

Surfers' paradise

Robert Upe, Craig Tansley and John Borthwick track down some great places to surf in PNG and the Pacific.

PICTURES: CHRIS PEEL, SAPING; JOHN BORTHWICK, PNG JAPAN TRAVEL TOURISM FUJI; TOURISM SOLOMONS, POHNPEI SURF CLUB, SWILLY

“

Step from the door, let the creek current carry you out to the break, and then surf until dusk.

”

Charging... a surfer catches a right hander at Ulingan Bay, opposite Tupira Surf Club, in Madang Province (above); beachfront huts at Vanimo (right).

NUSA ISLAND RETREAT, PNG

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

There's boat access to several nearby reef breaks, which typically break at 3–5 feet, sometimes up to 6–8 feet. Surfer numbers are capped and most likely you'll be surfing with just five or six others. As for all of PNG, the best surf is from November to April.

STAYING THERE

Nusa Island Retreat (nusastrandretreat.com) is on a small island across the harbour from Kavieng. The laidback retreat has 11 traditional bungalows, some

sleeping up to six. The best are overwater and include verandahs with hammocks and en suites. There are also beach bungalows, with a mix of en suites and shared bathrooms. Dinner and drinks are in an open-plan restaurant/bar with a sand floor. The evening buffet includes fresh seafood – outstanding every night during our visit.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

The retreat shares the island with a village, where you're welcome to mingle or buy handicrafts. There's a beautiful beach for swimming opposite the restaurant, or snorkel over wrecks (some of them sunk

during World War 2). Kayaking, fishing and diving are also on the cards.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Kavieng. Nusa Island Retreat picks surfers up at the airport for a short road and boat transfer to the island. – RU

TUPIRA SURF CLUB, PNG

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

PNG'S inaugural international surfing event – a round of the 2017 World Longboard Championship – was conducted at Ulingan Bay, opposite Tupira Surf Club. That

such an event can be staged here is testimony to the consistency and quality of the waves. There are nine reef breaks in the area, including a right-hand point break.

STAYING THERE

Tupira Surf Club (tupira.com) offers back-to-basics accommodation in a guesthouse that sleeps 12, six twin rooms and a two-bedroom bungalow. Fresh and organic food is on the menu.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Go fishing, catch prawns at night, hang out with the locals or go bird watching to see PNG's famed bird of paradise.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Madang. It's a two-hour 180-kilometre road trip north from Madang to Tupira Surf Club. – RU

VANIMO SURF LODGE, PNG

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

PNG's far north is blessed with uncrowded waves. There are at least eight reef breaks and two beach breaks close to Vanimo (and many more a bit further away). All levels can find a wave here, whether it's easy Town Beach or Lido Point, a right-hander that can peel for 150 metres. Seasonal



swells originate from Philippine monsoons and North Pacific storms and range in size from 2–10 feet. There are plans for a round of the WSL longboard championship to be held at Vanimo this year.

STAYING THERE

Vanimo Surf Lodge (vanimosurflodge.com) has traditional beachfront huts facing Lido Point. The lodge has capacity for 16 guests but rarely

achieves those numbers. There is an adjoining shower and toilet block, as well as a bar and eating area with a table-tennis table and hammocks. Hire boards are available. The food is fresh and local, whether it's from the sea or land.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Waterfall bushwalks, village tours and beach or boat fishing are available.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Vanimo. Vanimo Surf Lodge provides airport transfers. – RU ▶



Surfers' paradise

At anchor ... the PNG Explorer in quiet waters; Fatboys in the Solomon Islands (below).



DALOM, PNG

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

The wave at Dalom is an easy beach break. Beside a creek and surrounded by jungle, a little guesthouse sits right on a white-sand beach. Step from the door, let the creek current carry you out to the break, and then surf until dusk. You can explore in both directions along the coast for more challenging waves, such as further south at Rubio Plantation Retreat (newirelandsurf.com).

