

# New Caledonia

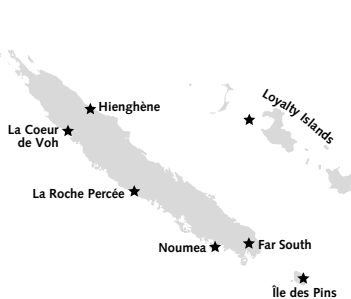
New Caledonia is dazzling. Its lagoon surrounds it with every colour of blue. So the light and the space delight your senses. The 2008 prestigious listing of the lagoon as a World Heritage site has brought the people together to celebrate and protect from village level through to government.

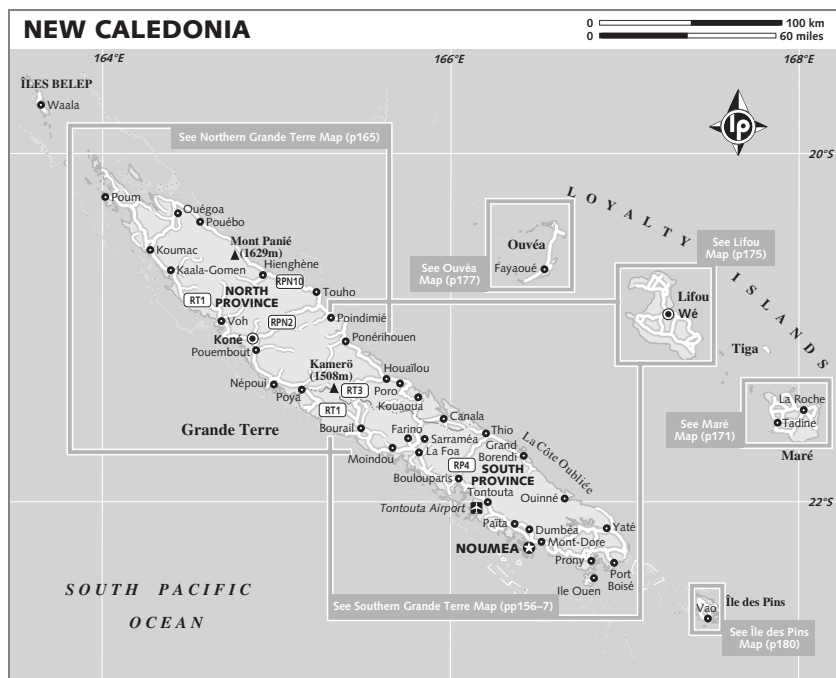
Moreover, New Caledonia isn't just a tropical playground. There's a charming mix of French and Melanesian: warm hospitality sitting beside European elegance, gourmet food beneath palm trees, designer clothing next to woven mats, resorts, bungalows, concrete, bamboo. Wander past colonial-era buildings and through museums, soaking up the cultures of these joint owners of the land. But most of all, have fun, because there are long gorgeous beaches backed by cafes and bars, with horizons that display tiny islets to attract day-trippers. Be lured into helicopters, kayak, rock-climb, sail, dive into a world of corals, canyons, caves and heritage shipwrecks, go whale-watching or relax on the warm sand of a deserted isle. Natural wonders and manmade delights at your fingertips.

South of the capital, expanses of red earth and olive scrub, sparkling bays and waterfalls surround Kanak settlements, all of which remind you how to live at one with the earth. The north is compelling, with dramatic rock formations, stunning coastlines, silent mountains, dusty country towns and wide white fly-fishing territory. Ferry across to Île des Pins to feel the magic of pencil-thin araucaria pines, watching dreamily as you laze by the diamond-blue lagoon or snorkel in a natural aquarium. Gather your things for a jaunt to the Loyalty Islands, richly steeped in Kanak culture, and wonder how you'll ever leave this delightful country.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Get your Pass to Culture & Nature in **Noumea** (p149) to admire Napoleon at the **Aquarium des Lagons** (p149), marvel at the architecture at the **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p149), dream about days past at **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (p148)
- Drive north on a geo-adventure to **La Roche Percée** (p162), **La Coeur de Voh** (p165) and the towering black jagged **Lindéralique rocks** (p168) at Hienghène
- Absorb the silence in the drowned forest, the solitary bush or on a deserted little islet, all in the **Far South** (p157)
- Glide across Baie d'Upi on **Île des Pins** (p179) in a *pirogue* (outrigger canoe) and then feast on grilled lobster under the pines.
- Scuba dive and snorkel, check out the shark nursery and watch the whales passing on the gorgeous **Loyalty Islands** (p170)





## NOUMEA

pop 92,000

With its cheerful multi-ethnic community, New Caledonia's cosmopolitan capital is both sophisticated and uncomplicated, classy and casual. The relaxed city sits on a large peninsula, surrounded by picturesque bays, and offers visitors a variety of experiences. Diners have the choice of eating out at sassy French restaurants or humble establishments in Chinatown, while shopaholics can blow their savings on the latest Paris fashions or go bargain hunting for imported Asian textiles.

### ORIENTATION

Central Noumea revolves around Place des Cocotiers, a large, shady square with landscaped gardens, a couple of blocks in from the waterfront. The main leisure area where locals and tourists hang out lies south of the city centre at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata, with beaches, restaurants, bars and night-clubs. The domestic airport at Magenta is 4km to the east of the city centre.

### Maps

Bookshops sell IGN maps with scales ranging from 1:50,000 to 1:500,000. These have the most geographical detail but they're about 15 years old. The Office du Tourisme (right) has free maps of Noumea and New Caledonia.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Librairie Calédo Livres** (Map p146; ☎ 273 811; 21 rue Jean Jaurès) Specialises in books on New Caledonia and the Pacific.

**Librairie Montaigne** (Map p146; ☎ 273 488; 23 rue de Sébastopol) Has a selection of books and travel guides in English.

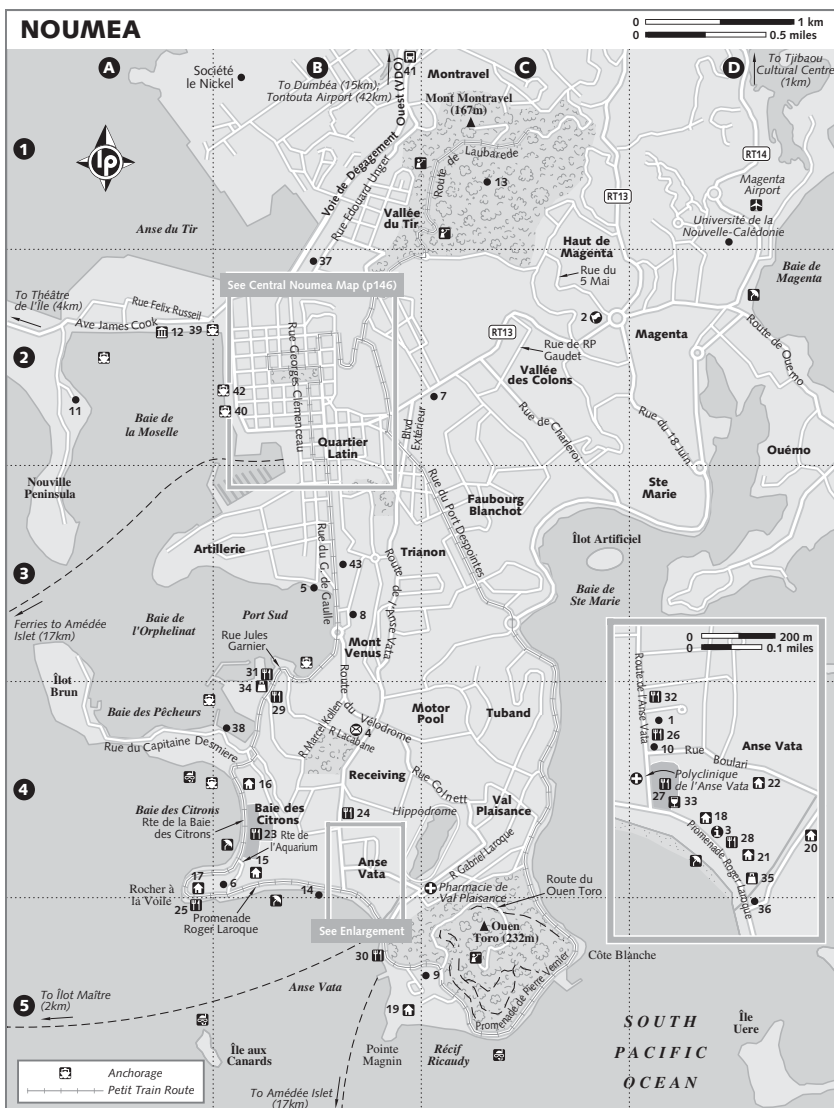
#### Internet Access

**Cyber BD Citron** (Map p144; ☎ 241 169; cyber-bdc@live.fr; 35 promenade Roger Laroque; per 30min 400 CFP) In the Baie des Citrons complex.

**Cyber Noumea Centre** (Map p146; ☎ 262 698; tetnet@mls.nc; Galerie Noumea Centre; per 30min 400 CFP)

#### Medical Services

Pharmacies, identified by a green cross, are dotted all over Noumea. On Saturday



afternoons and Sundays, only one emergency pharmacy is open, according to a rotating schedule.

**Decompression Chamber** (Map p146; ☎ 264 526) A Comex 1800 decompression chamber, next to the hospital, is available 24/7, accessible by land, sea or air.

**Hôpital Gaston Bourret** (Map p146; ☎ 256 666, emergencies 256 767; 7 rue Paul Doumer) Noumea's main hospital.

## Money

ATMs are outside most banks, and they accept most major credit cards. There are several banks on av de la Victoire/Henry Lafleur.

**Banque BNP Paribas** (Map p144; ☎ 262 103; 111 promenade Roger Laroque) At the Anse Vata shops.

**Banque Calédonienne d'Investissement** (BCI; Map p146; ☎ 242 060; 20 rue Anatole France)

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Hôtel Beurivage.....16 B4	L'Étrave.....33 D4
Alpha International.....1 D4	Hôtel Le Surf.....17 A4	Malecon Café.....(see 23)	
Banque BNP Paribas.....(see 33)	Lantana Beach Hôtel.....18 D4		
Cyber BD Citron.....(see 23)	Le Méridien Noumea.....19 B5	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>	
Japanese Embassy.....2 C2	Le Pacifique.....(see 21)	Cort'o Maltese.....(see 30)	
Office du Tourisme, Anse Vata...3 D4	Motel Anse Vata.....20 D4	L'Acropole.....(see 28)	
Post Office.....4 B4	Nouvata Park Hôtel.....21 D4	Mister Swing.....(see 33)	
	Ramada Plaza.....22 D4		
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>			<b>SHOPPING</b>
Abyss Plongée.....5 B3	<b>EATING</b>	Galerie Commercial Port	
Alizé Diving.....(see 21)	Baie des Citrons Restaurant & Bar	Plaisance.....34 B4	
Aquarium des Lagons.....6 B4	Strip.....23 B4	Palm Beach Shopping Mall.....35 D4	
Aventure Pulsion.....7 C2	Casa Italia.....24 B4	Tricot Rayé.....(see 34)	
Children's Playground.....8 B3	Fun Beach Restaurant & Grill....25 A5		
Children's Playground.....9 C5	L'Amédée.....26 D4	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Colleen Excursions.....(see 25)	La Promenade.....27 D4	Budget-Pacific Car Rentals.....36 D5	
Glisse Attitude.....10 D4	La Sorbetière.....28 D4	Caltours Caravanes et Loisirs...37 B2	
Locajet.....11 A2	Le Galapagos.....29 B4	Carsud.....(see 41)	
Mary D.....(see 35)	Le Roof.....30 B5	Cercle Nautique Calédonien.....38 B4	
Musée de l'Histoire Maritime.....12 A2	Snack.....31 B3	Ferry Terminal (Betico).....39 A2	
Parc Zoologique et Forestier.....13 C1	Snack Ulysse.....32 D4	Ferry Terminal (Havannah).....40 B2	
Plages Loisirs.....14 B4		Gare de Montravel.....41 B1	
Vata Loisirs.....(see 14)	<b>DRINKING</b>	Gare Maritime (Cruise Ship Terminal).....42 B2	
	Bodega Del Mar.....(see 30)	Noumea Explorer.....(see 35)	
<b>SLEEPING</b>	Le Bilboquet Plage.....(see 35)	Point Rouge.....43 B3	
Casa del Sole.....15 B4	Les 3 Brasseurs.....(see 23)		

**Banque Société Générale** (Map p146; ☎ 256 300; 44 rue de l'Alma & 56 av de la Victoire/Henry Lafleur) Western Union representative.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map p146; ☎ 268 400; 7 rue Eugène Porcheron) The main office of the Office des Postes et Télécommunications (OPT) has a poste restante and fax service, and there's an ATM outside the building. There's also a post office on route de Anse Vata, on the way to the beach.

## Tourist Information

First, pick up the free *Weekly* from airports, tourist sites, hotels, Office du Tourisme etc. It is spot on, with everything to do that week including the theme for Thursday's festivities. Also get the monthly entertainment guide *NC Pocket* ([www.sortir.nc](http://www.sortir.nc)) for the month's festivals, exhibitions, concerts and Jeudis du Centre Ville themes.

Next collect a fantastic range of information, plus maps, brochures, booklets and DVDs for the entire country from the following offices:

**Office du Tourisme** (Map p146; ☎ 287 580, free call 057 580; [www.office-tourisme.nc](http://www.office-tourisme.nc), [www.visitnewcaledonia.com](http://www.visitnewcaledonia.com); Place des Cocotiers; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) The very friendly staff offer practical information in English or French, make bookings for you, and have walls layered with pamphlets about every activity and service.

**Office du Tourisme, Anse Vata** (Map p144; ☎ 277 359; 113 promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 9am-5pm) It's

a little smaller than the office in the city centre, but the service is just as good.

## Travel Agencies

Companies that organise transport, tours and accommodation within New Caledonia include the following:

**Air Calédonie** (Map p146; ☎ 287 888; 39 rue de Verdun)

**Alpha International** (Map p144; ☎ 272 420; [www.alpha-tourisme.com](http://www.alpha-tourisme.com); 143 rte de l'Anse Vata)

**Arc en Ciel Voyages** (Map p146; ☎ 271 980; [www.arcenciel-voyages.nc](http://www.arcenciel-voyages.nc); 59 av du Maréchal Foch)

**New Caledonia Hotels** ([www.newcaledoniahotels.travel](http://www.newcaledoniahotels.travel)) Itineraries, flights, tours and accommodation online.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Air Calédonie** (Map p146; ☎ 287 888; [www.air-caledonie.nc](http://www.air-caledonie.nc); 39 rue de Verdun; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) is the domestic airline, with flights to northern Grande Terre, Île des Pins and the Loyalty Islands. It also has a **ticket office** (☎ 252 177) at the domestic airport in Magenta.

### Boat

The friendly and efficient **Capitainerie** (Harbour Master's Office; Map p146; ☎ 277 197; [port.moselle@sodemo.nc](http://port.moselle@sodemo.nc)) is located at Port Moselle's southern end. Noumea is connected to the Loyalty Islands and Île des Pins by the fast *Betico* ferry and the *Havannah*, a slower cargo boat (see p192).



## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Tontouta International Airport is 45km northwest of Noumea. Public buses that are operated by **Carsud** (☎ 251 615; 400 CFP) run there from the corner of rues Georges Clémenceau and Paul Doumer. Several private companies, including **Philo Tours** (☎ 289

957; philo@canl.nc) and **Arc en Ciel Voyages** (p145), run airport transfer services (one-way 3000 CFP). **Taxis** (☎ 283 512) into Noumea cost 11,000 CFP (shared).

Magenta domestic airport is serviced by Blue-line Karuia buses (200 CFP) and a taxi to the city or beaches costs around 1700 CFP (shared).

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Le Marché.....	21 B4	Salle de Spectacles.....	40 D3
Australian Consulate.....	1 B3	Musée de la Ville de Noumea...	22 B3	Théâtre de Poche.....	41 D5
Banque Calédonienne		Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie...	23 C5		
d'Investissement (BCI).....	(see 4)	Mwâ Ka.....	24 B5	<b>SHOPPING</b>	
Banque Société Générale.....	2 C4	Noumea Fun Ride.....	25 A3	Galerie Noumea Centre.....	42 B3
Banque Société Générale.....	3 B2	Pacific Charter.....	(see 15)	L'Atelier des Femmes de	
Cyber Noumea Centre.....	4 A3	Temple Protestant.....	26 C2	Nouvelle-Calédonie.....	43 B3
Decompression Chamber.....	(see 5)			Le Village.....	44 B4
Hôpital Gaston Bourret.....	5 A2	<b>SLEEPING</b>		L'Association des Sculpteurs de	
Librairie Calédo Livres.....	6 B3	Auberge de Jeunesse.....	27 C3	Nouvelle-Calédonie.....	45 B3
Librairie Montaigne.....	7 C3	Hôtel Le Paris.....	28 C4	Teeprint Boutique.....	46 C3
Main Post Office.....	8 B4				
Marine Corail.....	9 A4	<b>EATING</b>		<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Netherlands Consulate.....	10 C3	Best Café.....	(see 28)	Air Calédonie.....	47 C3
New Zealand Consulate.....	11 C2	Café de la Gare.....	29 A3	Air France.....	48 C3
Office du Tourisme.....	12 B3	Coco Glacé.....	30 B3	Air New Zealand.....	49 B5
Pharmacie Centrale.....	(see 42)	La Chaumière.....	31 C4	Air Vanuatu.....	(see 49)
UK Consulate.....	13 C5	La Kasbah.....	32 C3	Aircalin.....	50 C4
Vanuatu Consulate.....	14 C4	L'Annexe.....	33 B3	Arc en Ciel Voyages.....	51 C5
		Le Bout du Monde.....	34 B5	Bus Ticket Office.....	52 B3
		Roulottes.....	35 B5	Caltours.....	53 D4
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Snack Loan.....	36 C5	Capitainerie.....	54 B5
Air Mer Loisir.....	15 B5	Zanzibar.....	37 C3	CMA-CGM.....	55 A3
Amédée Diving Club.....	(see 9)			Ferry Terminal (Bético).....	56 A2
Aquanature.....	(see 15)	<b>DRINKING</b>		Ferry Terminal (Havannah).....	57 A4
Band Rotunda.....	16 C3	Le Bilboquet Village.....	(see 44)	Gare Maritime des Îles.....	58 A3
Bibliothèque Bernheim.....	17 B4	Le Bout du Monde.....	(see 34)	Gare Routière (Bus Station).....	59 B4
Cathédrale St Joseph.....	18 C4	Le Muzz' Bar.....	38 B3	Office du Tourisme for Cruise	
Direction des Ressources				Ships.....	(see 58)
Naturelles.....	(see 1)	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>		Qantas.....	60 B3
Fair Rides.....	19 B5	Ciné City.....	39 B4	Taxi Rank.....	61 B3
Hôtel de Ville.....	20 A3				

## Bus

Red-and-white buses (200 CFP) operate around the city from 6am to 7pm. The ticket office is at Place des Cocotiers, and the routes are colour coded.

**Bleue (Blue)** Tjibaou Cultural Centre–Magenta–city centre.

**Jaune (Yellow)** Faubourg Blanchot–city centre–Gare de Montravel.

**Orange (Orange)** Val Plaisance–Anse Vata–city centre.

**Verte (Green)** Kuendu–city centre–Baie de L'Orphelinat–Baie des Citrons–Anse Vata.

**Violette (Purple)** Magenta–Vallées des Colons–city centre.

The hop-on, hop-off **Noumea Explorer** ( 271 980; day pass 1000 CFP; 7am–6pm Tue–Sun) does an hourly circuit from Anse Vata into the city via Baie des Citrons and then on to the Maritime Museum in Nouville, the Parc Zoologique et Forestier and the Tjibaou Cultural Centre before returning to Anse Vata.

## Car & Scooter

The Office du Tourisme has a comprehensive list of car- and scooter-hire companies; also see the Transport chapter for some suggestions. Car rental costs from 5000 CFP per day, including free 150km per day.

## Taxi

Noumea's taxis are operated by **Radio Taxis de Noumea** ( 283 512). The main taxi rank (Map p146) is on rue d'Austerlitz, adjacent to the Galerie Noumea Centre.

## SIGHTS

### Place des Cocotiers

This is the heart of the city. The square (Map p146) slopes gently from east to west and at the top is a band rotunda, a famous landmark dating back to the late 1800s, where teenagers meet in the afternoon to show off their hip-hop dance moves. Place des Cocotiers is the perfect spot to watch the world go by. Near the band rotunda there's a popular *pétanque* pitch and a giant chess board. Down the other end it's like a lush botanical garden, with palms and large spreading trees.

Regular concerts and street markets are held in Place des Cocotiers. The popular **Jeudis du Centre Ville** ( Thu evenings Apr–Nov) street market has a different theme each week, outlined in *NC Pocket*, free at the Office du Tourisme. Stalls sell arts and crafts, fresh produce, cakes and local dishes, and entertainment includes live music and traditional dance.

