

**A SHORT NOTE FROM OUR MINISTER FOR CULTURE AND TOURISM**

As the Minister responsible for Tourism in Papua New Guinea, I am delighted to contribute to this brochure on eco-tourism on the Sepik River. In Papua New Guinea we comprehend eco-tourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of the local people.

*This pamphlet was produced by the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management of Divine Word University, Madang in cooperation with WWF Madang and Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau.*



Tambunum



Garamut



I am aware of the great potential the cultural heritage of the Sepik region has for Papua New Guinea, and the intimate relationship between culture and tourism. My mission as Minister is to provide both the support and balance between those aspects of culture that need to be protected and those that need to be developed and promoted by strengthening existing legislation.

The Sepik has some of the most beautiful, diverse and unique species of flora, fauna, a rich, vibrant and living cultural heritage and archaeological sites.

Our visitors can be assured of the holiday experience of a lifetime. It is my earnest hope that the information presented in this publication will persuade you to come, visit and experience the eco-tourism hospitality of the Sepik, a land of adventure and excitement.

HONORABLE DAVID BASUA, MP.  
MINISTER FOR CULTURE & TOURISM



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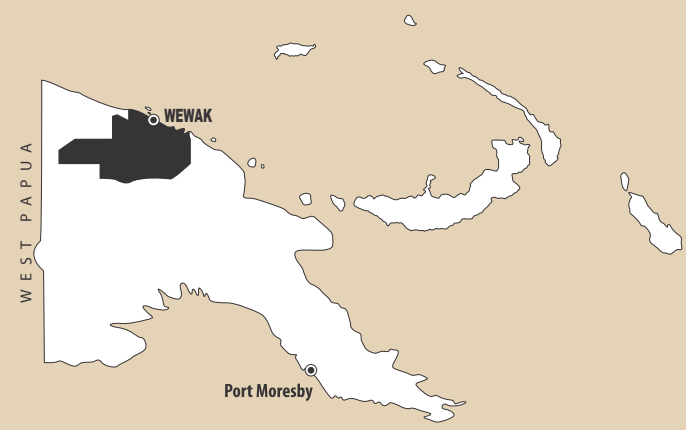
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# Sepik River

NATURE AND COMMUNITY TOURISM

# Snapshots

## SEPIK RIVER



TOTAL LENGTH:	1,126 km
LAND AREA :	80,763 km <sup>2</sup>
POPULATION:	425,000
CLIMATE:	wet season (December - April) dry season (May - November)
AVERAGE ANNUAL RAINFALL:	2,000 to 2,600mm up to 6,000mm (Hunstein Range)
TEMPERATURE:	Lowland 23 to 32°C decrease by about 5.5°C for every 1,000 meters
ECONOMY:	copra, coffee, cocoa crops, vanilla, fish, crocodile

# Nature and Community

## T O U R I S M

This pamphlet aims to help the traveller's interaction with the extraordinary nature and culture of the Sepik River. The Sepik River catchment offers a diverse range of experiences with nature and local communities. With some descriptions in this pamphlet, visitors can participate in the ancient cultures and explore beautiful wilderness areas in ways that package tourism does not allow.

