

Teaching practicum in New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea

(Grades K-2)



During my time as a visiting professor at the University of Augsburg, I have been asked by an elementary school near my home on the island of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea to offer German students the opportunity to have a teaching practicum in this special place.

Gregg Hiob, the head teacher at the school, had a visitor from Germany stay in his village recently. The visitor spent time at the school playing with the students and speaking with them in English. Mr Hiob said that even from this informal and short encounter, he could see a change in the young children's attitude toward using English, and would like to continue the experience in a more organised way. This is a unique opportunity for University of Augsburg students to experience village life in a South Pacific setting and teach English in an immersion education environment. At the same time, it is a good opportunity for New Ireland children to learn about a new culture and be more motivated to use English, the language of all school instruction in Papua New Guinea.

Where?

The practicum will take place at a school on the island of New Ireland, formerly known as Neu-Mecklenburg in the German colonial era. New Ireland is a long and narrow tropical island in the Bismarck Archipelago, surrounded by reefs, with the steep Schleinitz Mountain Range running along the centre of the island. About 250,000 people live on the island. New Ireland is part of Papua New Guinea, the largest Pacific Island country and with more than 800 separate languages, the most multilingual country in the world.

The school is in Laraibina Village, about 80 kilometres along the Boluminski Highway from the provincial capital, Kavieng,. Laraibina is well known among visitors to the island as the home of Gregg's mother Cathy, nicknamed the "Eel Lady" for the tamed eels that she and visitors hand feed in the creek behind her house (google "Cathy eels New Ireland" for videos and photos by visitors).

Who?

Gregg's school and the elementary school in my village (Madina) are each able to host two visitors at any given time. While unable to provide financial assistance, the practicum teachers will be able to stay with a family and share ordinary village food. The students should be comfortable using English for all classroom interactions, and should be willing to be self-directed without much supervision. The villages have neither running water nor electricity, and village housing is simple, so a love of camping would help.

The children are in grades kindergarten (called "prep" in Papua New Guinea) through grade 2. Although English is the language of instruction for all schools in the country, children rarely come in contact with English outside of classes, so it is very much a foreign language to them. All speak Tok Pisin (aka New Guinea Pidgin English) and most the local language, Nalik.

When?

Foreigners can stay in Papua New Guinea for up to two months on a tourist visa. The practica will last one to two months, with the student teachers working for three hours a day (one with prep, one with grade 1, and one with grade 2) Monday through Friday. The school year begins in February and, with some short holidays, goes until early December. Practicum teachers are welcome to come at any time during the school year.

How?

Rather than taking the place of the teachers and teaching the set curriculum, practicum teachers will be asked to prepare units of work on subjects of their choice, such as sports, health, handcrafts, or music. The idea is that because the subjects will be taught in English, and because the foreign teachers do not speak a Papua New Guinean language the children know, the children will be motivated to use English in a way that they are not with their regular teachers who all speak Tok Pisin and other local languages. At the same time they will learn about another culture and acquire skills that might not normally be covered in the regular school curriculum.

How much?

While the school cannot give financial support to practicum students, the community will arrange for room and board with a local family. This means that you will not have to worry about breakfast or dinner, both of which will be heavy on fish, taro, rice, and coconut milk. New Irelanders generally don't eat lunch, so if lunch or European goodies like pasta, muesli, cheese and milk, are important to you, you will need to budget a extra for these.

Depending on your inclinations and energy levels, you may probably also want to budget for weekend trips, activities such as diving, or trips to town for a meal at a restaurant.

Roundtrip airfare is usually around €2500.

You should note that because Papua New Guinea is right next to Australia, it is possible to combine a practicum in Papua New Guinea with a working holiday in neighbouring Australia to earn money while you are travelling.



