



# Bismarck bound!

If you have a taste for the exotic and some time to spare next November, you might want to find out more about *Club Marine's* spectacular new **Ultimate Getaway** subscriber promotion ...



There were so many times when I was convinced that it couldn't possibly get any more spellbinding, exhilarating or breathtaking. But then it did. Time and time again.

The memories, still fresh, form a kaleidoscope of captivating images. Like the countless times we found ourselves enveloped in swarms of impossibly coloured fish, or having a giant, active volcano materialise *King Kong*-like out of an impenetrable tropical mist. Then there was the dramatic and colourful welcoming ceremony on a stage perched precariously on spindly stilts over the mighty Sepik River, or the time we stumbled across a tiny, freshly born islet lapped by a sea of the most vibrant turquoise. There seemed no end to it, and for at least 10 magical days there wasn't.

I have had the privilege of tasting adventure *True North*-style previously, when I experienced the Kimberley aboard the five-star cruiser a year ago. So I at least had some idea of what lay ahead when I flew into Madang, on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea in mid-November. I knew that the days ahead would be filled with mouthwateringly creative cuisine, an ever-helpful and cheerful crew and, most importantly, adventure on an industrial scale.

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But nothing prepared me for the sights, sounds, scents and smiles that make up what the folks from North Star Cruises call the Bismarck Bonanza. It is impossible to convey in detail all that makes up this rich, diverse and endlessly amazing voyage of discovery. Far better to try and conjure up verbal snapshots of the many encounters, both human and natural, that materialised throughout the cruise.

### AIRPORT ANGLING

An indication of what lay ahead in terms of the relaxed approach to life of the inhabitants of the Bismarck Archipelago came as we touched down at Madang airport following the flight from Cairns. As we slowed along the runway, I glanced outside to see a teenager standing only a few metres away casually fishing in the adjacent waterway. He turned, smiled and waved before returning to the



*Erupting volcanoes, raging rapids and vast rivers are just some of the features of the Bismarck Bonanza.*



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task at hand. I couldn't help wondering how the airport authorities back home would react to an angler on the apron. Not too well I'd imagine ...

Awaiting us at the nearby port was *True North*, and within minutes of our arrival lines were cast off, welcome drinks were dispensed and the bow was pointed north-west in search of adventure on the Bismarck Sea. For the remaining nine days, we would typically steam between destinations during the night, then drop anchor early in the



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morning and spend the day exploring local reefs and islands, or by being hosted with 'sing sings' by local villagers.

The plan was to head west to begin with, aiming for Bagabag Island and its explosive neighbour, the volcanic island of Karkar, before venturing up the Sepik River for two days of sightseeing and village visits. Then it was on to our western-most port of call, the Ninigo Islands for a day of fishing and diving indulgence. The Hermit Islands, including the small village on Luf Island, was next on the agenda before we dropped anchor off Ponam Island for the most colourful and energetic 'sing sing' welcome of our voyage. Continuing east we took in Rambutyo Island, the large island of Manus and the sea-filled volcanic cone of Garove Island and then on to Baia on New Britain, where we explored the Pandi River. The port town of Kavieng on New Ireland completed our circumnavigation of the Bismarck Sea.

Fishing was an option on most days, while scuba divers explored the deep and snorkelers hovered in the shallows above. And hovering even