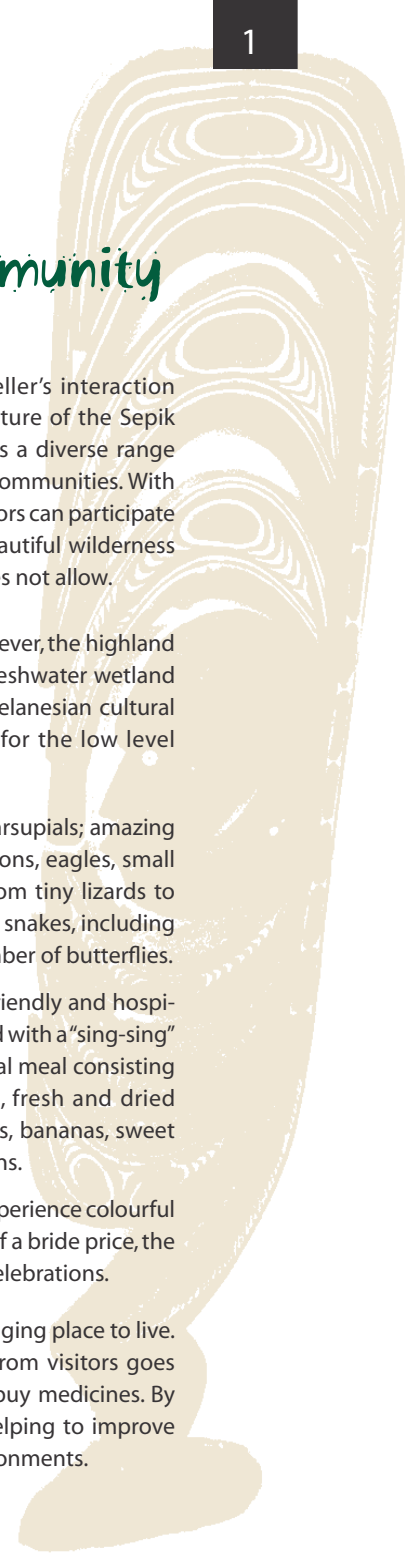
Community tourism travel is basic. However, the highland forest rich in fauna, uncontaminated freshwater wetland systems and of course the 'peaceful Melanesian cultural experience' more than compensates for the low level of luxury.

The animal life consists of a variety of marsupials; amazing bird life such as birds of paradise, herons, eagles, small parrots, cockatoos; reptiles, ranging from tiny lizards to enormous crocodiles; a large variety of snakes, including gigantic pythons and an extensive number of butterflies.

Sepik people in their culture are very friendly and hospitable. Traditionally visitors are welcomed with a "sing-sing" (a celebratory dance) followed by a local meal consisting of "saksak" (flour from the sagopalm), fresh and dried fish, pork, chicken, taro, yams, coconuts, bananas, sweet potatoes and any number of leafy greens.

On special occasions the traveller can experience colourful village ceremonies such as the paying of a bride price, the initiation of young men, or Christmas celebrations.

Rural PNG is beautiful, and it is a challenging place to live. The small income communities earn from visitors goes directly to pay for school fees and to buy medicines. By visiting the villages you are directly helping to improve people's lives and to protect their environments.

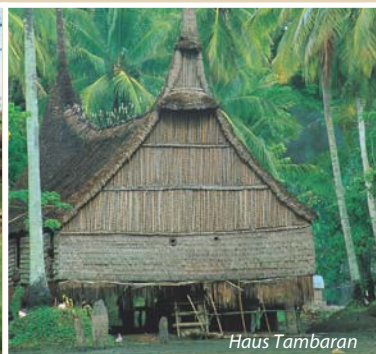


## Cultural Attractions

Artifacts from the Sepik are particularly known for their diversity and distinctive style. Visitors will find a rich national heritage of beautiful masks, pottery, storyboards, bilums, woven handcrafts and unique architecture.



Bride's headdress



Haus Tambaran



Orator's stool



Initiated man

### HAUS TAMBARAN

Among the most important and the most spectacular art objects in the Sepik region are men's ceremonial houses (Pidgin: Haus Tambaran).

In the Middle Sepik region, between Pagwi and Tambunum about half of the villages still have one or more large ceremonial houses (Korogu, Aibom, Wombun, Kamanibit, Timbunke, Govemas, Kapriman, Yanchan, Palimbei).

These buildings are the focus of the social and ceremonial lives of the adult male members of the communities in which they are located. Here, men spend part of most days either chewing betel nut, sleeping or conversing with other men. They publicly debate matters of the clan and village concerns. In the Haus Tambaran men formerly prepared for wars.

