ISSUE 93

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Solomon Airlines CEO's Welcome



A heartfelt thank you as we embark on 2025

Dear Solomon Airlines Team, Customers, Partners, and Supporters,

As we close the first guarter of 2025, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each member of our extraordinary Solomon Airlines team. Your unwavering support through the challenges of 2024 and into the early months of this year has been truly inspiring. With your dedication, resilience, and commitment to excellence, you have built a solid foundation for our continued growth. It is a privilege to lead such an exceptional group of professionals, and I am deeply grateful for your steadfast spirit.

Over the past 12 months, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of our operations-both internally and in collaboration with our valued supplier partners. This effort reflects our sincere commitment to enhancing service delivery and customer experiences while prudently managing costs and pursuing sustainable revenue opportunities. The outcome is our Business Plan, a blueprint to our Strategic Plan 2024-2028, shaped by your contributions and committed to our supportive Board of Directors as we work together to become the Best Emerging Airline in the Pacific. For their steadfast backing, I extend my deepest thanks to the Government of Solomon Islands and our esteemed Board. Their encouragement fuels our collective aspiration-a goal we pursue with humility and determination.

This year marks an exciting milestone as we spread our wings further. We are proud to have launched our inaugural Auckland-to-Brisbane flights, adding 14,000 seats annually to the trans-Tasman route. This achievement underscores our dedication to improving connectivity to the Solomon Islands and delivering world-class service to every passenger-a mission we approach with gratitude and resolve.

As we celebrate advancements in aviation, I am profoundly honoured to recognize the remarkable contributions of our team. On International Women's Day, March 8th, we paid tribute to the tireless efforts of

women across our airline-in engineering, operations, piloting, customer service, and beyond. Together with our female flight crews, engineers, ground staff, and air traffic controllers, their invaluable work ensures the safety and efficiency of every flight. I am sincerely thankful for their pivotal role in our success.

To our loyal customers, I offer my deepest appreciation. Your trust and support inspire us to innovate and grow, and I am genuinely grateful for the privilege of serving you. I also extend heartfelt thanks to our suppliers and business partners, whose collaboration strengthens our operations. Together, with the support of our Government and Board, we are building a resilient airline for the future-one we hope will bring pride to our nation.

Solomon Airlines is more than a carrier; we are proud ambassadors of the Solomon Islands, sharing our culture, warmth, and breathtaking destinations with the world. Whether you travel for business, leisure, or to reconnect with loved ones, we are committed to making your journey comfortable and memorable-a promise we strive to uphold with every flight. Our full-service offerings, including onboard meals, generous baggage allowances, and spacious seating, combined with strong partnerships with tourism operators and local communities, reflect our dedication to you. As you settle in, I invite you to enjoy this edition of our in-flight magazine, filled with travel inspiration, airline updates, and stories celebrating our region's beauty.

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With sincere gratitude, Sean Te'o **Chief Executive Officer Solomon Airlines Limited**

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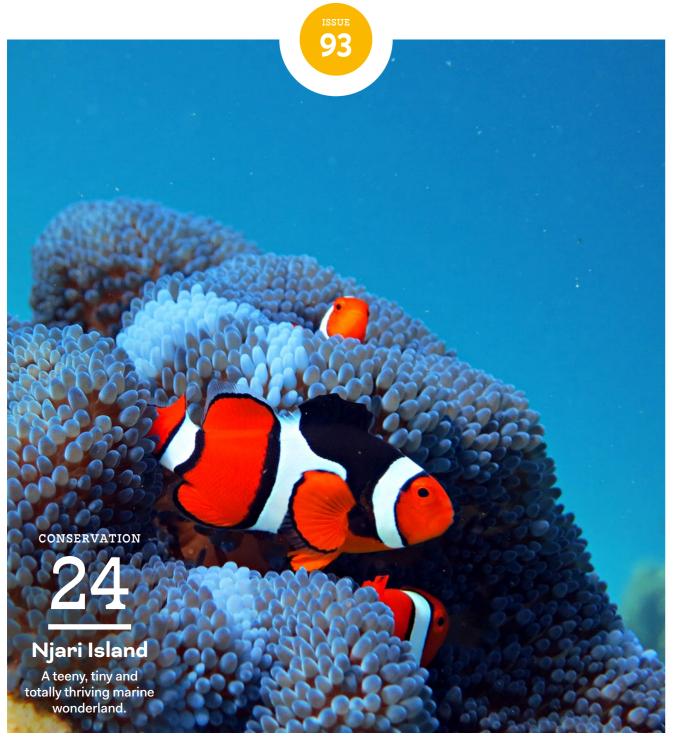
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Editorial

PUBLISHER EDITOR GENERAL MANAGER EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS David Green

Justin Jamieson Kate Gazzard Karina Schiller Jenny Lobo

Design

CREATIVE DIRECTOR SENIOR DESIGNER PRODUCTION MANAGER Ivan Valachovic

Luke Fraser Beck Haskins

Advertising Justin Jamieson Ph: (61) 3 9486 0550 Email: justin@grincreative.com.au

Address Grin Creative

Studio 04, 281 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy 3065, VIC Australia Ph: (61) 3 9486 0550

Contributors

Katie Dundas, Justin Jamieson, David Allegretti, Cal Foster, Kate Gazzard

Cover image PHOTOGRAPHER Jason Gagame and Pana Paza, storystream.com



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Inaugural music festival celebrates **Melanesian culture**

The inaugural Aelan Riddim Music Festival (ARMF), held on Saturday night at the Pacific Crown Hotel, delivered a spectacular showcase of Melanesian music, culture, and unity.

The event brought together both legendary and emerging artists from Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands, offering an electrifying celebration of the region's rich musical heritage.

ARMF Event Director Terence Rini expressed his elation at the festival's overwhelming success, noting that attendance exceeded expectations.

"For a debut event, this was a massive production that united top artists from PNG and the Solomon Islands," Rini remarked. He highlighted the enthusiastic support from the Honiara community and travellers to the region, with many attendees purchasing last-minute tickets to be part of the experience.

Looking ahead, Rini revealed plans for the

next ARMF. which could be hosted in another Melanesian country such as Vanuatu, PNG, or Fiji. He extended his heartfelt gratitude to the fans and Honiara residents, emphasising that their participation was instrumental in making the festival a triumph.

The festival was made possible with the backing of key sponsors, including Our Telekom, Tourism Solomons, PNG Coke Studio Coca-Cola, Pacific Crown Hotel, and Air Niugini.

Rini gave special recognition to Coke Studio for its sponsorship, marking the first time the brand has supported an event outside of PNG - a milestone that highlights the festival's growing regional significance.

The event featured five headline artists from PNG (Kali Dion, Mereani Masani, Saii Kay, Jarahn, and Tau Likoniau Po'o Jr (J-Liko)) who were accompanied by the Makasi Band, consisting of Grainger Runialo, Wesley Midian, Joseph Loksi, Noah Kana Jr, and Julian Semoso.

Joining them on stage was an impressive lineup of celebrated Solomon Islands musicians, including DJ Tanz, Cottsi, Jammin, Rosie Delmah, Ghemu, Ramo, Kool Roots,



"For a debut event. this was a massive production that united top artists from PNG and the Solomon Islands."

Kekene, Wally Pazzi, Small Axe, Max Lulu, JAG, Solid T, Solkisz, Lite Life, and Onetox. For some veteran artists, this marked their first live performance in years, making it an especially memorable occasion for fans.

Kicking off at 6 PM on Saturday and running until 2 AM Sunday, the energy, passion, and camaraderie displayed on stage underscored the festival's role in strengthening Melanesian musical ties and setting the foundation for future editions of ARMF.

With its resounding success, the Aelan Riddim Music Festival has firmly positioned itself as a premier event celebrating the vibrancy of Melanesian music and culture, promising even greater experiences in the years to come.



The Gizo Market in the Western Provincial Capital is undergoing a significant renovation aimed at enhancing its appeal and creating a more inviting space for vendors, customers, and visitors.

As part of this initiative, palm trees have been planted around the market, bringing a fresh touch of greenery and improving the overall aesthetic. This effort was led by Gizo Market Manager Moffat Maeta, who envisioned a more vibrant and welcoming atmosphere for the community and travellers alike.

