



DESTINATION
SOLOMON
ISLANDS

Paradise found in Uepi Island.

By Lee Czerniak, photographs by Peter Pinnock.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

a Hidden Paradise

These islands were named by a Spanish explorer, Alvaro de Mendaña de Neira, who, on finding alluvial gold on Guadalcanal in 1568, believed he had found the biblical King Solomon's source of gold.

Pure 'gold' is just what the Solomon Islands are. Here you will find something more precious than gold. The beauty of untouched tropical forests, the majesty of the mountains as they flow down to pristine beaches into the aqua blue of the ocean surrounding these islands. Here the natural underwater wonder is uniquely Solomon Islands. Dive sites that range from shallow lagoons to drop-offs in excess of 600m. With over 992 islands to explore you will discover that these islands have more to offer than you could imagine.

History has played a big part in creating this underwater playground. In 1942, World War II's bloodiest and longest campaign saw a loss of nearly 38,000 lives and was to be the turning point of the war in the Pacific. Battle sites and relics of the war can be found throughout the Solomon Islands both below and above the water. Seeing this history you will appreciate what our ANZACs and Allies went through to protect Australia, New Zealand and the surrounding Pacific.

Honiara, on Guadalcanal, is the capital

of the Solomon Islands and it's from here you leave to venture to some of the outer destinations. But before you leave Honiara, you need to visit the Central Market and experience a typical Melanesian market. It is vibrant and full of the colour of the community. The range of fruit and vegetables are what all travellers to the tropics dream of. You can just stand there and soak up the atmosphere, chatting with the locals while enjoying the fresh coconut water. Local crafts are also in abundance with a chance to pick up some great souvenirs.

Within close proximity to Honiara there are tropical rainforests with waterfalls, including lovely natural pools that will refresh you for your journey back to the hustle and bustle of Honiara's city life.

To dive in these waters and see some of the wartime relics is extraordinary as you are taken back into a history that is hard to comprehend, as today these are rather tranquil islands but with a fascinating past. You will see complete aircraft, ships, and tanks, and still today these are not all mapped and located.

With crystal clear waters and an abundance of World War II history there is an endless variety of dive sites for you to choose from, with the opportunity to discover this new world and a marine life that is more than bountiful. It's precious and untouched – how our oceans should be.

Honiara – the Floridas & Iron Bottom Sound

Iron Bottom Sound is the resting place of countless Japanese and American ships, planes and landing craft all sunk during various WWII battles. These include the USS *Aaron Ward* and Japanese sea planes. There is also land-based diving at Bonegi Beach, which includes the *Hirokawa Maru*. There are a variety of hard and soft corals providing vibrant marine life. An hour by boat across from Honiara are the Nggela Islands, more commonly known as the Florida Islands. Tulagi was once the capital and was used as a base during the WWII – in particular for the Australians and New Zealanders serving here. There are a number of wreck dive sites here as well as some great reef diving.

Gizo

Here you will discover some of the most exciting dives only a short boat ride away, and all in sheltered waters. The marine life is abundant and of course you will encounter wrecks here including American planes such as the Hellcat and Corsair. The reefs are spectacular and in the north-western tip of Gizo where the oceanic currents merge you will meet up with big fish life as well as small.

Munda Area

Here is the jumping-off point for some of the most amazing diving from wall drop-offs to sheltered lagoons. This is where some of the local sharks patrol, where eagle rays dance in sunlight and barracuda stand century. The micro fans and their critters will keep the macro photographer enchanted for hours. The Cave is a unique site accessed through mangroves where you enter a water pool via a shaft, giving photographers their dream opportunity with lighting that ignites the subject, giving even the amateur photographer a chance to capture some extraordinary results. You will also encounter wrecks in this area – one of these being a dive bomber.

Western Marovo (Uepi Island)

Marovo Lagoon is a natural underwater wonder. Diving this area is usually done from Uepi Island Resort on the north-western edge of the lagoon. This is where the lagoon slips into the deeper waters of the passage known as the Slot and here you will enjoy large schools of feeding fish.

Eastern Marovo (Gatakae)

At the south-eastern end of Marovo Lagoon lies Gatakae Island, known as the gateway to Marovo. With



Above: Plenty of wrecks to explore. Below: Fish life abounds.



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DIV038



Growth is abundant.

the combination of open ocean and lagoon you are treated to a variety of underwater terrain and marine life. Male Male Island lends itself to beautiful soft corals and Mbulo gives you gigantic fan corals. Cathedral's massive caverns produce fabulous lighting with the sun shining in through inland waterways and pools.

To visit The Solomon Islands is to take a step back in time, where you can enjoy freedom away from the fast-paced way of life we all seem to be caught up in these days. Put your cell phone away and commune with the beauty of lush tropical islands set in clear blue waters. Slip into warm tropical waters, explore the marine life and enjoy the added luxury of doing some great wreck dives while you are at it. There is abundant culture and a history to discover. You also will realise you have only just touched on these islands and they will be beckoning you back again. This is a hidden paradise both above the water and below.

<http://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/>
www.peterpinnock.com

INFO-SNIPPET

Location: North-east of Australia

Day time temperature: 28–32°C

Water temperature: 28–30°C

Language: English and Pidgin English

Currency: Solomon Dollar

Five airlines currently provide regular scheduled services into Honiara. Solomon Airlines, Virgin Australia, Fiji Airways, Air Niugini and Air Vanuatu all provide international flights to the Solomons.

Honiara International Airport on the island of Guadalcanal is the only international airport in the Solomon Islands and the main port of arrival. One of the best and most convenient ways to get around is by air. Solomon Airlines' domestic wing offers scheduled flights to about 20 airstrips around the country. Domestic flights can be heavily booked so it can pay to reserve well in advance.



So Solomons, So Different!



Explore the hidden paradise of the South Pacific, an archipelago comprising a vast group of 992 breathtaking tropical islands. Feel the spirit of adventure and enjoy your own special piece of paradise - dive, fish, surf, hike, kayak or simply relax and discover a culture with a welcoming smile.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau
PO Box 321, Mendana Avenue, Honiara, Solomon Islands
call (677) 22442 or email info@sivb.com.sb

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