



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM201 2014 MT HAGEN SHOW TOUR 10-18 AUGUST 2014

8 nights Mt Hagen and Simbai

Fully escorted sign-up soft adventure tour, group size minimum 6 maximum 8.

This small group tour begins with an excursion to *Simbai*, a remote mountainous part of the highlands a short flight from Mt Hagen. The Kalam tribe of Simbai still live in grass huts and practise a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. The Kalam tribe of Simbai rivals the Huli tribe of Tari for exotica but is hardly visited by tourists because there is no tourist-quality accommodation, no access by road, and no scheduled flights. Currently less than 100 visitors make it to it Simbai every year.

Archaeological digs in this area indicate that the Kalam people have occupied this area continuously for more than a thousand years. The traditional culture here is exotic even by Papua New Guinea standards and the Kalam dialect, characterised by glottal stops, is unique among PNG's eight hundred languages. Native houses at Simbai have a trademark hexagon shape, the men have pierced nose septums and sport all manner of nose ornaments (quills, bones, shells) and on special occasions the initiated boys and men wear huge cane-framed head dresses decorated with animal skins and the exoskeletons of thousands of iridescent green beetles collected from the forest. Just a few hours walk from the airstrip are subsistence villages where time has stood still and the people still live in grass huts, still wear traditional dress and still hunt game and harvest food from the forest for their diet. This tour program takes you to just such a remote little mountain community for a village study and overnight in a native hut.

The second half of the tour is focused on the *Mt Hagen Show* which is Papua New Guinea's largest cultural extravaganza. The Show has its origins in colonial days when colonial administrators sought to reduce tribal fighting by promoting inter-marriage and channelling inter-tribal rivalry into positive forms of competition. Major sing-sing events like the Mt Hagen Show and Goroka Show became opportunities for tribes to gain status without bloodshed, by competing to put on the best cultural performance. The Mt Hagen Show today is still a competition, with tribal groups vying for sizeable cash prizes and of course the honour and glory that first prize at the "Hagen Show" brings to one's tribe.

The Show attracts cultural groups mainly from the Highlands but also other Papua New Guinea provinces. The local crowds of up to 100,000 mainly flock in from the Highlands provinces plus Madang and Lae which are connected by road to Mt Hagen. In contrast, less than 500 overseas visitors attend the Show, so it is still definitely a "local" festival and not something put on for tourists. Some very remote villagers come to town only once per year, for the Show, so you will see quite a kaleidoscope of faces in the spectator crowd, even before you turn your attention to the sing-sing arena.

Tourists sit in a private viewing area and have permission to enter the performance arena to take close-up photographs of the dancers. Apart from the Show itself, our tour group will also attend another, smaller sing-sing on the day before. This is held at Paiya village about half an hour's drive out of town, is more informal without the huge crowds, and provides an authentic village backdrop for photography, with opportunities for watching the performers putting on their make-up and body decorations before the performance.

NOTE:

EM201 is a “wet foot” tour that involves some challenging hiking and one night sleeping rough in a village hut without electricity or running water, so some physical agility and mental resilience is required. Also note this is a unique small group tour program originally designed by Ecotourism Melanesia and not offered by any other tour company. The tour price includes a tour development levy to recover our outlays on designing, reconnoitring, organising and monitoring the remote area logistics, and a share of the group leader’s travel costs.

TOUR COST:

PGK 12,300 per person (8 nights Mt Hagen, Simbai, Mt Hagen) based on twin-share or willing to share, 2.5 star motel accom in Mt Hagen, includes internal air and some meals.

Single supplement: please enquire.

Upgrade to 4 star Highlander Hotel in Mt Hagen (if available): please enquire.

To convert the tour cost to other currencies, please contact us for a quote. The tour price is subject to change. However packages paid-in-full are protected against any price rises.