STAYING THERE

Dalom Village Guesthouse (villagehuts.com) has six basic rooms and several bungalows. The meals are filling but simple, mainly fish, rice and vegetables; bring a few chocolate bars and other treats, if so inclined. The villagers are very friendly but, this being a traditional rural culture, don't expect nightlife.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Other activities include beach fishing, trekking and cycling.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Kavieng. Dalom is 170 kilometres south of Kavieng on the Boluminski Highway, so arrange a transfer when booking your accommodation. The highway runs the length of New Ireland Island, tracking beside the sea – perfect for surf checks as you drive. – JB

PNG EXPLORER

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

You'll be accessing deserted breaks by small ship along the New Hanover and New Ireland coastline in the Bismarck Archipelago. Surfers have a choice of breaks – some, like The Slab (shallow right-hander) are for experts, but mostly these are waves for intermediates.

STAYING THERE

While the cabins are fairly simple and functional, there's nothing downgrade about staying on the PNG Explorer (pngsurfaris.com) – there's even an espresso machine on board serving fresh-ground PNG coffee. Passengers gather for communal seafood dinners on deck, and beers are served cold at sunset.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Fish in waters that have hardly been touched by commercial fishing. Marlin jump as you troll; if you can't catch a 10-kilogram plus game fish, throw your rod away. You can also snorkel, visit



traditional villages and dive World War 2 wrecks (Japanese and American planes).

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Kavieng, where the PNG Explorer is based. The good folk from the PNG Explorer will pick you up at the airport. – CT

PAPATURA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

Papatura Island Retreat is on the shore of a pristine, out-of-the-way, jungle-lined bay. Access to nearby empty reef breaks is by boat with a guide/driver. Some of the breaks are within 10 minutes and include Anchovies, a right-hander that can barrel, and Zoli's, a fun left-hander. Papatura waves are usually in the range of 3–6 feet and are best surfed from November to April.

STAYING THERE

Papatura (papatutura.com) has a casual barefoot vibe with traditional-style basic huts. Some are on the water's edge and others are scattered in the jungle, connected by boardwalks. Life here revolves around the open-sided dining/kitchen hut, where three meals (including crab and crayfish) are served daily at shared tables.

There's also a bar, where everyone gathers after the day's surfing to swap stories. Longboards and shortboards are available free if you don't bring your own.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Fishing, snorkelling and village visits are available. ➤



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HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Honiara five times weekly. From Honiara, connect with Solomon Airlines for a 60-minute flight to Santa Isabel Island in a Twin Otter that lands on a grass strip, followed by a short boat ride. – RU

FATBOYS, SOLOMON ISLANDS
WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

The Fatboys resort is near Gizo, with several reef breaks accessed by boat. Two of the major breaks are Paelonghi, a fast right-hander, and Titiana, a strong left-hander. There are no crowds here and the few local surfers we meet are welcoming.

STAYING THERE

Fatboys Resort (solomonislands fatboys.com.au) consists of comfortable en suite bungalows along the water's edge, and an overwater restaurant/bar accessed along a jetty. The food is simple and excellent. You can eat crayfish every day without going broke. There's a snooker table in the bar and plenty of lounges where you can catch the sea breeze with a gin and tonic.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Swimming, snorkelling and fishing are available. Kennedy Island is a small and uninhabited island you can visit for a swim or picnic. It's where John F Kennedy (before his presidency) hid when the Japanese forces sank his PT boat during World War 2.



HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Honiara. From Honiara, connect with Solomon Airlines for a one-hour flight to Gizo and an eight-minute boat journey to Fatboys. – RU

PALIKIR PASS, MICRONESIA
WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

Palikir Pass (P-Pass) has a fearsome reputation, and it's true that pro surfers from around the world suddenly show up when forecasts indicate a big swell. But locals will tell you this only occurs once or twice a year and that this wave usually breaks at 3–6 feet. Like all breaks in this area, it can only be accessed by boat.

