



# Sepik River & the Crocodile Clan

## *Papua New Guinea*

The Last Tuesday Society

&

The Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, Fine Art & Natural History

**Invite You...**

To Join Viktor Wynd & Stewart McPherson

On a Collecting Expedition Up The Sepik River in Papua New Guinea  
To Visit Remote Villages, Observe a Crocodile Clan Male Initiation Ceremony  
& Sight Birds of Paradise!



## Papua New Guinea is like no other place on Earth.

Indisputably the most culturally diverse country in the world, it is a land of stunning mountains, spectacular wildlife and one of the world's last intact systems of tribes, clans and rituals.

In many remote villages across the country, first contact with the outside world is well within living memory and visiting today is like stepping back in time to witness cultures that defined native peoples for millennia. This expedition takes you to perhaps the most interesting part of Papua New Guinea... **the Sepik River**.

At 1,126 kilometres, the Sepik River is Papua New Guinea's answer to the Amazon. It is the country's longest river, and is often referred to as Papua New Guinea's 'cultural heart' because it is so rich and varied in its tribal cultures. During this 12 day trip, we travel by canoe to the Upper Sepik and Middle Sepik to visit villages with ancient beliefs and rituals. We will meet the famed crocodile men, known for their intricate crocodile-skin scarification marks, and we will be allowed to observe an initiation ceremony. We will visit many varied Spirit Houses, and discover the Iatmul tribe's mythologies of wayward spirits and animal gods that still hold sway over traditional village lifestyles.

During our journey along the Sepik River, we will have many bird-watching opportunities (with good chances to see several birds of paradise). We will visit numerous villages for artefact buying opportunities, and may be allowed to go out with the crocodile men to observe their traditional livelihood of hunting crocodiles at night.

**During this expedition, we will visit many (varied) villages along the Sepik River that offer opportunities to purchase crafts and artefacts, including spectacular masks, stone tools, shields figures and axes!**

**COST:** US \$4,750 (= approx £3,375, AUS \$5,980 or EUR 3,800) per person for **12 days/11 nights** (all inclusive from start point to end point).

**NOTE:** this trip includes an essential 25,000 Kina (approx US \$7,580 / £5,500) donation from our group to the Iatmul community as a gesture of friendship to help the lives of old and young people. This is essential to enable our access to these fascinating villages and witness the Iatmul way of life and initiation ceremony.

**DEPOSIT POLICY:** US \$1,680 (= approx £1,200) to reserve your place (non-refundable, unless we can find a replacement to step into your booking). The balance due 60 days prior to departure.

**START POINT:** Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

**END POINT:** Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

**DATES:** Monday November 5th to Friday November 16th, 2018 [Note: these dates minimise the number of weekdays required as participants will be able to catch outbound flights to PNG on Saturday November 3rd and return home on Saturday November 17th) - **just 10 working days needed!**].

**ACCOMODATION:** In Wewak, twin share. Single supplement (private rooms) available at extra cost.

**GROUP SIZE:** 10 plus staff

Email [expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org](mailto:expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org) for more information and to make bookings.



# ITINERARY

**November 5th - Day 1:** We meet at Port Moresby airport for flight (approx at 10.00 am) to fly to the town of Wewak. We are met at the airport and transferred to the “In-Wewak Boutique Hotel” where we overnight and have dinner. At 7 pm we have a detailed briefing meeting held explaining the itinerary of our expedition.

**November 6th - Day 2:** After breakfast, at 8:30 am, we drive to the small town of Pagwi on the Sepik River (about 5 hours driving time). At Pagwi, we are met our canoes and canoe men who will transport you up river to visit Wagu Lagoon in the Upper Sepik and check into the guest house there. Overnight and dinner in the guesthouse.

**November 7th and 8th - Days 3 and 4:** Awake early and visit birds of paradise sites to (hopefully) see them performing their dawn chorus. We have a chance to see the lesser bird of paradise, the twelve-wired bird of paradise, the magnificent riflebird (a true beauty!) and the king bird of paradise. Sightings cannot be guaranteed, but we have a good chance!