TOUR INCLUSIONS (8 nights):

- Port Moresby - airport meet and greet at with check-in/luggage assistance for connecting flight to Mt Hagen and short Port Moresby city tour if time allows
- Port Moresby - domestic airfares Port Moresby-Mt Hagen-Port Moresby
- Mt Hagen 5 nights 2.5 star accommodation in Mt Hagen (twin-share standard ensuite motel room, room only - pay as you go for meals)
- Mt Hagen - return charter flights to Simbai
- Simbai - 2 nights village guest house accommodation (1.0 star twin-share with clean bedding, outdoor bathroom), including local-style meals, bottled or boiled water and local guided walks
- Simbai - Kalam tribal sing-sing performance and head-dress procession
- Simbai - overnight hiking trip to remote Waim village with village feast and other local food, very basic sleeping conditions in village hut. Carry your own backpack.
- Mt Hagen - Wahgi Valley sightseeing trip
- Mt Hagen - excursion to the Paiya village sing-sing, includes entry fee, bottled water and lunch
- Mt Hagen - two morning excursions to the Mt Hagen Show, includes entry fee, bottled water and fruit
- Mt Hagen - afternoon excursion to Moikap village (or similar)
- Mt Hagen - afternoon excursion to Rondon Ridge forest (or similar)
- Port Moresby - check-in assistance for international flight
- Throughout the tour we provide:
 - services of a full time tour leader
 - all fees and gratuities for local villages, guides, demonstrators and helpers
 - all airport/hotel transfers
 - all road travel by late model mini bus or four wheel drive vehicle with bottled water on board (unless otherwise specified)
 - all water travel by open speed boat, skiff or motor canoe with life vests supplied and bottled water on board (unless otherwise specified)
 - various additional gear that may be required for your safety and comfort in remote areas such as mobile satellite phone, tropical first aid kit, mosquito net, life vest, sleeping bag, supplementary food supplies (we may ask you to carry such items with your personal baggage from Port Moresby to your destination and if this incurs any excess baggage penalty we will pay the charges)
 - daily reconfirmation of flights and arrangements coordinated by our Port Moresby office
 - 24 hour assistance from our Port Moresby office (phone 7700 5066, 7204 6950 or 7686 8917)

EXCLUSIONS:

- international airfares
- bottled water (except where stated as provided)
- hotel meals unless stated as included
- tips (not expected, and only appropriate for exceptional service)
- souvenirs and items of a personal nature
- bar drinks
- visa fees and visa assistance
- excess baggage charges - your free allowance on Air Niugini flights is 16kg + 5 kg and you can check in additional kilos at your own cost but for the light aircraft flights excess baggage is not permitted and a strict maximum of 16kg + 5kg is enforced.
- personal items - bring your own favourite munchies, favourite bath soap, favourite toilet paper, quick-dry bath towel, personal medications and first aid kit, personal hygiene requirements, brimmed hat or cap, "amphibious footwear" (sandals or quick-dry canvas shoes), insect repellent, sunscreen, personal flashlight, battery-operated personal fan. NB Aerosol cans are not permitted on domestic flights in PNG so bring roll-ons or pump-action sprays.

ITINERARY

DAY 1: SUN 10 AUG 2014

PORT MORESBY / MT HAGEN

After arriving in Port Moresby (international flights are your own arrangements) you will connect through to Mt Hagen on an internal flight. This domestic sector from Port Moresby to Mt Hagen is included in your tour package. Available flights to choose from include:

PX180 departing 08:00 arriving 09:00

CG1582 departing 08:15 arriving 09:45

PX182 departing 11:30 arriving 12:30

PX184 departing 12:30 arriving 13:30

CG1544 departing 14:30 arriving 16:00

PX186 departing 15:00 arriving 16:00

When booking your tour package we will ask you to select one of the flights above and we will supply the ticket for you.

For details of international flights into Port Moresby from Australia and Asia see these airline websites:

www.airniugini.com.pg

www.qantas.com.au

www.virginaustralia.com

Note that flights from Singapore, Tokyo and Hong Kong arriving in Port Moresby on Sunday 10 August all depart their origin airports the evening before ie Saturday 09 August and arrive early Sunday morning in Port Moresby.

On arrival in Port Moresby Ecotourism Melanesia staff will meet and assist you to board your connecting flight to Mt Hagen.

If time allows between flights, our staff will take you on a short tour of Port Moresby. Pay-as-you-go for lunch today. The café upstairs in the international airport terminal has a good selection of light meals available for sit-down or take-out, or if you are "on tour" in Port Moresby with our guide you can pick up something along the way. Internal flights in PNG are non-catering and there is no food available at Mt Hagen airport either so plan ahead.

