AUSTRALIAN

GOURMET TRAVELLER

74 RECIPES ON THE TABLE IN 30 MINUTES

Super-fast food issue

Fresh flavours quick smart: summer soups, tasty fish in a flash, cool lettuce recipes & fried rice masterclass

INTO THE WILD
ANDREW DENTON TOURS PAPUA NEW GUINEA

+

THE NEW ULTRA-LUXE AIRPORT LOUNGES

Prawn, corn and tomato salad with shiso and sesame

FEBRUARY 2014 $8.95 NZ $9.70
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DINNER IS SERVED

Fish-finger rolls, LETTUCE, BACON & PEA BRAISE, ZUCCHINI & PISTACHIO SOUP, ***dulce de leche milkshakes,*** TROUT TRAMEZZINI

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Suffering the ***post-holiday blues***? Wondering how you'll manage to get through the day without a ***lunchtime Campari soda*** and a kip?

I'm guessing your holidays were filled with fun, and I'm guessing some of that fun revolved around food – and probably a lot of it. I've just enjoyed a month's vacation on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, way too much of it spent in the *Gourmet Traveller* pop-up restaurant drinking Avani biodynamic shiraz and enjoying Brigitte Hafner's exquisite food, and I'm now battling to adjust (and keep up) with the daily grind of the working week.

It's a good thing, then, to have this Fast Food issue to help ease the transition. It's filled with fresh and fabulous food ideas you, and I, can have on the table in 30 minutes (which means more time on the beach and less in the kitchen, making for happy end-of-summer days). It might be barbecued ocean trout with green mango and shallot salad (see page 104), a prawn and pineapple tom yum (page 124) or braised lettuce, bacon and peas (page 129). Momofuku head chef Ben Greeno brings his unique talents to the issue with his take on fast food (we say "yes" to zucchini and mortadella orecchiette with pecorino; page 113), and if even these sound like a bridge too far, you could try not cooking at all (page 94).

In our travel section, I'm delighted to welcome Andrew Denton to the pages of *Gourmet Traveller* for the first time. Denton travelled to Papua New Guinea – where his parents lived before he was born – and discovered raw tropical beauty, a resilient and happy people, and what it means to "become crocodile". You can read his sometimes confronting piece on page 144.

Happy February,

Anthea Loucas

ON OUR COVER *Prawn, corn and tomato salad with shiso and sesame (page 113) Recipe* ***Ben Greeno*** *Photography* ***Ben Dearnley*** *Styling* ***Emma Knowles*** *Merchandising* ***Rhianne Contreras***

PHOTOGRAPHY SHARYN CAIRNS (ANDREW DENTON) COVER: KOSKELA WHITE SERIES PORCELAIN PLATE FROM KOSKELA. DANTE TRAY FROM COUNTRY ROAD. BLACK SALT DISH FROM GOLDEN BROWN FOX. ALL OTHER PROPS STYLIST'S OWN. STOCKISTS P175

WHAT WE'RE EATING

OUR FAVOURITE PLATES OF THE MONTH

CEVICHE OF SCALLOPS AND TOMATO
Shane Osborn's raw scallops paired with fennel confit, Japanese tomatoes, lemon oil and ginger is a serendipitous meeting of East and West. It's so delectable that it has given a whole new meaning to tartare. *St Betty, Shop 2075, IFC Mall, Central, Hong Kong, +852 2979 2100* TONY TAN

NASI AYAM BETUTU
About halfway between Seminyak and Ubud sits a tiny warung that serves some of Bali's best ayam betutu: spicy chicken slow-roasted in coconut oil. It's served with boiled egg, rice, green beans, peanuts and sambal matah, a combination of raw shallot, lemongrass, chilli, garlic and lime juice, for extra fire. *Warung Liku IV, Jalan Raya Sempidi, Badung, Bali, +62 361 7470 306* MAYA KERTHYASA

BURRATA AND FENNEL
Rabbit liver and hazelnut on toast. Fat, garlicky legs of king crab. Scallops with a spicy XO sauce. Pleasures of the flesh abound at Singapore's hottest barbecue joint, yet Perth-born chef Dave Pynt is just as adept working with fruit and veg. A delicious case in point: this thrilling mash-up of silky burrata, bright citrus and sweet, charry fennel. *Burnt Ends, 20 Teck Lim Rd, Singapore, +65 6224 3933* MAX VEENHUYZEN

CONTRIBUTORS

ANDREW DENTON

Andrew Denton is a writer, broadcaster and TV producer, responsible for such programs as *Enough Rope* and *The Gruen Transfer*. He's also the man who first brought *The Chaser* to our screens, "for which I'm wanted in The Hague". His account of a cruising adventure in Papua New Guinea on page 144 is a story he was destined to write. "My parents lived in PNG before I was a glint in their eye, and I grew up with tales of our exotic neighbour. Even all these years later, I can see why it held a certain magic for them."

