

Papaya, palms and a gecko in my room - welcome to the tropics

by Tertia Butcher

I knew I was back in the tropics when I loaded my breakfast plate with papaya (pawpaw) on our first morning in Port Moresby; our stop-over before our Kokoda adventure.

Papaya and the people of Papua New Guinea were the only nice things about Port Moresby I decided.

That was before we went on a city tour later that day.

I was impressed.

Everything I ever read about Port Moresby was negative – crooks, dirty city, old dilapidated buildings.

Not so!

City gardens, fountains and a decent supermarket were all pleasant surprises; and our lunch venue, the Port Moresby Yacht Club, could rival any restaurant in Australia.

I was also relieved to find no mosquitoes and only the odd fly. A sure sign of being in the tropics was the pale, almost translucent little geckos scurrying up and down the walls of my bedroom.

But there was a chilling reminder that malaria is a serious problem when a doctor was called to our hotel to treat a Chinese tourist.

The people of PNG love their rugby league.

For hours I listened to my neighbour's television on my first night as he and his mates watched two games of NRL, broadcast from Australia.

When I complained to reception the next morning, I was simply told: "It was Friday night. That is what we do in PNG on Friday night. We watch Australia play league".

And they seem to favour Queensland. Every second car had a Brisbane Broncos flag flying proudly from the aerial.

On my second night I was looking forward to a

good night's rest. Rugby league is on Friday night, so I should get some sleep on a Saturday night.

Wrong time of the year! The world soccer was on, and the game finished with some obscure African country's national anthem at 4am.

We stayed at the Hideaway Hotel in Port Moresby which proudly promotes itself to being the city's newest hotel.

Either the brochures and websites are as old as the hotel itself, or there has been no new hotels built in 40 years.

But the service was excellent, the pool clean and the food good. Breakfast was interesting – rice, savoury mince and scrambled egg; plus papaya for those who got to breakfast before I did.

Few people would make Port Moresby a tourist destination if it weren't for the Kokoda Track.

I decided I would not either; 18 hours in Port Moresby was a pleasant experience, but long enough.

Then we discovered a little jewel which definitely will get me back to PNG – Laloata.

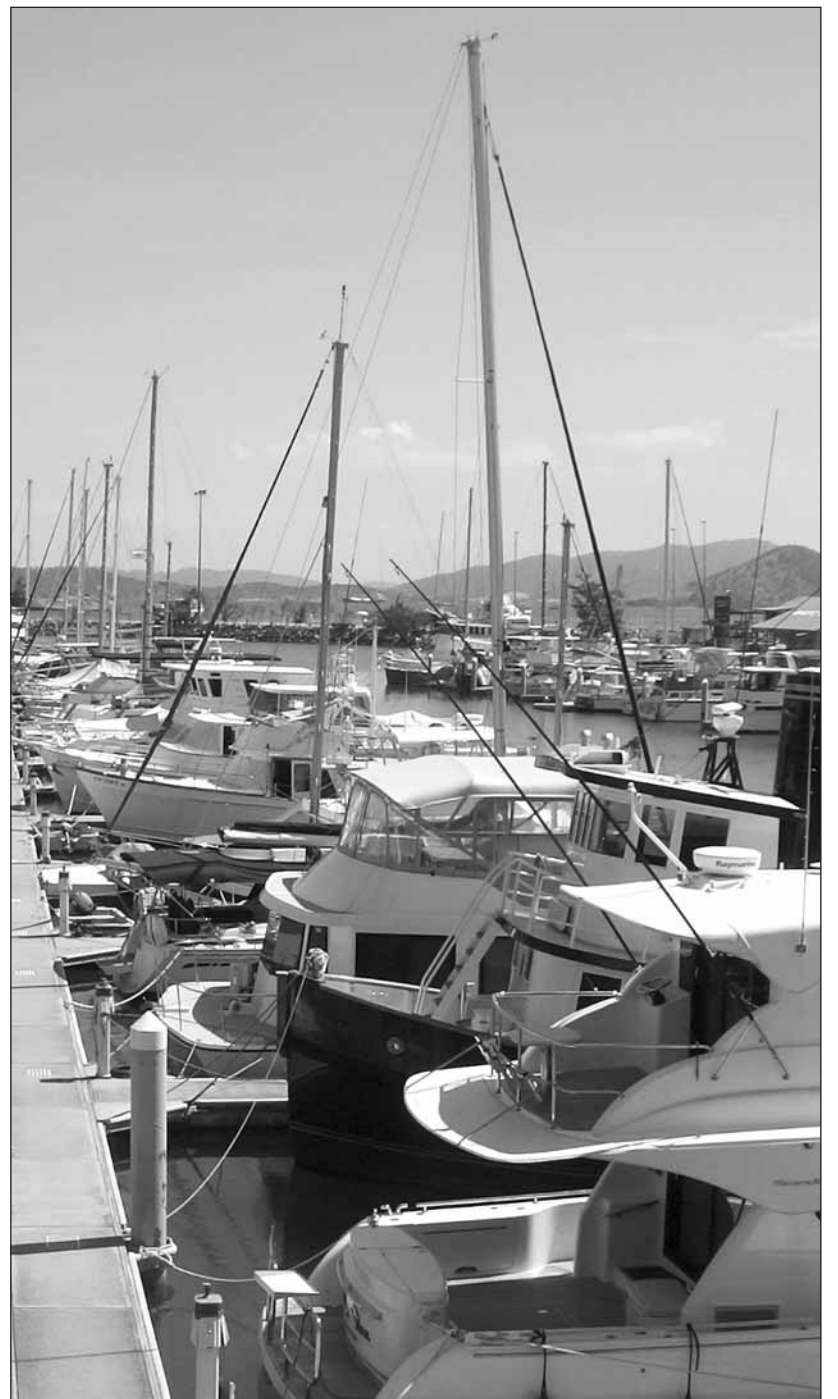
This tiny island is only 15 minutes from the international airport by bus and then a short ferry ride to the resort.

But it felt as if we were a world away on this Melanesian garden isle.

Nearby reefs are easily accessible with a complimentary boat available every hour to take you snorkelling, swimming or scuba diving.

The weather was just cool enough not to stay too long in the water and get sun burnt, but warm enough for balmy evenings on the verandah which serves as the restaurant.

Laloata was the perfect rest stop after our gruelling Kokoda experience and before returning to the demands of life back in Australia.



The impressive yacht club in Port Moresby. Pictures by Cam Clark.



No roads - no bus door - no worries. Welcome to Port Moresby.



Port Moresby is a happy, vibrant and noisy place - typical of third world country standards.

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