

## Willis's Walkabouts Vanuatu Checklist – Updated February 2014

### Personal Papers

- Q Passport (I suggest also a photocopy of the page with your photo, kept separate in case of loss.)
  - Q Re-entry visa for Australia (for non-Australians). Be prepared for airport taxes, domestic and international, up to about US\$20 at a time
  - Q Air tickets -
  - Q **Vatu in cash** for emergencies. American dollars and Australian dollars will not be accepted anywhere outside Port Vila. (I'd guess about 10,000 Vatu in 1000 Vatu denominations, about 100 AUS dollars in ten dollar notes) Travellers Cheques are becoming more hassle than they are worth but they are still good insurance. If you don't have an appropriate credit card, you should bring about US\$500 to be safe.
- You will also need to bring extra Vatu for additional expenses such as provincial airport taxes (only a few dollars each flight), extra activities or tours, purchasing artefacts, handicrafts, art and other souvenirs as well as shouting your guides or new friends a shell of kava and the end of the day. Tipping does not occur in Vanuatu and is considered culturally inappropriate. The culture of Vanuatu is based around gift giving (Yu givim, mi givim). Any tip that is given will make the receiver feel uncomfortable and obligated to return the favour by giving you something that they won't be able to afford. That being said you will most likely be given things as a token of appreciation for your visit, as you are a guest in their country. This does not mean the giver will expect anything in return. Although the giver will give no indication of an expectation for you to return something, it is common courtesy to return something in exchange if it feels appropriate. This can be as simple as buying a few cups of rice from the store and giving it to the family. Or you may like to carry some small items to give to individuals or families that are especially hospitable. Things like colour pencils for kids, sewing needles and good quality thread or dental floss for sewing up sails, or fishing line and tackle, hooks and soft plastic baits are all really light, cheap, easy to carry and perfect simple gifts that will be greatly appreciated. They will be cheaper and easier to find in Australia. You'll be sure to meet some very generous families and guides and if you are really touched by their generosity you'll be glad to know you have a simple, cheap and practical gift to give them.

I would suggest that each person carry about 20,000- 30,000 Vatu (\$200- 300AUD) or more, for additional activities, handicrafts and contributions to the community. You may only spend a fraction of this but it's a good idea to carry this amount in case you need it.

**THERE ARE NO ATMS OUTSIDE OF PORT VILA AND LUGANVILLE.**

There will be two rest days where we will stay in the one place and there will be the opportunity to go on locally run tours such as fishing, snorkelling, cultural site visits and guided walking tours around Maskelyne Island and South West Bay. These will all be about \$20 (2000 Vatu) maximum per person and are well worth doing.

If you want to stay on after the volcano walk and attend the Ruan cultural festival you will also need to carry at least 20,000 Vatu (200AUD) to pay for the festival, this includes village accommodation with a family, cultural displays and dances, tours, demonstrations and all meals for five days. If you stay for this then carry a little extra on top of the 20,000 Vatu to purchase things you may want. The area the festival is in is home to some of the best wood carvers in the Pacific. This extra is highly recommended if you have time and a great way to unwind after the trip.

- **A credit/debit card** (Visa, Mastercard or both) which can be used in ATM's. Visa is somewhat more common than Mastercard. American Express is good also but not as flexible.) I've never had any trouble finding ATM's for cash advances. To minimise fees, make fewer and larger withdrawals and put some money into your credit card account before you leave. Check with your bank as you should be able to make direct withdrawals from your account. Port Vila has Westpac and ANZ branches, withdrawing money in Port Vila will not be a problem but as mentioned above  
**THERE ARE NO ATMS OUTSIDE OF PORT VILA AND LUGANVILLE.**  
You will need to carry all the money you will need for additional items not included in the price of this trip, for the entire length of the trip.

- 0 Waist belts, neck straps, leg pouches are all good places to carry money and documents. Do not carry all your money and identification in one place.

### 0 **Travel Insurance**

Your policy should cover costs incurred by the need to change airline reservations, medical expenses, lost baggage, lost passports, air tickets & personal papers, lost money (always limited). It should be possible to make a claim while in Vanuatu. It should cover you while bushwalking. Not all policies will do this.

