



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM62 - SIMBAI REMOTE VILLAGE FLY-IN PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS

- Fly in to a remote village and stay from 1 night up to 7 nights with isolated tribe
OR
- Same day fly-in fly-out also available (charter flight only, up to 4 hours on the ground weather permitting) - great opportunity for photography groups
- Flights ex-Madang or ex-Mt Hagen OR fly in one way and out the other

INTRODUCTION

In response to growing interest from ethno-tourists to visit and observe isolated communities still living largely traditional lifestyles with minimal corruption by western civilisation, Ecotourism Melanesia's senior guide based at Simbai (in the Bismarck mountains between Mt Hagen and Madang) has negotiated with a number of isolated Kalam tribe villages without road access to accept fly-in visits by intrepid ethno-tourists and photographers on "fishbowling" visits to observe and capture their tribal lifestyle. This enables visitors to see and experience life in an extremely remote PNG village that would otherwise require several days very tough trekking to get there.

Light aircraft flights to their rough airstrips is the only connection to the outside world for these remote villages located in steep sided valleys and high on razorback ridges that will probably never have vehicular road access, not even four wheel drive. Before their short, rugged airstrips were built, these communities' only means of contact with civilisation was to walk several days over mountainous terrain to the nearest mission station such as Simbai or Tsendiap. Even the mission stations, however, are still not connected by road to anywhere but they do have bigger airfields with more regular flights thus enabling them to establish schools, clinics and even small trade stores.

Missionary airline MAF now flies into the isolated Simbai district village airstrips "on request" but due to low passenger and freight demand the MAF aircraft may only end up stopping at each particular village once a month or so. Despite infrequent use, rain damage and rapid growth of vegetation, the villagers do work hard to keep their "lifeline" airstrips in usable condition but in reality less than half the smaller strips in the Simbai district may be certified "open" for flights on any given day.

Giving the villagers some advance notice of a tourist visit would be nice but even though the Digicel mobile phone network now covers the Bismarck Ranges, the remote villages don't have electricity for charging devices, and some villages down in steep sided valleys are out of network reach anyway.

Further, our guide based at Simbai does not fancy a six day round trip hike to a remote village to pass the news each time there is a booking for a visitor fly-in. So, "unannounced arrival" is the most practical way to operate these trips. Of course, many ethno-tourists would prefer it that way anyway, to surprise the villagers living their normal everyday lives in situ without any warning of the arrival of an outsider, and no time to "dress up".

Other ethno-tourists and cultural photographers however do prefer the staged "time warp" experience whereby the fore-warned people 'clean up' the village to look more retro, dress up in their traditional costumes with not a ragged pair of shorts in sight, and spend a few days persevering with traditional stone axes, digging sticks and other home-made tools (instead of their normal bushknives and shovels) to enable the visitors to see and take photographs of what life was like in these villages before PNG was "discovered" by the outside world and invaded by Coca Cola and the T-shirt.

Let us know what type of experience you prefer and what type of photos and video footage you want to take home with you (because it's all about the photography, isn't ?) and we'll try to accommodate.

HOW IT WORKS

MAF operates regular “service flights” into the Simbai district airstrips using light aircraft based at both Mt Hagen and Madang. You can launch your remote village fly-in from either of these airports, and fly out at the end to either the same airport or the other.

MAF’s current days for service flights to airstrips in the Simbai district are Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays though this is subject to change - please check with us before committing yourself to any dates or costs or connecting travel arrangements.

The service flights do not depart and arrive at fixed times on the scheduled days due to weather and loading considerations, but usually operate sometime between 8am and 12 noon on the day.

On service flight days MAF will fly you and our guide in to one of the remote strips for a seat fare only, which is included in our core package price and pre-paid by us before your flight.

Paying seat fares on service flights and not having to charter a whole aircraft keeps the trip price reasonable despite the considerable work (and risk) involved for us to organise such an unusual and adventurous tourism experience. However if the schedule of service flights is inconvenient to your travel schedule and does not work for you, or if MAF’s scheduled flights will not operate on your chosen date for some reason, you also have the option to charter a flight to insert you, extract you, or both. Charter prices are quoted below as an optional extra cost - this may of course be uneconomical for a solo traveller but quite affordable for a small group.

