



Ecotourism Melanesia

Discover Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

EM80 - DISCOVER HONIARA AND MALAITA SOFT ADVENTURE PACKAGE FOR INDEPENDENT TRAVELLERS 8 nights Honiara and Auki (ex-Port Moresby)

Depart Port Moresby Friday and return the following Saturday OR depart Sunday and return the following Monday. For a 7-night version of this tour that connects with Brisbane flights, see EM80A.

This soft adventure package combines drive-around day tours with off-the-beaten-track excursions on foot or public transport. In Honiara, you'll start with a privately guided tour of the town by comfortable air-conditioned vehicle before opting for a waterfall hike or an intrepid battlefields exploration the next day. In Malaita you'll take the obligatory outboard canoe tour of the Langa Langa Lagoon artificial islands then venture out for a village stay experience before branching off to the East or North of Malaita, travelling by public transport with a guide. Using public transport not only keeps the cost down, but once you get there you'll see there's really no better way to mingle with the locals and have the true Malaita experience. Accommodation on this trip varies from three star in Honiara to half a star in Malaita villages, so if you are the Club Med type this may not be the trip for you.

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

	Group of 1	Group of 2	Group of 3**	Group of 4+
Standard 8-night package	PGK 10,136	PGK 6,541	PGK 6,144	PGK 5,315
Extra nights Honiara (Mendana Hotel), room only	PGK 400 per room (single or twin-share)			
Extra nights Honiara (Mendana Hotel) with day tour (private vehicle)	PGK 950	PGK 600 pp	PGK 550 pp	PGK 475 pp
Extra nights Auki Lodge, room only	PGK 275 per room (single or twin-share)			
Extra nights Auki Lodge with day tour (private vehicle or motor canoe)	PGK 950	PGK 600 pp	PGK 550 pp	PGK 475 pp
Extra nights remote area excursion with guide (public transport)	PGK 500	PGK 400 pp	PGK 350 pp	PGK 300 pp

*To convert these costs to other currencies, use the exchange rates quoted on our website home page www.em.com.pg

** Accommodation for groups of 3 is 1 x twin and 1 x single

PACKAGE INCLUSIONS:

- meet and greet at Port Moresby, Honiara and Auki airports
- welcome kit including maps, destination information, souvenir polo shirt
- all airport transfers
- daily local guide for all travel and activities
- 3 nights three-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.
- full day Honiara sightseeing tour by private air-conditioned vehicle with driver/guide. Includes bottled water and lunch.

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- full day excursion option ex-Honiara, choice of Mataniko Falls hike, battlefields excursion or shopping trip (all options are counted as equivalent value). Includes lunch.
- full day Langa Langa Lagoon sightseeing tour by outboard canoe with guides, including Laulasi artificial island and shark cult, Busu Cultural Centre and custom dance performance. Includes lunch.
- 2 nights two-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. Day 4 and Day 8.
- 1 night half-star basic twin-share accommodation at village homestay near Auki. Private bungalow with outdoor bathroom. Includes meals, clean drinking water and bottomless fruit and coconut juice. Day 5.
- 2-nights excursion option ex-Auki (Day 6 and Day 7), choice of East Malaita hike and paddle (1 night Lalibaola village, 1 night Atori guest house), North Malaita road trip (1 night Malu'u Rest House, 1 night Kwailibesi mission guest house), extended village stay near Auki (2 additional nights village stay), or Auki-based sightseeing (2 additional nights Auki Lodge), including public transport fares, activities and accompanying guide of the same gender, as stated in itinerary. (All options are counted as equivalent value).
- tour monitoring and 24 hour assistance from our offices in Honiara (ph +677-94273 or 27772) and Port Moresby (ph +675-686 8917 or 323 4518)

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

EXCLUSIONS:

- airfares
- bar drinks, tips, souvenirs, personal items
- meals specified as "pay-as-you-go (PAYG)" or not otherwise specified as included
- visa fees (PGK100 on arrival in PNG and free-of-charge on arrival in Solomon Islands)

ITINERARY:

DAY 1: Friday or Sunday

HONIARA (ARRIVAL)

Depart Port Moresby at 12:00 on **Air Niugini flight PX84**, arriving Honiara at 15:00 (2-hour flight plus 1 hour time advance).

On arrival at Honiara airport you will be welcomed by our local guide (look for somebody holding a sign with your name) and transferred by road from the airport into Honiara town, a twenty minute drive along the main road past schools, shops and residential 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 in the Point Cruz area - it is safe and pleasant to stroll around this area in the evening.

