Clinical Elective Report
Kavieng, New Ireland, Papua New-Guinea

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Summary
Introduction

Kavieng is a town of approximately 40.000 people, the capital of the New Ireland Province and located on the West-end of New Ireland Island north of mainland Papua New Guinea.

Since 1884 the island of New Ireland, together with New Britain, Manus and Bougainville were part of German New-Guinea whilst mainland Papua New Guinea fell under UK colonisation. During the first World War Australian forces overtook New Ireland and Kavieng, which was thereafter mandated to Australian care. During World War II Japanese Forces invaded Kavieng and where only defeated in September 1945. Most of the infrastructure however was completely destroyed due to constant bombing. After the war mainland Papua and the Island provinces were combined to the country of Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Currently about 6.5 Million people inhabit PNG on a landmass of 500.000 km\(^2\) and over 800 different indigenous languages still spoken. The official language is Tok Pisin.

People from New Ireland are Melanesian and speak around 19 local languages. The three main cultures persisting in New Ireland are Malagan culture in the north, the Kabai culture in central New Ireland and the Tumbuan Culture in the south. However, as with each island/village speaking its own language, also cultural specifications occur from village to village.

**Fig 1.** Map of Papua New Guinea (PNG) & Flag of PNG with the national sign being the Paradise bird
Clinical Setting

Kavieng General Hospital (KGH) is a provincial hospital located in the town of Kavieng and serves the urban area of Kavieng as well as rural areas of the whole province. Services provided are a General Surgery Ward, a Station of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Pediatric services as well as an Emergency Care Unit. Furthermore there are basic services for Internal Medicine, Radiology and Dental Health. The team consists of doctors, Health Extension Officers (HEOs – with an University education of 4 years), nurses & midwives and technical staff. Altogether the hospital counts just over 100 patient beds, outpatient settings for around 350 consultancies per day and a new operational theatre, which opened just as I arrived. During the first week I spent at KGH executive staff from the federal ministry of health came to confirm the opening of the newly erected surgical theatre, which would allow two operations at a time and give space due to the takedown of improvised surgical theatres, which were serving the different services up to that point. Furthermore, a new X-Ray was put in place to provide services to the clinicians.

How to organize an internship

The best way to get in touch with KGH is to connect via Facebook – Kavieng General Hospital Volunteers (https://www.facebook.com/kavienghospitalvolunteers?fref=ts). Ange, who organizes internships for medical students is at the same time married to Dietmar a diving instructor from Mödling, Austria and the both of them run an idyllic dive resort on Lissenung Island (www.lissenungisland.com) just 20 mins by boat, south-west of Kavieng. Ange provides you with recent informations, available dates and information packages concerning your internship and stay in Kavieng. Most of the interns also find their lodging opportunity via her connections and just about all of them enjoy at least one weekend on Lissenung relaxing, swimming, snorkeling, diving or just eating incredible seafood.
Personal Medical Preparation

Regarding vaccination the following are advised:
- Tetanus / Diph. / Polio
- Pertussis
- Measles
- Hepatitis A / B
- Typhus
- Japanic Encephalitis
- Meningococcus ABCWY

(Source: CRM Handbuch Reisemedizin 2014)

Concerning Malaria the country is a high-risk country. I brought my own impregnated mosquito-net and mosquito-spray, however both are also available in the shops here, whereas I’m not sure which sprays are exactly being sold. On arrival I took Malarone for one week and switched to stand-by mode thereafter. Continuous treatment is discouraged by doctors here, because of the possible false-negative diagnostic due to that. Additionally, I brought some Arthemeter-Tea, which tastes good and is supposed to help with one cup a day. With the common prophylactic measures, I was fine throughout my stay and even if something happens testing and treatment is available at the hospital.

What I found more dangerous were Reef-Cuts, whereas I had an infected foot once for one week. Always wear Reef-Shoes (available in stores here) when going for a swim.
Work Experiences

During my 8 week internship I served 3 weeks in the Department for Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 2 weeks in the Surgical Department and 3 weeks in the Outpatient and Emergency Service.

