

ABOUT PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Is it New Guinea, Papua, Irian Jaya or Papua New Guinea?

These names can be confusing, and are sometimes used incorrectly. It is correct to refer to the whole island (second only in size to Greenland, if one counts Australia as a continent) as New Guinea. Its land mass is 818,000 square kilometres and it has a population of over 6 million people.

Two political units – Irian Jaya, and Papua New Guinea – occupy the main island of New Guinea, together with some smaller, nearby islands. Irian Jaya, formerly called West Irian, and prior to that (up to the end of World War Two) ‘Dutch New Guinea’, covers the western half of New Guinea and is now one of the provinces of Indonesia. Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern half of the island. Formerly comprising two separate territories of Australia (‘Papua’ and ‘New Guinea’), it became a combined trusteeship (Papua New Guinea) in 1945, and an independent nation in 1975. Port Moresby is the capital.

European Intrusion

Evidence suggests humans have inhabited the country for the last 27,000 years. Most tribes lived in extremely primitive conditions until the last century, surviving by hunting with stone tools and wooden spears. Cultivation began only in relatively recent times. Early European sailors recorded visits as early as 1526. Jorge de Meneses, a Portuguese, gave the land the name ‘Papua’, a Malay term meaning ‘fuzzy-haired man’. Another Portuguese, Ortiz de Retes, called the island ‘Nova Guinea’ in 1545. Torres, a Spanish navigator (after whom the Strait separating Australia and New Guinea is named), sailed along the entire south coast of the island in 1606-7.

The Dutch took possession of the western parts of the island in the 1600’s to stop the British and French from laying their claims. However, many English sailors explored the island’s coasts including Dampier, Carteret and John Moresby (who named Port Moresby after his father). Moresby chartered the southern and north-eastern coasts in the mid-1800’s for the British Navy. Traders and whalers of all nationalities called in regularly for food and water. European traders, planters, scientists and missionaries began to settle on the island.

Papua New Guinea

Up to the end of WWII, both the territories had separate administrations, but in 1945 the United Nations accepted Australia’s proposal that they be combined to form one ‘trusteeship’ and be called ‘Papua New Guinea’. The administrations were combined and headquartered in Port Moresby. When independence was granted to the country in 1975, the name Papua New Guinea was retained.

Track or Trail?

Either term is correct, but ‘Track’ was the original name used by Europeans before WWII, and by the Australian Diggers during the Kokoda Campaign. Some claim it was American journalist, Geoff Reading, who first used it when filing his stories from Papua to Sydney in mid 1942. The Track originally led all the way from Port Moresby on the south coast to Buna on the north coast, and so for the purposes of this booklet the whole section is referred to as the ‘Track’.

The History of the Track

The Track is centuries old and was used by natives to commute from the coast to the hinterland and to move further away from the inter-tribal warfare that was commonplace. In the early years of white settlement, apart from a few handy locals, it was considered impassable to white men.

The route of the Track used during the war was already established and even now has changed very little. It was pioneered in the 1890's by Sir William MacGregor, the first Administrator of British New Guinea (Papua). In 1904 Captain Francis Rickman Barton was appointed administrator in Port Moresby. Resident Magistrate Monckton of the northern region of Papua (the Track lies within the old Territory of Papua), agreed to establish a fortnightly mail service over the Ranges by a native runner. Both men shocked the white population by inaugurating the service by actually walking the Track themselves, Barton heading north and Monckton south. They met at the top of the Track, and opened a bottle of champagne to celebrate!

In 1927-8, when gold was discovered in the Yodda Valley (in which Kokoda is situated), two separate parties set out from Port Moresby to seek their fortune – and were never heard from again!

The Track passes over Papua's great central mountain range, the Owen Stanley Range. This range was named after a British naval Captain who, in 1850, was on an exploratory voyage along the southern coast of Papua in his ship the HMS 'Rattlesnake'. Lost in mist and unsure of his position, Stanley was fortunate to make a planned rendezvous with his assistant, Lieutenant Charles Yule, who was travelling in a second vessel, the 'Bramble', in Orangerie Bay, some 320 kilometres east of Port Moresby. Yule led the way into a safe anchorage in the mist-enshrouded bay while the intensely anxious Stanley followed. Then, towards evening, the mist and clouds lifted 'as if a curtain had been drawn upon' and before them was a magnificent chain of mountains, their summits clearly defined and brilliantly illuminated by the setting sun. The highest peak, at 13,400 feet, is that of Mount Victoria which is plainly visible from part of Port Moresby when the clouds lift, usually in the early morning.



Our Spirit
Experience What's Out There

The Australian Militia Forces

The militia had been formed in peacetime and consisted of part-time volunteers. In subsequent times they were called Citizen Military Forces (CMF) and are now known as the Army Reserve. After the outbreak of World War Two, the militia was brought up to strength with men conscripted under wartime regulations. Officially they were only required to serve on Australian soil, but so serious was the military situation in 1942 that the Government changed the law to include Papua and New Guinea which, at the time, were separate Australian Territories. The militiamen were commonly referred to as 'Chocos', a derogatory term deriving from 'The Chocolate Soldier', a well-known musical from pre-war days.

