

Best of the Solomons, Solomon Islands

Overview

The 10-night Best of the Solomons liveaboard itinerary allows divers to experience a bit of everything that the Central Province and a small part of the Western Province has to offer. Stunning walls and drop-offs, caverns and chasms, unspoilt reefs, abundant marine life and a smattering of WWII relics, are just some of the underwater delights included on this itinerary. Then there's the opportunity to discover the Solomon Islands' cultural diversity and traditions that continue to play a key part in the day-to-day lives of the islanders.

Embarkation, Disembarkation & Transfers

- **Embarkation: Honiara Port, Main Wharf at 18:00**
- **Disembarkation: Honiara Port, Main Wharf at 09:00**

Transfers between Honiara International Airport or local hotels and the port are provided free of charge on embarkation and disembarkation days.

Guests arriving on morning flights or early afternoon flights on embarkation day will usually be transferred to Coral Sea Resort where they can relax before being transferred to the port for embarkation at 18:00 (6 pm).

Guests staying in Honiara before their liveaboard trip will be picked up from their hotel between 17:30 and 18:00.

PLEASE NOTE: Most of our itineraries operate back to back on the same day; therefore *early embarkation or late disembarkation is not possible* as the crew are on a tight schedule to turn the boat around.

Diving Information

Due to depths and strong currents in some areas of the Central Province, some of the diving can be challenging, even for experienced divers and not suitable for entry-level divers.

All guests are responsible for their dive profiles and must stay within the bounds of their training and dive computer guidelines, follow dive guides' advice, and make a safety stop before the end of each dive.

It is a mandatory requirement for all divers to have insurance which covers scuba diving to depths of 30+ metres, emergency evacuation and recompression chamber treatment costs.

Minimum dive certification and experience:

We recommend guests have PADI Advanced Open Water certification, or equivalent, with a mandatory minimum of 40 logged dives.

Any guests who do not have the recommended certification and experience, or who our crew feel lack the experience or skills to dive safely in certain conditions, may be denied participation in some or all dives.

Itinerary Details

Participation in this liveboard itinerary is subject to acceptance of our Terms & Conditions as outlined here: www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions.

Number of scheduled dives: Up to 34

Please be aware that this itinerary involves some long-distance cruising, which will usually be overnight. While we endeavour to ensure the number of scheduled dives is fulfilled, bad weather and sea conditions can affect the vessel's ability to reach or remain at some locations and may impact the number of dives possible.

Marine Kastom Fees & Local taxes: 250 USD per person (payable on board only).

Island Visits

During the course of the itinerary, we will stop at some of the smaller islands, where you can enjoy some time on the beach or visit remote local villages. We usually also visit Peava Village where guests can be shown around the elementary school and meet the children and their teachers, experience the villagers' traditional way of life, admire their handicraft skills and be entertained by a ceremonial dance performance. If it's not possible to visit Peava, there is a choice of other villages we can visit which are equally fascinating and enjoyable. During these visits, the children often come out to play a game of football and love receiving gifts of school supplies. Read our Pack for a Purpose [blog](#) to see what they would appreciate you bringing.

The following is an example of the day-to-day itinerary.

Safety and dive briefings are conducted in English. If you, or any of your group, do not speak or fully understand English, please let us know before you travel.

Day 1: Embarkation from Coral Sea Resort at 18:00, followed by introductions, boat and safety briefings and dinner. There is no diving on embarkation day.

Days 2-9: Your Cruise Director will schedule up to 4 dives per day; 3 day dives followed by either an afternoon land visit, a sunset dive or a night dive (if cruising schedules permit).

A typical diving day is scheduled as follows:

- Light Breakfast followed by a briefing and Dive 1
- Full Breakfast, relaxation followed by briefing and Dive 2

- Lunch, relaxation followed by briefing and Dive 3
- Relaxation
- **Land Tour or Late Afternoon Dive***
- Cocktails & Dinner
- Cruise overnight to the next location

***A Night dive may be offered on selected days but is not guaranteed**

Day 10: For your last full day on board, schedule 2 morning dives* before the boat commences the cruise back to Honiara where she will remain at anchor overnight.

