

P R E S S R E L E A S E

20th October 2009

Additional destinations added for Orion PNG expeditions in 2010

For those who truly seek a *path less travelled*, Australia's closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea, ranks as one of the worlds most diverse and absorbing geographic and cultural destinations.

Impenetrably dense tropical rainforest, scattered islands, rugged terrain and active volcanoes conspire to make PNG difficult to explore. The purpose-built 5 star expedition cruise ship *Orion* provides the perfect base for those seeking adventures in this unspoilt paradise.

In March, April and October 2010 *Orion* returns to Papua New Guinea with five voyages to exciting points-of-call including spectacular Lambom and Lamassa (visited for the first time in 2009 and regarded as highlights of unspoilt wonder), and for the first time evocative Tingwon, Manus, Wuvulu, Sissano, Hansa Bay and Bagabag – newly uncovered by Orion's Expedition Scouting team and described as offering exceptional cultural experiences.

Outside the main towns many villagers have still only been exposed to the western world through the workings of missionaries and occasional traders and so Orion's visits are of as great an interest to the locals as they are to Orion's guests.

Not for everyone, these expeditions appeal to those who are naturally curious, seeking intellectual stimulation through experiences far from the norm – all the while assisted by Orion's knowledgeable Expedition Team both onboard and ashore, while travelling in luxurious surroundings with the service of 75 crew to manage every need or whim.

With numerous World War II sites of great significance, colourful colonial trading history, an extraordinary range of cultures and artwork, friendly villagers and outstanding crystal clear waters for swimming, snorkelling and diving, Orion's expeditions attract a group of like-minded travellers who enjoy photography, marine biology, bird watching, anthropology, maritime and military history and the just plain curious.

.....

Access to and from Rabaul in PNG has been simplified as Orion has arranged for Australian-operated charter flights between Cairns and Rabaul to assist in convenient transfers in both directions meaning, in effect, the expeditions start and finish in Cairns.

11-night Papua New Guinea Cultural Highlights: RABAUL (embark after charter flight from Cairns), Sepik River and Watam Village, Madang (for Goroka & the highlands), Tami Islands, Tufi, Fergusson Island, Samarai Island and Kwato Islands, Alotau (Milne Bay), CAIRNS.

2010 Departures: 17 April and 22 October.

11-night New Guinea Islands Adventure: CAIRNS, Alotau (Milne Bay), Deboyne Lagoon, Egum Atoll, Kitava (The Trobriands), Lambom, Lamassa Islands, Duke of York Islands, RABAUL (overnight onboard; charter flight available to Cairns).

2010 Departures: 27 March and 11 October.

11 night fares from \$8,995 per person for an ocean view (Category B Stateroom)

Suites begin from \$12,410 per person for a Junior Suite

Orion's Owners' Suites are \$18,840 per person. All prices twin share.

Cairns/Rabaul or Rabaul/Cairns charter flights \$600 per person.

10 night Wild New Guinea & Bismarck Archipelago: RABAUL (embark after charter flight from Cairns), Tingwon, Manus, Wuvulu, Sissano Lagoon, Hansa Bay, Bagabag, RABAUL (overnight onboard; charter flight available to/from Cairns).

2010 Departure: 7 April.

10 night fares from \$6,950 per person for an ocean view (Category B Stateroom)

Suites begin from \$9,025 per person for a Junior Suite

Orion's Owners' Suites are \$14,555 per person. All prices twin share.

Cairns/Rabaul or Rabaul/Cairns charter flights \$600 per person per sector.

Cruise fares include accommodation and all meals in an unhurried single sitting, the service of 75 experienced crew members, guest speakers and/or expedition leaders and selected landings & activities ashore.

All departures are guaranteed.

Additional information:

Expanding on previous voyages to Papua New Guinea, *Orion*, during her *Islands Adventure* voyage, will depart Cairns to visit Alotau, Deboyne Lagoon, Egum Atoll, Kitava, Lambom, Lamassa Islands, Duke of York Islands before arrival in Rabaul.

Rarely visited, even for PNG, *Orion* was the first ship of its kind to visit Lambom and just the second to visit Lamassa. Here fire eating and night-time spirit dances remain core cultural activities and in local mythology a secret beach has a salt water spring said to be the source of all the world's oceans.

Regardless of which itinerary is selected guests will encounter primitive tribal cultures and unique flora and fauna, see superb indigenous artwork and artefacts, visit remote villages and enjoy world-class snorkelling. For many the World War

II history and relics in Rabaul and Milne Bay, palpable reminders of our recent history, will be a highlight.

Orion's guests will become immersed in a diverse array of experiences found nowhere else on the globe. Evocative ports of call on *Orion's Papua New Guinea Cultural Highlights* voyage include colonial Madang, Tufi, Milne Bay, the Sepik River (PNG's equivalent of the Amazon), Samarai Island and Deboyne Lagoon. All spark the imagination – without disappointment, for much still remains a tropical paradise time has forgotten and tourism overlooked.