**We need to see a copy.** Willis's Walkabout liability insurance requires you to have travel insurance.

### **Photography**

- 0 Bring spare batteries for any camera requiring them. You can recharge batteries between walks but you'll need an adapter. Car chargers also work. We will be using community owned solar systems or petrol generators to access power, the locals will expect a small contribution of \$2-3 AUD (200-300 Vt).
- 0 If you are using film, bring plenty of film as all film may be more expensive.
- 0 If you are serious about wildlife photography, you need a long telephoto. I have a 300 mm lens and past experience has shown that it is not long enough for many shots.

### **Personal Health**

- 0 Vaccinations: Tetanus (required) Typhoid, hepatitis & polio are recommended by some authorities. See <http://www.mdtravelhealth.com/destinations/oceania/vanuatu.php> for full details of recommendations.
- 0 Anti-malaria medication. We **will** be in a malaria area. It is a personal choice as to whether you want to take anti malarial medication, The Man Bush Walk section of the trip goes high up into the interior where there is no malaria; however on the coast it is prevalent. The malaria carrying mosquitoes only bite at night so covering up at night with repellent and long sleeves and using a mozzie net are the best options. Some medications have severe side effects in some people that could compromise the overall enjoyment of the trip. There are medical clinics in most of the areas we are going to that all carry a new drug that takes three days to completely kill the malaria parasites. It is very effective against the strain of malaria in coastal areas in Vanuatu and widely available these days. There are medical clinics in the three areas this trip visits South West Bay, Maskelyne Islands and Ambrym. It's worth doing some research before deciding what medication to take or whether to take it at all especially if you have never taken an anti malarial.

- Q Personal medications: bring a copy of the prescription for any prescription item you carry.
- Q Personal first aid items: sunscreen, insect repellent, bandaids, blister kit or similar, etc. I will have a reasonable first aid kit for the walks but you might want your own antiseptic such as tea tree oil or betadiene plus any other items you are likely to need.)
- Q Antibiotics. If you want to carry antibiotics, see your doctor. In the major centres, they are available to a similar standard to Australia.
- Q Vitamin tablets are recommended
- Q Toothbrush & Toothpaste
- Q Ear plugs for noisy nights might be useful (not that I expect many noisy nights although the roosters and children will begin making noise at about 5am when we sleep in the villages).
- Q Water purification tablets or giardia proof filter. We may bring a large filter although probably not needed. Vanuatu is blessed with good water supplies and not a lot of water borne stomach bugs; many villages have tapped into pure springs or creeks and there is plenty of rainwater to catch.
- Q Lip Eze, moisturiser

## Equipment

Some of the equipment on this list will need to be used every day while other items may not be needed until the second or even third stage of the trip. Unfortunately due to the remote nature of this trip you will need to carry everything with you from day one. However, you can hire a porter for about 1500Vt (\$15) a day for the days of walking on Malekula and Ambrym, the canoeing section in the middle won't be a problem as we paddle our gear. A few examples are as follows:

We may not need to sleep in tents until day 6 or 7, as we'll be staying in villages with small bamboo huts, although having a tent with you is a good option if you need it. We'll use tents on the canoeing section and for every night spent on Ambrym.

We may carry a bowl and a spoon in our packs but in the bush eat using leaves as plates, bamboo as bowls and spoons and our hands, or with plates and cutlery provided by our hosts when we stay in bungalows; however we'll need them for the nights in the ash plain on Ambrym.

All up we walk with full packs for 7 days on the first section, no pack walking at all on the second section and then 3 days with full packs on the volcano for the last section. So porters for that entire period will cost about \$150AUD or 15,000 Vatu.

- Q11 Light weight tent. Best if not a three-4 season tent for Tassie in September. Vanuatu is hot and humid and a tent that is designed to be warm will be excessively heavy and hot. You may even like to take a light weight mozzie dome and a fly tarp to use if it looks like rain.
- Q Sleeping bag - light weight and thin suitable for + 10 C. Temperatures below this are possible on the ash plain and high in the hills of Malekula but unlikely. Many nights on the coast you may not use it.
- Q Therma-rest inflating mattress or foam mat. You'll use this every night. The huts in the hill villages will just have woven Pandanus mats for sleeping on.
- Q11 Eating utensils (bowl, spoon, knife, cup; fork & plate are optional)
- Q Water bottles (two 1L bottles or a 1L bottle and a wine bladder)
- Q Head Torch — make sure it takes standard sized batteries, AA or AAA. The rectangular batteries used in some Petzl torches are almost impossible to find. Good quality batteries are available in Port Vila, make sure you have some spare as they are expensive and poor quality on the islands.
- Q A small towel is useful. The commercial 'pack towels' are excellent.
- Q A backpack with a pack liner and/or cover. It is very important that everything in your pack stay dry in the heaviest possible rain as well as the canoeing section.

