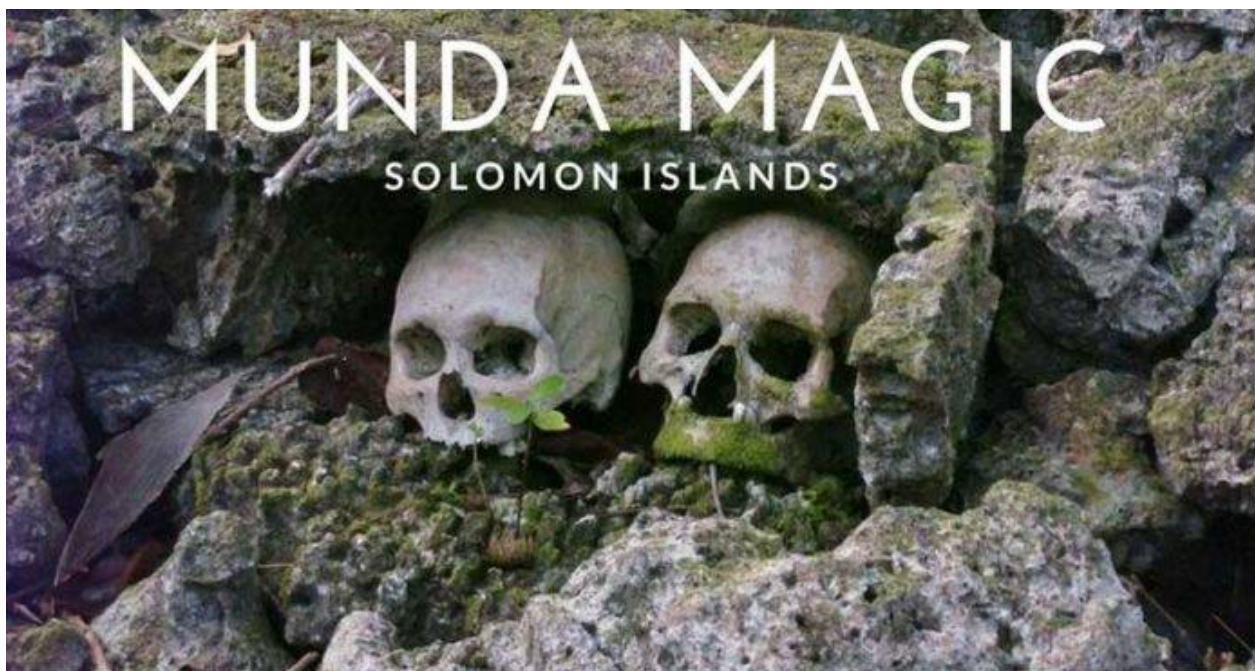


MUNDA MAGIC | SOLOMON ISLANDS DIVING

By **Maria Visconti** - August 26, 2016



Photos: Maria Visconti

Munda is our destination, the largest settlement on the island of New Georgia in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. And a top Solomon Islands diving spot.

SOLOMON AIRLINES JOYRIDE





The flight from Honiara, capital of the Solomon Islands, can easily be classified as a joyride.

Solomon Airlines' sleek Dash-8s glide over a seascape of islands and lagoons, crescents of turquoise waters and expanses of ultramarine blue.

From the comfort of our leather seats the panorama below unfolds like a brilliant map.

This flight gives you a feeling of 'real' flying, when you can see where you are going in stark contrast to the jumbo jets that –as wonderful as they are- cocoon the passengers in a bubble so far up the sky that only sky and clouds are visible.

MUNDA MAGIC

Touching down at Munda airstrip is exhilarating; descending from the plane onto the tarmac is, again, reminiscent of the early days of flying.

There aren't any air-conditioned air bridges here, just a blast of warm tropical air hitting you on the face, a warm welcome from the locals and a slow walk to the hotel.

AGNES GATEWAY HOTEL



Yes, [Agnes Gateway Hotel](#) is a five-minute walk from the airstrip and the gateway to a Pacific experience.

Bouganvillea cascades down the front, palms sway in the breeze and trees with the most unusual fruits hanging like tennis balls from branches, welcome visitors.

A path of crushed coral link the bungalows and of course the first thing one does is dump the bags and head for the waters' edge where sail boats with foreign flags bob up and down against a lavender sky.

SOLOMON ISLANDS DIVING

Dutch and Swiss yachtsmen are the visitors this time. All keen divers, they have come to explore the war wrecks that litter the bottom of the ocean around these islands.

Munda diving is among the best in the world. Drop offs to over 600 meters with Grey, Blacktip and Whitetip Reef sharks, eagle rays, barracuda, pygmy seahorses, squat lobsters and fiery dartfish are a magnet for international divers.

It is hard to imagine the Solomon Islands were at the centre of the Pacific War over 70 years ago.

A war scenario linked to WWII when fire and brimstone rained on the innocent islanders who had no clue of what was going on in a convulsed, far away world.