After birding, we return to the guesthouse for breakfast. On day 4, we continue up river to visit Yambon village to visit the Haus Tambaran (Spirit House). We continue further up river to the villages of Yessan and Maio, which follow a Yam culture (as can be seen in their carved artefacts). We dine and sleep in village family houses in the Upper Sepik region for the nights od days 3 and 4.

**November 9th - Day 5:** Today we journey by canoe to Tongujam to visit the distinctive (and very different) Spirit House of that village. Afterwards, we begin the return journey down river stopping off at a few other villages and overnight and dine in a family house near Ambunti.

**November 10th - Day 6:** Today we canoe down river to Korogo Village fishing lake. There we start a 2-hour trek inland through the tropical rainforest into the delightful village of Yumuk. We visit some of the 6 Spirit Houses within Yumuk which are beautifully and distinctly decorated with painted beams and rafters from natural clay colours of ochre, grey, white and black sourced from the Sepik River. This style is unique to Yumuk. We dine and sleep in the Yumuk village guesthouse.

**November 11th - Day 7:** After visiting any remaining Spirit Houses which we did not see yesterday, we trek back to the canoes at the fishing lake and travel further down river to the Middle Sepik region, which is the Iatmul tribe's area. The Iatmul are famed for their ‘Crocodile Clan Culture’ and occur across this part of the Sepik River. We visit Kanganamun village, which has the largest Spirit House on the entire river. We dine and sleep in Kanganamun village guest house. An opportunity to go with the villagers crocodile hunting (their traditional livelihood) may be possible in the evening.

**November 12th - Day 8:** After breakfast, we visit Palembi village (also the Iatmul tribe). The village is home to two spectacular Spirit Houses filled with artefacts, some of which are for sale.

Note: our team in PNG have built a uniquely close, longstanding relationship with the Iatmul tribe, and we have been invited to observe a male initiation ceremony. It is extremely rare for outsiders to be permitted to watch this intimate ceremony (see explanation on the following pages).

Late in the afternoon, we travel to the initiation ceremony location, and make a base camp in the village guest house and / or family houses nearby.

From early evening the already initiated men will start their traditional chanting, and marching round and round, each calling out to their own ancestral Crocodile Spirits for support and guidance for the following morning's ritual. We have the option to stay with them all night listening to the mysterious, hypnotic chanting (though there will be accommodation should anyone wish to sleep).

**November 13th - Day 9:** At the first light of dawn, we arise and gather outside the Spirit House where the initiation ritual will commence. The to be initiated young men are taken in behind the leaf fence into the Spirit House. In an age old tradition, the Iatmul tribe cuts the skin of their young men to initiate them. The skin cuts cause scars in patterns that resemble the scales of a crocodile. We may be allowed to witness this ancient custom from start right through to completion inside the Spirit House. ***The highest respect is required from all visitors during this very private and intimate ritual.*** It may be possible for participants of the expedition to collect some crocodile scars on their own body (entirely at their own risk). This cannot be guaranteed - we will ask the villagers after the ceremony.



# ITINERARY

After lunch, we travel by canoe to visit the village of Kimindibit where the village ladies will demonstrate daily village tasks of grass skirt making, weaving, sago making/cooking. We then travel onto Aibon (a clay pottery centre) and visit the Chambri Lakes. We dine and sleep in a local guest house.

**November 14th - Day 10:** Today, we visit a series of villages of the Chambri Lakes, then travel back up river to Kanganamun village. We dine and sleep in Kanganamun village guest house. We may have a second opportunity to observe the villagers crocodile hunting (their traditional livelihood).

**November 15th - Day 11:** After breakfast the next morning, we motor upriver, stopping off at Korogo village before we return back to Pagwi. We say goodbye to the boatmen, transfer into a private charter bus, and are driven back to the “In-Wewak Boutique Hotel” where we dine and overnight. We will aim to arrive in Wewak during the early afternoon to allow time to visit artefact traders.

**November 16th - Day 12:** After breakfast, we transfer from the hotel to Wewak airport for a flight to Port Moresby. We should land at Port Moresby airport by 5 pm (possibly earlier) in time for 7:30 pm departing flights. Depending upon the schedule of flights, we may be able to arrive back at Port Moresby early enough to visit one or more art and artefact traders, and a shipping agent (to send back any items as required).

