

P&O Cruise to Papua New Guinea – November 2013

By Georgie

Firstly I have now been advised that we say Papua wrong. It is pronounced Par-poo-a. Another thing you learn from going to a New Country!

This was the first cruise that P&O have done to Papua New Guinea so that is what I was excited about. It is one of our closest neighbours to Australia but off the radar for most people. I must say I was blown away going there. The trip way exceeded my expectations.

The first port of call in PNG was Alotau. For PNG it is a relatively big town but for us more the size of a county town. As we were pulling into Port in Alotau we were greeted but dozens of canoes (spelt Kanu in PNG) with worriers inside in their traditional wear calling out their cries of greeting to us. Their canoes have about 10 men inside and are their traditionally made from a dug out tree.



To hear their cries of greeting in their language (which they have over 3000 in PNG alone) was amazing. A big ship has never called into here so these people had never seen something like this before. The shores were lined with locals who had come to see this huge event. The port had local tribes dancing and singing for us on arrival.

There is a big festival held in Alotau every year which is the Kenu & kudu festival (canoe and sailing boat festival). This was the only sailing for P&O that co-insides with the festival. What an amazing site. Tribes come from all over, some canoeing for 3 weeks to get to the festival. Each tribe has their own traditional wear and songs (along with their own languages). With over 40 tribes in attendance it was like stepping into the pages of the National Geographic!

As all the tribes have their own songs and dances, it was great to see other locals watching as well.



Our 2nd port of call was Kirawina Island. This Island is famous for their version of cricket. They use a branch from a tree as a bat and a guava fruit for a ball. Matches have up to 300 players and each hit/run has its own song and dance. Needless to say some matches go on for weeks!

As no big ships have been to any of these Ports before, P&O had to build the jetty's in every place even just to take the tender boats to get us all to shore. On Kirawina there is a great jetty out over the Coral Reef. All the locals (and I mean ALL the locals) came down for the day to see us. This was a HUGE deal. Most of these people had never seen white fella's before, let alone a huge ship and to top it off the PNG Prime Minister flew in on his helicopter as well! The locals were gob smacked to say the least! They are all so happy and all want to say "Hello" with a great big smile. They were obviously advised to spend time making carvings from wood to sell to us tourists but as you usually aren't allowed to bring them back into Australia not many people brought any (which is a shame as those that did buy them, Quarantine allowed them through no worries!).

We took some gifts for the kids so we went over to the school and spoke to a teacher there. He said it wasn't his school but his school but from another school on the other side of the island, and came with all the kids in the back of a truck and it took them 24hrs to get there (and it's probably only 10km away). The kids don't have tables and chairs they sit on the concrete floor (helps keep them cool!) and they write with chalk on slates. We took heaps of pencils for them and they were very appreciative even though they don't use them. They all learn in English though.



This is Frazer with the kids at the school.

The Island itself is stunning! The water is crystal clear with heaps of Coral. Nothing too close to shore but lots a bit further out. A local boy stated taking kids for a ride in his Kenu (canoe) and charging 5Kena for (approx \$1) which the kids loved. His mum and dad were very proud of him by the end of the day!



This is Hunter and the local boy who took him for a ride.

The local tribes here were stunning too. Even all the schools put on a dance for us!



The Ship had trouble anchoring here and keep floating away so the Captain said “Bugger this” and came in so close to shore to drop anchor we though we might get ship wrecked here!



We almost became locals!



Back at anchor at a safe distance!

Our next destination was Doini Island. An Aussie guy has purchased the whole Island and set up his own Resort. What an amazing place. This would rival any South Pacific Island. They have built 8 Bures along the waters edge and all have 2 bedrooms. They are beautifully built and would be an amazing location to hire out the Island for a group. <http://www.doiniisland.com/index.php>



We were very well looked after here. They set a BBQ up and had a bar running. The locals came down with shells to sell – which most were amazing shells. All cleaned so they are ok to bring back to Australia. We brought a Nautilus shell from them, which wash up on the beach regularly. The kids here were really cute too.



