

Dive Kabaira Rabaul - Papua New Guinea

Rabaul

New Britain is PNG's largest island. East New Britain Province is the eastern part of the island, where Rabaul is located, about 2 hours flight north east of the capital Port Moresby. Rabaul harbour is an ancient volcanic caldera which partially collapsed, allowing the sea to enter, several thousand years ago. Today the harbour is ringed by several smaller volcanoes, most of which are dormant or extinct. Since two of the volcanoes erupted simultaneously in September 1994, businesses and the airport have been relocated to Kokopo which is 20 km south east of Rabaul. There are daily flights from Port Moresby, Hoskins and Kavieng to Kokopo. The flights are on Air Niugini's F28 jets.



Kabaira Dive Resort is located on the north coast of New Britain Island, 45 minutes drive from both Kokopo and Rabaul. Set right on the beach with views across Ataliklikun Bay and those much sought after tropical sunsets it is a great place to escape from civilization. Kabaira Dive is built on land originally used by local plantation owners as an overnight stopover while transporting cocoa and copra produce to Rabaul by boat since the 1940s. Today the main building has been renovated to be sleeping quarters, with one double, two twin and two single bed-



Having been occupied by Japan during World War II, Rabaul has long been known for the WWII shipwrecks and planes that litter the coastline. Many documentaries have been filmed in and around Rabaul and the Gazelle Peninsula region. It has a history of strategic battles and volcanic eruptions, creating both amazing scenery and world-class diving.

rooms, and shared bathroom facilities. Adjacent to the sleeping quarters is the Dining Lounge and Pukpuk Bar. Three meals are served daily, and the menu consists of Australian and Asian influenced local cuisine. At dusk some of the worlds most beautiful sunsets can be seen from here, adding to the exotic experience. Your hosts are Stephen and Marsha Woolcott, who are more than willing to share their many years of intimate local knowledge.



Rabaul's surrounds are as tropically lush and as dramatic as ever. For those who are fascinated by volcanoes, Rabaul is the place to watch the active volcano, "Tarvuvur". There are guided tours to the crater and nearby hot springs. Take time to visit the famous Japanese Tunnels, hundreds of kilometers were dug during WWII and most still remain today. A visit to the local markets is always a must for visitors where tropical fruits and local artifacts are well displayed. There is so much to see both underwater and on land. Sitting at the gates to both the Bismarck Sea and the Solomon Sea, Rabaul offers a special alternative to the adventurous diver in search of WWII wrecks as well magnificent reef diving.



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With in the Rabaul Harbour there are Japanese WWII ships that were sunk by the Americans. These dives are for advanced divers or above as they are deep wreck dives. Most of the ships are still fairly intact.



The visibility is between 5 and 15 meters and the water temperature is 30°C. On the North Coast there are coral and a few more wreck dives where the visibility is between 15 and 30 meters and water temperature is 30°C.



Some of the more popular dive sites in Rabaul Harbour **Italy Maru.**

This is a 5859 ton transporter built in 1919 in the Kawasaki shipyard Kobe and sunk on the 27th of December 1942.

She lies on her starboard side in 54 meters of water. The wreck was carrying aviation fuel and some drums still remain. She was sunk by U.S. Navy land based aircraft.

Yamato Maru

The Yamato Maru is a cargo carrier approximately 4,359 tons. It was sunk on 18th April 1943 and amongst it's cargo were truck bodies which can still be seen today.

Manko Maru

This was a 1502 ton refrigeration vessel and launched from the Yokohama shipyards in 1923. She was strafed and sunk by a 1000lb bomb dropped by Captain Charles W Howe on the 2nd of November 1943.

The vessel sits upright on the sand at around 32 metres. The stern section is detached due to the anchor of a freighter waiting to berth just prior to the 1994 eruptions.

Visibility is usually around 10 metres.

The Zero at Malapau

This is a Mitsubishi A6M-2. She is in 32 metres of water and has seen some action as a row of bullet holes can be seen along the left-hand side behind where the pilot would have been sitting. The weaponry is still intact. The reef is also a good spot to look for small for small critters.



