

WWII Wreck Week, Solomon Islands

7 Nights Itinerary

- Embarkation: Coral Sea Resort, Honiara at 18:00
- Disembarkation: Coral Sea Resort, Honiara at 09:00

Transfers between Honiara airport or local hotels and Coral Sea Resort on embarkation and disembarkation days are provided free of charge.

Guests arriving on morning flights, or departing on afternoon flights are welcome to relax at Coral Sea Resort or can leave their luggage at the resort if they wish to venture into town.

Marine Kastom Fees & local taxes: 175 USD per person (payable on board only)

Minimum dive certification and experience

Many of the WWII wreck dives on this itinerary are at the deeper end of recreational limits, often between 30 and 40 metres (100-130ft).

PADI Advanced Open Water certification, or equivalent, is mandatory, with a minimum of 75 logged dives.

To fully participate in all dives on the WWII Wreck itinerary, *Deep Diver (40 metres) certification and wreck diving experience are strongly recommended*. You will be asked to provide copies of your certification card(s) and show recent log book(s) after boarding the vessel to confirm your dive qualifications and experience.

Any guests who do not have the required minimum certification and number of dives, or who our crew feel have insufficient experience or skills in certain conditions, may be denied participation in some or all dives.

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

Itinerary Details

Although the main focus of this itinerary is diving some of the WWII wrecks that are within recreational diving limits, there is also a fantastic amount of marine life on and around the majority of them, so it's not all 'rusty metal' or exclusively for wreck enthusiasts.

Number of scheduled dives: Up to 22

Whilst we attempt to ensure the number of scheduled dives is fulfilled, this number is indicative only, and not guaranteed. In addition to considerations regarding dive depths, bottom times and surface intervals, some dives may be substituted with a land visit.

Safety and dive briefings are in English. If you or any of your group do not speak or fully understand English, please let us know. Following is an example of the day-to-day itinerary.

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 2-6: Your Cruise Director will schedule up to 4 dives per day; 3 day dives and either a sunset or a night dive. A typical diving day is scheduled as follows:

- Light Breakfast followed by a briefing & Dive 1
- Full Breakfast, relaxation followed by briefing & Dive 2
- Lunch, relaxation followed by briefing & Dive 3
- Relaxation
- **Land Tour or Late Afternoon Dive** (a night dive may be offered on selected days)
- Cocktails & Dinner
- Cruise overnight to a new location

Village visits or land-based excursions may be offered on selected days. During village visits the children come out to play and love our gifts of school supplies.

Solomons Master is a member of Pack for a Purpose supporting local communities and an advocate of the Solomon Islands Literacy League project. Find out how you can help here www.packforapurpose.org/destinations/oceania/solomon-islands/

Day 7: For your last full day on board, we schedule 2 morning dives* before commencing the cruise back to Honiara.

Day 8: Following breakfast on board, disembarkation is scheduled for 09:00.

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

While we wish to show you the very best diving possible, a number of factors can determine which sites we visit. Weather, tides, currents and many other considerations influence the Cruise Director's decision of which route the boat takes and which sites are selected for diving. Specific dive sites are always chosen with conditions, visibility and guest safety in mind.

WWII History

The Solomon Islands were the scene for some of the fiercest WWII battles in the South Pacific; with names such as Bloody Ridge, Red Beach, Skyline Ridge and Henderson Field remaining to mark the brutal combat areas.

Due to the important strategic location close to Australia, the Japanese invaded Guadalcanal in 1942. In reaction to this, the Allied Forces launched Operation Guadalcanal, better known as the Guadalcanal Campaign, and continued to fight the Japanese forces until they finally withdrew from the island in 1943.

Code named Operation Watchtower, the Battle of Guadalcanal turned out to be a significant strategic combined Allied victory in the Pacific theatre; Along with the Battle of Midway, it has been called a turning point in the South Pacific war against Japan.

You can find out more about the campaigns and WWII activity around the Solomon Islands in our blog: [The Guadalcanal Campaign and Solomons wrecks](#)

The numerous WWII wrecks are in various conditions with the highest concentration in the area known as Iron Bottom Sound between Guadalcanal and Florida Island; some of the wrecks remain fully intact, while others are in pieces, or completely blown apart due to the damage suffered in battle.

