

MELANESIA DISCOVERER

EXPLORING PAPUA NEW GUINEA
& THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

EXPEDITION DOSSIER
10 – 23 OCTOBER 2020

PNG
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HOLIDAYS

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Uncover the hidden gems of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. From the culturally rich arterial of the Sepik River we sail north across the Bismarck Sea to the remote shores of Manus and Mussau Islands. Manus has the lowest population density in all of New Guinea with its people still living a traditional lifestyle. Next, delve into the history, culture and wildlife of New Ireland and New Britain.

We cross the Buka Channel and at Nissan Island can see reminders of intensive World War II action during which the islands were recaptured by Kiwi, Australian

and British forces from the Japanese occupiers. Then enter a long-isolated world as we are among the first travellers to return to Bougainville in more than two decades. Sailing through the turquoise waters of the Solomon Islands, new vistas and unexpected encounters await.

For birders, this itinerary offers once-in-a-lifetime species on remote islands where few bird watchers have visited. The birding potential is exceptional; highlights may include the Superb Pitta, identifiable by its black plumage, turquoise blue wings and scarlet belly. Endemic to the Solomon Islands we will be on the lookout for the Roviana Rail and the Solomon Sea Eagle. Allowing birders to maximise the unique opportunities available to them, there will be an optional specialised birding programme with customised excursions.

Throughout Melanesia there are spectacular reefs, which are home to masses of fish and coral gardens of every colour. These waters offer some of the greatest marine diversity in the world and everybody will have the opportunity to snorkel and appreciate the beauty beneath the waves. Whether you are snorkelling or swimming, this ocean aquarium is waiting to be explored and discovered.



ITINERARY

Day 1: Madang, Papua New Guinea

Arrive in the port town of Madang and transfer to the Madang Resort where our group will spend the first night of the expedition. This evening meet with your fellow travellers and the expedition team over dinner at the resort.

Day 2: Madang

Madang is situated on a picturesque peninsula surrounded by islands and waterways. It is a thriving community renowned for its traditional artists, and the richness of its surrounding forests. This morning we leave Madang for the verdant highlands close to the township; here the tall forests contain a richly diverse wildlife. There may be time to visit a small highland village where the beat of the Kundu drum could be heard, we will arrive back in Madang with time to explore the colourful markets with your Guides. There will also be optional excursions depending upon your interests with birders leaving early for a morning birding excursion. Late morning board the *Spirit of*

Enderby, settle into your cabin and enjoy lunch on board before joining the captain and your expedition team on the bridge as we set sail.

Day 3: Sepik River

Sure to be one of the highlights of our expedition, we have allowed plenty of time to fully appreciate this remarkable river, its birds, animals and the people that call it home. The Sepik River, the longest in Papua New Guinea, flows from the highlands to the Bismarck Sea. It is a rich arterial river that has fostered great traditional artists. We plan to explore the river by Zodiac, following tributaries and channels in search of local wildlife. We also meet with the villagers and marvel at their artistry. Bring along plenty of the local currency (kina) to purchase unique carvings directly from the artists.

Days 4 to 5: Manus Province

Seldom visited and little known, Manus Province is considered a jewel in the crown of Papua New Guinea. Biologically isolated, the islands are home to a high

proportion of endemic species, and our stop here is likely to be one of the birding highlights of the expedition. On our first day, we take in the neighbouring island, Bipi, a true paradise where the local people will share their customs with us. Manus province has the lowest population density in all New Guinea with its people still living a very traditional lifestyle.

Day 6: Mussa Island

Far to the north of New Ireland and considered a separate bio-region we have allowed a full day to explore in true expedition-style Mussa Island and its surrounding waters. Mussa Island represents one of the westernmost extensions of the Lapita culture. Debate continues as to whether this was caused by reverse migration or possibly represents one of its earliest known sites as people moved out of Asia. Spend time with the local people to learn about their special culture and life on this remote Pacific outpost.

Day 7: Kavieng, New Ireland

Today we spend the day in and around historic Kavieng at the northern end of New Ireland. Evidence from Japan's World War II occupation is prevalent in historic Kavieng town, but today the area is a developing hub for tourism because of the rich



diversity of the surrounding land and sea. The birders will leave early for the highlands to the south, while the rest of the group spends the morning exploring Kavieng, absorbing Malagan culture and enjoying the beautiful islands nearby. Later there will be snorkelling and swimming in the crystal clear waters of the local reefs.

Day 8: Rabaul, New Britain

Six beautiful cone-shaped volcanoes ring Rabaul's dramatic, flooded-caldera harbour. Visit the bubbling hot springs and take in the magnificent views of the harbour and volcanoes from Observatory Ridge. As we explore the island, we will see fascinating reminders of the Japanese occupation, our tour taking in the site of the enormous volcanic eruption that all but destroyed Rabaul town, and the underground bunker that was the hiding place of Pearl Harbour commander, Yamamoto. In the afternoon we head towards the Duke of York Islands to take advantage of the excellent snorkelling opportunities.

Day 9: Nissan Island

A tropical atoll adrift in the azure waters of the Buka Channel, Nissan Island is bathed in rich tropical currents that abound in marine life. Seldom have outsiders had the opportunity to discover this world promising abundant pelagic fish-life and pristine coral reefs. Ashore there are still reminders of the brief but intensive World War II activities during which the islands were recaptured by Kiwi, Australian and British forces from the Japanese occupiers. During our time ashore we will meet with the friendly locals and search the dense woods for some of the elusive birds that occur here.