Some of the more popular dive sites on The North Coast **George's Wreck**

This wreck, which is named after George Tyers, the first person to dive it, started life as a Japanese marine cable layer, was later converted to a mine layer and still remains unidentified. The story goes that the skipper ran her aground after being skip bombed or torpedoed on the port side. The bow of the vessel is in 12 metres of water and the stern is at 60 metres. The bridge area is approximately 30 metres.

Coral, Muck and Wall Dives

In addition to all these great wreck dives we have beautiful pristine coral dive sites which include Tom, Dick & Harry, Hannah's Hotspot for schooling & pelagic fish; The Lighthouse, East Point and Pigmie Point for macro enthusiasts; and Reimers Wall and Sub Base for wall divers.



Tom, Dick & Harry

These are 3 reefs joined by a submerged 15m deep ridge. Each reef is

unique – Harry has large plate corals & barrel sponges and is frequented by large schools of trevally and rainbow runners. Dick, being the middle reef, features a coral and rock field amongst which a diverse range of cryptic critters can be found. A seamount adjacent to the final reef, Tom, is a great place to hover in wait of mackerel & eagle rays passing in the oncoming current.

The Lighthouse

On the southwest side of Ura Island is a small lighthouse, below which there are huge coral rock bommies standing at least 6-7 metres tall. There are resident double-headed Maori wrasse, coral trout, and crayfish, as well as heaps of critters like nudibranchs. There are swim-thrus amongst the bommies and at the bottom there are giant barrel sponges, sea whips, lettuce leaf coral and schools of reef fish, all just in 16-20m of water.

Reimer's Wall

This wall has over hangs, short swim-throughs, and canyons spread right the way around the open side of the reef. The drop-off plummets to 50m before easing away. Many small schooling fish travel the wall, rainbow runner's and blue fin trevally to name two, but the wall is also covered with smaller cryptic creatures.

Submarine Base

This sheer drop off (250 meters plus) located meters from the shore line, was used in World War II for Japanese submarines to unload and load cargo with a quick escape plan. Straight down! Its natural sheer wall is the edge of a vast submerged caldera, with many soft and small corals growing from the wall, barrel sponges and sea fans-whips decorating the wall. Entry here can get a bit awkward at low tide especially if you don't have your booties but once in, it is like you are falling into the abyss. A must dive.



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More Information on Rabaul - Papua New Guinea

The history of Rabaul is one of wreckage and regrowth. Modern historians will find a treasure trove of World War 2 relics, tunnels and bunkers to explore within driving distance of Rabaul. Close to the now thriving centre of Kokopo, are the remnants of Gunantambu mansion, built in the 1880s by the legendary Queen Emma. After the eruption of Tavurvur and Vulcan in September 1994, most Rabaul services were relocated to Kokopo, which is strung along the edge of Blanche Bay. The town has grown rapidly and the busy market, selling fresh produce, local cigars and betel nut, is located on the main road from Tokua Airport near Supabake Bakery. The waterfront is the place to find boats for travel to the outer islands or for a spot of fishing.

The drive from the airport, now located at Tokua about an hour from Rabaul, is along a narrow road winding its way around the glittering waters of the Gazelle Peninsula. Through the coconut trees villages of thatched huts surrounded by colourful flowerbeds and tropical fruit trees look out over calm waters. East New Britain has a fascinating World War 2 history and visitors can explore Japanese tunnel & bunker systems, aircraft and ship wrecks.

Culture

The people of East New Britain are culturally diversified with rich and unique traditions. The "tumbuan" signifies spiritual dancers and traditional ceremonies that demonstrates a history well kept and used in today's society. The Tolai people of the Gazelle Peninsula have continued to use the traditional shell money called "tabu". They use the tabu as a contribution to the Tolai male secret society of tumbuan and dukduk, for distribution to people at death ceremonies, as payment of a bride price, for settling disputes, and to purchase land or even garden food from local markets.

