

New Caledonia

📍 687 / POP 270,000

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Le Lagon (p137)
- ➔ Hotel Hibiscus (p151)
- ➔ Relais de Poingam (p152)
- ➔ Nèkwéta Fish & Surf Camp (p150)
- ➔ Refuge de Farino (p148)

Best Beaches

- ➔ La Roche Percée (p150)
- ➔ Baie des Citrons (p131)
- ➔ Baie de Kanuméra (p166)
- ➔ Fayaoué Beach (p161)
- ➔ Yedjele Beach (p156)

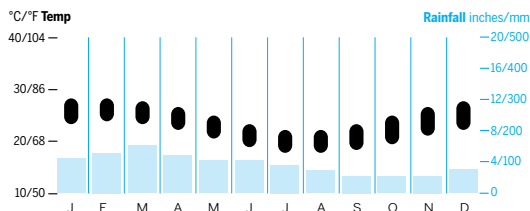
Why Go?

New Caledonia's dazzling lagoon surrounds it with every hue of blue, green and turquoise. The light and the space simply delight your senses. By becoming a World Heritage site, the lagoon has helped bring 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 and bungalows. Long gorgeous beaches are backed by cafes and bars, with horizons that display tiny islets to attract day trippers. Be lured into kayaks or microlights, rock climb, sail, dive into a world of corals, canyons, caves and 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-Aug It may be cool for beachgoers, but that bodes well for hikers and whale-watchers.

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

GRANDE TERRE

POP 245,000 / AREA 16,372 SQ KM

Oriental northwest to southeast, a chain of mountains sweeps down the middle of New Caledonia's main island, Grande Terre. Four hundred kilometres long, the island is 50km to 70km across for most of its length. To the west, in the lee of the mountains, are wide, dry plains dotted with country towns, while to the east, on the windward coast, lush vegetation descends to the sea.

The island is surrounded by its legendary World Heritage-listed lagoon, though this is not Grande Terre's only 'green gold'. The other is garnierite, a silicate rich in nickel that has fueled the country's economy since its discovery in 1864.

Administratively, Grande Terre is divided into two districts, Province Nord (the North) and Province Sud (the South). Île des Pins is officially part of Province Sud.

Noumea

POP 100,000

With its cheerful multi-ethnic community, New Caledonia's cosmopolitan capital is both sophisticated and uncomplicated, classy and casual. The relaxed city sits on a large peninsula, surrounded by picturesque bays, and offers visitors a variety of experiences. Diners can eat out at sassy French restaurants hidden in Quartier Latin, dine at bold waterfront bistros or grab a bargain meal from a nocturnal van in a car park. Meanwhile, shopaholics can blow their savings on the latest Parisian fashions or go bargain hunting for imported Asian textiles.

Central Noumea revolves around Place des Cocotiers, a large, shady square with landscaped gardens, a couple of blocks in from the waterfront. The main leisure area where locals and tourists hang out lies south of the city centre at Baie des Citrons and Anse Vata, with beaches, restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

While Noumea city has 100,000 residents, the greater Noumea area, including Le Mont-Dore, Dumbéa and Paita, is home to 164,000, or about 63% of New Caledonia's population.

Sights

City Centre

★ **Place des Cocotiers** SQUARE
(Map p134) This is the heart of the city. The square slopes gently from east to west and at

the top is a band rotunda, a famous landmark dating back to the late 1800s. Place des Cocotiers is the perfect spot to watch the world go by. Near the band rotunda there's a popular *pétanque* pitch and a giant chessboard. Down the other end it's like a lush botanical garden, with palms and large spreading trees. There's free wi-fi throughout the square.

Regular concerts and street markets are held in Place des Cocotiers. Held twice a month, the popular *Jeudis du Centre Ville* street market has a different theme each time.

★ **Le Marché** MARKET
(Map p134; www.noumea.nc/en; ☎ 5-11am Tue-Sun) This colourful multi-hexagonal-shaped market is beside the marina at Port Moselle. Fishermen unload their catch; trucks offload fruit, vegetables and flowers; and there's fresh-baked bread and cakes, plus delights like terrines and olives. The arts and crafts section includes a cafe. On Saturday and Sunday live music keeps shoppers entertained. The market is busiest early in the morning.

★ **Musée de la Ville de Noumea** MUSEUM
(Noumea Museum; Map p134; ☎ 26 28 05; Rue Jean Jaurès; admission 200 CFP; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat) The beautiful colonial-style Musée de la Ville de Noumea, which overlooks Place des Cocotiers, is dwarfed by towering palm trees. It features fascinating temporary and permanent displays on the early history of Noumea.

Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie MUSEUM
(Museum of New Caledonia; Map p134; ☎ 27 23 42; www.museenouvellecaledonie.nc; 42 Av du Maréchal Foch; adult 200 CFP; ☎ 9-11.30am & 12.15-4.30pm Wed-Mon) The Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie provides an excellent introduction to traditional Kanak and regional Pacific culture. Local exhibits are displayed on the ground floor and regional artefacts on the mezzanine level.

Mwâ Ka MONUMENT
(Map p134) Mwâ Ka is erected in a landscaped square opposite Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie. The 12m totem pole is topped by a *grande case* (chief's hut), complete with *flèche faitière* (carved rooftop spear), and its carvings represent the eight customary regions of New Caledonia. The Mwâ Ka is mounted as the mast on a concrete double-hulled *pirogue*, steered by a wooden helmsman, and celebrates Kanak identity as well as the multi-ethnic reality of New Caledonia.