## NOUMEA IN...

## One Day

Head out to the **Tjibaou Cultural Centre** (p149) on **le petit train** (p149), then into town for a picnic at **Place des Cocotiers** (p147) or a three-course lunch at **La Chaumière** (p153). Spend the afternoon at the **beach** in Anse Vata or Baie des Citrons (p154), taking time out for a drink across the road. In the evening, amble down to **Le Bout du Monde** (p155) to watch the boats against the sunset while you dine, then check out the music at **Le Muzz' Bar** (p155).

## Two Days

Follow the itinerary above on your first day, and on the second day do the Noumea **walking tour** (p151), starting with breakfast at the **market** (below). Visit the **aquarium** (p149) before catching a taxi boat to **Île aux Canards** (p149) to snorkel. Back on terra firma, head to the **Baie des Citrons** (p154) for dinner, then check out the nightlife at one of Anse Vata's **bars** (p154).

## Musée de la Ville de Noumea

The beautiful colonial-style **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (Noumea Museum; Map p146; ☎ 262 805; rue Jean Jaurès; admission 100 CFP; 🕒 9am-4.45pm Mon-Sat), dwarfed by towering palm trees, overlooks Place des Cocotiers. It features temporary and permanent displays on the early history of Noumea.

## Cathédrale St Joseph

The **cathedral** (Map p146; ☎ 273 288; 3 rue Frédéric Surleau) was built in 1888 by convict labour and is one of Noumea's landmarks. It has beautiful stained-glass windows and an elaborately carved pulpit, altar panels and confessional. The main entrance is generally locked, but you should find the side doors open.

## Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie

The **Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Museum of New Caledonia; Map p146; ☎ 272 342; smp@gouv.nc; 42 av du Maréchal Foch; adult/child 200/50 CFP; 🕒 9-11.30am & 12.15-4.30pm Wed-Mon) provides an excellent introduction to traditional Kanak and regional Pacific culture. Local exhibits are displayed on the ground floor and regional artefacts on the mezzanine level.

## Mwâ Ka

The magnificent Mwâ Ka (Map p146) is erected in a landscaped square opposite Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie. The 12m totem pole is topped by a *grande case* (chief's hut), complete with *flèche faiteière* (carved rooftop spear), and its carvings represent the eight customary regions of New Caledonia. The Mwâ Ka is mounted as the mast on a concrete double-hulled *pirogue*, steered by

a wooden helmsman, and celebrates Kanak identity as well as the multi-ethnic reality of New Caledonia.

## Le Marché

The colourful multi-hexagonal-shaped **market** (Map p146; 🕒 5-11am) is beside the marina at Port Moselle. Fishermen unload their catch; trucks offload fruit, vegetables and flowers; and there's fresh-baked bread and cakes, plus delights like terrines and olives. The arts and crafts section includes a central cafe. On Saturday and Sunday a local string band keeps shoppers entertained. The market is at its busiest early in the morning.

## Musée de l'Histoire Maritime

The **Musée de l'Histoire Maritime** (Maritime Museum; Map p144; ☎ 263 443; 11 av James Cook; adult/child 400/200 CFP; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has bits of boats and exhibitions on early seafaring days in New Caledonia and the Pacific.

## Parc Zoologique et Forestier

Wander along a network of paths through gardens of native shrubs and trees, cactus and forest with a changing backdrop of sea views in the distance and native species such as the flightless *cagou*, *roussette*, *notou* pigeon and various parakeets right in front of you. The **Parc Zoologique et Forestier** (Zoological and Botanical Gardens; Map p144; ☎ 278 951; Rte de Laubarède; adult/child 400 CFP/free; 🕒 10.15am-5.45pm Tue-Sun, to 5pm May-Aug) also has a cafe, a playground and an enclosure with farm animals for children to pet.

*Le petit train* (opposite) and Noumea Explorer buses run here from the city centre, or it's a quick taxi ride out.

## Tjibaou Cultural Centre

The **cultural centre** (☎ 414 545; www.adck.nc; Rue des Accords de Matignon; adult/child 500 CFP/free, guided tours 1500 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a tribute to a remarkable man, pro-independence Kanak leader Tjibaou who was assassinated in 1989. It sits in a peaceful woodland and mangrove setting on Tina Peninsula. Displays include sculpture, paintings and photographs representing Kanak culture, as well as other cultures from around the Pacific. The main buildings are a series of tall, curved wooden structures which rise majestically above the trees. The harmony between this contemporary architecture (designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, who also designed Paris' Pompidou Centre) and the surrounding landscape is amazing. Behind the main building are traditional *grandes cases*; traditional Kanak dance shows by We Ce Ca are held every Tuesday and Thursday at 2.30pm. Amenities include a multimedia library, theatre, shop and cafe. Blue-line city buses and the Noumea Explorer bus run regularly to the centre.

## Aquarium des Lagons

This **aquarium** (Map p144; ☎ 262 731; www.aquarium.nc; rte de l'Aquarium; adult/child/student/senior 650/115/210/300 CFP; ☎ 10am-4.45pm, closed Mon) is stunning. Species found in New Caledonian waters, including nautilus, sea snakes, stone fish, turtles and sting rays, have realistic surroundings in their huge tanks. Living coral displays are surprising but don't miss the emperor of coral reefs: Napoleon fish. How cute are these? In the meantime, follow the progress of 46 tagged loggerhead turtles on the aquarium website.

## Le Petit Train

Yes, that was a train you saw. It's very cute and entertaining, and a big photo opportu-

### ONE PASS, SIX PLACES

On your first visit to a Noumea museum or site, ask about buying the 'Pass to Nature & Culture'. It costs 1700 CFP but it gives you entry to three museums, the aquarium, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre and the zoo and botanical gardens. However, those aged over 60 get much better individual entry discounts. Get to all the places on the hop-on, hop-off Noumea Explorer (p147).

## THE CAGOU

The *cagou* (*Rhynchotos jubatus*) is a much-loved New Caledonian bird and an unofficial national symbol. It is about 50cm tall with soft grey plumage and crest, red eyes and an orange beak. Its call sounds like a dog barking; ironically, dogs are its main predator as the *cagou* cannot fly. It mates for life and females have one baby a year.

nity. **Le Petit Train Touristique de Noumea** (☎ 778 073; transcar@lagoon.nc; adult/child 1200/600 CFP) makes two large loops a day (except Sunday) leaving Palm Beach at 9.30am and 1pm, passing through Baie de Citron, the city centre and out to Parc Zoologique et Forestier, offering grand views as you return inland to Palm Beach. Purchase tickets from the driver.

## Beaches

The two most popular beaches are at **Anse Vata** (Map p144) and **Baie des Citrons** (Map p144). On a breezy day at Anse Vata, you can watch the colourful kite- and wind-surfers skimming up and down the bay. The best thing: as they face different directions one of these beaches is always free of wind for the sun loungers.

## Islets

The waters around Noumea are sprinkled with beautiful islets. Most are marine reserves and the clear waters surrounding them are great for snorkelling.

## ÎLE AUX CANARDS & ÎLOT MAÎTRE

Île aux Canards (Map p144) and Îlot Maître are the cutest postcard-perfect poppets of islets. You can see them just a swim out from Anse Vata. Pick up a map of the underwater walkway on Île aux Canards, or buy a waterproof one at the kiosk.

**Plages Loisirs** (Map p144; ☎ 269 000; plageloisirs@mls.nc; 110 promenade Roger Laroque) runs taxi boats to Île aux Canards (1000 CFP) and Îlot Maître (2400 CFP) from a kiosk at Anse Vata. Snorkel hire is 600 CFP.

Go out in a glass-bottom taxi boat (1800 CFP per 45 minutes) with **Colleen Excursions** (Map p144; ☎ 795 929; cruellas@offrate.nc; 56 promenade Roger Laroque), located at Fun Beach. Or head for the islets (with/without a stop 1000/800 CFP), watching the sea life on the way. Rent snorkel



gear and wet suits (500 CFP) or go reef fishing (three hours 6200 CFP).

### Dumbéa River

The RT1 crosses Dumbéa River at **Parc Fayard**, 16km north of Noumea. It's a popular spot during the hot summer months as the shady park is a good picnic area, the river offers good swimming here, and there's plenty of hiking tracks along two branches of the river: north takes you to a canyon, south to a dam. **Terra Incognita** (☎ 253 993, 789 446; [terincognita@canl.nc](mailto:terincognita@canl.nc)) hires canoes and kayaks, and runs full-moon kayaking trips down the river (two hours, 3000 CFP).

**Yala Ranch** (☎ 774 623, 848 534; [mikesaintpol@caramail.com](mailto:mikesaintpol@caramail.com); rte du Golf; 1hr 2000 CFP) has an equestrian centre and pony club. Ride your horse through the river for a fun summer activity.

## ACTIVITIES

### Diving

Noumea dive clubs **Alizé Diving** (Map p144; ☎ 26 25 85; [www.alizedive.com](http://www.alizedive.com); Novvata Park Hôtel) and **Amédée Diving Club** (☎ 264 029; [www.amedee.sponline.com](http://www.amedee.sponline.com), [www.amedeediving.nc](http://www.amedeediving.nc); 28 rue du Général Mangin) charge 11,000 CFP for an intro dive along with a day trip and lunch at Phare Amédée, a marine reserve with plenty of marine life including sharks and rays and healthy coral. A two-dive package is 14,500 CFP. Other dives include the *Dieppoise* and *TohoV* wrecks; see p185 for details of the 'Plongée' discount card.

**Abyss Plongée** (Map p144; ☎ 791 509; [www.abysnc.com](http://www.abysnc.com); Marina Port du Sud, Baie de l'Orphelinat) dives at many sites around Grande Terre and charges 7200 CFP for an intro dive and 11,000 CFP for a double dive, plus transport costs. Dive clubs all offer PADI courses.

### Other Water Activities

On the beach at Anse Vata under the large hut, **Plages Loisirs** (Map p144; ☎ 269 000; [plageloisirs@mls.nc](mailto:plageloisirs@mls.nc); 110 promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm) hires equipment like kayaks (per hour 1500 CFP), windsurfers (per hour 1800 CFP) and hobby cats (per hour 4000 CFP), along with **Vata Plaisirs** (Map p144; ☎ 781 300, 765 909; [www.mdplaisirs.com](http://www.mdplaisirs.com)), which offers introductory lessons (1500 CFP). Ask about the MD Plaisirs Card, which gives you 40% discount (eg catamaran 2100 CFP, kayak 950 CFP) and is usable here, in Poé and in Koumac.

**Locajet** (Map p144; ☎ 262 613, 777 979; [www.locajet.info](http://www.locajet.info); half-day 1/2 riders 18,000/12,000 CFP each), in Nouville on the western side of Baie de la Moselle, rents jet skis. Do a circular whiz from Baie de la Moselle to Île aux Canards, Îlot Maitre, a few more islets and back to the northern side of the Nouville peninsula. Check out the helicopter package.

Bernard at **Aquanature** (Map p146; ☎ 264 008, 78 36 66; [quanature@canl.nc](mailto:quanature@canl.nc); Pacific Charter Kiosk; morning/afternoon/full-day 5000/4000/7000 CFP) takes you out from Port Moselle to snorkel on the reef; he finds the best spots and you get coffee and cakes as well.

See p186 for information on boats to hire, or get a full list of companies from the Office du Tourisme. See opposite for taxi-boat or glass-bottom boat trips.

### Land-based Activities

You'll find all your favourite sporting activities are available in Noumea, or around Grande Terre: golf, squash, clay-pigeon shooting; just ask at the Office du Tourisme.

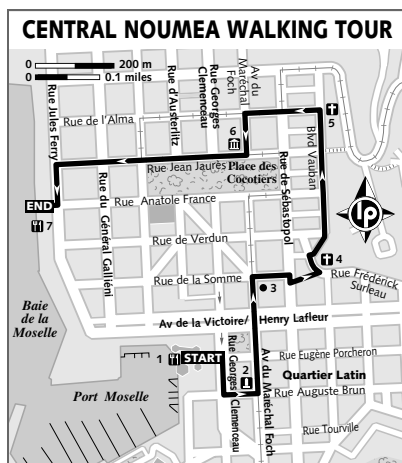
**Noumea Fun Ride** (Map p146; ☎ 269 626; [noumeafunride.org@canl.nc](http://noumeafunride.org@canl.nc); Gare Maritime; scootcars 1/2hr 4500/6000 CFP) rents fun movable vehicles including miniature cars (5000/8000 CFP per one/two hours) if you're over 16 years of age. There's also mountain and beach bikes (1100/1300 CFP per hour/half-day), helmets, racks, child seats, roller blades and scooters for kids (2300/2700 CFP per hour/half-day).

The Office du Tourisme produces a folder, *Randonnées en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, of helpful brochures describing many small or grand walks, cycling trips and climbs across islands, through forests and up many creeks.

*Le Circuit Historique*, a lovely booklet produced by the **Hôtel de Ville** (Town Hall; ☎ 273 115; [www.ville-noumea.nc](http://www.ville-noumea.nc); 16 rue du Général Mangin), takes you on a fascinating history tour past Noumea's old buildings (from 1856 on).

### NOUMEA WALKING TOUR

Wake up early and head to Port Moselle for a breakfast of coffee and croissants at the **market** (1; p148). Go across to the square to admire the amazing **Mwâ Ka** (2; p148), then walk down av du Maréchal Foch to the corner of rue de la Somme to see the **Bibliothèque Bernheim** (3; ☎ 242 090; 41 av du Maréchal Foch; ☎ 1-5.30pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-5.30pm Wed, to 4pm Sat), the attractive colonial-style public library with its old chandeliers and curved wooden staircases.



### WALK FACTS

**Start** Le Marché  
**Finish** Gare Maritime  
**Distance** 2km  
**Duration** Two hours

Turn right into rue de la Somme and walk along to the steps at the top of the street, which lead up the side of a building to rue Frédéric Surleau and **Cathédrale St Joseph** (4; p148). From the cathedral, head north along blvd Vauban to the attractive old stone **Temple Protestant** (5) at the top of rue de l'Alma. Then head down to the charming **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** (6; p148), opposite Place des Cocotiers. From there, head down to the waterfront and along to attractive Gare Maritime. If a cruise ship is docked, there'll be a spread of stalls crammed with souvenirs upstairs, or have a coffee downstairs at **Café de la Gare** (7; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Sat).

## NOUMEA FOR CHILDREN

Face it, the children want to stay on the beach, swimming and building sand castles at **Anse Vata** or **Baie des Citrons** beaches (opposite). But if anything will drag them away, it's a ride on **le petit train** (p149).

There are shady **playgrounds** (Map p144) at Baie de l'Orphelinat off rue du Générale de Gaulle, and next to the public swimming pool at Ouen Toro near Anse Vata. Or head to **Le Marché** (p148). There's a buzz of activity, plenty of things to buy, and opposite, in the

car park, children's **fair rides** (200 CFP; ☎ from 3pm Mon-Sun).

A visit to the new **aquarium** (p149) is a must: endlessly entertaining and the perfect introduction to a trip out in a glass-bottom boat (p149). The **Parc Zoologique et Forestier** (p148) offers stacks of running space. And when Thursday evening comes around, go by **Place des Cocotiers** (p147), where traditional dances will entrance them, there's Liese's famous face-painting stall, an ice-cream bar and candyfloss for the ultimate sugar fix.

## TOURS

One of the most popular tours of Noumea is organised by **le petit train** (p149). Adventure Pulsion and Caledonia Tours (p159) run day excursions to the Far South. There are tours to Monts Koghiis, tours on the deep blue and tours up north. See p194 for a few ideas, or contact the Office du Tourisme for recommendations that include the following:

**Alpha International** (Map p144; ☎ 272 420; www.alpha-tourisme.com; 143 rte de l'Anse Vata) Catamaran trips to islets.

**Mary D** (Map p144; ☎ 263 131; www.amedee.ws; Galerie Palm Beach, Anse Vata; ☎ 9am Mon-Sat) A grand day on one of **Mary D's** launches out to Amédée Islet 12,900 CFP). Visit the lighthouse, snorkel off-shore or from the glass-bottom boat, feed sharks on the reef, indulge in a luscious three-course buffet lunch and see fun dance and cultural shows.

## SLEEPING

Noumea has few budget options but some hotels have grouped together and offer more relaxed tariffs. Many offer very good deals on their websites. Almost all of the hotels offer free wi-fi; return transfers to Tontouta airport are 6000 CFP by bus.

## Budget

**our pick** **Auberge de Jeunesse** (Map p146; ☎ 275 879; www.yhanoumea.lagoon.nc; 51bis rue Pasteur Marcel Ariège; dm/d 1700/3700 CFP; ☎ ) This sparkling-clean hostel, behind St Joseph's Cathedral, has a fantastic view of the city and Baie de la Moselle. The energy here is exciting. It's an extra 200 CFP for HI nonmembers; wi-fi or computer use is 300 CFP an hour. Linen is provided. You'll get stacks of tourist info. The quickest way to get there from the centre of town on foot is up the 103 steps at the top of rue Jean Jaurès. Advance bookings are recommended.

**Lantana Beach Hôtel** (Map p144; ☎ 262 212; www.hotel-lantana.nc; 113 promenade Roger Laroque; r 7600 CFP) It's looking its age but still kicking, just across the road from the beach at Anse Vata. Great value, free wi-fi, fridges and coffee-making facilities. Ask about the discount for staying a week.

**Motel Anse Vata** (Map p144; ☎ 262 212; www.motelansevata.com; 19 rue Gabriel Laroque; r 8000 CFP) It's looking orange, retro, and simply plain but it's just up the road from Palm Beach mall and you get your own little bit of balcony and your own front door key. There's a small clean kitchen for guests to share, and a happy atmosphere.

## Midrange

**Hôtel Beurivage** (Map p144; ☎ 262 055; www.grands-hotels.nc; 7 promenade Roger Laroque; standard/sea-view 9200/10,200 CFP; 🍷 🍷) Talk about position. This rather faded retro hotel is just across the road from the beach at Baie des Citrons and a quick step away from the restaurant strip. Yet it's a quiet spot and rooms are airy.

**Hôtel Le Surf** (Map p144; ☎ 286 688; www.grands-hotels.nc; Rocher à la Voile; r 9800; 🍷 🍷) Two large hotel sections with a network of private balconies bridge together across an access road with a casino and restaurant below. All rooms have stunning views, meals are reliably good, and it's an easy stroll to either Anse Vata beach-front or Baie de Citrons. The breakfast buffet is 1800 CFP, dinner mains cost from 1600 CFP.

**Hôtel Le Paris** (Map p146; ☎ 281 700; www.best-western-leparishotel.com; 45 rue de Sébastopol; s/d/f 10,500/12,000/15,500 CFP) It's good to be in the centre of Noumea, a short stroll into the French atmosphere of Place des Cocotiers. The staff are delightful, making it a bit of a home away from home.

**Le Pacifique** (Map p144; ☎ 262 200; www.nc.hotels.nc; 123 promenade Roger Laroque; r pool/ocean view 14,400/16,400 CFP; 🍷 🍷) It doesn't look much, but it opens onto top-end Nouvata Park Hôtel's spreading swimming pools, shops and restaurant, which are yours to use.

**Casa del Sole** (Map p144; ☎ 258 700; www.casadelsole.nc; 10 rte de l' Aquarium; 1-/2-bedroom apt 16,500/18,300 CFP) These spacious stunning apartments have bright kitchenettes, comfy furnishings and a private terrace filled with views. It's a couple of minutes' walk from the beach, shops and restaurants.

## Top End

**Nouvata Park Hôtel** (Map p144; ☎ 262 200; www.nc.hotels.nc; 123 promenade Roger Laroque; r garden/beach view

18,900/22,900 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This grand hotel in the middle of the tourist atmosphere at Anse Vata has all the facilities you could possibly need. It also offers deluxe rooms and suites (from 27,900 CFP). The lounging areas, pool area and restaurants are welcoming, making for good places to meet other guests.

**Ramada Plaza** (Map p144; ☎ 239 000; www.ramada-plaza-noumea.nc; Rue Boulari; studio 19,900 CFP, ste deluxe/executive 36,900/46,900 CFP) The rooms and suites at the twin-towered Ramada Plaza are tastefully decorated in contemporary Pacific style. Rooms have racecourse or sea views and facilities include a kids' club and spa. The revolving restaurant features fine dining with fine views (dishes from 2500 CFP, set lunch menu 3900 CFP). There are amazing deals on the website, like three nights all inclusive out of Sydney. Take a look.

**ourpick Coral Palms Island Resort** (☎ 260 512; www.nchotels.nc; Îlot Maître; B&B garden-/beach-view bungalows 34,900/41,900 CFP, over-water bungalows 69,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) An idyllic hotel on Îlot Maître with bungalows in an island garden and luxury over-water accommodation where you snorkel off your own deck into a coral garden. The pool has a swim-up bar, the activities kiosk has a range of water-sport equipment and in case you're interested, there's a charming wedding chapel. Transfers on the Coral Palms launch are 2400 CFP.

**Le Méridien Noumea** (Map p144; ☎ 265 000; www.lemeridien.com; Pointe Magnin; classic/superior/executive B&B 36,000/41,000/44,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷) This stunning hotel by Anse Vata beach has landscaped grounds, an hypnotic pool area and several restaurants. You have transport to all sites and activities, should you ever wish to drag yourself off the premises. Check out the special deals on the website.

