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MT HAGEN SHOW WEEKENDER – 11-15 AUGUST 2011

4 nights Mt Hagen - semi-escorted program for independent travellers

The Mt Hagen Show is Papua New Guinea's largest cultural extravaganza. The Show has its origins in colonial days when colonial administrators sought to reduce tribal fighting by promoting inter-marriage and channelling inter-tribal rivalry into positive forms of competition. Major sing-sing events like the Mt Hagen Show and Goroka Show became opportunities for tribes to gain status without bloodshed, by competing to put on the best cultural performance. The Mt Hagen Show today is still a competition, with tribal groups vying for sizeable cash prizes and of course the honour and glory that first prize at the "Hagen Show" brings to one's tribe.

The Show attracts cultural groups from all over Papua New Guinea, even from Bougainville and the Trobriand Islands. The local crowd of 50,000 mainly flock in from the Highlands provinces plus Madang and Lae as these are the only places with road access to Mt Hagen. In contrast, less than 300 overseas visitors attended last year's Show, so it is still definitely a "local" festival and not just for tourists. There are also agricultural and trade displays, health awareness programs, sideshow alley and all manner of other activities at the Show which make it the highlight of every year for the Highlands people. Some very remote villagers come to town only once per year, for the Show, so you will see quite a kaleidoscope of faces just in the spectator crowd, even before you turn your attention to the sing-sing arena. Tourists and locals with cameras are given special seats with the best view, and you will also have permission to enter the performance arena to take close-ups of the dancers.

Apart from the Show itself, there is also another, smaller sing-sing on the day before the Show. This is held at Paiya Village about half an hour's drive out of town, is more informal without the huge crowds, and provides an authentic village backdrop for photography, with opportunities for watching the performers putting on their make-up and body decorations before the performance.

This four-night program EM201A is designed for independent travellers requiring managed arrangements for visiting the Mt Hagen Show. It offers a selection of accommodation options – subject to availability at time of booking – and managed excursions to the Paiya Village sing-sing and the Mt Hagen Show.

Air Niugini flights in and out of Mt Hagen immediately before and after the Show are usually overbooked and even if you hold a confirmed ticket there is still a chance that you will be denied boarding. Therefore we suggest you consider the merits of either flying in and out of Mt Hagen at least 24 hours before and after the Show, or flying in and/or out of Goroka and travel at least one way to or from Mt Hagen by road. Neither public road transport (PMV) nor self-drive by rental car are recommended during busy Show periods but private vehicle hire or one-way rental with chauffeur drive can be arranged. Flying in or out to or from Wewak, Madang, Tari or Kiunga are other options; it's mainly the Port Moresby flights that are problematic.

TOUR COST (per person, 4 nights in AUD):

4 Nights and 3 days tour program Per person, twin share	2 ★ BUDGET Includes Lunches	3 ★ STANDARD Includes Lunches	3.5 ★ PREMIER Includes all meals	4 ★ SUITE Includes all meals
		\$2220	\$2445	\$2850
Single Traveller	\$1450	\$1570	\$1775	\$1985

NOTES:

1. Package rates for 3.5 star and 4.0 star include all meals because it is a condition of booking rooms at those hotels for the peak Show weekend that dinners and breakfasts must be purchased in-house.
2. Hotels in Mt Hagen charge peak-season rates for the Show weekend and this contributes to the high cost of this package.
3. Mt Hagen has less than 300 hotel and motel rooms. When booking a Show package with us we require a 50% deposit at the time of booking so that we can immediately secure your preferred room type by full prepayment to the hotel. If you later cancel we will refund only 30% of the value of the package (ie 60% of your deposit) and retain the balance to cover hotel cancellation penalties.
4. Star ratings are an approximate guide only and are not based on any published star rating system.

