

KOKODA SPIRIT

“In the footsteps of heroes”

9 nights Kokoda Trail Trek Itinerary 9N1 from \$2,695.00
Owers' Corner to Kokoda



Day 1

Port Moresby – Good Water Camp/Dump 66 (approx. 4 hours)

Daily ascent 50m Daily descent 315m

Today we travel by road from Port Moresby via the Bomana War Cemetery to pay our respect to the fallen soldiers. We then travel to Sogeri where there is a white stone monument marking the beginning of the Kokoda Trail. Our road journey then takes us to McDonald's Corner, this is where “B” company of the 39th Battalion commenced their walk to Kokoda and then onto the North Coast area. “B” company was led by Captain Sam Templeton and guided by Bert Kienzle. They departed McDonald's Corner on July 7 1942 and arrived in Kokoda July 15 1942. We continue to Owers' Corner with an air of excitement and apprehension for the journey ahead. There is time to relax along the road and take photographs of the spectacular scenery.

On our arrival at Owers' Corner we make final checks and preparations for the trek ahead and meet our personal porters. Owers' Corner was also the place where our Australian troops first received the morale boosting artillery support from the gunners. Three 25pound guns were positioned on the ground and fired 700 rounds over three days into Ioribaiwa Ridge, where the Japanese made their last big push; it took 25 seconds for the projectiles to cover the 15miles across Imita Ridge into Iorabaiwa.

Our troops also dragged down the hill one of the 25pound guns across Goldie River and up towards Imita Ridge. Have a look for the original zig zag track cut along the way which wound its way down the ridge and up towards Imita Ridge. We start the Kokoda Track with a steep descent down to the Goldie River. The trail crosses the Goldie River and past the abandoned village of Uberi. The first camp is deep jungle, in an old wartime campsite location of Dump 66 at the foot of Imita Ridge. Dump 66 was a major supply/logistic area and also had a medical aid post.

Day 2

Good Water Camp/Dump 66 – Ioribaiwa (approx. 8 hours)

Daily ascent 660m Daily descent 550m

The first full day of the Kokoda Trail walk includes the ascent up Imita Ridge. Although this is not the steepest or the highest of the mountains along the trail, it will give you an indication of things to come. We stop on top of Imita Ridge and soak in the atmosphere of the place. Imita Ridge was our last line of defence, the line was drawn in the sand here, there was to be no further withdrawal. There was a set of “Golden Stairs” on both sides of Imita Ridge and up towards Ioribaiwa Village. It is important to remember across the Kokoda Track that there was more than one set of Golden Stairs. We descend down Imita Ridge into the beautiful Ua-Ule Creek area (Pronounced Fa-Lay). Here we take our boots off and put on our adventure sandals to cross the creek 22 times. After the creek crossings we put our boots

back on and make our final ascent for the day up the gruelling Ioribaiwa Ridge. You will now know that all that training was now worthwhile. Our walk today finishes at the Village of Ioribaiwa.

Day 3

Ioribaiwa – Naoro Area (approx. 9 hours)

Daily ascent 1117m Daily descent 952m

We have an early start today as we leave Ioribaiwa Village and make our climb up to the top of Ioribaiwa Ridge. This is the furthest spot that the Japanese made across the Kokoda Track, before being ordered to advance to the rear back to Buna. From this point on the ridge the Japanese could see the search lights of Port Moresby. Ioribaiwa Ridge was also the spot where our artillery was pounding the Japanese and the scene of bloody fighting. There is also a series of both Australian and Japanese trenches in this area. Our journey takes us down towards Ofi Creek which was the scene of a very successful Australian ambush on the Japanese. Our journey across the Kokoda Trail sees us climb one of the most difficult and tiresome sections of the track up and over the Maguli Range to the village of Naoro this is a long climb up that appears to never end. Naoro is another village we see in our travels and is a very pretty place. On the way up there is a concealed Japanese trench system at the Japanese camp where the Japanese mountain gun was being used to pound the Australians on Ioribaiwa Ridge. Depending on time, we camp at Naoro Village or move onto our alternative camp site near the Brown River.

