



# ISLANDS Undiscovered

— BY DANIEL RESNIK —

*For an island vacation close to Australia,  
try the hidden paradise of the Solomon Islands.*

**F**or a tropical paradise only a three-hour flight from Sydney, the Solomon Islands are still very much undiscovered. While Fiji – a further two hours away – plays host to about 700,000 tourists a year, only 20,000–25,000 or so, make it to this nation of scattered islands in the South Pacific.

This is a pity, as the Solomons deserve much closer attention.

This archipelago northeast of Australia between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu is

made up of 922 islands (only 347 of which are inhabited) with 70 different languages spoken.

It's perhaps only from the air that you can get a true sense of how isolated and beautiful it really is. Looking down on to the aquamarine waters and beach-fringed atolls as you fly in to the capital, Honiara, is a jaw-dropping experience.

We are heading for Tavanipupu Resort Island on the southeast coast of Guadalcanal in Marua Sound. Rather than take the



20-minute flight to the resort, we are instead taken by boat. It's a longer trip – about two-and-a-half hours – but a great way to see many of the uninhabited islands along the way.

Among the places we get to see is an area off Guadalcanal known by the locals as 'Blood Beach'. It was along this stretch of coastline during World War II, that 7,000 American and Japanese soldiers lost their lives during six months of torrid fighting in the Battle of

Guadalcanal. The Japanese finally withdrew in early 1943.

Looking at this shoreline as we cruise by, with its swaying palm trees and gentle waves breaking on white sand beaches, it is hard to comprehend that such carnage was perpetrated not that long ago.

At Tavanipupu, we disembark at a pier that juts out about 100 metres over cobalt coloured water where vibrant parrotfish fight for our attention.

**Opening image:** The overwater restaurant at Fatboys on Mbabanga Island.  
**Clockwise from right:** Tavanipupu Island Resort; The accommodation at Tavanipupu comes with a hammock; Friendly locals in Honiara.

The resort sits on 13 hectares, surrounded by coral reefs the colour of a photo-enhanced travel brochure and dotted with 12 thatched luxury bungalows with vaulted ceilings and wooden furnishings.

This is where the world's most loved royal couple, Prince William and Princess Kate, chose to stay when they were on their last Southern Hemisphere tour.

My bungalow has a four-poster king bed shrouded by a romantic harem-like mosquito net, a large bathroom and an outside area with a day bed and hammock which offers glorious lagoon views.

This is where the world's most loved royal couple, Prince William and Princess Kate, chose to stay when they were on their last Southern Hemisphere tour. Oddly enough, nine months after their stay, a royal son arrived. The geckos on the ceiling that night would have a story to tell.

Later, after some island exploring, swimming and snorkelling in fish-filled coral gardens only metres off the beach, we devour a superb lunch of freshly-caught seafood and locally-grown produce.

Afterwards, I allow the strategically-placed hammock outside my deluxe bungalow to lull me to sleep to the sound of palm leaves fluttering in the breeze. From that same hammock later that night, I am dazzled by the amount of stars visible in the clear night sky.

With so many Australians getting married offshore these days, it's the perfect location to get hitched. For a mere AUD\$3,700 per day, about AUD\$92 per head for 40 guests, you can have the whole island.

As with most Pacific islands, the local staff with their infectious smiles, innocence, warmth, charm and bare feet, ensure your stay is long remembered. And if there's a more gorgeous and happy bunch of children with their Luna Park-sized smiles, I'm yet to meet them.

During our two-day stay we also visit the nearby island of Marapa where we listen to beautiful pitch-perfect voices wafting out of a church service. Visits to Marapa Island and other villages can be arranged through the Tavanipupu staff.

Whatever you want is available – from swimming, snorkelling, kayaking, stand up paddling and island hopping, to offshore fishing in waters that are abundant with marine life fighting for your bait.

In the distance from Tavanipupu, waves can be seen breaking on numerous reefs that can be accessed only by guests of the island. If you love surfing, you may be in luck as the dynamic General Manager Sean Tiesman (when he has some rare downtime) may invite you out to one of his outstanding private breaks to catch a few. I did notice he had a quiver of surfboards strategically stored on the island.



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*“The islands around the Western Province are renowned for having some of the best dive and snorkel sites in the Pacific Rim”*

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Or you can do nothing but relax, sip sunset cocktails and drift off into utopia at the PUPU overwater bar.

Back in Honiara, before we fly to Mbabanga Island, we visit the US War Memorial at Skyline Ridge and other war sites where rusted wrecks of old tanks and planes lay to remind us of troubled times.

Mbabanga is a breezy one hour and 20 minutes away in Western Province. Try to get a window seat as the views of the uninhabited islands are spectacular. From the airport, our resort is just a 10-minute boat ride away.

On the way we pass a small island where John F. Kennedy, future President of the USA, was shipwrecked after his motor torpedo boat was ambushed and sunk by the Japanese navy on 2 August 1942.

He and 10 of his crew members survived by swimming to a small, uninhabited island – now known as Kennedy Island.

On Mbabanga Island we are staying at a resort called Fatboys, which given the amount of food we consume is more than appropriately named. The name, by the way, comes from a Dickens character (Joe) in *The Pickwick Papers*.

The islands around the Western Province are renowned for having some of the best dive and snorkel sites in the Pacific Rim. One of the dive sites at nearby Njari Island has been recorded as having the fourth largest fish count recorded anywhere. There are also many dive sites of wrecks left over from the many World War II battles.

A boat from the resort can access many classic surfing reefs close by or you can make your own way to different surf breaks via Ghizo Island.

The resort itself has only four waterfront bungalows and one self-contained unit (the full capacity is 19 guests) and all have spectacular views.

So if you want solitude, serenity, diving or snorkelling on reef or wrecks, surfing, kayaking, fishing, (local or deep sea)

and an over-water restaurant surrounded by azure-coloured water, then Fatboys will meet all expectations.

During our short but action-packed stay, we crammed as much adventure in as we possibly could, including visiting a local self-sustaining village and a market visit to Gizo town on Ghizo Island.

There we were greeted by the usual array of colourful locals, island-grown produce and copious amounts of betel nut vendors with their smiling red-stained lips. We also feasted on crayfish and taro at a barbeque on the uninhabited Kennedy Island before slipping into the extraordinarily clear water for a snorkel.

Later in the day we ventured out by boat to capture a glorious open sea sunset. As the sun slipped over the horizon and the stars began to appear it dawned on me that very soon the undiscovered Solomons will be discovered and attract the tourism numbers it deserves. •

*Photography by Daniel Resnik.*

## travel facts

### GETTING THERE

Solomon Airlines flies direct from Sydney and Brisbane to Honiara, with connections from Honiara to various cities including Gizo and Marau. [flysolomons.com](http://flysolomons.com)

### WHERE TO STAY

- Tavanipupu Island Resort: [tavanipupu.com](http://tavanipupu.com)
- Fatboys: [solomonislandsfatboys.com.au](http://solomonislandsfatboys.com.au)
- The Heritage Park Hotel Honiara: [heritageparkhotel.com.sb](http://heritageparkhotel.com.sb)

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau: [visitsolomons.com.sb](http://visitsolomons.com.sb)