

## Wartime Memories but it's Always "Island Time" in The Hapi Isles!

➔ JOHN McNAMEE continues on his journey through an enchanting South Pacific archipelago



JFK and PT-109 memorial on Kennedy Island in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands.



It's probably the most famous coconut shell in the world.

During his occupancy of the White House, US President John F. Kennedy used it as a paperweight on his desk in the Oval Office.

After the tragic events of his assassination in 1963, the coconut became a treasured item in the Kennedy Museum in Boston and is there to this day.

Inscribed in the shell are the words:

**Nauro ISL Commander... native knows posit... he can pilot...11 alive...need small boat...Kennedy.**

The message was carried to

the US Pacific Navy Squadron Commander by two Solomon Islanders, Eroni Kumana and Biuku Gasa, who discovered the then Lieutenant Kennedy and his remaining crew on a small uninhabited island. They had survived after Kennedy's PT-109 patrol torpedo boat was rammed by the Japanese destroyer Amagiri in the early hours of the morning in August 1, 1943 during the battle of Guadalcanal, one of the Second World War's bitterest campaigns.

Two of his crew had died in the attack but Kennedy miraculously managed to get

his remaining men (including one seriously injured whom he "towed" on his back using a gun-strap between his teeth) to swim across dangerous waters to another nearby island.

Meanwhile, carrying the inscribed coconut shell in their dugout canoe, Kumana and Gasa had paddled more than 50km through Japanese-occupied islands to deliver the message. A week later PT 157 commanded by William F. Liebenow, came to the rescue.

It seemed strange standing there on what was once called Plum Pudding Island but is now known as Kennedy Island and

looking out over the stretches of turquoise coloured waters of this Western Province area of the Solomon Islands where Kennedy and his crew made their heroic swim.

We were having a traditional Coral Triangle picnic among the swaying palms and screeching parrots on this isolated atoll which became part of history and on which there is a moving memorial to those events.

Ever mindful of our surroundings, we enjoyed a sumptuous lunch which included superb barbecued lobster and fried fruit and vegetables

including local pumpkin, bananas and eggplant. The still uninhabited but now locally-owned island is just a short boat trip across the water from the well-known Fatboys resort where we were staying.

The resort is situated near Gizo, one of the main towns of the Western Province, and run by an Australian entrepreneur Dan Kennedy.

The wonderfully comfortable thatched bungalows have huge double beds covered by sweeping mosquito nets wafting in the tropical breezes. They line the coral fringed beaches around the small villages of Mbabanga Island and provide a unique accommodation for our stay.

The cosy bar and restaurant sit picturesquely at the end of a long pier above the tropical aquamarine waters and each afternoon you can lean over the balcony and watch the slender grey reef sharks thrashing around and fighting for the titbits thrown to them by the restaurant staff.

If you're still in the



## When Only The Best Will Do

Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara, a name synonymous with premier service and top-in-line luxury, is in the Central Business District of the capital, only 12 kilometers from Honiara International Airport. Spread over five acres of beautifully manicured lands, the hotel once served as the residence to the former Governor, but is now the leading choice for several business and luxury travelers.

An outstanding example of preserved legacy and contemporary architecture, Heritage Park Hotel offers 48 flawlessly decorated executive rooms with private balconies overlooking the ocean and the exquisite gardens, as well as 39 one, two, and three-bedroom self-contained serviced apartments.

All guest rooms have been designed keeping in mind

the modern necessities that make a stay comfortable. Equipped with en-suite bathrooms and several amenities, every unit in the hotel has been designed with elegance.

Business and banquet facilities at Heritage Park Hotel include five well-furnished function rooms with a seating capacity of 10 to 250 guests suitable for meetings, conferences, product launches, and the likes.

The Splash Bar and Grill by the poolside offers a perfect ambience for cocktail parties, corporate gatherings, as well as weddings. Alternatively, you could spend the day enjoying a dip in the pool that overlooks the gorgeous ocean, sip on a cocktail, and watch a beautiful sunset.

Heritage Park Hotel, with its diverse range of facilities and services, is also popular as a diner's haven. GG's, is arguably the premium-most fine-dining restaurant on the island and offers guests with a wide selection of à la carte menu from various parts of the world. For something slightly more relaxed yet equally palatable to the taste buds, the Terrace presents the impeccable

ambience to watch a game of soccer or rugby while unwinding with a chilled beer.

The in-house club, Club HP, is the place where the who's who hang out. The perfect place to see and be seen, the club offers two pool tables, a great selection of beers and drinks, live music performances, and DJ nights.

Other conveniences at Heritage Park Hotel include an apparel store, a salon, a convenience store with organic products on sale, and a fully-functional gymnasium.

Over the years, Heritage Park Hotel has served several high-profile clients including but not limited to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the Princess of Abu Dhabi, Ban Ki Moon - Secretary General of United Nations, King of Tonga, and Governor General of Australia, among many others.