Notes:

- Although the sites covered on the WWII Wrecks itinerary are all within recreational limits, many lay at the boundaries of those depth limits. Therefore, bottom times may be limited by your experience or certification.
- We often complete two or more dives at a single site to ensure you have time to properly explore the wrecks.
- Penetration diving is always dependent on the condition of the wreck and will be limited to those with appropriate certifications and experience.
- Unguided penetration is NOT allowed.

All guests are responsible for their own dive profiles and for obtaining suitable dive insurance to cover all in-water activities. We respectfully request that you dive conservatively at all times, stay well within the bounds of your training, follow dive computer guidelines and make decompression stops where necessary.

It is a mandatory requirement for all divers to have appropriate insurance which covers the scuba diving activities and the depths of this itinerary, including emergency evacuation and recompression chamber costs.

We customise our itinerary on each trip to ensure you experience the best visibility, water conditions, wildlife and dive sites possible.

As many of the wrecks are deep, we may limit bottom times or even participation in some dives for some guests. Following is a sample of what you might experience on your trip.

[Russell Islands](#)

The Russell Islands provide an opportunity to take a break from history and explore some of the fantastic natural and artificial reefs of the Solomon Islands.

[White Beach](#)

Located off Hai Island, White Beach was an American military base and key re-provisioning and supply area during WWII. When the U.S. troops departed at the end of the war, they pushed 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 amongst 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.

Wreck of the Ann

Not a WWII wreck, The Ann is an island freighter that was sunk intentionally along a sandy slope to create an artificial reef **between 9 and 31 metres** (30-102 ft) depth. She is now massively encrusted with corals and home to spectacular marine life. Coral groupers, skittish on most other reef sites, pose brazenly here. Blennies, sharpnose puffers, hawkfish, and grouper prowl amid the soft corals and gorgonians. Wide-angle shots along the bow, kingposts, and wheelhouse provide vibrant colour and dramatic texture. Even the sand slope is productive, with a great colony of garden eels, anemonefish, and shrimp gobies.

Florida Islands

Tulagi

Tulagi Island was one of the most significant bases for the Japanese during WWII and the scene of several major battles as part of the Guadalcanal Campaign, which is considered the turning point of WWII in the South Pacific. The Japanese invaded the island on May 3rd, 1942 and, over the following months, established a naval refuelling, communications and seaplane reconnaissance base on Tulagi and the islets of Ghavutu and Tanambogo. On 7th August 1942 U.S. Marines landed on Tulagi and nearby islands, heavily outnumbering the Japanese, and establishing it as a base for Allied forces.

The wrecks located around Tulagi include both Japanese and American seaplanes, cargo ships, personnel transportation vessels and minesweepers that were sunk during numerous land, sea and air attacks. For more WWII perspective, we will visit the town of Tulagi to see some of the battlegrounds, Japanese caves and bunkers, as well as a British colonial house.

RNZN Moa

Moa was a Bird Class minesweeper and submarine chaser of the Royal New Zealand Navy and played a pivotal role in the sinking of the [Japanese submarine I-1](#) off Cape Esperance at Guadalcanal. On 7th April 1943, while in Tugali Harbour, Moa was hit by three bombs from a Japanese airstrike which broke her keel resulting in her sinking from the surface to the bottom in just 7 minutes; she now rests at a **depth of 35-42 metres** near Tulagi Harbour. Depth charge racks at the stern and the 4" gun at the bow are key features of this wreck.

USS Minneapolis

USS Minneapolis (CA-36) was a New Orleans-class cruiser featuring 8-inch calibre guns. She was struck by two torpedoes forward of the number one mount during The Battle of Tassafaronga at Savo Island on 30th November 1942; She was towed back to Tulagi Harbour where her badly damaged bow section was removed and a temporary replacement constructed from coconut logs and steel beams so that she could be sailed back to Pearl Harbour for a complete repair.

The blast-damaged bow now lies at the back end of the bay *in 14 to 24 metres of water* in the area where the US Seabees Shipyard was located. Discarded parts from many other ships that were damaged and repaired during the Solomons campaign litter the harbour floor around the Minneapolis's battered bow making it an interesting site with lots to explore.

Catalina Airplane

The PBY Catalina 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 sits the right way up *on the seabed at 34 metres*, as if someone has just (badly) parked her on the sea bed.

USS Kanawha

This dive is at the edge of recreational limits even at its shallowest point, meaning bottom times are limited unless divers have decompression diving certification and experience for depths deeper than 40 metres.

