

Simply Solomons

The Solomons have an authenticity you won't find elsewhere. Life here is simple.

Though they might seem poor in the trappings of our everyday existence, no TVs, no computers and no tablets, their islands are rich in natural beauty. It's a place that will touch your heart, where the friendly Solomon Islanders will welcome you to with open arms.

If you are looking to disconnect and reconnect then this is the place for you. Translation, not much internet. Snorkelling replaces iPads, watching the fish under your bungalow making TV forgotten, exploring Skull Island and other head hunting history better than any computer game.

You can get a taster of traditional Solomon Islands life in the capital Honiara, with a visit to Lumtohopo Village, a short drive from the centre of town, where you'll be shown how villagers cook with hot stones

and bamboo utensils, how to weave roofing from palm leaves and given a coconut to sip through a bamboo straw.

Get to Gizo

The best places to explore the authenticity of the Solomons however, are outside of the bustling capital Honiara. Head over to the Western province on a short internal flight to visit the small towns of Gizo and Munda each with their own natural rhythm. Even the inflight entertainment is authentic: you'll be glued to the window as you head over the tin roofs of Guadalcanal's scattered villages, over the turquoise ocean, with its shallow fringing reefs, and then the restful greens of the vibrant jungle landscapes.

Fatboys Resort in Gizo provides a classic example of

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Learn about traditional Solomons life at Lumtohopo Village.

Local kids cooling off at the jetty in Munda.

Snorkelling under the jetty at Fatboys Resort in Gizo.

Heading over to Kennedy Island in one of Fatboys' hobby craft vessels.



the multitude of simple Solomons pleasures to enjoy as a family. The resort's restaurant, bar and 'day room' sit out over the lagoon so you can get excited about swimming in the warm, clear waters even whilst you eat your breakfast.

You can snorkel around and under the jetty, check out the iridescent giant clams and sea anemones stuffed full of clown fish. Try your hand at stand-up paddle or paddle a kayak along the water's edge to the next resort and soak up your peaceful surroundings.

If you want to venture further afield take one of the motorised hobby craft vessels and set out across the lagoon to Kennedy Island – named after the rather famous John F. Kennedy, who was rescued here during World War II after the patrol boat he was skippering was rammed by a Japanese Destroyer. The

island is uninhabited but you'll find a large picnic area surrounded by palm trees and the island is circled by a white sandy beach. There's a small shrine to Kennedy on the island, built by local Eroni Kumana, who helped in the famous rescue. The snorkelling here is amazing: big boulder corals decorated with Christmas tree worms, the fragile reefs brimming with colourful little inhabitants and big territorial damsels and graceful batfish.

Nearby, the appropriately named Sandy Bar is also worthy of a little expedition in the hobby craft. A coral reef runs the full length of one side of this low sandy island and it's the perfect place to 'wine down' and enjoy the sunset.

Back at Fatboys, enjoy a family game of pool or watch the reef sharks just off the wharf vying for

OAWK TIPS

- The power outlets and voltage are the same in the Solomons as Australia. No power adaptors needed.
- Whilst not common in the western provinces, mosquito born disease is a feature of the Solomon Islands. See your doctor first for the appropriate information and be sensible with mozzie protection.
- Pidgin is the common language between all cultural groups and English is taught in school. You will be able to communicate with every one you meet, with most speaking good English.



scraps as chef fillets the freshly caught fish, soon to be served as your family dinner.

With 992 islands, and 300 inhabited, the waterways here are the islands' highways. Everywhere you visit, you're surrounded by seas so blue and transparent that the coral reefs and sea life are visible as you skim on your way to the next destination.

Marvellous Munda

Munda is another place of simple pleasures that makes a great base for some of the many tours in the Western Province.

You don't have to travel far to meet the locals in Munda, you'll find them most days just outside the entrance of Agnes Gateway Hotel, where the market is located. The market is busiest on Fridays, when villagers from the outer islands come to sell their produce, honing in on this small centre in their dugout canoes.