Whatever be the reason or occasion, Heritage Park Hotels guarantees to pamper you with the highest level of personalized, unobtrusive service that will leave you yearning for more.



mood after that, you can go snorkelling, kayaking, fishing or stand-up paddling and discover the eerie coral formations which lie just below the surface and later cool off again with a local Solbrew lager or glass of Aussie wine. For the more adventurous, there's even expeditions for birdwatchers to a nearby volcanic crater, home to hundreds of nesting Pacific birds.

After a strenuous day, there's nothing like returning to the

Fatboys evening dinner menu which features delicious fresh fish and chicken dishes. The breakfast choice of flapjacks, scrambled eggs or omelettes is mouth-watering ... and they've even got jars of Vegemite for your toast!

We were on a week-long sojourn through the Solomons archipelago, visiting local villages, World War 11 battle and museum sites, spectacular deep-sea diving venues and isolated island eco-resorts.

One of these is Oravae, run by another adventurous Australian, Naomi Baca and her locally-born husband Patson) which offer "getaway holidays with a difference." (If you're lucky, you can spot a dugong lazily swimming between the coral outcrops just a few metres from Naomi's "jungle" cottages.

Oravae is situated on the island of Sepohite, and Naomi and her husband have had to rebuild some of the structures

following the deadly tsunami which ravaged some parts of the South Pacific region in 2007 but now the bungalows and facilities are restored and offer a secluded holiday destination.

After previously leaving our first stop-off place at Munda on the Roviana lagoon, we spent a lazy morning on the banana boat, piloted by local Tourism Solomons guides Billy and Brenden, and were taken to the Titiru Eco Lodge run by local chief Kilo and his family, where we received a colourful, warm island welcome.

We were regaled with a traditional island lunch and escorted around the resort's beautifully equipped bungalows and amenity blocks literally hidden among the thick jungle growth and winding coral edged paths.

If you want to really "get away from it all" an eco-resort such as Titiru offers isolated bungalows built right on the deeply blue lagoons each with a private wharf and canoes and well away from any prying eyes.

(But don't expect the sophistication and ultra-modern conveniences of resorts and hotels in other more popular tourist destinations such as Bali, Fiji, Vanuatu or Vietnam. Thanks



Local village schoolgirls on Titiru Island love wishing visitors "good morning".

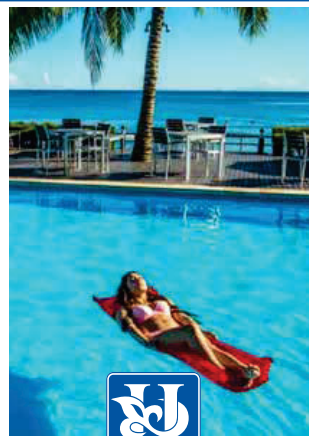
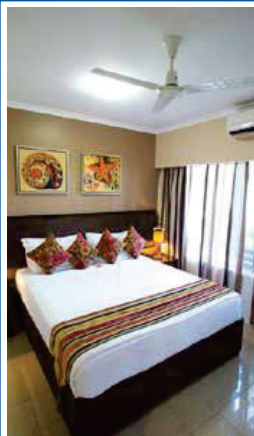
to cash injections from both the Australian and New Zealand governments, most island resorts do have generators and solar powered water heating so you don't have to rough it too much!)

Titiru was the perfect stop-off place before we set off across the wide stretch of ocean between the islands towards Fatboys (about an hour and a half in the open boat, although our boatman Billy, who reckons he knows every single one of

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Native chief Primo and his grandchildren welcome visitors to their traditional village.



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**HONIARA'S FINEST - FOR BUSINESS OR TO JUST GETAWAY - ENQUIRE NOW**





Fatboys bar and restaurant on the end of a picturesque pier..the resort's bungalows line the coral edged shores of the lagoon.

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the Solomons’ 900 islands, said it was only a 45-minute trip. But that’s “island time” of course!!)

After our all-too short stay on the idyllic secluded resort of Fatboys we flew back to the capital Honiara on a Dash 8 aircraft from Nusa Tupe airstrip and took up residence once again in the top-class Heritage Park Hotel.

It was on our last day that we were privileged to witness perhaps the most memorable of

all the local customs during our visit to the intriguing Solomon Islands, known affectionately as the Hapi Isles.

Our guides took us to a “cultural community traditional movement” village called Moro, a bumpy pot-holed ride about an hour along isolated tracks outside Honiara.

But it was all worth it. There we met a remarkable local chief called Primo, who has re-created a traditional village dating back hundreds of years when

head-hunters and missionaries inhabited the islands.

Primo explained that the purpose of the village was to teach younger generations the historic culture, crafts and languages of their revered forebears.

As we watched in awe, Primo, with his two grandchildren on his lap, laid out the village welcome mat and prepared the traditional food and drink in a ceremony called “tatalonga.”

Luckily we didn’t have to

sample the nasty looking “kava” type drink that a laughing Primo concocted but we were to get a taste experience of a lifetime when Primo’s wife Pauline and daughter Sharon, clothed in their traditional grass skirts, lit the stone and banana leaf fire pit in a native thatched hut and cooked us a meal of roasted pork in bamboo sticks.

Phew!! It was hot stuff...but it’s a feast you won’t find in any takeaway food outlets in our neck of the woods!

