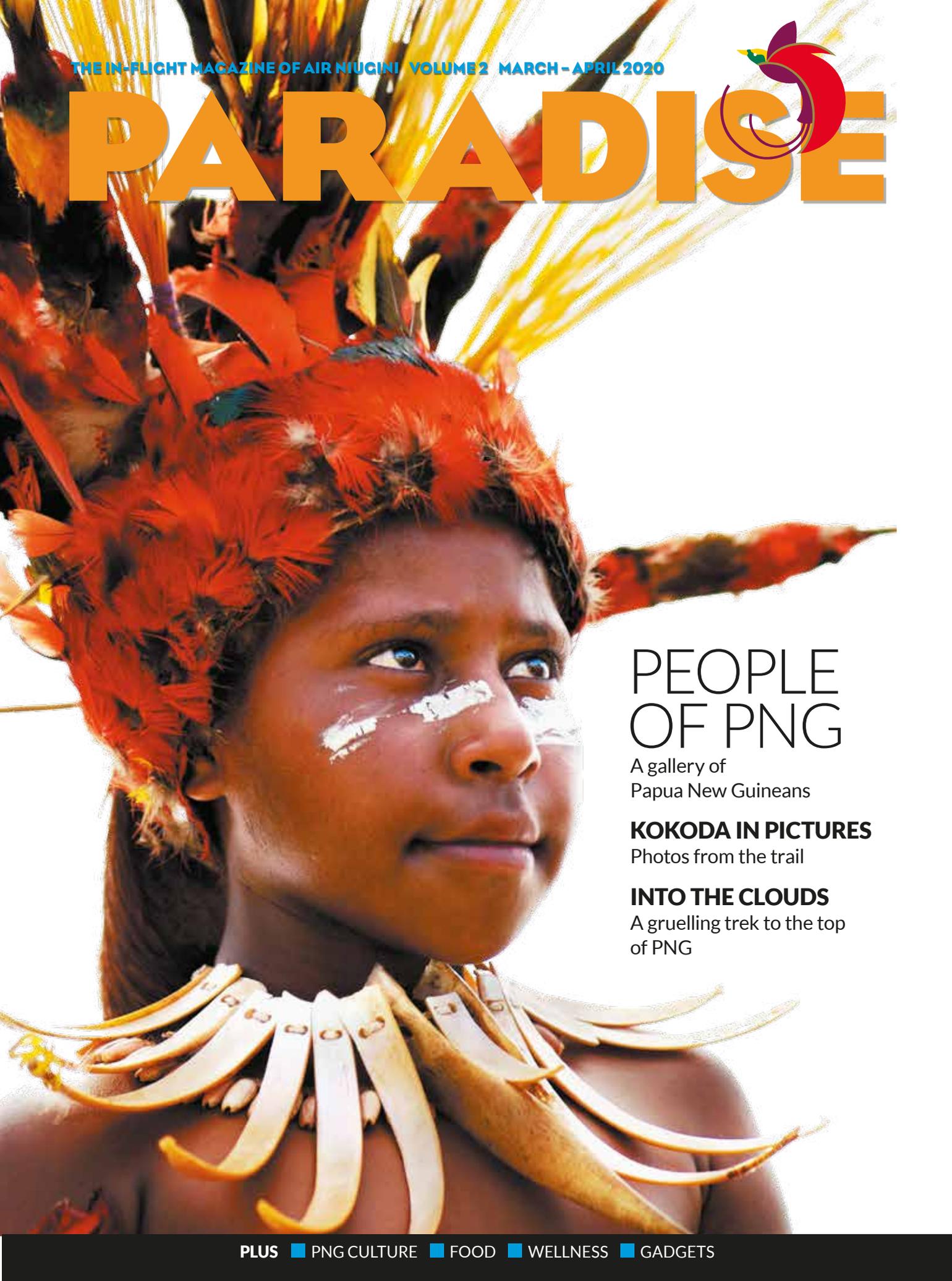


THE IN-FLIGHT MAGAZINE OF AIR NIUGINI VOLUME 2 MARCH - APRIL 2020



PARADISE



PEOPLE OF PNG

A gallery of Papua New Guineans

KOKODA IN PICTURES

Photos from the trail

INTO THE CLOUDS

A gruelling trek to the top of PNG

“

This land holds its treasures close to its heart and requires a local guide to locate the art sites.

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Masterpiece ... UNESCO regards the images depicting spirit figures in Quinkan Country as being among the most significant rock art in the world.

