



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM81 - HONIARA, AUKI AND GIZO EXPLORER

6 nights SOFT ADVENTURE PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS

This is a sampler package offering a taste of Solomon Islands' three major visitor destinations. In Honiara, choose from a menu of interesting day trip options to explore locations around the capital. In Auki, visit the shark callers and shell money makers of the famous Langa Langa Lagoon then take a day to immerse yourself in the Malaita village lifestyle. The package concludes with two nights at a premier hideaway resort on a tiny island near Gizo where you can enjoy snorkelling and beach walking right in front of your waterside bungalow, and take a boat trip to visit local villages.

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

	Group of 1	Group of 2	Group of 4	Group of 6+
Standard 6-night package	USD 5200	USD 3400	USD 3000	USD 2600
Single supplement	---	USD 800	USD 800	USD 800
Airfare supplement HIRGZOHIR	USD 350	USD 350	USD 350	USD 350
Extra night Auki (room only)	USD 100	USD 50	USD 50	USD 50
Extra night Gizo (room only)	USD 300	USD 250	USD 250	USD 250
Extra night Honiara	USD 160	USD 80	USD 80	USD 80

Prices subject to change but otherwise valid till end 2016. For package modifications, please enquire.

PACKAGE INCLUSIONS:

- meet and greet at Honiara, Auki and Gizo
- all airport transfers
- daily local guide for all travel and activities
- 2 nights 3.5-star twin share accommodation at Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel, Honiara (deluxe garden or ocean room), or equivalent alternative if the Mendana is full. Room only, pay as you go for meals, drinks and extras.
- Honiara day trip - as selected - by private air-conditioned vehicle with driver/guide. (All excursions are counted as equivalent value for packaging purposes).
- return first class ferry fares to Auki
- half day guide Langa Langa Lagoon tour by outboard canoe.
- 2 nights 2-star twin-share accommodation at Auki Lodge (standard air-conditioned room with private bathroom), or equivalent accommodation at Auki Motel or Rarasu Motel. Room only, pay as you go for meals, drinks and extras.
- full day Auki village experience with private vehicle transfers. Includes lunch.
- 2 nights 3.0 star twin-share waterside bungalow accommodation at Fatboys Resort, Gizo (or similar if Fatboys unavailable). Room only, pay as you go for meals, drinks and extras.
- 1 x half-day boat excursion ex-Fatboys Resort, including guide and bottled water only.
- return boat transfers from and to Gizo airfield
- tour monitoring and 24 hour assistance from our offices in Honiara and Port Moresby

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

EXCLUSIONS:

- international airfares
- internal airfares (quoted separately)
- hotel meals, bar drinks, tips, souvenirs, personal items

ITINERARY:

DAY 1:



HONIARA

Arrive at Honiara airport early afternoon on your flight from Port Moresby, Brisbane, Sydney or Nadi (a free visitors permit is available on arrival for most passports). Our local guide will welcome you when you exit Customs (look for somebody holding a sign with your name) and transfer you by private car or minivan into Honiara town. This will be a thirty minute drive on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon but up to an hour and a half during weekdays due to traffic congestion along the main coast road into town which runs past schools, shops, churches and industrial areas.

Check in at the Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel, popularly known as “the Mendana” (named after the Spanish explorer). The hotel is located on the main waterfront with its own tiny beach, just a few minutes walk from the central business and shopping district known as Point Cruz. There are a number of Chinese restaurants and take-away food bars in the Point Cruz area. It is safe and interesting to stroll around the shops in the afternoons and early evenings - local people will greet you with a friendly hello or an “eyebrow flash” and will be happy to engage in conversation. Most local people speak and understand basic English although it’s fun for you to learn a bit of the local Pidgin as well.

Spend the rest of today exploring around the hotel and Point Cruz area or cooling off in the hotel pool.

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

Arriving flights

based on southern summer / northern winter schedules Oct-Mar. Flights between Apr-Sep may be different.