Day 4

Naoro Village Area – Menari Village (approx. 5 hours)

Daily ascent 385m Daily descent 330m

The Naoro area was also the scene for some aerial supply drops, better known as biscuit bombing. From our camp site, we cross the Brown River, after about an hour's walk through marshy ground. It's mostly level to the river with the more difficult sections crossing log bridges and causeways. There is a steep climb shortly after the Brown River known as the wall; this climb will certainly test your fitness. This climb brings you to a crest with views down to Menari Village – our overnight stop. A steep descent and a walk through the tidy village will bring you to our overnight village accommodation. A Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel who is a village elder runs it. Menari is also the site of one of the most famous speeches made regarding the Kokoda Track campaign by LT COL Ralph Honner. It was his inspirational thank you speech to the heroic men of the 39th battalion, those "ragged bloody heroes".

Local fruit and vegetables can usually be purchased here to supplement the food carried. As with all villages along the Kokoda Trail, travellers are well accepted by the villages. The people from the villages are often eager to talk to visitors about their lives and families. Many have a working knowledge of English. One of the guides can always assist should communications "bog down".

By now, an easy routine has been established on arrival at the day's end of the trail. Drop the pack at the campsite, collect clean clothing from the pack and off for a bath and swim in the nearby creek. While the group members are away freshening up, the guides and group leaders set up the cooking arrangements arrange purchases of fresh vegetables and prepare accommodation for the night in the village area. By then the main part of the group have returned, things are organised and dinner is being served. There is time to explore the village, meet local people and photograph what catches your eye. Remember – you can never take too many photos; there is just so much to look at.

Usually just before the tropical night fall everyone gathers to exchange experiences of the day and hear what is to come. After dinner the fire is the focal point and while the guides and carriers clean up, the conversations flow amongst the walkers. Each day will bring a sense of personal achievement a good last thought before sleep.

Day 5

Menari Village – Brigade Hill- Efogi Village (approx. 7 hours)

Daily ascent 960m Daily descent 460m

From Menari the next major climb is up Brigade Hill, this will takes us 4 hours. Along the track occasional weapon pits mark "stay behind" positions of both Japanese and Australian Forces as they withdrew. Brigade Hill was also nicknamed "Butchers Hill" by the Australian soldiers due to the number killed, on both sides, during the Australian withdrawal. 101 Australian Soldiers lost their lives between

the 6-8 September 1942 during the battles of Brigade Hill and Mission Ridge. We stop and reflect on the knoll about the battles and lives lost during this bloody and ferocious fight. We then descend down from Brigade Hill and stop at Nishimura's stump. Nishimura is the Japanese soldier who pledges to recover the remains of his deceased comrades. He is known as the "Bone Man".

Our journey takes us past the turnoff to Mission Ridge and the alternative track to Myola Lakes. There are remarkable views back to Menari as the trail approaches the crest of Brigade Hill and there are even more spectacular panoramic views on the Northerly slopes of the mountain of the villages of Kagi and Efogi spread out below. Efogi Village is the biggest settlement on the Kokoda Trail, with an airstrip and a first aid post. Efogi is the halfway mark and the altitude climbed becomes apparent in the rapid cooling of the evening. Warm clothes are recommended... now you know why they were on things to bring!

Day 6

Efogi Village – Mt Bellamy 1900 Camp (approx. 9 hours)

Daily ascent 900m Daily descent 300m

Our journey today is a day of steep ups and downs. We start by walking up to Efogi 2, down to the main creek and up to Naduri Village. Naduri is also the home of one of the last remaining Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. We then climb up and over the shoulder of Mt Bellamy towards our evening camp. There are spectacular views back to Kagi and Efogi. This is the region that the Japanese conducted their infamous lantern parade. Brigadier Potts also ordered an aerial attack along the Kagi Ridge prior to the battle of Brigade Hill and Mission Ridge. You can feel the spirit of the Australian Soldiers as they withdraw down the ridgeline back towards Efogi. We walk past large village gardens with high fences to keep wild pigs out of the crops. Without the vegetables grown in these gardens, villagers would starve, so the prodigious effort in felling, trimming and dragging logs form a 1.5 metre high fence line is a matter of survival. Along part of the razor ridge leading up to Mt Bellamy is open Kunai grass without any tree cover. This cleared areas of the gardens means an exposure for some two hours to the tropical sun. It is not the place to loiter as water consumption increases and the full packs slow movement down.