American and Japanese war ships and planes battled it out in this area leaving behind thousands of dead and an underwater forest of downed planes and ships.

In time, these wrecks littering the ocean's floor have become a magnet for divers and fish alike.

PETER JOSEPH MUSEUM





Near Agnes Gateway Hotel there is a *must see*, most unusual museum, the love child of Barney Paulsen who has collected over the years a trove of war paraphernalia, carefully curated it and housed it in an open shed in his own backyard.

Touchingly, Barney Paulsen has named his museum "Peter Joseph Museum", in honour of the first American soldier whose dog tag he found. Sadly, Peter Joseph's tag has never been claimed by any family in the USA.

Paulsen started young and amassed a cache of thousands of war mementos: from machine guns to Japanese water canteens.

On the long trestle-tables lie – neatly classified – bullets, helmets, medical kits, flags, pistols, uniform buttons and a myriad of other finds.

On the ground, spilling outside the shed, plane wings and engines, lie mangled and twisted, a stark reminder of war.

SKULL ISLAND



The Roviana people of Munda are a very special and tightly knit community. It is another Roviana man who takes us to Skull Island, a tiny speck of land where trophy skulls have been relocated.

Head hunting raids were not unusual before the coming of Christian missionaries. The power of these skulls is evident when the skipper of our boat shouts a greeting to the winds and asks for permission to land. There are penalties to pay for not doing so.

Our local guide relates an incident that happened this year, when a journalist disembarked before the salutation and got very ill indeed.

Local women had to perform a ritual cleansing ceremony at the end of which the hapless journalist got better immediately.

At Rendova Island a welcoming party greets the visitor with song and dance. The Titiru Eco Lodge is brand new and sits surrounded by orchids.

A long crushed coral path leads the adventurous to the village but before we get there a high shrill stops us in our tracks... It is a sentinel in full war paint who, perched upon a bolder, alerts the villagers of our coming.

He then proceeds to utter menacing words demanding to know who we are and where do we come from. This is of course a re-enactment of what used to be the only way to stop raiders.

When we finally make it to the village, the community has set up several stations where arts and crafts plus domestic chores (such as how to bathe newborn babies in a palm leaf) are on display. Guests of Titiru Eco Lodge can interact with the local community this way.





Back at Agnes Gateway Hotel, a barbecued seafood spread is ready to be consumed right after dark.

The fish and lobsters are cooked to perfection, as always on these islands.

The divers and all other guests are happy and mellow celebrating yet another day of exploration both on land and at sea -and under the sea- Solomon style.

Maria Visconti was a guest of the [Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau](#) and [Solomon Airlines](#)

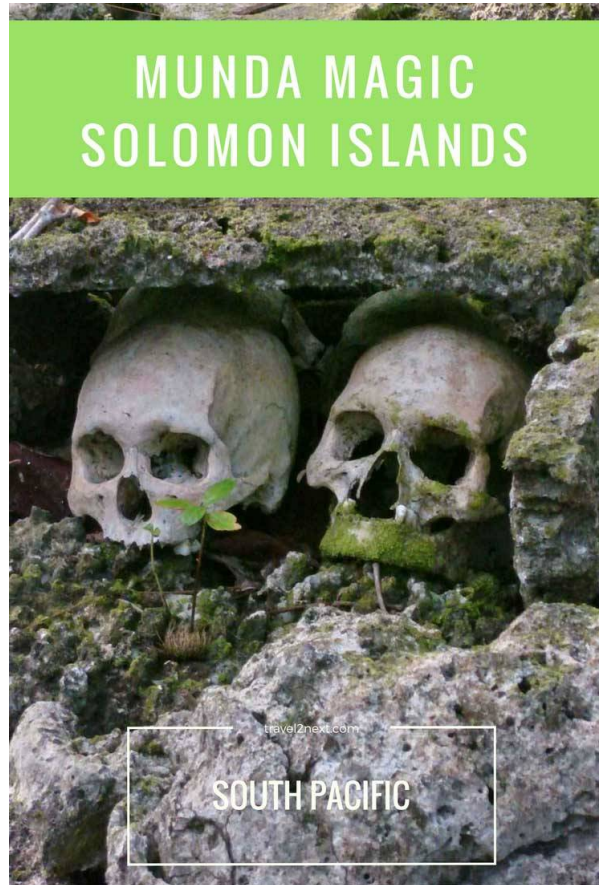
DISCOVER SOLOMON ISLANDS

For more ideas on how to have an enjoyable holiday in the Solomon Islands read:

THE SECRET OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

SOLOMON ISLANDS FISHING

SOLOMON ISLANDS RUSTIC ROMANCE



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Maria Visconti

<http://travel2next.com/maria-visconti/>

As a travel writer and photographer, I owe my present 'incarnation' to two authors who –I have recently realised- influenced me greatly: Emilio Salgari and Lobsang Rampa. They shaped my craving for adventure and far away places while growing up in Buenos Aires.

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comments

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