Here, the famous male initiation - a trial period for young men to prove their manhood - takes place. Time is spent in the "Haus Tambaran", away from the family, undergoing pain and suffering. Women are traditionally prohibited from entering or even approaching the Haus Tambaran.

Photography courtesy of Fr. Pat Gesch

### CARVINGS

The supporting **wooden pillars** of the Haus Tambaran are often carved to represent human or animal forms. The posts are the private property of those who erect them, and are usually placed near the sitting area of their clans.

Few men possess the skill to carve house posts, and those who do are rewarded with pigs, shell money and feasts. People on the Sepik have a long tradition of making **wooden masks** for initiation and to decorate men's houses. The design of the masks varies depending on the village.

Some are decorated with clay into which shells, hair and pig's teeth are placed. Others are recognisable by their black elongated design. **Orator's stools** are placed inside the house and from the ceiling, **bilums** (string bags) and woven baskets hang on beautifully **carved hooks**. They serve to keep whatever has to be stored off the ground. Of special interest are the **storyboards** of the Keram River, which illustrate daily incidents of village life.

The villagers of Aibom trade their pots and jars with other villages for food, being the only village on the Sepik to specialise in **pottery**.

### MUSIC

Sepik music is famous for its characteristic flute and bamboo trumpet sounds. Big **slit-drums** (Pidgin: "garamut") are beaten to send messages across the rainforest, therefore known as "the telephone of the village".

Visitors can observe the flute players dancing around each other in special hilltop ceremonies during the full moon.

Photography courtesy of Fr. Pat Gesch

WILDLIFE . TREKKING . WALKING

## Natural Attractions

Like other incredible and unspoiled parts of Papua New Guinea, the Sepik catchment is both unique and vast, with a variety of habitats, from dense rainforest to wetlands. This area harbours an exceptional abundance of flora and fauna to discover.



Cuscus



Blythes Hornbill

### WALKS & TREKS

Treks follow traditional routes and visitors can view exotic beetles, orchids, crocodiles and the cultures and traditions of the Sepik people.

The Upper and Middle Sepik area offer a variety of exciting walks.

Ambunti Lodge arranges tour guides for some of the following treks: Wilderness trek from Wagu to Bitara, the nine day Kiap patrol in the Ambunti area as well as bushwalks around the Chambri Lakes, Lake Govemas and Blackwater Lakes.

Treks may not be accessible in all seasons. It is advisable to confirm with local guides.

### WILDLIFE

The region holds some of the most diverse and least described ecosystems on earth. The slopes of the Upper Sepik mountains contain more marsupial species than anywhere on the planet. The Sepik is the largest wild crocodile skin producing area in the world and habitat to the second largest known butterfly - the Goliath bird wing butterfly.

Photography courtesy of WWF Madang/Paul Chatterton

### PROTECTED AREAS

The **Hunstein Range Wildlife Management Area** is a 220,000 hectare protected area. It is located on customary land of the Bahinemo people near Ambunti and was established under the threat of one of PNG's largest logging proposals.

The region supports a remarkably wide range of forest types, extensive tracts of diverse tropical lowlands, mountain forests, important lake systems and some of the finest wetlands and bird habitats in the country. Within these forests the unique "Hunstein's secret" orchid can be discovered.



Hunstein Range

### SEPIK WETLAND PROJECT

Crocodile lovers are welcome to the Sepik Wetland Project, a conserved area that regulates hunting of crocodiles and their eggs.

This protected area, which is about 2 hours by boat down the Sepik River from Ambunti, belongs to the Yauambak community.

Communities are involved through the awareness and understanding of various flora and fauna. When the community looks after and grows different waterweeds, grasses, reeds and lilies, they are helping the fish population increase and, in turn, increase some of their own food sources.

The purpose of the wetland protection areas is to keep the balance between the village lifestyle and the native flora and fauna on the Sepik River.

The people depend on the resources of the river therefore it is important that the populations and quantities are known and regulated.

