

# WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

## SURFING THE SOLOMONS

WORDS BY ROXANNE WILLIAMS

**You'd be correct in thinking that a surfing trip to the Solomons will be one heck of an adventure.**

The wild and untamed beauty of the Solomons features of over 900 islands. It's a remote, yet accessible destination with a bunch of uncrowded waves to discover, many of which remain unnamed. It's regularly touted as one of the final surfing frontiers, and for good reason. Forget all about modern luxuries and instead embrace an intrepid surfing excursion like no other. Visualise tidy seaside bungalows with panoramic views of crystal clear waters, loads of super fresh seafood and endless icy cold Sol Brews. As for the waves, expect to find plenty of secluded reef breaks perfect for sharing with a few mates.

### WAVE GUIDE

November to April, is the favoured swell season for the Solomon Islands. Waves average about three to six feet. However, it can get heaps bigger and certain breaks easily handle up to ten-foot waves, pending

weather conditions. Fact: the Solomons are blessed with both a north and south swell direction. Also worth noting is that the same swells which hit Hawaii generally reach here about a week later, albeit at a reduced size, but on the plus side tend to run for a longer duration. Same goes for the large typhoon swells that push down from South-East Asia (predominately Japan and the Philippines). The Western Province region is the most well-known zone for surfing.

### ACCOM OPTIONS

Here's a few favourite surfer friendly locations nearby to the region's best reef breaks. Alternatively, you can always commandeer a yacht and set about discovering a tonne of secretive atolls, complete with reeling rights and long lefts.

### PAPATURA ISLAND RETREAT

Step of the map and book into Papatutura. This exotic surf escape stay has an enviable beachfront spot on Santa Isabel island. The resort only takes a maximum of 14 surfers at

a time, thus you are guaranteed uncrowded waves up here. The resort excels in catering for surfers by way of its dedicated surf guides, epic dining spreads, private beach stretch and dreamy seaside lodgings. Most importantly, Papatutura boasts a bunch of prime breaks just a short boat ride away including the following:

**Anchovies** – The Solomon's favourite contortionist. A twisted, warping wave that you can backdoor the barrel and unleash on the right-hand wall. Favours the south and south-west winds.

**Dolphins** – This left-hander is a sucky 'lil number. When the outside spots are maxing it's a great option on the mid to high tides.

**PT's** – A great option if you're looking to surf both directions. PT's will hold a solid swell and 100 metre rides are not uncommon. Bonus points here as it works on all tides with a west or north-westerly wind, and it's pretty consistent too.

**Kummas** – Unlike many Aussie east coast beaches, the northerly wind is your best

mate at one of the Solomon's prime spots. This long-walled left-hander turns on between mid and high tides, and is a great spot for those envious holiday snaps taken from a boat!

**Zoli's** – If you love a wave with a kinky end section, make this your first stop. Generally a fun left-hander, but there's the odd right that pops up too with a surprisingly hollow finish on both.

**Blanchey's** – A long reef break that has multiple lefts breaking along its 1000 metre stretch. You'll find barrels, stretched out walls and even a few right-handers.

**Tarzan's** – The most family friendly peak on the mainland. Peaks for days, giving surfers of all skill levels plenty of opportunity.

**Watto's** – A speedy left-hander that can be surfed right alongside the island or deeper in the channel on those larger north swells. A super fun set-up that can be enjoyed at any size.

**Donuts** – Here's one for the natural footers and longboarders! A long right-hander for those looking for a mellow change of pace.

### FATBOYS RESORT

Supremely located on Babanga Island, Fatboys is the epitome of a laid back and friendly Melanesian surfing getaway. Guests will be impressed with the incredible water clarity that surrounds this small boutique retreat and will no doubt be keen on participating in the many ocean going activities on offer here. Obviously, surfing is the numero uno choice. However, you best prepare for a litany of adventures, such as, snorkelling, adrenaline charged off shore fishing trips, and world class diving. Given that the Solomon Islands has the highest marine biodiversity on earth, we recommend you explore its unspoiled seas good and proper to get your money's worth. Here's the rundown on breaks near Fatboy's.

**Paelonghi** – A fast and hollow right-hander. It works best on bigger swells when all the sections join up to create a flawless ride.

