM MT HAGEN OR MADANG TO DUSIN + WALK FROM DUSIN TO WOMUK (5-6 hours)**

0700 Check in at the MAF terminal at Mt Hagen or Madang airport for your light aircraft flight to Dusin (your ticket will be available for collection at the check-in counter).

On arrival at Dusin airstrip you will be met by our local guide and a few extra guys to help carry bags. Dusin is the end of the line for the Simbai District, the last village at the western end of the Kaironk River valley, high on a ridge overlooking the river with jaw-dropping mountain scenery.

From Dusin the Kaironk River turns south and passes through a steep, narrow gorge into the Jimi Valley and empties into the Jimi River which empties in to the Yuat River which empties into the mighty Sepik.

After kitting up and discussing walking protocols with your guide you'll strike out southeast from Dusin following the high ridge line parallel to the river. You'll pass through several hamlets and the village of Ainonk before a steep downhill descent into the valley brings you to WOMUK, the site of a rich Lapita deposit that has been the subject of many archaeological digs over the past 30 years proving the continuous occupation of this valley for thousands of years. This is truly a "stone age" culture.

Spend the last few hours of daylight meeting the village people and finding out about their culture before retreating in to your hut for the night. The sun sets early in this high-sided valley and also rises late in the morning. Tonight you will sleep rough with the village people at Womuk. At night it will be pitch black and you will gain an appreciation of how your own ancestors lived as "primitive man".

Overnight village hut, Womuk village

### DAY 2:



### **WALK FROM WOMUK TO SIMBAI (6 HOURS)**

This second day of hiking through the Kaironk River Valley pass through a variety of habitats including grassland, woodland and marsh. It is rather more challenging than yesterday with multiple hills and spurs to scramble up and down, many pig fences to straddle and many small streams to splash through. Crossing the Kaironk River is also necessary at several points. Bring sandals or old sneakers for the water crossings. Your guide has instructions not to take you across water with strong currents or water deeper than your waist. You may well joke about being a mountain goat during this walk, but you will find that some of the villages do indeed keep herds of goats.

Departing early, arrive at Simbai in time for a nicely prepared late lunch.

In the afternoon a combined group of men and women will perform a traditional welcome dance (sing-sing) for you at the guest house, followed by a Kalam tribal head-dress procession with initiated men wearing their trademark head-dress crowns decorated with green beetle shells and women wearing animal furs and orchid stem necklaces. As they dance and sing they beat small "kundu" hand drums fashioned from small hollowed logs with a lizard or mammal skin stretched over one end creating a tympanic membrane. After the sing-sing you will be able to meet the performers and examine their costumes and body decorations, describe how they are made and applied, and talk about their cultural significance.

Overnight Kalam Guest House, Simbai

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**DAY 3:**



**WALK FROM SIMBAI TO WAIM (5 HOURS)**

After breakfast, commence walking with your guide and porters in a south-westerly direction towards tiny Waim village, passing through open grasslands and forested areas with waterfalls - a beautiful experience of nature with many photo opportunities. The terrain today is undulating but not difficult. On arrival at Waim you will watch (and join) the village people preparing food to be cooked in an earth oven.

The whole village is involved in preparing a small traditional feast in honour of your visit and you will enjoy interaction with children, old people and everyone in between. When the food is ready you will sit on the ground with the locals and share the meal with them.

Everything is rather primitive at Waim but that, of course, is what you have come to see.

Overnight village hut, Waim village.

**DAY 4:**



**WAIM TO TSENSIAP (6-7 HOURS)**

After a breakfast of pancakes, sweet rice or fried potato slices, commence the long descent to Tsendiap which lies at the foot of the Bismarck Range, on the floor of the Jimi Valley. The descent is initially steep but then shallows out as you emerge from the montane forest into the grasslands of the valley, having lost one kilometre in altitude since breakfast and feeling rather glad that you are not walking in the other direction.

On the outskirts of the Tsendiap mission is a village community where you'll spend the night tonight before proceeding to the airstrip in the morning.

This village is on the border between the Kalam tribal lands and the Jimi tribe of the Western Highlands so the culture and language here is slightly blended.

Overnight village hut, Tsendiap.

**DAY 5: FLIGHT FROM TSENDIAP TO MT HAGEN OR MADANG**

After breakfast, walk 30 minutes to the airstrip and wait for your flight out. After farewelling you, your guide and porters will walk back to their home base at Simbai unless your aircraft has plenty of seats in which case we will try to uplift the guys back to Simbai on the same flight.

On arrival in Mt Hagen or Madang, check in for your connecting flight to Port Moresby or other arrangements.



