

PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT
 Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
 to help you put together your perfect trip

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and insider tips



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HELP YOU HAVE A SMOOTH TRIP

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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Jayne D'Arcy



Look out for these icons:



Our author's
recommendation



A green or
sustainable option

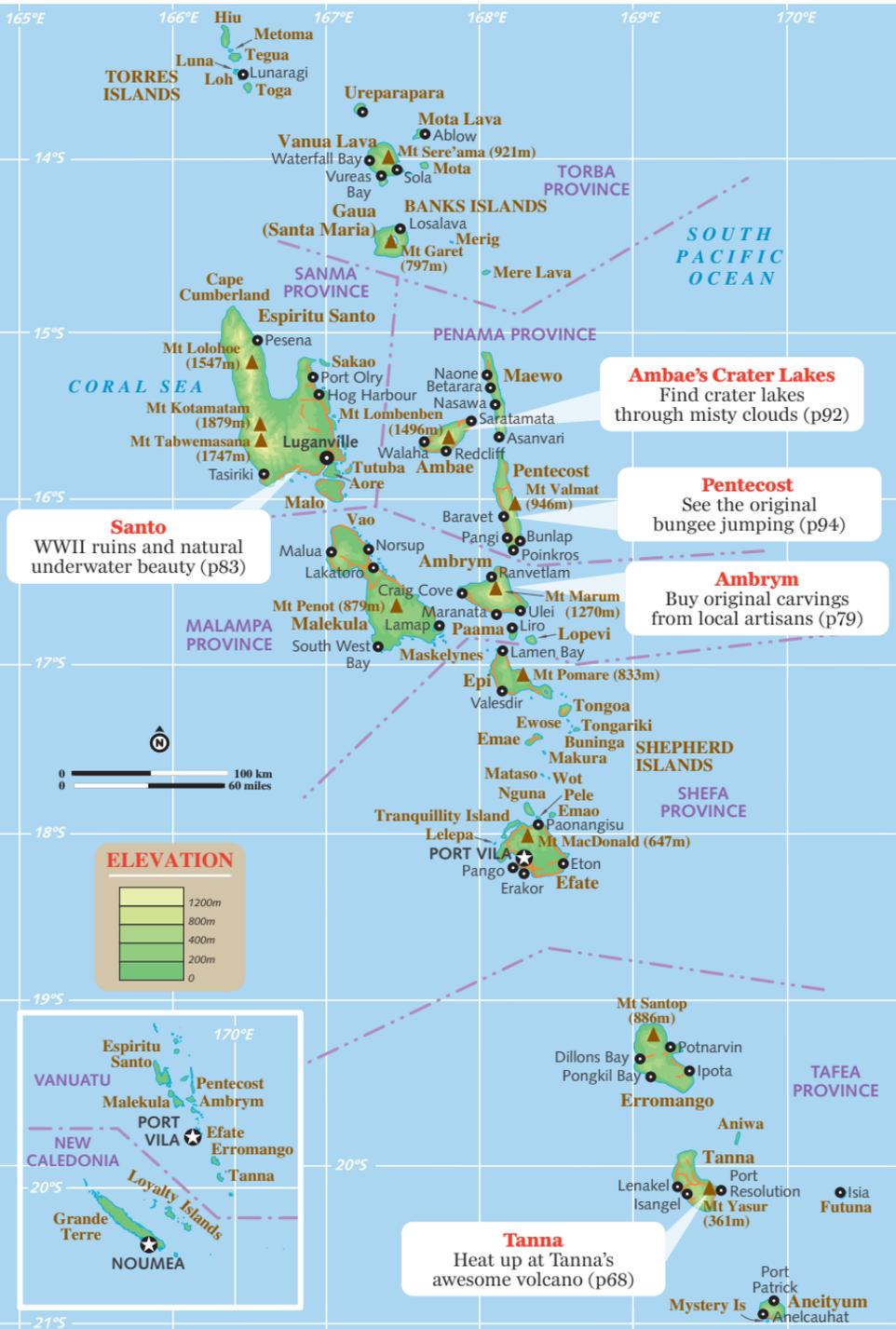


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On the Road

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Vanuatu & New Caledonia



Loyalty Islands

Beaches, seafood, swimming and snorkelling (p158)

Grand Terre's Far South

Walk, cycle and kayak in nature reserves (p145)

