



Kokoda Trekking back on track

The threat from COVID-19 is over and the tourists are returning.



UNIQUELY PNG
WITH BONITA DUBA

They are coming especially to the iconic Kokoda Track with the first recorded group led by Marty Hook, the Director and a Trek Leader of Kokoda Tribute Limited.

The group spent eight days on the track in a company comprised of 14 trekkers with 14 carriers. The carriers are the local Papua New Guineans who assist in carrying the trekkers' sleeping gear and other essentials.

Bare necessities include a bag pack, water bottle and side bags. The trekkers and carriers are paired off and so build a friendship along the way.

Anything the trekkers do not know, they ask the carriers. For instance, the name of plants, insects or villages on the Track.

The trekking usually takes seven days if they take the direct route but Marty likes to include side trips to the villages, some graves or a market so the trekkers can experience the local life.

Though the tracks southern point starts at Ower's Corner and finishes at the corner of Owen Stanley Range at Kokoda Station near the Kokoda village, Marty likes to start his trekking adventure at the Bomana War Cemetery and then finish off in Popondetta.

He usually does one or two treks a year and never with a group of more than 13 or 14. He feels that it is better for him to manage a smaller group for a more personal experience.

The trekking has village stops and each camp has its own pricing for one night. It used to be K5 per carrier per day but now the price is K10 per carrier per day. As for the trekkers, it went from K20 to K50 but it is worth the value in some of the stops.

Martin from Naduri whose camp is called Bombers Camp has a hot boiler in his camp area so for K5, you can have a hot shower.

Martin also bakes cakes and scones to sell to trekkers. Another person who treats the trekkers is Joel who is the descendant of one of the last Fuzzy Wuzzies, Ovoru Ndiki, that lives in Naduri village.

He tells stories to the trekkers when they stay at his camp and after the trekkers have dinner, he arranges for the little children in his village to come and sing songs.

Such an experience is truly worth the walk says Marty who first walked the Track as favor to his sister-in-law in 2007. He came to Port Moresby knowing nothing about Kokoda but that all changed after walking the track. When he went

back to Australia, his father gave him books on Kokoda and even a field guide.

He also had a mutual friend, whose father was a veteran from the track, who introduced him to more veterans.

They told him stories of the track. Marty, by now, has most of the poems and stories memorized by heart as he had studied them for a total of seven to eight years.

He uses the poems and stories to makes his trekking experience unique by combining them with spots on the Track that are of special interest to some of the trekkers.

The entire group would stop for someone to recite a poem or Marty tells a story to capture the emotions of a place or a person. Most of the trekkers who go through this human experience feel very connected to the WWII experience.

Such a feeling is worth experiencing if you decide to walk the track. All you have to do is go online and find out which Trekking company you wish to walk under and set off on your Kokoda adventure.



Original Carvers unknown



By BONITA DUBA

The National Museum in Port Moresby has some of the rarest and if you like, mysterious traditional artifacts on display.

The artifacts are on display inside the galleries for all to see and they are a favorite for history buffs, students and tourists.

When the museum acquired these objects, there was little known about them other than what the eye could see. What it was made from could sometimes be told but who had originally carved it and when it was carved was the mystery. These objects were simply musical instruments or symbolic totems that represented a deity or some spirit being of a village or tribe or clan. One such rare musical instrument is the Mud Beater drum. Not much is known about the that carver origins. The Mud-Beater drums, also known as Kami or fish is found only in Middle Sepik Area in East Sepik. They usually come in pairs. The drums on display at the museum were donated by the people of the Palimbei Village in 1971.

Both the drums are black and carved to look like an upturned wooden bowl which is then tied to the end of a long thick rattan or bamboo handle. They are round with two carved mud fish on the top. The bowl is then stamped into the middle of a hole that has a muddy bottom that is about a meter deep to produce a certain very low pitched sound. It has to sound just right and the elders will decide if the sound is right. For the young novices, when the drum has made the right bang, it means that they have passed into adulthood but if not, then they failed their manhood test. The drums are usually kept inside the mens'house and will only be used during initiation rituals. The drums are always kept hidden from women and children and when the sound represents the voice of spirits. Musical instruments weren't the only artifacts carved, traditional carvers were sometimes tasked to make carvings for a person's spirit and to show their status.

The Four Figure carvings which are from Northern New Ireland of New Ireland Province are another fascinating group of objects. The Four Figure carvings are of the malagan of Nombowai. The birds carved into the totems are not just sea hawks or hornbills but they are the totem birds of a particular clan or sub clans of two or more ritual groups.

The actual name of one of the carvings is unknown as it was carved a lot time ago, which means that the people who gave the totem to the museum did not know exactly what name was. It is said that several men would go to their Chief to have a carving made personally for them.

The carvers would carve them with the symbolic birds and any other animals or being associated with their clans. However, as soon as that person died, these carvings had to be destroyed as the villagers believed that destroying it would release the person's spirit so they would not roam around on earth.

Man and some inside the homes of the person who asked for a totem specifically. As for the carvings that resemble a deity, the carving of Kinjinmbunduo (The Female Figure in a Basket) from East Sepik Province is on display in the museum inside a glass case.

Kinjinmbundo is a mythical female in the form of a flying fox that lived out of sight of humans and only came out at night. The legends say that whenever she flew, her wings would create great winds that would upturn tree and coconut palms along the wat. She was idealised as a mother.

This deity is both feared and respected. The legends say that where she flew and dropped breadfruit seeds, there would be good sago trees growing or the food of a particular village would be plentiful. She usually did this after the Sepik River Basin was flooded to bring back life to the villages along the Sepik River Basin.

Here's a challenge for the next time you are at the National Museum. Walk around and see how many objects you can find that were carved before living memory.