WILSON CHUNG

A London-based cook and writer specialising in all things Asian, Wilson Chung was born into a restaurant family in Sydney – a background, he says, which has set him up very well for a life working in food. Though he grew up with the pastries and buns he covers in this issue's guide to Chinese baked goods, Chung says he gave himself a thorough refresher before putting pen to paper – just to make sure. "I basically ate my body weight in bread". Read all about it on page 80.

RICHARD COOKE

Sydney-based writer and broadcaster Richard Cooke continued his offbeat romance with the Swiss in Zurich to research our city hitlist on page 167. "Zurich has a reputation as a bankers' playground with a shopping strip for a soul, but it's surprising how many of the city's pleasures are free – chocolate, swimming in the lake or the river, the mountain scenery. Just try not to take a taxi. And if you must, don't look at the meter. It ruins the scenery."

FEBRUARY 2014

travel

Savour the sensory pleasures of Margaritas in Mérida, the fragrant fields of Grasse and sing-sings in PNG.

Mérida, mañana Hot, sleepy and sensuous, the capital of Mexico's Yucatán state is rich in culture, unique in flavour and beguiling for travellers. Emma Sloley falls under its spell.

Last seen in the Sepik Exotic, thrilling, powerful – Papua New Guinea is all these things and more, as Andrew Denton discovers when he explores the tribal heart of the mysterious Sepik River.

Scents of place Toni Mason follows her nose to the famed flower fields surrounding the perfumed Provençal town of Grasse.

The waiting game Whiling away time between flights has never been so swish as airline lounges head upmarket, writes Kendall Hill.

LAST SEEN IN THE sepik

Exotic, thrilling, powerful – Papua New Guinea is all these things and more, as ***Andrew Denton*** discovers when he cruises around the pristine islands off its northern coast and explores the tribal heart of the mysterious Sepik River.

PHOTOGRAPHY **SHARYN CAIRNS**

BAY WATCH
Children at a "sing-sing" on Ponam Island. Opposite: Christmas Bay, Bagabag Island.

I am kneeling on the grass, tensed, my right arm raised in the air, waiting to be publicly whipped. Above me stands one of the men of Noipus, a microscopic dot of a village on one of the marginally larger dots of islands that make up Papua New Guinea's Bismarck Archipelago. Over his head, a stick longer than his body is poised. We are a study in contrasts. Me: submissive, doubtful, white, sweating. He: aggressive, certain, dark, cool. As I wait for the blow, a thought crosses my mind: "Well, this is exotic."

It is my second day, and first time, in Australia's nearest neighbour. After an endearingly shambolic welcoming "sing-sing", the men of Noipus are demonstrating the "whipping ceremony", an initiation ritual that involves one man cracking a two-metre-long solid reed across the upraised arm of another. Each crack reverberates like a rifle shot and I've noticed even the locals flinch as they take their turn.

It is this that I have, literally, put my hand up for (something about "when in Noipus") and I have serious doubts that the protection offered me – a mouthful of chewed-up leaves and coral lime spat onto my wrist in a green band – will offer any protection at all.

Using the full weight of his muscled body, my initiator belts the stick unerringly across the thin green shield on my arm. It wraps completely around my wrist and then snaps, the force of it like a concentrated punch. It hurts, though not as much as I had feared. To complete the theatre I pause for a moment, arm still in the air, then fall face first on the ground. Laughter. Applause. Am I initiated?

An hour later, what had been a red welt on green skin has entirely disappeared and, with it, all trace of pain.

Over the next 10 days I will discover that Papua New Guinea has other skins, each a cause for wonder.