## EATING

Noumea has fabulous restaurants specialising in French and international cuisine as well as seafood. The hotels all have excellent restaurants as well. Many places are closed on Sunday or Monday.

## City Centre

You'll see numerous small *snacks* (eteries) in Chinatown but prices are sometimes better, and the surroundings definitely better, in the restaurants.

**Coco Glacé** (Map p146; ☎ 249 989; Place des Cocotiers; lunch 350-550 CFP; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Sat) Smell cooking waffles, see shaded outdoor tables, think

## IT ALL TASTES GREAT

New Caledonian restaurants are famous for their fine dining. But it's at the *snacks* (eateries), cafes and country pubs that you really appreciate the flare and flavour of French cuisine: everything is prepared with sauces and marinades you could die for. Take the simple sandwich. It's a very long delicious crusty baguette with leg ham dripping out the sides, or perhaps a homemade terrine stacked inside. If a restaurant serves Pacific cuisine, the meal will be simple but elegant, fish in lemon say, using local produce.

Buffets look good and cost a bomb. But a seafood buffet is wonderfully indulgent. Then there's the 'menu', designed to stretch your waist and shrink your wallet. Many places let you share them. If you're on a tour that includes lunch, wow. Magnificent. And you thought you'd get blackened sausages.

The Melanesian specialty is *bougna*: yam, sweet potato, taro, other vegetables and meat, fish or seafood covered in coconut milk, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked on hot stones in an earth oven for two hours. Most Melanesian-run gîtes can prepare a *bougna* but you must order 24 hours in advance. Lobster *bougna* is the most expensive option and perhaps not the best way to treat something as special as the local lobsters; they're so fresh and sweet.

On the islands a lot of your food, and all your drinks, arrive by boat, so don't be surprised if your choice isn't available. And if all the fishermen are off to a wedding, there'll be no seafood that day. It happens.

what diet? There are also ice creams, sorbets and crêpes at this kiosk.

**Best Cafe** (Map p146; ☎ 251 010; 47 rue de Sébastopol; mains 1250-2950 CFP; ☎ 6.30am-11pm) It looks a bit ordinary, but the food is delicious. The chef edges the prawns with a salt that makes them burst with flavour, and the *plat du jour* is often a roast.

**L'Annexe** (Map p146; ☎ 253 315; Place des Cocotiers; lunch 1550-1950 CFP; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Sat) Sit by a pond while you enjoy an excellent meal, like Hawaiian fish salad. And the front servery sells mouthwatering sandwiches, quiche, pizza and cakes (350 CFP to 550 CFP).

**Zanzibar** (Map p146; ☎ 252 800; 51 rue Jean Jaurès; mains 1900-2700 CFP; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) It's all atmospheric timber and cloth, with a tiny upstairs veranda and a range of dishes like duck with lavender. It's famous for its desserts. A three-course menu is 2600 CFP.

**La Kasbah** (Map p146; ☎ 278 861; 15 rue de Sébastopol; mains 1900-3700 CFP; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sun) Enter another universe in this fascinating spot, where the *tajines* are large and full of glorious flavours that almost match the exotic decor. Sharing a *tajine* is totally acceptable.

## Quartier Latin & Port Moselle

**Snack Loan** (Map p146; ☎ 271 351; rue August Brun; dishes 550 CFP; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) This take-away *snack* specialises in Asian food, including mouthwatering samosas, spring rolls and rice and noodle dishes. It's in a colonial house with a red roof.

**Roulottes** (Map p146; rue Georges Clémenceau; dishes around 600 CFP; ☎ dinner) These food vans in the large car park opposite the market serve great takeaway meals.

**Le Bout du Monde** (Map p146; ☎ 277 728; 4 rue de la Frégate Nivôse; mains 1600-2900 CFP; ☎ 7am-11pm) This relaxed bar and restaurant that spills out towards the marina at Port Moselle serves a lunchtime salad buffet (1200 CFP) on weekdays, but you can also order à la carte. So try an ostrich fillet.

**La Chaumière** (Map p146; ☎ 272 462; 13 rue du Docteur Guégan; menus lunch/dinner 2300/3400 CFP; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) The atmosphere is warm and uncluttered in this old colonial building where fabulous fine dining makes it very popular. French favourites like fish soup or confit of duck come with traditional accompaniments it's hard to find elsewhere. Come for lunch, share the menu, whatever, just don't miss out.

## Baie de l'Orphelinat

**Le Galapagos** (Map p144; ☎ 262 218; 21 rue Jules Garnier; mains 1900-2500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The Galapagos serves food cooked to perfection, with sauces you keep remembering. A two-/three-course lunch menu is 2200/3200 CFP. At night it's tapas (800 CFP), with a fantastic cheese buffet (1900 CFP) on Thursday night and live music Saturday night. Book in for a game of squash while you're here.

Galerie Port Plaisance has pleasant cafes serving tasty meals at reasonable prices (like veal scallopine for 1200 CFP) in attractive open settings. **Snack** (☎ 797 697; mains 650-1350 CFP; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat), across the driveway in Cercle des Nageurs Calédoniens, is a popular terrace with sandwiches from 400 CFP and filling mains.

## Baie des Citrons

The electric strip at Baie des Citrons has some neat shops tucked between an amazing line of restaurants clamouring to be noticed: Italian, seafood, steak, Mexican, salad, fusion, Basque. Wander along, join all the other people enjoying the atmosphere and having a drink or two, then pick your spot, but be good and leave the ice-cream bar till last. Main meals cost between 1500 CFP and 3300 CFP.

## Anse Vata

**Snack Ulysse** (Map p144; ☎ 286 928; rte de l'Anse Vata; sandwiches 450-750 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) A popular *snack* that serves generously filled hot or cold sandwiches, burgers, chips and rice dishes. Eat in or take away.

**Casa Italia** (Map p144; ☎ 259 258; 113 rte de l'Anse Vata; small/large pizzas 1500/2400 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This Italian restaurant is famous for its authentic pizzas and pasta dishes and warm atmosphere. Everything is homemade; try the grappa if you dare.

**L'Amédée** (Map p144; ☎ 261 035; rte de l'Anse Vata; mains 1900-5500 CFP; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) It's a cosy restaurant for lovers of seafood. The menu has pictures of the fish, so you know what you're ordering; the crab d'Amédée comes piled high, the sauces are rich as.

**Le Roof** (Map p144; ☎ 250 700; 134 promenade Roger Laroque; mains 2500-3500 CFP; ☎ lunch & dinner) Out on the pier, spacious and open, Le Roof has a large central backlit hole so that you can see ocean, fish and perhaps even a turtle. Add two large aquariums, delicate white china, majestic wine glasses, delicious fish dishes and its like fine dining for mermaids.

**La Sorbetière** (Map p144; ☎ 262 803; sandwich/crepe/croque 400/350/450 CFP; ☎ 8am-6pm) serves indulgent ice creams, waffles and crepes. Up the other end, **Fun Beach Restaurant & Grill** (Map p144; ☎ 26 3132; mains 1300-2800 CFP; ☎ 11am-2pm & 6-11pm) is all Western-style pasta, fish and steak, served on a deck by the bay. And it's a pleasant spot for a drink in the evening.

There are two little curved malls: Palm Beach has several eating options serving meals costing from 680 CFP; at the western end, La Promenade has Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, Australian (meals from 1200 CFP to 5500 CFP). Wonton soup (700 CFP) at the Vietnamese is magnificent.

## DRINKING

### Bars

Everywhere, your drinks are served with a bowl of peanuts or marinated olives. So nice. The bars along the Baie des Citrons strip where everyone gathers include **Malecon Café** (Map p144; ☎ 282 805; ☎ to 11pm), which offers quiche and pizza (650 CFP) to help you drink more, and the microbrewery, **Les 3 Brasseurs** (Map p144; ☎ 241 516; ☎ till midnight Sun-Thu, till 2am Fri & Sat), where you can choose your poison, blonde, amber or brown, from the stainless-steel brewing equipment. Its upstairs restaurant serves a Plat de Saison (2500 CFP). Both bars have live music on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Ask for their monthly concert brochure.

In Anse Vata, **Bodega Del Mar** (Map p144; ☎ 261 153; 134 promenade Roger Laroque) is a trendy bar on the pier that features kegs for tables and ragged posters. It really buzzes with 30ish-aged casual types. Tapas costs 700 CFP to 900 CFP. **Le Bilboquet Plage** (Map p146; ☎ 264 660; Palm Beach; ☎ 11am-2pm & 6.30pm-1am), an upstairs French brasserie that serves tasty meals and snacks (from 650 CFP), has a spacious veranda that's a relaxing place for

### ALCOHOL & WATER

An alcohol licence may allow beer to be sold only while food is being served. Other places may have a 24-hour licence. You can only buy alcoholic drinks at special bottle shops from Friday evening till Sunday evening. Sadly, or suspiciously, you can buy a bottle of wine in a supermarket for, say, 850 CFP yet pay 650 CFP for a small glass of wine at a restaurant. Perhaps have your drink after dinner, on your balcony with that view to die for. Just a thought.

The country's water supply is managed by the same company that manages Sydney water. Of course if you come from Melbourne that won't impress. But nevertheless, tap water is excellent quality everywhere.

a drink amidst plenty of potted palms (well, green stuff).

Back in the city, **Le Bilboquet Village** (Map p146; ☎ 264 330; 45 av du Maréchal Foch; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat) serves drinks and meals in the charming courtyard of an old court house at Le Village.

If you prefer to drink in a classy bar with comfy lounge chairs and mood music, the friendly staff make stylish **L'Etrave** (Map p144; ☎ 259 440; promenade Roger Laroque; ☎ 9am-midnight) both casual and fun.

In the city centre, **Le Bout du Monde** (Map p146; ☎ 277 728; 4 rue de la Frégate Nivôse) at the Port Moselle marina is a pleasant place for a drink as well as a meal (see p153). And check out **Le Muzz' Bar** (Map p146; ☎ 277 930; 37 rue Jean Jaurès; ☎ 6pm-late Tue-Sun), new and inviting, oozing atmosphere, it features popular live music (from 9pm Thursday to Saturday) and some nights the owners play jazz, beautifully. There's tapas (Thursday to Sunday, 600 CFP) and skewers barbecued in the beer garden.

For a South Pacific experience, head out to Dumbéa where **Nakamal du Col** (Dumbéa; kava per shell 100 CFP; ☎ 3.30-10pm Mon-Fri, 3.30pm-midnight Sat & Sun), a kava house on the RT1, has small *farés* on a terraced hillside with panoramic views over Noumea and its bays. Don't miss the sunset.

## ENTERTAINMENT

The Office du Tourisme publishes the *NC Pocket* ([www.sortir.nc](http://www.sortir.nc)) entertainment guide.

The nightlife mostly happens naturally: the buzz along Baie des Citrons as young people and music fill the bars and spill across to the beach; the slightly older group that park their cars along the Anse Vata foreshore and make the most of the heavenly nights and music drifting or beating across the bay.

On weekends, towards midnight, the Anse Vata crowds might head to **L'Acropole** (Map p144; ☎ 241 938; 119 promenade Roger Laroque), **Mister Swing** (Map p144; ☎ 240 393; 115 promenade Roger Laroque) or **Cort'o Maltese** (Map p144; ☎ 262 725; 134 promenade Roger Laroque), on the small pier at the eastern end of the bay.

There are always sporting activities, markets, fairs and animations happening somewhere. Check them out on [www.newcaledoniaturism-south.com/calendar/index.cfm](http://www.newcaledoniaturism-south.com/calendar/index.cfm).

## Cinemas & Theatres

**Ciné City** (Map p146; ☎ 292 020; 18 rue de la Somme; admission 950 CFP) Ten theatres screen a large range of

movies in French. During La Foa Film Festival (June/July) movies are screened, both here and at La Foa's Cinéma Jean-Pierre Jeunet, in their original language.

The ugly **entertainment centre** (Salle de Spectacles, F0L; Map p146; ☎ 272 140; 51 rue Olry) and lovely old theatres **Théâtre de Poche** (☎ 250 750; 6 blvd Extérieur) and **Théâtre de l'Île** (☎ 255 050) have local groups, amateur theatre and stand-up comedy nights. Ask for the programmes at Office du Tourisme or visit [www.sor.tir.nc](http://www.sor.tir.nc).

## SHOPPING

You'll find shops selling French designer labels as well as prêt-à-porter outlets along rue de Sébastopol, rue de l'Alma and rue Jean Jaurès. There are also duty-free shops in this area. Two shops selling local clothing brands are **Teprint Boutique** (Map p146; 48 rue Anatole France) and **Tricot Rayé** (Map p144; Galerie Commercial Port Plaisance).

Galerie Commercial Port Plaisance (Map p144) and Galerie Noumea Centre (Map p146) are attractive, bustling malls; tiny Palm Beach mall (Map p144) has 24 boutiques and cafes and Le Village (Map p146) has a few gift shops around a lovely courtyard.

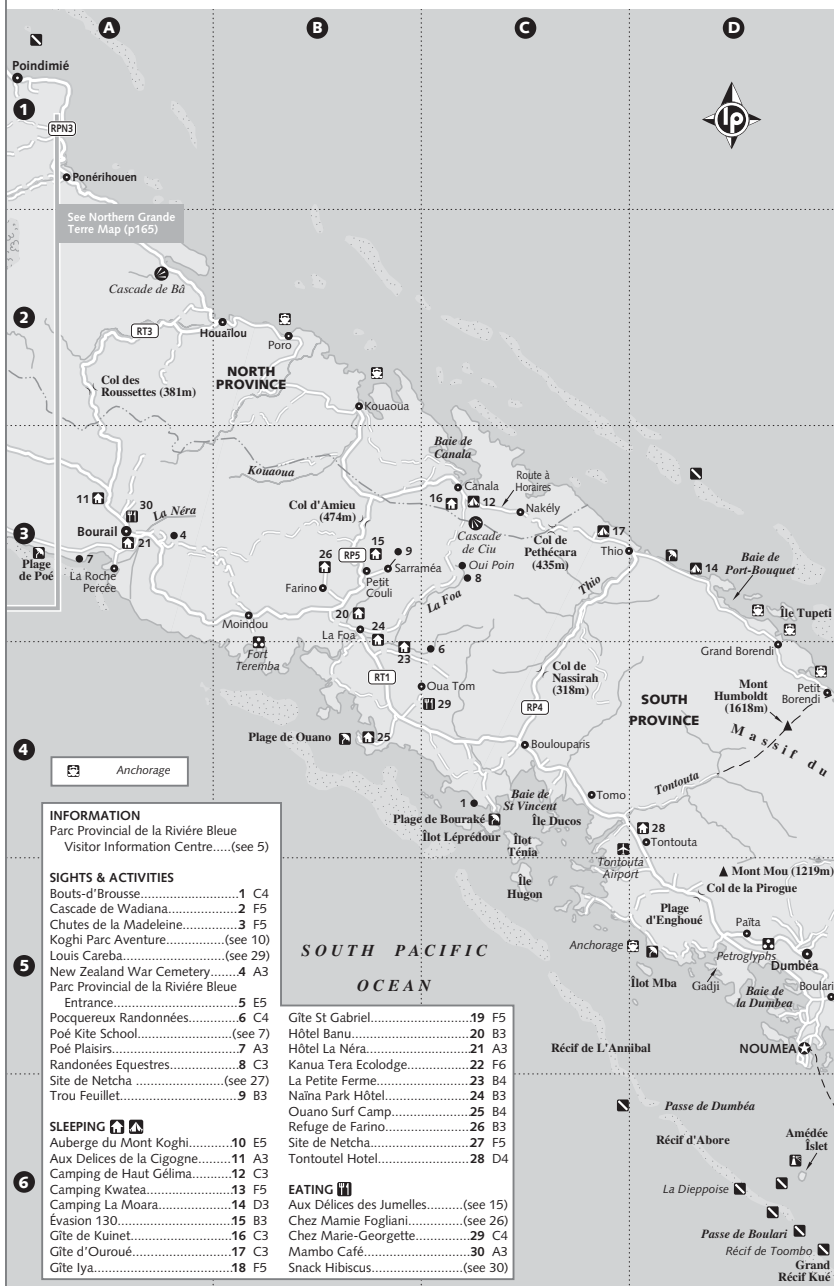
**L'Atelier des Femmes de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Map p146; cnr rue du Gouverneur Sautot & rue Anatole France) sells local crafts and **L'Association des Sculpteurs de Nouvelle-Calédonie** (Map p146; ☎ 775 124; rue Anatole France), next door, sells Kanak sculptures.

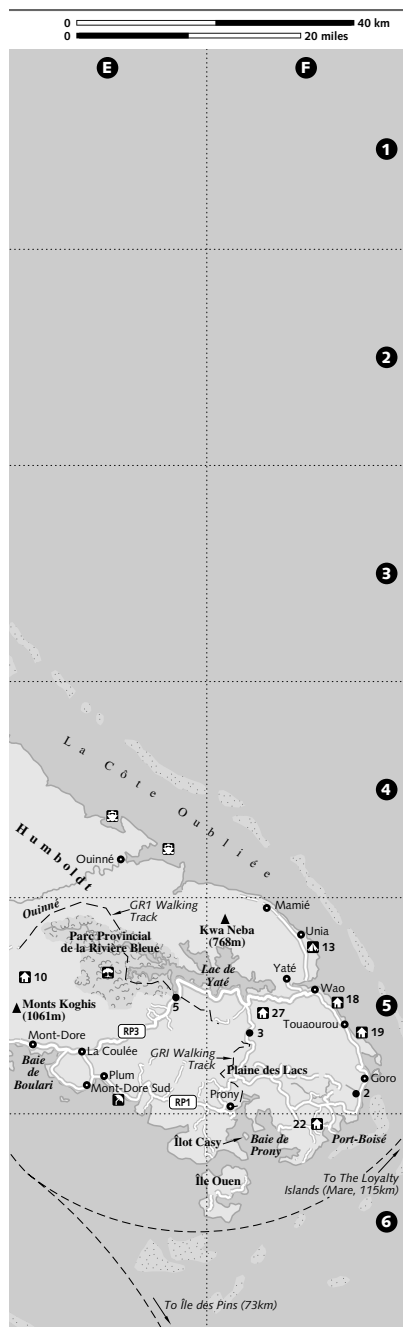
# GRANDE TERRE

pop 210,000 / area 16,500 sq km

A chain of mountains sweeps down the middle of Grande Terre, and the wide plains that stretch along its west coast are dotted with country towns where cattle breeders stroll down the street in Stetsons and cowboy boots. On the east coast the mountains descend to the sea, their lush vegetation meeting the steep and sinuous coastline. Waterfalls rush down the mountainsides into deep pools and out into the famously colourful lagoon, where the islands' inhabitants spend much of their leisure time fishing, boating and enjoying other water sports. Grande Terre is not only New Caledonia's major island, but also the third-largest island in the Pacific after Papua New Guinea and NZ.

## SOUTHERN GRANDE TERRE





## THE FAR SOUTH

The Far South feels like a remote wilderness. The vast, empty region is characterised by its hardy scrub vegetation and red soil, and offers a wide range of activities including hiking, kayaking, abseiling and mountain biking. If you are looking for a bit of action and adventure, head to the Far South. If you're looking for a peaceful, isolated spot by a river, head to the Far South. Sadly, the controversial pipe carrying waste from the nickel processing plant will dump into the ocean, almost alongside the South's specially protected Merlet Marine Reserve.

### Orientation & Information

To get to the Far South, head east out of Noumea towards Mont-Dore. The easiest route is to follow the Voie Express out of Noumea to the RP1. The road forks when it reaches the mountain at La Coulée: take either the RP3 across to Yaté or continue along the RP1 south to Prony and Port Boisé, then the two routes eventually meet at the Chutes de la Madeleine. Ask about road conditions before you start as they can be blocked or pretty bad due to the construction of the nickel processing plant.

A small **visitor information centre** (☎ 433 344; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) beside the RP1 at Boulari has information on accommodation and activities, including several walking-track brochures.

### Getting There & Around

You'll need to hire a car to explore the Far South; see p193 for car-rental agents in Noumea. It's about a 1½ hour drive to Yaté from Noumea. Buses to Yaté (600 CFP, two hours) leave from Noumea's Gare Routière at 11.30am Monday to Saturday but don't connect with a return service. Tours which include a commentary plus lunch are always a good option (see p159).

### Sights

#### PARC PROVINCIAL DE LA RIVIÈRE BLEUE

Spacious protected Blue River Park is a reserve for many bird species, including the *cajou*. The landscape is a mixture of the Far South's typical scrub vegetation and dense rainforest and includes gigantic kaori trees, at least 1000 years old and with trunks up to 2.7m across. Take the RP3 from La Coulée to get to the western end of the hydroelectric dam, **Lac de**



**Yaté**, where you enter lovely **Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue** (☎ 436 124; adult/student 400/50 CFP; ☞ 7am-5pm Tue-Sun, entry closes 2pm).

There is a visitor information centre by the entrance gate which has good displays in English and French on the park's flora and fauna. At the entrance you will also find free maps that outline the park's many walks.

One of the park's famous features is a drowned kaori forest, the trunks reaching, ghostlike, out of the clear blue water. Go on a moonlight paddle to become part of it.