## DETAILS ON THE MIDDLE SEPIK CROCODILE CLAN MALE INITIATION

Very few outsiders are allowed to visit the male initiation ceremony of the crocodile clan (Iatmul tribe). Our visit during this trip is only possible because of a longstanding relationship built on trust between the tribe and our team working in Papua New Guinea. In return for being allowed to observe the tribe's ancient ceremony, we (as a group) will be donating 25,000 kina (approx US \$7,580 / £5,500) to the village as a gesture of friendship (very important in Papua New Guinea for building trust). This money will be given to help the lives of old and young people.

The male initiation ceremony is performed only by the Iatmul people in the Middle Sepik villages, and traditionally, once every 7 to 10 years. It involves many months of preparation, and a tremendous amount of effort and work from the whole village community.

This intimate and secret ritual is fundamental to Iatmul culture and traditionally welcomes adolescent boys gaining their status into manhood together with gaining highly respected warrior status by obtaining their ancestral crocodile powers. The Iatmul people of this region do not worship the crocodile; instead they co-share living together on the river and revere the large reptile for its strength. To the Iatmul, the crocodile is central to many ancient traditional myths from creation of their people through to power and spiritual guidance.

The traditional initiation procedure comprises of a succession of rituals designed to test the physical strength and moral fiber of the young “man to be”, as well as remove him from the influences of his mother.



# THE CROCODILE MALE INITIATION CEREMONY

The village Spirit House is where the initiation ritual is performed. Prior to the ritual event, a high leaf barrier is built to surround the traditional structure so that non-initiated males, women and children cannot see what will be performed inside. This temporary fencing barrier represents the crocodiles nest.

The night before the initiation the traditional flutes and drums are played throughout the night together with the initiated men chanting for calling upon their ancestral crocodile spirits. Other mysterious sounds are made to ward off evil spirits.

Early the following morning the initiates will be pulled into the Spirit House by their maternal uncles and made to lie down. These uncles will calm and comfort the initiates whilst the boy's bodies are being cut as it is imperative that no sound from the "man to be" is made. They have to endure the difficult procedure without omitting any noise or cries, or their initiation becomes invalid.

The skin is cut on the back, shoulders, upper arms and chest of the "man to be". After the cutting, the cuts are then washed with water, then painted gently with traditional lotion of bush antiseptics oils. A few days later the scabs are scraped off and a thick lotion, based from fire ash and natural oils, is rubbed into each mark so that the scars will heal to be raised and dark in colour. Then river clay is painted over the initiates' bodies and face as a barrier over the wounds, representing the crocodile egg, with potential hatchlings inside it. The initiates then remain inside the Spirit House with the Chief and older initiated men to recover over a period of weeks or in some villages for many months.