I'm aboard *True North*, a luxury Australian cruise ship built to take no more than 36 passengers to remote wilderness areas. A chartered jet has flown us north from Cairns to Kavieng, the capital of New Ireland Province, which lies 860 kilometres north-east of Port Moresby. From here, for the next 11 days, we will sail south, then due west, along the Bismarck Archipelago, through the Admiralty Islands and, finally, to Papua New Guinea's most remote territories, the Hermit and Ninigo islands, before turning south once more for the mainland and the tribes of the Sepik River.

The first week is a checklist of tropical clichés. White sand? Check. Palm-fringed islands? Check. Reckitt's-blue seas clear to the bottom? Check.

SET SAIL

Above: the beach near Noipus village in the Bismarck Archipelago; locals on Garove Island. Opposite: *True North* moored at Garove Island; a Garove boy in traditional dress.

Pristine coral reefs? Check. Volcanic peaks and craters? Again, check. Sunsets to make a poet weep? Check.

It comes as no surprise to learn that American movie star William Holden was so enamoured of these islands' untouched beauty he tried to buy several of them in the 1970s. What is surprising is that, 40 years later, the word "untouched" is still not out of place.

It is difficult to recall the last place I travelled where there was virtually no sign of tourist infrastructure. But it is not the blessed absence of Visa, Coca-Cola, backpackers' hostels or WiFi that most delights. What makes this experience shine is an unambiguous sense that the warmth and welcome of the people we meet is real.

Nowhere is this more apparent than Ponam Island, a dead-flat sliver of land – two and a half kilometres long and 360 metres across at its widest– that sits just off Manus Island. From the air, Ponam resembles nothing so much as an aircraft carrier, which, during World War II, it effectively became, turned into an airstrip by the Allies as they drove the Japanese, inch by bloody inch, from the Pacific.

Our welcome today could not be further removed from that grimness. Even before our boats reach the shore we are swamped by waves of rhythm and colour. On the beach a phalanx of women and children are dancing to the beat of unseen garamut slit drums that echo across the island. Stepping ashore we are each taken in hand by children whose bodies, like those of the women, are adorned in intricately woven outfits of beads, shells, plants and twine.

As we are led the dancing never stops: rhythmic movement from foot to foot set to a continuous drumbeat, ending on every eighth beat with a loud cry of "aaiii!", a twist of the body and what may, or may not, be some kind of pelvic thrust.

In our sweaty, rhythmless way, we try to keep up but it hardly matters. The children guide us to the triangle at the centre of the village where we are surrounded by warriors, women and children of all ages, dancing with all the excitement of Christmas morning. Beyond them, what must surely be the rest of Ponam's population revels in the show, laughing and calling out in shared delight.

It is such an overwhelming, raucous, heartfelt welcome that I feel unexpectedly emotional. Others, passengers and even crew, confess to tears. In a world where so much travel is sliced and diced into packages, this feels different.

The welcome at Ponam, while more spectacular than other islands, is typical. Wherever we go, people are excited to meet us. Ships don't come by often and our visit inspires both curiosity and pride. Simon Tewson, *True North's* local guide, has lived in Papua New Guinea almost all his life: "This is probably the most white people they've seen for a long time in one hit. For us to go there, that means so much to them. Forget what we spend or donate, they're more interested in, hey, that boat came to our village.">

TIME AND TIDE
Above: expedition craft at sunset. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Ponam Island "sing-sing"; a king suite aboard *True North*; at home in the Hermit Islands.

And people are keen to talk: 21-year-old Leroy dreams one day of opening a bar for tourists. Barun, also 21, has a chemistry degree but no work. "It is not what you know but who you know in this country," he says, sadly. Mina and Vincenzia ask me if I am Catholic and, when I tell them I was born so but am not any more, look at me astonished – how is that possible? – then burst out laughing.

Here is another of Papua New Guinea's skins: the missionaries – Germans, British, Irish, Australian – sowed their seeds deep in these islands. It's like walking into a tropical edition of the Old Testament. Wherever I go men welcome me with names such as Elijah, Isaiah and Abraham, even Judas.

And just beneath that skin lies an even older one. On one island the primary school has a list of denominations on the wall of Class 4a. At the bottom, after Catholics (2), Baptists (1), and Seventh-day Adventists (6), sits Wind Nation (2). "What is Wind Nation?" I ask the teacher. "They believe the wind is a spirit," comes the easy reply.