To the west and northwest of the park are the Rivière Blanche and Rivière Bleue, Lac de Yaté's main tributaries. You can drive along the banks of Rivière Blanche to the end of the road, walk or bike along the Rivière Bleue side, or kayak up the river.

### CHUTES DE LA MADELEINE

This ladylike **waterfall** (☎ 469 247; adult/child 400/200 CFP; ☞ 8am-5pm), with its wide apron of tinkling water, sits in a botanic reserve in the middle of a vast plain. Swimming is forbidden at the waterfall, but it is permitted where the road runs beside the river between the waterfall and **Site de Netcha** (☎ 469 247; day entry adult/child 1000/500 CFP). Here, there are wooden diving platforms over the river and shelters and tables overlooking the water where you can picnic. Best of all, there's a kid's playground and you can rent kayaks.

To get to the waterfall from the RP3, take the signposted road turning towards the eastern end of the Lac de Yaté; it is 11km to the waterfall. This road joins the road connecting Prony and Port Boisé a few kilometres further on.

### YATÉ & CASCADE DE WADIANA

From the eastern end of Lac de Yaté, the RP3 winds to the top of a mountain and then drops steeply to the sea. If you turn right at the bottom of the escarpment and cross a small bridge, the road leads past Wao to tourist gîtes and campsites. If you continue, the road veers left to Yaté village, where there's a small shop and petrol pump.

South of Wao you come to Touaourou and then Goro. At Goro the road passes beside **Wadiana falls**, which cascade down a rocky slope into a natural pool where you can swim. From Goro you can go on, past the rusting remnants of an iron-mining operation, to Port Boisé and round past Prony back to Noumea.

### PORT BOISÉ

Port Boisé is an isolated bay surrounded by a forest of Cook Pines, 6.5km from the turn-off on the main road. The ecolodge here makes a good base for the walking tracks along the coast and to a lookout point. It's also a top spot for lunch.

### PRONY

Once a convict centre, Prony sits in a lush hollow surrounded by forest beside Baie de Prony. No cars are allowed. A stream runs through the village of corrugated-iron cottages and overgrown stone ruins. It's a charming place to wander through or enjoy a picnic beside the sea. A plaque tells about Capitaine Sebert landing here in 1887. He found rosewood, wanted in Europe for walking sticks, pipes and clogs, ebony, koup and kaori. Across the stream a banyan has sculpted its roots to the edge of the cliff. Look for the little purple mushrooms and brilliant orange fungi.

Baie de Prony is a good place for yachts to hide from the Westerlies. **Casy Express** (☎ 793 260; casyexpress@lagoon.nc; 2500 CFP) runs taxi boats out to islands from here, whale-watching trips leave from here between July and September, and there's hot springs to be visited. The GR1 walking track also starts about 500m south of the village at Baie de la Somme, which is part of the larger Baie de Prony.

### Activities

There's a great range of activities waiting in the Far South: canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking, walking, abseiling, hunting, sitting by a stream. During the whale-watching season (July to September), there are dozens of local men with boats, ready to take you out **whale-watching** (adult per day 8500 CFP). The Office du Tourisme has a list of companies in the **Syndicat des Activités Nautiques et Touristiques** (www.nouvelle-caledonie-nautisme.nc) that adhere to its Whale-Watching Quality charter:

**Aventure Pulsion** (Map p144; ☎ 262 748; www.aventure-pulsion.nc/sorties.htm; kayaks half-/full day 2500/4500 CFP) Rent your kayak in Noumea (carried on your own car) or take a guided sea-kayak tour to a hot spring, a moonlight paddle over the drowned forest or a river or lake kayak (4200 CFP, see the website for dates).

**Koghi Decouverte/Sud Loisirs** (☎ 778 143; koghi.decouverte@hotmail.com, sudloisir@lagoon.nc) Hire a mountain bike (2200 CFP) on weekends, in Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue. Ask the ranger at the park entrance for directions to the kiosk.

## FLORENT LIMENTO, AVENTUR PULSION

Florent is a part-time tour guide. He takes groups of six to eight on day trips in a 4WD.

### You came to Noumea from France five years ago. Why?

I was dreaming about a tropical island and I saw there were not much people on New Caledonia and also the size of the island with mountains and rivers and that made my destination. I had no real idea of what to expect but I was most interested in discovering this big land.

### Are you pleased to be bringing your children up here?

Yes, yes. It is quite safe. No cars, pollution is not too bad. I feel safe, you won't get an allergy. And the Melanesian way of life, you're not worried about money, the future. For me it is a dream to grow a kid in a place that was my dream, a country that is part of me now.

### You obviously love the South. Why?

For me it is a place of freedom. You can find your own little river and camp there. You're allowed to make a fire camp and you see nobody.

### You take tourists to the South. What do you show them?

You know there's the views, the waterfalls, the tribal villages. You have this special vegetation; some come from the dinosaur era. The reef here is still alive, put your line in the water and there's fish, take a boat to a small island and your island is for yourself. Where else can you find that?

**Pacific Free Ride** (☎ 792 202; www.pfr.nc) Go abseiling down the falls at Goro or Yaté (8000 CFP), or canoe in Baie de Prony and Baie des Pirogues (half-day 5000 CFP).

**Terra Incognita** (☎ 789 446; www.terincognita.com) Kayak rental at Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue (5500 CFP). Full moon kayaking (4200 CFP); park nature tour by foot, bike, kayak and 4WD (11,000 CFP).

## GR1 WALKING TRACK

The **GR1** (Grande Randonnée 1; www.trekking-gr-sud-nc.com) is a five-day (123.4km) walk (Great Walk) between Prony through Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue and on north to Dumbéa. Trek from the sea through plains, forests, hills and streams, along mule tracks and into pond or marsh. The air might be moist, acrid or crisply alpine; the views are always magnificent. Bunk down in a hut along the way; download the route and hut details from the website. Drop-offs or pick-ups need to be arranged either through the office at **Site de Netcha** (☎ 469 247) or **Aventure Pulsion** (www.aventure-pulsion.nc/taxi.htm) has a taxi service to and from the different legs of the walk (from 10,000 CFP for up to eight people).

## Tours

The following tours of the Far South are based on a minimum of two adults:

**Aventure Pulsion** (Map p144; ☎ 262 748; www.aventure-pulsion.nc; 4WD per adult per day 16,000 CFP) A grand adventure in a 4WD, visiting waterfalls, tribal villages, bays and mountain tops. Lunch is a three-course feast and you'll learn heaps from your driver/guide. Tours leave at 8am.

Other tours, like the one-/two-day kayak tours, cost from 5800/10,000 CFP.

**Caledonia Tours** (☎ 259 424; caledoniatours@lagoon.nc; adult/child 11,500/7500 CFP) Specialise in day tours through the Blue River Park. Swim, walk through rainforest, bird-watch and listen to a rich commentary about geology, botany, wildlife and history. Lunch is a BBQ by the river. Tours leave at 8.15am.

## Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation places serve meals to non-guests but you must book in advance.

**Site de Netcha** (☎ 469 247; camping 1200 CFP) Cute little roofed campsites are set by the river. Camp fires, tables and benches sit between the bushes, the toilet is swish and there's a shower and basin. There's no electricity and you must take drinking water.

**Gîte Iya** (☎ 469 080; camping 1500 CFP, bungalows 5000 CFP) The rustic but comfortable bungalows are in a coconut grove beside a small private beach. Set menus cost 2200 CFP (closed for dinner on Sunday), or 3600 CFP for lobster. You can snorkel along the fringing reef not far from the beach. There's a signpost to the gîte, just south of Wao.

**Gîte St Gabriel** (☎ 464 277; camping 1000 CFP, bungalows 13,000 CFP) You can see St Gabriel's lawns sweeping down to the beach from the main road, about 3km south of Touaourou. It's a peaceful spot and you can go for long walks along the beach. The bungalows are crisply modern; Marie-jo serves seafood platters, *bougna* and other local dishes (set menu from 2400 CFP, order in advance) in the open

restaurant. Canoes and bikes can be hired for 500 CFP per half-day.

**Kanua Tera Ecologie** (☎ 469 000; www.tera.nc; d/f 12,600/15,600) Port Boisé seems so isolated, on the edge of a magical forest of Cook Pines. Then you come down a narrow road into a lovely garden with nestled bungalows and a spectacular restaurant that floats out from the cliff. The beach is shallow but you can snorkel on the edge of the fringing reef. It re-opened in 2009, shiny new but the meals are as delicious as ever (tropical breakfast 1900 CFP).

**Camping Kwatea** (☎ 966 182; *faré* s/d 1500/2000 CFP) Four *farés* are in a market garden of sweet potato, taro, papaya and coconut. All have ocean views and shared facilities. Idyllic actually. Your hosts, Marie and Bonaventure, produce a range of *bougnas* (1000 CFP), adding quails or fish to your liking. Tours to Unia tribal village, hiking and demonstrations of traditional farming or boating practice are on offer.

## CENTRAL GRANDE TERRE

Not far from the bustling cosmopolitan capital, Central Grande Terre offers enriching cultural experiences, coastal scenery and mountain treks. On the west coast you can stay in a Kanak *tribu* or a Caldoche farm and explore the countryside by foot or on horse back. On the east coast, in Thio and Canala, there are simple campsites in beautiful coastal and riverside settings.

### Orientation & Information

The west-coast settlements of Bourail and La Foa are the main towns in the region. Both have a *gendarmerie*, pharmacy, post office, bank and supermarket. And both have little cinemas that screen the latest films in French on Wednesday and weekend evenings (tickets 800 CFP). West of Bourail is La Roche Percée, New Caledonia's only surf beach.

### Getting There & Around

Several buses a day from Noumea stop in the west-coast towns. There is a daily bus to Thio and Canala from Noumea, but no connecting services between the two towns.

### Amédée Islet

This islet (Map pp156–7), about 20km south of Noumea, is famous for its tall white lighthouse, **Phare Amédée** (admission 200 CFP), that was built in France, shipped out in pieces, and assembled on the postcard island in 1865.

Climb up its spiral staircase to a narrow shelf with 360-degree views. The lighthouse marks one of only three natural breaks in the barrier reef that allow boats access to the mainland.

There's a snack bar and curio shop for visitors who come here on a day trip on the *Mary D* (p151), which leaves from Port Moselle. It's also a popular spot for scuba divers and snorkellers.

### Monts Koghis

Monts Koghis (Map pp156–7) are clad in rainforest and rich native flora, and they have several walking trails; the Direction des Ressources Naturelles (p186) publishes a free walking map. Or take a treetop trail on swinging bridges and rope walks with **Koghi Parc Aventure** (Map pp156–7; ☎ 430 252, 821 485; talon@mls.nc; trail 2000 CFP; ☎ 10am–4pm Sat & Sun, by reservation Mon–Fri), behind the *auberge* (p151). Fun. The turn-off to these mountains is on the RT1, 14km north of central Noumea.

Caltours (p194) runs half-day tours to Monts Koghis.

### Boulouparis

Just north of Tontouta airport is Boulouparis, where a turn-off to Bouraké beach takes you to the departure point for trips to **Îlot Ténia**, a beautiful sandy islet surrounded by clear waters near the barrier reef. The islet is a popular surfing, diving and snorkelling spot.

**Bouts-d'Brousse** (☎ 432 962; www.ilot-tenia.com; half-/full-day boat trips 4600/6800 CFP) organises trips to the island which include dolphin watching; great fun, especially for children. Take your own picnic lunch. Trips depart at 9am. Scuba diving (intro dive 7800 CFP) includes exploring a magnificent coral massif that rises from the reef face.

### La Foa & Around

La Foa is a neat little town 1½ hours from Noumea. The friendly and efficient staff at **La Foa Tourisme** (☎ 416 911; www.lafoatourisme.asso.nc; ☎ 8am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, 9am–noon Sun), the visitors information centre, can advise on accommodation and activities in La Foa, Farino and Sarraméa. A major event on New Caledonia's social calendar is the June/July film festival where international films, screened in their own language, are shown at La Foa's **Cinéma Jean-Pierre Jeunet** (☎ 416 911). Each year, the festival is presided over by a famous person from the film industry.

The **sculpture garden** (📍 8am-8pm Sep-Apr, to 6pm May-Aug) behind La Foa Tourisme features wonderful sculptures by artists from throughout New Caledonia. The garden is a pleasant place for a picnic, with a children's playground and public toilets.

**Sarraméa**, 15 minutes' drive north of La Foa, sits in a lush valley surrounded by mountains. At the end of the road a path continues through a farm gate to **Trou Feuillet**, also known as *la cuve*, a refreshing rock pool in a mountain stream. On the main road, just past the Sarraméa turn-off, is **tribu de Petit Couli**, where a beautiful old *grande case* stands at the end of a row of tall araucaria pines.

**Farino** is a mountain village in primary tropical forest, known for its produce and craft markets held every second Sunday of the month. The real crowd puller is its *Vers de Bancoule* market day in September, which culminates in a contest to see who can eat the most fat, wriggling white grubs.

## ACTIVITIES

The **Refuge de Farino** (☎ 443 761) organises quad-bike tours (one/two hours 5000/6000 CFP) in the forest around Farino, and walks to waterfalls, and Parc Grande Fougères (big fern trees). The turn-off to Farino is on the road to Sarraméa.

**Jayak Surfari** (☎ 782 103, 797 374; www.jayaksurfari.com; day trips 5000 CFP) takes you out to surf or fish or walk about an islet.

There are many walks and horse treks in the La Foa region. Most places offer half- or full-day treks and some offer overnight treks:

**Louis Careba** (☎ 443 817; 1hr walks/horse treks 1500/3500 CFP) Louis offers historical and botanical walking and horse treks in *tribu de Oua Tom*. The turn-off is 13km south of La Foa.

**Pocquereux Randonnées** (☎ 773 254; 1hr/half-/full-day trek 3000/6000/12,000 CFP) The turn-off is 3km south of La Foa (on the road to La Petite Ferme). Mario Mediara

also offers camping/case accommodation for 500/1000 CFP and meals for 1800 CFP.

**Randonnées Equestres** (☎ 417 281, 354 522; guided walk 2000 CFP, half-/full-day horse trek 5000/8000 CFP) In the mountains 25km northeast of La Foa. Overnight walks or horse treks to Canala can also be arranged.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Refuge de Farino** (☎ 443 761; refuge.farino@lagoon.nc; camping 700 CFP, bungalows 7400 CFP) On a hillside in Farino's forest, Sabine's timber bungalows have a kitchenette and magnificent views from their decks. There's BBQs, a hot tub, a playground and breakfast (750 CFP). Just lovely. BYO food, or eat at Mamie's, 1km back down the road.

**La Petite Ferme** (☎ 443 405; lafoatourisme@canl.nc; camping 1000 CFP, bungalows 4000 CFP) These pre-fab bungalows make a base to go hunting; your host, Jean Louis, runs 4WD night spins to see the deer. Meals (five-courses with drinks 4000 CFP) are served in the garden, but book 48 hours ahead (six days ahead if you're a large group wanting cassoulet).

**our pick Ouano Surf Camp** (☎ 469 090; www.ouano surf.com; camping 1050 CFP, bungalows with/without bathroom 7000/6600 CFP) New in town and just what was needed for surfers and others, there's everything here, including a laundry, modern but basic bungalows and great meals. It's a 20-minute boat ride out to surf the reef breaks.

**Tontoutel Hotel** (☎ 351 111; ecotel@canl.nc; s/d/family 6700/8200 CFP/12,300 CFP; 🍷) It's five minutes from Tontoutel International Airport, so it's perfect if you're catching an early morning flight. Ecotel Association for Hotel and Catering Training trains students there. Rooms are large and comfortable and there's a pleasant restaurant.

**Hôtel Banu** (☎ 443 119; fax 443 550; s/d/f 4400/5200/7600 CFP, bungalows s/d 6400/7200 CFP; 🍷 🍷) Looking quaint, in the middle of La Foa, but

## IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'RE BLOWFLIES

You never know, do you. Take deer: Bambies, cute as. They were introduced into New Caledonia and have become an ecological disaster. There are more deer than people now, they ringbark forest trees, and even greenies agree they're a pest. So hunting has become an intrinsic part of local life. If you're interested in the venison, it can go back overseas with you, you just need an invoice saying it's been through proper channels. Or hold one big spit roast before you leave. If you're after a trophy head, you should come in the rutting season (July and August). After that the antlers fall off. Your trophy must be stuffed by a taxidermist, and the meat is inedible.

It's difficult to bring your own gun. Contact Hôtel Banu and Hôtel La Nero for advice, then you'll need a hunting licence to borrow a gun and a ration of ammunition.

the accommodation behind the hotel is excellent. The restaurant is open for all meals except Sunday dinner, and the cheerful staff serve the best *plat du jour* (1300 CFP) and other delicious meals (1300 CFP to 6500 CFP) using local produce. Or have a gourmet sandwich on the porch (550 CFP) then try counting the 4700 caps on the bar's ceiling.

**Auberge du Mont Koghi** (☎ 412 929; koghi.land@offratel.nc; Dumbéa; chalet/half-board 7500/15,000 CFP) Overlooking Noumea and its bays, 476m above sea level, the *auberge* has chalets and more remote huts about a 10-minute walk into the forest. The restaurant is open for all meals. It has a fireplace, warm timber interior, and specialises in melted-cheese *raclette* (3900 CFP).

**Nainā Park Hôtel** (☎ 443 540; www.nainaparkhotel.com; bungalows B&B 8900 CFP; 🚽 🚿) These bungalows are quite delightful, set amidst shady tropical trees at the entrance to La Foa. There's a relaxing pool area and a grand restaurant (dishes 2300 CFP to 3800 CFP, closed Monday).

**Évasion 130** (☎ 445 577; www.hotel-evasion.com; B&B r/bungalow 9900/17,500 CFP; 🚽 🚿) Smart modern bungalows with little verandas overlook a stream at the end of the road in Sarraméa. Or stay in a spacious room in the hotel. Évasion's top chef offers fine dining and elegant buffets (meals 2500 CFP to 4500 CFP) in the spacious restaurant.

**Chez Mamie Fogliani** (☎ 432 314; meals 2500-3500 CFP) Mamie's table d'hôte is very popular. Enjoy filling Caldoche cuisine including venison, wild pig, fish and duck dishes. It's 3km from the Farino *mairie* (town hall).

**Aux Délices des Jumelles** (☎ 434 665; set menus from 3000 CFP; 🍷 lunch Tue-Sun) In a gorgeous garden near the chapel in Sarraméa, Bernadette serves four courses of Kanak cuisine that delight her guests. Try her special coffee with coconut jam (*mamarèni*). Book 24 hours ahead and dinner is available by arrangement (BYO drinks).

**Chez Marie-Georgette** (☎ 443 817; set menu 3000-3500 CFP) This table d'hôte adjacent to the *tribu* de Oua Tom serves Kanak cuisine including *bougna*, and chicken or prawn dishes. Book 24 hours in advance and take your tent so you can stay the night (camping 1000 CFP).

## Bourail & Around

With a rural atmosphere and strong Caldoche community, Bourail is the next biggest town on Grande Terre after Noumea. The main road crosses the Néra river bridge at the

southern end of town, and the turn-off to La Roche Percée and Poé beach is immediately after the bridge.

An old stone building 500m south of the centre houses the **Musée de Bourail** (☎ 441 218; adult/student 250/100 CFP; 🕒 8-11am & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, to 3pm Sun). Its displays include objects relating to the presence of US and NZ troops in Bourail during WWII and a guilotine complete with the basket where the decapitated head was placed. The guilotine was brought to New Caledonia in 1867. Behind the museum there's a *case*.

Bourail holds a hugely popular **country fair** (☎ 412 104; admission 500 CFP) over the weekend closest to August 15: farm animals on display; produce, arts and crafts for sale; children's rides; food stalls; and, the highlight, a rodeo. Campsites are available, 25,000 people are expected; there's contests, races, demonstrations. One grand weekend.

About 9.5km east of Bourail is the well-tended **New Zealand War Cemetery**, where over 200 NZ soldiers killed in the Pacific during WWII are buried. NZ troops set up a hospital in the area during the war, and many locals received free medical care there. A ceremony is held at the cemetery on the Saturday closest to Anzac Day (25 April) and local children place a flower on each grave.

La Roche Percée has two famous rock formations: **La Roche Percée** (pierced rock) and **Le Bonhomme**, a rock shaped like a tubby man. A walking track begins at the base of the cliff near the rocks and follows the coast for 4km past Baie des Tortues (Turtle Bay) to Baie des Amoureux (Lover's Bay).

There's a panoramic viewing point above Le Bonhomme where you can often spot turtles in Baie des Tortues below. With its bent araucarias and wide beach, Baie des Tortues is a beautiful spot but beware of the strong currents. To get there, follow the main road round to the right instead of turning left to La Roche Percée. As you ascend the hill, turn onto the dirt road to the left.

## ACTIVITIES

The surf at La Roche Percée is caused by a break in the fringing reef, so you don't have to go out to the reef to catch a wave. The best spot is at the mouth of the Néra river. When you've conquered the shore breaks, Nēkwéta (right) offers trips to the barrier reef to surf

(four hours for 5300 CFP), snorkel (half-day 5500 CFP) or explore Île Vert (3100 CFP).

