

# SOAKING UP THE SOLOMONS

WITH ITS LARGELY UNTOUCHED LANDSCAPES, HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RUSTIC CHARM, THERE IS LOADS FOR TRAVELLERS TO LOVE ABOUT THE SOLOMON ISLANDS.

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**T**he competition between South Pacific nations has always been fierce, and as they all share many geographical similarities, the challenge for each is showcasing their uniqueness and authenticity.

That's what you get with the Solomon Islands. It's not pretending to be something it's not – what you see is what you get, and that's refreshing for travellers.

Add to that the fact that Australia is currently going through a rough economic patch, with many consumers set to tighten their purse strings and look for cheaper travel alternatives closer to home, and agents have a compelling argument for selling the Solomons.

## HONIARA HUSTLE

With an estimated population of about 100,000, Honiara is a hive of activity and a great place for visitors to start getting acquainted with the Solomon Islands.

A walk down the main drag will open their eyes to the everyday lives of those who inhabit the capital city on the Island of Guadalcanal, with a plethora of convenience stores, eateries, bottle shops and beetle nut stalls lining Mendana Avenue.

Tourists can also feel like one of the locals by paying a visit to the buzzing Honiara Central Market, which offers everything from fresh produce and sweets, to clothing and handmade jewellery.

If your clients are looking to learn about the history of the Solomons, the National Museum showcases cultural artefacts and World War II relics, and also houses a collection of audio-visual material and books in its library.

When it comes to accommodation in Honiara, the two standouts would have to be Heritage Park Hotel and Coral Sea Resort & Casino. Both



Locals going for a paddle

**WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET, AND THAT'S REFRESHING FOR TRAVELLERS.**



A perfect Solomon Islands sunrise

are conveniently located within half an hour of Honiara International Airport and within walking distance of the city centre on the water's edge, but each have their own quirks.

For those travellers wanting a more traditional hotel experience, the four-star Heritage Park is just the ticket, with a range of accommodation options including executive and deluxe rooms and suites, as well as serviced apartments.

The hotel's restaurants and bars cater to all types of traveller tastebuds. Guests can enjoy a leisurely bite to eat at Splash Bar & Grill or a fine dining experience at GG's Restaurant. If they are after something in between, The Terrace Restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

As for the much-newer Coral Sea Resort & Casino, the property's design is focused on relaxation and entertainment, with an appreciation of the Pacific seaside.

The venue embodies the vibrant, urban and Solomon Islander spirits with internationally inspired food and drinks on a romantic oceanfront deck with beautiful sunset views and warm ocean breezes.

Or, guests can treat themselves to an evening at Haydn's Steakhouse complemented by top-shelf spirits and premium wines from over the globe.

And then there's the casino, of course, where tourists can take on each other and locals in a variety of games including blackjack, roulette and baccarat.

Oh, and if your clients are rugby league fans and happen to be staying at the resort during State of Origin, they don't have to worry about missing all the action while on

holiday. The three-game series gets the big-screen treatment every year.

## SIMPLICITY AND SERENITY IN SAVO

To appease travellers hunting a rustic, no-frills experience in the Solomon Islands where they can totally disconnect from their everyday world, Savo is the answer.

Approximately 6,000 people live on the island, and it's only accessible by boat (like many places in the Solomons). The ride from Honiara takes roughly an hour and costs SBD\$400 (\$75) return.

Savo's Sunset Lodge offers basic accommodation that's perfect for backpackers and those on a budget, with rooms for SBD\$150 (\$25) per night.

Managed by the son of a former Solomon Islands prime minister, the property also provides a variety of authentic activities around Savo, including an incredible three-hour volcano walk (sturdy, enclosed shoes are highly recommended for this) and a rousing cultural performance by local villagers.

## THE WILD WEST

A trip to the Solomon Islands simply isn't the same without a stint in the wild Western Province.

The flight alone from Honiara to Gizo (which costs just under SBD\$3,700 (\$650) return with Solomon Airlines) is an experience in itself, with the view coming into Nusatupe Airport one for the memory bank and Instagram.

The airport has a boat shuttle service that ferries passengers to Gizo, with private boats also able to pick-up passengers from the jetty.

Visitors will find an array of overwater and »

Toa Mairru wreck dive



A warm Solomon Islands welcome



## A TRIP TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS SIMPLY ISN'T THE SAME WITHOUT A STINT IN THE WILD WESTERN PROVINCE.

bungalow-style accommodation options in the Western Province, but *Travel Weekly's* two picks are Imagination Island and Fatboys Resort.

Owned by an Aussie geologist and his wife, Imagination Island will impress the environmentally conscious traveller, providing power through a combination of solar, a 240-volt generator and battery-powered inverters.

Furthermore, all bungalows contain composting toilet facilities, and the reef bungalows have been built by locals using sustainable materials harvested from the islands.

Imagination Island offers plenty of activities from snorkelling, diving and fishing, to hiking and specially designed village tours.

Guests can also mix and mingle with the locals by taking a boat ride over to the mainland and dining in at Gizo Hotel, before taking a stroll down to one of the waterfront bars for a drink and a dance.

Just across the water, Fatboys is home to four private bungalows and one beach house each with large verandas capturing the seductive views of the Solomon Islands'

famous crystal-clear water and stunning natural scenery.

All accommodation is situated on the water's edge, with a short stroll to Fatboys Restaurant & Bar located along the resort's private jetty 100 metres out over the reef.

Again, there is plenty of world-class snorkelling (the Solomons has some of the most stunning and unusual coral I've ever seen),

History buffs will revel in a tour of Kennedy Island, which lies just five short minutes by boat from Fatboys. It's a small, uninhabited piece of land in the Solomon Islands named after John F. Kennedy, following an incident involving the former US president during his World War II naval career.

Guests at Fatboys will also probably find themselves spending a good portion of their time at the resort's restaurant and bar, where they can relax and unwind while chowing down on fresh local seafood and sipping cocktails to the sound of the ocean.

It must be noted, however, if your clients can't holiday without an internet connection, Fatboys probably isn't for them. The resort's 'one user at a time' WiFi policy caused much squabbling between me and my fellow travel journos! ●