

Incredible Kimbe Bay

In a country famous for the amazing diversity of its scuba diving there are a few stand-out locations where, should you only visit PNG once in your life, you will just have to choose from...

Don's Handy Hints...

• You will need a visa to enter PNG and in the past, you had to either apply in advance, which means sending your passport... or get one on arrival. The problem with the visa on arrival is there is often a big queue and it can eat into your transit time!

The good news is that the PNG Government has now introduced evisas and you can now get a 30 day visitor's visa on-line, which makes things much easier all round: <https://evisa.ica.gov.pg/evisa/accout/apply>

• If you fly Air Nuigini into Port Moresby and use them for the flight to Hoskins, then you are eligible for the 35kg "divers allowance" which makes things much easier and cheaper on the baggage front!

Don Silcock

Don is based from Bali and his website www.indopacificimages.com has extensive location guides, articles and images on some of the best diving locations in the Indo-Pacific region and "big animal" encounters globally.

On that short-list would certainly be Kimbe Bay, the literal jewel in the crown of New Britain - the largest of the many islands that make up the incredible country that is Papua New Guinea.

Located roughly one third along the north coast of New Britain, Kimbe is a large sheltered bay bounded by the Willaumez Peninsula in the west and Cape Tokoro, some 140km to the east.

New Britain

Roughly 500 km long and about 150 km at its widest, New Britain is a crescent-shaped island located just to the south of the equator.

It is part of the Bismarck Archipelago, which forms the southern ridge of the so-called Ring of Fire - the volatile and unpredictable, horseshoe shaped, seismic strip of oceanic trenches and volcanic arcs that wreak periodic havoc around the Pacific Ocean basin.

The islands of the Bismarck Archipelago were formed some 8-10 million years ago as a result of what geologists refer rather mildly to as 'volcanic uplift'...

Running along the spine of New Britain are huge mountain ranges created by those

volcanic uplifts. So high are those ranges they effectively isolate the north coast from the south and create their own weather patterns.

So that while the north coast follows the normal monsoonal seasons, the south is completely opposite.

The mountains also create a partial rain shadow over the north, making the south coast the second wettest place on earth, with annual rainfalls of between 6-8m!

Kimbe Bay

The approach into Kimbe Bay's Hoskins Airport takes you over the Willaumez Peninsula and provides a spectacular introduction to the visually defining feature of this part of New Britain - volcanoes...

On the tip of the peninsular are two large freshwater lakes occupying the huge caldera left by the massive eruption of the Dakataua volcano almost 1200 years ago. Then dotted along the long and narrow isthmus are three smaller volcanoes.

The final approach into Hoskins is overshadowed by the large Mount Pago volcano, together with its two smaller siblings and one can only imagine the incredible forces released upon this remote area of New Britain.





But time is a great healer and the results are a sight to behold. All around are the rich soils created by those volcanic eruptions and everywhere you look is life. As somebody once said about this part of Papua New Guinea – just put a dead stick in the ground and wait for life to sprout anew...

Biodiversity

Kimbe Bay is renowned for its extremely rich marine environment and surveys by The Nature Conservancy, have helped to establish a bewildering array of statistics for the area.

Not least of which are around 860 species of reef fish and 400 species of coral, plus at least 10 species of whales and dolphins that are known to visit the area.

The life-source for that amazing biodiversity are the rich currents of the Bismarck Sea to the north, which are themselves the result of the incredibly complex regional and equatorial water flows.

But the bottom line, as they say in the real estate game is location, location, location and Kimbe Bay's sheltered position on the north coast of New Britain, together with its incredible underwater topography and those rich currents have created an almost perfect and pristine marine environment!



Beneath Kimbe Bay

When those immense tectonic forces wreaked their havoc all those centuries ago and created Kimbe Bay, it formed what is basically a 140km wide underwater amphitheatre with shelves that start at a depth of some 200m and run parallel around the shore.

About 5km offshore the bottom drops down to around 500m and then as it approaches the Bismarck Sea the seafloor descends rapidly to in excess of 2000m.

Along the inner shelf are many pristine reefs that rise up in to the shallows, while across the deep seascape are dramatic seamounts and pinnacles that reach towards the surface and provide isolated ecosystems for the marine creatures of the bay.

Diving Kimbe Bay

Kimbe Bay's mix of beautiful scenic reefs and dynamic seamounts offer some excellent diving, plus the bay has one of the best-preserved WWII aircraft wrecks in Papua New Guinea.