Day 11: Breakfast on board followed by disembarkation no later than 09:00.

*We kindly request that guests check their flight departure times to ensure they leave a minimum of 24 hours between their final dive and their flight home.

While we wish to show you the [best diving](#) possible, the safety and comfort of all on board remain paramount throughout the itinerary with various factors determining which sites we visit on each trip. Weather, tides, currents and many other considerations influence the Cruise Director's and Captain's decision on the exact route the boat takes and where we dive each day. Dive sites are always chosen with sea conditions, marine life, visibility and guest safety in mind.

Following is a sample of dive sites we may visit during your liveaboard.

Disclaimer: The information below is only a general indication of the areas covered and some of the possible dive sites; the inclusion of specifically named sites is not guaranteed. We will offer diving at alternative locations if we are unable to reach or remain at a specific area for any reason.

Russell Islands

Mbanika Island - [White Beach](#)

Home to a major American supply base during WWII, before the U.S. Military departed at the end of the war, they dumped everything into the sea creating an artificial reef with plenty to explore; trucks, jeeps, tractors, bulldozers, large amounts of ammunition and Coca Cola bottles are among the many war relics located **between 5 and 30 metres**. These artefacts of years gone by, and the surrounding mangroves, host an array of small and juvenile reef fish as well as an abundance of macro critters including pygmy seahorses, ornate ghost pipefish, a variety of nudibranchs, shrimps, eels, crocodile fish and archerfish.

Folau Island - Rainbow Reef

This large saddle-shaped seamount, covered with sea fans, soft corals and sponges, is an open-ocean site just south of Mbanika Island which offers a gorgeous vantage from which to spot sharks, mobula rays, and schooling barracuda. The water clarity is normally excellent and there is so much going on, it's hard to know where to look. With a minimum depth of 17 metres (55 ft), your dive is sure to be over long before you're ready to ascend.

Karumolun Point

A sheer wall down to a depth of around 20 metres leads to a deep, tiered peninsula extending downwards to 40+ metres. This is a great location to hang out and observe the pelagic action as white-tip and black-tip reef sharks, trevallies and barracuda patrol the point searching for food. Occasionally, eagle rays are also seen making a fly-by. In the shallows be wary of nesting titan triggerfish while you search the coral for nudibranchs and other critters.

Leru Island - Leru Cut

One of the most iconic sites in the Solomon Islands; this 100 metre chasm cuts deep into Leru Island and offers amazing photography opportunities as the light bounces off the walls above and below the surface. Imagine yourself surfacing in the jungle, listening to the frogs call, before you descend into this one-of-a-kind cavern. Outside of the cut is a fabulous wall teeming with fish life.

Mane Island - Mirror Pond

Not far from Leru Cut, **Mane Island is best known** for the famous **Mirror Pond** with its many swim-throughs and **Bat Cave** with its resident bat colony. Descend into this cavern and surface in the mangrove forest. Or if you prefer, spend your time cruising along a beautiful wall covered in fans and coral hunting for pygmy seahorses.

Mborokua (Mary) Island

This small, uninhabited island is notable for an underwater point that commonly hosts schools of barracuda and trevally. Explore the cuts and caverns behind **Jack Point** or the **Coral Gardens** right below the boat.

Barracuda point

This site is extremely weather dependent and conditions must be appropriate to dive here.

Just adjacent to the most common mooring area at Mborokua (a great dive site in its own right called **Mary's Bommies**), Barracuda Point is a submerged, current-swept peninsula that juts into the ocean. Enormous schools of jacks and chevron barracuda are commonly seen here, and a variety of sharks often patrol nearby, but be prepared to see almost anything - mobula rays, sperm whales, or even orcas.

Marovo Lagoon

This World Heritage Site nominee is a double barrier reef and, at more than 100 kilometres in length, is the largest saltwater lagoon in the world. Located at the eastern end of the Solomons' Western Province, the lagoon encompasses Vangunu Island and Nggatokae Island with hundreds of small islets and reefs scattered throughout.