Beneath a twinkling, star-filled sky, I'm about to close my eyes and fall asleep after an exhilarating day of travelling overland when an amber glow on the horizon catches my attention.

My first thought is that there must be a fire. I sniff for smoke and smell none.

As I rise on my elbows to focus more clearly, the radiance is noticeably brighter. It's now silhouetting the gum trees standing proud on the far escarpment. Moments later I realise I'm seeing the full moon rising and call softly to my friend, who has settled into her camp stretcher 30 metres away.

Amidst the stillness of the bush, we both sit up and watch the moon's graceful ascent. There's not a breath of wind. The silence is absolute as the enormous orange ball rises above the horizon, extinguishing the stars as it moves ever higher, casting a silvery tint across the landscape. Soon, I fall asleep bathed in moonlight, having shunned the canvas tent in favour of a camp stretcher sans walls and ceiling.

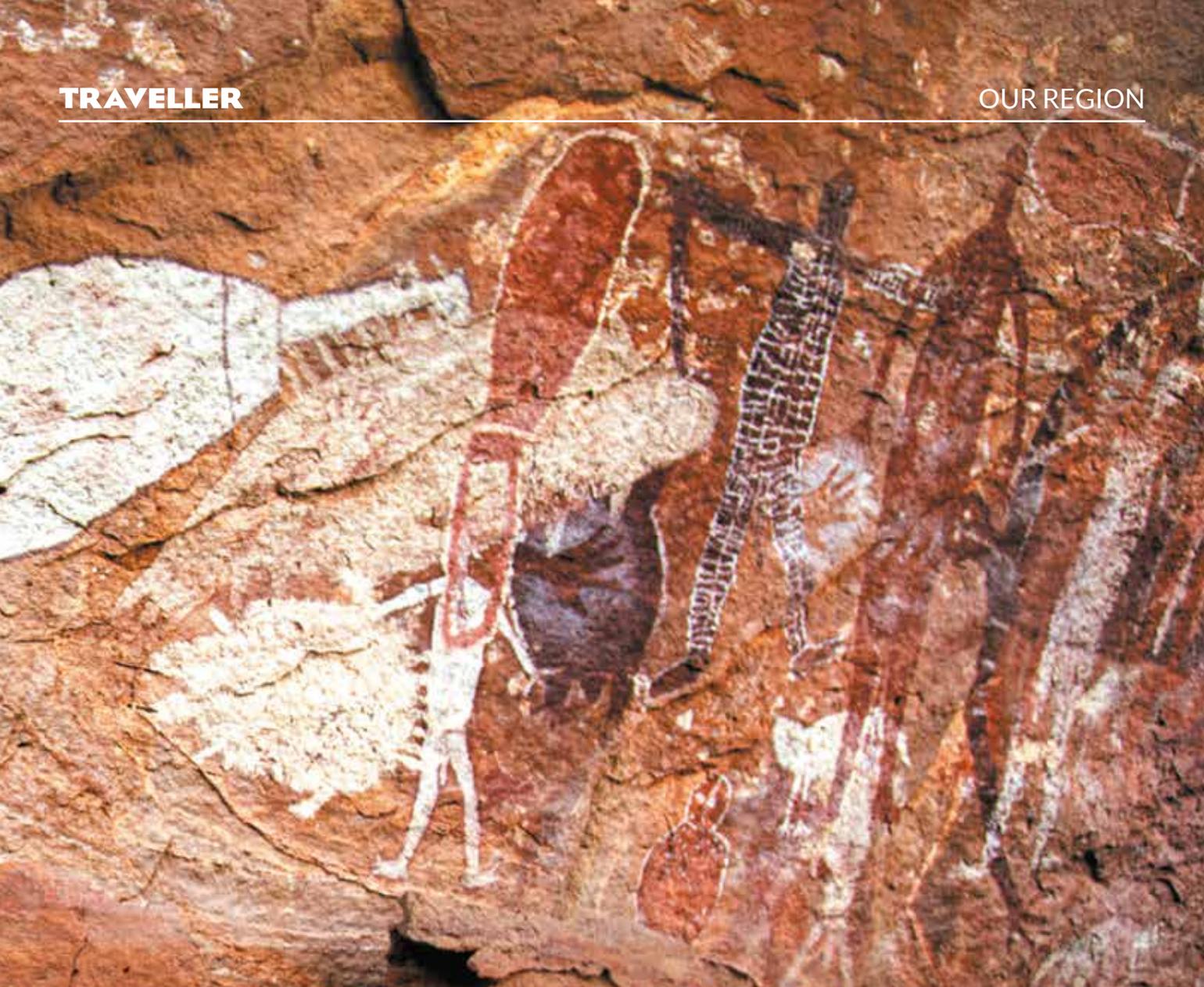
The peaceful embrace of Quinkan Country wraps around me as I sleep deeply before awaking at dawn to a pastel sky tinged the colour of fairy floss. I feel rested and blissfully at

peace, despite hair matted by dampness and the persistence of early-rising flies.