On arrival in Mt Hagen your tour group leader will meet you at the airport and transfer you to your accommodation.

There is no sightseeing program today.

Overnight Kanges Hotel, Mt Hagen (2.5 star twin room, room only)

TOUR NOTE: Mt Hagen accommodation

The bigger 3 and 4 star hotels in Mt Hagen require hefty advance deposits to hold rooms for the Mt Hagen Show week and are heavily block-booked by other bigger tour companies one year ahead, so accommodation for your tour group is booked at a modest 2.5 star hotel where we stay every year, the Kanges ("can-guess") Hotel. Rooms in the new wing at Kanges Hotel are large, clean and comfortable although the walls are very thin so think first before you speak loudly or make any objectionable noises ☺

The rooms each have one double bed and one single bed and are of solid quality (eg inner spring mattresses, quality Manchester, hot water showers) but the other facilities at the hotel hold it down under three stars (eg the restaurant is only basic and there is no room service or 24 hour reception). Most nights our tour group will bus across to one of the bigger hotels for dinner and you will only take breakfast here at the Kanges.

Nevertheless if you are happy to pay the extra deposit we do offer an accommodation upgrade option at the Highlander Hotel subject to availability of rooms at the time of booking and paying your deposit.

DAY 2: MON 11 AUG 2014

MT HAGEN / SIMBAI

07:00 After an early breakfast we will check out of the hotel (extra baggage can be stored at the hotel while we are at Simbai) and transfer to Mt Hagen airport for our charter flight to Simbai (9 seater PAC750=XL operated by Central Aviation or 9 seater Cessna Grand Caravan 208 operated by Missionary Aviation). The flight time is less than 30 minutes.

TOUR NOTE: Flights to Simbai

The small aircraft which fly between Mt Hagen and Simbai operate under visual flight rules (VFR) and cannot take off from Mt Hagen if Simbai is known to be under cloud cover (otherwise they will waste time and fuel if they have to turn back).

On some days Simbai is crystal clear first thing in the morning and aircraft can fly in early. Other days there is morning fog at Simbai and flights cannot land at Simbai until the fog lifts. On most days high altitude cloud cover closes the airstrip again mid-afternoon but sometimes earlier. Therefore our departure time out of Mt Hagen cannot be confirmed in advance and all we can do is get to the airport early and be prepared to fly either first-up or later in the morning once the pilot receives a radio report of clear visibility at Simbai. The clear weather window is normally between 09:00 and 14:00.

There is a 10% risk that our flight will not operate at all today if the cloud cover at Simbai is particularly heavy, if the aircraft has a technical problem or if the pilot is sick (there is a shortage of both aircraft and pilots in PNG and there will not likely be a "spare" of either on the day). If our flight to Simbai today does not happen, an alternative activity will be arranged in Mt Hagen for today and the flight rescheduled for Tuesday morning. It's unlikely this will happen but we like to inform our clients in advance of potential disruptions.

If we do have Monday night in Mt Hagen your hotel accommodation will be covered by Ecotourism Melanesia and you will pay for your own meals again - this arrangement is equivalent in value to the basic accommodation-and-meals package provided at the guest house at Simbai.

Obviously the same risk of disruption applies for the return flight sector from Simbai back to Mt Hagen on Thursday and it's possible we may have to spend an extra night at Simbai thus missing some of the Mt Hagen program.

Flight cancellation two days in a row is extremely unlikely as August is generally a good time of the year for travel to Simbai, and experiencing disruptions both on the way out Monday and on the way back Thursday is also improbable - it certainly hasn't happened to us before.

The tricky weather at Simbai is one of the reasons why other tour companies do not offer Simbai in their tour programs. However over the past 10 years Ecotourism Melanesia has learned how to work around the Simbai weather issue by informing our clients in advance of possible delays or disruptions and asking our clients for their patience while sitting at the Mt Hagen airport waiting for a clear weather report: may we suggest BYO deck of cards, Sudoku puzzles or Tom Clancy mega-novel ☺

All our past clients will tell you without hesitation that visiting with the Kalam tribe at Simbai was the absolute highlight of their trip to PNG and is well worth any waiting time.