Mbulu Island

Located near the southeastern aspect of Marovo Lagoon, this island is surrounded by spectacular diving on all sides and six unique dive sites. A gently sloping wall covered in fields

of hard and soft corals invites you for a lazy drift along the bottom. Along the island, long swim-throughs in volcanic lava tubes allow for amazing photographic opportunities.

Cathedral

One of the most ethereal dive sites of Mbulo Island, this meandering series of cracks, crevices, and caverns may not look like much at first glance, but add bright sunlight, and you will find yourself bathed in dancing, darting rays. The site has four unique caverns, some larger than others, and the intensity and direction of the light rays will alter notably during the time you are in the water, so be sure to keep moving so you can explore each one.

Kicha Island

Just east of Mbulo Island, Kicha Island is renowned for its beautiful, vibrantly coloured coral gardens, abundant marine life and amazing visibility. Large numbers of reef sharks, schools of batfish and jacks are common sightings, along with giant bumphead parrot fish and predatory barracuda. Along the wall decorated with sea fans and whip corals, you will find butterfly fish, snappers, groupers, wrasse and a plethora of smaller fish darting amongst the coral fronds.

Kavachi Corner

Off the southern tip of Kicha Island, a sheer deep wall, with plateaus that push out into the blue, offers the opportunity for awesome marine life sightings. Grey reef sharks, rainbow runners, barracuda and midnight snappers, along with a large school of bumphead parrotfish are regular visitors.

As you round the corner, you may hear a loud BOOM which will have you checking your pulse! Try and remain calm, the noise is 15km away, although it is an active volcano. The Kavachi volcano is the most active marine volcano on the planet and is fighting to become an island. Kavachi Corner catches the sound and provides a percussive background while you dive.

Njapuanu Island

With sheer walls facing New Georgia Sound (also called The Slot during WWII), tuna pace back and forth hunting schools of rainbow runners and trevally along the reef edge while titan triggerfish protect their nests among the coral on the wall.

Kokoana Passage

Sandy slopes give way to steep drop-offs, and nearly every inch is inhabited by hard and soft corals, huge sea fans, and anemones. The water can be a little green but the nutrients it carries are what support the abundance of life in this wide channel. There's no need to go very deep as the reef starts just below the surface. Sharks and mobulas are typically spotted in the channel while crocodile fish, crabs and shrimp, nudibranchs, and pipefish can be found amongst the masses of coral.

Wickham Island

Wickham Island has a long and rich history as the home to one of the original families of missionaries in the Solomon Islands, whose descendants still reside there. Situated off the southeastern corner of Vangunu Island, which was occupied by the Japanese during WWII, Wickham Island offers a unique blend of historical significance and natural beauty.

The island is renowned for spectacular dive sites, particularly around Wickham Harbour. The island's shoreline slopes gently downwards creating habitats for blue-spotted rays, chocolate chip sea stars, and a variety of coral heads. As you descend deeper, the slope transforms into a wall covered in soft corals and large sea fans, making it an excellent spot for macro and wide-angle photography. Keen-eyed divers can often find pygmy seahorses, sea slugs, nudibranchs, cuttlefish, crocodile fish, snake eels, reef octopus, and many different species of anemonefish.

Additionally, there are the wrecks of several Japanese freighters sunk by Allied Forces during the Battle of Wickham Anchorage in July 1943. The vessels are relatively intact, covered with coral growth and home to a diverse array of marine life.

Taiyo Wreck

Also known as the Upright Wreck, Taiyo (Solomon's word for Tuna) is a Taiwanese fishing boat which ran aground off Mbahoro Island after hitting a reef in Nono Lagoon on her maiden voyage and subsequently sank vertically while attempts were being made to salvage her. Her bow is less than 2 metres (6ft) below the surface and, as you swim over it, you can look straight down the deck to where her stern rests on a ledge at around 40 metres (130 ft). It is undoubtedly one of the most picturesque wrecks in the world and is now home to a variety of anemonefish and a plethora of nudibranchs.

Florida (Nggela) Islands

Mangalonga Island - Maravagi

This quaint village is home to approximately 100 local islanders. The bay in front of the village is the Solomons' answer to muck diving with coral bommies, patches of rubble and white-sand muck, boat wreckage, and a large bed of seagrass, all of which are inhabited by tiny creatures. This heavy-hitting macro dive delivers nudibranchs, sapsucker sea slugs, cuttlefish, seahorses, tiny crabs and shrimp and even such rarities as pugnose pipefish. All sorts of anemones can be found in this area as well, including one inhabited by true clownfish.

