



FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PNG

Don't leave home without....

- small umbrella or plastic poncho for tropical downpours.
- a small torch for when the lights go out
- a sense of humour and a deep well of patience – your best plans will go awry.

These were a few pieces of advice I read as I prepared for my trip to Papua New Guinea in April. Another I received from a fellow traveller as our aeroplane landed at Port Moresby was, *"Welcome to Papua New Guinea where the unexpected will happen!"* They proved to be top tips.

As part of my sabbatical from work I was going to spend ten days visiting missionaries in PNG - six days in Port Moresby, the capital, with Linda and Bernard Lewis and then four days in Rumginae. It's really hard to sum it all up but here are a few vivid memories.

Imagine living in a sauna and you'll get a feel for what the weather was like. The simplest task like hanging the washing on the line reduced you to a dripping mass. I was going to have to get used to being hot and sticky!

Port Moresby is an interesting city. Very beautiful but with a neglected, rather run-down air. I'd heard that crime was a problem but I hadn't realised quite how much lawlessness affected everyday life – 24-hour security guards at our home and more to protect the car when we went to the local supermarket. It wasn't safe to just go out for a stroll and even nationals don't go out after dark, except in an emergency. So, no evening meetings for the church. I wonder if you ever get used to it?

The highlight of my time in the capital was accompanying Linda as she visited one of the settlements to lead a Bible study. So many warm welcomes and so many handshakes! It was fun trying to follow conversations and Bible studies in Tok Pisin!

Rumginae in the Western Province seemed a world away from Port Moresby. It was quite an adventure getting there. I was a little worried when the electronic sign announced that our gate had closed before we'd even been called to board the aircraft. Ah well! The previous flight had been cancelled and so our flight



took a few detours to compensate. We landed on several mud and grass air strips cut out of the jungle before finally arriving at Kiunga, the nearest commercial airport to Rumginae.

My first impression of Rumginae was of lots of wooden huts on stilts. I soon discovered that this was the hospital as well as the homes of the workers and missionaries. Rumginae is lovely though remote. Nowhere to escape to on a day off and no handy corner shops if you've forgotten something on your monthly shop in Kiunga! Meeting the missionaries and Sunday morning worship in the village church were highlights and cooling down in the river at the end of the day was a real treat. One day I accompanied the doctors on a ward round and, even to my untrained eye, I could see the patience and creative, lateral-thinking required to practice medicine here where the facilities and drugs are limited. Other memories revolve around sweet potatoes, pineapples and bananas and, less pleasantly, cockroaches, geckos and the loudest cockerel in the world!

It was a privilege to spend time with missionary friends in Papua New Guinea. Glimpsing just a few of the challenges of ministering in a very different culture and climate has helped me as I pray for them. It helped me realise, too, how important contact with home is for them. Emails, letters and parcels were real highlights and, as one missionary commented, especially visits from those who will ask the hard questions and encourage them in their walk with God. ■

Kirsten Wynn
UFM Council

