



Outside Magazine – October 2010



DESTINATIONS

Cay Party
What do the world's most rejuvenating island escapes have in common? Empty sand, lonely surf, and new adventures of the strangest kind.

Off Ambergris Caye, Belize



New Britain's Tavorvur volcano gets feisty

Fire on the Mountain

Playing in the shadow of a volcano in Papua New Guinea

BY KYLE DICKMAN

IN 1994, a 2,257-foot volcano erupted on the island of New Britain, Papua New Guinea, burying the city of Rabaul under seven feet of ash and prompting 30,000 people to evacuate. Only 3,000 returned, leaving the town essentially like Kauai pre-Captain Cook, only with more pyrotechnics: The island is populated mostly by members of some 50 indigenous tribes, and the resident volcanoes, Tavorvur and Vulcan, are still very much active. Go now and you can lounge on a black-sand beach and watch Tavorvur burp up lava and small columns of ash as many as four times an hour.

I arrived two years ago to find an ashy town—the swimming pools were gray—set on an active caldera with countless adventure options just beyond the city limits. One can scuba-dive at a reef wall that served as a berth for Japanese submarines in World War II; sample grilled crocodile at a sustainable farm in New Britain's jungle; or take a heli-

copter flight over inland waterfalls so remote, nobody has bothered to name them. But the highlight of New Britain is the paddling. On my third day in Rabaul, I drove five minutes south to Matupit Island and rented a dugout canoe with a guide from the Tolai tribe. We paddled across Simpson Harbor while a hot ash cloud boiled overhead. Afterwards, my guide brought me back to the Tolai village and served me bananas poached in coconut milk, which he said was a traditional feast commemorating the arrival of Fijian missionaries—whom the Tolai ate.

GET THERE: Air Niugini flies here at least twice daily from Port Moresby, on the south side of PNG's mainland (from \$300; airniugini.com.pg). Lodging in Rabaul is limited to the Hamamas Hotel (doubles from \$59; www.rabaulhotel.com.pg). Ask the staff about tours of the OISCA farm (\$18 with crocodile lunch; oisca.org) and rides to Matupit. The Tolai guides will find you; a day trip is \$9.

GET LOST: ISLANDS



BULLETIN VIEQUES RISING

Back in 2001, the Navy was still using Puerto Rico's Vieques for war games on the beaches. There was just a handful of restaurants and hotels on the 21-mile-long, four-mile-wide Caribbean island, and it was the kind of place where guests didn't wear shoes. Today, the Navy is gone and the old bombing ranges have been designated a national wildlife refuge. Now, Vieques is exploding in a different way: New roads are being built; old ones are getting paved. One of the military's old bunkers is now a sports bar by day and a disco by night. Swanky hotels, like the W, which opened in March (doubles from \$379; wvieques.com), and restaurants, like El Quenepo (787-741-1215), are popping up.

But don't worry. While it's now possible to have the resort experience, Vieques is still funkier and more laid-back than most Caribbean islands. Book a *cabañita*—one-room cottage—at La Finca (doubles from \$125; lafinca.com), a clean but rustic joint with outdoor showers and mismatched towels. Then head for the sand. There are more than 50 beaches—perfect for everything from kayaking (Green Beach) to snorkeling (the islet of Blue Beach) to paddling at night in one of the biggest bioluminescent bays in the world (Puerto Mosquito, a.k.a. "Bio Bay"). The best way to see the latter is in a clear canoe from the Vieques Adventure Company (two-hour rentals, \$45; viequesadventures.com), which, should you start getting antsy for more action, can also set you up with decent mountain bikes to explore all the old military roads (\$25 per day) or take you kayak fly-fishing for tarpon (\$150). —SAM MOULTON