

GENERAL TOUR INFORMATION

for travel in Papua New Guinea with Ecotourism Melanesia Ltd

Please also read our Booking Information at www.em.com.png

Tour variation. The weather in Papua New Guinea is changeable and there is a predominant likelihood that prevailing weather conditions or other hurdles erected by Mother Nature (eg impassable roads, flooded rivers, extreme tides) may require the tour operator to modify some parts of this tour itinerary at short notice. Where possible, tour modification will involve reordering the original destinations but in some circumstances the tour operator may have to substitute other destinations to enable the tour to proceed. Such variations to the advertised itinerary will be at the discretion of Ecotourism Melanesia and/or local tour guides in accordance with safety considerations and operational limitations.

Climate and clothing. Coastal and lowland areas of Papua New Guinea, including the Sepik River, are perpetually warm-to-hot with high humidity. Nights are cooler but still humid. In the Highlands areas the days are generally warm and sunny with moderately cold nights and mornings. We suggest visitors pack clothes made predominantly of cotton which will allow an evaporative cooling effect in hot humid areas. A battery operated personal fan is useful when travelling in rural areas without electricity. Pack a light sweater or casual jacket for wearing in the Highlands. Recommended sleeping attire is light track pants and sweat shirt or similar. Papua New Guinea is a conservative country and brief or revealing clothing worn by foreigners is frowned upon.

Packing suggestions. We suggest that your packing list include: a small flashlight with spare batteries, rain poncho, a small bath towel, your favourite soap in a leak proof container, two rolls of your favourite toilet paper, a one-litre water bottle, a small first aid kit. We recommend valuable personal items (camera, travel documents etc) be packed in ziplock plastic bags to protect them from the wet (rain, sea spray). Suitable footwear for this tour includes boat shoes, tennis shoes, sneakers, sandals. High heels and thongs (flip-flops) are not recommended, nor are heavy hiking boots. Bring spare batteries for your digital camera because batteries seem to go flat more rapidly in the humid climate and are not obtainable in all stores here.

Accommodation. Hotels and resorts on this tour are generally of three star standard. Hotel and resort rooms all have private bathrooms, TV and air-conditioning (except in the Highlands), unless otherwise specified. Village guest houses offer very basic accommodation in village-style huts accommodating up to four people per room. Bedding consists of mattresses with clean sleeping bag or sheets and pillow under mosquito net "tents" inside the hut, sometimes set on a woven mat on the floor, sometimes set on a raised bed frame. Lighting is provided by kerosene pressure lamps and flashlights. There is usually an outdoor bathroom and toilet - the toilet will be a sit-down pedestal over a pit latrine and the outdoor bathroom will consist of a screened-off area of grass or pebbles with a drum of water that you can use to scoop water over yourself Asian-style. In some villages there is a stream that everybody bathes in. When bathing in public places such as a stream it is appropriate to bathe in your clothes and change into dry gear once back inside your room. Male visitors may bathe in shorts. Ladies should bring a sarong or quick-dry shorts and top to wear for bathing.

Food. On this tour, set-menu meals at smaller lodges and village guest houses are generally included in the tour price. At village guest houses local-style food is served consisting of a variety of fresh fruit and fresh vegetables cooked in coconut milk, plain boiled or baked in banana leaves under hot stones (known locally as *mumu*). For breakfast they provide tea with fresh scones or pancakes, and fruit. At hotels where a menu is available, these meals are usually not included in your tour, to give you freedom of choice. Hotel meals may be paid for in cash or by major credit card. With your itinerary you will find a list of tour inclusions which specifies which meals are included in your tour price.

Water. Town water supplies in Papua New Guinea are chemically treated and officially rated as safe to drink. In the villages, drinking water is collected in rainwater tanks or carried in containers from clean water sources. However to prevent discomfort from drinking from a different water supply every day as you travel through the country, we recommend you either drink bottled water, carry and use water purification tablets, or drink boiled water. Village guest houses should routinely offer you drinking water that has been

boiled and cooled. In the villages you can also ask for coconut water fresh from young coconuts which is always sterile and safe to drink. Coconut water is a great tonic for diarrhoea too.

Visas. Tourist visas are available on arrival at Port Moresby airport for citizens of designated countries including Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and western European countries. The cost is PGK100, local currency only. Getting your tourist visa issued will be quick and easy if you have a copy of your tour itinerary handy to show the immigration officer. Please note your passport must have at least 6 months validity left on it in order to be issued a PNG visa. Please check your passport to make sure the expiry date is at least 6 months away from the time you plan to enter PNG. Passport-holders of central and eastern European countries, Middle Eastern countries, African and Caribbean countries must apply for a visa at least 6 weeks in advance, from their nearest PNG diplomatic mission (eg ie London, Brussels, Washington DC, Canberra, Singapore, Manila). The diplomatic mission must fax the visa application to head office in Port Moresby for approval, and this can take many weeks. For an additional fee we can assist with visa matters.