For all the tropical bounty and beauty, it is clear that life here is also fragile. At night, villagers can see the lights of the Filipino fishing boats and Chinese supertrawlers 20 kilometres offshore, sucking in marlin, dolphin – whatever they can – in industrial amounts, canning them on board, then moving on. Even if the locals could afford the petrol to go and remonstrate, they know they have no power.

Many of these islands are so low in the water that, if someone left a tap running, they would disappear. On Ponam, I ask another son of the Bible, Luke, if he has seen any sign of the water rising. He considers this for a moment, then replies: "We have probably lost three-eighths of our island."

Yet resilience, says Tewson, is what best characterises Papua New Guineans. "The people here are pretty stubborn," he says. "Come back in 20 years' time, there might be salt water but they'll be living on stilts." He may be right. When I remark on the precarious position of huts just centimetres above the water, someone responds, "Yes, but I have the best view."

The sea is also the shining thread that binds these lives together. They live from it, hunting dugongs ("the pigs of the sea") from canoes, spearing lobsters on the reef, closing their pandanus-leaf traps around fresh hauls of sweetlips. And they live on it; we are constantly surrounded by a flotilla of tiny, fragile, wooden canoes, kids and adults alike intensely curious about our impossibly large boat.

The tropical waters embrace us, too. As a first-time diver I am spoilt by, reputedly, some of the best diving in the world. So much is happening, in such clear water, it feels like flying in a sky full of fish. At the famous Krakafat Reef, I have to fight the urge to take the regulator out of my mouth and say to the others, "Are you guys seeing this?" For the snorkellers, it's as though they are swimming in a warm aquarium.

After eight days of island light, we turn due south for the turbid waters of the Sepik River and a sense that we are swapping *Blue Lagoon* for *Heart of Darkness*.

Although missionaries set up shop in the Sepik a long time ago, the spirit world is still very real here. The people are different as well: happy to see us, but cooler than their island cousins. On the river, with little income and few opportunities to trade, our presence means business.

At Angoram, the oldest and largest settlement on the Sepik, we are met by competing dances from rival clans within the one tribe. Not the warm and cheerful welcomes we have become used to, these are aggressive and muscular. To one side, men and women of the eagle totem, with ochre-smeared faces, bodies adorned with cassowary feathers, pig's tusks, dog's teeth, shells and plants, chant and stamp their way towards us, their leader wearing a grotesque, outsized spirit mask – and Pokémon slippers (nothing goes to waste here). To the other, the crocodiles do battle: two enormous puppets made from feathers and painted wood, each carried aloft by two men, surrounded by spear- and drum-wielding villagers in multi-coloured grass skirts and pig's tusk headdresses. It feels ancient. Tribal. Serious. It is also thrilling.

Our next stop, 30 kilometres up the river, is more confronting: the village of Kambaramba. If *Mad Max* had been set on the water, this is what it would look like. A collection of maybe 80 ramshackle huts made>


TRUE
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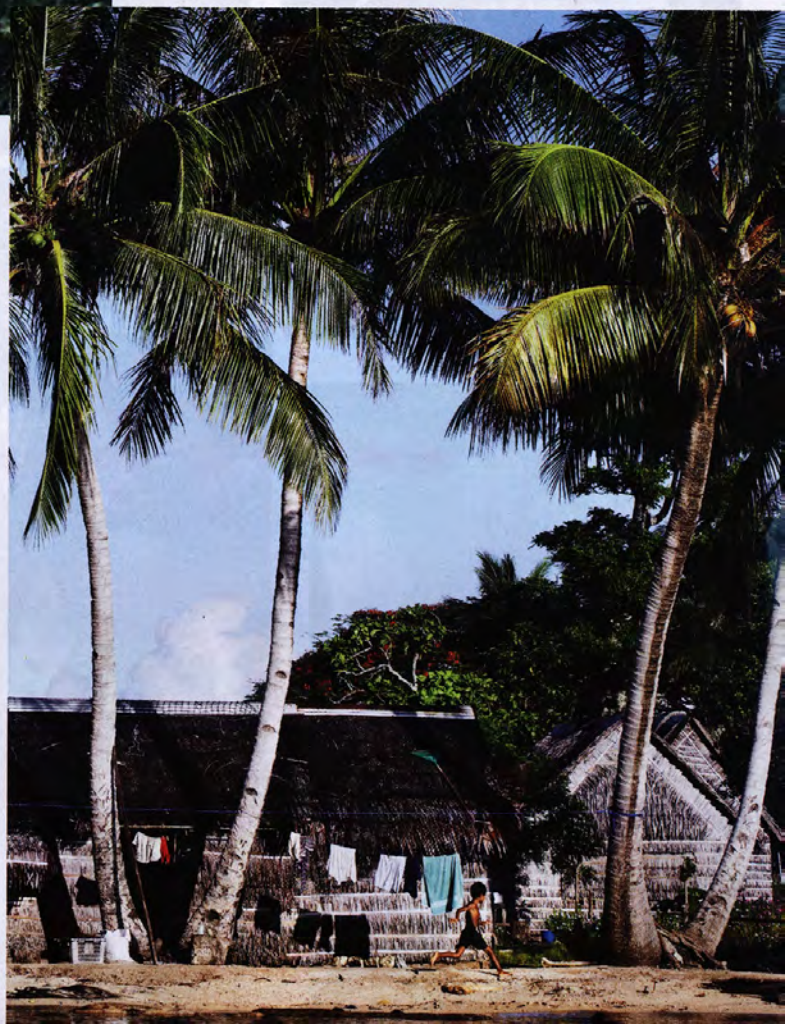