Munda is one of the best places to explore some of the World War II artefacts scattered throughout the whole Solomon's archipelago. Visit the two anti-aircraft guns now silent in a quiet stretch of jungle along the side of Munda's massive airstrip – itself a relic of the war that was fought in the skies and on the seas of the Pacific. Nearby Peter Joseph War Museum has an array of guns, shells, bullets, helmets, mess tins and a string of dog tags, a poignant reminder of the human cost of such conflict. The museum is named after the first dog tag found in this collection. But then there's Alfie's jeep, assembled



The chief's grandson picks out some betel nuts for us

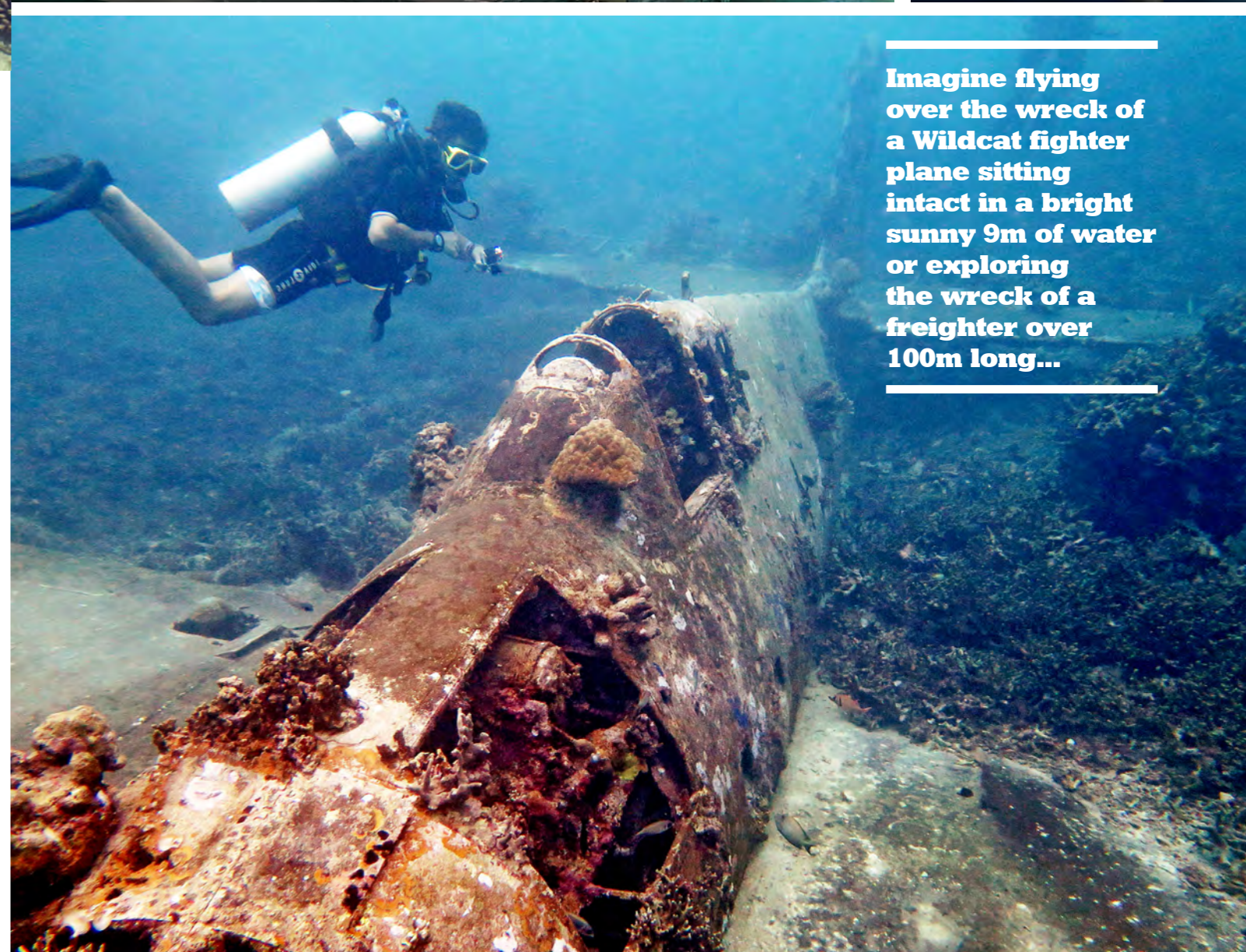


Anemones stuffed full of clownfish!

