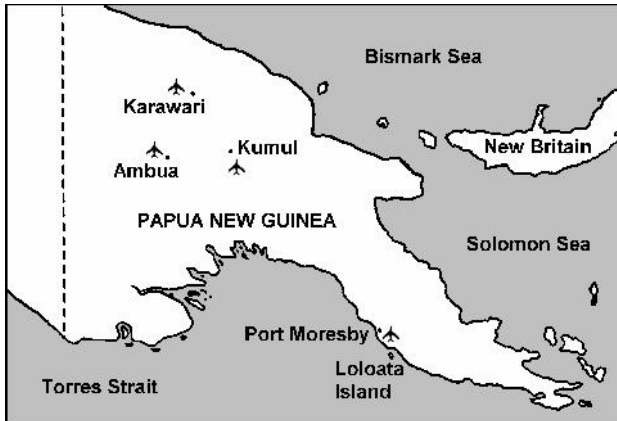


PAPUA NEW GUINEA

birds of paradise and rich culture from the comfort of some great ecolodges



Returning from the unexplored forests and vast trackless swamps that clothe Papua New Guinea, Alfred Russel Wallace described the 'wonderful productions of nature' he had discovered to the Zoological Society of London in 1862. He reported that the birds 'displayed that exquisite beauty and marvellous development of plumage, calculated to excite admiration and astonishment among the most civilised and intellectual races of man'.

Today we are bombarded with countless images of visually stunning birds. Among the shiny metallic pheasants, paintbox-coloured parrots and glistening hummingbirds, one family stands out: *the Birds of Paradise*. It was not surprising, therefore, that customers visiting our stand at the Birdfair voted Papua New Guinea as their number one dream destination.

We have cherry picked some exciting places with superb birds close by, making this trip a memorable holiday and not an extreme expedition. We take short flights (some by private charter) to remote, but very good quality lodges that even have birds of paradise visiting their gardens! We can also witness the tribal cultures that fascinated the likes of Wallace and Attenborough. We can visit the famous Huli tribe and see how they used to make their amazing head-dresses; or the mudmen whose masks are the most fearsome of all. Some of our guides can tell you about the days when their fathers waged war and ate their enemies, but don't worry, this was in the 1950's. On our recce, we found the people charming, we never saw a leech nor many mosquitoes, the accommodation was first class and *Homo sapiens* was not on any menu we looked at!

We will begin our trip in Port Moresby where we will look for the Raggiana Bird of Paradise in Varirata National Park. From here, we will fly to Mount Hagen, home of the Sicklebills and Superb Bird of Paradise. Our private plane will take us to a beautiful lodge at Karawari in the Sepik River Region, where we will explore the area from the comfort of our own boat. The next hop is to Ambua in the Southern Highlands, before a final night's rest at Loloata Island. There is also a chance to extend your tour by joining us in Bali, Java, Flores and Komodo Island.

ITINERARY

PORT MORESBY

Our flight arrives at the capital of Papua New Guinea. We have two nights to recharge our batteries, but there are great things to see. A visit to the university campus should yield the cryptic Papuan Frogmouth, while a wide variety of Australian wetland species include Comb-crested Jacana, Radjah Shelduck, Dusky Moorhen, Spotted Whistling Ducks, Australian Ibis, Masked Lapwing and Australasian Grebe. A day at Varirata National Park gives us the chance to see displaying Raggiana Bird of Paradise, perhaps the most iconic bird of their family. The Barred Owlet Nightjar roosts in



King of Saxony Bird of Paradise

hollow branches, Papuan Needletails fly overhead and a Paradise Kingfisher may dart by. The Hooded Pitohui can also be found here. The recent discovery that it has evolved poisonous skin and feathers that are able to kill creatures the size of a mouse underlines just how otherworldly this place is.

MOUNT HAGEN, CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

A short flight takes us to Mount Hagen, capital of the Central Highlands. Here we spend three nights at Kumul Lodge. The gardens and surrounding forest is well known for attracting birds of paradise like the amazing Blue Bird of Paradise and the Superb Bird of Paradise. The chest of the latter opens to show a dazzling electric blue shield that draws in the sun like

a magnet. The less gaudy Brown and Black Sicklebills are of the same family, their long bills and extravagant tails making up for their lack of colour. Papuan Flowerpeckers, together with Ornate and Rufous-sided Honey-eaters, gather nectar from flowering shrubs. Papuan Parrotfinch may drop in, and we could also see the delightful White-shouldered Fairy-wren.

We can visit the Asaro Mudmen who are actually perfectly nice when they remove their terrifying masks. Legend has it that, having fled their enemy by diving into the Asaro River, they emerged covered in pale mud, resembling evil spirits. Their enemy retreated and the tribe retained this appearance to keep them at bay.

