



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM83 - WESTERN SOLOMONS ECO-TOUR

8 nights SOFT ADVENTURE PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS

commence any Saturday or Sunday

This independent touring program almost circumnavigates New Georgia, the main island of the Western Province of the Solomon Islands, and takes you off the regular tourist trails to stay in small local lodges in rural areas. The itinerary brings you very close to the nature and traditional culture of this region with opportunities to explore villages, reefs, islands and rainforests hardly touched by tourism. Some of the accommodation is rather Spartan but always clean and comfortable. The exuberance and warm hospitality of local guides and hosts, who only receive very small numbers of visitors, will certainly overwhelm you.

PACKAGE COST: (per person, twin share, ground content only)

	Group of 1	Group of 2-3*	Group of 4-5*	Group of 6+
Standard 8-night package	USD 4900	USD 3500	USD 3000	USD 2700
Airfare supplement HIRRAM/GZOHIR	USD 350	USD 350	USD 350	USD 350
Extra night Honiara (Mendana Hotel or similar, room only)	USD 160	USD 80	USD 80	USD 80
Extra night Munda with two half-day tours (Roviana villages walking tour and Roviana lagoon and river canoe tour)	USD 390	USD 230	USD 200	USD 180
Extra night Kukundu with two half-day tours (Kolombangara villages walking tour and Ghizo Island canoe tour)	USD 280	USD 170	USD 140	USD 130
Single supplement standard 8 nts package	N/A	USD 650	USD 650	USD 650
Single supplement extra night Honiara	N/A	USD 80	USD 80	USD 80
Single supplement extra night Munda	N/A	USD 70	USD 70	USD 70
Single supplement extra night Kukundu	N/A	USD 30	USD 30	USD 30

*Odd numbered groups based on one triple plus twin shares unless single supplement is paid for odd person.
Prices subject to change but otherwise valid till end 2016.

PACKAGE INCLUSIONS (standard 8 nights package):

- Honiara - meet and greet, arrival tour
- Honiara - first night twin share accommodation at 3.0 star Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel, Honiara, or similar (room only, pay as you go for meals, drinks and extras).
- Ramata - 2 nights 1.5 star accommodation at Mavo Eco Lodge (includes meals)
- Ramata - half day village tour as per itinerary
- Ramata - 2 x half day selected excursions / activities as per itinerary
- Ramata - motor canoe transfer to Matikuri with stops

ECOTOURISM MELANESIA LTD

- Matikuri - 2 nights 1.5 star accommodation at Matikuri Lodge (includes meals)
- Matikuri - select any 2 excursions as per itinerary
- Matikuri - motor canoe transfer to Munda (or flight from Seghe to Munda if available and preferred)
- Munda - 1 night 2.5 star accommodation at Agnes Lodge Hotel (room only, pay as you go for meals)
- Munda - water transfer to Kukundu with stops
- Kukundu - 1 night 1.0 star accommodation at Hambere village stay (includes meals and free use of paddle canoes)
- Kukundu - motor canoe transfer to Gizo town and airport
- Honiara - last night twin share accommodation at 3.0 star Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel, Honiara, or similar (room only, pay as you go for meals, drinks and extras).
- Honiara - departure transfer and check-in assistance
- Throughout the tour we provide:
 - daily guide and assistant guide or driver i.e. 2 locals to accompany you or your group at all times
 - all fees and gratuities for local villagers, demonstrators and helpers
 - all airport/hotel transfers
 - all road travel by late model mini bus or four wheel drive vehicle with bottled water on board (unless otherwise specified)
 - all water travel by open speed boat, skiff or motor canoe
 - various additional gear that may be required for your safety and comfort in remote areas such as tropical first aid kit, mosquito net, tropical sleeping bag, supplementary food supplies (we may ask you to carry such items with your personal baggage from Port Moresby or Honiara to your destination and if this incurs any excess baggage penalty we will pay the charges)
 - daily reconfirmation of flights and arrangements coordinated by our Port Moresby and Honiara offices
 - 24 hour assistance from our Port Moresby and Honiara offices

NB Accommodation star ratings are indicative only. Solomon Islands does not have an official hotel rating system.