Depart Port Moresby

TUE FRI SUN at 10:00 on Air Niugini flight PX84, arriving Honiara at 13:20 (1 hour time advance)

Depart Brisbane

MON at 10:00 on Virgin Australia flight VA187, arriving Honiara at 14:00 (1 hour time advance)

MON at 10:00 on Solomon Airlines flight IE701, arriving Honiara 13:15 or 14:15 (1 hour time advance)

TUE at 10:00 on Virgin Australia flight VA187, arriving Honiara at 14:00 (1 hour time advance)

WED at 10:00 on Solomon Airlines flight IE701, arriving Honiara 13:15 or 14:15 (1 hour time advance)

THU at 10:00 on Virgin Australia flight VA187, arriving Honiara at 14:00 (1 hour time advance)

FRI at 08:45 on Solomon Airlines flight IE701, arriving Honiara 13:00 (1 hour time advance)

SAT at 09:00 on Solomon Airlines flight IE701, arriving Honiara 13:15 (1 hour time advance)

Depart Sydney

TUE at 09:30 on Solomon Airlines flight IE711, arriving Honiara 14:45 (1 hour time advance April to September only)

Depart Nadi

TUE at 12:30 on Fiji Airways flight FJ261, arriving Honiara 1500 via Port Vila (2 hours time retard)

THU at 09:00 on Air Niugini flight PX85, arriving Honiara at 10:00 (2 hours time retard)

THU at 11:00 on Solomon Airlines flight IE709, arriving Honiara at 12:00 (2 hours time retard)

SAT at 13:30 on Fiji Airways flight FJ269, arriving Honiara 14:30 via Port Vila (2 hours time retard)

SUN at 09:30 on Solomon Airlines flight IE703, arriving Honiara 12:30 via Port Vila (2 hours time retard)

DAY 2:



HONIARA: pick a day trip

Today a selection of excursions with our local guide is offered as part of your package. Please select your preferred excursion and advise your selection at the time of booking your package (you can change your preference up until one week before arrival if you wish).

1) Half day Honiara sightseeing tour (4 hours 08:00-12:00)

This tour by airconditioned private car includes:

- national museum, parliament house and cultural centre
- the central market
- the U.S. war memorial on Skyline Ridge
- the Japanese peace monument on Mt Austen
- Chinatown and Mataniko River (WW2 icon)

Includes bottled water. This is a half day tour - return to the hotel for lunch or explore lunch options at Point Cruz (we recommend the airconditioned Bamboo Café at the nearby King Solomon Hotel) and the rest of your day is at leisure. After lunch perhaps you may like to get on a public bus outside your hotel and go for a "bus ride" west to White River or east to King George School. The buses charge a small flat fare each way and it makes for very cheap sightseeing (no guide required) ☺.

2) Full day hike to Mataniko Falls (10 hours 07:00-17:00)

This excursion involves a guided 6-hour round-trip hike following the Mataniko River upstream from Honiara, plus transfer time and time swimming at the falls. The main waterfall is quite high and majestic even during the dry season. There is a big cave at the bottom which can be explored if you take flashlights. There are stalagmites, bats and birds in the cave, which was used as a hideout by Japanese forces after the American marine landings. The walking is challenging in the humid climate. Don't select this option unless you are quite physically fit. Includes bottled water and boxed lunch.

3) East Guadalcanal battlefields excursion (8 hours 08:00-16:00)

This day trip covers all main points of interest from the 1944 Guadalcanal Campaign including Henderson field, Hell's Point, Bloody Ridge, underground hospital, Red Beach, Koni field, Tetere Beach, and the little-known memorial to the crew members of the Austrian-Hungarian navy gunboat the SMS Albatros who were massacred by locals in 1895 (<http://mateinfo.hu/a-albatros.htm>).

As you drive along the east coast road, you may note straight sections of the road that are actually old fighter airstrip runways. Includes bottled water and boxed lunch.

4) West Guadalcanal village excursion (8 hours 08:00-16:00)

Villages and settlements close to Honiara town are all westernised and are generally populated by locals from other islands. To get to native Guadalcanal villages it is necessary to drive 2 hours from town, and inland from the coastal strip. From the hotel your guide will drive you out through Honiara's western suburbs of Rove (*Ro-vay*), White River and Kakabona, over the Poha River and out through the Mamara Estate coconut plantations to the north western tip of Guadalcanal past Visale Mission and the old Tamea Resort. Here you will be welcomed at a small native village where you will be able to see local lifestyle and customs. A traditional dance will be performed and local style cooked food and fresh fruit will be served for lunch with coconut juice to drink straight from the nut. Includes bottled water and lunch.

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

DAY 3:



HONIARA / AUKI: Langalanga Lagoon tour

Although Auki has an airfield, it is regularly closed due to disputes between the government and the owners of the runway land.