Mr. Maeta personally sourced the palm trees from Honiara and initially planted them in his own outback living area before relocating them to the market. His motivation stemmed from a desire for sustainability and environmental consciousness, recognising that the older trees around the market, planted decades ago, would eventually require pruning or removal.

"To ensure the market maintains its natural charm, planting these palm trees was the ideal solution," he explained. "The original plan was proposed by the Gizo Market Vendors Association (GMVA), but when it didn't come to fruition, the market management took the lead in making it happen."

Mr. Maeta hopes this initiative will inspire other provincial government offices to implement similar beautification projects, fostering a cleaner and more visually appealing town. Gizo Town Clerk Charles Kelly also expressed his enthusiasm, stating that the improvements would not only enhance the market's appearance but also encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility among the public.

"These efforts align with broader plans to upgrade public spaces in Gizo, ensuring a better experience for everyone,' Mr. Kelly noted.



Bevond benefiting local vendors and shoppers, the beautification of Gizo Market is also expected to attract more travellers. As a key hub in the town, a visually appealing market can leave a positive impression on visitors, enhancing their overall experience. Many travellers seek authentic cultural experiences, and a well-maintained, inviting marketplace can encourage tourism, providing economic benefits to vendors and the wider community.

Local vendors and residents have responded positively to the changes, believing the market's new look could attract more customers and boost business activity. The community is encouraged to support this initiative by keeping the market clean and taking pride in its refreshed appearance.

Clockwise from opposite: A group of performers posing after the festival; palm trees being planted at the entrance to Gizo Market; the planters trying to boost the market's appeal; the festival was a resounding success.





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DON'T GO CHASING WATERFALLS

(Unless You're Wearing Football Boots)

Honiara's Tenaru Falls prove paradise was never meant to be easy.

Words David Allegretti Images Cal Foster

oniara. 8am. The capital is already buzzing market vendors setting up, utes and scooters stacked to the brim, dogs seeking shade wherever they can find it.

The hangover doesn't help. The Solbrew wasn't cold, but I was in Honiara, so I drank it anyway. Today I pay the price. I take a sip of lukewarm canned coffee, its sickly sweetness doing little to cut through the muggy air. I light a smoke and watch my ride pull into the dusty lot. Destination: Tenaru Falls.

Behind the wheel is Andrew – 'Ada' to anvone who knows him – a former Solomon Islands national team footballer who still hikes to Tenaru Falls in his old boots. "People know when I've been there," he says with a grin, "they see the stud marks in the mud." I glance at my tattered sneakers and wonder if they'll survive what's ahead.

But before the hike is a one-hour journey by car, and it's a hell of a ride. We're four today: me, my photographer Cal, our guide Brandon, and Ada. The drive out of Honiara is a slow escape from chaos into green.





Clockwise from opposite: David trying to figure out if the tough hike was worth it (spoiler alert: it was); the start of the trail; the family-run Parangiju Mountain Lodge.

This isn't so bad. Then we hit the steps. Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. Some carved into stone, others jerryrigged from wood and prayer.

The road is unpaved and unforgiving. Ada is at full concentration as we wind our way up, through Guadacanal's interior at 20km/h, bouncing and rattling all the while. This is not the realm for the carsick-prone. But this is the point; this is what we came for.

Eventually, we pull into Parangiju Mountain Lodge, a family-run joint that serves as base camp for the falls. It's a quiet, shady oasis perched on a hillside with open views that stretch forever. The kind of place you could spend a weekend bird-watching or fishing by the river if you're into that. Today, it's just a pit stop. A quick breakfast, some strong coffee, and we're off. Well, not all of us — Ada stays behind at the lodge, and a young local lad takes his place to take us to the falls.

I'm told it's a 6km round trip from the lodge to the falls — and cautioned that it's not exactly a walk in the park. The hike starts easy. A nice little path, a few shady trees, a small bridge, the sound of birds. I begin to give in to hubris. This isn't so bad. Then we hit the steps. Hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. Some carved into stone, others jerry-rigged from wood and prayer. The humidity is suffocating. The forest closes in around us, dense and

alive. Sometimes there was a railing, sometimes you were one wrong step away from a very long tumble.

Now, let me preface this by saying I'm not exactly unfit. I played soccer my whole life. I even ran a marathon once, in a fit of temporary insanity. But I've also had six surgeries on my legs. Two knee reconstructions (cheers, football), two broken ankles (one in the Swiss Alps, one courtesy of a Balinese motorbike mishap), and two more to remove a cyst that had a weird vendetta against my left knee. All that is to say, at times, I was less than graceful as I clung in desperation to a vine here, a branch there.

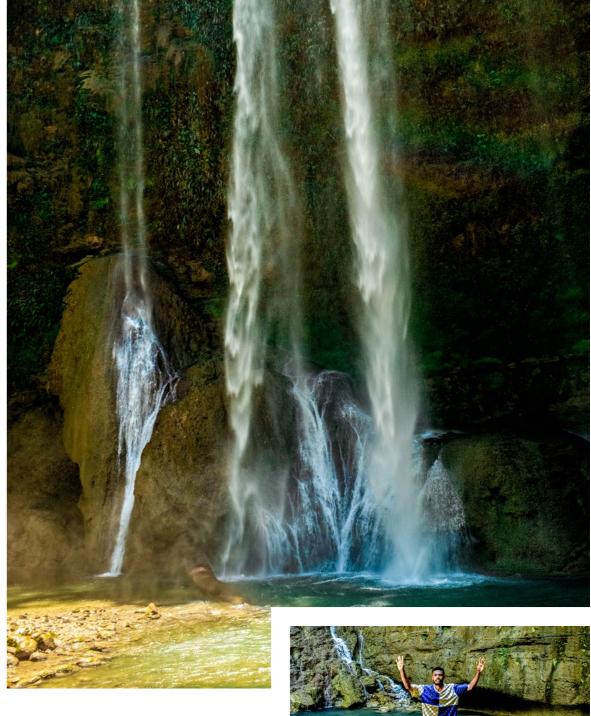
Our young guide, on the other hand, was a goddamn mountain goat, gliding ahead like water over rocks, like he'd done this hundreds of times before. I'd later find out that in fact, he had. At one point, Brandon, taking pity, ripped a branch off a tree and handed it to me. "Here," he said, "walking stick." It was perfect.

We cross a river, barefoot and with deliberate footing because the rocks are slick, and the water is up to our $% \left({{{\rm{D}}_{\rm{B}}}} \right)$

shins. Then, more dense forest, more bird call, more life. You hear Tenaru Falls before you see it — a low rumble that builds to a roar that grows louder with each step, until it's a constant crashing that vibrates through the trees and your chest. And then, there it is, out of the green it announces itself without humility. Sixty-three metres of water crashing into a pool that begs you to strip and dive right in.

And so, we do. The water is exactly as you'd place it in your dreams. Not too cold, but still refreshing. Clean and tranquil, but not boring. The way in is slippery, rocks slicker here, but worth it. If you can't swim, don't be a hero, some parts get deep. If you're confident, do as the young lad and climb the highest rock — a few stories high — and dive. Cal

Opposite: Making a slow descent towards Tenaru Falls. **Clockwise from above:** The thundering and extremely impressive Tenaru Falls; put your hands in the air if you've just made it to the Falls.





does the same. I consider it, for half a second, until I imagine filling out yet another travel insurance claim. I find my peace drifting in the middle depths instead, where the waterfall's mist clouds my face, and I need neither courage nor caution.

I look up to the sky as I float. The rainforest opens up around the falls, sunlight cutting through the mist in golden streaks. And we have it all to ourselves. No crowds. No selfie sticks. Just the four of us and one of the most stunning natural sights I've ever seen. There's a wooden bench or two nearby, the only concession to human comfort. Everything else is pure, untamed Guadalcanal.



The hike was brutal, but the reward? Worth every step, every drop of sweat. This is a view you earn. You can't drive here, can't cheat your way in. The falls demand effort, and they give back tenfold.