Gregg Hiob, Head Teacher (in yellow shirt)

Some basic facts

Of course, anyone going so far and into an area that is relatively unknown in Europe will want to do considerable research to find out more about the place. In addition to the normal place where one would look for information, there are several Papua New Guinea and New Ireland news and discussion groups on Facebook that can help round out your research with personal takes on current events and matters of concern to Papua New Guineans. Here is some basic information to get you started.

About Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea (often abbreviated as PNG) is a very rich country with very poor people. With its hundreds of languages, ethnic groups, and cultures, it is difficult to generalise about the way of life in the country as a whole; what is said about one area may be in direct contrast to what is true in another area. The country is a democracy in the Commonwealth that has been independent from Australia since 1975. Compared to neighbouring southeast Asia, prices are rather high, especially for imported Western goods and especially for tourist-related activities and goods.

About New Ireland Province

New Ireland is known in Tok Pisin as *Bilas Peles* (“the home of beauty”) and has a reputation in Papua New Guinea as one of its most relaxed, peaceful, and beautiful provinces. Located only two degrees from the equator, the climate is always warm, with a wet season during the European winter and a dry season during the European summer. The island has one of the best paved roads in the country, the Boluminski Highway, which runs along the entire east coast.

Most people in New Ireland are indigenous, speaking more than 20 local languages. New Ireland societies are matrilineal and local cultures have remained relatively intact in spite of 150 years of colonial and post-colonial contact and the introduction of Christianity. Kavieng has a small number of residents from Chinese and Australian background who own most businesses and shops.

Visitor facilities are limited, but there are two internationally certified diving centres in Kavieng, both of which offer diving instruction, one even in German.

About Laraibina

Laraibina is a small, tidy hamlet next to Lugagon Village, about 80km along the Boluminski Highway. Together they have around 300 people. Most people are farmers or fishers or work for nearby plantations. The local language is Nalik, which is also the name of the ethnic group to which most people belong, although there are a number of people from other ethnic groups because of ethnically mixed marriages. Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English) is the inter-ethnic language of communication and increasingly children’s predominant language.

Inland from the village is a Catholic boarding school with around 200 students and staff from all parts of the province and elsewhere in Papua New Guinea.

There is no electricity in the village except for generators and solar power. There is no running water. There is a very cold and refreshing stream running through the village. Mobile telephone service (including rather expensive internet connection) is available, although in some parts of the village the reception is poor.



Laraibina Village

About schools

The PNG school system has three levels:

Elementary school: “prep” (kindergarten) to grade 2

Primary school: grades 3 to 8

High school: grades 9 to 12

The current practicum is being planned for the elementary school level.

New Irelanders pride themselves on their long history of formal education. The Nalik area is unusual in Papua New Guinea in having virtually 100% school attendance through grade 8.

Schools are very basic, with few books or teaching materials. Teacher training is poor, with some elementary school teachers having only a grade 10 education followed by six weeks of teacher training. Some teachers are fluent in English, while others do not have a communicative knowledge of the language.

During the Australian colonial era and in the years immediately following Independence in 1975, English was the only language of education. After a poorly planned attempt to introduce bilingual education in 2000, the government has decided to return to a policy of using only English at all levels of education. This is a challenge in areas such as Laraibina, where English is not part of young children’s everyday life.

About safety

The German Foreign Affairs Department has good information about the country on its website. There you will read about the high levels of violence and crime and of the dangers of visiting some areas, especially the capital, Port Moresby. These warnings should not be underestimated, but on the whole, they do not apply to New Ireland or neighbouring East New Britain provinces. It would be unwise to plan travel to the New Guinea mainland without local people escorting you. If possible, you should not overnight in Port Moresby; luckily, flight connections are planned so that this is usually not necessary.

Unlike some parts of Papua New Guinea, New Ireland is safe for women. There is currently a female researcher from the University of Cologne staying in a village near Laraibina, and over the years a number of both female and male students from Japan and Europe have stayed in the area for fieldwork. People are used to interacting with foreigners, and it is an area where Germans are particularly welcome.

