

Vanuatu

📍 678 / POP 281,500

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Rocky Ridge Bungalows (p68)
- ➔ Havannah (p60)
- ➔ Traveller's Budget Motel (p54)
- ➔ Espiritu (p83)
- ➔ Lope Lope Adventure Lodge (p87)

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Oyster Island (p87)
- ➔ Market Meal Booths (p84), Luganville
- ➔ Kesorn's Exotic Thai Kitchen (p57)
- ➔ L'Houstalet (p57)

Why Go?

Vanuatu is a Pacific island adventure far beyond any notions of cruise-ship ports and flashy resorts. Deserted beaches, ancient culture, remote and rugged islands and world-class diving are just a small part of the magnetism of this scattered 80-plus island archipelago.

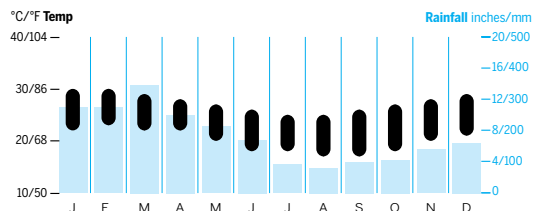
Where else can you hike up a crater to stare down into a magma-filled active volcano then ashboard back down, snorkel in a blue hole and drink kava with the local village chief – all in the same day? The resorts and restaurants of Port Vila have little in common with traditional *kastom* (custom) village life in the outer islands, but it's contrasts like these that make Vanuatu a surprise and a challenge.

Vanuatu was slammed by Cyclone Pam in 2015, but its people, resilient and laid-back as ever, take life in smiling strides.

It takes a little time, effort and a healthy sense of adventure to truly explore Vanuatu's islands, but it's worth every bit of it.

When to Go

Port Vila



May–Jul Warm and dry; high season. Pentecost's land diving is in full swing.

Aug–Oct Avoid Australian school holidays and enjoy mostly dry sunny days.

Nov–Mar Wet (cyclone) season, so accommodation is plentiful but transport may be delayed.

EFATE

POP 66,000 / AREA 915 SQ KM

Efate is Vanuatu's main island, politically, economically, industrially and in terms of population and tourism. Even so, outside of the capital Port Vila it's pretty low-key, with some of the village life you'll find on other islands.

Efate has two of Vanuatu's best deep-water anchorages in Vila Bay and the expanding Havannah Harbour, as well as the principal airport. Drive around the island's sealed ring road (opened in 2011) to explore its bays and beaches, islands and inlets. It's also easy to access remote-feeling offshore islands such as Pele, Nguna, Moso and Lelepa.




Port Vila & Around

POP 44,000

Set around pretty Vila Bay and a series of lagoons, beaches and offshore islands, Port Vila is a surprisingly compact but energetic town. It's a little rough around the edges, with a few traffic-clogged main streets offering up a supply of souvenirs, markets, and waterfront restaurants and cafes with some lingering French influences. Beneath this veneer is an odd mix of holidaymakers, cruise-ship day trippers, expats and yachties, along with ni-Vanuata (local people) drawn from all over the archipelago.




This is the liveliest town in Vanuatu, with a mind-boggling array of tours and adventure activities, some excellent restaurants, bars, supermarkets, banks and markets. Vila is a place for comfort over culture, beach bars over basic bungalows – and that's reason enough to stay a while.

Sights

★ **National Museum of Vanuatu** MUSEUM (Map p53;  22129; Rue d'Artois; 1000VT, with guided tour 1500VT;  9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat; ) This excellent museum, in a soaring traditional building opposite the parliament, has a well-displayed collection of traditional artefacts such as *tamtam* (slit gongs or slit drums), outrigger canoes, ceremonial headdresses, shell jewellery and examples of Lapita and Wusi pottery. There's an interesting photographic display on the unearthing of Chief Roi Mata's burial site. One-hour guided tours include a traditional instrument demonstration and sand drawing.



Hideaway Island

ISLAND

(Map p50;  22963; <http://hideaway.com.vu>; opposite Mele Beach; marine park adult/child 1250/600VT;  24hr; ) Just 100m or so off-shore from Mele Beach, Hideaway Island isn't all that hidden but it's one of Vila's favourite spots for snorkelling, diving or just enjoying lunch at the island's resort (nonguests can access the marine park until 4pm). The free ferry puts out from in front of the Beach Bar (p56) regularly, and once on the island you can snorkel in the marine sanctuary, join a dive tour and send a waterproof postcard from the world's only underwater post office.




Erakor

ISLAND

(Map p50; www.erakorislandresort.com; adult/child day pass 1000/500VT;  24hr; ) Erakor is one of Vila's excellent resort islands. Day trippers can swim and snorkel at the shallow white-sand beach, kayak around the island or dine in the Aqua Restaurant (the day pass is redeemable for food and drinks). The 24-hour ferry leaves from the end of the road past Nasama Resort.





★ Mele Cascades

WATERFALL

(Map p50; adult/child 2000/1000VT;  8.30am-5pm; ) This popular and photogenic swimming spot is 10km from Port Vila. A series of clear aquamarine pools terrace up the hillside, culminating in an impressive 35m waterfall flowing into a natural plunge pool. A slippery path with guide ropes directs you to the top. There are toilets, change rooms and a cafe-bar with free wi-fi at the entrance. Go out by local minibus (250VT), or take a guided tour with **Evergreen** (Map p56;  23050; www.evergreenvanuatu.com; Lini Hwy; tours 3000VT).

Tanna Coffee Factory

FACTORY

(Map p50;  23661; Devil's Point Rd, Mele;  8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat; )  **FREE** Watch the roaster at work and learn the story of Tanna coffee over a strong brew (350VT) at this welcoming coffee-roasting factory and cafe.

Secret Garden

CULTURAL CENTRE

(Map p50;  26222; www.vanuatuscretgarden.com; adult/child 1000/500VT; ) The beautiful botanic gardens here help bring some of Vanuatu's island flora and its cultural uses to life. There's a *kastom* magic show (adult/child 1500/750VT) on Friday morning and a popular 'Island Feast' (3500/1750VT) on Tuesday and Thursday evening.