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Our incredible, forgotten neighbour paradise

JANUARY 25, 2016 6:40AM



Welcome to the Solomon Islands. Picture: A TripAdvisor traveller

Fiona Harper, news.com.au



THE Solomon Islands are well-known as a tropical paradise among surfers and divers.

But for those wanting to escape to a dreamy tropical island for relaxation, rejuvenation and romance, the Solomon's are laying down the welcome mat. And even better, it's just a few hours away.

The [Solomon Islands](#) have slipped quietly under the holiday radar for years as travellers flock to better known Pacific Island holiday hot spots. Unlike her Pacific cousins Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, the Solomon's (fondly known as the Sollies) are not teeming with camera-toting tourists.

Around 20,000 travellers visit each year though visitors will likely increase with Qantas' new codeshare agreement with Solomon Airlines.

Leaving Honiara behind to explore the thousand or so islands, it quickly becomes evident that tourism is in its infancy. On the other hand, raw, natural beauty dominates.

The tropical Solomon's are a photographer's dream. Surfers, sailors, scuba divers and snorkellers feel right at home in the ridiculously turquoise sea. Water babies, this is your kind of place. It's equally popular with loved-up couples, hammock swingers, book readers and lobster lovers.



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Flying to Munda, in the Western Province. Source: *Supplied*

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GETTING AROUND

With little infrastructure beyond a couple of airstrips hacked out of forest-clad atolls there are two options for getting around the Solomon's: boat or plane. If pressed you could walk (at low tide) or swim (at high) between islands as John F Kennedy did after his ship was sunk by a Japanese destroyer during WWII but it's not recommended.

Solomon Airlines operates domestic flights throughout the archipelago and are your best bet.



Just wow. Picture: Kirkland Images Source: *Supplied*

WHERE TO STAY

Tavanipupu Island has evolved much since Norwegian traders purchased it in exchange for 10 shillings, a musket and a smoking pipe back eons ago. The 1970s built Tavanipupu Island Resort that sits among a former cocoa plantation is getting a spruce up since new management took over in late 2014.

Prince William and Kate's visit in 2012 has helped to cement the laid back resort's reputation as one of the country's best. Located in Marau Sound on the southeastern tip of Guadalcanal, getting there is a bit of an adventure.

The nine-seater aircraft lands on a grass airstrip on a neighbouring island followed by a short boat trip to Tavanipupu. Beneath the jetty, a kaleidoscopic coral garden

appears to be hovering in midair, in water with the clarity of gin. Villagers paddle past in dugout canoes, staff can't do enough to please and the only sounds are the gentle whoosh of palm fronds in the breeze.



Tavanipupu island. Picture: Fiona Harper

Oravae Cottages are low key and even more laid back, with three rustically romantic cottages making up the entire 'resort'. The main cottage hangs over the sea creating a splendid platform for launching yourself into a cobalt blue sea.

There are also a couple of tree house-type rooms built high on stilts on the water's edge. Outdoor showers (there's an indoor bathroom too if you must), beds draped in colourful mosquito nets and a communal deck with hammocks and low slung chairs make for a pretty chilled out vibe. If you're the sort who needs hot and cold entertainment on tap, organised activities and an extensive menu this is not the place for you. Actually, perhaps the Sollies are not for you at all.



Oravae Cottages. Picture: Fiona Harper

Fatboys Resort takes its name from Charles Dickens' character, Joe from the *Pickwick Papers*. Doing his best to avoid work at all costs, his life revolves mostly around eating, drinking and sleeping.

Which is how Fatboys guests are encouraged to spend their days. It's not hard considering the hotel's hub is plopped about 50 metres from the shore. Guests get there from beachfront bungalows via a boardwalk teetering over a turquoise sea teeming with marine life.

If you can lift yourself from torpid tropical lethargy, give the Fatboys' Decathalon a shot. (Warning: there's beer involved)



Fatboys Resort. Picture: Solomon Islands Visitor Bureau

WHAT TO DO

As you might have guessed, the Sollies are all about relaxation, rejuvenation and romance. Besides the water-based fun mentioned earlier, there are plenty of opportunities to get to know Solomon Islanders too.

Especially if you check into one of the homestay bungalows that are starting to pop up in villages. Usually perched atop the sand on ridiculously pretty beaches, these offer a terrific insight into village life.

The National Museum and Cultural Centre in Honiara offers an insight into the unique culture and customs of Solomon Islanders. Like currency, for example. We're talking feather money in Santa Cruz and shell money in the southeast.



A deserted sand spit in the Western Province. Picture: Kirkland Images Source: *Supplied*

WHAT TO EAT

The topography and the climate is a giveaway. The Solomons are a seafood-lovers heaven. Lobster is in abundance and appears on virtually every menu, alongside fresh-caught fish. It's cheap too.

If you can't get your fill of these succulent crustaceans, well, you're really not trying. Tropical fruits like mango, pineapple, paw paw and coconut grow wild. Tomato, avocado, chilli, yam and sweet potato are cultivated in village vegie patches.

Check out local markets like the ones in Honiara or Gizo and you'll find tables laid out with tantalising, tasty fresh produce likely to appear on hotel menus.



Solomon Islands fisherman. Picture: Fiona Harper

But really, if you're looking for things to do, look no further than Solomon Islands' national flag. Five white stars represent island groupings while the yellow line represents the sun's rays dividing the green of the land and the blue of the ocean.

Sounds like paradise? Trust us, it is.



It's a raw beauty. Picture: A TripAdvisor traveller

This story originally appeared on [Skyscanner.com.au](http://www.skyscanner.com.au).