The 476 ft (145 metres) long USS Kanawha AO-1, US Navy Fleet oiler was also a supply vessel for the US Marines. On 7th April 1943, Kanawha had been anchored in Tulagi Harbour where she had been fulfilling her refuelling duties and was awaiting an escort so she could leave. As she began her escorted departure from the harbour Japanese bombers launched an air attack. She took several hits including one that went into the oil tank forward of the bridge and exploded causing her to catch fire and another that hit the engine room resulting in a complete loss of power. Attempts were made to save her but she was too badly damaged and subsequently sank early the following morning.

Although she now rests on the seabed at 60 metres, the *forward deck is 40 metres deep* and the *stern is at 45 metres* with lots to explore.

Ghavutu

Located just west of Tulagi, Ghavutu Island was a seaplane base occupied by various forces during the Pacific War. Built in 1939 by the Australian Air Force, it was originally known as RAAF Tanambogo until the invasion and occupation by the Japanese in May 1942. Also referred to as Tulagi Seaplane Base, the old wharf site was home to the Japanese Navy at the start of the Guadalcanal campaign. Before the landing of the US Marines on the 7th of August 1942, an airstrike was launched by the US Navy to eliminate the Japanese Forces' flying boats; As a result, several Kawanishi 4 engine reconnaissance/ VIP transport seaplanes were sunk, many of which are located in the area around Ghavutu.

Also scattered around Ghavatu Harbour and wharf there are landing barges along with aircraft wings, landing gear, at least one PBY Catalina plane and a variety of war detritus. There is some great macro life to be found too, including weirdly beautiful mantis shrimps.

Japanese Kawanishi H6K Mavis Planes

The Kawanishi H6K was an Imperial Japanese Navy flying boat used during World War II for maritime patrol duties. The Allied reporting name for this type of aeroplane was Mavis and the Navy designation was "Type 97 Large Flying Boat". There are more than 13 planes that can be dived in and around Tulagi but our favourites lie just off Ghavutu Island.

The two main Mavis sites lie in **30 metres of water** and the wrecks are big enough to keep you occupied for an entire no-decompression dive and more. However, divers need to watch their bottom time to avoid deco and also need to maintain good buoyancy as the bottom is soft and easily stirred up by careless fins.

Guadalcanal - Around Honiara

The Solomon Islands' capital conveniently borders what is known today as Iron Bottom Sound. Originally called Savo Sound, the new name was assigned by Allied sailors in recognition of the great number of Japanese and Allied ships and planes that perished here during the Battle of Guadalcanal through 1942 and 1943. Discover some of the history and combine exploring wrecks of cargo ships, planes, and submarines underwater with a land-based tour of an outdoor museum full of machinery and remnants from the war.

Bonegi I, II and III

These 3 Japanese ships are located close to shore, west of Honiara. Each wreck is named after the beach she ended up on. **Hirokawa Maru** (Bonegi I) is a 156m (468ft) cargo vessel converted into a Boku Kikansen (anti-aircraft) armed transport ship; **Kinugawa Maru** (Bonegi II) is a cargo ship converted to an armed transport vessel, and **Kyusyu Maru** (Bonegi III) is a passenger-cargo ship converted to troop transport.

Bonegi I and II sank in November 1942 while carrying out transportation missions during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. On the evening of the 15th-16th November 1942, the Japanese Navy was to provide cover for a transport convoy of some 7,000 troops. While the capital ships were involved in the melee off Savo Island, the transport vessels slipped by unnoticed and commenced unloading troops and supplies along the eastern shore of Guadalcanal. They were spotted by US Marine reconnaissance pilots the following morning and soon came under attack from the Marines' Douglas SBD Dauntless bombers leaving them ablaze and with many internal explosions from the munitions they were transporting. As loss was inevitable the ships were deliberately beached to enable more supplies to be offloaded from their holds.

Bonegi III was part of a high-speed convoy, transporting Imperial Japanese Army soldiers and cargo through 'The Slot' to Guadalcanal. On 15th October 1942, she was hit squarely on the bridge by an Allied air forces bomb which killed the captain and other officers. The engineers below deck were unaware of this, so they put the ship on full steam until she ran aground on the beach near the mouth of Ruinin Creek with her entire bow angled upwards and sticking out of the water. She remained in situ until the late 1960s when, due to earthquakes and sections being removed for scrap, the rest of the shipwreck finally slid below the water.