This is the kind of spot you can spend all day at, but it takes a while to get there, so a word to the wise - start early. Bring water, and plenty of it. Pack snacks, because a picnic here is something you'll remember forever. Bring swimwear, or a change of clothes, or just do what we did and accept you'll be wet, either from sweat or water, no matter what. Bring a towel and a dry bag for electronics. And keep in mind, the trail can be treacherous after rain (though I hear football boots help with this), so consider weather conditions when planning your visit. The dry season (May to October) offers the most reliable conditions, though the falls are accessible year-round. ►

Above: Enjoying a well earned staring sesh.



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Retreat. Relax. And immerse yourself

Words Justin Jamieson Images Justin Jamieson and Katie Kelly

step off the boat onto the jetty at Uepi Island Resort, and it feels like I've just entered a dream. The water is so clear I can count the fish loitering beneath my feet, and the dense jungle ahead hums with the sound of an island untouched. This is the Solomon Islands as it was meant to be; raw, pristine, and drop-dead gorgeous.

Uepi is an exclusive little slice of paradise, a thin strip of land perched on the edge of the Marovo Lagoon, the largest saltwater lagoon in the world. It's a diver's heaven, a snorkeller's playground, and for those of us with a penchant for hammocks and sundowners, a tropical utopia. The resort itself blends seamlessly into the lush surroundings. Think rustic, eco-friendly bungalows, solar-powered everything, and a complete absence of pretension. There are no infinity pools or cabana boys, just the endless blue of the lagoon, the whisper of palm trees, and the kind of silence that makes you forget your phone even exists.

Opposite: Following a manta ray as it glides through the water.

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This place owes its existence to Grant Kelly, who, along with his wife Jill, saw the untapped potential of this remote island and turned it into the eco-friendly retreat it is today. Arriving in the 1980s, Grant, an avid diver and adventurer, fell in love with the untouched reefs and pristine wilderness. Instead of transforming Uepi into a mass tourism destination, he focused on sustainable, lowimpact tourism that would preserve the island's natural beauty while benefiting the local communities. Decades later, their vision has flourished into a world-renowned resort that still holds true to its original ethos - simple, authentic, and deeply connected to its surroundings.

I'm staying in a Beachfront Bungalow, which, as the name suggests, spills straight onto a stretch of sand that sees more hermit crabs than people. There are also Garden



Bungalows tucked into the jungle for those who want the sounds of nature to lull them to sleep, and larger, familyfriendly units if you're bringing the whole crew. They're all spacious, breezy, and charmingly rustic; no air-con, but with the sea breeze and ceiling fans, you don't need it.

The first order of business? Diving. Uepi is world-famous for it, and within minutes of rolling backwards off the boat, I see why. The drop-offs here are dizzying sheer walls that plummet into the abyss, draped in corals and teeming with marine life. The famous Uepi Point dive site is a riot of sharks, barracudas, and swirling schools of trevally. It's like swimming through a real-life National Geographic documentary (minus David Attenborough's voiceover).

Not a diver? No problem. The snorkelling here is just as ridiculous. The house reef, accessible straight from the resort, is a technicolour world of clownfish, giant clams, and reef sharks cruising the shallows like they own the place. One morning, before breakfast, I head out to the manta ray cleaning station - a surreal experience watching these graceful giants glide in slow circles as tiny cleaner fish do their work. Kayaking across the lagoon is another must; just you, a paddle, and miles of turquoise silence.

For a taste of the local culture, there's a trip to nearby Marovo villages, where the woodcarving skills of the islanders will have you contemplating how much room you have in your suitcase.

The resort works closely with nearby villages, funding education initiatives, supporting sustainable fishing practices, and providing employment opportunities that help preserve the traditional way of life. They source as much of their food as possible from local farmers and fishermen, ensuring that the benefits of tourism flow directly to the people who call this





Clockwise from left: Sunset vibes a beachside bungalow, Idyllic South Pacific, The Uepi reef is epic; Up close and personal with a Manta Ray; A handwritten sign welcomes you to Uepi Island.

If you want to spend the day drifting between a hammock and the water, nobody's judging.

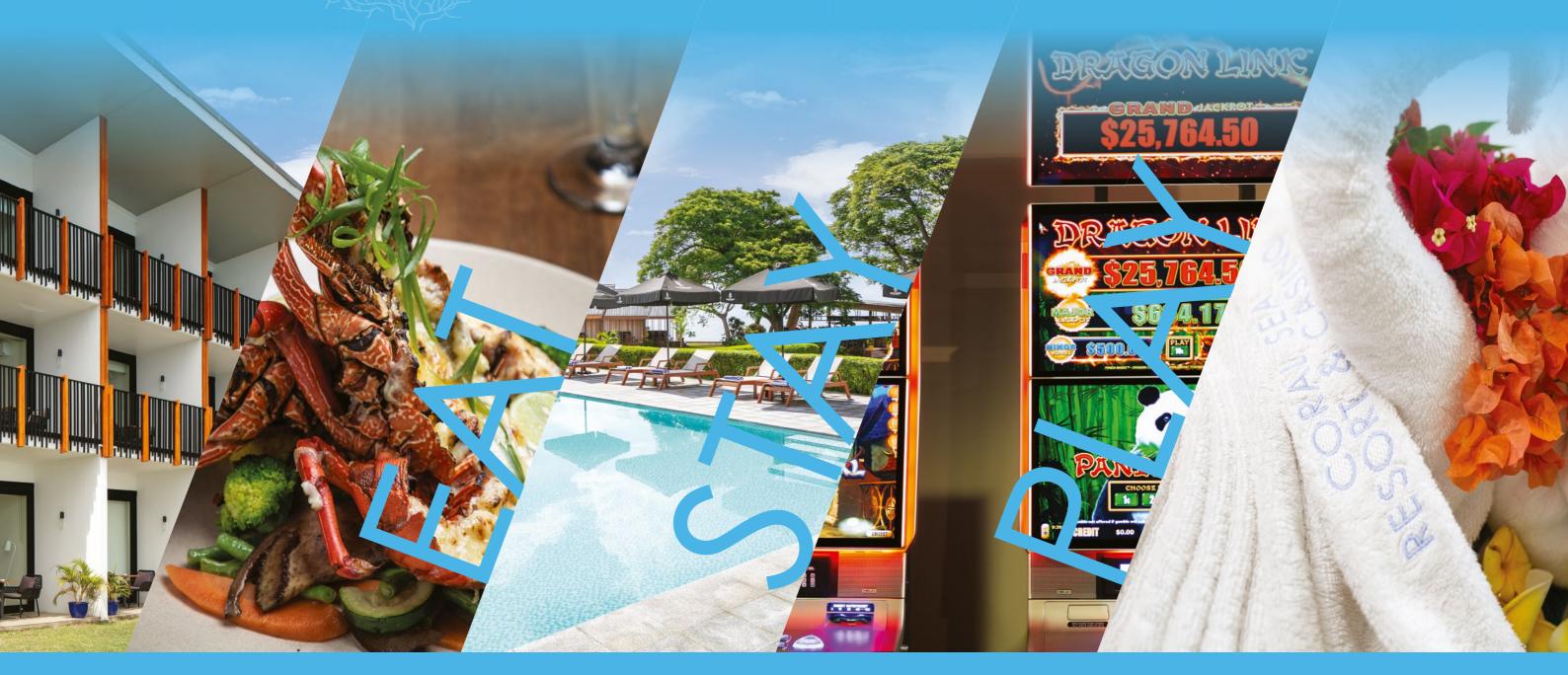
paradise home. Guests can even contribute by bringing much-needed supplies or donating to the resort's ongoing community projects. Afternoons at Uepi are a masterclass in relaxation. There's no pressure to do anything. If you want to spend the day drifting between a hammock and the water, nobody's judging. The honesty bar at the main lodge becomes the social hub around sunset, where everyone gathers to swap stories over a cold Solbrew. There's also a volleyball court for those keen to work up an appetite before dinner.

As I settle into my bungalow on my final night, the sounds of the island (gentle waves, distant laughter, the occasional gecko chirp) blend into a lullaby. Uepi isn't just a resort; it's an experience. The kind that reminds you why travel matters, why unplugging is essential, and why, if you're lucky, you might just leave a little piece of yourself behind in the Solomon Islands.



