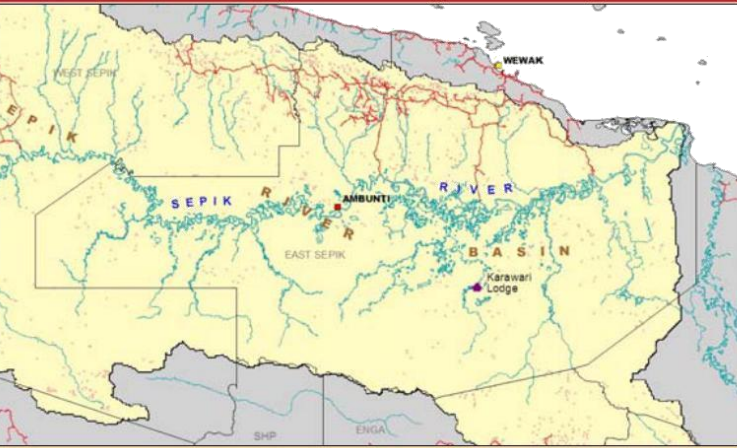


SEPIK RIVER CROCODILE AND ARTS FESTIVAL

August 05th -07th annually, Ambunti, East Sepik Province, PNG



Map

The Sepik River meanders through the mountainous highlands region and pours into the bays of the Bismarck Solomon Seas and covers a distance of approximately 1,200km. It has a total catchments cover of 70,000km² covering four highlands provinces, three coastal provinces and parts of Indonesia. It has numerous tributaries and sub-catchments and oxbows like the Chambri Lake which is the second biggest in the country.

HOW TO GET THERE

a) Air-Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) operates from Wewak to Ambunti on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The 45 minutes flight costs K450 one way.

b) Land-PMV's operate on upgraded road between Wewak to Ambunti PMV fare is K65. Accommodation- Ambunti Lodge charges K200/night, other guest houses are run by the Catholic Church and PIM NGO and charge a reasonable price.

Background

The mighty Sepik River is one of the most pristine rivers in the Asia Pacific Region that is under threat by human activities. It could lose its biological and cultural richness that has been an integral part of the Sepik People. Conservation organization, WWF and Department of Environment & Conservation are working with local communities in the River basin to minimize these threats through a partnership program-the Sepik River Network Plan. DEC and WWF are working with community based organization such as the Sepik Wetland Management Initiative and Help Resources to mobilize and integrate conservation and development activities by local clans

"Promoting tourism & culture! Protect Sepik River and its wetland habitats"

and villages across extensive area. WWF hopes to link science with culture in protecting the Sepik's pristine environment. The Sepik River Crocodile and Arts Festival to be held on August 05th -07th in Ambunti is part of this initiative. This year's event with the theme is **"Promoting tourism & Culture! Protect Sepik River and its wetland habitats."** Calls to promote the importance of tourism and recognize conservation of habitats and encourage sustainable use in the Sepik. This also places emphasis to better protect the river flow and water allocations in order to safeguard habitats and people's livelihoods.

What is remarkable about the Sepik?

The Sepik region has a large tourism potential which can improve the lives of the locals significantly if further developed. WWF is developing a framework to protect important freshwater and forest resources that offer significant habitat for threatened species such as the harpy eagle and cassowary. In sustaining the livelihoods for local communities, WWF supports a range of activities in the Sepik river basin, including the establishment of protected areas, sustainable harvest of freshwater and forest products, development of ecotourism, healthcare and community education.

Main objectives

Sustainable management and protection of the Sepik River and its unique and rich biodiversity by:

- Raising awareness on the huge tourism potential and assisting villagers to obtain alternative income while retaining their natural environment.
- Encouraging government and stakeholders to develop regulations to conserve these resources. Empowering community participation to think globally and act locally.
- Encouraging local communities and resource owner to take ownerships over there resource and ensure its sustainable use.

Why are crocodiles significant to the Sepik people?

Crocodiles are part of the Sepik heritage. Men and crocodile share a special bond. The Crocodile symbolize strength, power and manhood. Many boast of scares cut into their skin during initiation. The scares resembling the back of a crocodile run from the shoulder to hip. Crocodiles are significant to the Sepik culture where they have cultural traditions, beliefs and legends based on this

particular animal.

The Sepik River has two species:

Salt water crocodile (*Crocodilus poro-sus*) can grow over ten metres long and is found in both the rivers and coastal areas of PNG. It is highly sought after for its skin.

Freshwater crocodile (*Crocodilus novaeguineas*) common in PNG is small and can grow to a length of three to four meters.

Major Threats

The Sepik River and its habitants especially the crocodile are increasingly under threat from:

- Pollution from unsustainable logging, mining & exploration and agriculture expansion.
- The increasing impacts of climate such as rising water level, erosion could lead to loss habitats and threaten the eco-systems.
- Fish populations, the top source of protein and overall life support systems the communities along the Sepik are being threatened with the increasing population of introduced species such as **Pacu (*Piaractus brachyponium*)** and **grass cutter (*Caprimus carpio*)**

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