Money. You should change about USD\$200 / AUD\$400 per person to PNG Kina at a bank or at a currency exchange booth at a major airport prior to your arrival in PNG (eg Brisbane, Cairns, Singapore) so that you will have cash to pay for your tourist visa on arrival (if applicable) and to tide you over the first day or so in the country. To give you an indication of the costs of hotel meals, at the Gateway Hotel in Port Moresby fish and chips costs USD\$8, a medium pizza is USD\$10, T-Bone Steak is USD\$15 and a local beer is USD\$2. The Travelex currency exchange booths at major Australian airports including Brisbane and Cairns usually have PNG Kina currency in stock (banks and currency exchange booths in the city centres may not), but don't change large sums of money there because the exchange rate for purchasing kina is better here in PNG than in Australia. If you need more cash, wait till you arrive in Port Moresby and use your credit card to get a cash advance in PNG kina from an automatic teller machine at the airport or in the town. There is also a bank foreign exchange counter in the customs area at the airport but this desk only exchanges cash and does not accept cards.

If you happen to arrive without any PNG Kina in your pocket to pay for your tourist visa, the immigration officer will let you go out of the customs area to an ATM in the main terminal area to withdraw some local cash and come back inside to pay your fee and get your passport stamped. Travellers cheques are accepted at most hotels and resorts.

Health. The major health risk in PNG is malaria. Preventive medication must be taken while visiting PNG (see information below). Minor health risks for which tourists are advised to update their vaccinations include typhoid, cholera and hepatitis B. Your personal first aid kit should include sticking plasters (fabric eg Elastoplast, not plastic strips), paracetamol, treatment for insect bites (eg Stingose or Calamine lotion/cream), antibiotic cream or powder (not antiseptic - Dettol etc is useless for preventing infection in the tropics, you have to hit skin wounds with antibiotics straight away). Ask your doctor to prescribe it for you, eg tetracycline ointment).

There are hospitals and doctors available in all major towns in PNG which can provide urgent medical care, but when visitors require serious medical attention we normally contact their travel insurer to arrange a medical evacuation to Australia - this can be accomplished in a matter of hours as there are several medivac companies operating in PNG that are on 24 hour standby with fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. However availability of medical care in some rural areas visited as part of your tour is limited and medical evacuations may be difficult to arrange in some locations.

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

Even if you are infected with malaria you are unlikely to fall ill during your visit here as the incubation period for the malaria parasite is a minimum of seven days so even if you get bitten by a malaria mosquito on your first day you are unlikely to experience malaria symptoms until you are back at home. Thus, if you fall ill after returning home please don't try to "sleep it off" at home, you must seek medical treatment and

inform the doctor that you have been in PNG. Malaria symptoms include body aches and pains, diarrhoea, headache, high temperatures, fever and chills - feeling cold while your body is actually hot. However the only way to correctly diagnose malaria is with a blood test. If laboratory facilities are not available, health workers generally treat patients presumptively.

The recommended presumptive treatment for malaria in Papua New Guinea is a combination of artemether and Fansidar tablets. This treatment is available over-the-counter from pharmacies (five days artemether with Fansidar on the third day). Artemether has no known side effects or interactions with other medications so there is no harm done in taking the presumptive treatment if the symptoms are not caused by malaria. The Sepik River area is renowned for mosquitoes: be prepared with insect repellent and anti-malaria medication.

Safety. Some activities on this tour require water travel in native canoes that carry only basic safety equipment. Individuals who cannot swim are advised against taking tours involving open water river or sea travel. Hiking options on this tour require an average level of fitness.

Papua New Guinea is sometimes pictured as a dangerous destination, but although street crime is a concern in some urban areas and tribal fights are prevalent in some parts of the Highlands, the vast majority of the country, especially the rural areas, is safe and welcoming. It is very uncommon for a tourist to be a victim of crime in PNG because tourists do not visit areas where crime or tribal violence are prevalent. Even in Port Moresby and Lae, most crime occurs in the squatter shanty-towns and betel-nut markets, and the common victims are local residents not foreigners.

Nevertheless, Ecotourism Melanesia takes the safety and security of our visitors seriously and all tours we offer involve destinations that we rate as safe.