The dive club **Bourail Sub Loisirs** (☎ 442 065, 782 065; butterfly.diving@lagoon.nc; 2-dive package 12,000 CFP), also at the Néra river mouth, will take you to see magnificent corals along vertical drops and canyons with abundant sharks, rays and Napoleon fish. Surfing trips to the barrier reef and boat trips (from 3000 CFP) can be arranged.

**Plage de Poé** is a beautiful, long white-sand beach 9km north of La Roche Percée. It's all happening on the beach at Poé:

**Glass-bottom boat tours** (1800 CFP)

**Poe Kite School** (☎ 776 059; www.poe.kiteschool.com; 1½hr 6000 CFP) Teaches kitesurfing.

**Poe Plaisirs** (☎ 750 001; www.mdplaisirs.com) Hires kayaks (1600 CFP per hour), windsurfers (beginners/intermediate 1000/2700 CFP per hour) and funboards (6700 CFP per day). Ask about the MD Plaisirs discount card.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**our pick Nèkwéta** (☎ 419 081; www.nekweta.com; case adult/child 3000/1500 CFP) The attractive campsite is like a small botanic garden with areas to sit and discuss the breaks. It's at La Roche Percée, one block back from the beach.

**Aux Delices de la Cigogne** (☎ 442 552; s/d 4500/6300 CFP) A traditional Alsace table d'hôte which features crane in its menu

(three-course meal with wine 3200 CFP). It's highly recommended by the locals who like to stay the night in the newly renovated rooms – basic but with ensuite. Book in advance; it's 4km north of Bourail on the main road.

**El Kantara** (☎ 441 322; el.kantara@lagoon.nc; d fan/aircon 5700/6500 CFP; ♿ ♿) It's very orange, with motel-type rooms in lines, but the pool's a drawcard and it's a short walk through to La Roche Percée beach. The large dining room is open for all meals (1750 CFP to 2450 CFP) and there's a shady deck for lounging, table tennis, *pétanque* and canoe hire.

**Chez Catherine et Pascal** (☎ 439 806, 795 782; d/tr 6000/7000 CFP) Another sweet tropical garden in La Roche Percée with attractive pre-fab bungalows, lots of private space and charming hosts who'll cook for you if you ask (breakfast 700 CFP, three-course dinner with wine 3000 CFP).

**Hôtel La Néra** (☎ 441 644; s/d 6700/7700 CFP; ♿ ♿) This Bavarian-style hotel with a river view is by the Néra river bridge. Dishes like veal provincial cost between 1900 CFP and 2300 CFP at the hotel's cosy restaurant (breakfast is 800 CFP). Try your hand at clay pigeon shooting here (25 shots for 2500 CFP).

**Rick's Place** (☎ 442 281; www.rochepercee.com; challet weekday/weekend 8000/11,000) A rustic romantic

## RICK ANEX, RICK'S PLACE, LA ROCHE PERCÉE

Owner of Rick's Place (see above)

**New Caledonia's reef has been granted World Heritage status. What was the listing based on?**

It fulfils all the criteria. It has exceptional natural beauty and is of universal value. It is the only place in the world that has all the components of a reef and associated eco-systems in one place. The mangroves, giant lagoon, river deltas, wet lands, coral plateaus, sea grass, internal fringing reef. And it's almost unbroken barrier reef surrounds a spectacular number of species of all forms of marine life.

**How will protecting New Caledonia's reef benefit the rest of the globe?**

This reef has the chance of being saved. With its geographical position and isolation, there's been less coral bleaching than on other major reefs, showing it has a greater potential to survive global warming. Plus there's less effluent from agriculture and general pollution. So it could be the world's best chance of preserving a reef ecosystem.

**But New Caledonia has major industries. Do they not cause a problem?**

For sure. Industrial development is anathema to the reef. In fact we requested World Heritage status for the entire reef, but political issues, driven by industrial requirements, meant only six areas were finally included, areas where there was no mining or industrial sites.

**You played a big role in the request.**

Yes, I was inspired by the efforts of Tasmanian Greens to get Franklin River inscribed on the World Heritage list. It is essential that we do everything possible to protect our environment against development without concern for the consequences.

cubby for two in La Roche Percée, up some steps and over the river, with a large kitchenette and sitting area, bedroom, front deck, and carved chairs and door handles. If Rick's at home (next door), listen to his stories about local history and the early days of surfing. He has bikes, kayaks and coffee he roasts himself.

**Gîte du Cap** (Map p165; ☎ 469 009, 766 617; gites ducap@tropik.nc; maisonnette/chalet B&B 10,000/5800) A further 24km up the RT1 from Bourail, turn at the sign on col du Cap and it's 8km down towards the sea to Gîte du Cap. The well-equipped maisonnettes sleep five, the chalets three, on this 70 hectare farm that stretches down to the ocean. Germaine cooks traditional meals (3800 CFP) using local produce while Yann takes you around the farm, or to fish, canoe and hike.

**Snack Hibiscus** (☎ 441 217; dishes 1400 CFP, snacks 450-600 CFP; ☎ 7am-6pm) Yes it's hibiscus pink, busy and serves good paninis, toasted sandwiches and burgers, or copious fish or chicken dishes.

**Mambo Café** (☎ 442 930; dishes 1500-2300 CFP; ☎ 7am-1pm & 5.30-8pm) This cafe in the centre of town specialises in Asian dishes with prawns or beef, and pizzas (from 1500 CFP).

## Thio & Canala

These two east-coast towns are in the heart of mining country, where the mountains are scarred by the destructive mining practices of the past. Don't be put off, though, as the rest of the landscape is beautiful. There are a couple of lovely beaches in Thio where you can camp. Thio also has a small **mining museum** (☎ 445 177; adult/child 200 CFP/free; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri, to noon Sat & Sun).

A scenic coastal drive from Thio heads 30km south to Petit Borendi. The starkly contrasting red, green and blue of the earth, vegetation, sea and sky are amazing.

Beware the *Route à Horaires* (schedule road), a 13km goat track called a road between Thio and Canala. If you arrive outside the schedule, you have to wait for two hours because cars can only depart at odd hours from the Thio end, between 5am and 5pm, and at even hours from the Canala end, between 6am and 6pm. Plus, you can only enter the road in the first 20 minutes of your hour. After dark, traffic becomes two-way. Don't try to think why.

The views from the valley looking up at the 60m **Cascade de Ciu** are spectacular. The

turn-off to the waterfalls, a sealed road beside a green corrugated-iron shop, is 2km south of Canala.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Contact **Canala Information Centre** (☎ 426 061) or **Thio Tourism Information Desk** (☎ 442 504) for information on camping in the area.

**Gîte d'Ouroué** (☎ 445 085; camping 1100 CFP) North of Thio, in a coconut grove beside a remote beach, with a long shady stretch of lawn. Half-day kayak hire costs 500 CFP.

**Camping de Haut Gélima** (☎ 786 490; camping 1100 CFP) A tranquil campsite beside a river, 1.5km from the main road about 3km south of Canala; the turn-off is signposted.

**Gîte de Kuinet** (☎ 428 442; camping 1100 CFP, case 3600 CFP) In *tribu* de Kuinet, on the road to Cascade de Ciu, these *cases* are a modern version of the traditional structures. Meals are 2800 CFP.

**Camping La Moara** (☎ 445 184; camping 1500 CFP) This grassy campsite sits by a white-sand beach curved around a small bay. It's 11km southeast of Thio.

## NORTHWEST COAST

Much of the northwest coast and its rolling plains are taken up by cattle ranches. The coast is not great for swimming, as it has mangrove swamps and shallow bays, so it makes more sense to head inland for horse trekking or staying on a Caldoche farm or in a Kanak homestay.

## Getting There & Around

Air Calédonie flies twice weekly from Noumea to Koné (☎ agency 472 113) and Koumac (☎ agency 475 390); see p192. There are daily buses from Noumea (see p192). The **gare routière** (bus station; Rue Roger Trouillot), 300m from the roundabout in Koumac, has schedules for buses going north to Poum and northeast to Ouegoa and Pouébo.

## Koné & Around

Koné, the Northern Province capital, has a post office, *gendarmerie*, clinic, pharmacy, supermarkets and banks with ATMs. It is noted for its excellent horse-trekking opportunities. Pouembout, located 8km south of Koné, is in many ways an extension of the capital.

North of Koné, in Voh, there's a mangrove swamp which has developed some unusual

natural designs. The most intriguing is a perfect heart shape, **La Cœur de Voh**, which is on the cover of *Earth from Above*, the book of aerial photography by famous photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand. There's a track up to a viewing point on a mountain but the heart is best seen from the air. **Alain Nouard** (☎ 472 593; 30min flight 6000 CFP) or **Pierre Couget** (☎ 473 287; 60min flight 10,000 CFP) from the ultra-light club in Koné take microflight flights on weekends. Book well in advance.

Places that organise guided horse treks into the foothills or to the summits of the central mountain range include:

**Centre d'accueil d'Atéou** (☎ 472 613; per 2/4hr 2000/3000 CFP) In *tribu d'Atéou*, 20km from Koné. It's signposted from behind the post office.

**Patrick Ardimanni** (☎ 422 151; Koné) Near Hôtel Koniambo, Patrick takes 7-day treks to Hienghène (23,000 CFP).

## SLEEPING & EATING

It's a good idea to book your accommodation as early as possible as places are booked by people associated with the mining complex being developed in the Koniambo mountains.

**Camping d'Atéou** (☎ 472 613; camping/cabin 1000/1500 CFP) Visitors and trekkers can stay in a wooden cabin which has wonderful views down the mountain to the coast, or camp under shady trees. Meals cost 1500 CFP.

**Hôtel Le Bougainville** (☎ 472 060; [www.hotel-bougainville.nc](http://www.hotel-bougainville.nc); r/bungalow d 7300/8300 CFP; 🚻 🍷 🍷) In the centre of Pouembout, happily colorful





bungalows are set in a quiet garden. The restaurant (meals 2000 CFP to 2600 CFP, closed Sunday dinner) is in a stunning *case* where you'll enjoy excellent meals (the beef fillet is especially good).

**Hôtel Hibiscus** (☎ 472 261; www.hibiscushotel.net.nc; rstd/luxury 7800/8800 CFP; 🍷) This modern hotel at the southern end of Koné has attractive cool rooms and a white airy restaurant (dinner menu 3900 CFP) opening onto a paved pool area.

**ourpick Paddock de La Boutana** (☎ 471 617; paddockboutana@mls.nc; adult/child 8000/4500 CFP) Marie-Claude is your host at this peaceful farmstay 20km inland from Pouembout. The rates include breakfast and dinner, tours of the farm and deer-spotting trips. Go hiking, swim in the rivers and creeks. It's lovely. Marie-Claude can't take children under seven.

**Hôtel Koniambo** (☎ 473 940; www.grands-hotels.nc; r 11,800 CFP; 🍷) Named after the mountain range behind it and recently rebuilt, this makes a very comfortable base to explore the surrounding 'stockman's country'. The restaurant's buffet features regional dishes, such as venison, and international cuisine.

**Tumbala Café** (☎ 424 439; snacks 450-650 CFP, mains 1500-2400 CFP; ☎ 6am-11pm Mon-Fri) The bright and popular Tumbala Café is the best place to eat in Koné. It serves light snacks, fish and meat dishes like veal escalope and chicken with caramel.

## Koumac

Koumac, further north than Koné, is quite big. Like Koné, it has a post office, *gendarmerie*, clinic, pharmacy, supermarkets and banks with ATMs. **Koumac Tourisme** (☎ 427 842; www.koumac-tourisme.com; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), the information centre, is at the northern end of town opposite the post office. Elise will give you lots of local advice.

Located near the roundabout, eye-catching **Église Ste Jeanne d'Arc** was constructed in 1950 out of a WWII aircraft hangar. Take a peek inside at its stained-glass windows and traditionally inspired wood carvings.

Head to Koumac's lovely marina, La Marina de Pandop, where the new dive club, **Reve Bleu** (☎ 424 564; www.revebleucaledonie.com), is geared up to provide a grand professional experience. It's a 15-minute boat ride to the reef with your PADI divemaster. Intro dives are 7000 CFP, double explorative dives 13,000 CFP.

**Koumac Plaisirs** (☎ 790 791; www.mdplaisirs.com) hires windsurfers (one hour 1000 CFP, 600 CFP with the MD Plaisirs Card). Intro lessons (one hour) cost 1500 CFP.

**Monitel Koumac** (☎ 476 666; monitelkoumac@lagoon.nc; bungalows s/d 8500/9500 CFP, chalets s/d 10,500/11,500 CFP; 🍷) has sweet stone bungalows or Western-style units that are timber-lined and well-equipped. They look out on the pool with its inviting deck chairs. The restaurant features a central buffet (set menu from 2300 CFP).

## THE FAR NORTH

The remote region north of Koumac is known as the Far North. Up here, fishermen wade around the endless white with their lines and nets, thinking they're in heaven. The area is considered one of the world's top five for fly-fishing; the world record is from here. Richard Bertin of **New Caledonia Fishing Safaris** (☎ 251 940; www.fishinpeace.com) organises sportfishing tours to Poingam. Don't worry: it's catch, tag and release. You can also go big-game fishing in Richard's Boston Whaler, deer hunting or birdwatching. A package out of Tontouta, all-inclusive, staying in a luxurious safari tent is 50,000 CFP a day.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Stock up on supplies before heading to the Far North as there's not much available in the tiny town of Poum.

**ourpick Relais de Poingam** (☎ 479 212; camping 1000 CFP, bungalows 9400 CFP, safari tent 13,500 CFP; 🍷) On a long beach at the northern tip of Grande Terre are these comfortable bungalows that everybody loves. The private bathrooms are cutely outside and the restaurant serves delectable crab, fish, wild pig or venison meals (from 2800 CFP). The shallow lagoon is not great for swimming, but the saltwater pool is. The safari tent is total luxury for those who love the creature comforts. From the turn-off south of Poum, it's 23km to Poingam. The first 6km are sealed; the rest is packed earth but quite good.

**Gîte et Camping Golone** (☎ 479 078, 472 000; camping 1200 CFP, bungalows 6000 CFP) A tranquil and isolated place on a small peninsula where you can hire a tent (700 CFP). Breakfast is 800 CFP, and dinner is 2200 CFP to 4600 CFP, depending on what seafood delights you request. The turn-off is about 400m

north of Hôtel Malabou Beach. Take your mosquito repellent.

**Hôtel Malabou Beach** (☎ 476 060; www.grands-hotels.nc; d/tr bungalows 11,900/15,000 CFP, 6-person ste 22,900 CFP; 🍷 🍴) Along a white-sand beach in Baie de Néhoué are these well-equipped bungalows with separate bedrooms and private terraces. The restaurant's grand buffet (3700 CFP) specialises in seafood straight from the lagoon. There's kayaks, treks, tennis, minigolf – no end of activities. The hotel is signposted on the main road (transfers from Koumac airport are 5000 CFP return).

## NORTHEAST COAST

The stunning coastline here is edged by foothills covered in lush vegetation, gentle rivers, fascinating rock formations, waterfalls and deserted beaches. Visitors can experience traditional Kanak life in a *tribu* plus there's nature trails to suit all levels of fitness, from 20-minute walks to hikes lasting several days. Keen hikers can climb Mont Panié (1629m), New Caledonia's highest peak.

### Orientation

Poindimié and Hienghène are the two main towns on the northeast coast. Both have grocery stores, a post office, clinic, pharmacy, bank and ATM, and *gendarmerie*. The airfield at Touho is halfway between Poindimié and Hienghène.

### Getting There & Around

Air Calédonie flies two to four times weekly to Touho (☎ agency 428 787); see p192. **ALV** (☎ /fax 425 800; Poindimié; car hire per day from 5000 CFP) can meet you at the airport with a hire car.

Buses from Noumea run daily to Poindimié and six times weekly to Hienghène; see p191. Buses run from Koumac to Pouébo four times a week.

If you're driving, it's best to come up the west coast and then cross the island at Bourail, Koné or Koumac. If you cross south of Bourail the road between Kouaoua, north of Canala, and Houaïlou winds through the mines and can seem very long.

Driving on the RT3 across from Bourail, the road veers north at the roundabout in Houaïlou, and then crosses the long Houaïlou bridge. Another 13.5km north, turn down the gravel track immediately after the bridge at *tribu* de Bâ to a lovely picnic spot at a waterfall, **Cascade de Bâ** (car/adult 100/50

### DOUBLE IDENTITY

Many *tribus* and towns on the northeast coast have more than one name or are spelt differently. Road signs show two variations.

CFP), beside a large pool that's perfect for a swim.

However, the drive not to be missed is from Koné via the scenic Koné–Tiwaka road (RPN2) that winds through the mountains over high river bridges and past forested slopes, to the Tiwaka river mouth, 14km north of Poindimié. Halfway through the mountains you can detour via **tribu de Bopope**, with its charming bark-and-thatch *cases* perched on the edge of steep slopes.

### Poindimié

The largest town on the coast, Poindimié has a picturesque coastline and, stretching inland, the peaceful valleys of Ina, Napoémien and Amoa river, where you can admire the lush vegetation and magnificent treeferns of the natural bush or pretty *tribu* gardens. These valleys are delightful places for a walk or a scenic drive. Ina valley is at the southern end of town. To get to Napoémien, turn inland at the *mairie*. In Amoa valley, turn at the bridge just before the church at Tié Mission.

Poindimié overlooks **Îlot de Tibarama**, an islet just offshore. **Tiéti Diving** (☎ 424 205; www.tieti-diving.com; 2-dive package 12,000 CFP) is run by a friendly instructor who also offers transfers to Îlot de Tibarama (per person 1500 CFP), a great spot to relax, snorkel and swim.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Camping Tiakan** (☎ 428 514; camping 500 CFP) A peaceful campsite, 22km south of Ponérihouen, with a little thatched shelter alongside each site and hot water. A half-day of fishing costs 2000 CFP.

**Gîte Newe Jie** (☎ 427 074; bungalows 4800 CFP, case s/d 2500/5000 CFP) This gîte in Vallée d'Ina offers comfortable and impeccably clean accommodation, with a large, well-equipped kitchen and dining area. It's hard to find; take the Vallée d'Ina turning 2km south of Poindimié and follow the signposts illustrated with a hut.

**Hotel-Restaurant le Tapoundari** (☎ 427 111; letapoundari@hotmail.com; s/d 6800/7800 CFP) Look

for the pink place behind the bridge. Its basic rooms sit along open corridors, but they're perfectly adequate and have ensembles. The restaurant, however, is fabulous and open for all meals during the week. The locals eat here, enjoying terrines, seafood and steaks (meals 1700 CFP to 2400 CFP). Take advantage of the small helping for 1100 CFP deal.

**Tiétí Tera Beach Resort** (☎ 426 400; www.tieti.tera.nc; r/ste 12,600/26,300 CFP; 🍷 🍷) Reputed to be the best resort up north, it is indeed splendid and spacious, and features stacks of timber beams and carvings for a rich atmosphere. Plus you're an easy walk away from charming Poindimie. Breakfast is 1300 CFP and dinner dishes like red snapper with eggplant and goat cheese cannelloni, cost from 2100 CFP to 2799 CFP. Or choose a three-course menu (lunch/dinner 3200/4100 CFP).

**Snack Le Banian** (☎ 866 481; dishes 1100-1700 CFP; 🍷 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat) Two large banyan trees watch over this friendly place where an excellent chef oversees the paninis and toasted sandwiches, then cooks tasty veal, fish or chicken dishes. Or enjoy his salads, and the fun range of coffees.

**Chez Simone** (☎ 427 484; ppswc@lagoon.nc; dishes from 1900 CFP) You may like to book in for the night (single/double 3500/6500 CFP) after your feast of home-cooked Kanak cuisine. Dishes are based around wild deer, pig or fish. The turn-off is 4km south of Poindimie and it's another 3.5km to Simone's in *tribu* de Nessapoé.

## Hienghène

This serene village with its fairy-tale buildings is tucked into the foothills on the shores of Baie de Hienghène, at the mouth of the Hienghène River. The area has fascinating rock formations, and it is also important historically as it was the home of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, New Caledonia's pro-independence leader. People speak of Tjibaou with great respect, and he is buried in Tiendanite, a *tribu* 20km up the Hienghène valley.

Hienghène's renowned **Poule Couveuse** (Brooding Hen) rock formation sits on one side of the entrance to Baie de Hienghène, facing the sphinx on the other. You can view these two rock formations from the sign-posted lookout, 2km south of the village. There's a better profile of the sphinx about 1.5km north of the village.

The **Lindéralique rocks** are towering black limestone rocks with jagged edges, which begin about 10km south of Hienghène.

The **visitor information centre** (☎ 424 357; hen-tourism@mls.nc; Hienghène; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) looks over the Hienghène marina (which is also the bus terminal (see p192)). Sylvana and her colleague in the centre can book accommodation in *tribus*, help you contact **Association Dayu Biik** (☎ 428 777; dayubiik@lagoon.nc; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) for trekking in the area (see opposite), and arrange traditional meals and dances in local table d'hôtes.

## ACTIVITIES

There are dozens of excellent local guides in Hienghène, waiting to take you on the hike of your life, through and over this stunning region of mountain, forest, river, waterfall, beach, lagoon and extraordinary rock formation. Email [hienghen-tourism@mls.nc](mailto:hienghen-tourism@mls.nc) and choose your adventure.