On arrival at Simbai airstrip the group will be met by our local Simbai guide with a few extra guys to help carry our bags. From the airstrip it is a 30 minute walk to the Kalam Guest House.

At the guest house we will be welcomed by a traditional Kalam tribal sing-sing procession with men wearing their trademark head-dresses decorated with iridescent green beetle shells and women wearing animal furs and orchid stem

necklaces. As they dance and sing they beat small 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 we will be introduced to the performers who will show us their costumes and body decorations, describe how they are made and applied, and talk about their ritual significance.

Lunch is served at the guest house and will be our first opportunity to sample some local Simbai fruit and vegetables including sub-tropical varieties of banana, yam and sweet potato. Starchy vegetables are usually served with cooked greens such as watercress and long beans, or salad vegetables like tomato and cucumber.

Adjacent to the guest house is the tribal museum which is a local style hut housing a collection of Kalam tribal artifacts, some of which are quite old and rare, representing the tribal history and culture. Our guide will explain the historical and ritual significance of the pieces on display which include everyday utensils, weapons, musical instruments, head dresses, nose pieces, traditional clothing, shell money for making bride price payments, and heirloom ornaments.

One hour's walk from the guest house brings us to the hamlet of Wechenrau where we will visit with a family and see how they live in traditional style yet within easy reach of the Simbai government station where they can sell produce at the little market and buy consumer items like rice and kerosene. (Villages further afield have to be more self-sufficient being too far to walk to the market).

As time allows we may also visit the Simbai orchid gardens, lovingly tended by community volunteers, displaying a full range of wild and cultivated orchids which grow prolifically in the mid-montane Simbai climate. Orchids play an important part in the lives and rituals of the Kalam people, not so much for their floral beauty (the flowers are exquisite but each plant may only bloom every two or three years) but the usefulness of their stems which when dried are hardy and hollow, useful as straws for sucking food and water, and for threading together as necklaces.

Overnight Kalam Guest House, Simbai (basic twin room, includes meals)

TOUR NOTE: Kalam Guest House

Kalam Guest House is a basic but clean and comfortable facility built with local materials and operated by the Simbai community as a non-profit venture designed to attract more visitors into the area. The guest house has ten twin rooms with clean bedding supplied. The bathroom, which has running water and a flush toilet, is shared but it is unlikely that there will be any other guests staying apart from our tour party so we should have the place to ourselves (hardly any tourists come to Simbai and the guest house mainly accommodates visiting government officers, coffee buyers and the occasional intrepid salesman). Electricity is supplied in the evenings by a small generator. Local style meals prepared by Simbai ladies are served. In front of the guest house is an open area that the locals use as a meeting place and sing-sing ground.

DAY 3: TUE 12 AUG 2014

SIMBAI (hike to Waim village)

Today and tomorrow are the most physically challenging yet culturally stimulating days of the tour. This morning we commence hiking 4 to 6 hours (depending on the weather and the surface condition of the foot track) in a south-easterly direction to Waim, a tiny remote village sitting smack on the border of the Western Highlands province and the Madang province. Waim has just a few

families living in a dozen or so huts - only about 70 inhabitants altogether.

The hike passes through open grasslands and forested areas with waterfalls - a beautiful experience of nature with many photo opportunities. The level of difficulty of the hiking is 3 on a scale of 1 to 5. There are some steep climbs and descents but if you are able bodied you will not need assistance from porters or equipment to complete the walk. The walking pace is relaxed with frequent stops. Some of the lads from the Kalam Guest House will carry our sleeping gear, lunch and drinking water but you will have to carry your own personal gear so you should only bring with you to Simbai a backpack weighing less than 10kg that you can carry yourself, and leave your other luggage back in Mt Hagen.

At Waim we will watch (and we are free to join) the village people preparing food to be cooked in a pit under hot stones for our dinner. A pig will be killed and butchered for the occasion although the locals will not be offended if you choose not to watch or if you stick to the vegetables when it comes time to eat ☺ The whole village is involved in preparing this traditional welcome feast. In the evening when the food is ready we 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 we have come to see. (In February 2008 our local guide brought a small film crew from the Irish TV travel show "No Frontiers" to Waim with charming host Kathryn Thomas. The program was available for viewing online for several years but has now been removed from the RTE Ireland website).