Speaking of which, dinner is a communal affair, showcasing the kind of fresh, local cuisine that makes you wonder why you ever settled for anything less. The seafood - straight from the lagoon - is legendary, and the coconut-infused curries could make a grown man weep.

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diver's

The teeny tiny and totally thriving marine wonderland of Njari Island

Words and Images Kate Gazzard

he backs of a nearby pod of dolphins, as they crested the water's waves, welcomed us as we sidled up to the dock at Njari Island. The big red "Keep out" sign?



"Are we allowed to be here"? "Yes, of course," our guide, Nangarita, said, "there's a SBD50 landing fee, so we've paid. They just have that sign to deter people who don't want to".

We quickly docked and I got my first good look at this tropical paradise. If you close your eyes and picture a typical South Pacific Island with its clear blue water, pure white sand and lush green foliage, that's pretty much Njari Island.

But here's the thing, while this place might be small (at just a few hectares in size), it punches way above its weight when it comes to marine biodiversity and environmental protection, championed by ex-pat turned Solomon Islands resident turned master diver, Danny Kennedy.

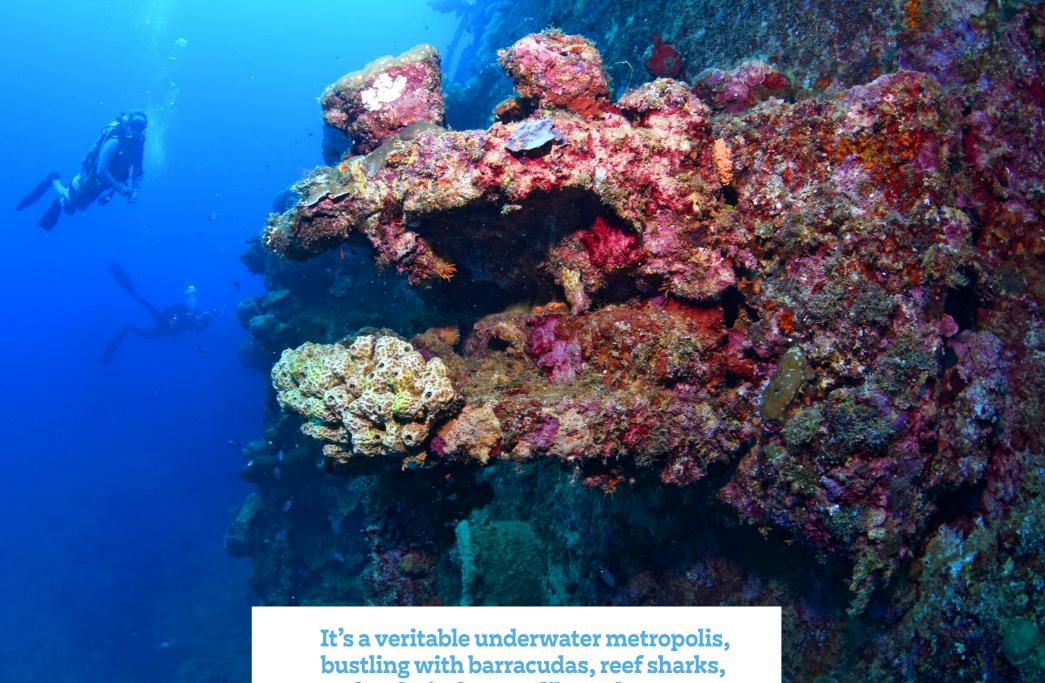
Opposite: The underwater world of Njari Island is teeming with colourful marine life. Left: The jetty at Njari Island, complete with 'Keep Out' sign.

You see, Njari Island is famous for its underwater spectacle, and if you're a diver, you might just cry a little when you first dip beneath the surface. I mean, this tiny reef system boasts one of the highest fish counts recorded in a single dive - over 270 species spotted in just one go (cue the tears).

It's a veritable underwater metropolis, bustling with barracudas, reef sharks, and technicolour nudibranchs that look like they were designed by a hyperactive child with a box of crayons. But it wasn't always this way.

In 2002, Danny secured a 75-year fixed-term lease on Njari Island, and he's been on a mission to protect it ever since transforming it into a thriving sanctuary for marine life. His conservation efforts were fuelled by a 2004 study led by Dr. Alison Green, which assessed the health of the reef and its surrounding waters. The verdict? While the reefs were in good shape, the study revealed significant signs of human and environmental impact.





and technicolour nudibranchs...

Danny's mission was clear, if he wanted to secure and protect the island's stunning underwater world, action needed to be taken. Fast forward to today, and after a few minor setbacks (we're looking at you 2007 earthquake), the island now sits in the heart of a world-class marine protected area (MPA). This means its surrounding waters are a no-take zone; no fishing, no spearfishing, and no sneaky midnight poaching. Danny even set up an outpost on the island so a security team could safeguard the waters at nighttime.

From planting baby corals like underwater gardeners, kicking out those pesky, reef-munching crown-of-thorns starfish to scattering tiny clam recruits to help beef up the marine ecosystem, Danny and his crew of oceanic superheroes have really made a difference.

Despite all of the challenges (and twenty plus years), his dream has remained the same. To turn this little pint-sized slice of paradise into the ultimate crash course in oceanic comeback stories, where scientists, adventure-hungry divers, and starry-eyed students from all corners of the

Solomon Airlines Magazine

globe can gather, geek out, and witness firsthand how a reef goes from 'uh-oh' to 'oh wow.'

Njari Island is living, swimming, coral-growing proof that nature is one tough cookie. Given a little TLC (and a break from human meddling), ecosystems can bounce back in spectacular fashion and this one has bounced back big time.

I didn't dive while I was there; that would require me to put on a wetsuit and face my fear of the open ocean (something I'll never do). But even from my vantage point on the shore, I could tell there was something special going on under the water's surface; something that wouldn't have existed if it weren't for one diver's mighty conservation dream.

Clockwise from above: Njari Island is known to be one of the best diving spots in Gizo; the island is bursting with lush greenery thanks to conservation efforts; a strict list of rules visitors to Njari Island must follow.







WHEN ONLY THE BEST WILL DO



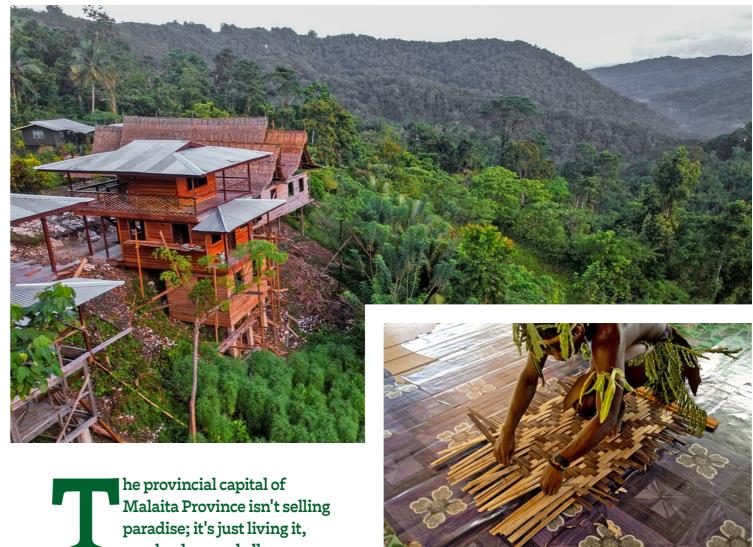


Explore

A WEEKEND IN

SOLOMON ISLANDS' UNTAMED HEARTBEAT

Vords David Allegretti Images Cal Foster



rough edges and all.

Malaita doesn't give a damn if you're comfortable. This forgotten corner of the Pacific - a two-hour ferry ride or mercifully brief 30-minute flight from the capital Honiara - isn't interested in your Instagram aesthetics or five-star expectations. But that's precisely why you should go.

As the country's third-largest town after Honiara and Gizo, it remains blissfully untouched by mass tourism. No resort compounds, no tour buses, just a raw, unfiltered slice of Solomon Islands life that leaves you changed in ways glossy brochures could never promise.