Instead there are daily sea ferries which offer a safe and reliable mode of transport between the Honiara the capital (on Guadalcanal Island) and Auki the main town on Malaita. Malaita is the most populous island in the Solomons, and culturally distinct from the other main island groups.

06:00 Breakfast and check out of the hotel (please settle any meals or extras you have charged to your room account).

07:00 Our local guide will pick you up at the hotel and transfer you to the main wharf and assist you to board the twin hull fast sea cat ferry "360". The guide will travel with you on the ferry and farewell you at Auki before returning to Honiara the same day on the same ferry.

08:00 The ferry departs Honiara for 3 or 4 hours crossing to Auki. Sometimes the ferry stops at Tulagi and navigates through the delightful Siota Passage between Big Gela and Small Gela (Florida Islands group) and sometimes proceeds direct to Auki by a route to the east of the Florida Islands. (Solomon Islands ferries operate to high safety standards and do not have any recent history of accidents so you need not worry about getting wet).

12:00 On arrival in Auki your guide will walk with you 15 minutes to Auki Lodge and assist you to check in to your room, buy your own local syle fish and chips for lunch at one of the shops then return to the wharf to board your private motorised canoe for a tour of the Langa Langa Lagoon.

14:00 Your Honiara guide returns to Honiara on the ferry while you depart with our Auki guide on your exploration of the lagoon. During this excursion you will stop at some of the communities living on artificial islands which have been built up over centuries by piling up lumps of coral collected from the floor of the lagoon. Visiting the artificial islands of Alite (pronounced *ah-lee-tay*), Busu or Laulasi (*low-lahsi*) you will be shown local fishing methods, inspect the ancestral skulls, see how shell money is made and learn about the pagan shark worshipping cult. At Busu Cultural Village you'll see a cultural group performing what the locals call a "custom dance".

18:00 Arrive back at Auki wharf and walk up to Auki Lodge.

Dinner is available in the Lodge dining room (there aren't many other options except for the small restaurant next to Rarasu Motel about 15 minutes walk away).

Overnight 2 star Auki Lodge (room only, pay as you go for meals and drinks).

(NB If there is heavy rain during this afternoon your guide will discuss with you the possibility of rescheduling the lagoon tour for tomorrow morning which will require shortening of tomorrow's village excursion. The rest of today would then be spent exploring Auki town and market with an umbrella ☺)

DAY 4:



AUKI: village experience

06:00 Breakfast

07:00 Our local guide will meet you at the lodge reception and transfer you by private-hired vehicle (local style pick-up truck or battered mini-bus!) to a local village. Today you'll spend the day at a typical local village and have an opportunity to meet ordinary Malaitans and learn about their culture and lifestyle. Your host village will be either on the shore of the lagoon or a little way inland. This is a genuine *in situ* cultural experience and not a tourist show.

It's a lovely safe environment, with no snakes or other nasties to be worried about apart from the usual mosquitoes. With the guidance of your hosts at the village you can safely:

- paddle around in the lagoon by dugout canoe, exploring the mangrove labyrinths (if you are visiting a seaside village)
- bathe in the freshwater stream
- bushwalk in the forest to see medicinal plants and bush foods, try to catch a glimpse of the frigate bird, the Malaita eagle and the wide variety of parrots

- visit the gardens to see how staple foods are cultivated and harvested
- watch how food is cooked in the smoke-house kitchen
- play soccer or volleyball with the village kids.

During the day you'll meet many of the villagers and share a little of their lives. You'll also learn about the Malaita culture, learn some pidgin and local language words. You will not be treated as royalty to be entertained but rather as a new member of the family being inducted into daily routine. After spending a day with your host family you will be able to say with confidence that you understand something of the lifestyle of Solomon Islanders living in rural villages.

Local-style food will be served for lunch, including unique local delicacies such as mangrove soup made from the grated propagules (fruit) of the large-leafed orange mangrove (*Bruguiera gymnorrhiza*), *kata* pudding made from indigenous nali nuts mashed with boiled taro and coconut cream, and *takuma* swamp fern cooked in coconut milk. Of course you'll also find familiar favourites such as pineapple, bananas and scones with butter and jam to wash down with a cup of tea.

17:00 Depart from the village for return transfer to Auki.

Overnight Auki Lodge (room only, pay as you go for dinner, breakfast, snacks and drinks).

DAY 5:



AUKI / GIZO

06:00 Breakfast

07:00 Our local guide will meet you at the lodge reception and walk you down to the wharf and assist you to board the morning ferry to Honiara, departing 08:00 approx. Today you will travel on your own without a guide (tickets will be arranged by our Auki guide before your departure).