EXCLUSIONS:

- International and domestic airfares (quoted separately as required)
- Meals (unless specified as included). In general meals are included at lodges where set meals are served and there is no menu choice. Meals are not included (ie you must pay extra) at bigger hotels which offer an a la carte menu.
- Bar drinks and between meal snacks
- Excess baggage charges (your free allowance is 16kg + 5 kg)
- Personal items. Bring your own favourite munchies, favourite bath soap, favourite toilet paper, small quick-dry towel, personal medications, personal hygiene requirements, brimmed hat or cap, "amphibious footwear" (sandals or quick-dry canvas shoes), insect repellent, sunscreen, personal flashlight, battery-operated personal fan. Please note that pressurised aerosol spray cans are not permitted on some domestic flights - bring pump-action sprays or roll-ons.
- Life vest and snorkelling mask - bring your own compact life jacket of your own size fitting for water travel and your own mask and snorkel for snorkelling (a small pair of fins is optional). This equipment is difficult for us to supply and maintain in rural areas of the Solomons.



ITINERARY:

DAY 1: Saturday or Sunday

HONIARA

Arrive Honiara and meet up with our representative after you exit Customs (look for somebody holding a sign with your name). To make the best use of the remainder of the day you will commence your city tour as soon as you leave the airport, with your luggage safely stowed in the back of your tour vehicle.

TOUR NOTE: About Honiara

Work on the main runway at Honiara Airport was first commenced by the Japanese in early 1942. American forces landed on Red Beach, near the airport, in August 1942 and completed work on the main runway and a number of parallel strips on the same site and further east. The Americans christened the complex Henderson Field, named after a naval aviator killed in the Battle of Midway earlier. For sixty years it was known as Henderson Field until the Solomon Islands Government dropped the name Henderson in the mid-2000s when the Japanese government sponsored major airport renovations.

From the airport you'll drive through the urban fringes, past schools and light industrial areas then turn inland through residential areas up a few steep hills to the Mt Austen peace park built by the Japanese government in the 1980s to commemorate their war dead. From the memorial there are panoramic views of the North Guadalcanal coastline, from east to west horizons.

Retracing your steps to the main road and passing many local landmarks (the hospital, the soccer stadium, Chinatown, the Mataniko River, you'll turn inland again and up another ridge, Skyline Ridge, to the U.S. war memorial. Here again there are excellent views of the town and harbour, and moving tributes to American forces killed in action during the Guadalcanal campaign.

Stopping at the central market you will find all manner of fresh food and handicrafts on sale. Your driver will mind the vehicle and your luggage while your guide shows you through the market. Late in the day the market is not at its best so you might care to stop here again at another time if possible.

A little further on is the main shopping and business area known as Point Cruz, so named because it is adjacent to a rocky promontory which juts out into the sea and was identified by Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana in 1568 as the only suitable site for a deepwater port along the whole north coast of Guadalcanal (the rest of the coastline is coral-and-black-sand beach). The promontory is now covered with the sheds and wharves of the Port of Honiara. Just past Point Cruz is the yacht club and the hotel where you will be staying. First established in the late early 1970s as the Mendana Hotel, this landmark also suffered a name change when bought out by the Japanese Kitano corporation in the early 1990s and is now officially called the Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel. However this is quite a mouthful so everybody still calls it "the Mendana". The hotel is located on the main waterfront with its own tiny beach in the lee of Point Cruz and a panorama of yachts and other small craft bobbing in the water. The hotel is just a few minutes walk from the Point Cruz shopping area, where there are a number of Chinese restaurants - it is safe and pleasant to stroll around this area in the evening.

Overnight Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel (3.5 star, room only, pay as you go for meals by cash or card) <http://www.kitanomendana.com/en>

DAY 2: Sunday or Monday

HONIARA / RAMATA (Mavo Eco Lodge)

Our local guide will drive you to the airport and help you check in for this morning's flight to Ramata, a tiny island inside the northern reach of the Marovo Lagoon, just a stone's throw from "mainland" New Georgia,.

Solomon Airlines flight IE546 departs Honiara for Ramata (aircraft: twin engine Britten-Norman Islander with 8 seats or Twin Otter with 18 seats)

On arrival at Ramata you will be met by somebody from Mavo Eco Lodge and walk a short distance from the airfield to the accommodation. Settle into your room and have lunch which is prepared for you at Mavo Lodge.

