

SOLOMON ISLANDS

# Romance Redefined



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Who said romance had to be five-star resorts, fancy restaurants and people waiting on your hand and foot? In the Solomon Islands, you'll find a destination that happily breaks this mould. Indeed it's a place made for couples who much prefer their travel raw and real, rather than glamorous and glitzy.

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## MAGNIFICENT MAROVO LAGOON

The Solomon Islands provides a natural wonderland for couples to explore. One of its gems is the Marovo Lagoon. More than 100 kilometres long, this stunning expanse of water is the largest saltwater lagoon in the world.

Several guesthouses and eco-lodges are dotted along its edges, each one accessible by banana boat, the most common form of transport in the Solomons.

The largest property is Uepi Island Resort, which gives water-loving couples instant access to a huge variety of spectacular snorkelling and diving spots, and an underwater world fizzing with sea life.

Another place where couples can rest their head is the aptly named Wilderness Lodge located the Gatokae end of the lagoon. The accommodation is simple, all your meals are included, and they have an array of activities, including spearfishing, free-diving, snorkelling, scuba-diving and hiking.

## STEP INTO A SLICE OF HISTORY

During the Second World War, the Solomon Islands were in the centre of strategic supply lines for the Allies and became a staging point for future Japanese expansion into the South Pacific. The result was six months of some of the war's most vicious battles.

As a couple, you don't have to be big history buffs to be moved by the incredible bravery of the islanders, who risked their lives to be the ears and eyes of the allies, or saddened by the lives lost by so many men on both sides.

The islands are littered with war relics, both underwater and on land. Many remains have been collected at the Vilu War Museum, a clearing in the jungle. There are a couple of 75mm field guns captured from the Japanese and an assortment of aircraft, including Corsairs and Wildcats, all bearing the wounds of battle or an abrupt return to earth. It is also home to plaques commemorating the service of the Americans, Australians and New Zealanders who fought there.

## DIVERS' PARADISE

Getting out into nature is the name of the game for visiting couples and one of the very best reasons to come to the Solomons is for the diving. If you're not qualified or don't have any prior diving experience, there's no need to worry. Local operators run introductory courses that will have both of you descending to 18 metres in next to no time.

The hundreds of sunken wreckages from the war battles strewn throughout the waters of the Solomon Islands, along with the circulation and convergence of intense sub-tropical ocean currents, have shaped and created amazing underwater terrain, creating spectacular experiences for both snorkellers and divers.

As well as the artificial reefs of ships, aircraft and landing barges, there are gigantic caverns, passages, ledges, pinnacles and coral reef gardens to be explored in sites ranging from shallow lagoons to drop-offs in excess of 600 metres.

Average visibility is about 15 metres, and the average water temperature is about 27 degrees Celsius. This pristine and magical underwater playground is home to an abundance of reef fish, turtles, squid and bigger fish such as sharks, barracuda and eagle rays, and has opportunities for both novices and experienced divers.



## Tying the knot

While there have been discussions about the possibility of amending the current Solomon Islands Matrimony Law - to allow overseas couples to marry in the Solomon Islands and have their weddings legally recognised in their country of origin - at time of printing, this law remains the same.

## WATCH THEM FLY

If you're thinking romance, watching birds probably isn't the first thing that springs to mind. But for nature lovers, the Solomon Islands is considered one of the richest endemic bird areas in the world. About 65 bird species are found nowhere else on the planet. There are a number of local bird-watching operators and many international tours for enthusiasts to choose from.

The fearful owl, the steel blue flycatcher and the chestnut-bellied imperial pigeon are some of these peculiarly named birds that couples are likely to spot in their natural, largely untouched forested habitat.

## PLACES TO STAY

### Tavanipupu Island Resort

Situated in Marua Sound, a 30-minute flight east of Honiara, Tavanipupu is considered the Solomon's most luxurious resort and a top spot for couples. Pristine bungalows, jetties and manicured lawns compliment beautiful natural surrounds, exuding opulence and understated luxury. The resort is also famous for hosting the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (Wills and Kate).

There is so much for active visitors to do, including fishing and diving, boat trips to deserted islands, village visits and bike tours. Kayaks and

stand-up paddleboards are available at the main beach, and you can even test your skill in one of the native dugout canoes.

All that exercise needs fuel, and the resort prides itself on local seafood. Lobster, prawns, mud crabs and fish are all accompanied by fresh vegetables from the resort's gardens.

### Fatboys Resort

Anywhere with a hammock in the bar has to be pretty cool, right? After a 10-minute boat trip from the Nusa Tupe airstrip, it's immediately evident that this is a special place.

The main bure is built over the water and accommodates the reception area, office, kitchen, restaurant, a horseshoe bar and a seating area. Constructed from local hardwood with a traditional thatch-style roof, Fatboys is one of those gems found in the tropics that screams relax!

A quiver of surfboards slung under the roof, a stack of fishing rods in the corner and a deck piled high with windsurfers, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards hint at things to do, once you're 'tired' of all that relaxing.

The private quarters are a collection of beachfront and hilltop bures, all with ceiling fans, mosquito nets and verandas. Couples can book the Honeymoon Bungalows, which have an ensuite bathroom with hot water, a queen-size bed and large over-ocean verandas that boast panoramic ocean views. There's not much more you could ask for! 🌸



TAVANIPUPU ISLAND RESORT



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