"Stay behind" pits are scattered along the track, the larger (3 man size) indicate position of a machine gun. Engagement ranges vary from 3-4 metres out to 5 metres. Very close combat indeed!

Mt Bellamy is higher than Mt Kosciusko and the effects of such heights start to wear on the trekkers. Our trek towards camp takes us through an ancient Arctic beech forest with magnificent giant pandanus and beech trees. The camp this night is in the jungle some two hours climb below the crest, it is also the place that we discovered the skeletal remains of 4 Japanese Soldiers from the 41st Regiment killed in an Australian ambush by the 2/16th Battalion between the 3 and 5 September 1942. An eerie place, as you progress along the track, which is now corridorred with trees and vines with moss. The moss hangs in streamers from dead and living trees with little light to pierce the gloom. Until the war, this was a taboo placed and avoided by all. The sky tonight is crowded in by rainforest, with insect noises (the soldiers called them "the 6 o'clock crickets") on nightfall so loud they drown the conversation. The stream, which is near the camp, is so cold it is a marvel it flows at all! Once you stop walking the cold altitude is apparent. Humidity is still high, which, accompanied by cloud and night makes for a continuous patter on the leaves of falling droplets of condensation. Porters are uneasy in this area and will keep a fire going all night.

Day 7

Mt Bellamy – Iora Creek (approx. 9 hours)

Daily ascent 860m Daily descent 1335m

From the night's campsite we then start upward to the highest point of the track on Mt Bellamy at 2190m. We stop at a vantage point called "Kokoda Gap" with magnificent views (on clear days) of the surrounding mountains, the lower part of the Owen Stanley Range and the Yodda valley in the distance. The "Kokoda Gap" is the area that Generals Blamey and Macarthur wanted to dynamite to prevent the Japanese from coming through! This was to be our Thermopylae our 300 Spartans to hold back the ravages of the Japanese Army! Nice plan except the Kokoda Gap is over 12km wide and all the Spartans were killed! As you could imagine our boys were not real fond of the plan! Planes can be heard droning overhead several times during the day as they make their way through the gap on their way to Kokoda or returning back to Port Moresby. What takes nine days for those walking the Kokoda Trail, an aircraft does in 35 minutes!

The descent from the Kokoda Gap lookout is steep initially, but eases *some* 3 hours down the Trail to a steady decline toward Iora Creek at Templeton's Crossing 1. The area is dotted with weapon pits. Major delaying actions were fought here Japanese positions on the North side and Australian positions to the South side of the Creek.

As we have found, most of those who travel the Kokoda Trail have very little accurate knowledge of the true position of battle sites or even a good knowledge of what happened during the campaign. They plod past areas unaware of relics and earthworks hidden 3 or 4 metres off to their sides. They miss a great deal.

Bridging the creek is by a temporary span masterly constructed by the boys made of logs bundled together. We cross carefully, with dry feet – for a change. The dry foot does not last long as we come upon Templeton's Crossing Number 2. The muddy track parallels (generally) Iora Creek and is intersected with innumerable small creeks flowing across the track, often in only a short distance, until cascading down into the main creek, Iora. The main creek joins these tributaries and, when Templeton's Crossing Number 2 is reached, it is a foaming torrent. The noise is constant, amplified by the deep, sharp-sided valley. The deep valley means that the sun sets early in the day. A series of areas were levelled here during the campaign for the construction of store huts, medical post, kitchen (Haus Kook) and other native built buildings, the buildings are long gone, but the level sites stand out from the roughness of the terrain.

Digging explorations on a number of trips has turned up a wide variety of relics from expended and live ammunition of all calibres, (Australian and Japanese) 36 pattern hand grenades to personal equipment such as an Australian Army kit preserved in the soil covering it – webbing buckles, water bottles; also telephone equipment and numerous other items. After about one and a half hours the track begins to steadily climb to the crest where more and more weapon pits become visible. As the track descends here it becomes apparent you are clearly passing through a major defensive area.

