



Para, para, paradise...

PASSING THROUGH THE 'PASSAGE OF THE TRIGGER FISH'

Words and Pictures **The Bondi Travel Bug**

The Solomon Islands is an archipelago of 922 islands in the southern Pacific Ocean, northeast of Australia between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. One of these islands is Tavanipupu, located off the southeast coast of Guadalcanal between Towara'o Island and Marapa Island in Marua Sound. The name Tavanipupu was enough for my ears to prick up - translated to English it actually means 'passage of the trigger fish'.

It is less than three hours flying time from Sydney to Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, so when we arrived we were still feeling relatively fresh. From Honiara we were transported by boat to the Tavanipupu Island Resort, which was a great experience and took a few hours, giving us the opportunity to see many of the uninhabited islands on the way. You can also opt to fly and be in nirvana seamlessly in 20 minutes.

The resort is situated on 13 luscious palm-filled hectares and is surrounded by coral reefs the colour of a digitally enhanced travel brochure photo.

We disembarked from our boat onto a pier that juts out about 100 metres over the aquamarine water below. We didn't know where to look as electric blue and multi-coloured

parrotfish fought for our attention.

Minutes later we were shown our deluxe bungalow. There are just 11 bungalows on the island, each of which falls into one of three different classes - family, deluxe or island bungalows - plus a 'royal' bungalow. They are all freestanding, spacious and luxurious.

By now it was quite clear to me why the world's most loved royal couple, Prince William and Princess Kate, chose to stay a night here when they were on their last Southern Hemisphere tour. And it's no surprise that nine months after their magical stay a royal son arrived. I wish I was a young gecko on the ceiling that night.

Hours later, after some island exploring, swimming and snorkelling in fish-filled coral gardens only metres offshore, we gorged on a superb lunch of freshly caught seafood, which included an abundance of lobster and locally grown produce.

After lunch, strategically placed hammocks outside our bungalows beckoned us over for a blissful nap with only the gentle sounds of coconut leaves fluttering in the balmy breeze to distract us.

The island can only accommodate up to 32 guests. It's the ideal island for romantic getaways, singles'

sojourns, family fun, or getting away with a group of your mates. With so many Australians getting married offshore, and given that the Solomons is so close to home, it's the perfect location to get hitched. Conveniently, the entire island can be booked for such an occasion.

It's not only weddings that they're happy to host either. Any special occasions can be arranged. Tavanipupu would undoubtedly be an epic island for a company to bring its staff for a conference or team building exercise (or maybe even the next Beast Christmas party).

Like most Pacific Islands, the local staff - with their infectious smiles, innocence and bare feet - ensure your stay is one long remembered. Only a small number of staff live on the island, so at the end of day or late into the night the non-resident workers get into their traditional dugout canoes and paddle to their nearby island homes.

In terms of recreational activities, everything from snorkelling to kayaking, stand up paddling to island hopping, and even offshore angling in seas festooned with fish (they're literally fighting each other for your bait) is available to resort guests.

If you love surfing you're in luck too, as there are no crowds and the surf is sensational (well it was for me, at least). The waves generally come in at the one to one and a half metre range, perfectly offshore, and the water is crystal clear. And did I mention there are no crowds?

From Tavanipupu you can actually see the waves breaking on numerous reefs in the distance, and they can only be accessed by guests of the island.

Of course, recreational activities aren't compulsory. You can happily choose to do nothing but relax and sip cocktails at one the gorgeous overwater bars while the sun turns on another memorable display.

The word paradise is used too loosely these days, but that's exactly what this secluded Solomon Island was. There's simply no other way to describe it.

How To Book

www.ftysolomons.com

Solomon Islands Information

www.visitsolomons.com.sb