Day 1: The High Country

The ferry from Honiara deposits you at Auki's bustling wharf by mid-morning. Don't linger in town just yet you'll get there tomorrow. Instead, arrange transport to Haodaikirio Lodge in the highlands of Central Kwara'ae. The hour-long drive is a crash course in Malaitan geography - literally. Your spine will count every irregular bump as your 4WD crawls upward through rough road and

Clockwise from opposite: A local family that lives in a village close to Steven's lodge; Steven's lodge from above; traditional weaving demonstration, creating panels used in constructing walls or thatched roofing for huts.

dense jungle that occasionally parts to reveal views that hit you like a physical force. The pumping, the jostling, the shaking - these are good things. This is what you want. You will enjoy the ride (good luck reading a book, though). Malaitan Steven Misiosi's lodge sits at the end of this punishing road, a utilitarian yet charming collection of bungalows perched atop what feels like the roof of the world. The accommodation itself is basic - one bungalow with a double bed and two singles - but you're not here for thread counts or room service. You're here for what's outside.

From the lodge's wooden deck, Malaita spreads beneath you, an undulating carpet of impossible green stretching to a horizon where jungle meets sky. The air up here is cleaner, cooler, alive with bird calls and rich with the smell of earth and growth. It's the kind of view that makes you shut up mid-sentence.

Don't get too comfortable. The nearby cascade demands your attention, and it's an experience worth the sweat equity required. This half-hour hike involves a bit of scrambling, at times a little more verticality than you'd bargained for, and one particularly hairy section where your feet search for purchase on a muddy decline while your hands cling to lifeline branches and exposed roots. It's not the most demanding hike in the world, but it will absolutely punish anyone who shows up in thongs.

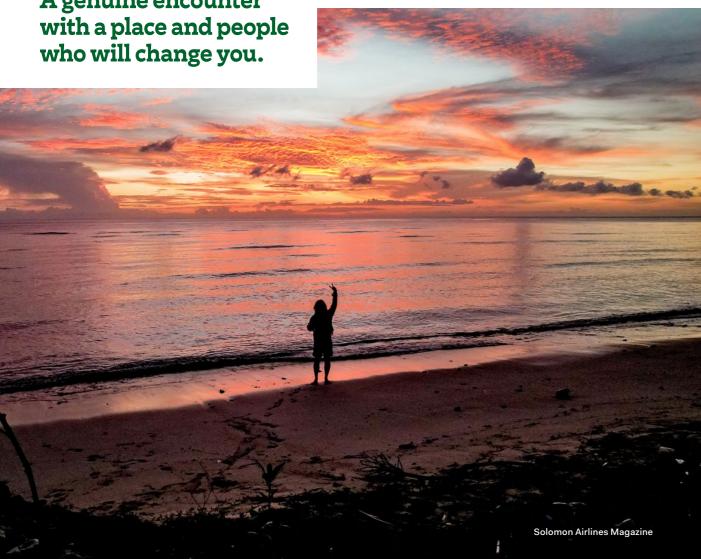


A genuine encounter with a place and people who will change you.

The payoff, though – a secluded waterfall tumbling into a shallow, peaceful pool amongst the trees - is worth doing it all again 10-fold (okay, maybe 9-fold). Let the water wash away travel grime and muscle ache in equal measure, float to the base and let the pounding water massage your shoulders. If you're resourceful, pack a traditional banana leaf basket with SolBrew, crack a can either in the water or on the wooden decking hand-built by Steven. Take a sip. You've arrived. This is Malaita.

Back at the lodge, sunset transforms your already spectacular view into something almost hallucinatory. As darkness falls, the stars emerge with astonishing clarity - real stars, not the faint urban approximations most of us settle for. The Milky Way asserts its dominance across the sky.

Dinner at the lodge is simple but satisfying - fresh vegetables from nearby gardens, local chicken or fish, and the ubiquitous root crops that form the backbone of Solomon Islands cuisine. Finish it all off with some of Malaita's famous watermelon and sweet pineapples for dessert - you will think about these pineapples months, even years later. Sleep comes easily, exhaustion and silence conspiring to deliver the kind of rest that feels medicinal.



Day 2: Auki Town and Osi Waters

The morning brings difficult choices. You could easily spend another day exploring the highlands, but Auki proper deserves your attention. Arrange for your driver to collect you after breakfast for the bumpy descent back to town.

Auki's central market is the town's beating heart and your first stop. This waterfront hub throbs with commerce and conversation from early morning, vendors spread their wares across concrete tables: pyramids of impossibly colourful fruit, mountains of taro and sweet potato, fish so fresh they practically quiver.

Beyond the market, Auki itself doesn't boast many conventional attractions. Its dusty streets, lined with simple shops and government buildings, tell the story of a frontier town that serves as the commercial hub for the province's villages. Take some time to wander, peek into a shop or two, let your whim guide you - just make sure you bring cash. But you know that by now.

By early afternoon, it's time to head north to Osi Lake. This natural lake teems with birdlife and offers a glimpse of Malaitan ecology that contrasts with the highlands you experienced yesterday. Some parts of the lake feel ancient, untouched, while others show the inevitable signs of human proximity. The Solomon Islands, like everywhere else, contains these contradictions.

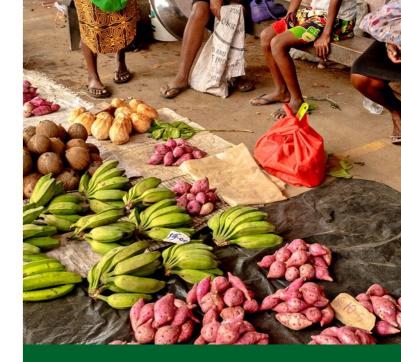
From Osi Lake, it's a short trip to the beach, in fact, it's called Osi Beach Side, so you won't get lost. Spend the remaining sunlight hours here, bring snacks and plenty to drink. Watch the sun get lower while families frolic on the sand; local children practice somersaults into the gentle waves.

The water is the temperature of a relaxed exhale - not cold enough to shock, not warm enough to notice. Small waves provide just enough movement to remind you the ocean is alive. Swim or float on your back or just sit in the shallow and let the waves move you. Watch the sky change colours, from the harsh blue of afternoon to the soft pinks and oranges of a Pacific sunset.

For your final night, swap the commercial accommodations for a more personal experience at BH Family Lodge. Here, you're in the warm and welcoming care of Hazel Harohau, with her encyclopedic knowledge of local customs and history, transforms a simple overnight into an opportunity for riveting conversation. Her cooking alone justifies the choice - fresh family-style fare to make you feel at home across the sea.

Auki won't coddle you. It won't serve your cocktail with a paper umbrella or scatter rose petals on your turned-down bed. What it offers instead is far more valuable - a genuine encounter with a place and people who will change you. It's not always comfortable, rarely convenient, but that's what you want; that's where beauty lives. ►

Clockwise from opposite: Local woman and BH Family Lodge owner, Hazel Harohau; a selection of local fruits from Auki market; enjoying a magical sunset.



Getting There and Around



Flights from Honiara to Auki run daily (weather permitting) and take about 30 minutes. The ferry option is cheaper but less comfortable - expect a roughly two-hour journey that can become significantly longer if seas are rough.



Once in Auki, transportation options are limited, but arrangements can be made through accommodations for drivers and vehicles. For shorter distances around town, walking is feasible, just be prepared to break a gentle sweat.



The road to Haodaikirio Lodge requires a 4WD vehicle and someone who knows the route. Don't attempt the drive yourself unless you have significant experience with rough terrain.



Cash is king - come prepared.



Cell service is hit or miss and let's just say you won't be taking any business meetings on the Wi-Fi, so maybe block out your calendar and choose to view the trip as a nice digital detox.



Pack light but smart – quick-dry clothing, decent walking shoes, insect repellent, and a portable charger. A sense of humour and flexibility will serve you better than any physical item you could bring.

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22 hours in Auckland

Words Kate Gazzard



hanks to Solomon Airlines' brand-new direct flight from Brisbane to Auckland, you can now swap sun-soaked island vibes for the urban buzz of New Zealand's biggest (and coolest) city.

Auckland couldn't be more ready to impress you with its stunning harbour views, quirky eats, and adventure-filled spirit. So, whether you've got a few days to play or just a long layover, here's exactly how you're going to spend your time...