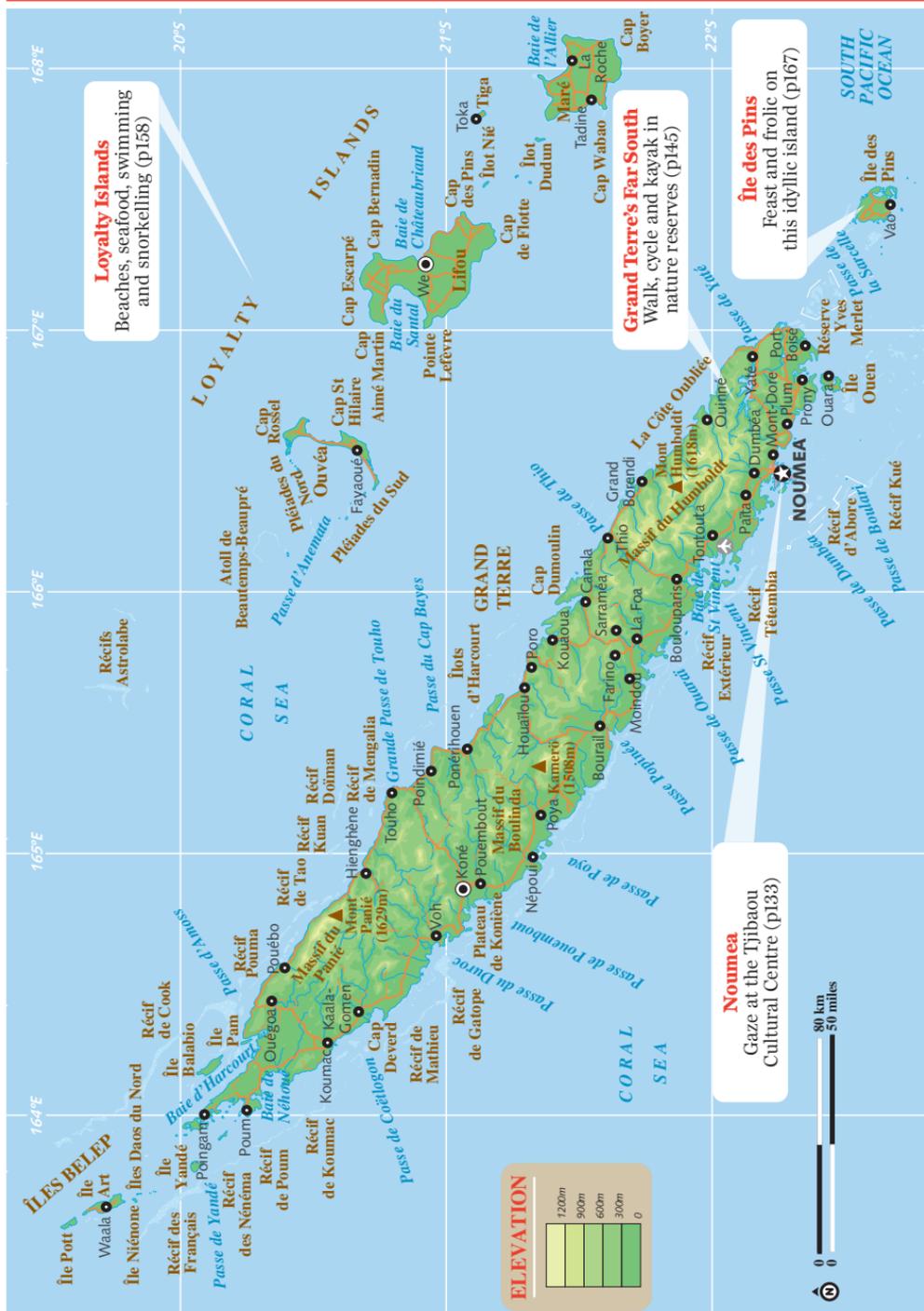
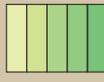
Île des Pins

Feast and frolic on this idyllic island (p167)

Noumea

Gaze at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre (p133)

ELEVATION





OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITER



Jayne D'Arcy

[New Caledonia](#), [Vanuatu](#) Jayne started her travels with overland Asia trips, but has discovered that overland in the South Pacific can offer up similar diversity and excitement (with more French imports). Aside from the French influence, Jayne digs the coral reefs, astounding lagoons and serious *Survivor* opportunities that the area has in abundance. When she's not researching for Lonely Planet (this is her 17th guide), Jayne writes for the *Age* in Victoria, Australia.