When the Japanese arrived on the north coast of New Guinea in July 1942 to begin the Kokoda Campaign, the only troops on PNG soil were militia. These consisted of:

The 30th BRIGADE comprising:

The 39th Battalion

The 49th Battalion

The 53rd Battalion

The 14th BRIGADE comprising:

The 3rd Battalion

The 36th Battalion

The 55th Battalion

Many scholars have voiced their opinions on the Australian commanders at the time, and there is much condemnation of the fact that inadequately trained 18 year old militia conscripts should have been placed in such a strategically vulnerable position, as opposed to the professional AIF divisions. However, such is the wisdom of hindsight and it should be remembered that virtually the whole of the 8th Division had fallen into captivity in Singapore in February 1942, while the Australian garrison at Rabaul, New Britain (just to the north of PNG) was over-run and either slaughtered or taken captive. There can be little doubt that the Australian commanders feared the same fate probably awaited the Australian garrison at Port Moresby.

Our Spirit
Experience What's Out There

Kokoda Track Campaign Time Line

The campaign took place in two phases. Firstly, the Japanese landed on the north coast and advanced south as the Australians made a fighting withdrawal over a three month period from July to September 1942. Then the Australians advanced and the Japanese withdrew to their original beach-head. This phase took four months with all resistance ceasing on 21 January 1943, exactly six months after the initial landings.

Japanese Advance/Australian Withdrawal

1942	21 July	Japanese land at Buna-Gona-Sananada beach-head area
	23 July	Australians confront the Japanese for the first time at Awala
	28-29 July	First Battle of Kokoda
	8-10 Aug	Second Battle of Kokoda
	12-14 Aug	Battle of Deniki
	26-30 Aug	Battle of Isurava
	2 Sept	Australians withdraw to Eora Creek
	3 Sept	Australians withdraw to Templeton's Crossing
	4 Sept	Australians withdraw to Myola
	7-8 Sept.	Battle of Brigade Hill
	10 Sept	Australians withdraw to Nauro
	11-16 Sept	Battle of Ioribaiwa
	17 Sept	Australians withdraw to Imita Ridge

Australian Advance/Japanese Withdrawal

	24 Sept	Japanese pull back from Ioribaiwa
	12-16 Oct	Battle of Templeton's Crossing
	22-29 Oct	Battle of Eora Creek
	3 Nov	Australians reoccupy Kokoda unopposed
	5-12 Nov	Battle of Oivi-Gorari
	15 Nov	Battle of The Sananada Track commences
	18 Nov	Battle of Gona commences
1943	9 Dec	Honner sends his famous message, 'Gona's Gone'
	2 Jan	Battle of Buna commences
	21 Jan	Major Japanese resistance at Buna and Sananada ceases

Geography

The Kokoda Track crosses the Owen Stanley Mountain Range, running south from the small village of Kokoda to Owers' Corner near Port Moresby some 96 km away.

Battle localities are still spread throughout the jungle, marked by the weapon pits of the combatants, as if the soldiers who sheltered there have shouldered their packs and walked away only a day or two ago. Relics of these terrible times can still be found, testament to the ferocity of the fighting.

The Track is very hard walking, but with good preparation anyone of reasonable health and a strong will can complete it.

Climate

PNG is situated near the equator and is mostly tropical, with our treks running predominantly during the dry periods. Temperatures are not extreme, and in the higher country you can expect cooler nights and warm days. An average daily temperature of between 28 and 32 degrees can be expected on the Track.

Currency

The currency of PNG is the Kina and the present exchange rate is approximately 2:1. It's a good idea to have small denominations (for example 1, 5, 10 and 20K) to carry along the track to pay for drinks, fruit, souvenirs, etc. It is not wise to carry large denominations as villagers won't be able to change large notes. Money can be changed on arrival at the airport in PNG.

Time Zone

All of PNG is in the same time zone as the East Coast of Australia, except for when Australia enters Day Light Saving. During Day Light Saving, PNG maintains the same time zone as Queensland.

Flora and Fauna

The jungle along the Track varies from minute to minute. The beauty of the flora and fauna has to be seen to be believed. Insects, despite the terrible stories of the tropics, are not as bad as their reputation implies, especially with insecticides, repellents and protective clothing.

The Villagers

Along the Track you will meet many local villagers. They will belong predominantly to the Koiari people and will be of the Seventh Day Adventist faith. They are warm, friendly and generous people and are very happy to interact with you, so simply be friendly and respect their home. There are important rules of etiquette governing behaviour, conduct and bargaining – these will be described in a pre-trek training session.

Frequently Asked Questions

What equipment do we require?

We will provide you with the latest in lightweight, , tents, sleeping bags, sleeping mats and cooking gear. A detailed packing list is included in this guide.

What sort of food can we expect?

We will pre-pack specially designed daily meal packages, which are lightweight, rich in energy, nutritious and tasty. There will be ample food provided, however you may choose to supplement your diet with fresh fruits and vegetables along the Track.

What is the pre-trek preparation program?

Our Spirit's exclusive pre-trek preparation program is the result of months of planning and years of experience and has been designed to ensure you're as ready as you can be to take on the challenge.

How safe is New Guinea and the Track?

Our use of native guides and porters gives us an added degree safety on the Track. Local authorities are kept apprised of our trek program and a satellite telephone system is carried to ensure reliable communications for the duration of the trek. We will also walk in teams, employing the buddy system to look after one another.

What happens if I can't finish?

Along the Track there are a number of airfields, so if necessary space on the regular shuttles can be negotiated. Similarly, in the unlikely event you are injured and the rest of the team can't get you to the next village, an evacuation helicopter can be requested via satellite telephone.

Our Spirit
Experience What's Out There