of sago palms but open to the elements – including the malarial mosquitoes that killed 37 people here last year – the village crouches shakily on stilts above the brown, still water. Children are in tattered hand-me-downs, dogs and pigs share ramps where crocodiles can't reach them.

It feels desperately poor. And sad. Later, we find out how sad. The people of Kambaramba were forced onto the water by other tribes and the only things they had to trade for the crops they could no longer grow were their women. They are still an outcast people today. A shadow tribe of ill repute. It is a disquieting visit and there is a feeling of relief when we head upriver to Tambanum, famous for its art.

This is a happier, healthier place. They haven't seen tourists for a long time and their carvings are exceptional. The spirit house, where racks of skulls were once kept as trophies, is itself a work of art: an intricately thatched roof nearly two storeys high, supported by a framework of giant carved and painted poles, topped by a six-metre-long carved eagle totem.

In Palumbi, the most powerful spirit is the crocodile and we head 20 minutes further upriver to see just what that means.

We see a single hut, isolated from the rest of the village behind a high screen of woven palm leaves. Here, for the past six weeks, is where the crocodile initiation has taken place.

Inside the screen we see five young men, naked but for grass skirts and a covering of clay on their bodies and heads. We see older men in ceremonial outfits of leaves and shells, wearing striking headdresses made of feathers. We see their skin. They have become crocodile. Across their backs, buttocks, arms and around their nipples are hundreds of raised scars: crocodile markings.

Village elders revived this old initiation ceremony in the past few years. They put the word out to younger men, some at university, offering the chance to be initiated like their forefathers and there has been no shortage of takers.

They are held down and their skin cut deep, up to a centimetre, with a razor in the pattern of the crocodile. It can take a whole day to carve one man's back. Then, after a few days' break, the front. This is the worst part. The men can't look away and the carving around the nipples is excruciating.

Tewson has been to one and says he's never heard people scream so loud.

The skin is then beaten, forcing the blood out; then clay and mud are jammed into the wounds to make them protrude. For the first week or two while the wounds are open, the only salves are stinging hibiscus oil, clay to keep mosquitoes at bay, and betel nut to take away some of the pain.>

WATER WAYS
Below: life on the water in Kambaramba village. Opposite: clockwise from top left, children in the Ninigo Islands; the Sepik River; stilt houses; a Ponam Island "sing-sing"; traditional carving.

We turn due south for the turbid waters of the Sepik River and a sense that we are swapping *Blue Lagoon* for *Heart of Darkness*.

Think of a spirit house as the ultimate in men's clubs. Men spend much of the day sitting around smoky fires, playing garamut drums, putting the world to rights. On some evenings they dance wearing full-length spirit costumes and masks, others playing flutes for effect. The women and children of the village, convinced these are actual spirits, live in fear of them and stay well away.

It could all be quaint if not for the knowledge that if you pulled out the supporting posts you would find the bones of enemies buried alive here, the life force of their souls giving the place its spiritual strength.

For our final day on the Sepik, we take *True North's* chopper ("eggbeater bilong Jesus Christ" if you believe the local joke) upriver to Palumbi. Here is where all the skins of Papua New Guinea fall away to reveal a world of sorcery, headhunting and cannibalism.