**Titiana** – A long and mellow left aka goofy paradise. It features an easy loop through paddle back. Note: as with nearby Palonggi, this shallow reef break can be risky for

inexperienced surfers.

**Skull Island** – This break is a decent 1.5 – 2 hour boat ride away, but if you score it right this wave will light your fire. Arguably one of the longest rights in the Solomons, it works best at three to six feet and needs a medium to large swell to deliver the goods. rates - A very shallow and very hollow right-hander near the entrance to a lagoon. Take your goggles and pack a picnic basket to maximise your day.

### ORAVAE COTTAGE

This locally owned and operated property consists of just a handful of picturesque cabins perched on the water, each with incredible rainforest and uninterrupted ocean views. The accommodation is basic, yet beautiful, an eco-friendly surfing escape indeed. Bonus: the family that run Oravae are also the Solomon Islands' most respected surf guides. So, yes, you're likely to find a multitude of hidden waves on any given day. Oravae Cottage is a short boat ride from Gizo township and nearby to famed breaks, Tatiana and Palonggi.



## INTERESTING HISTORY

The Solomon Islands is rich in historical and cultural stories. During WW2, the region witnessed many vicious land and sea battles. After the intense Pearl Harbour saga, the yanks began a strategic offence against the Japanese here in the Solomons. Loads of war artefacts are still scattered throughout the lands to this day. Same goes, for wartime shipwrecks — there's hundreds of vessels on the ocean floor throughout the isles, which have created a unique place to scuba dive and snorkel. Interesting fact: a young JFK (pre-presidential days) captained a PT-109 (patrol torpedo boat) that was sliced in half by the Japanese in the Solomons. His and the crew's remarkable tale of survival is well documented on the aptly named Kennedy Island, where they sheltered until rescue. The unpopulated and naturally beautiful Kennedy Island, is really close to Fatboys Resort — a top spot for beers and a BBQ.

Surfing Skull Island is also a somewhat unexpected lesson in history too, for here lies the skulls of vanquished warriors and chiefs passed. In order to enter upon the island itself the cultural custom is to gain permission from the spirit world via a local guide. Skull Island seems hauntingly calm and it's quite a surreal experience to see skull formations up close and personal, covered in moss and merged with the natural world. During my brief Skull Island visit, I was encouraged to touch the statue of the local people's revered fishing God. I did so apprehensively and was surprisingly (though not to the locals) rewarded by landing myself a 15 kg wahoo and scoring perfect runner waves the very next day. Wonders never cease, hey?



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PHOTO: HARROART



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## LOCAL VIBES

Granted, the Solomons has had its fair share of political turmoil in the past, but you'll be pleased to know that nowadays it is a safe destination to visit. On my most recent surf journey here, I found all the local crew to be ultra-friendly. They're proud people that are more than willing to share their far-flung island home with curious traveller folk. I chatted with Jeremy Baea, president of the Western Solomon's Surfing Association, who was very welcoming and happy to offer a knowledgeable insight into surfing life in the Solomon Islands.

### Q. What's your Top three SI Waves?

A. Titiana & Paelonghi (both near Gizo) and Maravaghi — a fast left and a super fun right in front of Maravaghi Resort in the Floridas, about a two hours boat ride from the capital, Honiara.

### Q. Advice for surfers visiting the region?

A. Bring lots of sunscreen. Always, if possible, get a local surf guide to show you around the breaks. Pack extra fins, wax and a leash. Also it's good

to have a ding repair kit with you. Nearly all breaks will be reef breaks, so be prepared and bring reef shoes and a first aid kit, just in case. Getting surfing equipment in the Solomons is almost impossible, so if you have any extra wax, fins, or an old board you would like to donate for the local kids, that would be much appreciated.

### Q. How long have you been operating your surf tours?

A. About three years. As part of surfing associations ocean waves initiative, we started surf tours to involve young surfers from local villages in the tourism industry. All money made from these tours go back to help our small surfing communities in local villages.

### Q. Most memorable swell?

A. January 2018, we had an amazing run of swell, perfect offshore barrels eight to ten foot, one week of uncrowded perfection.