Overnight Waim village camping in a communal hut.

TOUR NOTE: Sleeping rough at Waim

Clean sleeping bags and mosquito nets are supplied by Ecotourism Melanesia (the overnight temperature will drop to around 10 degrees centigrade) but there will not be any mattresses, only village woven mats to doss down on. Dinner will consist of cooked local food from the feast and breakfast will be fried sweet potato and fresh fruit with billy tea, or similar. Boiled spring water will be available for drinking.

At night it will be pitch black and we will all be reminded of what life was like for our ancestors before the industrial revolution and the advent of "mod-cons" ☺

There is no shower facility here (the locals bathe in the creek) so it will probably be easiest if you just wash your face and hands in a basin of water tonight and wait till you get back to Simbai tomorrow before having your shower.

Going to the toilet here involves squatting over a clean pit latrine freshly dug for our visit, inside a private outhouse. Ladies can use the latrine for both Number Ones and Number Twos. Gentlemen can "do as the Romans" by dispatching Number Ones behind a tree and only using the latrine for Number Twos. Toilet rolls are supplied.

TOUR NOTE: For non-hikers

If you are unable to hike or can't cope with roughing it in the remote village, you will have the option to stay back at the Kalam Guest House and another guide will take you for shorter walks around the tiny Simbai township area eg visiting the school, the church mission, the health clinic and satellite hamlets nearer the station.

DAY 4: WED 13 AUG 2014

SIMBAI (hike back from Waim village)

This morning we will spend some time with the people of Waim learning about their daily routine including:

- domestic chores
- child rearing
- gardening
- harvesting food from the forest
- hunting
- cooking
- building and repairing huts.

For these people every day is a struggle to survive and they work hard.

After an early lunch we will begin the hike back to Simbai, arriving late afternoon.

Overnight Kalam Guest House, Simbai (basic twin room, includes meals)

DAY 5: THU 14 AUG 2014

SIMBAI / MT HAGEN (Wahgi Valley)

The first half of today will be dedicated to getting back to Mt Hagen. After breakfast at the guest house we will walk to the airstrip and commence the rural PNG “ritual” of desperately searching the sky for that tiny black speck that will grow into the welcome sight of an aircraft. With luck we may be able to get through to Mt Hagen on the satellite phone for an indication of the arrival time but other than that we will just have to “do the time” and wait for the first person to shout “balus i kam!” - here comes the plane.

On touching down in Mt Hagen we will board our waiting mini bus and head for one of the hotels for some western food for lunch (“gangway - where’s the buffet?”) then check in at our accommodation and get cleaned up. Of course we could even do it the civilised way, vice-versa ☺

This afternoon we will take a road excursion to the Wahgi Valley which is known as Papua New Guinea’s “food bowl”. The valley is a patchwork of coffee and tea plantations, market gardens, cash cropping blocks, hobby farms, agricultural cooperatives, roadside stalls, processing sheds and livestock yards. Most Western Highlanders who have jobs are engaged in the agriculture sector or a related industry in the Wahgi Valley to the north and east of Mt Hagen. (Terrain to the south and west of Mt Hagen is mountainous and only suitable for subsistence gardens). Time will allow for stops, possibly including a coffee factory.

Overnight Kanges Hotel, Mt Hagen (2.5 star twin room, room only)

DAY 6: FRI 15 AUG 2014

MT HAGEN (Paiya sing-sing and Magic Mountain)

08:00 We will take a scenic drive out through typical highlands countryside to Paiyakona (Paiya) village where a sing-sing is held the day before every Mt Hagen Show. Arriving early before the sing-sing commences you will be able to watch the performers adorning themselves with feathers, shells and ochre paints in preparation for dancing. The performers will be happy to show and tell about their traditional dress (“bilas”) and pose for photographs without expecting payment. About 10 different dancing groups will perform, mainly from the Highlands. Some of them are groups that will perform at the Mt Hagen Show tomorrow.

