

# TOURISM FORGES AHEAD

Papua New Guinea's tourism industry is beginning to reap the benefits of the country's spectacular economic growth rates over the past few years, with increased visitor arrivals.

**T**he rapid pace of growth in the minerals and mining sector has brought increasing numbers of both business travellers (8% more in 2008 than the previous year) and holidaymakers (30% growth in the same period) to Papua New Guinea.

## UNDERSOLD DIVERSITY

PNG is probably one of the world's most undersold tourism markets with a diverse variety of attractions that few destinations can boast of. From virgin rain forests that nest unique ecosystems and human cultures in the highlands to some of the world's best surfing and diving locations, many of them with tremendous nostalgic value, the country has it all.

*The projected growth in the tourism sector... throws open a plethora of opportunities for investors.*

Much of the picturesque hinterland is a haven for ecotourism with new species of all types of life—birds, amphibians, reptiles and flora—being discovered almost every month and reported widely on the world's documentary channels, thus whetting appetites of ecotourists far and wide. It is home to the world's largest butterflies and over 3000 varieties of rare orchid. The historic Kokoda trail has been a celebrated hiking route for decades now.

## AVIATION THE KEY

One of the problems in the country has been reliable air connectivity. However, the Government and the airline industry are both working closely to upgrade the nation's aviation infrastructure and aircraft fleet to tap the latent potential in the adventure and ecotourism industries.

## NEW BRANDING

Sensing this potential, the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (PNGTPA) has embarked on a major rebranding exercise to portray the country's tourist destinations as being distinct from those offered by other Pacific Islands.

While adventure tourism in PNG is better suited to smaller groups, its impressively large and picturesque coastline make it a potential cruise destination as well—with the option of spicing up luxury travel with some 'soft adventure' diversions.

## OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE BOARD

The projected growth in the tourism sector, which is being supported by concerted efforts at bettering air links, throws open a plethora of opportunities for investors in the accommodation, hospitality (many of PNG's hotels are currently expanding and upgrading) and local transportation sub-sectors.

Perhaps one of the best endorsements for investment in tourism comes from Brett Entwistle, Managing Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers PNG: 'For me, tourism is where I see the largest "blue sky" opportunity. What the country has to offer is amazing.' ■

## DELIVERING PNG'S TOURISM MASTER PLAN



PNGTPA'S CEO, PETER VINCENT.

**Papua New Guinea has experienced difficulty in developing a tourism industry comparable to those of some of its Pacific neighbours but it is now moving in the right direction.**

A 10-year masterplan for PNG's tourism industry was launched in September 2007, recommending a 'whole of government' approach to developing PNG's tourism sector.

'The implementation of the masterplan is progressing very well,' says the Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority's Chief Executive Officer, Peter Vincent. Programs for 2009 include creating standards across PNG's tourism industry, a strategy to attract cruise ships, identifying the needs of the private sector and developing an incentive program.

Vincent says there are three main challenges for the PNGTPA in its ongoing efforts to promote PNG as a tourism destination: law and order concerns, a lack of information about the country, and the relatively high costs of visiting. All are constantly being addressed with industry and other relevant stakeholders.

'One of the projects we're developing now is a PR campaign for the next five years. We're taking a two-tier approach: promoting PNG overseas but also creating awareness here. We need to change attitudes and ensure people feel welcome when they come here.'

There are some welcome trends, particularly in aviation, which has seen a new entrant into the PNG market—Virgin Blue subsidiary, Pacific Blue. This will compliment the efforts of PNG's international flag carrier Air Niugini, particularly on international routes.

'We're encouraged by what Pacific Blue is doing and also what Air Niugini is doing—they're flying to new places,' Vincent explains. 'The environment is now conducive to competition and we'll do our best to support the airlines.'

Vincent is also encouraged by plans to upgrade Port Moresby's Jackson's Airport and several regional airports. With its annual budget increased from K3.9 million (US\$1.3 million) to K15 million (US\$5.14 million), Vincent feels the PNGTPA is now better placed than ever.

'Our overall goal is to increase the economic value of tourism to the country by doubling the number of tourists arrivals to PNG every five years. The potential would be a tourism sector worth K1.75 billion (US\$600 million) in foreign exchange revenue by 2017.'

*“An unexpected luxury in the land of the unexpected”*



Service with a smile, is a guaranteed feature that we pride ourselves with here at Airways, we invite you to come and visit us to see the smiling faces of Melanesian hospitality.



**AIRWAYS HOTEL**  
PORT MORESBY