STAYING THERE

It's a 15-minute boat ride from the Pohnpei Surf Club (pohnpeisurfclub.com) to P-Pass. There are eight lagoon-front rooms (motel style) at the club, with mod cons like AC, TV and Wi-Fi. The bar and restaurant, renowned for its sushi, are where you want to hang out.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Pohnpei is blessed with waterfalls, many easily accessible. It is also the site of the ancient stone ruins of Nan Madol. Diving and war history are also on the agenda.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Pohnpei. It's a 10-minute drive from the airport to Pohnpei Surf Club. – RU ▶

Chilling out ... the restaurant and bar at Pohnpei Surf Club.

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In the groove ... a PNG local gets some wave action (this page); a surf shop at Baler in the Philippines (opposite).

BREAKAS BEACH RESORT, VANUATU

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

Vanuatu will never compete with French Polynesia or Fiji for waves. But there's a fun high-tide wave right in front of this resort that's a great right-hander for intermediates.

STAYING THERE

That's the best part: this is a resort set around a wave. Paddle straight out from Breakas Beach Resort (breakas.com), then keep your eye on conditions for your next surf from the pool. Villas look out on the break.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

You're 10 minutes from Port Vila,

Vanuatu's capital, home to the island's best bars and restaurants. Only 25 minutes to the Mele Cascades waterfall – ideal for swimming and abseiling. Or hire a quad bike and explore the island (adventurequadtours.com). Eratap Beach Resort (eratap.com) is 20 minutes from Port Vila and while it doesn't market itself as a surf destination it does have a wave on occasions and provides surfboards.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Port Vila. Breakas is a 15-minute drive from the international airport. The resort can organise transfers – it's worth renting a car (Budget, Avis and Europcar operate from the airport) with so much to see on the island of Efate. – CT

SIARGAO ISLAND, PHILIPPINES

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

Siargao's renowned wave, Cloud 9, is a shallow, hollow, board-snapping reef peak that's not for amateurs. Fortunately, this island off northeastern Mindanao also has less gnarly breaks such as Stimpy's, Rock Island and Pacifico, all reached by boat. With the annual Cloud 9 Cup now on the world competition circuit, Siargao has become the surfing capital of the Philippines. July to November is surf season.

STAYING THERE

The past decade has seen a proliferation of small hotels, surf lodges and resorts, with standards

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ranging from plush to primitive. Cafes and bars have followed.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Visit other islands around Siargao, such as Daku or Naked Island for snorkelling.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Manila. Siargao Island is 800 kilometres southeast of Manila and 70 kilometres off Mindanao's Surigao City. You can take an overnight ferry from Cebu to Surigao (surigaoislands.com) and then a shorter ride to Siargao, followed by van transfer to General Luna village. – JB

BALER, PHILIPPINES
WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

"Charlie don't surf," ranted Robert Duval in one of Hollywood's most famous lines. He was standing on Baler's Sabang Beach where many of the coastal scenes of the Vietnam War classic, *Apocalypse Now*, were shot. Here, at the birthplace of Philippines surfing, the movie's memory lives on at Charlie's Point, a sand-bottomed, A-frame peak, plus numerous other beach breaks and the tougher barrels of Cemento Reef.

STAYING THERE

Duval also bellowed, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning," but you'll more likely smell roast pork, chicken adobo or fish soup.

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Snoozy, rural Baler (pronounced Bal-air) has a classic, Spanish-era square, plus accommodation ranging from surf lodges to hotels and resorts of varying standards. Check out Surfhouse Baler (surfhousebaler.com) and Blue Coco Baler Beach House, +63 9175 401234.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Visit Baler's historic church, scene of a dramatic, year-long siege during the Spanish-American War. Try horseback riding on Sabang Beach, diving or snorkelling on Los Confites Reef, or waterfall trekking.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Manila. You can do the 140 kilometre, six-hour road journey northeast from Manila by rental

car or the daily Genesis Transport bus. The best surf is from October to February. See philippines-travel-guide.com/baler-surfing.html. – JB

MAQAI, QAMEA ISLAND, FIJI

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

Unlike most of those in Fiji, this wave's often yours to surf alone – a crowd here is five people. Only discovered 12 years back, this is the best wave in northern Fiji. It's okay to surf at all tides (and that's rare on a reef) but it is a reef break, so no-one below intermediate level should surf it, except at high tide.