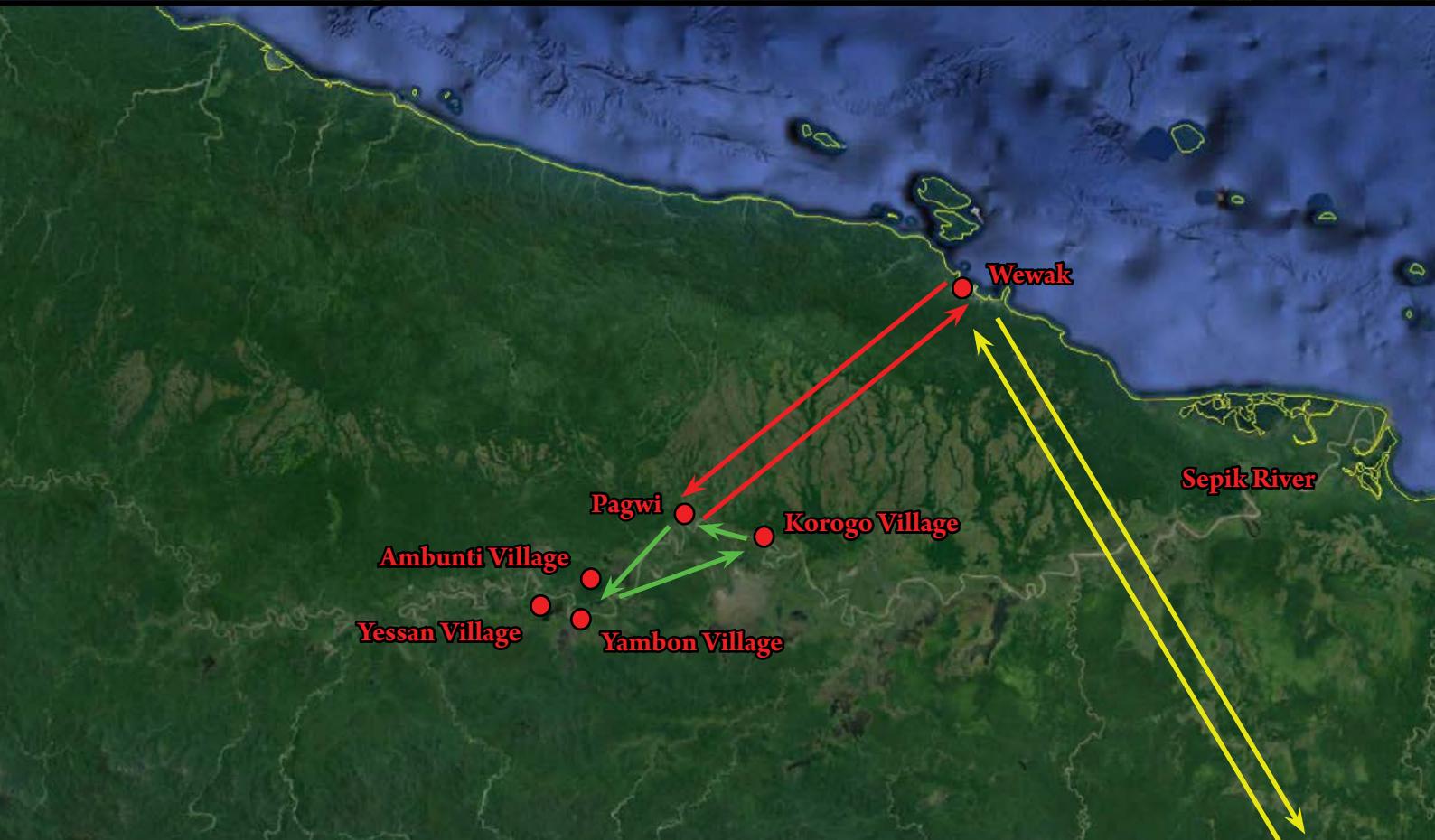
During this time of seclusion, the women of the village cook their sons/brothers the very best village food and place the bowls near the entrance to the Spirit House, as it is strictly taboo for any un-initiated people to see the young men. Inside the Spirit House, as they recover, the Chief will give each young man his secret Crocodile name and teach the initiates secrets and powers of their Clan. The chief will also instruct them as to their new responsibilities, and expectations regarding marriage and living within the village community.

Only when the Chief is fully satisfied that each of the young men has fulfilled his passage into being a Crocodile Man with high warrior status, does he allow the men to finally emerge out from the shadows of the Spirit House and enter back into village life. This conclusion is marked with a ritual bathing to remove the clay from their bodies, thus representing the hatching from the egg of a young crocodile. This is a time of great joy and pride within the village as the completed ritual has brought the young men into their fathers and grandfathers Clan, formed tight bonds with their fellow initiates and the older initiated men together with the highest respect from all within the village and along the river. The Crocodile men wear their scar marks with great pride and honour for the rest of their lives!



MAP USED WITH PERMISSION AND PROVIDED BY

# Google Earth



Email [expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org](mailto:expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org) to register your interest



Email [expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org](mailto:expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org) to register your interest



## BIRDS OF PARADISE ADD ON TRIP

We can set up the following optional add on trip to offer participants extra opportunities to see wildlife of the Port Moresby area, particularly birds of paradise. The Varirata National Park is one of the best and easiest places to see raggiana birds of paradise (and a vast array of other wildlife). We may have multiple chances during this add on trip to also visit artefact traders in Port Moresby as well.