Hygiene levels are good and most visitors do not have any serious health problems. As is normal for travel anywhere, hepatitis, tetanus, childhood and influenza vaccines should be up to date. Malaria is prevalent in New Ireland, so anti-malarial prophylactics must be taken before, during, and for a month after a stay in New Ireland. Malaria prophylactics and antibiotics are available in Kavieng at a reasonable price. Medical care is not well developed and students should take out travel health insurance that includes emergency evacuation. For this reason an Australian tourist visa should be applied for before leaving Europe, even if one's itinerary does not include travel through Australia.

About flights

Virtually all international travel is through the capital, Port Moresby. EU citizens can get a tourist visa on arrival there that is good for up to two months. Air Niugini, Philippine Airline and Qantas fly there from several Asian and Australian destinations. From Europe the most economical fares seem to be with Philippine Airline from London via Manila to Port Moresby, with a discounted fare to Bali (Indonesia) and then with Air Niugini to Port Moresby, or with a discounted fare to Brisbane or Cairns (Australia) and then with Air Niugini or Qantas to Port Moresby.

Air Niugini online: www.airniugini.com.pg

There is no reliable and safe sea travel to New Ireland, so you will travel by air between Port Moresby and Kavieng (the New Ireland provincial centre) either by PNG Air or Air Niugini. PNG Air is a bit cheaper, but Air Niugini has a better safety record (better, in fact, than Lufthansa), and will pay for overnight accommodation if a flight is cancelled.

There are regular minibuses between Kavieng and Laraibina at a cost of around €5 oneway.

For more information:

For a look at a project in New Ireland by a masters student from the University of Coimbra, Portugal:

<http://igg.me/AT/nalikculture>

(This is a crowd-funding page for a children's book that came out of his masters thesis research.)

and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX3tsn1dYjE>

(This is about the same student sharing his Brazilian culture with the children. It is all in Portuguese, but you can get an idea about what schools look like and how the children behave.)

For a look at Laraibina:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvyC1xo3v1A>

(This shows the tamed eels for which the head teacher's mother Cathy is famous)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-QYmXRJfvU>
(One of the many tourist videos online about New Ireland.)

Regarding general travel to New Ireland and elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, the Lonely Planet Papua New Guinea guide is probably the best guide: Brown, Linday, Jean-Bernard Carillet, & Anna Kaminski. 2016. *Lonely Planet Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands*. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet.

Regarding schools in New Ireland: Volker, Craig Alan. 2015. Vernacular education in Papua New Guinea: Reform or deform? In Craig Alan Volker and Fred Anderson (eds.), *Education in Languages of Lesser Power: Asia-Pacific Perspectives*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 2015.

For an introduction to Tok Pisin:
Pernet, Barbara and Wendt, Wolfgang. 2007. *Tok Pisin bilong Papua Niugini / Das Pidgin von Papua-Neuguinea eine Einführung Arbeitsbuch*. Neuendettelsau: Mission EineWelt. (through <http://shop.mission-einewelt.de/produkt/sprachkurs-pidgin/>)

Volker, Craig et al. 2008. *Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin English Dictionary*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Balzer, Trevor et al. 2008. *Lonely Planet Pidgin Phrasebook*. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet.

Schaefer, Albrecht. 2005. *Kauderwelsch, Pidgin-English für Papua-Neuguinea*. Bielefeld: Reise Know-How Verlag.

For more information about the practicum

Regarding administrative and University of Augsburg matters: Prof Engelbert Thaler, thaler@philhist.uni-augsburg.de

Regarding New Ireland itself and placement at the school: Prof Craig Alan Volker: craig.volker@jcu.edu.au

The Department of German Linguistics at the University of Augsburg has an ongoing research project about Unserdeutsch (Rabaul Creole German). Several students and staff have visited New Ireland or East New Britain for fieldwork and can be contacted through the departmental secretary if you want to get a local perspective about the area.



Initiating a future chief