Hirokawa Maru (Bonegi I)

The Hirokawa has become an absolutely spectacular artificial reef with colourful soft corals sharing space with anemones, fans, and branches of tubastrea while trevallies corral loose schools of baitfish overhead. There's so much structure and life to photograph here that even if you're not a fish-eye lens enthusiast, you may find yourself reconsidering.

The shallow parts of the wreck have disappeared over the years but the deep sections remain more or less intact. Because of its location, the wreck offers plenty of options for all divers, starting just beneath the surface at *around 3 metres and stretching to nearly 60 metres*.

Kinugawa Maru (Bonegi II)

Only 100 metres or so up the beach from Bonegi I, the Kinugawa was beached higher than the Hirokawa so most of her superstructure is now gone as a result of both salvage and 70 years of storm erosion and earthquake damage. There are still some significant features clearly visible like the engine block which protrudes above the water's surface. The aft section of the engine room is in only 8 metres of water, and *her stern lies in 26 metres*.

Kyusyu Maru (Bonegi III)

Following her abandonment, Kysuyu's superstructure is reported to have been used as target practice by the US Navy, Marine and Army Air Forces. During the 1960s and 70s, she was heavily salvaged and then Mother Nature did the rest of the damage. Though the architecture of the ship is largely destroyed, it is a great dive, with penetrations in the rear hold areas.

Resting on her port side at an angle of 45°, the ship is broken open near the engine area but more or less intact at the rear which reaches a *maximum depth of 47 metres*. There is excellent coral and fishlife on what remains of her front section around 3 to 10 metres and you can easily spend 30 to 40 minutes at the end of a dive just in this area.

B17E 'Flying Fortress' Airplane

Nicknamed 'Bessy The Jap Basher', on the 24th September 1942 this aircraft, along with three other B-17s, conducted a bombing raid on Japanese ships in the Shortland Islands. The bombers met strong opposition from Japanese Zeros and 'Bessy' was heavily damaged. Despite this, she managed to drop her bomb load on a Japanese cargo vessel, then turned to head back to Henderson Airfield. She continued to come under attack and was last seen descending, smoking into the sea around Vilu, west of Henderson.

In January 1944 the US Navy Seabees salvaged the rear fuselage and tail section so today the wreckage is just the front sections of the plane and includes the main wing and cockpit area which sit in *14-18 metres* of water. All engines are intact; the nose section has collapsed, but the cockpit is in good condition with the pilot's seat and top turret still in place. The ball turret rests in the sand behind the fuselage and other wreckage is scattered in the vicinity.

Submarine I-1

The I-1 was a 97 metre (319 ft) long Junsen (cruiser submarine) Type 1 (J1 Class), powered by twin shaft M.A.N. 10 cylinder 4 stroke diesel engines and two electric motors. She was fitted with six torpedo tubes and carried 20 "Type 95" oxygen-driven torpedoes.

From 14th January to 7th February 1943, Japanese forces conducted Operation Ke for the evacuation of their troops from Guadalcanal. On 29th January the I-1 was on station in the area of Cape Esperance where she was detected by the New Zealand ships RNZN Kiwi and Moa. The Kiwi and Moa dropped depth charges and drove the I-1 to the surface. A close-quarter battle ensued between the 3 vessels, during which the Kiwi rammed the I-1 three times damaging her conning tower and pressure hull and eventually the sub ran aground. The crew set destruction charges but they failed to completely destroy the I-1. In the following weeks the code books were retrieved from the wreckage and US intelligence was able to complete the code that was partly broken during the Battle of Midway.

The I-1 was salvaged during the 1960s and 70s which caused a lot of destruction and left her bow section completely obliterated, although her rear sections are mostly intact. The wreckage lies in **3-28 metres of water** and penetration is safe and easy starting from her midsection through to the stern. At the stern, you can see the submarine's dive planes, rudder, propeller shaft and prop as well as the cutters which were used to break through submarine nets that were used to guard ports. A large battery compartment with hundreds of wet-cell batteries in and around it lies on the sand near the vessel's port side; Other interesting features include air-bank cylinders that were used for discharging ballast tanks and the huge electric motors that powered the vessel underwater.

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@masterliveaboards.com who will be pleased to assist and advise you.

For further information about our involvement with Pack for a Purpose and the Solomon Islands Literacy League project, and to see how you can help, check out our blog: [Pack for a Purpose in the Solomons](#)