

# Papua New Guinea & The Solomon Islands



PNG Mount Hagen Festival + Solomon Islands

August 2022



## Papua New Guinea at last

At last, I had initially planned to go back in 2015 and then later in 2020 but had to abort these plans due to Covid. I arrived at 05:30 AM on Sunday morning into Port Moresby only about 30 minutes late. The visa and custom clearance were smooth as was the luggage claim at the carousel. Changed some money and was then picked-up and transferred to my hotel – Coots. Pretty dead upon arrival with now staff available. No wi-fi nor breakfast even having waited until 09:00. Decided to not stay at Coots the first day and night as I had been travelling for a day and a half. They helped and drove me to The Gateway Hotel, much better standard + working wi-fi as well as breakfast available.

Decided to rest up at the hotel all day Sunday. A few decent restaurants to choose from made it quite OK.

Gareth and Jimmy from YPT (my tour organizer), came and picked me up on Monday at lunch and transferred me back to Coots where the rest of the group (8 people in total) had checked in earlier this morning. A couple of hours city-tour was arranged to show us the most important sights in Port Moresby before we went to dinner at the evening. We saw the parliament and then went on to visit the National Museum of PNG. This was well worth a stop with lots of artifacts from various tribal groups from the young nation. Outside on the grounds they had also some old fighter planes shot down during the second world war on display. A stop at one of the supermarkets to buy some snack, water was included. Quite well stocked. We then continued to the beach which was not much to see really, before heading back to our hotel – Coots Lodge. We rested up a bit before being taken to dinner at the Royal Papua Yacht Club at the waterfront.



## Mount Hagen



**August 17<sup>th</sup>.** We left the hotel at 06:00 AM for the Airport to check in to our flight for Mt. Hagen in the Highlands. The flight was on time, and we arrived in Mount Hagen at around 09:00 where we were picked-up by the local team who would look after us during the coming week and the festival. After check-in at the Kori Lodge – a very basic establishment with no wi-fi possibility. The weather here in the highlands at ca: 2000 meters was very pleasant and a lot less humid compared to the Capital. We were taken to the main outdoor market where they mainly sold fruits and vegetable of all kinds mixed up with some chicken. We were very well received and people being very friendly and happy to have their photos taken. A lunch break and our tour continued to the mountain on bad roads. We got a lovely view of the Mount Hagen town from above. We stopped for a coffee at the very posh Rondo Ridge resort overlooking the valley.

**August 18<sup>th</sup>.** Breakfast at the lodge and then off to the village of our local guide – Jimmy. We spent a full day at their village some 40 minutes outside of Mt. Hagen, and what a day it was. The villagers had prepared, we were told, for over three weeks prior to us arriving. There have been no tourists here for two full years in PNG due to Pandemic restrictions. Furthermore, this village had never invited foreigners before. They had dressed up in different local costumes which they usually only dress up in for special occasions we were told. They also painted our faces in the same traditional patterns which they use themselves. Bloody difficult though to get the color off later in the evening when back at the hostel. They had arranged for us to share the food which was going to be cooked during the day. We first meet the two pigs, still very much alive. After a while it was time for preparing the food. They then ceremoniously clubbed the two pigs with a great big club of wood and then put them over an open fire to burn off all the hair. After that stones were put on the fire to be heat up. These were later laid in the bottom of a big hole in the ground, which was firstly coated with palm leaves. On top of the heated stones more palm leaves were laid. Thereafter, once they had taken out the intestines and cut up the meat into smaller pieces, they were put in the hole and covered with yet more palm leaves and stones. Sweet potatoes and vegetable were also added into the pit. The food was then baked for about an hour before being ready to eat. Freshly cut ribs were also distributed to be put on sticks and grilled over the open fire. Very good indeed.





**August 19<sup>th</sup>.** Today we went to another site where there were a few more tourist groups joining us. We got to see how the different groups prepared themselves – dressing up and putting on makeup for the later performance. There were eight groups in total performing for us tourists and many other locals who joined as well. This was also very nice, albeit a bit more for show. Dinner was taken in the evening at a more local joint this time. We had a good evening and ended up staying at a bar nearby before heading back to our hotel.





## Mount Hagen Festival

**August 20<sup>th</sup>.** A full day at the main Mount Hagen Festival. We drove in our bus to a large field near the airport in Mt. Hagen where we had to pass two security points to get into the festival area. We were allowed to walk behind the main grounds to have a look at the ca: 40 different groups or so preparing for the day. They were getting dressed in their costumes, painted their faces, and practiced their moves. A perfect opportunity for taking photos. We then spend the day watching the different groups performing on the main field. A few other tourist groups were attending, but also locals from all over. This year's event was apparently a lot smaller than the usual events as it had just opened again after covid. I ran in to six people in total whom I knew from FB and or had met in other places like the Gerewol festival in Chad. We met up later in the evening at the Mount Hagen Hotel for a meal and a drink.

