

# Guadalcanal & Western Province, Solomon Islands

## Overview

The 10-night Guadalcanal & Western Province itinerary follows a one-way route between Honiara in the Solomon Islands Central Province and Munda in the Western Province. Dive sites consist of pristine reefs, stunning walls and pinnacles, breathtaking chasms and caverns with a few wrecks added to the mix. Along the way, you will have the opportunity to experience island life with at least one village visit where you can interact with the village kids and participate in a traditional song and dance performance.

## Embarkation, Disembarkation & Transfers

The embarkation and disembarkation locations for Guadalcanal & Western Province itineraries alternate from one trip to the next and indicate the vessel's route. Please check your specific trip dates on our schedules and your booking confirmation details for the applicable start and end points which will determine your flight needs.

Complimentary transfers are provided on embarkation and disembarkation days only from the local airport or your hotel to the embarkation point, and from the disembarkation point to the local airport or your hotel.

### Honiara to Munda

- **Embarkation: Honiara Port, Main Wharf at 18:00**
- **Disembarkation: Agnes Gateway Hotel, Munda at 09:00**

Guests arriving in Honiara on a morning or early afternoon flight 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)

### Munda to Honiara

- **Embarkation: Agnes Gateway Hotel, Munda at 18:00**
- **Disembarkation: Honiara Port, Main Wharf at 09:00**

Guests arriving in Munda on a morning or early afternoon flight will be met at the airport and taken directly to Agnes Gateway Hotel; Guests are welcome to relax at the resort until embarkation time, or can leave their luggage there if they wish to explore the town.

**PLEASE NOTE: *early embarkation or late disembarkation is not possible*** as the crew are on a tight schedule to turn the boat around between each trip.

## Diving Information

Due to dive site depths and strong currents in some locations covered by this itinerary, some of the diving can be challenging, even for experienced divers, and unsuitable 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.

### Minimum dive certification and experience:

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

*Guests who do not have the recommended certification and mandatory minimum number of dives, 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.*

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.

## Itinerary Details

Participation in this liveaboard itinerary is subject to acceptance of our Terms & Conditions as outlined here: [www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions](http://www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions).

**Number of scheduled dives:** Up to 32 dives

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 and ancestral sites. There are a number of villages we can visit where guests can experience the villagers' traditional way of life, admire their handicraft skills and be entertained by a ceremonial dance performance. 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 understand English, please contact us.*

**Day 1:** Embarkation 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 and either a land tour, sunset dive or a night dive. A typical 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** (night dive may be offered on selected days)\*
- 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, we schedule 2 morning dives\* with the afternoon free to relax while the boat cruises to the disembarkation location where it 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 on the Guadalcanal & Western Province itinerary.

**Disclaimer:** The information below is only a general indication of the route, areas covered and some of the possible dive sites; However, 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](#)

White Beach was the code name of a major American supply base in the Russell Islands during WWII. Before departing at the end of the war, US Military personnel dumped trucks, jeeps, tractors, bulldozers, large quantities of ammunition and various other items into the sea, subsequently creating an artificial reef that today is teeming with life and scattered with interesting relics from years gone by.

### Folau Island - Rainbow Reef

A large oblong saddle-shaped seamount covered with fans, soft corals and sponges, its open-ocean location just south of Mbanika Island offers a gorgeous vantage 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 likely to be over well before you're ready to stop watching the action.

### 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 garden for nudibranchs and other critters.

### Pavuvu Island - Kastom Caves

These volcanic caves and caverns provide amazing photography opportunities as sunbeams filter through cracks in the rock. Lobsters and eels can often be found inside the caverns, while eagle rays can be sighted patrolling on the outside walls. The entrance is covered in soft corals and fans, offering brilliant macro opportunities throughout.

### 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. The outside of Leru 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 Island

Also known as Mary Island, this small, uninhabited island is a waypoint between the Russell Islands and Marovo Lagoon, but it's far from a boring stopover. Mborokua 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 and swim-throughs right below the boat.

### **Barracuda Point**

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

Adjacent to the most common mooring area at Mborokua (a great dive site of its own 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.

### **Mbulo Island**

Located near the southeastern aspect of Marovo Lagoon, this island is surrounded by spectacular diving on all sides with six unique dive sites and possibly the best hard coral in the world. 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 photography 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 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.

## Western Province

### 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 as well as many different species of anemonefish.

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

### Taiyo Wreck

Also known as **the Upright Wreck**, Taiyo is a Taiwanese fishing boat which ran aground on her maiden voyage off Mbahoro Island after hitting a reef in Nono Lagoon 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 38-40 metres. It is undoubtedly one of the most picturesque wrecks in the world and is home to a variety of anemonefish and a plethora of nudibranchs.

### The Abyss

This site was only discovered in 2019 so you will be one of the few people to have dived there since its discovery. A short tender ride through a mangrove-lined river takes you to the entry point which starts under a curving rock face. Descend a twisted shaft lined with electric file clams then swim through a rocky chasm filled with unique nudibranchs and you start to see a glint of blue light. Up ahead the wall opens up and drops down well beyond your line of sight. This is the Abyss ... dark blue water, deep purple fans and cruising pelagics are all on display.

### Shark Point

Situated at the end of a reef protruding a mile out into the Solomon Sea, this 600 metre (1,970 ft) wall is a fantastic multi-level dive with plenty to see. Shallower depths, starting from 10 metres, offer pristine corals, large schools of fish, reef sharks, turtles and titan triggerfish that can be seen darting about as they protect their eggs from predators. Experienced divers

can venture deeper to 40 metres (if certified to do so) on the point itself. Species seen here include grey reef, black tip, and white tip reef sharks at all depths plus the chance of meeting great hammerheads and large silvertip sharks deeper down.

Depending on the time of day, currents can be strong, but that only brings in more fish action. Drift along on the current and take in the incredible Gorgonian fans, soft corals and whip corals.

### **Airacobra**

Discovered in April 2011, little is known about this American P-39 fighter, but she is believed to be one of two aircraft lost by the USAAF 68th Fighter Squadron during a raid on Shortland on September 6th 1943. She lies in about 27m of water on a sandy bottom and hosts schools of sweetlips, lionfish, coral trout and thousands of tiny baitfish.

### **Haipe Reefs**

Situated off the west coast of Rendova Island are the pristine Haipe reefs. Vast areas of hard corals along the reef tops play host to schools of small, colourful fish and provide a feeding ground for large numbers of bumphead parrotfish. Turtles are also often seen here while deeper down, soft corals, fans and sea whips are a stunning backdrop for encounters with grey reef sharks and the occasional visit from silvertip or hammerhead sharks. For critter lovers, there is a dazzling variety of crustaceans, nudibranchs and molluscs waiting to be discovered.

Haipe is also a great location for a night dive and is the only site in the world where bioluminescent turtles have been captured on film.

### **Skull Island visit**

In a secret location, after a 30 minute speed boat ride around Munda's scattered island gems, you will have the opportunity to visit a kustom skull island guided by a blood descendant of one of the heads left on the island. After visiting the small island, an additional short boat ride takes you to a nearby resort for some snacks and refreshments before heading back to the vessel.

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](mailto:dive@masterliveboards.com).