We're just 300 kilometres west of Cairns, though this timeless land feels a million miles from civilisation. Travelling by 4WD through savannah lands awash with merlot-hued kangaroo grass, the rugged track beyond the small community of Laura has led us deep into Quinkan Country.

The ghostly remains of May Town, a thriving metropolis during the height of the Palmer River goldrush, are further down the dusty track, its once abundant golden riches plundered into history.





Fiona Harper goes deep into the Australian bush to see some of the best Aboriginal rock art in the country.

Now, it's rock art that lures travellers to Quinkan Country, thanks to an ever-growing enthusiasm for Australian Aboriginal culture. This land holds its treasures close to its heart and requires a local guide to locate the art sites, not only to avoid getting lost, but as a sign of respect for walking on this sacred country.

Quinkan rock art galleries are considered amongst the world's most important collections, with UNESCO regarding those with images depicting Quinkan spirit figures as one of the 10 most significant bodies of rock art in the world.

Proud Western Yalanji man, Johnny Murison, is our ticket to these treasures. He set up Jarramali Rock Art Tours in 2016 after he and a mate stumbled across an impressive gallery.

"In 2016 myself and my cousin were out hunting, camping and fishing when we rediscovered the rock art now known as the Magnificent Gallery," he says. Oh, it had been 'discovered' before, he explains, but its location was kept pretty quiet. He explains how he eventually came to be a custodian of this extraordinary place, enabling the development of a low-key glamping-style tourism business.

"I knew I belonged here. Once I had all the permissions from the Elders and my uncles I started bringing others here," he continues.

In developing Jarramali Rock Art Tours, Murison has created a simple yet adequate camp on the edge of a sandstone escarpment a short walk from the appropriately named Magnificent Gallery rock art site. Bringing in materials like water tanks, timber and roofing iron on the back of his 4WD, he built a cabin with one side completely open to take advantage of the views over the extraordinary landscape. ►



On the rocks



A peace offering ... Johnny Murison conducts a smoking ceremony to negate 'bad spirits' before visiting Magnificent Gallery; camping out at Jarramali invites a deep connection to the ancient landscape (below); access to Jarramali is via a rugged 4WD track (bottom of page) from the small town of Laura.

There's a kitchen sink and gas stove to boil water but Murison prefers to cook roasted meats and vegetables flavoured with plenty of garlic in camp ovens over hot coals. A handful of tents equipped with camp stretchers and duvets are positioned in strategic locations a short walk from this cabin. The doorless compost toilet has the best view, with the tree-lined escarpment hogging the limelight.

As glorious as the views are, the undisputed star of this two day/one night adventure is the Magnificent Gallery. After a brief smoking ceremony to negate any 'bad' spirits, we follow Murison across the ridge and down into the valley.

He announces our arrival at the open-fronted cave, calling out to his ancestors, letting them know that he has people with him not 'from country' and that we are friend, not foe.



The gallery that greets us is spectacular, both in its scale and abundance of art works.

A born storyteller with the raconteur of a seasoned professional, it's easy to be mesmerised by Murison as he shares stories that reach back thousands of years, allowing us a small insight into the people, his ancestors, who created these treasures.

An extraordinary collection of approximately 400 artworks graces the

towering overhang. Created over 20,000-odd years ago by Kuku Yalanji people, who roamed this land following the hunting and gathering seasons, I close my eyes and envision standing in their living room, smell the smoke from their cooking fires and imagine falling asleep on the soft sand underfoot.

I turn my back on the gallery and take in the endless blue sky above the same tree-lined valley and striking cliff faces these Kuku Yalanji enjoyed for thousands of years. It's not too difficult to imagine where the creative inspiration came from. ■

 **Air Niugini flies from Port Moresby to Cairns 10 times a week. See airniugini.com.pg.**



IF YOU WANT TO GO

TOURING THERE Jarramali Rock Art Tours has day trips and overnight camping excursions to see the rock art in Quinkan Country, starting from \$AUD280 (PGK660) a person for the day tour.

MORE INFORMATION jarramalirockarttours.com.au

