



New Caledonia

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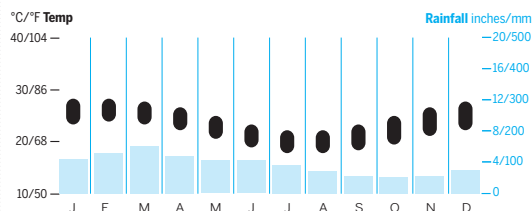
Why Go?

Dazzling – yes, New Caledonia is dazzling. Its lagoon surrounds it with every colour of blue. So the light and the space delight your senses. The 2008 prestigious listing of the lagoon as a World Heritage site has brought the people together to celebrate and protect it, from village level through to government.

New Caledonia isn't just a tropical playground. There's a charming mix of French and Melanesian: warm hospitality sitting beside European elegance, gourmet food beneath palm trees, sand, resorts, bungalows, concrete, bamboo. Long gorgeous beaches are backed by cafes and bars, with horizons that display tiny islets to attract day trippers. Be lured into kayaks, rock climb, sail, dive into a world of corals, canyons, caves and heritage shipwrecks, go whale watching or snorkelling, or relax on the warm sand of a deserted isle. Natural wonders and manmade delights are at your fingertips.

When to Go

Noumea



Apr–May Fresh from the heat and rains, the country is sparkling again.

Jul It may be too cool for beachgoers, but that bodes well for hikers.

Oct–Nov Catch life on the islands before folk head off on their annual summer vacation.

Connections

It's a breeze travelling to New Caledonia's islands; the Betico passenger ferry links them with Noumea twice a week, and offers day trips to Île des Pins. You can fly from island to island, with the exception of Maré, which is linked to Lifou and Ouvéa by ferry only, and Île des Pins, which connects only to Noumea. If planning to transfer from an international to a domestic flight take into account the 1.5-hour travel time between the international and domestic airports.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Practise your swimming at Noumea's beaches (**Anse Vata** and **Baie des Citrons**) and indulge in French pastries and bistro meals. Loll around the hotel pool, but emerge to see the gorgeous **aquarium** and, further out, the **Tjibaou Cultural Centre**. Ferry it to **Île des Pins**, pick up your awaiting rental car and drive to **La Piscine Naturelle**. Walk in and along a river to a simple beachside restaurant where you can eat lobster. Return the car, catch the ferry back and dance like there's no tomorrow at an over-water nightclub.

Two Weeks

As above, then head north for a week of cultural exploration. Stay waterside or journey into the depths of deer hunting, cowboy country on a farmstay. Book ahead for a couple of magic days at **Relais de Poingam**, right at the tip, before heading down the east coast, buying up carvings and tropical fruits. Still time? Duck south and explore the **Parc Provincial de la Rivière Bleue** by canoe.

Essential Food & Drink

New Caledonian restaurants are famous for their fine dining. But it's at the *snacks* (eateries) and cafes that you really appreciate the flare and flavour of French cuisine: everything is prepared with delicious sauces and marinades. Take the simple sandwich. It's a very long, crusty baguette with leg ham dripping out the sides, or perhaps a homemade terrine stacked inside. If a restaurant serves Pacific cuisine, the meal will be simple but elegant: fish in lemon, say, with green papaya salad.

The Melanesian speciality is *bougna*: yam, sweet potato, taro, other vegetables and meat, fish or seafood covered in coconut milk, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked on hot stones in an earth oven for two hours. Most Melanesian-run gîtes can prepare a *bougna* but you must order 24 hours in advance.

AT A GLANCE

Currency Cour de Franc Pacifique (CFP)

Language French, Melanesian-Polynesian dialects

Money There's an ATM on the Loyalty Islands, the Île des Pins and many on Grande Terre.

Visas Not needed for stays up to three months for EEC, US, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea passport holders.

Mobile phones Liberté SIMs (6130 CFP from post offices) work in unlocked European and Australian phones. Public phones available throughout the country.

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 18,575 sq km
- » **Capital** Noumea
- » **Emergency numbers** ambulance ☎15, police ☎17, fire ☎18
- » **Population** 260,000
- » **Telephone code** ☎687

Exchange Rates

| | | |
|-------------|-------|---------|
| Australia | A\$1 | 95 CFP |
| Canada | C\$1 | 89 CFP |
| Europe | €1 | 119 CFP |
| Japan | ¥100 | 109 CFP |
| New Zealand | NZ\$1 | 74 CFP |
| UK | £1 | 140 CFP |
| USA | US\$1 | 88 CFP |

Set Your Budget

- » **Museum visit** 400 CFP
- » **Bottle of beer** 350 CFP
- » **Transport ticket** 210 CFP