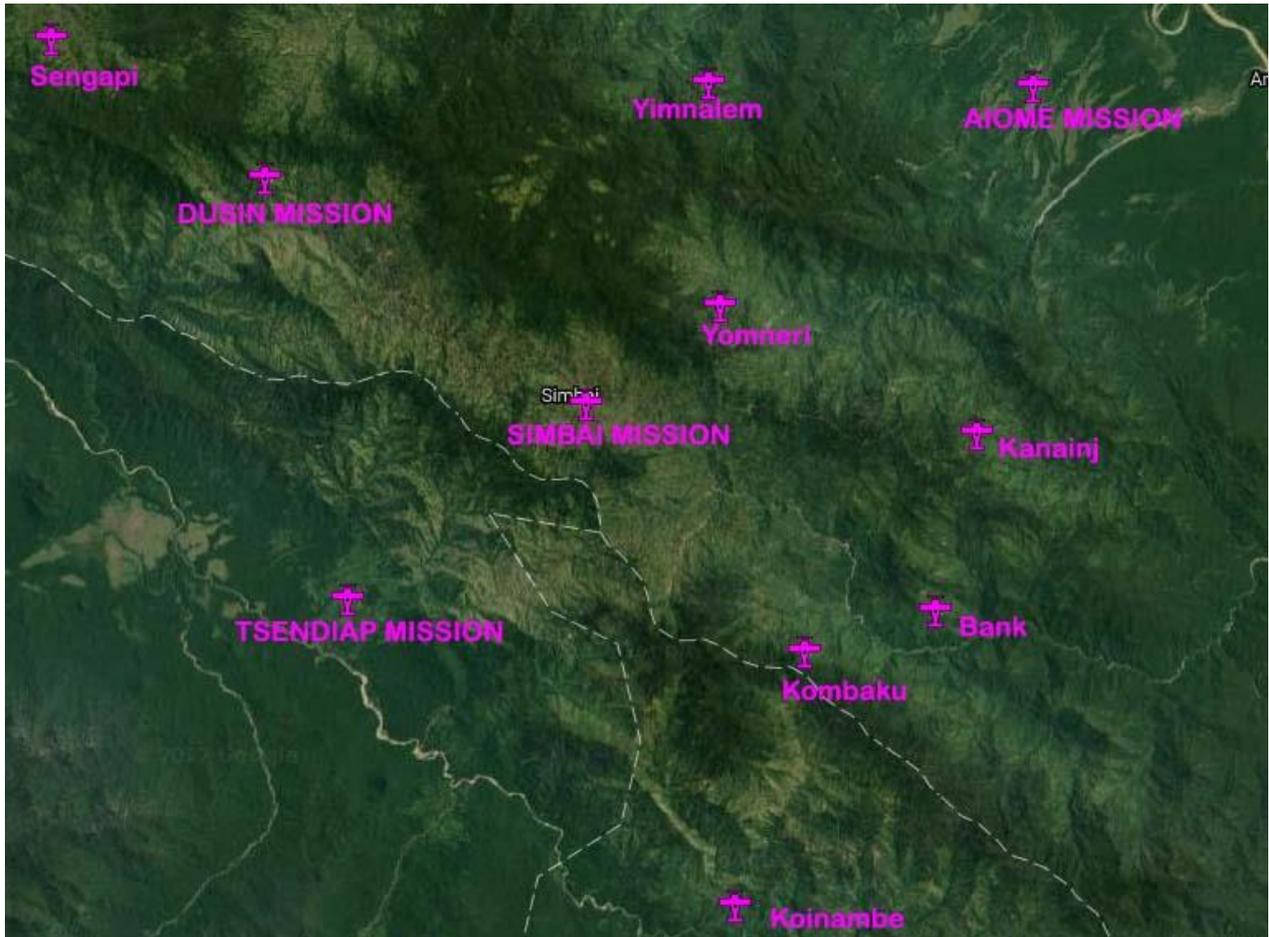
Our Simbai guide will fly out to Mt Hagen or Madang to meet you and fly with you direct into the remote airstrip, but deciding the actual village you will fly into cannot be finalised until ON THE DAY depending on which airstrips are open, what the weather is like, and whether MAF has any other loading restrictions or commitments. There may also be other considerations such as news of a recent death in one of the villages which might make it the wrong time to visit that location.



The pool of villages we have available for unannounced fly-in visits include:

Koinambe	Bank	Yomneri
Kombaku	Sengapi	Yimnalem
Kanainj	Megamanau (off map)	Mamusi (off map)

Villages that we can notify in advance to prepare for a “time warp” experience include Kanainj, Yomneri, Kombaku and Bank.



WHAT TO EXPECT

Regardless of whether the village knows you are coming or not, there will be a crowd of people at the airstrip when you land. As soon as the sound of the approaching aircraft is heard, everybody will drop what they are doing and run to the airstrip. The arrival of an MAF flight is always the most exciting thing that ever happens in the mundane lives of these isolated tribes.