If the weather and tidal conditions are right, nearby **Devil's Highway** offers the chance for manta ray sightings while just around the corner, **Baby Cakes** is another good spot for cuttlefish and cruising reef sharks.

Nggela Sule Island - Tanavula Point

This beautiful, steeply sloping reef and wall are covered with an innumerable variety of soft and hard corals and sea fans where the attentive diver can spot hundreds of nudibranchs and countless other critters. Bumphead parrotfish and a variety of rays are commonly spotted amid the diversity of coral and other marine life.

Tulagi Island - Catalina Airplane

The PBY-5A 'Black Cat' is a US seaplane or 'flying boat' which went down in 1943, apparently after hitting a small boat on the surface in the bay, not far from Tulagi. The Catalina was fitted with radar and the antenna can still be seen under the wing and, as it was in the process of landing, the wing tip floats are in the dropped position. She now rests East of Tulagi Island,

sitting the right way up *on the seabed at 34 metres*, as if someone has just (badly) parked her on the ocean floor.

Both engines have detached and sit alongside the fuselage with their propellers penetrating the sand; the waist gunner's machine gun also rests on the seabed beside the wreck, although its ammunition remains next to the gun mount.

Soghonangola Island - Twin Tunnels

Southeast of Tulagi Island, off the southern tip of Soghonangola Island, Twin Tunnels is a unique dive on a seamount measuring approximately 120 metres in diameter. The spectacular reef top at 12-16 metres hosts at least 8 varieties of anemonefish in hundreds of anemone homes. A pair of massive lava tubes, covered in sea fans and whip corals, descend from the top of the plateau into a wide-mouthed cavern which opens onto a dramatic, current-facing wall at around 36 metres where you will find schools of pelagic fish preying on shimmering baitfish.

Ghavutu Island

Ghavutu Island was a seaplane base built by the Australian Air Force, and occupied by the Japanese Navy at the start of the Guadalcanal Campaign. Off the northern tip of the island, Ghavutu was connected to Tanambogho Island by a concrete causeway, effectively extending the size of the base so the two islands are often referred to as one, i.e. Ghavutu–Tanambogho.

The main wharf area was a dumping ground for WWII detritus and has become a muck divers dream where blue ribbon eels, pipefish, a variety of nudibranchs and flatworms, and weirdly beautiful mantis shrimps can be found among the rubble. There are also landing barges aircraft wings and landing gear, engines and ammunition scattered around Ghavutu Harbour.

The area surrounding Ghavutu–Tanambogho is home to at least 13 Japanese Mavis seaplanes and at least one American Catalina plane.

Tanambogho Island - Mavis Seaplanes

The two best Mavis wrecks sit in *30-34 metres of water* and are known as M5 and M6. Each is big enough to keep divers occupied for an entire no-decompression dive and more, although we will usually only dive one of them. Care needs to be taken to watch bottom times to avoid deco and to maintain good buoyancy as the sandy seabed is soft and easily stirred up.

M5 rests upright on her hull on the silt-covered seafloor so divers need to be careful not to stir things up too much. She is largely intact with her nose bent upwards, which suggests she hit the seabed nose first when she went down. The mooring cable is still attached to the nose ring, and the cockpit is well-preserved. The port side wing is also in good condition with the engine still attached but part of the starboard wing including the outer float is missing.

M6 appears to have jack-knifed when it sank, as it is bent almost completely in half from the mid-section with the front section angled upwards, the tail section facing forward and the wings upsidedown on either side of the fuselage, opposite to how they would originally have been positioned. Sometimes referred to as the "Phallic Mavis" because of her nose standing erect off the seabed, the damage she suffered has left the rear section of the cockpit open allowing divers to venture inside and see what remains of the pilot's seats and controls.

Should you have any questions about the dive sites or whether this itinerary is suitable for your experience level, please contact our reservations team at dive@masterliveboards.com.