Barrel ride ... a surfer pushes through at Vanimo.



Surfers' paradise

STAYING THERE

Stay at Qamea Resort & Spa (qamea.com) and take a speed boat to this outer reef break 20 minutes away with a guide from Tropic Surf (which is stationed at the resort). The resort's five-star, but it's a barefoot kind of luxury.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

There's plenty to do within the resort – from yoga overlooking the sea, to stand-up paddle-boarding on tiny waves, which break just offshore. Also visit local traditional villages, or take a boat to nearby Taveuni to hike the renowned forests of the so-called Garden Isle, and swim beneath waterfalls.

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Nadi. Fly to Taveuni with Fiji

Airways and the resort will pick you up and take you to a small boat harbour for a 10-minute ride across the water to the resort. Expect a song on arrival. – CT

COCONUTS, SAMOA

This is the best wave in Samoa (the South Pacific's most underrated surf destination). It's a right-hand wave that's extremely hollow and can hold swell up to three metres. It's best accessed by boat – though a paddle across the lagoon is possible if you're fit. If you're not up for this wave, there are 11 easier alternatives nearby.

STAYING THERE

This is Samoa's surf central zone. Coconuts Beach Club Resort & Spa (cbcsamoa.com) sits on a lagoon ideal for snorkelling and looks across to the waves. It has a trendy day spa and one of the better restaurants in Samoa. Those seeking even higher-end digs, can try Sinalei Reef Resort and Spa (sinalei.com), while budget surfers might prefer Maninoa Surf Fales (maninoa.com).

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

That's the great thing about Samoa – there's plenty to do on flat days. The lagoon here's ideal for swimming, snorkelling and kayaking – while just a short drive away are waterfalls you can swim at.

HOW TO GET THERE

It's best to hire your own car; Avis and Budget offer cars at Samoa's international airport. From the airport it's a 75-minute drive on roads where the speed limit's a leisurely 50kmh (watch out for kids and pigs).

CLOUDBREAK, FIJI

Discovered in the 1970s, this is one of the world's most revered waves. It's a shallow, hollow left-hander that breaks below sea level. It can hold surf up to 20-feet high and can be deadly. ➤

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STAYING THERE

There's two main choices – both are private island resorts. Namotu Island Resort (namotuislandfiji.com) and Tavarua Island Resort (tavarua.com) sit on tiny atolls with villas looking to the waves.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

There's plenty to do on non-surf days – this area offers some of the best kite-surfing and diving options in the South Pacific. You're also part of the 20-island Mamanuca group, accessible by boat – there's everything here from sailing excursions to jet-skiing to a floating bar set on a pontoon, Cloud 9 (cloud9.com.fj).

HOW TO GET THERE

Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Nadi. At Nadi you'll be greeted by staff who'll take you on a bus for 30 minutes to board a long boat for a short ride across to the resorts. – CT

HA'APITI, MOOREA, FRENCH POLYNESIA

WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

French Polynesia's famous for its deadly reef breaks. Ha'apiti might break like a classic Polynesian reef pass, but it doesn't have the same fear factor. It's a left-hander, which isn't as shallow, or powerful. But you can get tubed for seconds.

STAYING THERE

Moorea's the home of the over-water bungalow, a honeymoon mainstay. Surfers should consider the Moorea Surf Inn (mooreasurf.com) – where you can

paddle straight to the wave across a stunning lagoon. It's set on a hectare block, and you'll have local surf legend Tama Pacomme to show you the ropes.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Moorea is one of French Polynesia's most striking islands. Rent a car or scooter and drive right around the island in an hour. There are eight peaks to hike, and swimming with dolphins and rays in the lagoon should be mandatory. There's also the best championship golf course in Polynesia (greenpearl.golf.com/en/).

HOW TO GET THERE

You can fly from Tahiti in seven minutes, or take a 45-minute ferry ride from Tahiti. It's best to rent a car or scooter (international car rental companies Avis and Europcar operate on Moorea). Ha'apiti is located 20 minutes from the wharf. – CT

limestone cliffs beside a Hindu temple to a shallow left-hander that's actually five breaks in one. Ride it all the way to the end and you have hero status for life.