The cost of this add on trip will be around £300 - £350, but decreases significantly in relation to how many people take part. Please email [expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org](mailto:expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org) if you would like to express interest in joining this add on trip. The price will be established once all participants of the Sepik River and the Crocodile Clan expedition have confirmed their preferences concerning joining this add on trip (at which point we will know the group size and the exact pricing). You will then be able to decide if you wish to proceed and book a place on this add on trip or not.

**November 16th - Day 12:** On arriving back in Port Moresby, we transfer to the Holiday Inn Express nearby to the airport where we dine and sleep for the night.

**November 17th - Day 13:** We have an early start, are picked up by a charter bus and drive to Varirata National Park (about 30 mins drive from Port Moresby). We arrive in sunset and are taken to key birding sites with a birding expert to focus on seeing the raggiana bird of paradise, the trumpet manucode, the crinkle-collared manucode, the growling riflebird, the marbled frogmouth, the hooded pitohui, the brown oriole and many others. During a 2017 trip to Varirata National Park, the group witnessed a full (amazing) mating display by the raggiana bird of paradise!

After lunch, we visit the Port Moresby Nature Park (formerly the botanic gardens) to see an amazing range of captive animals in very ethical, wild-style enclosures (excellent for photography). We may see the raggiana bird of paradise, the electus parrot, cassowaries, tree kangaroos, wallabys (the grey dorcopsis and the Macley's dorcopsis), and many other animals birds and an extensive collection of orchids and ferns. We have a chance to see birdwing butterflies as well! We dine and overnight at the Holiday Inn Express. If we arrive back early, we could visit artefact traders in Port Moresby.

**November 18th - Day 14:** We have a second opportunity to visit the Varirata National Park for further bird of paradise sighting opportunities (there are many sites in the park, so we can try different locations and try out luck at new sites).

After lunch, we visit the Port Moresby Adventure Park, home to a very impressive aviary containing magnificent birds of paradise, raggiana birds of paradise, the magnificent birds of paradise and eastern parotia. The park has a very impressive collection of other native Papuan wildlife, including a large number of birds, mammals and orchids. The park is home to a 5.6 m long saltwater crocodile (one of the largest crocodiles alive anywhere). We will try and organise feeding of the birds and crocodile to coincide with our arrival at the Adventure Park for amazing photo opportunities (can't be guaranteed, but we will try!) If we arrive back early, we could visit artefact traders in Port Moresby.

We transfer to Port Moresby airport by 5 pm in time for 7:30 pm departing flights (or our private charter bus can drop you off at any hotel in Port Moresby, if this is preferable).





**The Last Tuesday Society is Delighted to Offer Up To Ten People The Unique Opportunity to Accompany Viktor Wynd On a Expedition To Find New Wonders For His Museum.**

The Quest Will Be Led & Organized by The Distinguished Naturalist, Explorer, Author & Television Presenter Stewart McPherson, Discoverer of New Species, Author of Over 25 Wildlife Books, Founder of Redfern Natural History ([www.redferrnnaturalhistory.com](http://www.redferrnnaturalhistory.com)) and Redfern Adventures ([www.redfernadventures.com](http://www.redfernadventures.com)).

Mr. McPherson has over a decade of Experience In Taking Groups To Extraordinary Places – We Will Be In Good Hands!



What Mr. Wynd Will Find He Does Not Know – But It Will Be Something Marvelous. The Sepik River Has One of The World's Most Famed & Diverse Indigenous Cultures & We Hope To Be Able To Buy Items at The many Remote & Varied Villages We Will Visit & From Traders in Wewak & Port Moresby. It may even be possible to collect some Crocodile Scars on our own bodies at the initiation ceremony.

**Email [expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org](mailto:expeditions@thelasttuesdaysociety.org) for more information and to make bookings.**

This Expedition Will Be Organised and Run by Redfern Natural History Productions