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itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



One Week Exploring the Loyalty Islands

You can explore New Caledonia's three Loyalty Islands in a week; begin by flying from the domestic airport in **Noumea** to **Ouvéa**. Stay three nights, soaking up the sun on the island's 25km of white-sand beaches. Spend one day on an organised day trip that offers snorkelling off an uninhabited island, a fresh-fish barbeque and a peek at the local shark population. Check out the turtles from Ouvéa's only bridge and keep an eye out for more sharks. There's scuba diving here, too.

Waterlogged, fly to **Lifou** (landing at **Wanaham**) and enjoy more island life, spotting turtles in its southeastern bays, visiting stunning beaches on its west and east coasts and enjoying the great snorkelling at **Baie de Jinek** in its northwest. After staying at the nearby cliff spot of **Baie de Jokin**, head down to **Wé** to catch the ferry to **Tadine** on the little-explored **Maré**. Pick up your hire car from Tadine's ferry port and head south to the lovely **Eni Beach**. Whales pass by here between July and September. Stay the night before heading to the island's east and hiking **Shabadran** with a guide. Gaze at the spectacular **Le Saut du Guerrier** (Warrior's Leap) near **La Roche** before dropping of your hire car and catching a flight back to **Noumea**.



Five Days

Vanuatu's Beaches & Islands

Start exploring Vanuatu's watery delights with a visit to all three of the almost football-field sized islands off **Port Vila**. On day one, don a snorkel and fins and send a postcard from the underwater mailbox at **Hideaway Island**. Spend day two enjoying lunch on **Erakor Island**, followed by a paddle in its calm shallow waters. Then, as the sun goes down, hop on the regular ferry to **Iririki Island** for dinner. Each island has its own resort but you don't need to stay at them to visit. If manicured-resort fatigue kicks in, travel north by public transport or hire car and take the short boat trip to the islands of **Nguna** or **Pele**. Experience hospitality ni-Van style while staying in a rustic bungalow by the beach. It's very chilled out; your entertainment will most likely be hermit-crab watching.

Head back to **Port Vila** to catch a plane north to **Luganville**, the capital of **Santo**. Get straight into the action by exploring the underwater WWII dumping ground of **Million Dollar Point** and dive the wreck of the luxury liner *USS President Coolidge*. Once the diving's done, make your way north to recover on comfortable and fun **Oyster Island**. For a change from beaches, borrow one of the resort's kayaks and paddle your way to its nearby blue hole. You won't be able to resist diving into its luminous bright blue water once you get there.

Return the kayak and venture further north by road to **Champagne Beach**, which is one of Vanuatu's most impressive beaches. Its cuticle shape holds in whiter-than-white sand and clear turquoise waters. It's a cruise-ship favourite but, if you're lucky, you'll have it all to yourself. If you haven't managed to get all the sand out from between your toes, be tempted by the presence of yet more blue holes along the road back south. To finish off the watery Vanuatu experience stop at **Leweton Cultural Village** in time to see women and children from the northern island of Gaua perform water music. The soothing sounds and images will stick with you as you board your flight from **Luganville** back to **Port Vila**.



One Day Noumea

Those who arrive by cruise ship are lucky; the terminal is smack bang in the middle of Noumea. Start your day with a bit of shopping around nearby **Place des Cocotiers**. If you leave it until later shops may be shut. Drop off your purchases and walk south to the multi hexagonal municipal city market, **Le Marché**. Stand and drink your coffee like a local, buy fresh fruit, then walk up Rue Eugène Porcheron for some of the best pastries in the country. **Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie** is nearby; spend an hour here exploring Kanak culture and Melanesian artefacts.

Hop on the local bus to **Baie des Citrons** and settle onto your patch of sandy beach (there are grassed bits too). Have a swim and chill out on the floating pontoons just like the locals do. Dry off and walk to the **Aquarium des Lagons** (a waterfront aquarium). Spend at least an hour here, admiring the sharks and lagoon-dwelling sea life. Continue walking to **Anse Vata**, a beachside hive of shopping and eating. Adventurous types can depart here for some kite surfing on the windy but pretty **Îlot Maître** (book ahead, and take your snorkelling gear).