KARAWARI, SEPIK RIVER REGION

On day seven, we will take a private plane to the Sepik River. We will explore the area by comfortable boat. Each bend of the river reveals something new. Yellow-billed, Sacred and Azure Kingfishers sit by the banks while the larger Rufous-bellied Kookaburra watches from higher in the trees. We can expect other waterbirds such as Great-billed Heron, Little Pied Cormorant and Oriental Darter, as well as raptors like Whistling Kite and White-bellied Sea-eagle. Perhaps a Shining Flycatcher, Island Leaf Warbler, Rusty Pitohui, Brown Oriole or Singing Starling will put in an appearance too.

In the evening, starlings, mynahs, fruit doves and parrots fly to roost. The massive blue-black Palm Cockatoos dwarf the Papuan and Rainbow Lorikeets, Eclectus Parrots and Dusky Lories. If you thought pigeons were boring then you have never seen a Victoria Crowned Pigeon. These big powder-blue birds patrol the forest floor like turkeys. Above them perch yet more birds of paradise. The Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise shuffles up and down a vertical twig, waving its 12 feather 'wires' in the face of any female that joins him. The elusive King Bird of Paradise waves two green-blobbed spatule-shaped feathers over its red and gold head while climbing up a vine and wagging its undertail. After three nights here, our pilot returns to take us on another brief hop over the mountains to the Tari Gap.

AMBUA, SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

Ambua Lodge nestles in a hot bed of biodiversity most easily accessed at Tari Gap. The area is synonymous with birds of paradise. The beautiful gardens here hold many different species that include Short-tailed Paradigalla, Lawe's Parotia, and Loria's and Crested Satinbirds. When trees are fruiting, they are visited by figbirds, butcherbirds, cuckoo-shrikes, gerygones and berrypeckers. The well-kept flowerbeds encourage Belford's and Yellow-browed Melidectes to linger.

A trip over Tari Gap allows us to search for shy forest birds like Garnet Robin, Smokey Honeyeater, Red-collared Myzomela and Papuan Scrubwren. Continuing higher, the forest opens to reveal an alpine-like habitat. There are fewer birds here, but scenically it is very impressive. Patches of scrub house the bowers of Macgregor's Bowerbirds. Blue Bird of Paradise, Princess Stephanie's Astrapia or the King-of-Saxony could be a contender for bird of the trip. The latter has amazing eyebrow attachments so long that they frequently get them tangled on tree branches. The Ribbon-tailed Astrapia has the longest tail for its size, of any bird.

We will not ignore the cultural heritage of this incredibly diverse country. The Huli tribe own the land here and have a fascinating culture. It takes two years for a wigman to grow and decorate an extravagant wig. With their necks protected by the skull of a hornbill and a purse made from a cassowary thighbone, the men paint their faces red and yellow before crowning themselves with the most beautiful plumes. Their dances or Sing Sings are a form of respectful greeting and not a war dance, as films would have you believe.

LOLOATA ISLAND

After our time in the swamps and forests, we return to Port Moresby to relax at Loloata Island. A night by the Pacific allows us to catch up with some of the common birds we have missed, perhaps a Friendly Fantail, Willie Wagtail, New Guinea White-eye or Varied Triller. The next day we will fly back to the UK.

Our tour to Bali, Java, Flores and Komodo immediately follows the Papua New Guinea tour. It is possible to join it for a one week or two week birding extension. Alternatively, you can extend your trip by spending a few days longer at Loloata Island or relaxing in Bali.

CLIMATE AND PACE

It will be hot and humid at lower elevations. In the highlands it is cool but pleasant, with a chance of showers at any time. Most days we will make an early start but have a break in the early afternoon, when the temperature is at its highest and the birds are rather quiet. The birding sites are normally close to the lodges, so travelling is kept to a minimum. Basic fitness is all that is required and the pace will be sensible. Much of the birding will be on good trails (with some uphill) and by boat. However, in order to see some of the birds of paradise it is necessary to leave the trail.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full-board accommodation is provided, with two nights at Raintree Lodge, Port Moresby, three nights at Kumul Lodge, Mount Hagen, three nights at Karawari Lodge, Sepik River, four nights at Ambua Lodge, Southern Highlands and one night at Loloata Resort. All offer good quality accommodation with en suite facilities and good food. Lunch will normally be at the lodge but occasionally we will take a packed lunch.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local guides, full-board accommodation (starting with lunch on 19th, ending with breakfast on 1st), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, local transport by mini-bus, boat trips, reserve entrance fees, cultural visits as mentioned above, all internal flights and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Flights from London Heathrow to Port Moresby (via Singapore), using the scheduled services of Singapore Airlines and Air Niugini. Outbound flight departs mid-evening, return arrives back early morning. **It is also possible to fly from Manchester and other UK airports.**

16 nights including three overnight flights:	17th July to 2nd August 2015
Principal leader:	Phil Palmer
Local guides:	provided by each lodge
Maximum group size:	10 clients with one leader and local guides
Cost with discount (if you book before 3rd April 2015):	£7620 per person sharing (£690 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£7770 per person sharing
Deposit:	£600 per person