**\*Go55s was part of a media contingent invited to the area by the Solomon Islands Visitors office, Tourism Solomon, and Solomon Airlines in a bid to help boost tourism to the developing nation. We were guests of the Heritage Park Hotel, Honiara, Agnes Gateway Hotel, Munda and Fatboys Resort.**

**\*All resorts have their own websites so it’s worth checking tariffs and availability.**



Wreck of a US Navy Wildcat carrier-borne fighter in an open-air wartime museum site near Honiara...its starboard wing is still retractable.



Friendly island welcome to isolated Titiru eco-resort in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands.

Helpful Hints

- If you are travelling to the Solomon Islands, it’s well advised you consult your GP well beforehand regarding any inoculations, such as typhoid and tetanus boosters, as well as anti-malarial pills.
- You’ll also need a good supply of 50-plus sunscreen and tropical strength insect repellent.
- Passports need a minimum of six months validity to enter the country.
- Strong hard-soled joggers are highly recommended for walking across coral lined beaches.
- Men should take an electric razor as hot water in many hotel room bathrooms is limited. (It’s mainly generator and solar powered facilities in the outer islands.)
- ATM and WIFI access is available but can be spasmodic.

- Tipping is not recommended and try to stick with the bottled water. (Also there’s plenty of scope for bargain hunting and haggling in the local markets...if you’ve got the nerve!)

Accommodation & Airlines

- Generally hotel or eco-resort rooms on the islands can be around \$A300 for a single. As well as Agnes Gateway Hotel on Munda, there’s an excellent backpacker-style hostel called Qua Roviana with single rooms for \$A200 and an extra \$A100 for each other person. But check online for tariff updates for all resorts.
- Solomon Airlines A380s fly regular twice weekly services from Brisbane to Honiara (for around \$A700) with a direct flight to Munda.
- Solomon Airlines Dash 8 and Twin-Otter aircraft operate ferry services around the islands.



# 10 Reasons Why You Must Visit Solomon Islands



## 1. Cultural / Multicultural

Journey through an era where headhunters collected trophy skulls. Witness cultural performances and art that remains very much alive and intact. Prevalent and unchanging pristine village life. Dugout canoes that still serve as the main mode of transportation and our economics are still based on sustenance sea

and agro lifestyles. Welcome to a place where the past and present is connected and where Mela, Poly, Micro, Asian and Euro influences all share their lives together.

## 2. Natural

Who doesn't love a good ole' traditional sand and sun vacation? Wiggle your feet in



remote white sandy beaches and bask in the Solomon sun. We invite you to relish in our bounties of nature.

## 3. Pictorial

Beauty is EVERYWHERE and at every turn. Painted sunsets and magnificent waters are just some of the troves waiting to be adored.

## 4. Explorable

Excellent adventure options are right at your fingertips. Come with us and we'll trek to grand waterfalls. Hop around some of our 900 islands. Hike up beautiful mountains. Explore our lands. Explore our home. Together.

## 5. Historical

Our nation was home to some of the fiercest and bloodiest WW2 battle in the fight for freedom. Visit museums that house remnants of this heroic quest and

relive the moments where people bravely sacrificed their lives. Our museum will also take you back through 10,000 years of Solomon civilisation.

## 6. Loveable

Make romance an adventure with your beloved. Travel to a secluded island and enjoy the isolation. Live as our ancestors lived. It's a world of your own.

## 7. Immersible

Descend into our unparalleled underwater universe. Snorkel amongst colourful corals and WW2 wrecks. Dive alongside diverse sea life. Fish for your next meal. The options are just limitless.

## 8. Hospitable

Now there's one thing we absolutely want to boast about. We just love to smile and share

## 9. Delectable

When you're in the South Pacific, nothing can compare to the incredible seafood just pulled from bay you're gazing across. Indulge in all the freshness of the Pacific Ocean and local cuisines.

## 10. Unforgettable & Incomparable

When the time comes for you to leave us, we hope that you'll always keep us in your hearts as you remember the smiles, the laughs, the adventures, the incredible memories... But most of all... as you remember that now 'Solomon Is. You' too.



Experience some  
fine Melanesian  
hospitality at  
**Honiara Hotel**

Smiling faces and warm island hospitality are a distinctive trait of the Honiara Hotel which is located in tropical surroundings only a few minutes from the city centre.

With the addition of a new wing perched on a hilltop, the hotel has increased its guest accommodation and set an even higher standard with rooms that feature large balconies overlooking Honiara and the historic Iron Bottom Sound.

All accommodation, features air-conditioning, satellite TV, IDD telephones, private bathroom, fridge and tea and coffee making facilities.

The hotel has 3 Restaurants, one air conditioned (Mandarine Restaurant) and the other two are open air out door type dining (Club Havanah and Oasis Restaurants), poolside coffee shop, bar, souvenir shop.

The friendly receptionists can also help with enquiries about fishing, local tours and the famous "WWII Guadalcanal Battlefields Tours". The hotel also specialises in conferences, banquets, cocktail parties and wedding receptions.

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