Photography courtesy of WWF Madang/Paul Chatterton

## Villages along the river

Lining the waterfront along the river are houses built off the ground to avoid rising flood waters. On the river banks lie canoes and boats for easy access. Although visitors receive the same warm welcome, each village is different in its own significant culture.



Angoram



Kandungnum



Raten

**AMBUNTI** is the main station for the Upper Sepik. It offers a post office, airstrip, government offices, police, two markets, several trade stores, two health centers and comfortable accommodation. Authentic masks are sold at Ambunti Lodge at reasonable prices. From here the visitor can walk to the Telikom tower which offers a stunning view.

**ANGORAM** is the gateway to the Sepik River. Basic government facilities, good markets, second-hand cloth sellers and local trade stores provide service for travellers. Tourists can buy needed items such as batteries, fuel for the journey and canned food here. PMV trucks # 2 and 4 operate to/from Angoram/Wewak Town.

**CHAMBRI LAKES** is PNG's second largest lake. The vegetation there is mainly swampy grassland with a vast network of canals and shallow lakes. Trees are sparse and used for building houses, canoes, carvings and household items. Huge boulders, crocodile farms and refreshing streams that flow from the mountains can be seen at **Wombun** village. **Aibom** village is famous for its earthenware pots. The claypots come in various sizes and different creative designs.

**GOVEMAS** is serenely situated beside the Lake Govemas and the famous **Blackwater Lakes**. The village has one of the most beautiful and accessible forests with two cool waterfalls that supply village water. The lake is stained by humid acids through the association with swamplands. During flooding these can form "floating islands" and even puzzle the most experienced traveller due to change in passage.

**KANDUANUM** is an exciting village located 2 ½ - 3 hours by boat from either Timbukne/Angoram. The sensational "sing sing baram" (fish song) and "sing sing tambaran" (spirit song) is performed to appease the spirits of the dead. The latter is usually performed in the final stage of mourning with the intent to bid farewell. Other special celebrations include the yam festival.

**KANGANAMUN** has the oldest Haus Tambaran in the Sepik built in 1945. Initiation rites are strictly followed. Each clan has its own crocodile name for initiation. Two Haus Tambarans were bombed during WWII. A highlight ceremony is the paying of brideprice, where the groom gives up to several thousand kina plus traditional payments for his future wife.

**KARAU** is the first PNG's prime minister's village and the gateway to the famous Murik Lakes. This small village regularly survives the merciless floods from the Bismarck Sea and the Murik Lakes. Village highlights include the Murik baskets, dramas and hunting expeditions. Access can be via local boats from Angoram, Wewak and Bogia in Madang Province, or via cruise boats.

**KOROGU's** Haus Tambaran is a marvellous work by self-taught carvers who built a whole structure of Haus Tambaran on meticulously planted "king posts" (pillars), symbolising the community "Parliament House". The Korogu Haus Tambaran represents eight clans. Each clan designs clan spirits on their house posts and members sit on their clan platform. The lower level of the Haus Tambaran is used for discussions, initiated men access clan secrets in the top level.

**MAMARI** comprises three clans and each has different clan symbols and customs. It has Japanese history whereby



Mendam Murik Lakes



Karau



Angoram

Captain Roji Kimoto, who fought in WWII, came back in the late '70s and donated a 25 horsepower motor that is still kept in the village. War stories can be heard from the village elders who like to retell the stories in the Haus Tambaran.

**MENDAM** is situated beside the Murik Lakes, facing the green and gold mangrove forests. Here the vegetation changes to mangrove swamps which makes gardening difficult. Survival is dependent on the sea, lakes and the swamps. Entertainment is provided by the village theatre group which bases its performance on traditional legends such as tribal fights.