Climbing the rickety log ladder of the spirit house, we enter a smoky half-lit space filled with carved statues and masks of competing grotesquery. Giant tambaran spirit costumes are suspended from the ceiling. Men sit quietly in the shadows coolly appraising our goggle-eyed looks as we try to take it all in. It is easy to imagine the many masks hanging in the dimness as human heads and, in times not so long past, they might have been.

One man points to a notched rope suspended from the ceiling. Each notch, he says, represents a head that has been hunted by this village. Tewson tells me that headhunting and cannibalism were still happening on the Sepik in the 1950s and that to eat another human being was to get their power.

For two to three months the men stay hidden behind the screen; food is left outside for them by women who hear their screams and think the crocodile is doing its work. Traditionally, this was the start of them becoming men. Their next duty would be to go murder someone and bring their head back to the village. Nowadays, they skip that part.

It sounds barbaric, it's certainly brutal, but the markings are strangely beautiful and, for these young men, they carry weight.

"It makes them powerful," says Tewson. "You might find one of these men in a court of law one day, he might be a defence lawyer, and someone will look at those marks and he'll get a lot of respect out of it because they know how much pain he's gone through." This, less than two hours' flight from Australia.

After three days we emerge from the darkness of the Sepik for one more day of play in the warm, crystal-clear waters of Bagabag Island.

Dark and light, it has been a journey of rare natural beauty and authenticity. These people have an unbroken link with their land and traditions. Their welcome, cool or warm, is unmistakably theirs, not a construct for us.

Long after we have returned home, a moment stays with me. We are on Ponam Island and word has got around that one of the passengers, whose birthday it is, has made a donation towards the reconstruction of their church. Before he can quietly leave, the children surround him on the beach and sing happy birthday. Then, spontaneously, they burst into their national anthem – "O arise all you sons and daughters of this land, let us sing of our joy to be free." Their harmonies soar and in their wide smiles and shining faces there really is joy.

If silence can settle on a beach it does then for us. For those who have so little, to give so richly to we who have so much is powerful. Deeply moved, we make our farewell, a word of pidgin saying it all: Thankyoutrue. GT

It sounds barbaric, it's certainly brutal, but the markings are ***strangely beautiful*** and carry weight.

MARK OF A MAN
From top: crocodile markings of initiation on a man at Palumbi village; a mother and child on the Sepik; children on the riverbank. Opposite: a view of the Ninigo Islands from *True North*'s helicopter.

ALL ABOARD

The luxury cruiser *True North* is small enough to nose into remote, shallow and wild spots and with six expedition craft aboard passengers can go pretty much anywhere. But the vessel is big enough to have two chefs working around the clock, an observation lounge, comfortable staterooms, a sundeck and an alfresco bar (and, if you must, satellite phones and WiFi).

A six-seater helicopter parked on the top deck is the icing on the cake, giving us a bird's-eye view of everything from the detention centre at Manus Island to dugongs and dolphins in the crystal-clear water; we even fly inside the crater of a volcano. It's also the only way to reach the village of Palumbi for our extraordinary last day on the Sepik River.

Up to 36 passengers and 20 all-Australian crew head out in the expedition boats twice, sometimes thrice daily, for exploration, fishing, diving and snorkelling. The visits to villages, the highlight of the trip for many, are well-handled. There is no tourist infrastructure, so every village visit is negotiated as we go. It's *True North*'s third season on this route, though it's been visiting PNG since 2005, and it's clear the company takes seriously a self-imposed obligation to supply the communities visited with things they need, such as books, clothes and medicine.

Based in Broome since 1987, *True North*'s stamping ground is Western Australia's Kimberley coast. The company also cruises to West Papua and select beauty spots along the Australian coast, including Kangaroo Island and Sydney Harbour.

THE FINE PRINT

GETTING THERE
True North will run two 11-night **Sepik Soiree** expedition cruises in November 2014. Each costs from $16,695 per person in an ocean-class stateroom, including return charter flights from Cairns to Kavieng, where the first cruise begins, and return from Madang (and vice versa for the second cruise). **Qantas** has direct flights to Cairns from Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin, with daily connections from all other capital cities. ***True North*** is equipped with a helicopter, diving gear and a platform; flights from $230. *(08) 9192 1829, northstarcruises.com.au. For more on PNG, visit papuanewguinea.travel/australia.*