The Paiya sing-sing includes a “mumu” lunch cooked under hot stones at the sing-sing grounds, and a tour of the cultural displays at Paiya village including the men’s spirit house and the ancestors’ skull house which really is an ossuary full of dozens of skulls. The chief and his three wives will be on hand for photos and some traditional customs like courtship behaviour and mourning rituals will be demonstrated.

In previous years our tour groups have always commented that they enjoyed the Paiya sing-sing even more than the Mt Hagen Show itself, because the village setting made the experience (and the photography) more natural and the smaller crowd from just the one village area was easy to socialise with.

After the sing-sing our tour bus will scramble up the steep driveway to Magic

Mountain Nature Lodge nearby, for a walk through the moss forest that features endemic varieties of flowering trees and tree ferns which form a substrate for the growth of saprophytic native orchids and colourful mosses, fungi, lichens, liverworts and leafy epiphytes. Real “Lord of the Rings” stuff - a cryptogamic botanist’s dream.

Overnight Kanges Hotel, Mt Hagen (2.5 star twin room, room only)

DAY 7: SAT 16 AUG 2014

MT HAGEN (Mt Hagen Show and Moikap village)

08:00 We depart from the hotel for the 30 minute drive to the show grounds. Our staff have already been out to the show grounds earlier in the morning to stake our claim for a spot to set up our marquee and chairs.

09:00 The sing-sing program is due to begin in the main arena.

14:00 We depart from the show ground and return to one of the hotels for late lunch (pay as you go)

TOUR NOTE: Mt Hagen Show crowds

We estimated last year’s crowds in the Show grounds at 50,000 in the morning swelling to 100,000 in the afternoon when the public ticket gates were opened for free entry. The crowds are so dense that it is very hard to walk around the stalls and displays, even with guides to shepherd you, very easy to get separated from others and get lost, and very easy to get pick-pocketed. Realistically we have to abandon any ideas of our tour group perusing the stalls around the show ground after the sing-sing program in the arena. We need to just focus on getting in to the tourist enclosure, watching the sing-sing program and getting out again (we will drive in and out by bus but even this involves inching through the throng).

Toilets are available in the tourist area but there has been no decent food and drink available from year to year so we will just supply an icebox of bottled water and fruit to keep you going until you get back to the hotel for lunch.

15:00 After lunch we will take an excursion to Moikap, a typical Mt Hagen cluster village, for a village walk-around tour and an opportunity to look inside a traditional highlands roundhouse, see the food gardens they live off and some of their tribal artefacts. Despite being situated close to town Moikap village consists almost entirely of huts built of traditional materials.

Overnight Kanges Hotel, Mt Hagen (2.5 star twin room, room only)

DAY 8: SUN 17 AUG 2014

MT HAGEN (Mt Hagen Show and Rondon Ridge)

08:00 We depart from the hotel for the second day of the Mt Hagen Show.

13:00 We depart from the show ground and return to one of the hotels for late lunch (pay as you go) then continue 1 hour’s drive out of town to Rondon Ridge for a forest excursion. A local guide will take us on a nature walk through the montane forest pointing out the local flora and fauna. In the high altitude forest there is a wide variety of flowering and non-flowering plants including wild orchids. It is also possible to see and hear birds, small mammals, lizards and insects including butterflies - we will probably even see the Raggiana bird of paradise which is the biggest and loudest thus easiest to find (thus its propensity for becoming part of sing-sing head dresses ☺). We will be shown which trees and other plants can be harvested for used for food, medicine, handicrafts and building materials. Also in the grounds of Rondon Ridge Lodge there is a beautiful garden of cultured plants especially colourful orchids, gingers and lilies.

Overnight Kanges Hotel, Mt Hagen (2.5 star twin room, room only)

DAY 9: MON 18 AUG 2014

MT HAGEN / FLY OUT

After breakfast we check out of the hotel and transfer to Mt Hagen airport to check in for our morning flight to Port Moresby (this flight is included in the tour package).

In Port Moresby Ecotourism Melanesia staff will be on hand to help you connect with your international flight to Australia, Singapore or Denpasar. Complimentary sightseeing or artifact shopping around Port Moresby is available if you have time between flights or if you will be having a transit night in Port Moresby.

TOUR ENDS

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