



World War II History Comes Alive In The Solomon Islands

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Todd Sturm

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Australia has been lucky in that our shores have rarely seen the horrors of military conflict.

But while the battle scars of World War II are still visible at the Top End, we can be thankful that our Australian lands, and the people here at home never had to endure the tragic price of a large-scale military campaign or violent hand-to-hand conflict.

Still, it's easy to forget, that in the dark days of the early 1940s, Australia was very much under threat. The drum beat of war grew closer as the Japanese marched, and sailed, ever closer to Queensland, as they conquered one Pacific island after another.

For those who love history, you don't have to travel far to visit historic World War II battle

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sites, where you can see up close the remnants and artefacts of violent land and sea battles.



The Solomon Islands will always remember

History On Our Doorstep

Perhaps nowhere does World War II come alive more, than in the Solomon Islands, a place more important and consequential to Australians than most people realise – and it's all just a three-hour flight from Brisbane.

The Solomon Islands saw some of the fiercest fighting during World War II, and it was here, with strong resistance from Australian and American forces that the Japanese were pushed back for the first time. The Solomon Islands fight was a turning point as the slow retreat of Japanese forces began.

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Today, evidence of the many Solomon Islands battles can be seen on land and beneath the warm blue waters of the Coral Sea. In fact, HMAS Canberra lies in these very waters, in what is today known as Iron Bottom Sound.

Located on the north shore of Guadalcanal Island, Iron Bottom Sound is the final resting place for dozens of destroyers, military ships, submarines and even aircraft.

Even if you don't see artefacts up close, the feeling that something great took place here is real. History seems to hang in the air.



Dive Iron Bottom Sound to explore historic war relics

Here are some of the top World War II sights and attractions to visit in the Solomon Islands:

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What is today the international airport, was once the centre of the great battle for Guadalcanal. Today, reminders include the propeller from a Japanese Zero, one of which hangs in the airport's lounge.

Outside you'll find a Japanese 75mm gun, and just a two-minute walk away, a control tower from 1943 and memorial to the Battle of Bloody Ridge.

Bloody Ridge

Some of the heaviest fighting in the Guadalcanal campaign took place at Bloody Ridge. Within walking distance from the airport, you can find foxholes and barbed wire erected during the battle.

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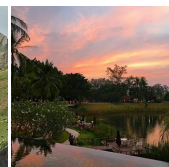
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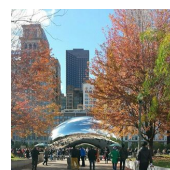
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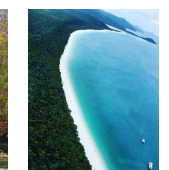
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There are numerous war relics on land too

Relics of Betikama

Just west of the airport, on the other side of Lunga River, sits Betikama School. This was the sight of a US military camp where relics from both sides can be seen.

Other sights of interest include a 75mm Japanese mountain gun and artillery pieces, an American Airacobra P-400 fighter plane and a massive Bren gun carrier.

Tulagi

Situated just north of Guadalcanal is the island of Tulagi. History buffs will find Japanese tunnels and the old Japanese military and refuelling base.

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The waters just off Tulagi hold many air and naval attractions too, some of which provide excellent scuba diving opportunities.

Iron Bottom Sound

If you enjoy scuba diving, there's plenty to see underwater. The waters to the north of Guadalcanal are filled with American and Japanese fighter planes, as well as numerous ships.

Scuba diving tours take visitors to all the top sights and underwater attractions.



Keep an eye out for old Japanese 75mm guns

Gizo and 'Kennedy Island'

Local 'Coastwatchers' hid within the jungles, reporting to the allies on Japanese movements

during the war. They were witness to the many battles that took place in the Western Provinces of the Solomon Islands, the most significant of which were around Gizo Island, and Munda on the island of New Georgia.

There's an informal museum in Munda featuring personal as well as military artefacts from soldiers. Just off Gizo Island, you'll find the famous 'Kennedy Island' where John F. Kennedy was marooned after his PT109 patrol boat was cut in half by a Japanese destroyer.

Guadalcanal Memorial

Located on a hill overlooking Honiara, the Guadalcanal American Memorial features tributes to the fallen as well as insightful information on the battle, along with a list of the ships lost in the waters below. The four directional walls face the major battle areas during the 1942-1943 conflict.

Getting there

Getting to the Solomon Islands is easy. The capital city, Honiara is just a three-hour flight from Brisbane, or 3.5-hours from Sydney. Honiara is the country's only international airport.

From there, Solomon Airlines offers connections to dozens of island destinations, including Gizo and Munda in the Western Provinces and Marau on the eastern shores of Guadalcanal.

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About Todd Sturm

For more information please phone 1800 017 849.

I currently live in Brisbane, Australia.

No matter where my travels take me, I enjoy experiencing each destination from the perspective of the locals.

Some of my favourite attractions include historic sites, national parks and architectural landmarks.

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