**NIKSEK (APRIL) RIVER VILLAGES** are not easy to reach but they repay the effort handsomely. The forests of the upper Niksek are some of the finest in the Sepik with massive pines emerging above a very rich rainforest understorey. The Sepik hills culture is alive and well and stands in dramatic contrast to the Sepik River people. Highlights include flute music in Kagiru or a trek to the spirit cave and Haus Tambaran in old Bitara. You can reach this area by plane to Bitara, Pukapuki or Niksek, or by a full day canoe journey from Ambunti.

**TAMBUNUM** is a place where carving enthusiasts will enjoy the masterworks. Exquisite carvings including crocodiles, figures, snakes and different birds sell for anything from K2 to K5,000. Carvings are usually named after each clan, and different designs and paintings follow traditional stories. Arts and crafts such as stools, and deep and shallow baskets can also be bought.

**WAGU** sits on a promontory framed by the dramatic Mt. Samsai. This village is a gateway to the Hunstein Range Wildlife Management Area. It offers walks to bird of

paradise display sites, treks to waterfalls, crocodile hunts and overnight trips to the wilderness of the Hunstein River where you can stay in a bush camp.

**WASKUK HILLS** are a short hop from Ambunti. They are a mosaic of lakes, grassland and forest dotted with a few small villages. Communities here are used to tourists and often have spectacular carvings for sale.

**YAUAMBAK** is about a 2 hour boat ride down from Ambunti station. See *Sepik Wetland Project page 5 for details*.

**YERIKAI** (and Garamambu) is a more traditional village which shows many of the traditions of the main river cultures with less of the modern trappings. Tourists can explore the village with its carvings and men's houses or paddle a canoe on placid Bimbal Lagoon. This is a great place to spend a few days to soak up Sepik River culture.

**YIGEI** is surrounded by lakes and is a great place to start your search for waterbirds and crocodiles. An overnight walk can be arranged into the location of the ancestral home of the Bahinemo at Namo in the deep forest.

## Village Guesthouses

Accommodation along the Sepik River is built using traditional materials such as sago palms, kwila and garamut timbers that are commonly found locally. Exciting activities offered include bushwalking, bird watching, canoe carving, crocodile hunting and fishing.



Cletus Maiban



Mamari Guesthouse



Kanganamun Guesthouse

**AMBUNTI LODGE** overlooks the Sepik River with a beautiful view of the sunsets and the surrounding landscape. **Facilities:** private rooms, refrigerator, mattresses, mosquito nets, and modern toilet/shower facilities, electricity. Food can be prepared upon request. **Access:** by plane from Wewak or a two hour boat ride from Pagwi.

**TAMBUNUM LODGE** is located close to the river, which invites for a refreshing bath after a long day's journey. The Tambunum people are particularly proud of their face painting abilities. They apply natural ochre, limestone and charcoal colours using a shredded hibiscus twig as a brush. **Facilities:** six bedrooms, toilet/shower, kitchen. Meals are provided. **Access:** by plane from Timbunke or boat from Pagwi.

**KANGANAMUN GUESTHOUSE**, owned by the villagers, has a natural surrounding with birds singing all day and wild fowls crying when the dusk falls. Just a few meters away from the village, it has a feeling of tranquility. **Facilities:** two rooms, mattresses, mosquito nets, kerosene lamps. Local food upon request. **Access:** located close to Gagairobi, it can be reached by a two hour boat ride downstream from Pagwi.

**YERIKAI GUESTHOUSE** is a small sawn timber guest house in the middle of Yerikai village and is owned by Betty Wabi. **Facilities:** Floor space to accommodate six people, mattresses are available. **Access:** 1 hour canoe ride from Ambunti.

**GOVEMAS GUESTHOUSE** is located at the foot of the Govemas village and beside the magnificent Blackwater Lake region. Surrounded by the mountains, it has an atmosphere of exploration. A beautiful pool in the rainforest provides a refreshing bath. **Facilities:** accommodates up to 18 persons, sleeping materials are not supplied, food upon request.