Flora and Fauna

The tropical nature of the province, with its evergreen rainforest vegetation and rugged mountain ranges, the imposing volcanoes which surrounds the town of Rabaul and the beautiful Simpson harbour have made East New Britain an attractive and adventurous place to visit. The marine resources are diverse and the tropical environment provides opportunities for bush and mountain trekking, volcano climbing and cave exploration. War wrecks also litter the surrounding reefs. The excellent visibility makes this an exciting dive spot all year round. Dive trips, day tours as well as charter boats for fishing can be organised through any of the accommodations or tour operators. Forty five minutes by boat from Kokopo are the Duke of York Islands offering sport diving, snorkelling and picnics under the coconut trees. The lagoons around this historical group of islands provide all-weather canoeing, wind surfing and water skiing and are a haven for visiting yachts.

Things to see

Kokopo

East New Britain Historical & Cultural Centre: Located across the road from the golf course, this has good displays and collections of historical relics and photographs, with plenty of information. Open 8am - 1pm and 2pm - 4pm week days; 1pm - 5pm weekends. Small admission charge.

Vunapope Catholic Mission:

Pleasant views and old colonial buildings in the hospital grounds are interesting. The mission is located at the eastern end of Kokopo.

Bitapaka War Cemetery

The graves of more than 1000 allied war dead are in these well-kept grounds and gardens. Located several kilometres inland, turning off the coast road past Vunapope.

Malmaluan Lookout

Fantastic views over the volcanoes surrounding Simpson Harbour can be enjoyed from this inland highpoint. Take Burma Road, off the Kokopo-Rabaul Road.

Japanese Barge Tunnels

At Karavia Bay between Kaluana Point and Vulcan are a network of tunnels and tracks connecting barges and buildings dating back to the war. In the main tunnel are five barges lined up end to end. Take a torch.

Rabaul

Some parts of Rabaul still function but most of it remains an eerie desolate wasteland covered by metres of ash. Beautiful Simpson Harbour is still the main port, guarded by the grumbling volcanoes. A large market and a few shops still operate at the eastern end of town.

Tunnels and War Relics

Some of the 580km of tunnels built by the Japanese are still open and aircraft wreckage can be seen beyond the old airport.

Duke of York Islands

These beautiful islands are undeveloped but are easily visited. Some have accommodation and tiny Mioko Island has an interesting history. Swimming, snorkelling and canoeing are good.

Things to do

Diving and Snorkelling

In Simpson Harbour there are World War II boat and plane wrecks, good walls, and the Beehives (a small group of craggy islands) to explore. At Tavui Point is Submarine Base where Japanese subs pulled right up to the edge of the reef. It's superb for snorkelling on the flat coral beds and along the edge of the 75m drop-off, which is also good for diving. Most resorts can arrange dive trips.

Climb a Volcano

The island of New Britain is dominated by both active and dormant volcanoes, some of them bellowing great clouds of black ash-laden smoke. All the volcanoes, except Tavurvur, can be climbed. Be aware that heavy rain can make the ground slippery and cause landslides. Vulcan is best tackled on the northern side, and the deep fissures can make it a difficult climb. Take plenty of water.

Canoeing

Taklam Tours in Kokopo can arrange paddling experiences around the Duke of York Islands.

Fishing

Sport fishing for blue and black marlin, sail fish and dog-tooth tuna is good in the waters around New Britain and the Duke of York Islands. Baia Sports Fishing has a lodge at Open Bay. The Blanche Bay area is good for casual line casting. Boats operate from Rabaul and hotels and guesthouses can organize trips.

Swimming

Beaches near Kokopo are good. Hotels in Rabaul have pools and there are good beaches at Pila Pila and Ratung villages in Talili Bay north of Rabaul.

Trekking

Suggested areas are the Bainings Mountains, the Pomio area, where you can walk from Pomio to Navu, and the Wide Bay area, walking between Milim and Sampun or Tokua and Merai. Air Niugini and other airlines provide flights to Tokua Airport from Port Moresby. They also provide connections to Tokua from other centres in PNG



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