

WWII Wreck Week, Solomon Islands

Overview

There are hundreds of wrecks around the Central Province of the Solomon Islands remaining as a testament to the fierce battles that were fought between the Japanese and Allied Forces as part of WWII's Pacific Campaign. Most of the wrecks are scattered across the sea bed between Guadalcanal and the Florida Islands, in the depths of the area known today as [Iron Bottom Sound](#), well beyond recreational or even technical dive limits.

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

Solomons Master's WWII Wreck Week itinerary offers divers the opportunity to explore some of the more accessible wrecks within recreational depth limits around the Florida Islands and Guadalcanal. The wrecks are in various conditions; some remain almost completely intact, while others are in pieces or completely blown apart due to damage sustained in battle or by salvaging.

However, *it's not all about wrecks*. There are some fantastic caverns, walls, cuts and pinnacle dives included in this itinerary, as well as land visits to experience some of the Solomon Islands' culture and rich history.

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 or early afternoon flights on embarkation day will usually be transferred to Coral Sea Resort where they can relax or leave their luggage and venture into town for a while 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

This itinerary is not suitable for entry-level divers. Due to depths and strong currents in some areas of the Florida & Russell Islands, some dives can be challenging, even for experienced divers. Many of the wrecks on this itinerary are at the deeper end of recreational limits, often between 30 and 40 metres (100-130ft).

All guests are responsible for their own dive profiles and must stay well within the bounds of their training and experience. We respectfully request that guests dive conservatively at all times, follow their dive guides' advice and dive computer guidelines, make a safety stop at the end of every dive, and observe any decompression stop obligations 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.

Notes:

- Although the dive sites covered on this 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 may offer two or more dives at some locations to allow time to fully explore the site.
- 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.
- Solo Diving is NOT permitted

MANDATORY Minimum dive certification and experience

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 Week 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) as part of your Advance Passenger Information (API) and may be asked to show recent log book(s) after boarding the vessel to confirm your dive qualifications and experience.

Any guests who do not have the mandatory minimum 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 liveaboard itinerary is subject to acceptance of our Terms & Conditions as outlined here: www.masterliveboards.com/terms-conditions.

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

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.

Additionally, considerations regarding dive depths, bottom times and surface intervals will also determine how many dives are possible and some dives may be substituted with a land visit.

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

Island Visits

Village visits or land-based excursions to key WWII sites may be offered on selected days. During village 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 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 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 a new location

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

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

Day 8: 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 route we take and where we dive each day. Dive sites are always chosen with sea conditions, marine life, visibility and guest safety in mind.

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.

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 site for any reason.

[Russell Islands](#)

The Russell Islands provide an opportunity to explore some of the fantastic natural and artificial reefs of the Solomon Islands.

[White Beach](#)

Located off Mbanika Island, White Beach was the code name of 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 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.

[Wreck of the Ann](#)

The Wreck of Ann is not a WWII casualty; She is an island freighter, intentionally sunk along a sandy slope off Mbanika Island to create an artificial reef between 9 and 31 metres (30-102 ft) deep. Now massively encrusted with corals she is 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.

[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

Another of the Solomons' iconic dives, the Mirror Pond is the open top of an underwater cave surrounded by mangroves and dense jungle which is accessed via a series of interconnecting caverns and canyons that cut through the reef from **5-25 metres**. Continue through a further maze of canyons and secret passageways to exit on a steep wall and hard coral pinnacle which reaches depths of **50+ metres**.

Pavuvu Island - Kastom Caves

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

Florida Islands

Tulagi Island & Harbour

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 Royal New Zealand Navy Bird Class minesweeper and submarine chaser. 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. Resting on the silty seabed at **41 metres**, with her **deck at 36 metres** (118-135 ft)) she is the only diveable New Zealand warship lost at war and offers plenty to explore with the prop, rudders and depth charge racks at the stern and the 4" gun at the bow being key areas of interest

Tulagi Base 1

Affectionately known as 'The Garbage Patch', the **25-metre-deep area** within Tulagi Harbour, is strewn not only with cast-offs from the shipyard that was located there during WWII but also poignant reminders of the battles fought during the Guadalcanal Campaign. The highlight for many is the discarded bow section of the USS Minneapolis, although there are many other relics to discover and explore including an American landing barge, a tugboat and a fishing boat. Among the spread of discards and wreckage, torpedoes and ammunition shells, steel barrels and coils of wire can also be found on the silty seabed.

Catalina Airplane

The PB5Y-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 sits the right way up **on the seabed at 34 metres**, east of Tulagi Island as if someone has just (badly) parked her on the sea bed.

Both engines have become 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.

USS Kanawha - weather dependent

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 145 metre long (476 ft) USS Kanawha AO-1, US Navy Fleet oiler was also a supply vessel for the US Marines. As she was departing from Tulagi Harbour on 7th April 1943 she was attacked by Japanese bombers and took several direct hits; one penetrated the forward oil tank and exploded causing her to catch fire and another 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 in the early hours of 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, including open hatches, gun mounts, armaments and the forward mast.