If they are expecting you, the whole village will turn out in traditional dress and there will be a welcome dance and welcome ceremony with the village chief at the airstrip. You will then be taken to a visitor hut which will be your base for the duration of your day trip or overnight stay. There will then be an organised program of village touring, visiting people's homes and gardens, seeing demonstrations of their daily activities and posing for photographs. A welcome "*mumu*" feast will be prepared, cooked and served from start to finish for your cameras if time allows, otherwise only the preparation or serving stage will be shown if time is limited (it takes about 6 hours to prepare, cooked and serve food cooked in a *mumu* pit under hot stones). If you are staying overnight or longer, some of these activities will be left for tomorrow or following days, plus there will be other activities like forays into the forest to demonstrate traditional hunting and gathering practices.

If they are not expecting you, the crowd at the airstrip will probably be a mixture of some people wearing ragged second-hand western clothes, some wearing traditional dress like loincloths and "ass-grass", and some wearing a bit of both. If the weather is warm many people may be topless: the older women in particular tend to go bare-breasted on "don't care" days especially if they have been out working in the gardens and hurried to the airstrip to meet the plane before cleaning up first. Whatever the case, as soon as they have the opportunity they will dash to their homes and change into their traditional dress because they are very proud of their culture and will be embarrassed to be seen by foreigners wearing threadbare holey tee shirts and tattered shorts with broken zips.

If you are flying in and out on the same day by charter flight, the aircraft and pilot will wait on the ground for up to 4 hours while you have your village experience and/or do your photography. If you want to catch the villagers unawares and capture their actual daily lifestyle we will make sure the villagers are not informed in advance so that you'll have a candid experience of their village life.

If you prefer a "time warp" experience so you can experience and photograph the village people as they lived 100 years ago before "first contact" we will select a village that we are able to contact in advance to advise them to be prepared. In this case, as far as possible the whole village will turn out in traditional dress for the day and will also put away or hide any signs of westernisation like modern garden tools and any blue canvases covering holes in their roofs so there won't be anything to spoil the "primitive stone age tribe" appearance in your photographs.

If you are staying overnight our guide will bring some sleeping gear, camp food supplies and bottled water for your comfort. We will also give you a packing list of things to bring yourself.



PACKAGE COSTS: (all figures per person)

	GROUP OF 1	GROUP OF 2	GROUP OF 4	GROUP OF 6+
OVERNIGHT PACKAGE service flights only ex-Mt Hagen or Madang IN Thu OUT Fri	USD 1800	USD 1300	USD 1050	USD 900
EXTRA NIGHTS* service flights only IN Mon, Thu or Fri OUT Mon, Thu or Fri	USD 400	USD 300	USD 250	USD 200
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
DAY TRIP ONLY Charter flight in and out Aircraft waits for you at the village up to 4 hours	Ex-Hagen USD 3300 Ex-Madang USD 4100 GA8 aircraft 6 seats	Ex-Hagen USD 2050 Ex-Madang USD 2450 GA8 aircraft 6 seats	Ex-Hagen USD 1450 Ex-Madang USD 1650 GA8 aircraft 6 seats	Ex-Hagen USD 1350 Ex-Madang USD 1500 C208 aircraft 9 seats DHC6 aircraft 16 seats

*Extra nights includes village accommodation, camp food, local guide, village activities and gratuities.
For odd group numbers please request a special quote.
Prices subject to change but otherwise valid till end 2018.

PACKAGE INCLUSIONS

- Return air uplift Madang-Simbai-Madang, Mt Hagen-Simbai-Mt Hagen or Mt Hagen-Simbai-Madang by service flight or charter as indicated
- Professional local guide
- Village entry fees and photography permissions
- Village gratuities for cultural demonstrations and activities, organisers and helpers
- Tribal sing-sing performance
- Village hut accommodation with local-style food, camp food and bottled or boiled water.
- Ecotourism Melanesia tour monitoring and contingency support



TRIP NOTES:

ABOUT SIMBAI

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 dialect spoken by the people here is one of PNG's most unusual languages, characterised by glottal stops. 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.

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 09:00 and 14:00. Since the departure time of your flights in and out of Simbai cannot be guaranteed in advance, all 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 trip to Simbai altogether (or pay more for a private charter flight) if there is no scheduled service the following day after a cancelled service flight. You need to be aware of this risk when deciding whether to take this tour, and when planning your follow-on travel. If the 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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. The weather at Simbai will be warm by day (20-25 Celcius) and cool at night (5-10 Celcius). Please bring a sweater and warm underwear, and a rain poncho. The rainy season is December to March but the "dry" season also has regular rainfall, so you are probably going to get wet at some point during this trip one way or another.
2. Baggage on the light aircraft flight to Simbai is very limited due to the small aircraft size. Limit your baggage to 10kg only. Leave extra baggage in Madang or Mt Hagen - your hotel will store it for you.
3. Simbai is a remote area where there is no hospital and the availability of medical care is very limited. Medical evacuations may be difficult to arrange.