

Solomon Islands

📍 677 / POP 538,000 / AREA 27,540 SQ KM

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Best Historical Sites

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Best Places to Stay

- Rekona Flourish (p321)
- Tavanipupu Private Island Resort (p330)
- Urilolo Lodge (p338)
- Uepi Island Resort (p333)
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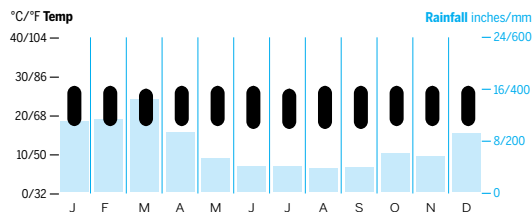
Why Go?

Forget what travelling the Pacific *used* to be like – around the Solomon Islands it's still that way. These islands are laid-back, welcoming and often surprisingly untouched. From WWII relics scattered in the jungle to leaf-hut villages where traditional culture is alive, there's so much on offer. Then there's the visual appeal, with scenery reminiscent of a Discovery Channel documentary: volcanic islands, croc-infested mangroves, huge lagoons, tropical islets and emerald forests.

Don't expect white-sand beaches and ritzy resorts. With only a smattering of traditional guesthouses and comfortable hideaways, it's tailor-made for ecotourists. For outdoorsy types, lots of action-packed experiences await: climb an extinct volcano, surf uncrowded waves, snorkel pristine reefs or kayak across a lagoon. Beneath the ocean's surface, awesome WWII wrecks and dizzying drop-offs will enthral divers. The best part is that there'll be no crowds to mar the experience.

When to Go

Honiara



Dec–Mar Intervals of calm weather broken by storms, making for good reef breaks and diving.

Jun–Sep High season's mild weather (but rough seas) is good for hiking, but less ideal for diving.

Apr–May & Oct–Nov The shoulder seasons are relatively dry and aren't a bad time to visit.

GUADALCANAL

POP 109,000

The largest island in the Solomons, Guadalcanal hosts the national capital, Honiara. There's no iconic calling card but a smattering of cultural sights, including well-preserved WWII relics along the northern coast, as well as a few modest beaches. There's also fantastic diving at Iron Bottom Sound, the famous graveyard of WWII's Battle for Guadalcanal, just off the north coast. Outside the northern coast, the island has the genuine look of a lost world. The hills behind the capital eventually become a mighty mountain range rising to 2400m, which remains untamed and raw.

Honiara

POP 68,000

The first port of call for most visitors, due to its position at the hub of all activity within the archipelago, it's hard not to spend some time in Honiara, the closest thing you'll find to a city in the Solomons. Just over a decade ago it was little more than a sleepy South Seas port, but over the last few years it has undergone an urban boom, and traffic snarl-ups at peak hours are now increasingly common in the centre.

It's rarely love at first sight – the architecture wins no prizes and sights are sparse. But get under the city's skin and the place just might start to grow on you. Hang around the atmospheric wharf, wade through the shambolic market, grab a few gifts in the well-stocked souvenir shops and get your first taste of Melanesian culture by visiting the museum.

Honiara is also the optimal launching pad for exploring Guadalcanal's outdoor offerings and the various WWII battlefields around the city.

Sights

★ Central Market

MARKET

(Map p324; Mendana Ave; ☀ 6am-5pm Mon-Sat) While Honiara won't be mistaken for Lagos, the country's bubbling principal food market covers a whole block between Mendana Ave and the seafont. It has a huge selection of fresh produce, especially fruits and vegetables, that come from outlying villages along the northern coast and from Savo Island. Also on sale are traditional crafts. The fish market is at the back. There's no hassling to buy anything, but beware of pickpockets.

Holy Cross Catholic Cathedral

CATHEDRAL

(Map p324; Mendana Ave) Honiara's most prominent religious building is this cathedral perched on a hill to the east of the centre. Visitors are welcome to attend, but make sure you dress modestly.

National Parliament

BUILDING

(Map p326; Lower Vayvaya Rd; ☀ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) The conical-shaped concrete building that's perched on the hill above Hibiscus Ave is the National Parliament. Inside, the dome boasts a rich tapestry of traditional art, including arching frescoes.

National Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p326; ☎ 24896; Mendana Ave; admission by donation; ☀ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) This modest museum (it has only one room) features interesting displays and old photographs on traditional dance, body ornamentation, currency, weaponry and archaeology. It also covers the role of the coastwatchers during WWII and the influence of missionaries.

US War Memorial

HISTORIC SITE

(Map p324; Skyline Dr) This superb memorial is a five-minute taxi ride from the centre. The well-maintained compound has marble slabs bearing detailed descriptions of battles fought during the Guadalcanal campaign. It was unveiled on 7 August 1992, the 50th anniversary of the US beach landings. There are also great views of the northern coast.



Activities

Diving is Honiara's trump card; a fantastic collection of WWII wrecks lie offshore in an area known as Iron Bottom Sound, including Bonegi I and Bonegi II to the west, and USS *John Penn* to the east. For more, see p36.

Solomon Islands

Diving – Tulagi Dive

DIVING, SNORKELLING

(Map p326; ☎ 25700; www.tulagidive.com; Mendana Ave; single/double dive from \$900/1200; ☀ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) This highly professional dive shop run by Australian Neil Yates adheres to strict safety procedures for deep dives. It specialises in dive sites along the northern coast but also organises day trips to the Florida Islands (\$\$1700 including two dives, equipment and lunch; minimum six divers) and snorkel trips (\$\$400) to Bonegi. It's beside Point Cruz Yacht Club.

Ko Kama Rafting

RAFTING

(☎ 7494788; aemmett04@gmail.com; trips \$700; ☀ Sat & Sun by reservation) East of Honiara, the