entirely (except for the distributor cap) from bits of American army JEEPs (Just Enough Essential Parts) that Alfie found scattered throughout the jungle and in the disposal pits where the Allies buried the 'useless' gear they chose to leave behind.

Of course, many of the Solomon's World War II relics lie submerged. Some in the depths of Iron Bottom Sound, named for the hundred or so Allied and Japanese ships of every type that line the seabed. But there are many relics even at snorkelable depths. You can snorkel over fighter planes lying just below the surface sitting upright and completely intact atop a pretty reef – there's one very close to Fatboys Resort in fact.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
The Honeymoon Suite at Fatboys Resort.
Pretty coral reefs surround the islands near Munda.
Fatboys Resort, Gizo
Wildcat fighter plane near Gizo.



Imagine flying over the wreck of a Wildcat fighter plane sitting intact in a bright sunny 9m of water or exploring the wreck of a freighter over 100m long...

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:
Alfie and his WWII JEEP.
Watching the sunset at
Agnes Gateway Hotel.
Learn about the Solomons'
head hunting days with a
trip to Skull Island.



Where To Stay

Gizo. Fatboys Resort is a small complex of one and two-bedroom waterfront bungalows, located a 15-minute boat ride away from the airport, surrounded by white sandy beaches and coral gardens.

Munda. Agnes Gateway Hotel is a 5-minute walk from the airport and overlooks a beautiful turquoise lagoon.

Titiru Eco Lodge, Rendova Island. New over water family bungalows are due to be finished in August this year.

Honiara. Heritage Park Hotel is 4-star hotel with fine dining and swimming pool.

Getting There

Solomon Airlines fly to Honiara four times weekly from Brisbane. It's a short 3-hour trip with full on board service.

More Information

visitsolomons.com.sb

The term wreck diving always conjures up images of dark, deep and dangerous silhouettes of maritime disaster, but many of the wrecks in the Solomon's are accessible snorkelling. Imagine flying over a Wildcat fighter plane sitting intact in a bright sunny 9m of water, or exploring the wreck of a freighter over 100m long – now looking more like a reef. There are plenty of natural coral reefs too, teeming with either shoals of colourful reef fish or, like Barry's Breakfast in Munda with big schools of barracuda and silver Jacks.

Skull Island

Another boat trip from Munda that will intrigue the kids is to Skull Island which provides a glimpse into the archipelago's dark past of inter-island tribal warfare. There are three stone statues here too: tribute to the three goddesses of the sea who would be implored to whisk up the sea to foil the attacks of marauding invaders. One thing you'll learn when you take a guided tour like this, is that the Solomon

Islanders are fantastic storytellers – and they don't let the truth get in the way of a good yarn, so you may hear a few different versions of the same story – depending on who's available to guide you on the day.

The tour usually includes a swim and snorkel on one of the many nearby deserted islands and a spot of beachcombing for World War II paraphernalia still being washed up from local wrecks.

Munda's not short of grown-up entertainment either, such as a sunset barbecue cruise with a glass or two of the local Sol brew, or the reasonably priced New Zealand and Aussie wines. Those feeling in the mood can even 'kick on' and head down to Munda's Kava Bar – the local nightclub which on weekends runs until the early hours.

So, if you're over commercial tourism and ready to swap a crowded theme park for a simple, south Pacific archipelago in its natural state – this is the place, simply Solomons.

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