12:30am



Solomon Airlines Magazi

DeBrett is always booming.



Kia ora, travellers!



Your Solomon Airlines flight from Brisbane gets in late, so you won't be doing much of anything except collecting your luggage as quickly as possible and heading to the taxi rank for a fast ride to your accommodation.

And when it comes to the comfiest bed to lay your travel-weary body in, it's gotta be at Hotel DeBrett. This boutique gem oozes heritage charm and has been around since the 1840s, surviving fires, rebuilds, and probably a few wild parties. Now, it's a guirky wonderland of bold colours, eclectic art, and the kind of vintage-meets-modern design that makes you want to redecorate your whole house.

The iconic striped carpet? Insta-famous. The vibe? Effortlessly cool. Whether you're sipping cocktails in the Art Deco Housebar or snoozing off your after-lunch food coma in style, this place is the perfect central spot to kick off your Auckland adventures.



Opposite: The beautiful cityscape of Auckland at twilight. Above: The funky and historic Hotel





9am

A quick visit to DeBrett's Kitchen is all the fuel you'll need for an epic morning spent kayaking to Rangitoto Island with Auckland Sea Kayaks.

After a short safety briefing and paddling instruction, you'll glide across the sparkling Waitematā Harbour (look out for penguins - yes, penguins!), then hike to the summit of Rangitoto Island like a true explorer where spectacular sights await; think unparalleled views of Auckland.

Back at the water's edge, a light Kiwi lunch will be ready, and if you're feeling brave, take a refreshing dip before paddling back to St Heliers Bay.

Clockwise from above: A group of kayakers heading to Rangitoto Island; the mouthwatering tacos available at Broke Boy Tacos; an artwork walking tour is a great way to see Auckland's beauty; kayakers on a mission to Rangitoto. Hike to the summit of Rangitoto Island like a true explorer where spectacular sights await; think unparalleled views of Auckland.



<u>3pm</u>

1010

Auckland's art scene will be unleashed on an Aucky Walky Artwork Tour, a two-hour private tour that transforms this city's streets into your own personal art gallery.

Guided by passionate art aficionados, you'll meander through hidden lanes and bustling avenues, uncovering over 400 public artworks that even the locals tend to miss. From vibrant murals echoing Māori heritage to sculptures celebrating Pasifika identity, each piece tells a story as colourful as the city itself.

And just when you think the canvas is complete, the tour wraps up at a lively downtown bar with a complimentary drink. Cheers to that!

2pm



There's no if, buts or maybes about it, Broke Boy Tacos is the place to be for an after-lunch snack. Only a short Uber ride away from the CBD, this no-fuss taco joint is beloved by locals thanks to its flavour-packed menu and killer prices (as its name suggests).

Of course the tacos are the star of the show here; tender meats, fresh veggies, and bold sauces wrapped in soft, warm tortillas. Whether you're going for the classic birria tacos, crispy quesadillas, or the mouthwatering birria ramen, each dish is an explosion of flavour that's perfectly balanced and oh-so-satisfying. Don't forget to pair them with a side of chips and salsa or a margarita, because why not?







5pm

After all that walking, you'll probably be feeling a little peckish again (especially for something sweet). This is where Giapo comes in.

If Willy Wonka opened an ice cream shop in Auckland, it would be this place. It isn't your average scoop-and-go spot; this is where ice cream gets reimagined into flavours you never knew you wanted to taste. Think espresso and jalapeño (yes, mixed together) and kumeu strawberry. They've even made the viral Dubai chocolate into a flavour you won't stop eating.

And the best part? You won't get a boring old cone to go with your unique flavour. Instead, your ice cream might arrive shaped like a giant squid, with a sourdough donut or as one half of a broken heart. Just don't expect to pick a flavour in under 10 minutes.



7:30pm

O

It's only fair you get a little bit of time to digest because trust us when we say you'll want to be starving when you're having dinner at Queens Rooftop & Wineshop. Perched high above Auckland, this place is where breathtaking views meet tastebud-tingling bites.

The menu is absolutely packed with seasonal and local ingredients, featuring everything from roasted monkfish skewers to duck breast with house hoisin for a little contemporary European flair.

And the vibe is elevated but unpretentious, with polished wooden floors, textured walls, and a wine list so good it deserves its own award. The Cocktails are inventive, the seafood is fresh, and the 270-degree harbour views make it the ultimate first-time-to-Auckland dining experience, especially if you enjoy dinner with a side of "we're definitely coming back here".

10pm



Forget flashy menus and neon signs, Deadshot keeps things deliciously mysterious. Tucked away in Auckland's Ponsonby district, this low-lit, speakeasystyle bar feels more like a well-kept secret than a regular watering hole.

There's no menu here. Instead, the expert bartenders size you up, ask a few questions, and then craft a cocktail tailored to your taste. Sweet and citrusy? Smoky and complex? Something that tastes like a holiday but also a little dangerous? They've got you.

Expect drinks that are as beautiful as they are boozy like crystal-clear Old Fashioneds, floral-infused sours, and unexpected twists on tiki classics. But don't go too hard, you've got a flight to catch in the morning.





Clockwise from opposite: The prettiest ice cream you'll ever eat; you'll get delicious food with a side of epic view at Queen's Rooftop & Wineshop; the cocktails are yummy but deadly at Deadshot; dark interiors and moody lighting makes for a really good time; when in Auckland, go for the seafood.



IN SEARCH OF CONTRACTOR CANADATIONS

Across Vanuatu's islands, dugong population numbers are believed to be declining - but one local conservation group is determined to help.

Words and Images Katie Dundas







Clockwise from opposite: A dugong swims over a Vanuatu reef; lone canoe on a Santo beach: Dr Christina Shaw. CEO of VESS.

The Bislama word for dugong, kaofis, translates to cowfish and is an apt description for these curious sea-dwelling mammals. Dugongs are gentle giants that are often seen grazing underwater, with downturned snouts perfectly designed for snacking on seagrass, their favourite meal. However, dugongs are actually more closely related to elephants than cows, or any other land-based mammal.

Dugong numbers across Vanuatu are declining and worldwide, the species are listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). However, one group is standing up for Vanuatu's dugongs - the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS), the only wildlife conservation organisation operating on the islands.

While dugongs proved elusive on my morning kayak, after speaking with Dr Christina Shaw, the CEO of VESS and local veterinary surgeon, I have a better understanding of why. Across Vanuatu's 83 islands, "We think there are probably a few hundred

dugongs," she explains.

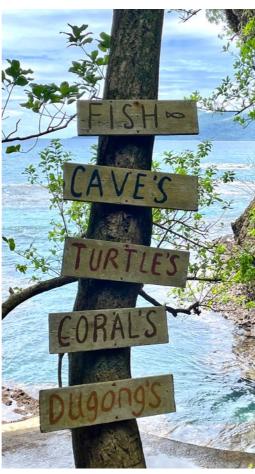
flvsolomons.com

s the hazy pink hues of sunrise quickly give way to bright blue skies, I head out onto the serene Erakor Lagoon in my kayak. Silently paddling, my gaze is aimed under the flat, glassy water in the hopes of spotting a kaofis, an iconic inhabitant of Vanuatu's oceans.

"That's one of the problems. We don't know how many dugongs there are, and we don't know whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing," Dr Shaw tells me.









We're meeting at Nambatu Vet, her new state-of-theart veterinary clinic on Efate, with a portion of all proceeds going to fund VESS efforts.

To protect dugongs, researchers first need to know exactly how many are living in Vanuatu's waters and where they are. VESS is lobbying for a nationwide population count in partnership with the global Dugong & Seagrass Conservation Project.

Visitors to the island love seeing a dugong on a snorkel or dive in Vanuatu. However, kaofis are often shy and prefer to socially distance themselves from us.

"The gold standard is aerial surveys with fixed-wing aircraft because dugongs can move," says Dr Shaw, but drones may also play a role in dugong counting in the future.

Financial and manpower limitations mean a nationwide survey hasn't been held since 1987, which is why conservationists are eager for updated data to better understand the dugong's plight.

Within Vanuatu, dugongs are in danger from multiple threats, including fishing gillnets, boat strikes, and habitat loss.