STAYING THERE

Nowhere in Bali is quite so surf hip. There's an ever-increasing number of accommodation options built high on the limestone cliffs above. Three Monkeys Villas (threemonkeysvillas.com) is the pick of them – it's 500 metres from the break and is a true surfer's retreat.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Hire a scooter – Bali's southwestern Bukit Peninsula is set up for a motorbike. Cruise between temples and jungle, dodging water buffalo and surfers too excited to look both ways. There's surf-themed restaurants on both sides of the

road, while Single Fin (singlefinbali.com) is the most iconic surf bar in Asia.

HOW TO GET THERE

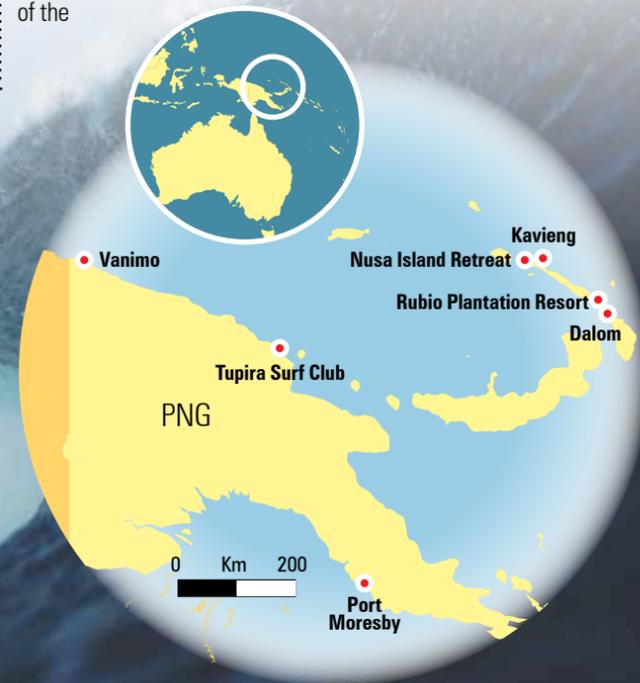
Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Bali. (Services were recently temporarily suspended, so check airniugini.com.pg for updates.) Take a taxi from the airport to Uluwatu. It's a 40-minute journey (metered and fixed fares are available). – CT ■

For more information about surfing in PNG, see the Surf Association of Papua New Guinea website, sapng.com.

ULUWATU, BALI

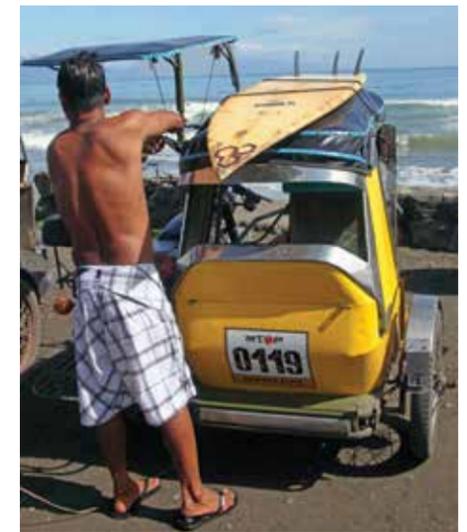
WHAT'S THE SURF LIKE?

Uluwatu was made famous in the 1971 surf classic, *Morning of the Earth*. Surfers paddle through a hole in



 Air Niugini carries 10 kilograms of any sporting equipment (including surfboards) for free. There is a 15-kilogram allowance for scuba-diving equipment. See airniugini.com.pg.

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Moments in the sun and surf ... (clockwise from opposite page) Cloudbreak; Nusa Island Retreat; a PNG local with a home-made surf craft; board transport in the Philippines; cabin at Nusa Island Retreat; the ancient Nan Madol ruins in Micronesia; a sign spruiking the surf at Vanimo; a wave accessed by the PNG Explorer; waterfall at Pohnpei, Micronesia.

