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PACIFIC'S MOST INFORMATIVE DIVE MAGAZINE

DIVE

PACIFIC

**The sex life
of sharks:
What do
we know?**



Solomons Dive Festival: Extraordinary photo gallery

**Poor Knights:
Rich days of
wonder**

**Borneo:
What lies
beneath?**

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your regular
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New career?**

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Lunch is served by our three chefs for the kastom lunch on Hopei Island

Report on the Solomons Dive Festival 2017

by Gilbert Peterson

We're tearing across the bay in a freshening breeze, 20 of us in our tropical finery, dressed to the nines for the closing cocktail hour on board the live-aboard, MV Taka. It's Friday, and the Solomon Islands Dive Festival is winding down. For the first time on the trip, the wind is getting up.

The pair of 180HP Honda outboards push the inflatable along at a fast pace. Everyone's animated; anticipation palpable. Spray lashes out and polythene sidewalls come down in a bid to keep a semblance of dryness about us. We come alongside the live-aboard, our craft hefting and yawing, banging against the steel of the ship's hull. But deftly we all step on board the mother ship, to waiting cocktails – a special brew made up,

we're told, of a third vodka, a third rum and a third coconut, lime and ice. Delicious, and somewhat less lethal than it may sound.

The captain welcomes us again, though we've all been on board this ship overnight earlier in the week. Ship operation's director, Adam, is at his gregarious best. The hors d'oeuvres are excellent, as befits the occasion. Time for more lively chatter. High spirits all round. Everyone is reliving the week's adventure highlights.

The formal part of the evening is to be the announcement of the winners of the festival's photo competition. We're told the prizes in advance; big generous packages, including flights from Australia, and domestically, courtesy of Solomon Airways, plus

full accommodation and week-long diving. Or a stay on the MV Taka. Expectation levels rise further. Alicia Shaw wins the coveted top award for her photo of a cameraman in the hold of the Japanese wreck, Toa Maru. (*The photo is on the cover of this edition of Dive.*) Mike Scotland wins too. (*Some of his photos follow.*)

The week long Dive Festival has been





see how seeing and doing more could be fitted in, in the allotted time. The 'more' sentiment expressed regret we couldn't stay longer, and will have to return.

'More' in the island context also takes on an element of intrusion of city borne stress. Here, where island time is the way of life, and where the island pace of things is an inherent part of the festival value and experience, time out is to be cherished. But should slowing down seem unachievable in this quick turnaround of a total of six days, at least we owe it to this paradise to take out some of the time to soak up this soft beauty, and the stories of its wild, violent history.

a full on success. A succession of dive opportunities were interspersed from day one with authoritative presentations on things like the sex life of sharks (see p 23), how to take better photos underwater, aspects of marine biology, and updates on health & safety issues presented on behalf of DAN.

For the festival we've also been hosted to several special dinners, with traditional cultural performances and 'kastom singing,' lunch at remote Hopei Island prepared in

the customary way over hot rocks, visited a WWII museum, and taken on a visit to Skull Island by the great great grandson of one of the last men to have had his skull preserved there. (see note below.)

Most of all, in the single six day spell, we've had our fill of epic dives, up to four a day: on reefs, walls, rock fall drop offs, to two ship wrecks and two aircraft. Nearly everyone seems very satisfied. A couple say they want more. No one disagrees. Who wouldn't want more? But its hard to

The Dive Itinerary

At Gizo

Day One: Toa Maru x 2, and Grand Central Station

Day Two: The Pinnacles, and No Tree Island

Day Three: **MV Taka** - Mbigo mbigo

At Munda

Day Four: Kashi Maru, The Lighthouse, Alice in Wonderland (upside down aircraft wreck)

Day Five: Barrys Breakfast and reef, and Hapi Reef

Who are these people?



Amongst these professionals I feel like a novice. Mike has done over 5000 dives; Stan is a Dive Instructor with 30 + years' experience; our guides, Sammy at Dive Gizo, at Dive Munda, and Carmen, on board the MV Taka are highly proficient dive instructors with highly honed people skills. My thanks to Danny and Kerrie Kennedy of Dive Gizo. Alicia Shaw and Belinda Judson are great photographers, (as you can see on these pages), Australians Deborah and Simon are professional dive writers and photographers with the website Dive Planit; David is on assignment from the US for Wreck Diving magazine; Jonathan and Glenn, publishers and underwater photographers from Singapore.



On behalf of the Dive Festival...

CEO of the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau, Josefa 'Jo' Tuamoto, thanked everyone for coming, especially Fiona Teama and Belinda Botha, who were responsible for organising the festival. He noted the event wasn't going for big numbers. "Our approach is to manage our growth," he said. "You have to be invited to come to the Solomon Islands."



Rudder of the Toa Maru



Machine gun emplacement at the Peter Joseph WWII Museum at Munda

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Sunga Boso explains shell money in front of the skull of his great great grandfather

The visit to Skull Island

Sunga Boso hosted our visit to Skull Island and explained it is the burial ground of warriors. Inside the log crypt the skulls are only of chiefs and kings, he said. The last chief's skull to be interred was in 1934, pointing out his skull, which is that of his great, great grandfather. This was part of a tradition during the times of headhunting and cannibalism, he said, and the keeping of the skulls in this way was to keep their memory, and in a way our visit here paid them a form of respect.

When the last person who knew how to remove the skull from the body for this form of interment dies in 1934, the practice died with him. Shell money used to be placed here as well but a lot of it has been stolen.



Dive Munda dive shop manager, "Sunga" Osborne Boso (left) and Dive Munda SSI Instructor, Zara Bedford. Dive Munda won the SICCI 'Tourism Business of the Year' award presented at Honiara's Coral Seas Resort & Casino.