**Access:** by plane from Wewak to Mariama and by a four hour boat ride from Mindimbit.

**WOMBUN GUESTHOUSE** in Kamanibit is situated only a few steps away from the mighty Sepik River. **Facilities:** one spacious room accommodates ten people. Meals upon request. **Access:** by boat from Angoram (8 hours) and Ambunti (6 hours). The nearest airstrip is in Timbunke where travellers can catch a boat to Kamanibit.

**NUMUNGI GUESTHOUSE** is serenely located on a bay close to Angoram in the lower Sepik area. The front of the guesthouse resembles the Tumbuan mask (Pidgin: large body mask). Along the waterfront are water lilies and water rafts for swimming and moon gazing. Cletus Maiban, who is an expert carver, a traditional architect and an artifacts buyer operates this guesthouse. **Facilities:** five open rooms, which accommodate up to 13 persons. Mattresses, pillows, mosquito nets, tea/coffee making facilities, gas stove, kerosene lamps, laundry, family boat and canoes are available. Local meals upon request. **Access:** by road (5-6 hours from Wewak) and by a one-day boat trip from Wewak via Murik Lakes.

# Contact List

Nature-based Tourism on the Sepik River

## ACCOMMODATION

### Ambunti Lodge

PO Box 83, Ambunti, ESP  
Ph: 858 5151  
via Alois Mateos  
Sepik Adventure Tours  
Ph/Fax: 856 1516

### ADLEF Guesthouse

Contact: Betty Wabi  
PO Box 94, Ambunti, ESP  
via Pacific Islands Ministry  
Ph: 858 5114, 858 5150  
Ph/Fax: 858 5115

### Govemias Guesthouse

Contact: Dominic Smari  
c/o New Tribes Mission  
PO Box 625, Mariama,  
Angoram District, ESP

### Karawari Lodge

Amboin, ESP  
Contact: Mary Jane Murray  
Trans Niugini Tours

### Tambunum Lodge

Contact: Alois Mateos  
Sepik Adventure Tours

### TRAVEL EXPENSES IN KINA:

Village guesthouse: 5-30 per night (Lodges range from 60 to 220 per room)  
Meals: 5-20, Boat hire: 200-250 per day  
Fuel drum: 700-1100 the further upstream the more expensive  
(Two fuel drums are required for Ambunti-Chambri-Govemias-Tambunum-Angoram-Murik Lakes-Angoram)  
Advance booking is highly recommended (up to 3 weeks).  
It is advisable to seek the opinion of some insiders before the trip.  
*Prices are subject to change.*

### Kanganamun Guesthouse

Contact: Michael Jirang  
PO Box 151, Ambunti, ESP  
via Christian Karis  
Ph: 856 1584  
or Susan & Richard Baker  
Last Frontier Arts

### Chimbut Guesthouse

Contact: Susan & Richard Baker  
Last Frontier Arts

### Mindimbit Guesthouse

Contact: Susan & Richard Baker  
Last Frontier Arts

### Numungi Guesthouse

Contact: Cletus Maiban  
PO Box 19, Angoram, ESP  
via Ralf Stuetgen  
Tower Guesthouse, Wewak  
Ph: 856 2395

### Wombun Guesthouse

Contact: James Minja  
Kamanibit village  
c/o Catholic Mission  
Timbukne, ESP

## TOURS

### Last Frontier Arts

Contact: Susan & Richard Baker  
PO Box 51, Wewak, ESP  
Ph: 856 1400  
Fax: 856 1413  
info@pngfrontieradventures.com  
www.pngfrontieradventures.com  
Information on artifacts:  
info@lastfrontierarts.com.pg  
www.lastfrontierarts.com.pg

### Ecotourism Melanesia

PO Box 24, Waigani, NCD  
Ph/Fax 323 4518  
ecomel@online.net.pg  
www.em.com.pg

### Windjammer Beach Motel

Contact: Steven Buku  
PO Box 152, Wewak, ESP  
Tour guide for the Sepik  
Ph: 856 2388, 856 1956