- 0 Bag for storing gear while you are on walks. We'll be able to leave some bags in Port Vila where you stay.
- 0 Binoculars - you'll almost certainly want these for wildlife viewing.

## **Food (Kae Kae)**

Most common items are readily available in the larger towns. But if you have a favourite something, bring it. All meals on this trip are included. We will be eating local food, a lot of root vegetables like sweet potato, taro, cassava, yams as well coconut milk, bananas, fresh greens, fish, shellfish and crabs when we are on the coast, occasionally local chicken and fresh water prawns if we are lucky and lots of tropical fruit. Sounds great and it is, however it is best to approach the cuisine of Vanuatu with an open mind and not let the simpleness put you off. It's fresh out of the garden or sea, healthy, satisfying and mostly delicious; however you will most likely find a few things you are not keen on. There is a huge variety of staples though so if you discover you don't like cooking bananas or taro but love cassava, sweet potato and yam then you'll know what to ask for!

**You need to supply your own lunch and breakfasts on some days.** You need one lunch and one breakfast for the section from SW Bay to the south coast of Malekula and you will also need 3 lunches and two breakfasts for the volcano section. You can buy these in Port Vila from the supermarket. Or you can get crackers and (poor quality) tin fish and peanut butter from the small stores on the outer islands. We recommend shopping in Port Vila. We will send an email with details about supermarkets in the capital to the entire group closer to the date.

We will be able to leave lunches and breakfast for the last section on the Volcano at a drop off point on the first day which we will return to before heading to the volcano.

**Nibbles.** There will be plenty of bananas, coconuts, paw paw, grapefruit, sugar cane, cocoa beans and other seasonal tropical fruits and nuts. If you are not a very adventurous eater, we recommend you carry a small amount of emergency nibbles just in case. But, even without bringing anything, most people never go hungry.

**Do not bring meat or meat products.**

**Do not bring fresh fruit or vegetables of any kind.**

## **Snorkelling**

There will be some equipment available but if you have your own mask and snorkel and you don't mind carrying it (or if you are using porters which is highly recommended for the Man Bush Trail) then we recommend bringing it along. If you don't have it or don't want to carry it all that way before you can use it then we should be able to scrape together some equipment from the islanders.

## Clothing

- 0 Two sets of clothes for mild to warm weather.
- 0 These sets of clothing should include the following
  - 0 Trousers. Lightweight, quick drying trousers are recommended.
  - 0 Shirts. Light as above.
  - 0 Sweater, light weight fleece or something similar for a little warmth.
  - 0 Socks (3\_4 pair) Thermal socks might help. Plastic bags between layers of socks can keep your feet dry.)
- 01A light weight rain coat or poncho is a good idea, not goretex or hydranaught or anything used in temperate Australia, it won't work and will make you sweat. A cheap plastic poncho or a decent tropical rain coat will be as good as each other. We'll avoid walking in the rain, but this will be handy if we get rain on a boat trip. Walking in the rain is actually pretty good in the tropics, it keeps you cool, and doesn't usually last long. Keeping the contents of your pack dry will be more of a priority than keeping yourself dry while walking.

We will be able to have clothes washed and scrubbed by hand just about anywhere for about 300 Vatu (\$3AUD). Clothes washing will be available on day 6, 11 and 14 so you can take minimal clothing. Remember it will be hot, I wore a pair of trousers once in 12 months in Vanuatu, with a thin merino pull over while camped on the ash plain of the Ambrym Volcano in late June.

Remember the layer principle. During the walks, you need to be able to put on and take off various layers of clothing so that you neither overheat nor get cold. You will almost always walk in shorts, gaiters and a light long sleeve shirt, same as usual on a Walkabouts trip.

In addition to the sets of clothing mentioned above, you need

- 0 Wide brim hat. You need this both to keep the sun off and to keep your head warm.
- 0 Gaiters
- 0 Thermal top & pants
- 0 Footwear. Any boots should be well broken in before the start of the trip. A second pair of sturdy shoes or sandals is a good idea and will also be good for walking in the water near coral reefs when going snorkelling.
- 0 Sunglasses.
- 0 Bathers