12:00 - 13:00 On arrival at Honiara wharf our Honiara guide will meet you and transfer you direct to Honiara airport to check in for the afternoon flight to Gizo which departs 15:00. On the way to the airport the car will make a stop at a hotel or restaurant for you to grab some lunch and use the toilets.

15:00 Solomon Airlines flight IE802 departs Honiara for Gizo via Munda (Dash 8 aircraft with 30 seats)

(NB If the ferry arrives late from Auki and you miss this flight to Gizo you will be accommodated in Honiara tonight again - at our expense - and fly to Gizo on the morning flight tomorrow).

16:30 On arrival at Gizo airfield which is located on a small island in the Gizo Lagoon, you'll be met and transferred by boat to Fatboys Resort www.Fatboysresort.com which is located on Mbabanga Island, another little island in the Gizo Lagoon. (Gizo town itself is located on the much larger Ghizo Island - note the different spelling for the island and the town).

Overnight 3 star Fatboys Resort, Gizo (twin bungalow, room only)
www.solomonislandsfatboys.com.au

(NB If accommodation at Fatboys Resort is unavailable at the time of booking you will be accommodated at Sanbis Resort, a similar resort which is located at the opposite end of the same little island, or at the Gizo Hotel in Gizo town. In this case, free daily water transfers will be provided as required).

DAY 6:



GIZO: pick a day trip

Today take a half day boat trip in one of the resort's motor boats with a resort guide, then spend the rest of the day at leisure at Fatboys.

Suggested boat excursions:

1. Circumnavigate Ghizo Island by motor boat stopping at a couple of villages on the tiny offshore islands, villages on the white sandy beaches around the main island, Titiana (pron: sisiana) Gilbertese village (people resettled from Kiribati in the 1950's) and spend some time exploring the chinese shops in quaint Gizo town and market. Return to Fatboys for lunch or have lunch in Gizo (market food, local food bars or the Gizo Hotel) and return to Fatboys later in the afternoon.

2. Kolombangara villages. Boat crossing to Kukundu Mission Station on Kolombangara Island then disembark and walk with a guide along the coastal footpath through pretty local villages between Kukundu and Ghatere - the boat will shadow you as you hike along the coast, stopping at villages to chat to local people and see what they are doing. Once you have had enough walking (between 2 to 4 hours walking is available), the boat will pick you up and transfer you back to Fatboys for lunch, otherwise you can buy local snacks at the village markets as you walk through (bananas, smoked fish) and return to Fatboys later in the afternoon.

3. Kennedy Island. Throw a few coconuts and a mask and snorkel into the boat and head for Plum Pudding Island which was re-named Kennedy Island in WW2 after it played host to John F. Kennedy (future American president) when he washed ashore there following the sinking of his motor torpedo boat PT109. The locals are every happy to tell visitors about JFK's visit even though those who were alive at the time have all now passed on. Return to Fatboys for lunch or buy fresh fruit from the locals at Kennedy Island (ask for soursop fruit for a real exotic taste) and return to Fatboys later in the afternoon.

Design your own excursion if you wish but if extra gear is required like scuba diving equipment, catering or extra fuel for long distances, this will be at your own expense.

Overnight 3 star Fatboys Resort, Gizo (twin bungalow, room only)
www.solomonislandsfatboys.com.au

(NB Extra nights at Gizo are available if you wish to stay longer for boating, scuba diving, fishing, sightseeing etc.)

DAY 7:



GIZO / HONIARA / FLY OUT

After breakfast, transfer by boat to Gizo airfield for your morning flight to Honiara. Morning flight times vary from day to day on the flight schedule but generally depart between 8am and 10am, arriving in Honiara between 11am and 12:30pm - sometimes direct flights and sometimes via Munda. These morning flights from Gizo are designed to connect with outbound international flights to Brisbane and Port Moresby (minimum 1 hour connection time is needed).

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.
3. This tour may involve travel in vehicles without seat belts.
4. Water provided for drinking in village areas is 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 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.
6. Solomon Islands is a malarial area - bring your mosquito repellent and make sure you are up to date with your malaria medication. Monitor yourself for malaria symptoms for several weeks after returning from this trip.
7. Automatic teller machines are available in Honiara, Auki and Gizo. You can use your credit card to withdraw cash advances in local currency (Solomon Islands dollar SBD\$).

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