At Lindéralique village, about 4km south of Hienghène, you can kayak beneath the overhanging rocks. There is also a large cave, **Grotte de Lindéralique** (adult/child 200/100 CFP), which you can visit. To get there follow the signposted turn-off 2.5km south of Hienghène.

Hienghène's small **Centre Culturel Goa Ma Bwarhat** (☎ /fax 428 074; culturehienghene@mls.nc; museum adult/child 150 CFP/free; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri & Sat, 9am-noon Sun) has good exhibitions, a museum as well as a sculptor's workshop. It also organises jazz, choral and classical concerts at Grotte de Lindéralique once a month.

Go diving with **Babou Côté Océan** (☎ 428 359; www.babou-plongee.com) around unique cliff faces of gorgonia and sheltered coral massifs (intro/double dives cost 8000/10,600 CFP), on island trips which include snorkelling (2500 CFP), or on a river walk (3500 CFP). It's based at Koulnoué Camping.

## SLEEPING & EATING

In the Hienghène valley there are many *accueil en tribu* (per person around 1000 CFP), traditional homestays with Kanak families. Visitors usually take part in everyday activities and meals (breakfast 400 CFP, dinner 1200 CFP, *bougna* 1500 CFP). Book through Hienghène's visitor information centre at least three days in advance.

**ourpick Koulnoué Camping** (☎ 428 359; camping per person 400 CFP, tent hire 1000 CFP) Just past Koulnoué Village is this pretty campsite on its own tiny bay where you can swim and picnic for 100 CFP. Sleep beneath the towering rock formations. The Babou Côté Océan dive club (above) is based here.

**Gîte Ka Waboana** (☎ 424 703; r/bungalow 4500/8400 CFP) These colourful bungalows with kitchenettes perch on a hill opposite the marina, with views of the bay. Breakfast (1050 CFP) and the daily menu (2420 CFP) are served in a rustic little eating area which is often booked out.

**Koulnoué Village** (☎ 428 166; bungalow 12,500 CFP, 4-person case 12,500 CFP; 🍷 🍷) Feel young again at this ex-Club Med establishment that still has plenty of good vibes. The bungalows are spacious, well-equipped and have private porches out to the beach. The traditional *case* is along the beach. Play tennis, canoe, go horse riding. There's a tiny supermarket 8km down the road if you find the buffet thing impossible (breakfast 1800 CFP, dinner 3500 CFP). The turn-off is 8.5km south of Hienghène; transfers from Touho are 5000 CFP return.

**Snack Terminus** (☎ 957 001; meals 1200-1500 CFP; 🕒 6am-5pm) Overlooking the marina is this bright and shiny little place, selling snacks and drinks and home-cooked lunches.

## North of Hienghène

This is the wildest and most stunning stretch of the northeast coast. It's covered in tropical vegetation, and waterfalls and streams rush down the mountains to join the sea.

New Caledonia's last surviving **river ferry**, a quaint old timber pontoon, carries vehicles across the wide Ouaième River, 17km northwest of Hienghène. It's free and runs 24 hours a day. The ferry's uniqueness makes the crossing one of the highlights of the journey.

The rugged coastal scenery changes to rolling hills, plains and mangrove swamps at **Pouébo**. Inside Pouébo's large Catholic church there's a marble **mausoleum** where the remains of Bishop Douarre, who set up New Caledonia's first Catholic mission, are interred. The first Europeans arrived in New Caledonia at Balade and Bishop Douarre arrived in 1843. The stained-glass windows in the small church here tell the story from the first Catholic mass. In 1853 France officially

laid claim to New Caledonia at Balade, the same year in which Douarre died.

An altar beneath an enormous banyan at **Mahamat beach** commemorates that first Catholic mass on Christmas Day 1843. The turn-off to the altar is 1.5km north of the church.

## ACTIVITIES

The area north of Hienghène is an amazing drawcard for trekking enthusiasts and nature lovers. However, all activities require a guide and authorisation for you to enter tribal territories. Guides and permissions are arranged by **Association Dayu Biik** (☎ 428 777; dayubiik@lagoon.nc; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri), including authorisation from the **Direction du Développement Economique et de L'Environnement** (DDEE; ☎ 427 252; Poindimié). It takes one to two weeks for arrangements to be finalised, so get your requests in as early as possible.

**Mont Panié** includes about 5000 hectares of botanical reserve. Its peak is New Caledonia's highest and the climb to the top is a magical two-day hike (19,000 CFP, maximum four people) out of Tao, passing giant kaoris, mountain araucarias, magnificent coloured rocks, waterfalls and creeks. Other guided walks cost around 12,900 CFP for one day.

You can also go on a half-day adventure around the **Cascade de Tao** (3/12 people 4200/7350 CFP), which plummets down a mountainside 7km north of the Ouaième River ferry. A path leads to the bottom of the falls starting at the cottage just after Tao bridge (200 CFP). If you're a thrill seeker, you can **abseil** (per person 10,000 CFP) down the waterfall; check with Association Dayu Biik.

## SLEEPING & EATING

There are a couple of **campsites** (camping 1000 CFP) north of the Tao river ferry where you can simply turn up. Stock up on groceries before you go.

Run by a friendly family, **Relais de Ouane Batch** (☎ 424 792; ouanebatch@lagoon.nc; camping 800 CFP, bungalows without bathroom 4700 CFP) is located 16km north of the river ferry. The bungalows have communal bathrooms with hot showers. There's also a table d'hôte that serves very good meals (2700 CFP); book 24 hours in advance. Activities include canoe hire (half-/full-day 600/1000 CFP) and fishing trips (10,000 CFP).

## LOYALTY ISLANDS

pop 22060 / area 1980 sq km

Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa. Such fairy-tale names for fairy-tale islands, each with their own characteristics: Maré is known for its deep rock holes, rugged coastal scenery and serene beaches; Lifou for its breathtaking cliff-top views and small secret beaches; Ouvéa for its unending beach and tranquil lagoon stretching endlessly to the horizon. They're all sparsely populated with secluded beaches, hidden caves and deep holes. They all have large tracts of impenetrable bush, but their roads are so good that driving around is a dream. Loyalty Islands? Captain Cook named them that, perhaps because the people are so friendly.

The locals blend traditional and modern lifestyles with ease, offering tourists a charming experience. You'll need to take cash (although each island has a bank with an ATM). You must book meals 24 hours in advance; seafood is a speciality and most places offer lobster or crab platters.

You'll find a shop with limited groceries in each village. Most places offer camping but only a couple have tents for hire.

### Getting There & Away

Air Calédonie flies at least twice a day between Noumea and each island (p191). There are fabulous flight-and-hotel packages (from 24,000 CFP); or visit all three for 32,300 CFP with the air pass (p192).

The *Betico* and *Havannah* sail from Noumea to the islands, and between the islands, once or twice a week; see p192.

### Getting Around

The islands don't have public transport and only Lifou has a taxi (two actually). Your accommodation can arrange transfers, but it's best to hire a car and have it waiting for you, especially if you're on a day trip. Car-rental companies drop off vehicles at the airport, wharf or accommodation places for free.

Hitchhiking is common everywhere but it can take a while for a car to come along.

### MARÉ

pop 7400 / area 641 sq km

With its scenic coastline of stunning beaches and rugged coral cliffs and an interior that hides impressive sunken pools and a mysterious ancient rock edifice, it is small wonder that Maré's geographical features have inspired legends.

### Orientation & Information

The small coastal town of Tadine is Maré's main centre; if you're travelling by ferry you'll arrive or leave from the wharf there. Tadine has shops, a petrol station, a pharmacy and a market on Tuesday and Friday.

**Air Calédonie** (✉) 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) airport (☎ 455 510) Tuo (☎ 454 277) Has an office in Tuo on the main road between La Roche and Tadine.

**BCI bank** (☎ 454 062; ✉ 7.15am-noon & 1.15-4pm Mon-Fri)

**post office** (☎ 454 105; ✉ 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri)

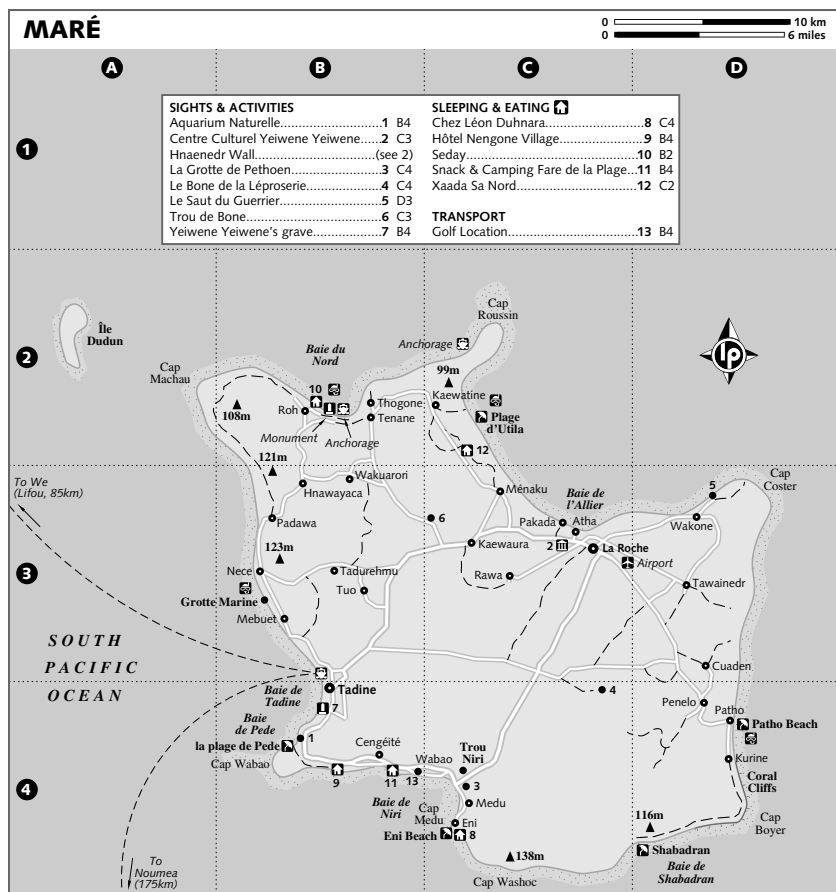
### KANAK GRANDE CASE

The *grande case* (big hut) is one of the strongest symbols of the Kanak community. It was traditionally home to the chief. Nowadays the *grande case* is the political centre of the district where the chief, who inherits his position, gathers with the village representatives to discuss the running of the community and affairs they want discussed in parliament.

Where possible, the *grande case* is built on a knoll above the rest of the village. The central pillar, an immense tree trunk, is erected first. It will support the entire *case* and symbolises the chief. A stone hearth is laid between the central pillar and the entrance which is via a low doorway flanked by carved posts.

Inside, the walls and ceiling are lined with wooden posts or beams, lashed to the frame with strong vines, all of which lean against the central pillar to symbolise the clan's close link to the chief. Finally, the roof is topped with a *flèche faitière*, a carved wooden spear that becomes home to ancestral spirits.

A *grande case* is always surrounded by large spiked tree-trunk fences. Only enter these areas with a guide and ask permission before taking photos.



## Sights

### TADINE & WESTERN MARÉ

The main road runs beside the coast for almost the entire length of western Maré. It's a picturesque drive, taking you past beaches, cliffs, *tribus* and forests.

The southwest coast has several gorgeous **beaches** where you can swim or snorkel during the day and watch the glorious sunsets in the evening. The small beach at Eni is the southernmost beach where you might spot **humpbacked whales** between July and September. Further north between Cengéité and Wabao, there's a fabulous beach beside a small enclosed lagoon whose water is an exquisite turquoise.

Keep going to the long white beach at Hôtel Nengone Village (p173) or continue to la

plage de Pede, a sheltered beach protected by the headland at Cap Wabao. A path to the beach leads through a gate from the main road at the sharp bend where it joins the coast.

Between these two beaches is the village of Medu. Just north of Medu there is a *trou bleu* (deep rock pool) near the road known as **La Grotte de Pethoen**, where you can see the dark shapes of eels swimming beneath an overhanging rock wall. Ask permission from anyone in Medu to go there.

Inland from Medu there is another *trou bleu* known as **Le Bone de la Léproserie**; there was once a leper hospital nearby which explains the name. This enormous hole in the limestone rock, hidden by thick vegetation, drops vertically to a pool of still water. It's one

### BONIFACE WAHAGA

Boniface Wahaga works in maintenance for Hôtel Nengone Village

#### You're a Maré local?

Yes. All the family has stayed here, father, grandfather. Great grandfather lived on the other side of the island. People here and there, hence family everywhere from marrying. Used to be, when they get married they have to marry from Tadine. Now it's different. I have married to a lady from Lifou. My adopted mother is from Ouvéa. One man here married to white people from Fiji. Other man to Wallis islander. Used to be, only marry Melanesian. Now it's different.

#### Do you mind having tourists on your island?

No, no. Before, no hotel. Just work in garden. Now there's a choice. I have family in *tribu* Singate. Mostly people from *tribus* around hotel work there, because the chief is chief of the land of the hotel. I never went outside this area to find a job.

#### The government offers scholarships to 400 Kanak people each year. Do you know people that this has helped.

It helps everyone. Local people push their kids now, must go to class, must study. No money but get a scholarship. There's training by hotel and government. People go to Canada, New Zealand, then get jobs in reception, kitchen. It's good for young generation.

of the largest drowned cavities in the world. Ask if you need permission to visit, and what condition the track is in after you turn at the signposted turn-off. The *trou bleu* is 1.5km down the track beside some solar panels.

About 3km south of Tadine is a large **Aquarium Naturelle**, a rock pool sunk in the cliffs and linked to the sea by an underground channel. Watch for Napoleon fish, perroquettes, picods and sometimes turtles swimming in the translucent water (take bread so that they come quickly). It is signposted by a parking area beside the main road.

**Yeiwene Yeiwene's grave** sits facing the sea beside the road about 2km south of Tadine. Yeiwene Yeiwene is the FLNKS leader, who was assassinated with Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1989. Ask permission before approaching the grave.

About 3km off the La Roche–Tadine Road, on the road to Thogone, is **Trou de Bone**, a deep rock cavity which drops to a lush tropical garden and a pool. It's on the right-hand side of the road as you're heading to Thogone, about 1.5km from the turn-off. It isn't signposted, so look out for a metal guardrail beside the road. Yell out to let off some steam and hear your echo.

### LA ROCHE & EASTERN MARÉ

Paths lead through the forest to the coast in the northeast of Maré; you can inquire about them at the various *tribus*. Maré's southeastern coastline is rugged and windswept.

There is a small exhibition of Kanak artefacts at **Centre Culturel Yeiwene Yeiwene** (☎ 454 479; ☎ 7.30–11.30am & 1–4pm Mon–Fri), about 2km out

of La Roche. Behind it, and more interesting because of their mysterious nature, are the stone ruins known as the **Hnaenedr wall**. This ancient rock fortification dates back to AD 250. The origins of the people who built the wall and its purpose are not entirely clear but legend tells of two warring tribes who agreed to construct walls for protection.

A huge limestone rock covered in vegetation near the coast gives the surrounding area of **La Roche** (the Rock) its name. The rock, known locally as Titi, rises above an attractive Catholic church with a red steeple. You can climb to the top of the rock with a local guide. Make inquiries in the *tribu*.

East of La Roche is **Le Saut du Guerrier** (Warrior's Leap). It is a gap in the cliffs, 5m wide and 30m above the pounding surf. Legend tells of a warrior who escaped his enemies by leaping across the abyss. Try to imagine the jump as you look down at the rocks and waves below.

**Shabadran** is an isolated, sheltered spot at the very south of Maré surrounded by cliffs and forest. The curved sandy beach is cut off from the sea by a reef, where waves crash and send foaming water cascading over coral terraces into a small sparkling lagoon.

### Activities

Follow the pleasant 6km **coastal walk** that links the beach at the northern end of Hôtel Nengone Village with that at Pede. It is mostly flat and shady as the path follows the shoreline through the trees. Near

Cap Wabao, it veers inland and meanders through a forest beneath a small cliff. Turn left at the end of the cliff and follow the wide path straight ahead through a wooded paddock to Baie de Pede.

Possibly the best walk on the islands is the coastal walk to Shabadran. Of course, Shabadran's beauty is enhanced by the effort of clambering along steep cliffs. But the views are amazing, and after a two-hour walk you descend to the exquisite beach: take plenty of water, a picnic lunch and wear sturdy footwear. You must have a **guide** (☎ 450 596; 1/2 days 3700/12,600 CFP), so contact Damas in Kurine, the last *tribu* before the end of the road. Book in advance; you need to be relatively fit.

## Tours

The hotels and gîtes organise tours of the island for around 3000 CFP per person. Local entrepreneurs include the following:

**Boniface Wahaga** (☎ 454 500) Runs guided snorkelling excursions to the coral beds up north.

**Emile Lakoredine** (☎ 454 244, 454 500) Offers glass-bottom boat tours (three hours for 2100 CFP).

**Kaloï Cawidrone** (☎ 454 501) Leads tours of his vanilla plantation for 500 CFP.

**Lakoredine Transport** (☎ 454 244, 454 500) Ernest Lakoredine takes round-island tours (2800 CFP) and rents scooters (4200 CFP a day).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Seday** (☎ 450 225; camping 1100 CFP, case per person 2000 CFP) Up north, in the quiet *tribu* of Roh, is a little honeymoon bungalow (3700 CFP) set on a rock in the water, plus three bungalows along the rocky coast. Sit on the wooden platform over the water, or slither between the rocks where it's great to snorkel. The restaurant serves excellent meals (1600 CFP to 1900 CFP) based on fish and home-grown vegetables. Jacques, the owner, is a sculptor and runs workshops; other activities include fishing and walks. Transfers are 2900 CFP.

**Xaada Sa Nord** (☎ 454 385; <http://wiako.iframe.com>; camping 1100 CFP, r 6900 CFP) Spacious motel-style rooms by the main road are painted cheery colours. Jacques will arrange boat or beach trips, but it's a 45-minute walk if you just want a swim. He has cars for hire from 6300 CFP, airport/wharf transfers are 2900/4200 CFP, meals are 1800 CFP, breakfast 600 CFP.

**Chez Léon Duhnara** (☎ 454 370; camping 1100 CFP, case 2100 CFP) This homestay in a coconut grove has two *cases*, two toilet blocks and camping across

from the rocky shoreline of Baie de Niri, a short stroll from white-sand Eni beach. Dinner mains are 1900 CFP, airport and wharf transfers 3800 CFP and island tours are 3300 CFP.

**our pick Snack & Camping Fare de la Plage** (☎ 454 224; camping 1200 CFP, case per person 1600 CFP) Down south, on idyllic Wabao beach, there is a *case* with beds for eight, and grassy spots for campers. Delicious meals (from 1200 CFP to 3000 CFP) are served at covered tables on the beach, every lunch and dinner (except Sunday lunch). So romantic and there's no need to book. Airport/wharf transfers cost 2800/1700 CFP, there's kayaks for hire (per hour 380 CFP) and island tours are 2900 CFP.

**Hôtel Nengone Village** (☎ 454 500; [nengone@canl.nc](mailto:nengone@canl.nc); bungalow/ste 13,000/23,000 CFP; ♿ ♿) All brand-new redesigned bungalows sit along a boardwalk looking quaint and tropical, yet modern, featuring local timbers. An infinity pool flows below the restaurant, there's some coral a few steps out from the shore and kayaks are available. This is Maré's top accommodation option. Meals (breakfast 1700 CFP, dinner mains 1200 CFP to 2600 CFP) are served in a pleasant room overlooking the ocean; airport/wharf transfers cost 2600/1400 CFP.

## Getting Around

You can try cycling around the island if you are fit but roads are long, straight and monotonous. Nengone Village hires bicycles (half-/full-day 650/1100 CFP).

The best way to get around Maré is by car. Car hire companies include the following: **Golf Location** (☎ 450 942; Wabao; per day from 5300 CFP) **K3000** (☎ 450 044, 950 220; [s.boulange@lagoon.nc](mailto:s.boulange@lagoon.nc); per day from 6300 CFP)

## LIFOU

pop 10,320 / area 1207 sq km

Lifou is home to magnificent cliff-top views, sheltered bays with coral shelves teeming with colourful tropical fish, secluded beaches, fascinating caves and a rich traditional culture. Water is pumped from underground, electricity is mainly wind-generated; in fact, the island is unpolluted except for household rubbish, which is collected twice-weekly.

## Orientation & Information

The main centre in Lifou is Wé, where the Loyalty Island's provincial offices are based. Wé stretches for about 2km along the main road beside Baie de Châteaubriand. You can



people-watch or relax on the white and aqua beach, there's a market Wednesdays and Fridays, a good supermarket, little gift shops, a beauty salon and an interesting marina.

**Air Calédonie** (✉ 7.30-11.30am & 12.30-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 8-11.30am Sat) airport (☎ 455 520) Wé (☎ 455 550) An office in Wé and a desk at the airport.

**BCI bank** (☎ 451 332; ✉ 7.20am-noon & 1-3.45pm Mon-Fri) On the main road opposite Air Calédonie. It has an ATM (DAB).

**Cyber@** (☎ 450 904; internet per 30min 400 CFP; ✉ 8.30am-noon & 1-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Sat, 8.30am-noon Sun) Opposite the provincial offices.

