

Solomon Is. Diving



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The Solomon Islands ...

a Grand Adventure

OUR fourth dive of the day was on Kavarchi corner off Kitcha Island near the rumbling volcano of Marovo Lagoon.

It was overcast and the visibility was less than fifteen metres. Kavarchi corner is a wild and remote dive location. It is dived less than a handful of times each year by a small band of very fortunate divers.

We could see the resident school of Bump Headed Parrotfish cruising off the deep wall below. A large school of Big Eye Trevally, off to the East, were agitated as a number of Grey Reef sharks hunted them. Some of the other divers reported the rumbling sound that schooling Trevally make when they are under threat.

The banded sea krait, Laticauda colubrina, is capable of killing a human if you annoy it enough. They have a calm and relaxed manner.

A one metre Marbled Sting ray cruised near us to check us out. Then, the largest Hawksbill Turtle that I have ever seen was seen feeding on some tough chunk of coral or sponge. It was almost tame and allowed us to approach very close. Adam, the Trip Director on board said that this friendly turtle has been swimming calmly with divers for about a year. We cruised up into the shallows to off gas whilst looking for the resident Rock Mover wrasse and angelfish. This had been a zinger of a dive!



White beach is home to the amazing Archer fish that live under the mangrove trees.



Male Melanesian Wrasse herd the school into their burrow in the coral rubble when threatened.

Our dive boat is the 30 metre Taka now under the name of "Solomon PNG Master" as one of the newest members of the Master fleet. It is a purpose built dive boat constructed in Australia in 2004.

She is a great platform for our underwater adventures! She has a massive dive deck and a huge dining/entertainment area where guests can socialize and relax.

Diving is mostly done from two dive tenders ably handled by ship's engineers and coxswains, Joe and Augu. Some dives are done from the wide marlin board at the rear of the boat. Once back on board, you drop your tank in your designated spot with its own dive tub. Tanks are filled ready for the next dive by Phillip, Kingsli and Alick, the friendly ships' engineers. There are five outdoor showers for the rinse off before the following meal.

Once inside the air-conditioned comfort, there is a three course buffet style hot breakfast with tea and coffee. Life on board Taka is very comfortable and relaxed.

MARY ISLAND

Mary Island is a famous fish dive site. Taka went there with some anticipation to see if the huge resident schools of Trevally and Barracuda were present. We rejoiced in the good news that they were there, as big and as bright as ever.

This amazing coral ecosystem is famous for its incredible powers of regeneration. The reefs here were in full bloom.

ATTRACTIONS OF THE SOLOMONS

The Solomon Islands is more of an adventure destination for divers. It will feature in the future as more divers, who have dived at many of the world hotspots look for a sea change. The Solomons has excellent hard coral gardens with some of the healthiest coral reefs I have ever seen. Its fish life is incredibly diverse and abundant. In fact, it is a fish watchers paradise. In addition, it has many war time wrecks from World War Two. The local culture is vibrant and the people are very friendly and helpful. The Solomons are known as the 'Hapi' islands.

MARY ISLAND'S SMALL FISH LIFE

The Trip Directors on board Taka, Adam and Carmen are first class. They run clear safety conscious dive and safety briefings. Adam and Carmen are both great communicators and have excellent people skills.

Carmen has developed a pre-dive briefing with a focus on fish identification. She starts with the Solomon Islands having nine species of Clown Fish. Divers are encouraged to locate all nine of them over the course of the dive. She has selected dive sites where these little fishy objectives



TOP TO BOTTOM:

Sleeping male Bleeker's Parrotfish at Marovo Lagoon night dive.

Juvenile Cardinal Fish about three cms long.

Golden Shrimp Goby with its resident bulldozer or Alpheid shrimp.

Saron Shrimp showing the starry pattern on its exoskeleton.



Carmen, the Trip Director on Solomons PNG Master poses for me in the sunlight.

and spectacular geology of these sea caves are wonderful to enjoy. As we wind our way through passage and caverns we are treated to fine vistas of light and colour. Outside of these caves, all of the corals were in excellent condition. After exploring the passages and labyrinths of the caves, we were treated to more outstanding fish and corals.

I had asked Carmen to model for me in the cave. The overcast conditions occasionally gave way to a few moments of sunshine. I tried to capture the dazzling rays of sunshine after checking out the cave for 'giant geckoes'. One was seen here last year. I do know one photographer who managed to get a photo of this Estuarine Crocodile.

One of the best dives of the trip was the last dive. It is called Twin Tunnels. It is an underwater coral volcano that begins at fourteen metres. Divers can go down two vertical holes from the top of the reef down to thirty six metres. Then, we can make our way up along the coral wall keeping an eye out for pelagics and sharks. I tried to photograph the Square Spot Anthias that are resident here. Up at the top, is a fish ecosystem that is quite possibly the best I have ever seen. Carmen had prepared us for the rich Angelfish diversity in her dive briefing. I spotted the Lamarck's Angelfish that Carmen had briefed us about before the dive. I managed to photograph a Navarchus Angelfish and a Clown Trigger. Several Giamard's Coris crossed my path. The stunning bright golden Three Spot Angelfish eluded my camera but I was in photo heaven. What a great spot!

I left this dive thinking that this has to be one of the ten best dives in the South Pacific.

Adam had planned the trip to take advantage of the wartime history. The last two days were filled with dives on World War Two wrecks. We dived Betty Bombers and a Catalina as well as Naval bases with landing barges and ordinance. His informative dive briefings were really helpful in bringing the dives to life and helping us to get more out of the dives.

can be realized. It is amazing how divers take to the challenge of this most appealing of treasure hunts.

I had one diver asking me for a photo of the ninth Clown fish species. She had managed to capture eight species on her Go Pro. The challenge had created real interest and had inspired many of the guests to join in the fun of identifying fish and developing their knowledge.

When diving on a wall with pelagic fish, the focal area obviously changed to the common species. Carmen gave us some tips of spotting Pelagic fish including Trevally, Jobfish, Barracuda and some of the tiny fish such a Fusiliers and Fairy Basslets that are prey for the phalanxes of predators.

SOLOMON ISLAND LIGHT SHOWS

We dived on quite a few coral caves and caverns including Leru Cut, Mirror pond and Cathedral cave. When the sun is high in the sky, a spectacular light show is put on for our enjoyment. We did have an issue with clouds on some of our dives and this did impact on the photography side of the dives. Still, the light effects