We also met another local who I have never seen before or even heard of called a Cus Cus.

Doini Island was the best snorkeling I've done anywhere in the world. As my hubby is a Marine Biologist by trade, any location in the world that is near the water we have been snorkeling. This place had the best variety of hard and soft corals I've ever seen. Unfortunately with mass people descending and being told repeatedly not to stand on the Reef they still do, so it won't remain so pristine for long.



This is a true tropical Island paradise where the rainforest meets the sea and there no crowds let alone neighbours.



This was our last Port of Call in PNG and I must say I the destination exceeded my expectations. I was excited about going to Alatou for the Canoe festival and it was truly amazing. Just like stepping into the pages of a National Geographic magazine. I didn't have an expectations about the other Islands as no one had visited there before. I didn't think we would get to go snorkeling as I thought there would be stingers and crocs in the water. The fact I asked the guy at the snorkeling shack onboard the Ship when we first arrived "can we actually snorkel there due to stingers and crocs?" and his response was "I don't know as none of the crew have been there and I just hire out the equipment", didn't leave much hope, but it was truly amazing.

The cruise I did was the only one that co-insides with the Kenu (canoe) festival, it was pretty special. The other cruises do go further north in PNG to Rabul which has a spectacular volcano to see and lots of war history too, so it will be different. I feel very privileged that I was on the first sailing to go to this amazing place as I'm sure over time it will become more commercialised with mass tourists descending, but they are limiting the visits to 3 times a year which will help.

Now onto a brief report on the P&O Pacific Dawn. As I have been on Carnival & Star cruises before I know I have been spoilt. P&O is definitely only 3 star but she does offer everything you could want. We took our friends along with us and it was their first time cruising and the raved all day every day about how fantastic it was. The top deck has the Buffet restaurant, NZ Ice cream bar, drinks bar, swimming pool, spa's & a big movie screen. Many hours are spent here just enjoying the fresh air and sunshine, live music and of cause when they come around asking if you want a drink, well its rude to say No isn't it? Mocktails for the kids too!



The food was plentiful and heaps of variety in both the Buffet and the Waterfront restaurant (both are free). You can pay extra going to the Luke Mengan's fancy restaurant or Luna the Asian restaurant, but we though the food was great and there was no need to pay extra.

For those of you who feel guilty after eating so much food, they do have exercise programs. They have the morning stretch class, followed by the Fab Ab's class, and then Zumba later in the afternoon. The gym was well equipped too if you prefer that. We did make use of the day spa with their steam therapy rooms, and I also had some acupuncture treatments done which worked amazingly. I don't have time at home to do these things so I took advantage of having spare time to get it done.

Our kids had a great time too. When we signed the up for kids club, we gave them the responsibility of signing themselves in and out of kids club. My boys are 8 & 10 and loved this. We didn't think they could get too lost by themselves and always knew they could find us on the top deck or in the cabin. This allowed us parents a bit of freedom too so we didn't have to interrupt what we were doing to go sign them in and out. The boys enjoyed the kids club more onboard P&O than they did on Carnival. They have a morning session 9am till 12 noon the are closed for lunch and open again 2pm till 10.30pm (they ask you to get your kids by 9.30pm though). We often went to get them at 9.30pm and they said they weren't ready to leave yet, so they came back to the cabin when they were done.

It is a great family holiday and P&O make it so there is something for everyone on board. But you do have to remember it is only 3 star but clean and comfortable. My biggest gripe is that all the coffee on board was instant (I'm a complete self-confessed coffee snob and wont drink that rubbish!). They do have a cafe onboard that does do espresso coffee but you have to pay extra for it, but even their coffee there was rubbish. But it that was my only gripe then I'm just spoilt. I'll just call it my 'coffee detox' week.

All in all it is a fantastic holiday and cruising is great. You can see why 90% of the people on board our cruise had cruised before.

Arrh holidays!!



Georgie.