The track drops suddenly, almost vertically, to the abandoned Iora Creek Village. This is a small level area with an open, iron roofed shelter marking the site of the village centre. This too, was a major staging centre. Overhead is a massive hill which overlooks the whole area, the Japanese defence system here, halted the returning Australians in their tracks for two weeks, before they overcame the tenacious defence of the Japanese. Often late afternoon mist creeps up the valley enclosing the already dark canopy the place has a special atmosphere all of its own.

Day 8

Iora Creek – Isurava Battlefield (approx. 5 hours)

Daily ascent 375m Daily descent 482m

Our trek today takes us across Iora Creek and up to the Japanese defensive position. This was the place the Japanese defended vigorously for two weeks and kept the Australians pinned down with accurate machine gun and mountain gun fire. Further on lays Alola Village, some three and a half hours ahead. The track rises mostly along the contour line of the ranges until a sudden drop to the river below. With the usual bush bridging (we make our own if the earlier efforts have been washed away) it's across the river then up into Alola Village.

The rest house at Alola is to a degree dilapidated and you wonder how it stands but the view is fantastic. Similarly, the wash point nearby has spectacular views, toward Kokoda. The locals are friendly folk and often we can buy supplements like vegetables and fruit. We are literally up in the clouds here and often Alola is covered with a fog like veil. However, it clears in a few hours and the panoramic view is spectacular. Alola was a strategic area for the Australians with Brigadier Potts having his Headquarters' here during the battle of Isurava. After a break at Alola we trek towards Isurava Battlefields. This is the location of what has been described as one of most significant battles of the South West Pacific War, the "Battle that saved Australia". A greatly outnumbered force of Australians, held a vastly greater number of Japanese for some 4 days between the 26th and 29th August 1942, their important timetable unravelled, initiating the beginning of the final destruction of the Japanese units. This is also the area that Private Bruce Steele Kingsbury won his Victorian Cross.

The original site of Isurava Village is still cleared with a magnificent memorial constructed commemorating the battle. The villagers moved out of this area after suspecting sorcery over some events. The new Isurava Village is about one hour from the old site and is in a well set out location with small hedges and gardens amongst the huts.

Day 9

Isurava Battlefield – Kokoda (approx. 7 hours)

Daily ascent 57m Daily descent 1025m

A long day as the track unwinds into a long one, but it is nearly all downhill. We are very excited as we sense that the finish line is very close, caution is needed as we need to stay focused on the job of walking safely. Our walk this morning takes us to firstly to the new Isurava Village, and continues down, crossing numerous streams and open spaces where shrubs and trees are blanketed by leafy Choko vines.

We pass through the Village of Deniki which was the scene of a short sharp battle during the Australians fighting withdrawal across the Kokoda Track. Deniki offers spectacular views down to Kokoda. Occasionally the open space coincides with the sides of the valleys and expansive views are exposed of the lower countryside and coast. A short walk further on and you step out onto a bare ridgeline with the village on the side. The jungle recedes with dramatic suddenness and children from the village of Hoi shout greetings, running to gather around the walkers. We stop at Hoi to savour the moment have a swim in the river and contemplate our journey.

From here, it's a fast walk on undulating terrain, along a wide well kept track to the village of Kokoda. An hour from Kokoda the track becomes a rough road, 20 minutes and power lines appear. Village folk using the same road become more frequent responding to greetings with wide smiles – they know you have come over the Kokoda Trail and respect you for it.

Finally Kokoda!

Sometimes it almost seems anti climatic in those first few minutes of arrival. Somehow you expect a mayoral reception or a band welcome... then, slowly it sinks in. You HAVE walked the Kokoda Track and the sense of personal achievement grows, along with appreciation of the endeavours and sufferings of those before have truly walked in the footsteps of heroes.

Tonight we celebrate in Kokoda explore the area and talk about our fantastic achievement.

Day 10

Kokoda - Port Moresby

After breakfast our flight departs for Port Moresby. We arrive in Port Moresby around lunchtime and our transport returns us to the Gateway Hotel for welcome showers.

Note: Accommodation along the Kokoda Track is camping in tents

Kokoda Spirit reserves the right to vary the trek itinerary/schedule in the event of unforeseen circumstances