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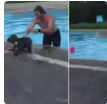
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# Solomons more than a surf destination

Tom Rabe  
AAP / February 2nd, 2018

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Dropping in to a clean South Pacific wave from a near-empty lineup, after a lunch of crayfish and a morning of scuba diving, is just one day in the Solomon Islands.



Gizo, in the Solomon Islands, has shallow reefs perfect for snorkelling and scuba diving.

When thinking "tropical surf trip", many Australians dream of Fiji, the Maldives and Indonesia, without realising an unspoiled paradise is just three hours from Brisbane.

Papatura Island, off the larger Santa Isabella Island, was my first stop. Lying at the north of the country, the area accepts uninterrupted swell from the Pacific Ocean.

Peter and Margie Blanche began building Papatura Island Retreat more or less on their own in 2008, living in a converted shipping container during the first few years.

Nestled into the trees on the beach, the peaceful retreat is made up of several wooden cabins joined together by a series of walkways just metres from the water.

A short boat ride from the resort, you've got the choice of several breaks - the best being Sardines - aptly named after the gleaming schools of fish that burst out of the water, putting on a spectacular performance as you wait for your wave.

Given the Solomons' are made up of hundreds of islands with fringing reefs and winding underwater channels, you're spoiled for choice when it comes to wave selection no matter what the wind, tide and swell direction is doing.

x

In saying that, a flat day is a flat day, and that's more or less what we encountered on our first morning.

While the waves weren't going off, there were moments when I watched the shape of the small swell move over the reef and realised we were in the right spot.

The place had good bone structure, we'd just caught it on a bad day.

While there were a few fun waves to be had, we settled for a relaxing afternoon back on the island.

A few of the crew decided to doze off in a hammock over the water while others SUP'd in the lagoon.

I got myself well acquainted with the resort dogs Kumma and Zoli, named after two other local breaks.

They trot up and down the beach inspecting small hermit crabs or washed up coconuts, cool off in the water and sleep under the shade of palms in the cool sand.

While it was tempting to live like a resort dog for the week, the group was anxious to find some waves and our second day delivered some fun.

The right tide and wind meant the Sardines was clean, and with only a few other surfers from our island in the water, there were plenty of nice right-handers to go around.

Another day of surfing off Papatura and we set off for Gizo in the Western Province.

Fatboys Resort was our home for three nights, though I ate enough crayfish at the resort's beautiful over-water restaurant to last me a year.

Similarly to Papatara, empty lineups are just a short boat ride away.

We surfed at Paelonghi, a long right that breaks a few hundred metres off a near-deserted beach.

After a quick takeoff, the wave drains over the shallow reef, producing a clean, hollow ride.

While I'd spent the morning scuba diving on Gizo's stunning reefs, I wasn't exactly thrilled to be reacquainted with the coral for a few violent seconds after mistiming a drop.

As with most tropical surf destinations, booties are recommended as the reef is sharp in areas and getting washed over it can leave a lasting impression.

While I jumped at the chance to leave my wetsuit in Sydney for some clean Pacific waves, I didn't realise what else the islands would offer.

The diving and snorkelling in the Solomons' is world class, offering some amazing experiences to surfers on a flat day or even as an alternative after a week of paddling.

Whether you've travelled to the "happy isles" for the surf, the diving or a tropical getaway, it's also impossible to avoid the history scattered across the some 900 islands that make up the country.

Rusted relics of World War Two are dotted around the place - sunken ships and bullet ridden aircraft lie beneath the warm water, sharing the colourful reef with stunning marine life.

The grass airstrips your surfboard-laden light plane lands on were most likely built by Japanese forces, while spent shell casings fired in anger more than 70 years ago have been repurposed as flower pots and ashtrays.

The solid waves on offer throughout the country mean the Solomon Island's could easily be classified as an amazing "surf destination," but that would be selling it short.

IF YOU GO

**GETTING THERE:** Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, is just over a three hour flight from Brisbane . Most smaller islands and resorts are within an hour's flight on a light aircraft.

Solomon Airlines flies between Brisbane and Honiara four times a week for around \$A500 or \$A550 return.

#### STAYING THERE:

**Papatura Island Retreat:** The retreat is about an hour's flight from Honiara. It offers a range of standard, surfing or fishing packages. The surf package is \$A65 per day and includes fuel, driver for two surfs per day. For more, visit [papatura.com](http://papatura.com)

**Fatboys Resort:** Fatboys Resort, on Babanga Island, is a 10-minute boat ride from Gizo airport. A couples bungalow costs around \$A220 per night.

For more, visit [solomonislandsfatboys.com.au](http://solomonislandsfatboys.com.au)

**PLAYING THERE:** Most resorts or retreats offer surfing or fishing options for guests. It's important to bring your own surfboards and gear, as many resorts don't have a lot on offer.

**Dive Gizo** is the only PADI certified facility on Gizo Island. Friendly staff will guide you through a fantastic variety of dives and also provide an authentic seafood lunch.

For other activities in the Solomon Islands, check out [visitsolomons.com.sb](http://visitsolomons.com.sb)



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