Soghonangola Island - Twin Tunnels

Southeast of Tulagi Island, off the southern tip of Soghonangola Island, Twin Tunnels is found on a seamount that rises from the seabed at around 60 metres to form a large coral-covered plateau at a depth of 12-16 metres. A pair of large lava tubes drop vertically from the reef top into a horizontal cave which exits to the dramatic, current-facing wall at 30-35 metres where a variety of pelagic fish can be found; Dog Tooth Tuna, Bluefin Trevally, Spanish Mackerel and Barracuda are often seen here along with the Grey, White-Tip and Black-Tip reef sharks.

Ghavutu Island

Located east of Tulagi, 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. Ghavutu was connected by a concrete causeway from the northern tip of the island to neighbouring Tanambogho Island, effectively extending the size of the base so the two islands are often referred to as one, i.e. Ghavutu-Tanambogho.

Before the landing of the US Marines on the 7th of August 1942, the US Navy launched an airstrike to eliminate the Japanese Forces' flying boats resulting in several reconnaissance bombers and VIP transport seaplanes being sunk, many of which are located in the area around 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 Ghavatu Harbour.

Japanese Kawanishi H6K Mavis Seplanes

The Kawanishi H6K was an Imperial Japanese Navy flying boat used during World War II for maritime patrol duties. The Japanese Navy's designation for these 4-engined, twin-tailed monoplanes was "Type 97 Large Flying Boat"; the Allies' reporting name for them was 'Mavis'.

The area surrounding Ghavutu–Tanambogho is home to the wreckage of at least 13 of these planes and at least one American Catalina.

The two best Mavis wrecks sit in *30-34 metres of water* just off of Tanambogho Island. 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.

Guadalcanal - Around Honiara

Along the northern shore of Guadalcanal Island, between Henderson Field and Cape Esperance, 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 to discover some of the history of the Guadalcanal Campaign.

Bonegi I, II and III

These 3 Japanese ships are located close to shore, west of Honiara. **Bonegi I** is a 156m (468ft) cargo vessel converted into a Boku Kikansen (anti-aircraft) armed transport ship; **Bonegi II** is a cargo ship converted to an armed transport vessel, and **Bonegi III** is a passenger-cargo ship converted to troop transport.

Bonegi I and II were deliberately beached on 15th November 1942 after being bombed while carrying out transportation missions during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. **Bonegi III** ran aground following an aerial attack one month earlier.

Bonegi I (Hirokawa Maru)

The shallow parts of the 156 metre long 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 **3 metres** beneath the surface and stretching **to nearly 60 metres**. Much of the ship's central machine areas were heavily salvaged in the decades following her sinking, but the Hirokawa Maru's engine is still easily visible along with the crankshaft and gearbox at bilge level. At depth, the rear holds lie intact with some easy penetrations.

Bonegi II (Kinugawa Maru)

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. Some significant features are still 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 **30 metres**.

Bonegi III (Kyūsyū Maru)

Due to her location near the mouth of Ruinin Creek, Kyūsyū Maru is also known as the Ruinin Wreck. She was heavily salvaged during the 1960s and 1970s, then Mother Nature did the rest of the damage. Although the ship's structure is largely destroyed, it is a great dive, with penetration possibilities 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', this aircraft was part of a squadron which conducted a bombing raid on Japanese ships in the Shortland Islands on 24th September 1942. Meeting strong opposition from Japanese Zero fighter aircraft, 'Bessy' was heavily damaged but managed to drop her bomb load on a Japanese cargo vessel. She continued to come under attack as she headed back to Henderson Airfield resulting in her crashing into the sea near Vilu.

The rear fuselage and tail section were salvaged by the US Navy Seabees in January 1944 so, today, the wreckage is just the front section of the plane which includes the wings with the engines still intact and the cockpit area which sits in **10-18 metres** of water. Although the nose section has collapsed, 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 Type 1 (J1 Class) cruiser submarine, powered by twin shaft M.A.N. 10 cylinder 4 stroke diesel engines and two electric motors, fitted with six torpedo tubes and carried 20 "Type 95" oxygen-driven torpedoes. She was immobilised by RNZN Moa and Kiwi while stationed off Cape Esperance during the evacuation of Japanese

troops from Guadalcanal in January 1942. Having suffered extensive damage to her conning tower and pressure hull, she eventually ran aground where the crew set destruction charges in a failed attempt to destroy the I-1 and the code books that allowed the Allied Forces to complete the code that had been partially decrypted during the Battle of Midway.

Salvaging during the 1960s and 1970s caused significant destruction leaving her bow section completely obliterated, but the rear sections are reasonably well preserved. The wreckage lies in ***3-28 metres of water*** and penetration is safe and easy starting from her midsection through to the stern. The submarine's dive planes, rudder, prop shaft and propeller can be seen at the rear, as well as the cutters used to break through submarine nets used to guard ports. Other interesting features include air-bank cylinders 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@masterliveboards.com.