



The bay of Manokwari with Mount Arfak to the right and Pulau Lemon and Manisnam in the background

# PAPUA

## Indonesia's Least Explored Holiday Destination

by Dennis G. Kloeth

In the 22 years that I am back in the country of my birth, I have crisscrossed this, the world's largest archipelago and without doubt it surely is a genuine anthropologist's dream-come-true. From Sabang in the west to Merauke in the east, Indonesia never ceases to amaze *studiers of humankind*, travel writers, photographers and film or documentary makers. The many travel journals and articles and films and documentaries that nowadays appear on for instance Discovery and National Geographic Channel support this statement. Indonesia is HIP and especially for travelers that are interested in somewhat more than just a *suntan*. It surely offers a wide palette of colors that goes way beyond the color of golden brown.

Papua, Indonesia's most eastern province(s) may well be the place that you want to explore. I know it from my childhood years between 1949 and 1961, when my dad decided to try his "luck" in what was then known as West Nieuw Guinea. Lock, stock and barrel, he decided to move his family from Batavia to one of the most primitive and inhospitable places in the world. Electricity and running water were only introduced in 1953 and life as a "pioneering" family wasn't easy.



Kamoro warrior

In 1961, I was sent to a Dutch boarding school and it would take until 2003 before I made a first trip back to what is now called Papua. To report on the Kamoro Festival, I traveled to Timika in the south. Said to be discovered by Portuguese explorer Jorge de Menezes in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Papua is clad with imposing mountain ridges, genuinely dense rainforest and extremely rugged terrain giving home to people that live in tribal communities. Fuzzy-haired and deeply black-skinned, they distinctively differ from the majority of Indonesians. Roughly divided in "highlanders" and "islanders", long before the Europeans arrived,

the peoples in the south were notorious for headhunting and cannibalism and although today the Indonesian language is the official tongue, in Papua more than 300 dialects are said to be spoken.

Since Indonesia took over control of West Nieuw Guinea from the Dutch in 1963, the Free Papua Movement (FPM) has waged a sporadic low-level armed revolt for independence and because of the presence of Papua Militias - but mainly due to "constraints" imposed by Jakarta - for years Papua was a restricted and "closed" part of the archipelago. Today, all this has relaxed somewhat and apart from certain areas where hotbeds of FPM opposition still exist, Papua can now be visited by local and foreign tourists alike.

In 2009 and nearly half a century later, I finally made two consecutive trips to Manokwari, the place that I had left as a teenager in 1961. It was a "homecoming" of sorts. Nothing really had changed and what struck me the most was the abundance of natural beauty, something I had never noticed during my childhood days. The impressive Arfak Mountain ridge looms impressive in the distant horizon and stand guard, so it seems, over one of



Kids in Papua

the most enchanting bays in the entire archipelago. This lovely bay is home to two tiny islands that go by the names of Pulau Lemon and Pulau Mansinam. The latter is the place where, on February 5, 1855, German evangelists Ottow and Geisler set foot for the first time and build the first church in West Nieuw Guinea. As a child and on both islands, I had spent exciting camping weekends with my dad and my brothers. Today, Papua is still an "off the beaten track" holiday destination and unfortunately in the future

that may change. Before that happens, go there and enjoy Mother Nature's abundant gifts to mankind. My next trip to Papua is planned for the fall of 2012. ■

### PLACES OF INTEREST

Interesting cities and places to visit in Papua are Jayapura where in June the so called Sentani Lake Festival (<http://www.holidaymamboo.com/2012/04/sentani-lake-festival.html>) brings together an array of Papua culture events.

The Baliem Valley Festival (<http://www.holidaymamboo.com/2012/04/baliem-valley-festival.html>) is yet another interesting happening while The Raja Ampat islands in the north-west offer some of the best diving around. Please go <http://travels.patrik.com/ra/> to read Patrik Nilsson's report on one of the best diving site in the world.

### HOW TO GET THERE

Garuda flies daily to Jayapura. From Jayapura you can hop on a 40-minute flight to Waimena in the Baliem Valley. Merpati Air and Batavia Air daily fly to Manokwari. Check their websites for schedules. To get to Raja Ampat you have to get to Sorong first where Raja Ampat tour operators provide local transport to the islands. Once a week, Batavia Air flies to Manokwari with a stop in Sorong.



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