TOUR NOTE: About Ramata

Ramata is a small island off the north eastern coastline of New Georgia Island. Ramata Island is part of a long chain of islands along the New Georgia coastline that enclose the Marovo

Lagoon from the open sea. The Marovo Lagoon is actually the largest and longest fringing lagoon in the world. From Ramata Island the local people traverse the calm lagoon by paddle canoe or motor canoe to the "mainland" (New Georgia Island). Ramata Island hosts a small government "station", a few shops, a school, a clinic and a grass airstrip. Only small numbers of visitors come up this way because the flights in and out are only three times a week. Mavo Eco Lodge is built in local style and has several twin rooms in the main building and two separate beachside bungalows. There is electricity at night (Australian style three pin outlets) and the fridge keeps drinks cold even when the power is off - there is a small bar with beer and soda available. Activities for visitors to Ramata include village tours and rainforest hikes on the mainland, snorkelling and beachwalking on the lagoon islands, and both saltwater and freshwater fishing. In recent years the word has gotten out that fishing in the river estuaries in this area is excellent with mangrove jack and bass easy to hook. Sustainable catch limits apply. A favourite activity is getting marooned on a small islet with a picnic lunch to enjoy a few hours alone with nature before being picked up by the boat. There are also swimming caves and waterfalls within easy reach of Ramata. Excellent carvings (wood and stone) are available for purchase from village carvers. New Georgia has a strong traditional culture and there are "taboo" sites that locals can take you to where animist religion and head hunting rituals were practised in the pre-Christianity days.

After lunch a half day tour to a local village on New Georgia is offered - this involves a 20 minute motor canoe ride, some walking around the village meeting the locals and seeing how they live, viewing a "custom dance" performance, tasting some local foods and viewing local carvers at work. From the village you will be taken for a walk in the village gardens and nearby jungle to see how these people live off the land.

Overnight Mavo Eco Lodge (1.5 star accommodation, includes meals)
www.mavolodge.com

DAY 3: Monday or Tuesday

RAMATA (Mavo Eco Lodge)

Spend a full day today on activities of your choice - fishing, snorkelling, a beach picnic, exploring the lagoon by paddle canoe on your own or with a guide, more village touring, exploring the local caves and waterfalls, take a walk around Ramata Island, take a longer hike on the mainland. Any two half-day activities offered or arranged by Mavo Eco Lodge are included in your tour package today. Please advise your hosts the night before of your selection.

Overnight Mavo Eco Lodge (1.5 star accommodation, includes meals)

DAY 4: Tuesday or Wednesday RAMATA / SEGHE (Matikuri Lodge)

Today must surely be the most exciting day of the trip: a leisurely journey by motor canoe down the north eastern coast of New Georgia Island, skimming along the placid waters of the northern arm of the Marovo Lagoon. The scenery is absolutely stunning and the habitat quite pristine all the way to Matikuri Island near Seghe at the southern end of the Marovo Lagoon.

Depart around 07:00 after an early breakfast so that you will make it to Matikuri in time for the boat crew will be able to get home to Ramata before dark. A picnic lunch and green coconuts to drink will be carried on board the motor canoe for refreshment and you will be able to stop at any little spot that takes your fancy en route, to swim, snorkel or walk on the brilliant white beaches. Brief village stops may also be possible.

TOUR NOTE: About Matikuri Lodge

Matikuri Island is a small private island off greater Vangunu Island, an extinct volcano. Matikuri is due south of the Seghe which is on neighbouring New Georgia island. Here is a useful map on the internet (copy and paste into your internet browser):

<https://www.google.com.pg/maps/place/Solomon+Islands/@->

ECOTOURISM MELANESIA LTD

[8.6604365,157.873364,1932m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!3m1!1s0x68d351e0555009d1:0xb44cc0a017442980](https://www.solomonislands-hotels.travel/Matikuri_Lodge)

Seghe is a tiny township with just a few shops, a school, a police post and an airfield. Matikuri Lodge is at the northern end of Matikuri Island. It is a locally-owned operation similar to Mavo Eco Lodge but last time we looked there was no electricity here - at night they use kerosene pressure lamps. Bring your own flashlight and battery-operated personal fan.