**August 21<sup>st</sup>.** The second day of the main Mount Hagen Festival. Today we went and spent half day only as many of the performances were very much the same as the previous day. I had heard Kumul lodge, ca: 45 minutes outside of Mt. Hagen, were supposed to be a haven for various birds – so this is where we went. On the way we stopped and trekked up a smaller mountain to get a nice view of the landscape. We continued to the Kumul lodge where I ran in to a guy, I met on the flight down from Manila who went particularly for the bird watching. A long fruit table had been set in the garden to attract the birds, and yes some were indeed seen, but really not worth the effort. Gillan, our local female guide, had organized for us to come and spend the evening at her families place where they had lit a fire. Moonshine booze had been brought in together with beer and some take-away food. There was dancing and mingling through the evening. Tata, the father of Gillian, who was the host had no less then 7 wives and 22 children in total





## Mount Hagen Festival (II)





## Goroka and Lea

*August 22<sup>nd</sup>.* Early start in the morning with the usual breakfast at a café near the shopping mall which is quite good. Thereafter we left for Goroka. We made some stops along the way as we drove from Mt. Hagen. The drive was some 4-5 hours in total. I decided I had had enough of the bus and got to ride with the follow-up 4-wheel car with all the luggage. There I had a nice front seat with plenty of space all to myself. A visit to a remote smaller village Asaro was arranged and there they performed in their mud-men costumes. Pretty much the same stuff as we had seen already on three occasions. We checked in at the Phenix hotel in Goroka.

*August 23<sup>rd</sup>.* Early start again this morning as we had a long drive ahead of us from Goroka in the highlands all the way to Lae in the coastal districts. The roads up in the highland were serpentine roads and in very poor condition. After some 150 kilometers we had finally come down the mountains out on flat land and where the temperatures were considerably hotter, but the roads in better condition. Again, a couple of stops along the way including a very lively market where we had lunch. We **arrived at Lae** at around 1:30 PM and had a stop at the **Botanical Garden** first. We then after a supermarket stop for stocking up on drinks and a few things to eat. We checked in to value **Inn hotel** which was quite good for a budget stay.





## Solomon Islands via Australia

*August 26<sup>th</sup>.* Airport shuttle at 07:00 AM and flight departure at 10:00 AM for the Solomon Islands. All went well this morning. Interesting to watch as at least three people were turned away at the flight check-in counter not having either taken their PCR-test in time or having the last vaccination dose done outside the mandatory 1 month latest before departure. I managed to edit some photos on the flight over. We arrived on time. Got through immigration and passport control to pick up my luggage. Anne was waiting for me outside and with her husband Robert driving we took off from the airport. Had a quick stop on the way to buy some water as well as getting some cash from the ATM.

We first made a stop at their home in a seedy suburb of the city. The car was parked, and we got out to with my backpack down the riverbank only to board a rope-driven barge to cross the small river. The boy operating the barge used his hands to pull us over. The cost a mere 1,50 sek/person. The sky opened and the rain came pouring down. Anne had some umbrellas which we used for cover and continued to walk along the riverbank – very wet and muddy – to get to their very simple house on the slope. Anne and her husband served some fresh melons and pineapple, and we sat and chatted for a while. They drove me to my hotel – The King Solomon – in the city center, which by the way was not much of a city at all. More like a provincial town. The hotel was OK with rooms climbing up the hillside. To get to the rooms a small cable car had been installed for the guest to get uphill. We stayed the evening at the hotel restaurant, had a few beers and chatted.





*August 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>.* The couple picked-me-up at the hotel. Went to buy a local sim-card for security. We then continued west-ward to get to the Dolphin View lodge some 45 minutes' drive from Honiara. Almost next to this lodge, there was another lodge – B17 – which I had also heard of. We checked out both places, and I decided upon B-17 which had their huts right on the beach instead of off the beach. Nicer. Have walked the beach today and just sat and read my book and relaxed. Not much else that can be done around here. It is family run and all family seems to be helping. There are only three huts, from what I gather, and one more is currently let. The daughter of the owner is cooking, so it is just to ask what one wants to eat, and she will prepare it. Had sandwiches for lunch and now tried fish with rice and vegetable to dinner. She also made a lovely shrimp-dish one evening for me.

Visited a fishery nearby where they had recently started up small scale. The following day we walked some smaller trails to get to Vilu War Museum located in the middle of nowhere. A gathering of shot down fighter planes, haubits and tanks. The vegetation had all but swallowed these old relics already. Interesting, but sad to see of course. There were some Memorial gravestones commemorating those who had died during these clashes during WWII back in 1942.

I had four days and three nights at this lovely lodge right on the beach. Not much to do but read, swim, relax and eat good food cooked by Juju.