TOUR INCLUSIONS (4 nights):

- meet and greet on arrival in Mt Hagen, transfer to accommodation
- tour welcome kit including welcome gift, souvenir polo shirt, maps, country information
- 4 nights accommodation in Mt Hagen (including dinners and breakfasts if applicable)
- 1 full day Paiya Village sing-sing tour with local style lunch and all bottled water
- 2 full days at Mt Hagen Show, including transfers, local guides, tourist pass, packed lunches, bottled water
- departure transfer to Mt Hagen airport or other departure point
- all fees and gratuities for local villagers, local guides and helpers
- all transfers throughout the tour
- on-site company tour leader to escort and manage daily tours and arrangements
- 24-hour phone number for tour leader assistance

TOUR EXCLUSIONS

- road travel in and out of Mt Hagen
- any meals not stated as not included
- tips (not expected, and only appropriate for exceptional service)
- souvenirs and items of a personal nature
- bar drinks
- visa fees

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DAY 1: THU 11 AUG 2011 ARRIVE MT HAGEN

Arrive Mt Hagen by air or road (own arrangement).

A representative of Ecotourism Melanesia will meet you on arrival and transfer you to your accommodation. The town will be very crowded due to the impending Show and walking around the shops and other public areas is not recommended. Best opportunities for purchasing artefacts will be at the Paiya Sing-sing tomorrow and the Showgrounds on the weekend. There is a carvers hut at the Highlander Hotel but the items for sale there tend to be made-for-sale souvenirs rather than genuine artefacts. An optional afternoon sightseeing tour of the Waghi Valley (14:00–18:00) including village stops is available for those who arrive early in Mt Hagen. An extra charge of PGK 250 per person applies.

Overnight Mt Hagen (accommodation only)

DAY 2: FRI 12 AUG 2011 MT HAGEN (Paiya Sing-sing)

After breakfast, we will take a scenic drive out through typical highlands countryside to Paiya Village where a sing-sing is held the day before every Mt Hagen Show. Arriving early before the sing-sing commences you will be able to watch the performers adorning themselves with feathers, shells and ochre paints in preparation for dancing. This is an experience that is in many ways more fascinating than the sing-sing itself because it gives you an opportunity to meet the dancers before they perform. They will be happy to explain their traditional dress ("bilas") to you and pose for photographs. About 10 different dancing groups will perform, from various parts of Papua New Guinea. Some of them are groups that will perform at the Mt Hagen Show tomorrow.

The Paiya Village sing-sing includes lunch cooked at the village and a tour of the cultural displays in the village including the men's spirit house and the ancestors' skull house. The chief and his three wives will be introduced to you and some traditional customs like courtship behaviour and marriage rituals will be demonstrated. In previous years our tour groups commented that they enjoyed the Paiya Village sing-sing even more than the Mt Hagen Show itself, because the village setting made the experience (and the photography) more natural and the smaller crowd from just the one village area was easy to socialise with. 17:00 return to accommodation. Overnight Mt Hagen (selected accommodation)

DAY 3 SAT 13 AUG 2011 MT HAGEN SHOW

At 8.00am we depart the hotel for the show grounds for an early arrival to take a look at the stalls and displays and settle into the grandstand before the performances commence around 10am. The show will finish around 3pm but we may leave earlier if the program is faltering or if everybody has had enough.

Depending on the weather and the layout of the spectator areas we may sit in the tourist enclosure or up on the hill overlooking the arena, with the locals.

Our guides will be available to interpret the performances for you, escort you to the toilet or around the sideshow alley stalls. Churches and other organisations set up a lot of interesting awareness stalls with drama skits, quizzes, music and singing to promote their various causes and themes (health, education, agriculture, domestic violence). Bottled water and a packed lunch is supplied by your guides today. After leaving the show grounds we will take a two-hour tour of the Waghi Valley, which is the agricultural powerhouse of the highlands. Overnight Mt Hagen (selected accommodation)

DAY 4: SUN 14 AUG 2011 MT HAGEN SHOW

Second day at the Mt Hagen Show, same program as yesterday.

The afternoon tour will feature a visit to a typical Mt Hagen cluster village, for a brief village tour and an opportunity to look inside a traditional highlands roundhouse, see the gardens they live off and some of their tribal "jewels" – the shell money and other artefacts they use as currency to pay bride price. Overnight Mt Hagen (selected accommodation)

DAY 5: MON 15 AUG 2011 DEPART MT HAGEN

Depart Mt Hagen by air or road (own arrangement). A tour representative will transfer with you to the airport or other departure point and farewell you. Connect to your next destination.