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## TRIP NOTES

### **ABOUT SIMBAI AND THE KALAM TRIBE**

*Simbai is an isolated district in the highlands. It is located approximately halfway between Mt Hagen and Madang. Administratively the area falls within the Madang Province but culturally the people of the Simbai area are more similar to the highlands tribes than the coastal peoples of Madang. The area surrounding Simbai airstrip - the Simbai River valley to the east and the Kaironk River valley to the west - is populated by the Kalam tribe. Archaeological digs in this area indicate that the Kalam people have occupied the Simbai area continuously for more than a thousand years. The traditional culture here is also unique among Papua New Guinea's eight hundred tribes. Native houses have a trademark irregular hexagon shape, men's initiation ceremonies feature nose-piercing and pig-killing, and on special occasions the initiated men wear huge cane-framed head dresses - the largest in Papua New Guinea - decorated with animal skins and the exoskeletons of thousands of luminescent green beetles collected from the forest. Just an hour's walk from the airstrip brings you to primitive villages where time has stood still and the local people still live in grass huts, still wear traditional dress and still hunt game and harvest fruit and vegetables from the forest for their diet. The Kalam tribe are a hardy people who survive off the land with little assistance from outside. Despite missionary planes flying into their airstrips, the lack of road access to their district means that the Kalam villages have very few outside visitors and have not been subjected to as much western influence as other parts of Papua New Guinea over the past century of colonisation, and the unique culture of the Kalam people has survived intact. The dialect spoken by the tribe is one of PNG's most unusual languages, characterised by glottal stops that make clicking sounds. The Kalam people live largely- traditional subsistence lifestyles in hexagonal-shaped huts grouped into small family hamlets. They hunt, gather and plant garden plots sufficient for their needs. Their colourful appearance rivals the Huli wigmen of Tari. Their traditional dress includes grass loin cloths, necklaces made from yellow orchid stalks, large nose ornaments made of bone, shell or cassowary quills threaded through their pierced nose septums, lizard-skin drums to dance with and - the coup de grace - huge cane-framed head-dresses covered with animal furs and inlaid with the shells of thousands of iridescent green beetles. A focal point of the Kalam tribal culture is the annual initiation of boys into manhood which occurs during the Kalam Culture Festival each September. Prior to the initiation each boy crafts his own head-dress crown and wears it for the first time at his initiation. Each boy-man then continues to wear the same crown on ceremonial occasions throughout his adult life. During the initiation festival each boy will have his nose pierced and will kill a pig in public to show that he is now a man.*

### **ABOUT KALAM GUEST HOUSE**

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

### **ABOUT SIMBAI FLIGHTS**

*Simbai flights do not operate on a guaranteed schedule. Flights operate subject to weather patterns. The small aircraft which fly between Mt Hagen, Madang and Simbai operate under visual flight rules (VFR) and cannot take off from Mt Hagen or Madang unless the weather at Simbai is known to be clear. On some days Simbai is clear first thing in the morning and aircraft can fly in early. Other days there is morning fog and flights cannot land until the fog lifts. On most days cloud cover closes the airstrip again mid-afternoon but sometimes earlier, leaving a daily clear weather window normally between 08:00 and 14:00. Since the departure time of your flights in and out of Simbai cannot be guaranteed in advance, all*

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you can do is get to the airport or airstrip early and be prepared to fly either first-up or later in the morning once there is clear visibility at Simbai. There is a 10% risk that the flight will not operate at all if the weather at Simbai is particularly bad or if the aircraft has a technical problem. This means there is a risk that you may be one day late getting to Simbai, or one day late coming back. There is also a risk that you may have to cancel your side trip to Simbai altogether if there is no scheduled service the following day after a cancelled flight. You need to be aware of this risk when deciding whether to take this tour, and when planning your follow-on travel. If you are indeed stranded at Mt Hagen, Madang or Simbai for an extra night due to flight cancellation, Ecotourism Melanesia will pay for your extra night accommodation and meals and try to arrange some alternative activities for you. If the side trip has to be cancelled altogether due to unsuitable flying weather, the package is fully refundable. Weather restrictions affecting flights is one of the reasons why other tour companies do not offer Simbai as a touring destination, despite its obvious appeal. If you decide to go, this will work in your favour as the small visitor numbers have hardly had any impact on the Simbai culture so far, leaving it well preserved for you to enjoy, and you will not have to share your experience here with other tourists. Almost all visitors to Simbai say it was the absolute highlight of their trip to Papua New Guinea and is not to be missed. Ecotourism Melanesia considers the 10% risk of flight disruption acceptable and manageable.

#### **ABOUT MAF**

Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) is a missionary airline that operates into the remote areas of PNG with the primary purpose of moving people and supplies in and out of church mission stations. Missions of all denominations are supported. MAF operates a fleet of small aircraft including the 7-seat GA8, the 10-seat Cessna Grand Caravan and the 18-seat De Havilland Twin Otter. MAF has bases in Wewak, Mt Hagen, Goroka, Kiunga, Telefomin, Port Moresby and Lae with an average of two aircraft at each base. Most pilots are expatriate missionaries from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Canada and the USA. MAF operates two types of flights: "service" flights and charter flights. Service flights operate to mission airstrips in designated areas on certain days of the week but these service flights only operate if there are enough local passengers and freight booked. These service flights to the mission airstrips are MAF's priority but they also accept private charter bookings. Ecotourism Melanesia uses MAF flights on a regular basis and we find their services to be professional and their safety standards to be world class. In general both the service flights and charter flights depart on time, subject to weather conditions.