### Q. Most undiscovered surf area?

A. Shortland islands in the far western Solomons.

## TRAVEL TIPS

- Since you're in the tropics, it is strongly advised to take anti-malaria medication. Sleeping under a mosquito net in remote areas is also recommended.
- Observe and respect local customs. For example, beachwear is fine in resort areas but its best to throw on a light weight shirt if you're exploring villages.
- Stop by local markets for fresh produce and locally crafted souvenirs.
- Eat lobster every day if you can, it's the sweetest, freshest and one of the cheapest options to feast on. Lash with garlic and chili on an open flame for best results.
- A regular shortboard is a recommended and maybe a step-up board a few inches bigger, for when the waves are solid.

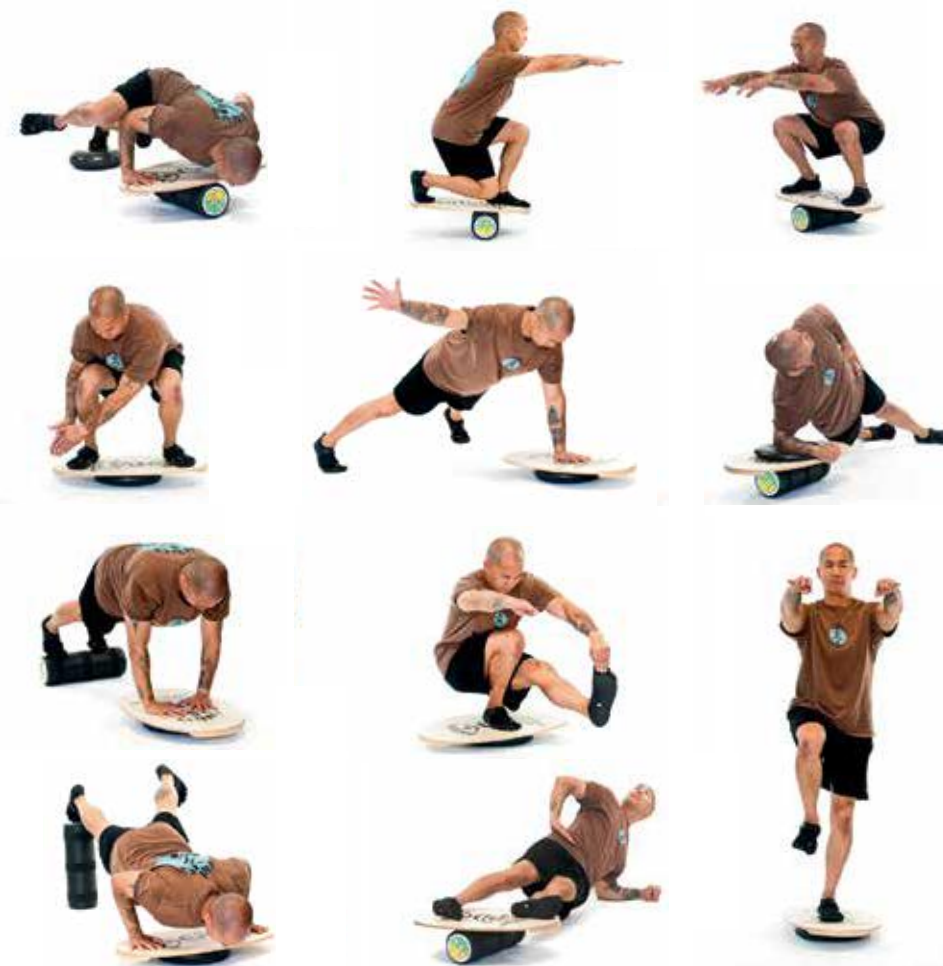
- Book a minimum seven to ten day surfing sojourn in the Solomons, to ensure you jag waves and have bonus time to explore the region on lay days.

## GETTING THERE

The Solomon Islands are a short three-hour flight from Brisbane to Honiara. Solomon Airlines offers the best flight schedule and timely connections to outer islands.

Ah, we can smell the sea breezes and taste the coconut already! Goes to show that with a little research and an adventurous spirit, world-class surf travel is closer to our Aussie shores than we think. Now we just have to work out which spot to hit first! 🐼

*\*The writer would like to thank Tourism Solomons for arranging an excellent surf trip.*



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