### Trans Niugini Tours

Contact: Mary Jane Murray  
PO Box 371, Mt. Hagen  
Ph: 542 1438  
Fax: 542 2470  
service@pngtours.com  
www.pngtours.com

### Tower Guesthouse

Contact: Ralf Stuetgen  
Information on the Sepik and on artifacts  
PO Box 154, Wewak, ESP  
Ph: 856 2395

### Sepik Adventure Tours

Contact: Alois Mateos  
PO Box 248, Wewak, ESP  
Ph: 856 1516  
Fax: 856 1516  
adventurepng@datec.net.pg  
www.ambuntilodge-  
sepiktour.com.pg

### East Sepik Administration - Division of Tourism & Culture

Contact: Ivan Huasi  
Ph: 856 1295  
Fax: 856 2355  
Provincial Administrator ESP  
Ph: 856 2146  
Fax: 856 2860

### Melanesian Discoverer Cruises

Contact: Anthony Los  
PO Box 707, Madang  
Ph: 852 2766  
Fax: 852 3543  
melanesian@mtspng.com  
www.mtsdiscoverer.com

## AIRLINES

### MAF

Ph: 545 1477, 856 2500

### Islands Nationair

Ph: 472 5277, 325 4055

### Airlink

Ph: 852 3477, 856 3404



# Useful Hints

when travelling the Sepik River

## WHAT TO BRING

Umbrella (to protect you from the sun and the rain)

Torch and batteries, lighter, matches, pocket knife

Sunhat, sunscreen, sunglasses

Insect repellent, coils, net and string (to hang up the net)

Sleeping bag or mat (often there are no mats provided by the guesthouses)

First aid kit and other medicines eg anti malarial. There are health centres located along the Sepik River (Kaningara, Ambunti, Timbunke, Tambunum, Angoram, Marienberg)

Food (there are very few trade stores - these sell canned beef, fish and rice). Bring enough supplies to share with your guide and boatman

Easy to slip off sandals or thongs for boarding canoes and entering houses

Water bottle and toilet rolls

Exercise books and pencils for the school children

## HELP PROTECT THE SEPIK'S NATURE & CULTURE

Take your rubbish out with you

Pay the fees asked for guiding and village stays

Do not use any detergents or washing powder in the rivers

Visit the declared Wildlife Management Areas since communities here have made a commitment to protect their land

# and Tips

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you are staying in villages, always go and meet the council or head men of the village first.

Dress modestly.

It is advisable to wear good boots, long trousers and long sleeves.

Women visitors should understand that it is taboo to show their thighs or to step across food or over men's legs.

Small currency notes should be carried, as it is difficult to find any change.

If you choose to go for a walk, always take someone with you, since they will be familiar with the area and provide help in case of an emergency.

Take personal care of your belongings, and do not leave your valuables in the canoe while you are visiting a village.

Couples should be aware that showing personal affection for each other publicly in most parts of PNG - including the Sepik - is considered unacceptable.

Pictures inside the Haus Tambaran should be taken only after asking permission first, and the Orator's stool must not be touched.

Female travellers should mix with other women in the villages since there is still a strict segregation of the sexes among the Sepik people. In the guesthouses it is widely accepted that male and female travellers share the same room because most guesthouses have no internal divisions.

The Sepik Highway is not considered safe and female travellers should not travel alone.

Beware of crocodiles and snakes in remote areas.

Travelling during the dry season might cause higher fuel costs since many tributaries are not easily accessible.

**WARNING:** This pamphlet is intended only to highlight the local cultures and nature of the Sepik River. All travellers are advised to seek information specific to their needs.



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*Design and Layout by DWU and Madang Visitors & Cultural Bureau  
 Photography by Divine Word University, Madang  
 Other photos supplied by Fr. Pat Gesch and WWF Madang  
 Cover Photograph - Hunstein Range by WWF Madang/Paul Chatterton*

*The production of this brochure was made possible by the kind support of WWF UK and the UK Department for International Development.*