Dive Munda takes out Solomon's 'Tourism Business of the Year' Award


The Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) has just presented Dive Munda its inaugural 'Tourism Business of the Year' Award in recognition of the role the Solomon Islands' diving sector plays in attracting international visitors.

Dive Munda's owner/operator Belinda Botha was an organiser of the Dive Festival and one of the hosts. She said she and her team were honoured and humbled to be the first company to receive the newly inaugurated award. "This award will not only help Dive Munda promote the Solomon Islands as a prime dive destination worldwide, it will also help our people and communities to develop and prosper," she said.

"Most importantly, it gives us a voice to continue to advocate the importance of sustainable dive tourism, ocean conservation and coral reef protection in a pristine, untouched and unspoilt destination."

Over recent months Dive Munda has won a string of prominent awards.





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Solomon Islands Dive Fest Photo Gallery



Soft coral garden, at Gap Out, Naru Island is one of the best dives at Gizo.

Photo Mike Scotland



Our dive guide behind a fan coral in the sapphire blue waters of Munda.

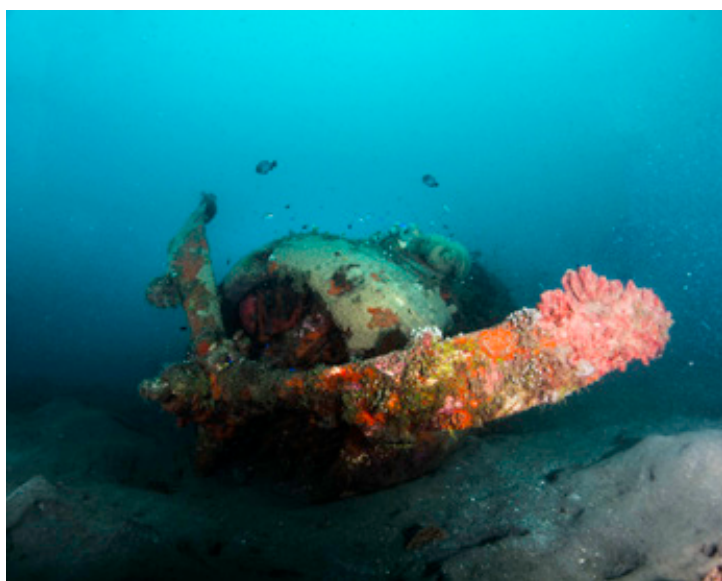
Photo: Mike Scotland



Dive guide Carmen poses near a soft coral in the pre sunset light at Mbigo Mbigo. *Photo: Mike Scotland*



Barrel sponge, Gizo. *Photo: Gilbert Peterson*



Douglas Dauntless bomber. *Photo: Belinda Judson*



Coral and seafans. *Photo: Alicia Shaw*



Blenny. *Photo: Alicia Shaw*



Turtle. *Photo: Alicia Shaw*



Douglas Dauntless bomber. *Photo: Alicia Shaw*



Photo: Alicia Shaw





Striped coral hermit crab. Photo: Belinda Judson



Fan coral. Photo: Belinda Judson

More Dive Fest photos

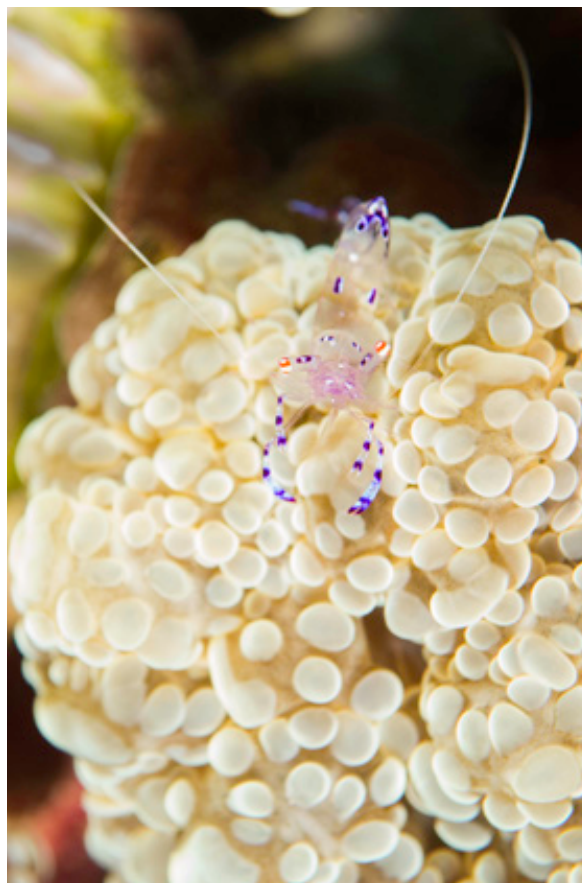


Ball anemone on plane wreck. Photo: Belinda Judson

Porcelain in the Toa Maru wreck. Photo: Belinda Judson



Purple shrimp. Photo: Belinda Judson





So Solomons, So Adventurous!

Explore the hidden paradise of the South Pacific archipelago, comprising of a vast group of 922 breathtaking tropical islands. Diving in the Solomon Islands has gained an enviable worldwide reputation that is unsurpassed.

If you are not a diver, but interested in learning, there could be no better place to discover this completely new world, than the warm crystal clear waters around the Solomon Islands. Throughout these magic islands is an endless variety of dive sites to suit all tastes and levels of experience.

Experience the abundance of World War II history, via the Solomons numerous wreck dives. Get up close to the extraordinary array of differing reef structures and bio-assemblage.

With worldclass dive sites in Honiara, The Floridas, Iron Bottom Sound, Gizo, Munda, Western Marovo and Eastern Marovo the Solomon Islands are sure to provide a dive experience like no other.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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www.visitsolomons.com.sb

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