



We finally arrived at the Sepik Spirit, which is a stationary riverboat. Lucas, who is from Germany and is the manager, greeted us with wet cold towels and cold juice. One of the things we would learn is that when locals are hired to manage the lodges, there are more logistical problems that arise. When Europeans are hired, they already understand how to run things. Anyone traveling off the beaten track to a place like PNG realizes not to expect five star service. That's why we come here, to experience the local culture not the western culture. But yet, there are certain minimum standards that we do expect, like basic courtesy and honesty, that does not always seem to be present

here. There were several instances at the other lodges, managed by locals, when we were told stories about why something promised to us never materialized that were clearly fabrications to appease us. This presents a dilemma as one would want jobs to go to the locals, but it will take a long time to train them on how to administer the hotels as an acceptable level.

So, back to the Sepik Spirit. We were instructed to remove our shoes and leave them outside where the staff would clean the mud off each evening. We were shown to our rooms and then came down for lunch. There is a sitting area with a bar, a dining room and an outside, mosquito free (but not humidity free) area to sit and watch the river.

But there was no time to dawdle. It was back into the canoe to visit our first village, the Kiminimbit. This is a village in two parts (called part 1 and 2). Part 1 was started when their ancestors floated down the river and settled there. Part 2 began with a later group of ancestors. There are about 600 people between the two parts of the village.

We were shown the men's Spirit House (since we are white Westerners, we were allowed in; otherwise only men are allowed) where we were given a little history. The Spirit House is located at the physical center of the village and is the highest point of the village. It is the focus of social and ceremonial lives for the men. Men spend part of almost every day of their lives either sitting quietly chewing betel nut, dozing or in conversation (or who knows what else as no one else is allowed in and no one is talking about it). In the center there is always a fire burning, or embers glowing. Around the periphery there is a ledge where the men sit. There are carvings every where, both on the wall, on the columns holding up the ceiling and free standing. It is here that rituals and "rite of passage"



ceremonies take place. But not in this village (more on this tomorrow).





There was a large grass area outside and the women put down blankets covered with carvings and bilum bags and seeded necklaces. One entrepreneur has a shop there which he keeps supplied with masks from up and down the Sepik river. And the prices, even in the shop, were very ,very inexpensive.



We then visited the women's house (and of course their children) where the women were weaving, something they do at the end of the day when they have finished all their other chores. Everywhere we stopped the people continued to be extremely friendly, no one minded having their pictures taken and those that could, happily practiced their English with us.



The roles of the men and women are clearly defined and clearly very separate. Even the oars used by the fishermen/women are gender specific. From a distance you can tell who is rowing by the shape of the oar. The women's oars have two peaks with the valley in between while the men's have one. Very anatomical.



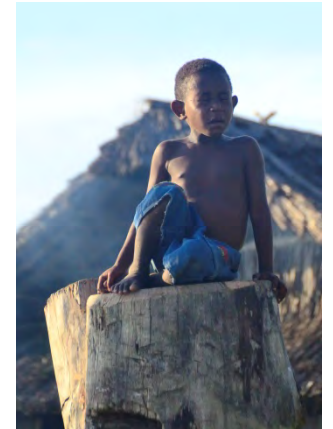




Since these villages are on the river, the area often floods and so they cannot do much farming. They grow just what they need to eat. When it does flood, if their homes are not high enough above the water, although they are all on stilts, the families float on rafts and canoes until the water resides. But the river is also their source of life from giving them their fish to bathing and washing their dishes.



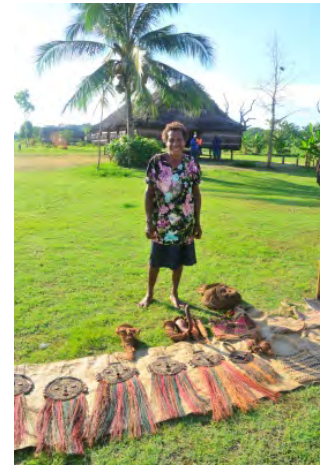
After spending some time there, we made our way down the river to part 2 of the village. As we approached we could see the kids hanging out. It is impossible to tell if this is just what they do, or if they were waiting for us. Usually when the motor boat is used, they hear the “white man” coming and get ready. But in our canoe, we just sort of sneaked up on them. So maybe the kids were the “look-out.”







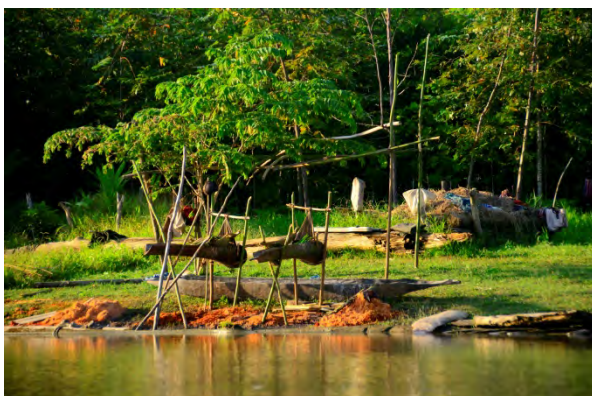
The women, and this time some men, again had their crafts on blankets. The wonderful thing about both these villages is that these were all items that were handmade by the person selling it.



At this village they also had a store where the villagers could trade for cans of mackerel, tuna, tang, nescafe, chicken flavor packets, beach towels, pots and other miscellaneous food and other items that the white man introduced. You had to climb up a ladder to get in and on the wall was a picture of Mary Magdalen. I make it sound like a large store. All was squeezed into an area of about 100 square feet.

Mary Magdalen. I make it sound like a large store. All was squeezed into an area of about 100 square feet.

We visited the Spirit House again and were given a demonstration of the song/flute dance used for ceremonies, particularly the cutting of boys. This particular village no longer does that, but other villages still do. More on that initiation tomorrow.



We also passed an area where the women had the Seago Palm bark resting on a frame. They push and press down and make meal out of it to make pancakes.



On the way back to the riverboat, the sun began to set and we were treated to the most beautiful sunset with everything reflecting in the water.