Later the snorkellers will find plenty to discover in the coral reefs that surround Nissan.

Day 10: Bougainville Island

We plan to be among the first expeditioners to re-discover the treasures of Bougainville, long isolated and in a strange way protected due to the conflict which swirled around its shores. Today it is emerging once again as a newly vibrant and remarkably pristine island paradise, it is home to some of the greatest biodiversity in the region both above and below the water. We plan to explore the area around Arawa, including

the Bougainville Copper Mine site – the setting for the movie *Mr Pip* – with great opportunities to access the island's interior and its reefs.

Day 11: Choiseul Island

Today we arrive in the Solomon Islands on the remote northern coast of Choiseul Island. Here the mountains tumble to the sea, broken only by torrents of fresh water cascading from the highlands. This was once the home of the Choiseul Crested Pigeon and, while it no longer walks the forest floor, many other species can still be found here. We cruise by Zodiac deep into the mangrove forest towards the





Sui River Falls where Dugong and crocodiles live. Here Kisa shell money was manufactured and used extensively in trade around the neighbouring islands. It is still valued and protected by the village elders to this day.

Day 12: New Georgia Islands

The volcanic New Georgia Islands are found in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands and are characterised by extensive reefs and lagoons, rugged terrain and an abundance of rivers. Nature enthusiasts will relish landing on Kolombangara Island, where we plan to visit the reserve which protects the island's central peak and search for the rare Roviana Rail along with other endemic bird species. For those interested in the marine environment, the nearby waters are renowned for their World War II wrecks and reefs that are home to some of the highest fish counts in the world. Stock up on the local currency to purchase the wood or stone carvings that the people of the Western Province are so famous for.

Day 13: Santa Isabel Island

The Arnavon Islands are north-west of Santa Isabel in the midst of an area rich in marine biodiversity and one of the most important rookeries in the western Pacific for the endangered Hawksbill Turtle. The islands also support a high diversity of terrestrial fauna, with 41 species of birds, 6 species of bats, and at least 7 species of terrestrial reptiles. Sensational snorkelling can be experienced around the islands.



Day 14: Honiara, Solomon Islands

Located on the northern coast of Guadalcanal, by the Mataniko River, Honiara was founded by the British as a military base during World War II. Honiara was witness to the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, where the Allied forces eventually overcame the Japanese invasion. Today we enjoy the option of touring Honiara, visiting historical sites including Henderson Airfield, war memorials and the open-air war museum. The birders head to the rain-forested slopes of Mount Austen in search of some of the Solomon Islands' most spectacular birds, including the Solomon Sea Eagle.

For those disembarking, a transfer to either a central city hotel, or to the airport, will conclude your voyage OR join us to discover the 'Secrets of Melanesia'. To allow time for disembarkation procedures we recommend that you book flights from Honiara after midday.

Note: During our voyage, circumstances may make it necessary or desirable to deviate from the proposed itinerary. This can include poor weather and opportunities for making unplanned excursions. Your Expedition Leader will keep you fully informed.

This tour offers a variety of activities and excursions. Your personal interests will determine which of these you wish to join. Please note that some activities and excursions will run at similar times and it will not be possible to participate in both. Accordingly, refunds for excursions and missed landings are not available.



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BIRDING SUPPLEMENT

While there will be ample opportunity for birdwatching from the ship, Zodiacs or on landings, those with a keen interest in birds are recommended to add on the birding supplement. Accompanied by our birding guide, the group will access the highlands and other remote areas, usually early in the morning, to see the best of the region's birdlife. Contact us for comprehensive birding notes for this departure.

ABOUT OUR DISCOVERY FUND

Each area we visit has rich cultural experiences and wild treasures to offer. As guests, we have made a point to source and support local projects in the areas through which we travel. A contribution from each passenger represents a portion of the money we donate to ensure the longevity and success of educational, environmental and cultural initiatives in these regions.



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DATES

Voyage #SOE2056
10 – 23 October 2020

PRICES

Heritage Suite \$12,100 pp*
Large lounge area, separate bedroom with double bed and a single bed in the lounge, writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin. Large forward and side facing windows allow great views.

Mini Suite \$11,300 pp*
Separate bedroom with a double bed and a single bed or sofa in the lounge, writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin. Mini Suites have windows.

Superior Plus \$10,300 pp*
Two lower berths, writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin. These cabins have windows.

Superior \$ 9,595 pp*
One bunk (one upper and one lower berth), writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin. These cabins have windows.

Main Deck \$ 8,595 pp*
Two lower berths, writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private washbasin. Nearby shower and toilet facilities are shared with other Main Deck cabins. These cabins have a porthole.

Main Deck Triple \$ 7,595 pp*
One bunk (one upper and one lower berth) and one additional lower berth, writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private washbasin. Nearby shower and toilet facilities are shared with other Main Deck cabins. These cabins have a porthole.

* The price listed includes the additional local payment (discovery fund) of \$600 which is payable in US\$ cash onboard the ship. (All prices are per person in US\$)

PRICE INCLUDES

Pre/Post cruise transfers, one night hotel accommodation in a twin share room (incl. dinner/breakfast), all on board ship accommodation with meals and all shore excursions and activities excluding optional specialised birding supplement. Programme of lectures by noted naturalists.

PRICE EXCLUDES

All items of a personal nature, laundry, drinks, gratuities. International/domestic flights, visas, extensions and travel insurance.

ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

Birding Supplement: \$500 pp