**Laverie** (per bag-full 1500 CFP) There are two laundries in Wé.

**Marina** (☎ 451 062; dae@loyalty.nc; ✉ 6am-6pm Mon-Fri) Customs and immigration clearance.

**Post office** (☎ 451 100; ✉ 7.45am-3pm Mon-Fri) Behind the provincial offices.

**Visitor information centre** (CEMAID; ☎ 450 032; cemaid@lagoon.nc; ✉ 7.30-11.30am & 12.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Next to the *mairie*. There's also a CEMAID booth at the airport with maps and stacks of info.

## Sights

**Jokin**, Lifou's northernmost *tribu*, sits on the cliff tops overlooking a vast bay with brilliant sunset views; the footpath to the left of the church here leads to a cove where you can snorkel among the coral formations. Between the church and the cliffs is a large attractive *case*. Ask permission before taking photos.

The road from Jokin to Easo winds through a cool green forest past Muaweng, a *tribu* known for its **vanilla plantations**. Félix Bolé shows visitors around his plantation for a small fee; sample vanilla tea or coffee and buy beans (200 CFP each). The farm is down the track next to the white water tower in Muaweng.

At the large white cross at Easo, a sealed road turns off to a parking area on the Easo peninsula beneath the small **Chapelle Notre Dame de Lourdes** that's topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary. Steps lead up the hill to the chapel from where there are fantastic views of Baie de Jinek to the west and Baie du Santal to the east and south. The chapel was built in 1898 to commemorate the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in 1858.

About 200m before the chapel a road heads off to **Baie de Jinek**, where steps from a wooden platform built above sharp coral rocks lead down to the water. It's a great place for snorkelling as the bay's clear and the water teems with small tropical fish.

Northeast of the airport, near *tribu* de Tingeting, you can visit **Grotte du Diable** (Devil's Cave); turn right after the church in Tingeting and follow the signposts to the house of **Adrien Trohmae** (☎ 451 793; tour per adult/child 800/400 CFP, filming 500 CFP), who runs guided tours of the cave.

Stop off at the little *tribu* of **Hnathalo**, about 3km southeast of the airport. It's home of the chief of Wetr, one of Lifou's three districts. There's a splendid *grande case* behind the chief's house that you're welcome to visit with a guide. Just ask in the *tribu*.

Don't miss the blissful and secluded beach at **Peng** on Baie du Santal, 3.5km off the Wé-Drueulu Road; turn off at the *tribu* Hapetra. Further down, **Drueulu** is the home of the chief of Gaïcha district. The *grande case* sits by the beach.

On the east coast, at Jozip, you can visit a sculptor's workshop, where Dick Ukewed and his wife Jacqueline, Lifou's first woman sculptor, run **Anyach Sculpture** (☎ 451 479; ✉ 7-11am & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 7-11am Sat & Sun).

**Luengoni beach** is a stretch of fine white sand bordering a stunning lagoon. Locals boast that it is New Caledonia's most beautiful beach. The sheltered bay is a renowned turtle haunt. Just before Luengoni beach is **Grotte les Joyaux de Luengoni** (the Jewels of Luengoni). These limestone caves are both above and below ground; the underground caves have beautiful deep rock pools which shimmer emerald green when you shine a torch on the water.

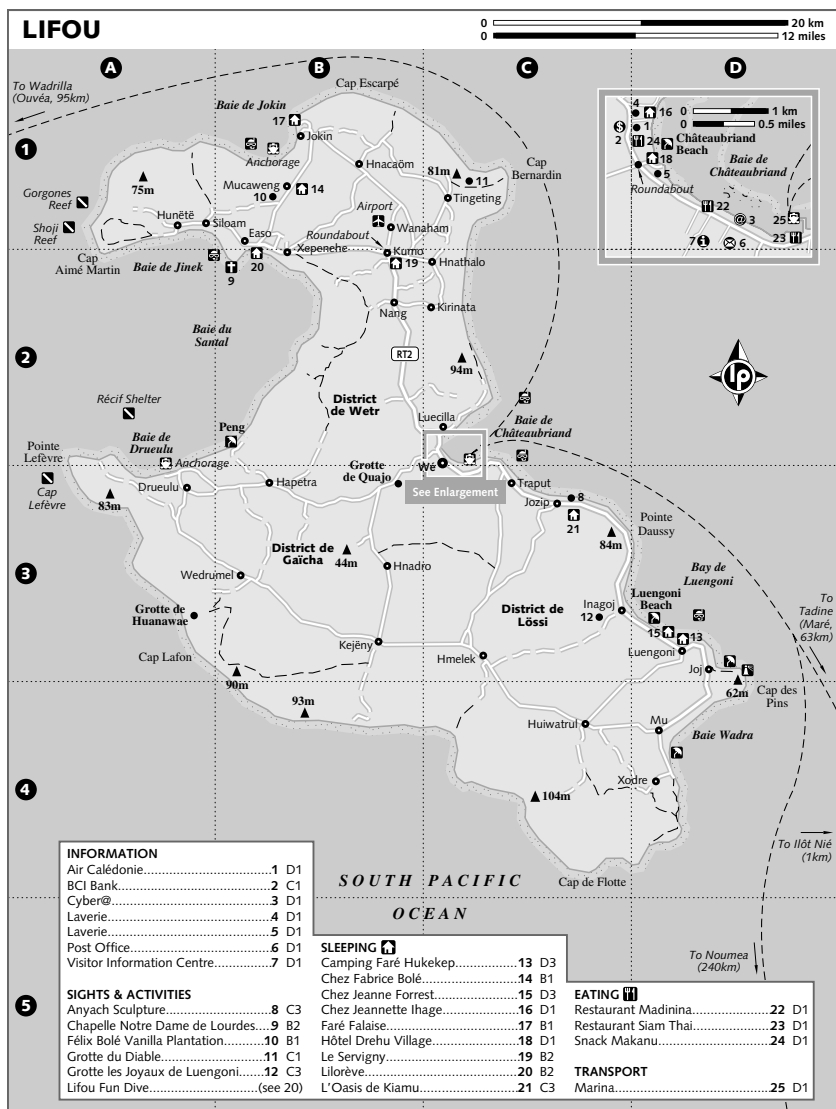
## Activities

**Lifou Fun Dive** (☎ 450 275; www.lifoufundi.com; 2-dive package 12,900 CFP), based at Easo, organises dive trips to the sheltered Shoji and Gorgones reefs. The club also offers night dives (7500 CFP), full-day sailing trips (10,000 CFP per person) and whale-watching excursions between July and September (10,000 CFP per person). Lifou's dive sites have an abundance of soft corals, gorgonians and tropical fish.

## Tours

**Noël Pia** (☎ 932 649; per person 1600 CFP) takes guided treks to the Grotte les Joyaux de Luengoni.

**Someltrans** (☎ 451 478; someltrans@cyberdidact.net; half-/full-day tours 2700/4800 CFP) takes you around the island; the company also runs transfers from gîtes and hotels, to Luengoni or Peng beaches (2000 CFP).



## Sleeping & Eating

### WÉ

**Chez Jeannette Ihage** (☎ 838 154; camping 1100 CFP, bungalow d/family 4600/5300 CFP, case 1900 CFP) Jeannette's homestay buzzes with energy as backpackers and adventurers organise their day. It's right on the beach at the end of Baie de Châteaubriand. Jeannette only caters for

house guests (meals from 2100 CFP), so you'll need to stay to enjoy her famous crab dish. Follow the unsealed road in front of *tribu* Lucella along the waterfront. Airport/wharf transfers are 2600/1300 CFP.

**our pick** **Hôtel Drehu Village** (☎ 450 270; [www.drehu.grands-hotels.cc](http://www.drehu.grands-hotels.cc); bungalow/ste 13,200/21,000 CFP; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Turn down towards Châteaubriand beach and

you're in this lovely garden where comfortable bungalows spread through to the grass and white-sand beach. The restaurant tables are romantically situated around a pool and under a *faré* (dinner mains 1900 CFP to 3400 CFP). Breakfast is 1700 CFP. It's a gentle stroll to a group of shops; there's canoeing and kayaking for guests, or bike hire (per half-day 600 CFP). Airport/wharf transfers are 2200/800 CFP.

**Snack Makanu** (☎ 833 532; dishes 600-1000 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) You know the food's good when everyone wants to eat there. It's outside Korail Alimentation and offers a choice of meals with rice, slices of quiche and light snacks, served at tables on its small veranda.

**Restaurant Siam Thai** (☎ 457 266; mains 850-1100 CFP; ☎ 7.30am-2pm & 5.30-10pm) All your favourite Thai dishes, like fried rice and chicken in coconut curry, are served at this low-key spot. Sadly there's no view of the marina; Siam Thai's veranda faces a quarry. Still, the food makes up for it.

**Restaurant Madinina** (☎ 450 188; mains 1100-1800 CFP; ☎ 9am-3pm & 6.30-11pm Mon-Sat) This relaxed waterfront restaurant serves generous helpings of West Indian food and you must try the French-Caribbean very spicy chicken. It's lovely eating on the veranda overlooking Baie de Châteaubriand.

## NORTHERN LIFOU

**Liloréve** (☎ 451 423; camping 1000 CFP, bungalows s/d 4700/5400 CFP) Three thatched bungalows sit on a grassy property sloping down to Baie du Santal, with a wide view over the bay and a private sandy cove. There's mattresses on the floor and a sparkling-clean shower block. A set menu is 2000 CFP to 3500 CFP. There's bike/car hire (1700/6600 CFP per day); airport/wharf transfers are 2400/3400 CFP.

**Faré Falaise** (☎ 450 201; camping 1100 CFP, r/case 2100/2100 CFP, bungalows 5000 CFP) Perched on the very edge of the cliffs at Jokin, these rustic bungalows have wooden decks to see magnificent sunsets and the best views. Guests can also stay in rooms in the family house or in a *case*, and a set menu is available for 1800 CFP. Activities include bike hire (per day 1500 CFP) and island tours (3900 CFP). The beach is via 200 steps, but it's great snorkelling. The gîte accepts credit cards. Airport/wharf return transfers cost 1700/2000 CFP.

**Chez Fabrice Bolé** (☎ 450 769; camping 1100 CFP, case 2100 CFP) This homestay in Mucauweng is in a

vanilla plantation, beside the winding forest road south of Jokin. Guests can sample home-made vanilla jams for breakfast (650 CFP; dinner menu 1900 CFP) and tour the plantation to see the interesting pollination process. Airport/wharf transfers are 1500/3200 CFP.

**Le Servigny** (☎ 451 244; www.hotel-servigny.nc; case/r/bungalow 4200/6900/8900 CFP; ☎ ☎) This fab place is actually only five minutes from the beach at Easo. It has a large swimming pool in a pleasant garden, so don't be put off by its position. The two-bedroom bungalows are spacious, with plenty of mod cons. M Albert cooks French cuisine to die for (breakfast 1200 CFP, dinner mains from 750 CFP, set menu 2700 CFP). An island tour with picnic (6000 CFP) includes the mysterious west coast. Cars/bikes can be hired for 5000/1700 CFP a day. Airport/harbour transfers are 320/2100 CFP.

## SOUTHERN LIFOU

**Chez Jeanne Forrest** (☎ 451 656; camping 1100 CFP, case/bungalow 2100/4200) Bungalows squat around the spacious lawns that run down to magnificent Luengoni beach. Jeanne is charming and cooks tasty local dishes (from 2500 CFP), but don't forget to book. Jeanne also arranges hikes to cliffs and caves.

**Camping Faré Hukekep** (☎ 451 434; camping 1100 CFP, paillote without bathroom 4700 CFP) At the end of Luengoni beach, away from the main road, this gorgeous place is oh so peaceful, the breeze whispering between the coconut palms. The *paillotes* (huts) have both beds and mattresses; bathrooms are shared. There's a kitchen, or meals cost 1200 CFP (breakfast 600 CFP). Turn left down the sealed road opposite the monument with a cross. Airport/wharf transfers are 3200/2100 CFP (shared).

**L'Oasis de Kiamu** (☎ 451 500; www.oasis-de-kiamu.com; d/tr/family 9700/11,800/15,800 CFP; ☎ ☎) New owner Dicher Grava has big plans for this charming spot in a large garden beneath a cliff. The pool is going to be bigger and the restaurant will be grand indeed. In the meantime, it's lovely as it is: there's tennis and table tennis, dinner mains are 1800 CFP, or 4000 CFP for lobster, and the family room has a kitchenette. Airport/wharf transfers are 2600/1400 CFP.

## Getting Around

The best way to get around is by car. Short bike excursions can be enjoyable but the is-

land is too big to tour entirely by bike. Car rental companies include the following:

**Aéro Location** (☎ 450 494; contact@aeroloc.nc; per day from 7400 CFP)

**Loca V** (☎ 450 777; locav@lagoon.nc; per day from 4700 CFP)

## OUVÉA

pop 4360 / area 132 sq km

Think 25km of long perfect white beach backed with grass and wild tropical flowers. Look further out, over an exquisite lagoon stretching as far as you can see. Add a chain of tiny islets, the Pléiades. Sound unreal? Nope. It's just Ouvéa.

### Orientation & Information

Ouvéa is a thin sliver of land with administrative centres at Wadrilla and Fayaoué. However, the facilities in these villages are so spread out that nowhere can really be described as a centre. There's a clinic near the airport.

**Air Calédonie** (✈ 7.30-11am & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri)

Airport (☎ 455 530) Office (☎ 457 022) Has an office in Wadrilla and a desk at the airport in Houlop.

**BCI bank** (☎ 457 131; Wadrilla; ✈ 7.20am-noon Mon-Fri, plus 1-3pm Wed)

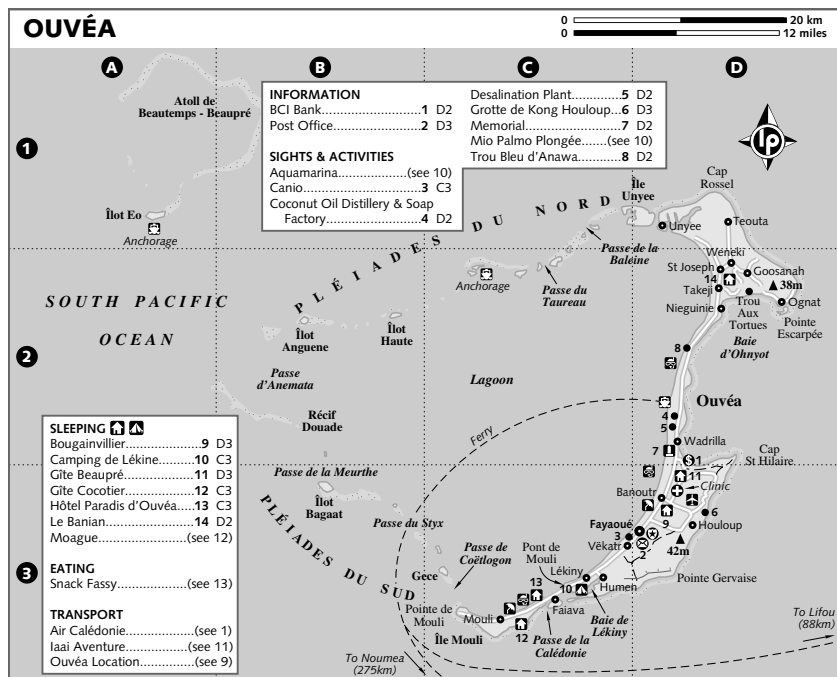
**Post office** (☎ 457 100; Fayaoué; ✈ 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri)

### Sights

The **Grotte de Kong Houlop** cave is in the bush behind the airport at Houlop. Drive or walk to the bottom of the cliff where the cave is set in the cliff wall. **Chez Jedjyah** (☎ 459 095, 865 936; per person 1100 CFP) takes guided tours to the cave and provides interesting commentary on local legends, history and flora.

The large white **memorial** in Wadrilla is a tribute to 19 Kanaks who died in 1988, when French military personnel stormed a cave to free French *gendarmes* being held hostage by the pro-independence movement. Tragically, pro-independence leaders Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene were assassinated opposite the memorial at the first-year memorial ceremony. Their perpetrator believed they had ceded too much to France.

A bit further north you can see the **desalination plant** that produces 400,000L of water a day to be trucked all over the island. Past that is the **Coconut Oil Distillery & Soap Factory** (admission free; ✈ 7.30-11am Mon-Fri), a fascinating mix of



vats and distillery apparatus. Local leaves are used to perfume the soap.

The deep, scary **Trou Bleu d'Anawa** is sunk in the coral rock and connected to the sea underground. You can see fish and turtles in the blue water. Turn left along a track just past the Anawa shop, where the road curves sharply away from the coast. The pool is behind the house, where you can ask permission. If you fall in, they say there's a rope down there (yeah, sure).

Heading south from the airport, you reach a long, narrow bay that stretches from **Humen** to **Lékiny**. Two small channels at the Lékiny end let in water from the open sea and cliffs rise above the bay to the east. There's a cave around from the edge of the cliff where locals go for church services, especially at Christmas. See the cliffs from a beautiful spot, reached via the Humen turn-off.

The island's only bridge is **Pont de Mouli** at Lékiny, where Ouvéa's southern tip is cut off by a wide channel that flows out of Baie de Lékiny into the lagoon. From the bridge, the display of dazzling white sand and different shades of blue is broken by outlines of sharks, rays, turtles and fish swimming beneath you.

At the very south of Ouvéa is **tribu de Mouli**, a peaceful settlement spread along the waterfront. An avenue of araucaria pines leads up from the beach to the Catholic church, and the road continues past the *tribu* to the tip of the island. When the weather is calm, it is a good place to snorkel, over a coral plateau, but be careful of the strong currents.

## Activities

The interesting new building on the beach in Fayaoué is the sailing club **Canio** (☎ 457 101; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Sat). Canio rents per one/two hours windsurfers (1500/2500 CFP), hobby cats (from 2000/2500 CFP) and kayaks (1000/1700 CFP).

It is prohibited to swim in Lékiny Bay so you must go with a guide if you wish to wade across to visit the cave in the cliffs or snorkel over the abundant coral; contact Félix at **Camping de Lékine** (☎ 925 512; guide per 2hr 800 CFP; ☎ Mon, Tue, Fri & Sat).

**Aquamarina** (☎ 450 067; aquamarina-ouvea@yahoo.fr) organises glass-bottom boat trips around Baie de Lékiny (adult/child 1750/1000 CFP). If you cannot go snorkelling, this is your chance to see the wonderful marine life of the bay up close.

**Shark-watching** is possible near Unyee in the north and Lékiny Bay in the south late

each year, when large sharks give birth in the warm shallow waters. Their hormones kick in, making them quiet (so they don't eat their offspring), and not dangerous to tourists. Ask for a guide at Weneki or Lékiny, or go with **Randonnée Pedestre** (☎ 987 205; St Joseph; 2000 CFP) – Antoine Omei takes northern discovery walks around the very old primary forest and to Nimek where it's a magical 6km walk to see the shark nursery (BYO lunch). Walks leave from in front of St Joseph Church.

**Mio Palmo Plongée** (☎ 450 067; aquamarina-ouvea@yahoo.fr; 2-dive package 11,600 CFP) is a friendly scuba-diving club based at Camping de Lékine. Take an intro dive for 6500 CFP, or an open-water PADI course for 40,000 CFP.

## Tours

To get to the Pléiades du Nord contact **Le Banian** (☎ 457 063; 4-person trip 20,000 CFP), a homestay near St Joseph. For Pléiades du Sud contact **Koïo Drany** (☎ 457 287; per person 6000 CFP), based in Fayaoué.

**Charly Aema** (☎ 450 760; adult/child 5000/2500 CFP; ☎ Mon-Sat) organises sea expeditions on the lagoon and to Pléiades du Sud where you can snorkel and fish and enjoy a picnic. See Moague, below.

You can also visit Pléiades du Sud on a diving trip with Mio Palmo Plongée.

## Sleeping & Eating

There is a grocery shop in each *tribu*, although the best-stocked is Chez Fella in Fayaoué, near the *gendarmerie*. Most places to stay can prepare lobster or coconut crab (around 3000 CFP).

**Gîte Cocotier** (☎ 457 040; camping 1000 CFP, case per person 2000 CFP, paillotes d/tr 3500/4000 CFP, bungalows s/d 4500/5000 CFP) Sammy is your host at this homestay about 500m north of the church in Mouli. It's across the road from the beach, but you can pitch your tent on the beachfront. Hire bikes for 2000 CFP a day, or take a four-hour island tour for 3500 CFP. A set menu is 2200 CFP. Airport/wharf transfers cost 2000/3000 CFP.

**Bougainvillier** (☎ 457 220; camping 1100 CFP, s/d 3900/4600 CFP) Walk down a track from the beach to this homestay in Fayaoué. There's three attractive thatched bungalows in a dense garden. Breakfast is 650 CFP and the set menu is 2400 CFP. Return airport/wharf transfers cost 1100/3200 CFP.