Then it's time to smarten up and make your way (phone for a taxi) to the architecturally amazing **Tjibaou Cultural Centre**. The walk around it, complete with informative plaques, is impressive, as are the exhibitions inside. Call for another taxi or wait for the local blue bus to take you back to the centre. Watch the yachting life while unwinding with an aperitif at a waterfront bar at **Port Moselle**, before ending your day with a wander through the historic and character-filled **Quartier Latin** (Latin Quarter).



Two Weeks New Caledonia

➤ Spend a few days in **Noumea**, swimming at the beaches (Anse Vata and Baie des Citrons) and practicing your French. Indulge in French pastries and bistro meals and don't miss the local market for your morning dose of caffeine. By all means loll around the hotel pool, but emerge to see the gorgeous Aquarium des Lagon and, further out, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

On day four, wake up early and catch a ferry to **Île des Pins**. On arrival at the wharf in the **Baie de Kuto**, pick up your waiting rental car and stop at all the sights en route to **La Piscine Naturelle** (a natural aquarium). Walk along the river to a simple beachside restaurant where you can eat lobster or (if you've ordered in advance) traditionally cooked *bougna*. Stay nearby in a traditional bungalow by the water. Head back to the **Baie de Kuto** to return the car and jump back on the ferry to **Noumea**. Dance like there's no tomorrow at an over-water nightclub. Recover, then hire another car (make this one a lovely new French import) and head north along the west coast for a week of cultural exploration.

Stay waterside, snorkelling and scuba diving at **Boulouparis**, and surfing at **Plage de Ouano**. Take a day out and head inland near **La Foa** to visit a farmstay in the depths of deer-hunting cowboy country. Return to the west coast road and head north again. Book early for a couple of magic days at **Relais de Poingam**, right at the tip of Grande Terre, before travelling across the top and part way down the east coast, buying up local Kanak carvings and fresh tropical fruits from roadside stalls on your way. Stay in one of the great (and simple) beachside bungalows and take advantage of more snorkelling and scuba diving opportunities. There are some interesting towns here – try to coincide your trip with the regular markets. Drive onto the terrific river ferry en route to **Hienghène**, and cross back to the west on the RPN2 after exploring **Poindimié**. Retrace your path along the west coast back to **Noumea**.

Still time? Duck down to the Grande Terre's Far South and explore the **Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue** by canoe. Head even further south and see the former convict centre of **Prony**. If the whales are around (between July and September), catch a boat from here to get a little closer to them before heading back to **Noumea**.



10 Days

Volcanic Vanuatu

Take the early morning flight from **Port Vila** straight to **Whitegrass Airport** on the island of **Tanna**. Choose your accommodation from the resort or bungalows nearby and hang out in the blue pools filled with coral and fish. Join a tour to a *kastom* (traditional) village to see how Tanna's tribes have been living for centuries; if you're lucky you'll get a peek at some black magic – it's particularly strong on this island.

Then rest up and prepare to cross a vast ash plain by 4WD truck in the late afternoon. Stop and take photos of this moon-like surface with **Mt Yasur** rising in the background. The 4WD drops you a few minutes' walk from this active volcano's lip. Settle into your viewing position and when dusk approaches witness the fireworks as lava and smoke spit out. Stay in a treehouse beneath the volcano for added spark – you'll hear the rumbles and lava explosions all night. Climb back up in the morning if you want to get another sulphur fix before crossing the island again and flying back to **Port Vila**.

From **Port Vila**, fly to **Craig Cove** on the island of **Ambrym**. The island has several routes to get to the **Mt Benbow** and **Mt Marum** volcanoes; each community has its own paths and guides to get you there, and each involves a different degree of difficulty. Reaching the volcanoes requires a four- to eight-hour walk and incorporates an overnight stay camping by the rim (only if it's safe to do so – check the warnings first).

Finally, fly from **Craig Cove** to **Longana** on the island of **Ambae**. Once there, head up to **Ambanga** (a two-hour 4WD journey away) and in the morning set off to visit Ambae's three crater lakes with a guide. The lakes are accessible on foot, though it's fairly dense forest that you'll be making your way through. Take your camping gear and stay the night by one of the lakes before returning to **Longana** for your flight back to **Port Vila**.

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