From the busy flooded caldera that is Rabaul harbour, bustling with inter-island trading ships, to dug-out canoes on the Sepik River, this is a land of trade. *Orion* visits Kwato Island and the Trobriand Islands (known as the 'Islands of Love') where, in the 1700's, European traders used to stop to trade in mother-of-pearl, sandalwood and sea cucumbers. Visit with *Orion* and discover for yourself just why the traders were so reluctant to leave.

In Madang, colonial buildings, lush gardens and magnificent vistas of tropical seascapes are reminiscent of Somerset Maugham and James A Michener. In bustling open-air markets shop for stone and wooden carvings, woven goods and baskets, shell necklaces, clay pottery and Sepik River artefacts.

The Cape Nelson volcanic fjord land around Tufi is surrounded by dense rainforest above sheer basalt walls, many with waterfalls plunging into the sea. Paddle up river in a dugout canoe and visit the villagers who call this home. The waters around Tufi are world famous for scuba diving and fishing – see if you can better the Tufi record of catching 38 fish in 45 minutes! Then have the boys in the galley onboard cook them for dinner!

The 10 night *Wild New Guinea & Bismarck Archipelago* voyage will see *Orion* venture to places as yet unvisited by the ship (or many other people). Always an exciting event as there will be a heightened sense of anticipation.

At just 37 km² in area, Bagabag, located in the Bismarck Sea off the coast of Madang Province, is an island dominated by a dormant volcanic peak. Here there are no roads, no cars and no motorbikes. The local people are very protective of their environment, recently petitioning the government to stop underwater mineral exploration around their island to protect their sea turtle habitat. Their protests opened with the dramatic statement "*For 50,000 years, the people of PNG have lived a subsistence life style in harmony with our natural environment. We have the right to determine our own destiny and at its own pace.*"

Pelagic fish and spinner dolphins abound in these waters providing an excellent location for snorkelling with endless walls of sea fans and undamaged corals.

During World War II, Hansa Bay was a major base for the Japanese. In June 1944 infantry from the Australian 35th Battalion reached Hansa Bay, finding a mass abandonment of Japanese stores - one of the largest arms dumps captured in the New Guinea campaign. The extensive number of marine and aircraft engagements in the area during World War II resulted in a wreck diver's paradise, with 34 WWII ships and aircraft wrecks.

The highly active volcano on Manum Island, just 15 km from Hansa is a reminder that we are transiting the infamous *Pacific Ring of Fire*, home to over 75% of the world's active and dormant volcanoes and much seismic activity.

At the eastern end of Sissano Lagoon is the village of Arop with the village of Sissano about 1km west from the lagoon entrance. Tragically this area was the epicentre of the Aitape Tsunami in 1998 that killed many and destroyed the simple villages. But life moves on for the villages and they have returned to their simple lives of fishing and gardening.

Another true expedition day, our Zodiacs will explore the lagoon and its environs in search of birdlife and other sights. Villages may be accessed on invitation from the local chiefs.

In the far west of the Bismarck Archipelago, just past the Admiralty Islands lies a forgotten gem. Protected by a fringing coral reef, with underwater visibility rarely less than 30 metres, this tiny island is just 8 kms from east to west and in no place more than 2 metres above sea level. Maintaining ancient traditions the people of Wuvulu carve massive ocean going "wave piercing" canoes.

Today's gentle Wuvulu inhabitants were once regarded as ferocious "savages" according to reports of its discovery by Europeans in 1817. They gave the island the name of 'Tiger Island', reflecting the apparent wild nature of the island's peoples.

From the ancient legend of Ainanvogapa, the stone lady of the reef, to the last haunts of cannibals or fire eating and night-time spirit dances, local mythology remains entwined within culture. This is the land of the ancient ritual of 'shark calling' and the region still abounds in sorcery and witchcraft.

Be it volcanic thermal springs, the world's largest butterfly, vertiginous topography, WWII history, sorcery or ancient artefacts *Orion's* five 2010 Papua New Guinea expeditions provide guests with remarkable opportunities to experience this totally unspoilt part of the world.

With *Orion*, you no longer need to look overseas in order to access a world-class 5 star cruise ship. Akin to a private mega-yacht, accommodating just 53 couples, *Orion's* staff of 75 professionally cater for the needs of everyone in an unobtrusive yet attentive way.

All 53 suites and staterooms have ocean views, marble bathrooms, flat screen TV and DVD/CD player, internet accessibility and choice of queen or twin bed configuration.

Elegant throughout, *Orion's* features include a sauna, health spa and gym, boutique, library with internet access, a wide range of water sport activities, plus a choice of dining areas and innovative menus created by multi-award winning chef, Serge Dansereau.

Further information on Orion Expedition Cruises can be obtained by visiting the website www.orionexpeditions.com

For reservations or to obtain a brochure call Orion Expedition Cruises: 61-2 9033 8777 (Sydney callers) 1300 361 012 (regional and interstate) or your travel agent. Email: info@orionexpeditions.com

For further media information please contact:

**Michael Corbett
Public Relations Manager
Orion Expedition Cruises
Phone: (61-2) 4572 1885
Mobile: 0417 469 228
Email: mcorbett@orionexpeditions.com**