The KGH is used to international students as there have been such from Australia, England and the US. Marika and Stephanie from Leeds University spent their summer break here together with me. It was great being able to exchange experiences and stories. Together with expats working for Australian Doctors International (ADI), the Red Cross and the WWF we also had Friday Night get-togethers to exchange views from various “western” minds.

The hospital in general and the staff are very professionally organized, with team meetings each Monday, Paper Club meetings once a week, oral presentations by the registrars once a week and a Grand Round Staff Meeting each Friday morning.

What is lacking are diagnostic facilities (limited lab tests, one ECG, two Ultrasound machines, one x-ray, for the whole hospital) as well as treatment options (at times no oxygen for weeks, no chemotherapeutics, no intraoperative x-ray). However, I want to stress that coming from a European setting, where everything is possible at all times and one really needs to filter which options are really necessary, it was a wonderful experience to work with limited resources and get trained to diagnose with only that and eyes, ears, hands.
Obstetrics & Gynaecology

With a team of 2 Specialists, one Registrar, six midwives and a dozen nurses 21 beds and three labour beds are managed. On average three babies are delivered each day. Wednesday and Friday are Theatre days, whereas the range goes from Tubal Ligation for family completion, over Total Hysterectomy in malignancies, to explorative laparotomies in emergencies.

In four weeks spending on this ward I learned a lot, from general gynaecological examinations, to delivering babies, assisting in various operations and leading ward rounds. Very hands on and a very nice work setting.

Surgery

The surgical department consists of 2 specialists and 2 registrars who together with nurses manage around 40 beds, 20 for each sex, for both emergency as well as elective procedures. During my internship I got to see a variety of Inguinal Hernia Raphing, Orchectomy, Emergency Laparatomy, Hemi-Thyreoidectomy, etc. I was surprised by the high quantity of paraplegics due to trauma, tuberculosis and neuronal degeneration, as well as by all the diabetic feet that are taken care of.
Outpatient & Emergency

One doctor, two HEOs and a handful of nurses handle this department with around 100 to 120 patients presenting each day for first consultations, follow-up visits, results discussions. 6 beds are even available to keep patients over night. Real triage is not installed, however Dr. Mark, one happy and good soul and a real pleasant supervisor is working everyday to improve the quality standards, logistical handling and patient outcome every day. As a medical student I really felt useful, handling patients, each day with less questions to my co-workers on where to find what document, piece of information and available instruments. I was allowed to work and found openness once I had questions or struggled to manage a case. The limited resources the hospital is facing made this rotation especially interesting, since on the one hand one had to work with which was possible, which was not always ideal, however at the same time it was pleasant, because I really got familiar with those resources and used them the best I knew.

Skin manifestation of Yaws Disease (*Frambösie*) a widespread tropical disease, which mainly affects children and is spread through skin-to-skin contact.
Off-medical

Kavieng offers lots of possibilities for outdoor-affine, water and underwater loving people. Being on-shore of the Pacific Ocean swimming, snorkelling, diving, surfing and fishing are all on the doorsteps. Generally, one has to have some kind of tourism provider to obtain gear, transport and expertise from, but all is provided by local operators. However, and this is one of the downsides of Papua New Guinea in 2016, prices are skyrocketing, especially thinking of other developing countries, which oftentimes provide cheap getaways.

Season wise December to February is rainy-season and therefore surfer’s paradise with famous waves. At the same time this means that it’s not recommended to plan any big overseas trips in small dingies or canoes.

How to get there

The cheapest route I researched starting in Vienna was the one going via Brisbane to Port Moresby and Kavieng. However, especially as Air Niugini is intensifying its services to places like HongKong and Singapore those routes might be ones of choice in the upcoming years.

Flight providers in Papua New Guinea are basically Air Niugini (www.airniugini.com) as well as PNG Air (www.pngair.com.pg). It’s worth checking both airlines for fares, as PNG Air is especially good at providing low fares on domestic flights. Air Niugini covers Sydney, Brisbane and Cairns in Australia, HongKong, Singapore and Tokyo in (South)-East Asia.