The reefs are simply a joy to dive and are a wonderful combination of hard corals, garnished with patches of beautiful soft corals, photogenic sea fans and bright red sea-whips.

While the seamounts pulse with life from the pelagic, open-water fish that patrol above and around them. And then there is always the chance of a random encounter with migrating mammals like whales or orcas that have entered the bay.

There are around 25 dive sites in Kimbe Bay that are dived regularly and so it is simply not possible to cover them all in an article like this... But having dived about 90% of them now, I can honestly say that I am rarely, if ever, disappointed with a dive in Kimbe.

Each site had its own characteristic features and special places - be it areas of incredibly rich hard and soft corals, beautiful patches of vibrant red sea whips, caves and swim-throughs or known habitats for those special creatures we all like to see and photograph!

Walindi

Diving in Kimbe Bay was pioneered by Max and Cecile Benjamin, agronomists who had arrived in New Britain in the late 1960's on a short-term assignment on their way to a new life in Canada.

But all that changed when they bought the 800 acre Walindi palm oil plantation in 1969, with the intention of modernizing and improving its operation. But, by the early 1970's, they had started to scuba dive at the weekends and were literally the first people to discover the incredible biodiversity of Kimbe Bay.

In 1983 Max and Cecile started Walindi Plantation Dive Resort and have grown it into a significant business. Complete with three day-boats for diving the bay and two liveaboards, the MV Febrina and MV Oceania, capable of exploring the most remote locations of New Britain. All now managed by their son Cheyne!

Getting to Kimbe Bay

Port Moresby is currently the only international airport in Papua New Guinea, but is well served by Air Niugini, Qantas and Virgin from Brisbane on a daily basis, plus there some direct flights from other cities in Australia.

Virtually all flights into Port Moresby (POM) arrive around lunch time, which gives you plenty of time to clear immigration and customs. Then it's the short walk down to the domestic terminal for the flight to Hoskins (HKN) in Kimbe Bay.

Air Niugini (www.airniugini.com.pg) operates direct flights to Hoskins, while PNG Air (www.pngair.com.pg) flies there via Lac and Rabaul - check their sites for specifics...

Which all means that, with a bit of careful planning, you should be able to leave home in the morning and have a cold beer at Walindi that evening. Similarly you should be able to leave Hoskins in the morning and be home the same day.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

walindi resort PLANTATION

Kimbe Bay, West New Britain
www.facebook.com/walindifebrina

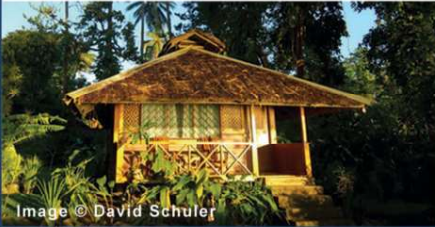


Image © David Schuler



Image © David Doubilet/Walindi Resort

Walindi Plantation Resort celebrates over 35 years of operation.

- Tropical bungalows in rainforest gardens with waterfront and garden views.
- World class diving in Kimbe Bay, a mecca for underwater photographers.
- Custom built day dive boats.
- Snorkelling and land tours.
- Experienced, professional dive staff.
- **Email:**
resort@walindifebrina.com
- **Phone:** +675 983 5541 or +675 723 48460



Image © Scott Johnson



MV OCEANIA

www.facebook.com/mvoceaniapng

A new dive liveboard begins operation out of Walindi Resort in Jan 2019.

- MV Oceania is a 27 metre catamaran catering for up to 16 divers.
- Modern comfort with two guest deck levels.
- Newly refitted cabins, all ensuite and air-conditioned.
- Offering dive itineraries including Kimbe Bay, Witu Islands, Fathers Reefs and beyond.
- Experienced and friendly crew.
- Nitrox available.
- Daily laundry service.
- **Email:**
reservations@mvoceania.com



Image © Darek Sepiolo



Image © Marcello Krause

mv febrina LIVEBOARD

North Coast, West New Britain
www.facebook.com/walindifebrina



Image © Peter Lange



Image © Franco Banti

MV FeBrina has been operating from Walindi Resort since 1991.

- Boutique, traditional style liveboard.
- Catering for 10-12 guests in 7 cabins.
- Ensuite, air-conditioned cabins.
- Kimbe Bay and North Coast New Britain itineraries.
- Up to 5 dives per day.
- Experienced and friendly crew.
- Nitrox available.
- Daily laundry service.
- **Email:**
febrina@walindifebrina.com



Image © Scott Bennett

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