Clockwise from opposite: A herd of dugongs; aerial image of Espiritu Santo; Top Rock snorkelling site in Efate; dugongs gliding over coral.

The presence of dugongs has long been considered a marker of good ocean health, as they act as gardeners of the sea. They churn up vital nutrients into the water as they devour seagrass, playing a key role in keeping Vanuatu's marine ecosystems in good health.

In addition to their environmental importance, dugongs are also intrinsically linked to the tourism industry. Visitors to the island love seeing a dugong on

> a snorkel or dive in Vanuatu. However, kaofis are often shy and prefer to socially distance themselves from us.

To assist, VESS has published ethical guidelines for both tourists and tour operators. Tourists can play a role in dugong conservation by keeping a safe distance, leaving at least 5 meters between themselves and a mother with her calf, and limiting boat travel over seagrass meadows to a maximum of five knots.

Curious to see one for yourself? On Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu's largest island, Island Fishing Santo operates snorkelling tours to the Aese Island reefs, where dugongs are often seen. Tutuba Island, to Santo's southeast, is another dugong hotspot known for its clear sandy beaches. However, anywhere where seagrass is thriving, you have a chance to spot a dugong.

If you head out on a paddleboard or kayak at sunrise, watch the water's surface for a dugong nose bobbing up or listen for their soft munching sounds as they dine on an underwater seagrass buffet.

Back home, I realise what a rare honour it is to be graced with the presence of a dugong. While I may not have had the pleasure this time, I'm thrilled to share the stories of Vanuatu's dugongs, ensuring their future generations are protected.



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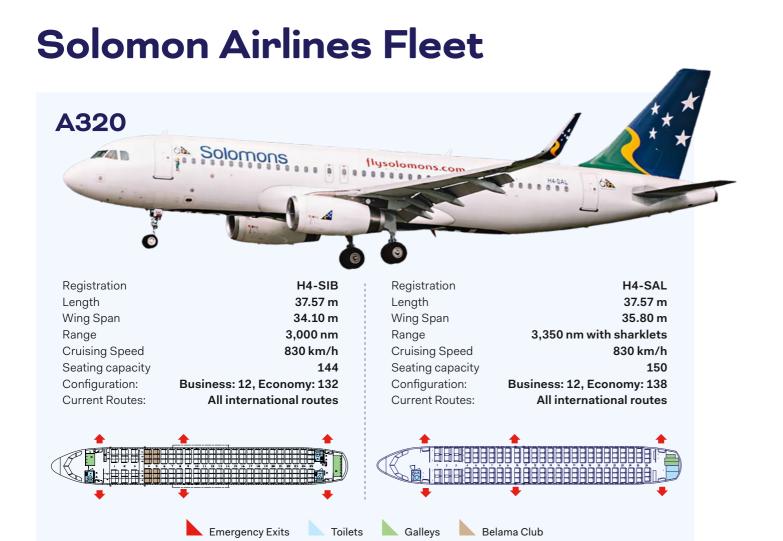
A Quick Guide to Honiara

Conveniently positioned centrally within the South Pacific and embedded deeply in World War Two history and Melanesian culture, Honiara is not only the capital of the Solomon Islands, but a great base for travellers visiting the South Pacific.



Guides

As well as this, there are a number of excellent food and drink options throughout the city, and modern facilities available



Dash 8-102



Length	22.25 m			
Wing Span	25.91 m			
Range	2,040 km			
Cruising Speed	490 km/h			
Seating capacity	/ 36			
Crew	3 crew including 1 cabin crew			
Aircraft in Fleet	1			
Current Routes:				
Honiara, Munda, Gizo; Kirakira, Lomlom				

Twin Otter



Length	15.77 m			
Wing Span	19.81 m			
Range	1,350 km			
Cruising Speed	338 km/h			
Seating capacity	16			
Crew	2			
Aircraft in Fleet	3			
Current Routes:				
All airports in the Solomon Islands				

Inflight Info

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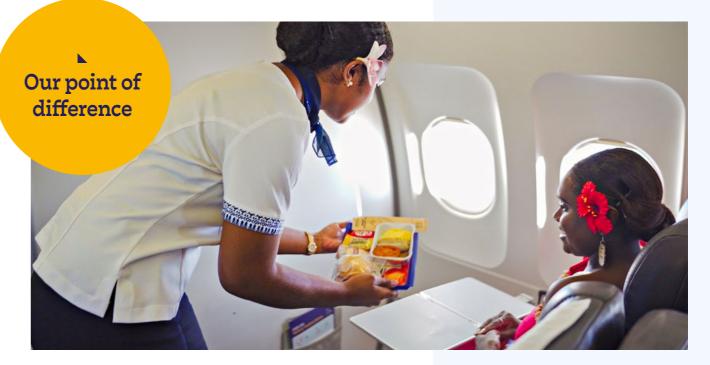
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Solomon Airlines Building, Mendana Avenue, Point Cruz, Honiara, Solomon Islands Ph: (677) 44999 Email: sales@flysolomons.com.sb

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Contacts

SOLOMON ISLANDS - Office Head office: (677) 20031 Reservations: (177) local or (677) 23506

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Solomon Airlines Magazine

Route Maps

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Things to remember before your trip to the Solomons

CLIMATE

Tropically warm and humid with coastal day temperatures averaging 28C (82.4F). April to November tends to be drier and November to April wetter.

WHAT TO WEAR

Light and casual... take it easy!

HEALTH

Malaria can be a problem. Take antimalarial medication a week before arrival, once a week during your stay, and for four weeks after departure. Consult your chemist or doctor about an appropriate brand of tablet. Maloprin is usually recommended.

IMMIGRATION

Commonwealth, United States and most European visitors do not need holiday visas but need return or onward tickets. People intending to work must have work permit.

HONIARA

Our capital is eight kilometres (4.97 miles) from Honiara International Airport.

AIRPORT TAX

SB\$305 payable by passengers 12 years and over) boarding international flights, and these are generally added onto the cost of your air tickets.

CURRENCY

The Solomon Islands dollar (SB). \$100, \$50, \$20, \$10, \$5 and \$2 Solomon Islands notes, while coins are \$1, 50c, 20c, 10c and 5c.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government and business general hours are Monday to Friday, 8am to 4:30pm, with a one-hour lunch break normally beginning at noon.

Shops and some offices open Saturday 8am to 12 noon.

ELECTRICITY

220-240 volts in Honiara and some outer island centres.

BANKS

ANZ Banking Group open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm. Pan Oceanic Bank Limited opens 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday, and the Hyundai Mall main branch opens 10am to 1pm on Saturday. Bred Bank opens 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Bank of South Pacific opens 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday.

TRANSPORT

flysolomons.com

Taxis and buses are readily available in Honiara. Rental cars are available from Economy car rental and Elite Vehicle Rental Ltd.

Honiara Airport Taxi Association (HATA) also provides airport transfers, tours, car hire and general transport service in Honiara.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Local, international calls and internet services are available through Solomon Telekom Company Limited (Our Telekom) and Bmobile networks. 4G network is available in Honiara, Auki, Munda, Noro and Gizo whilst all other provincial hubs are equipped with their 3G networks. SATSOL is also another internet service provider (ISP) in Honiara, other regional and provincial areas in Solomon Islands.

INTERNATIONAL AIR

Solomon Airlines operate out of Honiara and Munda International Airports, while other carriers include Fiji Airways and Air Niugini.

DOMESTIC AIR

Solomon Airlines operate services throughout the country.

NEWS MEDIA

The country has a vibrant media landscape, offering choices in both English and Pidgin. Radio services are offered by state radio, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, private operators and religious bodies. Our Telekom relays BBC and other satellite TV networks while Island Sun and Solomon Star are the two daily news papers.

TIPPING

Not expected and not encouraged.

Airline Nius

Solomon Airlines **launches Auckland** to Brisbane route

Solomon Airlines has successfully launched its first Auckland to Brisbane flights, adding 14,000 seats a year to capacity on the trans-Tasman route. Solomon Airlines now operates direct flights from Auckland to Brisbane with immediate onward connections to the Solomon Islands.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Solomon Airlines flight IE725 departs every Friday at 6.15 am NZDT, arriving in Brisbane at 7.00 am AEST, allowing for a full day of work or easy transfer to other flights.

