



SECRETS OF MELANESIA

EXPLORING THE
SOLOMON ISLANDS & VANUATU

EXPEDITION DOSSIER
22 OCTOBER – 2 NOVEMBER 2020

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Sail into a world that few have ever experienced; idyllic islands and isolated villages where unique time-honoured traditions and elaborately costumed dancers welcome us into their world. Sail from Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, to discover the beauty of the outer Solomon Islands and on to Vanuatu. Relax as our ship glides into secluded bays, and takes us to remote oceanic islands where the art of traditional navigation lives today. On Santa Isabel, the rhythms of life continue little changed, with daily life centred around the village and family. Malaita is culturally rich, the traditional currency, Malaitan shell-money, is still made on the island and is used as a dowry, and worn as a status symbol.

Vanuatu has produced a kaleidoscope of cultures, and more than 100 indigenous languages. With over 80 habitable islands, islanders have closely guarded their own cultures and languages. Our expedition embraces some of these cultures and languages, as well as a window into one of the happiest places on the planet.

On our journey you will also have the opportunity to experience some of the greatest underwater encounters in the world, with an abundance of marine life and coral gardens drawing you in to explore a magical underwater world. During frequent snorkel excursions throughout the expedition, everybody will have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty beneath the waves.

For birders, this itinerary offers once-in-a-lifetime species on remote islands where few have been before, and endemic birdlife such as the Solomon Sea Eagle, or the Vanikoro White-eye, may be seen. The birding potential is exceptional, and to allow birders to maximise the opportunities on the expedition there is an optional specialised birding programme with customised excursions.

A picture postcard paradise awaits as we uncover the 'Secrets of Melanesia'.



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ITINERARY

Day 1: Honiara, Solomon Islands

Arrive in the port town of Honiara; make your own way to the Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel where overnight accommodation is included in your expedition for the first night. This evening meet with your fellow travellers over dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Honiara, Solomon Islands

Honiara was founded as a military base during World War II and was witness to the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. This morning, enjoy a tour of Honiara visiting historical sites including the iconic Japanese and American war memorials. Birdwatchers will head to Mt Austen in search of some of the Solomon Islands' most spectacular birds, including the Solomon Sea Eagle. Board the *Spirit of Enderby* this afternoon. After familiarising yourself with your cabin and the ship join the captain and expedition team on the bridge.

Day 3: San Jorge Island and Santa Isabel

One of the largest in the Solomon Islands, most of Isabel remains

unexplored and undiscovered. We will explore the remote southern shores around Thousand Ships Harbour which is nestled between San Jorge Island and the high peaks of southern Santa Isabel. Beautiful uninhabited islands dot the waters and verdant forest covers slopes which surround the harbour as we are treated to a warm welcome and have the opportunity to explore the forest and coral reefs during our visit.

Day 4: Malaita

Mountainous Malaita is home to one-third of the Solomon's total population, with pristine rivers and unexploited tropical forests. This morning *Spirit of Enderby* enters the seldom visited Kwai Harbour. Here the local people choose to live on small artificial islands off the coastline and we are treated to a rapturous welcome on tiny Ngongosila Island where the houses stand shoulder to shoulder. In this one small area, several tribal groups overlap and these differences are readily apparent in dance and language. This afternoon, the beautiful

uninhabited Leli Island is the ideal snorkel site with calm clear waters and an impressive array of fish and corals.

Day 5: Makira

Makira is the most easterly of the main islands in the Solomon's archipelago. This morning the *Spirit of Enderby* anchors in the calm waters of Star Harbour. Join the naturalists for a Zodiac exploration of the abundant mangrove forests that line the shores, and take a short walk to Makira's south coast where the villagers live much as they have for millennia. We spend time with the locals, who share with us their traditional song and dance. If we are lucky, the local boys might be surfing on their hand-carved palm wood boards.

Day 6: Nendö – Temotu Province

Nendö is the largest of the Santa Cruz Islands, which lie to the south-east of the Solomon Islands. The Spanish navigator Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira unsuccessfully attempted to establish a colony in 1595. Biologically these islands share more in common with Vanuatu. It is also the home of red feather money, sourced from the Scarlet Honeyeater. Venturing inland, we visit a village where the ancient traditions are still very much alive. Watch the manufacture of red feather money, and join the locals



© H. Ahern

in dances which reverberate through the ages.

Day 7: Duff Islands

The Duff Islands are a cluster of 11 small islands on the edge of the vast Pacific Ocean. We navigate the Zodiacs through the shallow passages in the reef to visit the only inhabited island, Taumako. Here we are welcomed by the Polynesian-speaking local people, who live on hand-crafted artificial islands of coral stone within the lagoon. These islands are exceptionally remote, and the people are largely cut off from the outside world. We learn about their continued use of traditional sailing canoes and marvel at some of the most beautiful yet isolated islands you will ever encounter.

Day 8: Vanikoro

Today we explore the archipelago of Vanikoro, with its five islands encapsulated by a dramatic barrier reef which offers superb snorkelling. French explorer Jean-François de Galaup, comte de La Pérouse famously disappeared here after both his vessels, *La Boussole* and *Astrolabe*, struck the reef in 1788. On the shore we visit a monument to Le Pérouse, erected by fellow explorer Dumont Durville in 1827. Join the naturalists on a forest walk in search of the endemic Vanikoro White-eye and Monarch, or marvel at the delicate Vanikoro Orchid. We also have a good chance to see the recently rediscovered Vanikoro Flying Fox, considered extinct until a recent visit by the *Spirit of Enderby*!

Day 9: Vanua Lava

This morning we arrive in Vanuatu at the northern outpost of Vanua Lava, the largest island in the Banks Islands which is crowned by the active volcano Mt Séré'ama. Walk the main street and enjoy the carefully manicured tropical gardens of the administrative



centre of Sola, or for a more active option, climb through the waterfalls behind the town for some excellent views over the bay. This afternoon we explore the nearby offshore islands for snorkelling and beachcombing. The surrounding waters are home to the recently discovered Vanuatu Petrel which we will look out for upon our departure.

Day 10: Espiritu Santo

Enjoy a full day on Vanuatu's largest Island, Santo; location of James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. Early morning sees the birders ashore in search of many of Vanuatu's endemic

birds. Indulge in a swim in the crystalline waters of Champagne Beach with its famed powdery white sand. This afternoon we will enjoy Zodiac cruises to the iconic blue holes of Santo. For those with an interest in the history of the island, there is a visit to Lugainville and Million Dollar Point.

Day 11: Ambrym

The *Spirit of Enderby* will visit Ambrym, renowned as the island of volcanoes and magic throughout Vanuatu. We plan to head ashore at Ranon on the northern coast where the traditional Rom dance is still practised and custom carving is alive and well. A short walk through





© R Rudland



© E Hill

the forest brings us to the 'arena' where masked dancers emerge from the forest. The forests of Ambrym offer some excellent walks to go in search of the local birds and plants, accompanied by our naturalists. This afternoon enjoy a final snorkel excursion.

Day 12: Port Vila, Vanuatu

Arrive into Port Vila early morning and disembark. Upon disembarking a transfer to your central city hotel or the airport will conclude your voyage. To allow time for disembarkation procedures we do not recommend booking flights from Port Vila before 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.

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 #SOE2058
22 October – 2 November 2020

PRICES

Heritage Suite \$10,095 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 \$ 9,350 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 \$ 8,700 pp*

Two lower berths, writing desk, wardrobe and drawers. Private bathroom with shower, toilet and washbasin. These cabins have windows.

Superior \$ 8,095 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 \$ 7,095 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 \$ 6,095 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: \$450 pp