The beautiful tropical fjords of Cape Nelson offer some of the most spectacular scenery in Papua New Guinea. Combining the views with the excellent scuba diving on the isolated offshore reefs, it is easy to understand why the area draws visitors from all over the world.

The Tufi Dive Resort, situated as it is on the headland overlooking the main fjord and onwards towards Mount Trafalgar, offers a wonderful location to enjoy this special part of PNG.

But no visit to Tufi should be considered complete without some exposure to the local villages and their culture - either by attending one of the regular cultural demonstrations organised by the resort, or with a village homestay for a couple of days.

If you have the time... do both! While the homestays will take you right into village life and provide a real taste of local traditions and customs, it has to be said that they are not for everybody as no electricity or running water is available. For this reason, most visitors opt for attending the cultural demonstrations.

The demonstrations are very well organised making it clear that the village elders take great pride in their traditional practices, such as sing-sings and sago harvesting. The unspoken undercurrent at such an event is that the elders are reinforcing both the cultural and financial value of these traditions to the younger members of the community.

From a cultural viewpoint, the demonstrations take the villagers away...
A lemon plant thorn punctures the skin. 

From an anthropological perspective the practice of using coloured pigment to make permanent marks on the skin has been found in almost every major culture in history – for example the Egyptians were using tattoos to decorate themselves around the time of the pyramids and the Chinese are known to have adopted them around 2,000 B.C. "Tattooing was especially prevalent in the South Pacific islands and the word itself is a derivative of the Polynesian/Samoan verb *tāmoko* – meaning to strike. The first recorded use of the word was in a 1796 diary entry by the British explorer Captain James Cook. However, 20th Century colonisation, and in particular, religious missionaries, who very much frowned upon the practices as beneficent to the community.

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The actual patterns are quite specific, with an overall pattern that identifies the Korafe tribe (the main tribe of the Cape Nelson area) and variations for the numerous clans that make up the main tribe – such as the Kandoro, Fiyogha, and Tawari clans.

**Bride Price**

The completion of the tattooing is followed by a big celebration when the girl comes back to the village and the tattooist is presented with presents from the girl’s parents in recognition of the service provided.

Once the tattooing and the celebration is over, the girl is ready for marriage. A boy will “court” her to prove to her parents that he is of good character and worthy of their daughter. This is a big test for him that typically involves making a new vegetable garden for the parents or building them a new canoe or house to demonstrate his skills as a man.

If satisfied, the parents delegate the girl’s initiation to her uncle, typically the mother’s brother, whereby the uncle makes the preparations for the actual wedding – a major celebration and feast in the village.

When the girl has married the boy, it is then her turn to be tested to prove her worthiness as a wife to his parents so that the bride-price can be evaluated and settled between the families.

**Cultural Exposure**

Tufi is a truly special location that combines exceptional scenery with the opportunity to scuba dive its fjords and the excellent offshore reefs.

I have been fortunate to make several visits to the area and extensively explore its waters while getting to know some of the local villagers. The scuba diving drew me to Tufi in the first place, and I was not disappointed... but it was my exposure to the local villages and culture that made the whole experience truly memorable.

Tangible benefits in a subsistence lifestyle are extremely valuable, and by helping to organise homestays and cultural demonstrations, Tufi Dive Resort has done a great job in allowing the villages to benefit from the tourists who visit the area.

The village elders can also reinforce traditional cultures and practices with the young people in the villages.

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Don Silcock

http://www.indopacificimages.com

Airlines PNG flies from Port Moresby to Tufi, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, & Sunday.
For bookings:
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