The new service connects same day with flights from Brisbane to the Solomon Islands' capital, Honiara, and Munda in the Western Province. A return flight from Brisbane to Auckland is set to depart each Friday at 6.25 pm AEST, with scheduled arrival at 12.30 am NZDT on Saturdays.

"This route is part of our expanded international schedule designed to enhance regional connectivity, improve operational efficiency, and ensure smooth travel experiences for passengers and cargo," Mr Wopereis added.



Early morning celebrations at Auckland Airport delighted passengers with cultural performances, commemorative flight certificates, and branded treats.

"We are excited to launch our first Trans-Tasman flights offering Kiwis a new airline choice directly to Brisbane, and those travelling onwards to Solomon Islands, a convenient same-day connection via Brisbane to our international gateways of Honiara and Munda, "said John Wopereis, Commercial Manager at Solomon Airlines.

"Our Auckland-Brisbane flights in both directions are timed to provide great connections, making travel easier and affordable for business and leisure travellers and Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers, as well as those visiting friends and family in Australia, New Zealand and the Solomon Islands."

Scott Tasker, Auckland Airport Chief Customer Officer said it was great to have another option for travellers between AKL and Brisbane, a popular destination for Kiwis.

"Brisbane is a great hopping off point for travellers looking to soak up Brisbane itself or head to the theme parks, beaches and hinterland destinations within driving distance. Plus, with around 200,000 New Zealand expats living in Queensland, there is plenty of travel back and forth to reconnect with friends and whānau.

Mr Tasker also acknowledged the importance of regular

connectivity from the Solomon Islands to Auckland for seasonal workers.

"Solomon Airlines flights through to Brisbane and onward to the Solomon Islands is a great example of how reliable air connectivity brings a range of benefits to New Zealand's economy. Our horticulture and viticulture industries in particular have been able to grow and develop through access to this important seasonal workforce."

For booking contact Solomon Airlines Reservations via email at reservations@flysolomons.com, visit flysolomons.com, or call (677) 44999 or additional phone and email contacts are available globally.



Solomon Airlines and the Solomon Islands National Sports Council (SINSC) have signed a Letter of Cooperation establishing a foundation to support registered national sporting associations in promoting participation in national, regional and international events.

This partnership reflects a shared commitment to supporting the growth of sports nationally, fostering talent development, and strengthening the Solomon Islands' presence in regional and international sporting events. As part of this collaboration, Solomon Airlines will play a proactive role in supporting the travel plans of national teams and athletes representing the Solomon Islands on the global stage.

Frank Wickham, Chairman of Solomon Airlines, said, "We are proud to formalise this partnership with SINSC. Sports unite communities and build our nation's reputation. This collaboration supports Solomon Islands athlete's aspirations and fosters national pride to fly our flag at home and abroad."

Influencers on tour on Espiritu Santo



In partnership with the Espiritu Santo Tourism Association and the Vanuatu Tourism Office. Solomon Airlines flew a group of 20 social media influencers and content creators from three different countries (Australia, New Zealand

Airline Nius

Joe Sika Manuopangai, Chair of SINSC, added, "The support of Solomon Airlines as our first commercial partner is a significant boost to our mission. We aim to be a nationally and internationally recognised leader committing to access and participation for all in sport and physical recreation. Together, we'll create opportunities for athletes and communities to strengthen sports development in our country."

This collaboration is a milestone in the ongoing efforts to enhance sports development in the Solomon Islands. Both organisations are excited to work together to achieve shared goals and create lasting positive impacts for athletes, the community and the country. ►

For more information, visit Solomon Airlines website: flvsolomons.com or contact our reservation team by email: reservations@flysolomons.com

UPDATE

and the Solomon Islands) to Santo, Vanuatu in late March to help promote Solomon Airlines' Brisbane to Santo and Auckland to Santo routes, as well as raise the profile of the island among young travellers looking for their next tropical holiday.

The group spent up to six days touring the many attractions Santo has to offer including Champagne Beach, Port Olry, Millennium Cave, Mount Hope, diving at Coolidge Point, Nanda Blue Hole, canoeing down Riri River and horse riding.

The 'influencer camp' has proven to be a raging success with several videos already posted about the trip, seeing hundreds of thousands of views on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Solomon Airlines, Fred Hollows NZ team up for medical delivery

ANNOUNCEMENT

Solomon Airlines partnered with The Fred Hollows Foundation NZ to urgently deliver essential medical equipment to Honiara's National Referral Hospital. This is the first shipment on the airline's new Auckland-Honiara route via Brisbane.

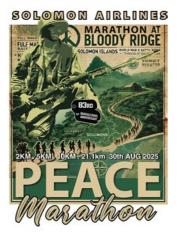
The shipment, coordinated by The Fred Hollows Foundation NZ's Procurement and Operations Lead, consisted of vital ophthalmic equipment that will significantly improve eve care services in the Solomon Islands.

Dr. John Salihue, speaking on behalf of the National Referral Hospital, expressed gratitude to Solomon Airlines for their generous support. "We sincerely thank Solomon Airlines for the great support they have shown. This gesture by our national carrier demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting local communities and patients who will directly benefit from this life changing equipment." he said.



"Solomon Airlines is proud to play a small part in this meaningful initiative. We're committed to supporting the health sector through reliable logistics solutions, especially when it comes to transporting life-changing medical supplies," said John Woperies, Commercial Manager Solomon Airlines.

This collaboration reflects the positive impact of partnerships between national carriers and humanitarian organisations in ensuring essential healthcare resources are delivered where they are needed most. Solomon Airlines looks forward to continuing its support for healthcare improvements across the Solomon Islands.



Solomon Airlines & tourism partners launch **Flysolomons Peace** Marathon 2025

ANNOUNCEMENT

Solomon Airlines, Tourism Solomons, and Travel Solomons proudly announce the return of the Flysolomons Peace Marathon, set for 30 August 2025 in Honiara.

The 2025 Flysolomons Peace Marathon, now a flagship sporting and tourism event, celebrates the Solomon Islands' wartime legacy and modern unity. Set along Honiara's historic WWII sites from Tenaru School to Hell's Point, the route aligns with the 83rd Anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal, highlighting the nation's growing role in WWII heritage tourism.

"The Peace Marathon is a celebration of our identity and journey," said John Wopereis, Solomon Airlines Commercial Manager. "We're proud to sponsor it and share the Solomon Islands story with the world."

Tourism Solomons CEO (Ag), Mr. Dagnal Dereveke, said they're thrilled to be involved in this major annual event for the Solomon Islands.

"The Flysolomons Peace Marathon appeals to serious athletes, but it's heartening to see locals of all backgrounds embrace it, making it a fun and established event on their annual social calendar."

The 2025 event features four race categories; 21.1km Half Marathon, 10km Race, 5km Race & 2km Community Fun Run

Expected to draw over 1,000 local and international participants, the Flysolomons Peace Marathon blends sport, heritage, and community.

Participants can register via the official registration form and submit in person at the Travel Solomons office, Ground Floor G01, NPF Food Court, or by email to travelsol@solomon.com.sb



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Join us on the rooftop for breathtaking sunset views while sipping on delicious cocktails. Then, indulge in an unforgettable dining experience at our renowned Garden Bar & Restaurant, home to Honiara's finest Malaysian Chinese cuisine.

Unwind with Happy Hour from 4PM - 8PM daily at the famous Canoe Bar. Enjoy live performances by local bands from Wednesday to Saturday.

Every Thursday, experience the vibrant traditions of the Solomon Islands with our Cultural Night—featuring mesmerizing Tamure dancing and a taste of our traditional slowcooked Motu.

(677) 45000

Pacific Crown Hotel offers accommodation for every budget, with modern amenities including air-conditioned rooms, free Wi-Fi, a fully equipped gym, conference facilities, and 24-hour security & reception.

Pacific Crown Hotel is located inside Supreme Estate, where you will find shops, restaurants, and a doctor's clinic. Everything you need is within a 2-minute walk. Just 3 km east of Honiara's CBD, our location offers both convenience and accessibility.

Let us welcome you with the warmth of Solomon Islands hospitality!



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