On arrival at Matikuri, farewell your Ramata boat crew, check in to your over-water bungalow and spend the afternoon at leisure at Matikuri Lodge. Staff will show you around the lodge and surrounds then leave you to soak up the atmosphere or jump in the water - there is a good swimming area right in front of the lodge and you can watch fish in the water right under your bungalow.

Overnight Matikuri Lodge, near Seghe in the Marovo Lagoon (rustic but comfortable 1.5 star accommodation, includes generous local-style meals). See more information at http://www.solomonislands-hotels.travel/Matikuri_Lodge

DAY 5: Wednesday or Thursday SEGHE (Matikuri Lodge)

Today you can choose any two of the following half day excursion options from your base at Matikuri Lodge:

- (a) a half day excursion to the Karuhahe Islands, a chain of pristine little islets further offshore from Vangunu which are uninhabited and offer excellent snorkelling and light rainforest which affords a bit of shade (but wear a big hat and plenty of sunscreen as well).
- (b) a Vangunu village tour with custom dance
- (c) a fishing trip with options for deep sea fishing, reef fishing or estuary fishing
- (d) an "African Queen"-style river safari up the river to the north of Matikuri which runs deep into the thick forest of Vangunu with overhanging jungle (is that a vine or a python?) and occasional little hamlets of families living off nature.

Two excursions are included as part of your tour package today. If you can fit in more than two excursions the additional trips will be at extra cost - pay direct to the lodge owner.

Overnight Matikuri Lodge, near Seghe in the Marovo Lagoon (rustic but comfortable 1.5 star accommodation, includes generous local-style meals).

DAY 6: Thursday or Friday

SEGHE / MUNDA

07:00 Make an early start this morning for the four hour boat transfer from Matikuri Lodge to Munda. The coastal canoe route begins at Seghe and follows the mangroved southern shoreline of New Georgia for the first three hours then passes through the protected waters of the Roviana Lagoon for the last hour or so. Comfort stops can be made ashore en route.

Arrive in time for lunch (own expense) at Agnes Lodge Hotel.

In the afternoon spend the afternoon exploring charming Munda township on foot. The airport runway, right in the middle of town, is the longest in the Solomons because it was originally built by Japanese forces as a heavy bomber air base in 1942. There are still many war relics to be seen around town - old gun emplacements, aircraft revetments, fuel dumps, bomb shelters, rusting barges - even Quonset huts erected by the Americans when they over-ran Munda are still in use today. There is no need to take a guide with you but you may request one at hotel reception if you would like one (not included).

ECOTOURISM MELANESIA LTD

*NB If you expect you may become travel-weary there is also the option to make the trip from Matikuri to Munda by air if today is a Friday. Solomon Airlines flight IE346 departs Seghe airfield at 15:40 arriving Munda at 16:25. This would give you one more half-day at Matikuri but hardly any time at Munda. This option is the same cost as transferring by motor canoe but if you wish to take this option it must be decided at the time of booking: it cannot be arranged at short notice during the trip.
(There is also an option to stay an extra night at Munda and tour the Roviana Lagoon, villages and rivers - quote available on request).*

Overnight Agnes Lodge Hotel, Munda (2.5 star cottage, room only, pay as you go for meals, cash or card)

DAY 7: Friday or Saturday

MUNDA / KUKUNDU

07:00 Another motor canoe transfer today again departing in the cool of the morning. The water transfer from Munda to Gizo normally takes about two hours and is one of the Solomons' most picturesque water journeys. Much of the route hugs the shore of Vona Vona Island and weaves through a myriad of tiny islands that lie in the lagoon between Vona Vona Island and Kohinggo Island, both part of the New Georgia group. At the end of the lagoon you'll pass through a narrow passage between Vona Vona and Kohinggo then cross Fergusson Passage, a short stretch of open water separating Vona Vona from the Ghizo Island group.

Today the water transfer will double as a sightseeing tour so total trip time will be about four hours.

First stop will be the Skull Island which is literally an island where the skulls of ancestors - and some unlucky head-hunting victims - are stored and displayed. The island is surrounded by a reef and can only be approached at mid or high tides. Head-hunting and open disposal of corpses is no longer practised so all the bones on this island are quite old. The locals charge fees for visiting the island but these will be taken care of by your guide.