Visas can be obtained at the PNG Embassy in Belgium, but pay attention to the possible admission-time of up to 5 months. Tourist Visas can be obtained for free at Port Moresby Airport.
**Lodging**

There are several hotels in Kavieng, and your best shot to get information on the most recent developments is to have a look into the newest version of the Lonely Planet’s Guide to Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands. Most of them are quite expensive and are no real option for long-term stays. As mentioned above it’s best to talk to Ange concerning lodging opportunities as a volunteer.

**Kavieng**

Kavieng town is a stretchd out one, with the hospital being on the southern most tip, the airport marking the north-eastern end, the ocean on the west and the Boluminsky Highway running to the north and all the way to Namantanai.
However, the whole north-south stretch is not more than 5km and since bikes can be obtained from the Australian ADI Service for the duration of the stay (a 50 Kina fee for service applies), it’s easily coverable. Attractions are the marketplace, where local goods are sold from Tuesday to Sunday, Nusa Island, with the Nusa Island Resort, which makes another good weekend destination – the small island where the resort is on can be walked around in about 1 hour, and the bigger island can be reached via a reef-bridge on low tide. Downtown one can find well-stocked grocery-stores, a post office, a handful of hotels and eating-places and a golf-club which is quite flexible concerning foreigners wanting to play, however I have never seen anyone play while I was here and the fairways reminded more of links than easy to play holes.

**People**

New Irelanders are proud to say that they see themselves as the most relaxed of all Papua New Guineans. Generally, people are very friendly, curious about white people coming to there place, and thankful once one picks up some everyday phrases in Tok Pisin – the local language. Many people, boys and girls chew buai (betelnut), which is why they are spitting red saliva, and roads tend to be covered in this colour. People on the streets are often poor / see white people as rich, which is why one should always be cautious not to *show-off* by throwing money around or openly carrying cameras, laptops, etc. – stay discrete and keep valuables with you.
Melanesian culture is centred around community, which is why for people here it’s sometimes irritating seeing someone walk alone – usually people of one tribe do things together. Especially during the night time I would not stress to walk around just by yourself, one because it’s culturally atypical and two because it is the night time, when especially drunk people have stupid ideas, and white people draw attention on them even more.

Summarizing, I always had the feeling to be living in a safe place, however I took some measures to make myself feel comfortable without disturbing anyone or bringing them on stupid ideas.

etc

Two (or three) aspects that make life here just a bit more hardsome in regards to travel, communication and living are that 1) AirNiugini as well as Air PNG are ranging their flights in a price scheme which is almost mind-blowing considering cheap European airlines, 2) telecommunication is extremely expensive and I had months where I spent around 50€ a month on data-bundles to surf the internet or skype with home, but at the same time connection is bad and I never had longer conversations than 25 minutes without disruption, 3) there are no coffee-shops in town and luckily I brought a small espresso-machine to soothe my addiction.
Destinations

From Kavieng it’s very easy to get to:

- Nusa Island (call the Resort and get picked up at the Malagan Lodge or the wharf)
- Lissenung Island (call the Resort and get picked up at the Malagan Lodge or the wharf)
- Namatanai Buses run there and back on a regular basis
  One can bike the Boluminski Hwy easily in ~5 days
- Rabaul / Kokopo Route via Namatanai

One can also organize trips to:

- Lavongai
- Mussau
- New Hanover
- Manus

Flight connections exist to:

- Rabaul / Kokopo
- Lae sometimes directly, sometimes via Rabaul/Kokopo
- Port Moresby via Rabaul / Kokopo

More Information regarding, place, culture, people, travel information, health can be found under:

http://www2.ling.su.se/staff/evali/resetips.html
http://www.ida.liu.se/~g-robek/PNG-NiuAilan.htm


www.newirelandtourism.org.pg

Lonely Planet – Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands
Summary

For anyone with an open mind, a flexible character and the heart to get to the other side of the world, I can only recommend to take the chance and get to know something that’s very different, people that are very interested and thankful for one’s own interest in them. It’s really been a glorious experience and I’m grateful for anything I’ve seen, everyone I got to know and the lessons I have learned, medically, humanly, culturally, historically and personally.

Thank You for anyone who was part of this experience.

Sunset over the Pacific Ocean. Seen from Lissenung Island.

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