

# Travel Tales

by

Llewellyn Toulmin

## Port Vila, Vanuatu, Part 2: What to Do and Where to Eat

Current guide books are deficient or out of date when it comes to reviewing Port Vila. In my humble resident expat opinion, the best things to do around Port Vila, in order, are:

**The Summit Gardens:** 11 gardens and a sandalwood plantation, distillery and gift shop on a 600-foot high plateau, with fantastic flowers and views. \$63 US dollars per person including pickup at the ship from [www.thesummitvanuatutours.com](http://www.thesummitvanuatutours.com); or just show up and pay \$25 pp. Open every day 9-5 except Christmas and Good Friday. Also has a separate, \$100, multi-stage zip line, for the adventurous or insane; 5 miles north of town on Devil's Point Road.



*A small pavilion for rest and relaxation in the beautiful Summit Gardens*

**The Mele Cascades:** several small and one 60 foot waterfall, very attractive and cool. Wear Crocs or reef shoes to cross the streams; \$26 admission pp.; open 9-5 daily; 4 miles north of town on the main round-the-island road.

**Mt. Yasur Volcano:** on Tanna island, 120 miles SSE of Port Vila. This is one of the most accessible and dramatic active volcanos in the world. A one day fly-in tour, about \$400 per

person, can be arranged at the many tour operators downtown or via Unity Airlines ([www.unity-airlines.com](http://www.unity-airlines.com)).

**Pentecost Island Land Diving:** 165 miles N of Port Vila. Boys and men from 9 to 35 jump headfirst into dirt, with their ankles tied with vines, from a tower up to 96 feet high! Most survive. A \$450 one-day fly-in tour can be arranged in downtown or from Unity Airlines. Only on Saturdays from April to June.

**Vanuatu Cultural Center:** the main (but small) ethnographic museum, with cultural displays and excellent sand painting by a local chief/artist, made while you watch. \$11 admission pp; open M-F, 9-4:30 pm. In town opposite Parliament and the new Chinese-built convention center.



*Fire dancing can be seen at local restaurants and resorts almost every night*

### **Best restaurants**

Port Vila has a surprising variety of restaurants, especially when compared to other small Pacific island countries. The dress code is always very casual. The following are the best restaurants around town, which can give you a change from eating on board ship. The listing gives the name, (type), neighborhood, best dishes, prices in US dollars, and meals offered. Reservations are never necessary and you are unlikely to have a phone that works locally, so phone numbers are not provided. All restaurants take Vatu (the local currency), most take Australian dollars, and a large minority will take Visa or Mastercard (not AMEX) and will add 3-5% for using the card. The listing below is in order of my estimation of quality.

**The Lookout**, (Thai); north part of town near the New Zealand High Commission; excellent Thai food, especially Pad Thai; main courses about \$8-12; lunch and dinner; super view over the harbor. Open 7 days for lunch and dinner, except Sunday, which is dinner only.

**Francesca's**, (Italian); 20 miles NW of Port

Vila; Havannah Harbor area; excellent seafood and Italian dishes (\$30-35 for main courses); lunch and dinner; great décor beside the beach. Closed Mon. & Tues.

**Au Peche Mignon**, (French); downtown; tuna, onion or mushroom quiche (\$4), long thin bag of small meringues (\$2), tarte citron (\$3), or any of the other petite fours; breakfast, lunch and afternoon meals to 5:30 pm. Closed on Sunday.

**Jill's Café**, (American); downtown; toasted "big cheese" sandwich with ham and local pineapple (\$9), strawberry shake (\$4). Also the only used book exchange and sale in town (which benefits

the only animal rescue in the country), breakfast, lunch, and afternoon meals to 5:00 pm, Mon-Sat.

**Numbaone**, (pizza, burgers, etc.); open-air on the waterfront near downtown; pizza la reine (\$11 for a regular feeds two); lunch and dinner. Has slow wi-fi Internet access. Shows stolen Hollywood movies on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays on a movie screen made of stretched canvas on a metal frame beside the harbor—see a movie and a sunset at the same time! Open 7 days.

**Wahoo Restaurant**, (local fish); 20 miles NW of Port Vila, Havannah Harbor area; latest local catch (about \$23); dinner only; walk north along the narrow beach to collect excellent sea glass left over from World War II. Open for lunch 7 days and for dinner on Thurs./Fri./Sat.

### **Shopping: Rather Sparse**

Duty free shops in town cater to Australians seeking cheap booze and jewelry. Locally made items are surprisingly scarce. The best shop is Pandamas for nice jewelry and souvenirs (downtown beside the ANZ Bank). If you want to get some soft drinks, hard liquor or other items that are expensive on board, go to the Au Bon Marche grocery (small branch in downtown or the main location one mile south of downtown). The best bread in town is at Breadwinner Bakery, a small yellow building just uphill from the old French Jail. Ahhh, those French -- even their prisoners get better bread than we Americans!

Lew Toulmin, from Silver Spring, is working in Port Vila and enjoys French bread every day.

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