From Skull Island continue on through the Vona Vona Lagoon making random stops at villages and snorkelling spots where you can snorkel over both natural reefs and those formed by coral growing on ship wrecks and other war relics. Your boat crew will be happy to stop at any spot that takes your fancy during the transfer through the lagoon, so that you can swim in crystal clear water, walk on beautiful little beaches and buy coconuts and bananas from people living on the islands. You'll probably never pass through such a beautiful part of the world again.

14:00 Arrive at Kukundu, a large village at the eight o'clock position on circular Kolombangara Island. Kukundu is an immaculately manicured village that hosts a Seventh-Day Adventist church mission.

A fifteen minute walk from Kukundu is Hambere Harbour, a small inlet hosting the tiny village of Hambere who huts line the little white beach. Your host here is Alvert Maena and family. (Alvert's nickname is Venti, pronounced "Venti").

Spend the remaining hours of the day enjoying the ambience of the little village, the smell of the mangroves and salt water and the delicious local food that Venti's wife is cooking up in the outdoor kitchen. Local food from the Western Province is well known as the Solomons' best. A church choir or traditional string band usually entertains after dinner here.

Overnight 1.0 star accommodation at Hambere village stay, Kukundu, Kolombangara Island. See more information at

http://www.solomonislands-hotels.travel/Hambere_Village_Stay

ECOTOURISM MELANESIA LTD

DAY 8: Saturday or Sunday

KUKUNDU / GIZO / HONIARA

Spend the morning exploring the mangrove labyrinths of Hambere inlet by paddle canoe. Paddle yourself or Venti will paddle you on request - the larger dugout canoes take three or four people.

After an early lunch depart Hambere 45 minutes by motor canoe to Ghizo Island for a look around Gizo town before your flight to Honiara. Note that Ghizo Island is spelled with an “h” while the name of the town on the island is Gizo with no “h”.

Gizo’s main market day is Friday so the weekends are fairly quiet. The market and some of the Chinese shops will be open.

Gizo airport is actually located on its own small island, Nusatupe (*noosa toopay*) just 500 metres offshore from Gizo town. Check in time is 90 minutes prior to scheduled take-off. After checking in it’s possible to boat back to Gizo town and have a cold drink at the Gizo Hotel while waiting for your flight to arrive.

Solomon Airlines flight IE803 or IE805 departs Gizo late afternoon for Honiara (aircraft: Dash 8-200 with 36 seats or Twin Otter with 18 seats)

On arrival at Honiara airport our driver/guide will meet you and transfer you to your hotel.

Overnight Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel (3.5 star, room only, pay as you go for meals by cash or card)

DAY 9: Sunday or Monday

HONIARA / FLY OUT

Our driver/guide will transfer you to the airport and assist you to check in for your international flight.





TRIP NOTES:

1. This tour involves travel to remote areas where medical facilities are not available.
2. This tour involves calm-water lagoon travel in motorised canoes that may not be carrying a full set of safety equipment and is not recommended for non-swimmers. Bring your own life jacket.
3. This tour may involve travel in vehicles without seat belts.
4. Water provided for drinking in village areas is either rainwater or piped from mountain springs and is clean and safe to drink. However, boiled water can be provided on request.
5. Solomon Islands is a high rainfall area year-round and your daily program will have to be flexible. Rain in the morning means activities will be postponed till afternoon and vice-versa - rain all day means some advertised activities will not proceed unless you are happy to get wet. There is no partial refund available for day trips or components thereof that are not availed of or which cannot proceed due to inclement weather or other circumstances beyond the control of Ecotourism Melanesia or the local tour operators and guides who provide these services on our behalf. Please ensure you have adequate travel insurance to cover yourself for such eventualities.
6. Solomon Islands is a malarial area - bring mosquito repellent and anti-malaria medication. Monitor yourself for malaria symptoms for several weeks after returning from this trip.
7. Automatic teller machines are available in Honiara, Auki, Munda and Gizo. You can use your credit card to withdraw cash advances in local currency (Solomon Islands dollars SBD).
8. See your invoice for other terms and conditions.

© Ecotourism Melanesia. This itinerary and contains original, creative travel product concepts, plans, activities, sequencing and descriptions based on extensive destination knowledge and experience accumulated by Ecotourism Melanesia. This document may not be forwarded, distributed or replicated in total or in part for use by other travellers, travel agencies or tour operators for any commercial purposes including comparative quotations or self-guided touring.