**Moague** (☎ 450 760; camping 1100 CFP, paillotes s/d 5000/5700 CFP) This friendly homestay is

about 5km south of the bridge, before the church. It's run by Charly Aema, who is famous for his boat excursions. There's a set menu for 1200 CFP, and coconut crabs, lobster or *bougna* on request for around 3000 CFP per person. Airport/wharf transfers are 3000 CFP.

**Camping de Léline** (☎ 450 067, 425 512; camping 1600 CFP, hut 3700 CFP) This is a delightful spot beside Baie de Léline, near the bridge. You can hire a tent with mattress for 700 CFP, a bike/scooter for 1500/4200 CFP a day, there's a kitchen and you're next to the scuba-diving club. All good. Airport/wharf transfers are 3000/2000 CFP.

**Le Banian** (☎ 457 063; case s/d 4000/4700 CFP) Up north, near St Joseph, with its signpost down a side road (unhelpful!), this homestay is like a Spanish hacienda: white stone courtyard, tropical plants, three *cases* looking cool, each with three beds. Have *bougna* (1600 CFP) or lobster (3200 CFP) if you order in advance; a set menu costs 2100 CFP. Airport or harbour transfers are 1400 CFP.

**Gîte Beaupré** (☎ 457 132; bungalows d/tr 10,400/11,000 CFP, studios 5800 CFP) Three bright wooden bungalows in a large garden are across the road from the beach. The basic studio rooms are airy and have shared bathrooms. The restaurant is open to anyone, but you must book (breakfast 850 CFP, main meals from 1600 CFP, lobster 3800 CFP). Airport/wharf transfers are 1000/1500 CFP. The owner, Willy, hires cars and scooters (from 7000 CFP and 5000 CFP a day) and takes guests on tours with/without a crab lunch for 7500/3500 CFP.

**our pick** **Hôtel Paradis d'Ouvéa** (☎ 455 400; www.hotelparadis.com; cottage 52,500 CFP, 2-/4-/6-person villa 34,700/52,500/76,700 CFP; 🍷) Step out of your luxurious spacious cottage onto a stunning white-sand beach, or lay on your private deck and think about swimming in the azure sea. The tropical restaurant with soaring ceilings serves delicious meals (mains 3300 CFP or set menu 4500 CFP) although it's tempting to keep ordering the thin-sliced fish (oh yum). Hire bikes for 2000 CFP per four hours. Airport return transfers are 2000 CFP and around-island tours 3700 CFP.

**Snack Fassy** (chicken or fish main 750 CFP; 🍷 7am-8pm) A fun place with tables set under a thatched roof. Nine local tribes take week-long turns to run the *snack*, and obviously enjoy it. Order in advance for specials, like lobster or lagoon crab (2100 CFP).

## Getting Around

Car-hire companies include:

**Julau Location** (☎ 454 530; per day from 5000 CFP)

**Ouvéa Location** (☎ 457 377; per day from 7400 CFP)

There's one **private bus** (☎ 457 077; 250 CFP; 🗓 Mon-Sat) that leaves St Joseph at 6.30am, passes through Fayaoué at 7.30am, arrives at Mouli at 9am, then returns to Fayaoué by 10.30am and St Joseph by 11.30am. The driver stops anywhere along the route if you flag him down.

**Iaai Adventure** (☎ 453 512; per day 1900 CFP), 200m south of Gîte Beaupré in Fayaoué, rents bikes.

## ÎLE DES PINS

pop 1900 / area 152 sq km

A tranquil paradise of turquoise bays, white-sand beaches and tropical vegetation, Île des Pins (Isle of Pines) is also a haunting place where dark caves hide in the forest and the bush invades the crumbling ruins of a convict prison. The Kuniés, as the island's inhabitants are known, have kept alive the tradition of sailing *pirogues*, and you'll see these ancient craft gliding elegantly across the calm lagoon. Île des Pins' *escargots* (snails) are a local speciality and most places serve them. Seafood, in particular lobster, is another popular dish. All restaurants attached to gîtes or hotels accept nonguests, but you must book in advance. Restaurants can also prepare sandwiches if you'd like a picnic.

## Orientation & Information

Vao is the main administrative centre. Kuto is the main tourist area, although hotels and gîtes are all around the island; most organise car rental and island or lagoon excursions. The Office du Tourisme in Noumea (p186) can also book accommodation, car rental and activities.

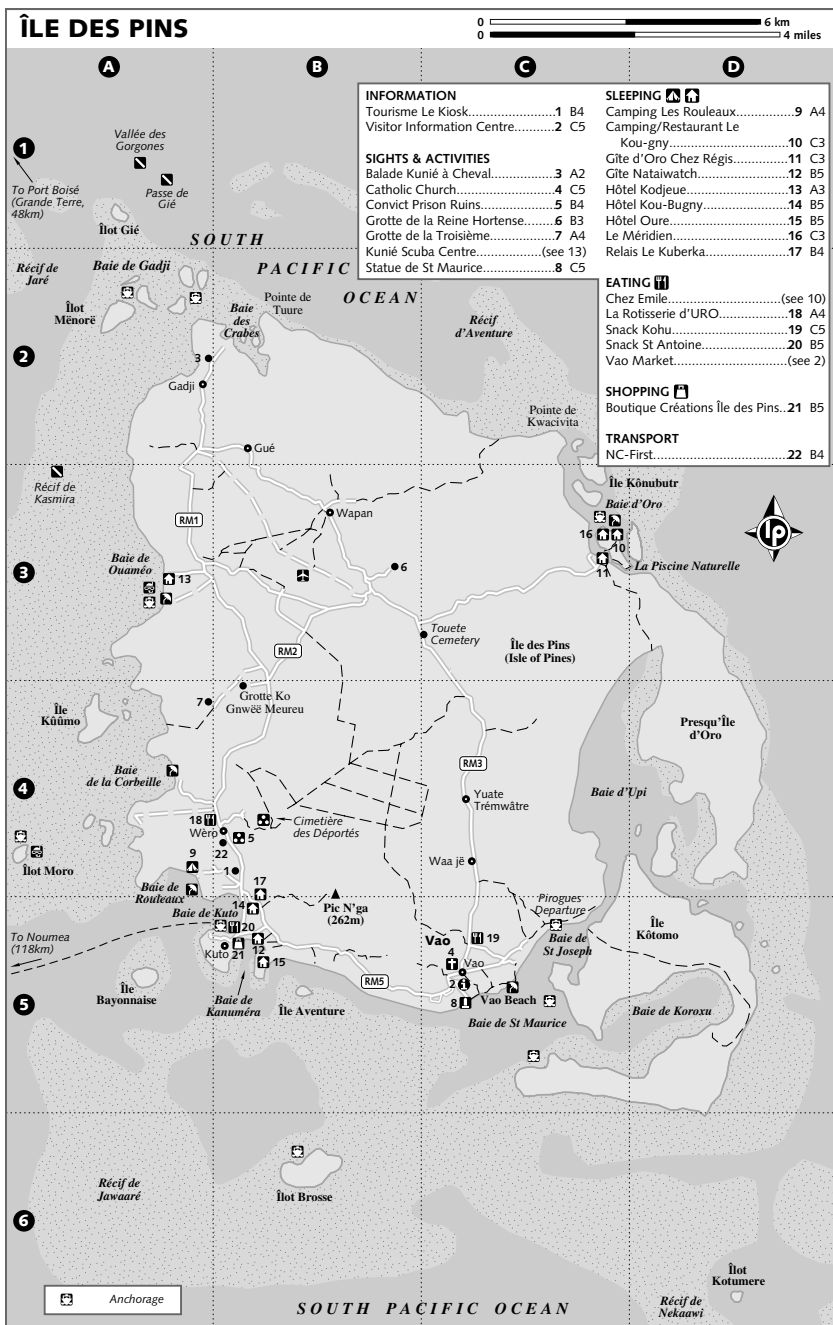
**BCI bank** (☎ 461 045; Vao; 🗓 8am-noon & 1-3.30pm Mon & Fri, 8am-noon Tue & Wed, 1-3pm Thu) Opposite the red-roofed market, with an ATM inside.

**Post office** (☎ 461 100; Vao; 🗓 7.45-11.15am & 12.15-3pm Mon-Fri) It also has a public telephone; there are other phones at the airport and wharf.

**Visitor information centre** (☎ 461 027; Vao; www.ile-des-pins.com; 🗓 8-11.30am & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) Opposite the market. There's an information desk (☎ 461 400) at the airport which opens for flights.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Do not climb the taboo rock in Baie de Kanuméra (Le Rocher). This is the large veg-



etation-covered rock with wooden stairs up the side that is separated from the beach at high tide. It is OK to swim around it or sit on the sand beneath it.

It's forbidden to kite-surf near Île des Pins, or for yachts to sail through St Joseph, Upi and Koroxu bays.

## Getting There & Away

**Air Calédonie** (✈ 7.30-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-11.30am Sat) airport (☎ 448 840) Kuto (☎ 448 850) flies to Île des Pins from Noumea at least twice daily (see p192).

The *Betico* sails from Noumea at 7am most Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, docking at the wharf in beautiful Baie de Kuto. It returns to Noumea at 5pm (9400 CFP).

## Getting Around

It is important to arrange a hire car, transfer or tour in advance, so you're not stranded at the airport or wharf, especially if you're on a day trip:

**Jean-Marie Vakie** (☎ 867 435) Can take you to a destination, or collect you. If you're staying overnight, your host will arrange transfers.

**Taxis** (☎ 791 926, 768 450) Have to be booked well in advance.

Some rental companies that drop your car where you want it include the following:

**Kuto Services** (☎ 461 147; per day from 7800 CFP)

**NC-First** (☎ 461 090; ncfirstesa@lagoon.nc; per day from 7500 CFP)

Oure, Kou-Bugny and Kodjeue hotels, and Gîte Nataiwatch hire cars (per day from 7500 CFP).

Other rental options are:

**Bikes** Gîte Nataiwatch and Hôtel Kodjeue (per half-/full-day 1000/1500 CFP). Cycling is excellent: not many steep climbs and short distances between places.

**Boats** Hôtel Oure and Le Méridien (per half-/full-day 50,000/80,000 CFP).

**Electric Bikes** Hôtel Kodjeue (half-/full day 1500/2500 CFP).

**Kayaks** Hôtel Kodjeue (half-/full-day 750/1500 CFP).

**Pirogues** Hôtel Oure (per half-/full-day 5700/7300 CFP).

**Scout cars Kunié Loca Fun** (☎ 435 480; Kuto; per half-/full-day 5000/7000 CFP) You must be over 16 but a driver's licence isn't necessary.

**Scooters** Hôtel Kou-Bugny (per half-/full-day 4000/5500 CFP).

## VAO

Île des Pins' main village, Vao, is a serene place with several interesting sights and activities in the town and the surrounding area.

The attractive 19th-century **Catholic church** dominates Vao. It was established by the Marist priest Father Goujon, who managed to convert most of the island's population in just over 30 years following his arrival in 1848. A path behind the church leads up to a small chapel from where you can admire the view over the village to the lagoon.

The **Statue de St Maurice** at (signposted) Baie de St Maurice commemorates the arrival of the first missionaries on the island and is also a war memorial. You don't need permission to photograph the solemn circle of wooden totem poles guarding a statue of Christ, just above the beach.

**Baie de St Joseph**, 2km east of Vao, is also referred to as Baie des Pirogues. Early morning, when the *pirogues* are out on the water, is the best time to visit. Later in the day you can watch sailors building their *pirogues* on the beach under the coconut palms. A trip on one of these crafts is a must if you're visiting Île des Pins; see the boxed text, above.

The **Market** (☎ 6-11am Wed & Sat) sells local produce. It's opposite the visitors centre 100m south of the church.

## PIROGUE EXCURSION

Its scenery aside, Île des Pins' most famous attraction is its wooden *pirogues* with their triangular sails that glide you softly over the deep blue. *Pirogues* leave Baie de St Joseph at 8am, heading for Baie d'Oro where a path leads through the forest to magical *la piscine naturelle* (natural pool, opposite). Laze on the sand around the pool or snorkel above a kaleidoscope of fish in its clear waters. Bring your picnic lunch or indulge your senses further by booking into one of Baie d'Oro's wonderful eating options, all just a five-minute stroll along the waterway.

Organised *pirogue* excursions, including transfers to Baie de St Joseph and from Baie d'Oro, cost around 3800 CFP. Or just turn up before 8am (sail 1800 CFP) and arrange your lift back from Baie d'Oro.



**Snack Kohu** (☎ 461 023; dishes 750-1200 CFP; 🕒 8.30am-4pm Mon & Wed-Fri, to 3pm Sat) is a pleasant place to stop, with tables under thatched shelters and everyone very friendly. Meals include chicken or steak and chips, sandwiches (from 350 CFP) and a *plat du jour* (1300 CFP). It's in a garden on the road heading north from Vao.

## KUTO

Kuto has two gorgeous aquamarine bays, separated by the narrow neck of Kuto peninsula. **Baie de Kuto** is the perfect place to lie on the beach or swim in the calm sea. Leafy trees grow to the edge of the beach, so you're always guaranteed some shade. For snorkelling go to **Baie de Kanuméra**, where coral gardens not far from the shore. Transfers to your accommodation around Kuto are airport/wharf 2000/600 CFP.

Just north of Baie de Kuto, beside the main road, are the crumbling, overgrown ruins of an old **convict prison** built in the late 19th century. Île des Pins was initially used as a place of exile for convicts, including Paris Communards and Algerian deportees in the 1870s.

Opposite is the **Tourisme Le Kiosk** (🕒 9am-11pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat), grocery shop and boutique selling Crocs.

Feeling energetic? Take a 45-minute climb up **Pic N'ga** (262m), the island's highest point. The path is mostly exposed, so it's best to go early morning or late afternoon. From the summit there are fantastic views over the entire island and its turquoise bays. The signposted path begins from the main road 200m south of Relais Le Kuberka.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Les Rouleaux** (☎ 461 116; camping 1100 CFP) A popular spot for board riders and kite surfers, this large, shady campsite has happy locals attending to your needs. It fronts on to the sandy beach at Baie des Rouleaux; heading north, turn left at the information kiosk (look for the green crocodile), then take the right fork and follow the power lines for 1km.

**Relais Le Kuberka** (☎ 461 118; camping 1600 CFP, s/d 6500/8400 CFP, bungalows d/tr/q 10,400/13,100/15,800 CFP) A short walk from the beach is this home-away-from-home. Rooms and bungalows are set around a small tidy garden and pool. The restaurant serves an excellent range of meals (dishes 2000 CFP).

**Gîte Nataiwatch** (☎ 461 113; www.nataiwatch.com; camping 1800 CFP, traditional bungalows s/d without

bathroom 8500/9200 CFP, B&B modern s/d 8700/9900 CFP) A relaxed and popular gîte in a wooded area towards the eastern end of Baie de Kanuméra. Modern concrete bungalows have bathrooms, traditional ones have kitchens but share bathrooms. Meals cost 1600 CFP.

**Hôtel Kou-Bugny** (☎ 461 800; www.kou-bugny.com; std/deluxe bungalows 22,600/25,600 CFP; 🕒 ) Kou-Bugny spreads across the road from Kuto beach: traditional-inspired bungalows under spreading branches of trees by a small pool; restaurant and boutique all glass and modern on the beachfront. Breakfast is 2400 CFP; and for dinner, chef Mickael produces elegant dishes (mains 2100 CFP to 2900 CFP) that include bouillabaisse.

**our pick Hôtel Oure** (☎ 431 315; www.tera.nc; garden/lagoon/beach bungalows 32,000/48,000/56,000 CFP; 🕒 📺 🚿) This is so delightful. Step off your wide veranda, across the grass, to amazing Baie de Kanuméra, closed in by pine-covered islands so you're in your own aquamarine paradise with coral gardens a flipper-kick from the sand. The open bar and dining room (mains 2200 CFP to 2600 CFP) open on to a curving pool area. Enjoy friendly service every day and Melanesian dancing on Saturday night.

**Snack St Antoine** (☎ 434 710; papiidp@live.fr; meals 1500-3500 CFP; 🕒 9am-late) This tiny place with the big beach bar by the wharf is run by Yves, who serves a mean beer. Sandwiches are 550 CFP and meals include lobster if you order in advance. He offers wi-fi, safe anchorage for yachties, bathroom and laundry facilities, and sells basic groceries. St Antoine closes at 7pm on Saturday and Wednesday.

## Shopping

**Boutique Créations Île des Pins** (☎ 461 268; 🕒 9-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm) Near the wharf in Kuto, this shop sells Île des Pins souvenirs, including coffee-table books (in English), postcards, and hand-painted tops and *pareus* (sarongs). A DVD (3950 CFP) featuring Île des Pins underwater and island scenes is also on sale. Several of the books about the island were written by the boutique's owner, Hilary Roots.

## THE WEST COAST

Further north there are open areas and patches of forest. A couple of roads lead to beaches. About 8km from Kuto a turn-off leads down a dirt track to the sunken **Grotte de la Troisième**. Stop when you come to a clearing where cars can turn around; the cave is 30m down a path. If you climb into the cave's wide opening, you

can peer into its depth. With a torch and a sense of adventure, you can go down the steep slippery floor of the cave to the bottom, which is filled with fresh water. Experienced divers can venture further into the underground caves.

## Activities

**Kunié Scuba Centre** (☎ 461 122; www.kunie-scuba.com; intro/2-dive from 7000/12,500 CFP, boat trip 8500 CFP), based at Hôtel Kodjeu, organises dives to the caves and sites off the northern tip of the island, especially Vallée des Gorgones, to see soft and hard corals, eagle rays and leopard sharks (ask about the accommodation-and-dive packages). Boat excursions include snorkelling gear and picnic lunch. Fishing trips can also be arranged for 8500 CFP per person.

**Balade Kunié à Cheval** (☎ 499 307; horse treks per hr/half-day 2500/6000 CFP) at the northern tip of the island, organises horse treks along the beach, through the forest or up to the plateau. Turn down a dirt road at the 'ranch' signpost on the road to Gadji.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hôtel Kodjeu** (☎ 461 142; www.hotelkodjeu.com; B&B bungalows std/deluxe 16,000/29,000 CFP; 🚽) Into sunsets? This is your dream then, on calm Baie de Ouaméo. Different-sized bright bungalows on a wide lawn offer choices: kitchenette, over-water, garden view, simple, family? They're all good. The hotel has a small grocery store, but the restaurant meals are tempting (mains 1900 CFP to 3500 CFP). Airport or wharf transfers cost 600 CFP.

**La Rotisserie d'URO** (☎ 779 074; mains 700-1200 CFP; 🕒 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sun) will set you up with a BBQ chicken meal, or chicken sandwich (500 CFP) for a beach picnic.

## BAIE D'ORO & AROUND

North of Vao the road climbs gradually towards the central plateau, where you have views over the dense forests of the east coast to the sea. Turn east opposite a small cemetery to beautiful secluded **Baie d'Oro**, its long white-sand beach enclosed on one side by a reef and on the other by tall araucaria pines. The area is best known for **la piscine naturelle**, a pool of exquisite turquoise water sheltered behind the reef. It is part of a waterway leading from the open sea to Baie d'Oro: follow the sandy waterway from Le Méridien or Chez

Regis. Another waterway leads north back to Baie d'Oro, coming out near Chez Emile and Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny.

Just north of the airport road turning is **Grotte de la Reine Hortense** (admission 200 CFP), an impressive cave which tunnels into a limestone cliff. A path leads through a beautiful wild tropical garden to the wide entrance. This cave was where Queen Hortense, wife of a local chief, is believed to have taken refuge for several months during intertribal conflict in 1855; there's a smooth rock ledge where she slept. The friendly lady who maintains the cave can tell you its history and that of the island in general.

The cave's earth floor is slippery; take a torch if you have one. The sealed road down to the cave is signposted.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping/Restaurant Le Kou-gny** (☎ 469 545; camping 1200 CFP) This rustic campsite and restaurant has an excellent reputation for its lobster meals (4300 CFP) and fish menu (2200 CFP). Tables are set under the trees on the beach overlooking a dreamy lagoon.

**Gîte d'Oro Chez Régis** (☎ 434 555; www.gitedoro-iledespins.com; camping 1500 CFP, bungalows 10,000 CFP) Estelle will look after you at this shady campsite, where four bungalows sit along the waterway leading to *la piscine naturelle*. The open-thatched restaurant is famous for its *bougnas* (chicken/lobster 2500/4000 CFP); order a day in advance. If you arrive around 10am, you can watch the ladies preparing them. Airport/wharf transfers cost 1200/1600 CFP.

**Le Méridien** (☎ 461 515; meridiendp@meridien.nc; B&B r/ste/bungalow 60,000 CFP/70,000/80,000 CFP; 🚽) Tropical luxury: cool timber floors flowing through to private decks, idyllic forest all round, views across Baie d'Oro to araucarias silhouetted against the sky, a swimming pool that seems to flow into the lagoon. Central lounge, bar and restaurant areas invite you to relax, enjoy. Transfers are 2200 CFP. Dinner mains like tajine lamb (luscious) are 2900 CFP to 3500 CFP. Plus there's a full range of tours and activities on offer.

**Chez Emile** (☎ 791 319; menu 3500-4000 CFP) Between the Riviere de Sable waterway leading to *la piscine naturelle* and Le Kou-gny is a casual little spot where fish, chicken and escargots are barbecued to perfection. Camping (1200 CFP) is available.

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