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

DAY 2: Saturday or Monday

HONIARA (SIGHTSEEING TOUR)

08:00 Your guide will meet you at the hotel reception to commence your day tour of Honiara. You'll start with a trip to the little museum and cultural centre, which is just across the road from the hotel, then proceed to the central market, the U.S. war memorial on Skyline Ridge and the Japanese peace park on Mt Austen. As you travel about the city you will be greeted by

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warm smiles everywhere you go. The Solomon Islanders are very pleasant and welcoming people which is why the country is nicknamed "The Happy Isles. Honiara is a safe town with a low crime rate where you will feel secure and welcome. Today you will visit an urban village where you will meet local families living together in clan groups within the town environment. Local-style food will be cooked and prepared for your lunch. In the afternoon, you'll take a drive out the scenic west coast road which features tropical rainforest interspersed with pretty coconut plantations, stopping for a swim at one of the coral beaches and a visit to the Vilu Cultural Village which has a display of World War 2 relics.

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

DAY 3: Sunday or Tuesday

HONIARA (DAY TRIP OPTIONS)

Today a choice of activities is offered.

1) Day hike to Mataniko Falls - this is a 6-hour round-trip hike following the Mataniko River upstream from Honiara. Guides will walk with you and a picnic lunch is included. The waterfall is quite large and majestic. 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. The walking is challenging in the humid climate and requires reasonable physical fitness. You will first be driven half an hour from your hotel to the Tuaruhu suburb upstream and commence walking from there. Pickup at reception 07:00, dropoff 16:00.

2) East Guadalcanal battlefields excursion - this trip covers all main points of interest from the 1944 campaign including Henderson field, Hell's Point, Bloody Ridge, underground hospital, Red Beach, Koni field, Tetere Beach. As you drive along the east coast road, you may note straight sections of the road that are actually old fighter airstrip runways. Includes packed lunch. Pickup 08:00, dropoff 16:00.

3) Artifact and souvenir shopping - for those who prefer to stick closer to the hotel, this is a half-day activity that leaves you with a free afternoon to laze by the pool or sit on the little beach at the hotel, or do your own thing around town. The morning's shopping stops include the Mendana gift shop (shell jewellery and general souvenirs), central market (shell money necklaces and other crafts), DJ Graphics (souvenir T-shirts, island-style garb and local music CDs), BJS Agencies (ebony wood carvings, woven baskets) and Betikama High School (copper beatings, paintings by local artists). Your guide may know some other good shop-stops. Of course there's no obligation to buy anything... browsing is fun too. You won't see another tourist all day and shopping is a great way to rub shoulders with the locals. For lunch your guide will take you to a local café to join the workers and shoppers for a local-style lunch: Honiara-style fish and chips (garlic-infused reef fish fried in batter with sweet potato chips) or curry chicken and tropical vegetables on rice are the two most popular dishes. Lunch is included in the tour. Pickup 08:00, dropoff 13:00 (or later by arrangement).

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

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DAY 4: Monday or Wednesday MALAITA (LANGA LANGA LAGOON TOUR)

0500 Your guide will transfer you to Honiara Airport to check in for **Solomon Airlines flight IE230** to Auki (pronounced *ow-kee*) departing 07:00 arriving 07:30. Our local tour guide will meet you at Auki airfield and transfer you to Auki town for check in and breakfast at Auki Lodge. From there you will be taken down to the waterfront to board a motorised canoe for a full day tour of the Langalanga Lagoon. You will stop off at a number of villages located on the edge of the lagoon and on the various 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. Local-style food will be served for lunch at Busu Cultural Centre, 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. You'll also be entertained by a cultural group performing what the locals call a "custom dance".

Late in the afternoon on returning to Auki Lodge, enjoy a poke around in the Chinese shops nearby. Stop and chat to locals in the street or in the shops.

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

DAY 5: Tuesday or Thursday MALAITA (AUKI VILLAGE STAY)

After breakfast, arrange with the Lodge to store the bulk of your baggage and take only an overnight bag with you for your village stay experience. Your guide will call for you at 08:00 and walk you down to the market where you will hop on local public transport (an open back truck with bench seats in the back) headed for the "south road".

Riding on a hard bench seat in the back of a truck on an unmade road can be either exhilarating or bone-jarring, depending on your philosophy of life and depending on how novel it is to you to be riding in the tray of a truck without seat belts which you would never even conscience back home. These public trucks generally travel fairly slowly due to the unmade road surface and incidents of passengers falling out are very rare. However if you feel unsafe in the back you can sit in the cabin of the truck with the driver. Sitting with the driver is routinely offered to tourists. Alternatively, take a rolled-up towel or travel pillow to sit on in the back.

After a bumpy forty minute ride through rainforest villages and across rickety bridges fording bubbling brooks you'll disembark at the roadside and walk 30 minutes through rainforest or coconut plantation towards the mangrove-lined shore of the Langa Langa Lagoon. The edge of the lagoon is dotted with tiny villages of "amphibious" Kwara'ae people (pronounced *kwar-eye*) who spend some of their time each day in hillside gardens and some of their time in dugout canoes fishing and gathering mangrove pods and shellfish in the lagoon. You will be allocated to stay in one of several different villages in this area that host visitors.

Your guide will introduce you to your host family who will then take over and look after you for the next 24 hours. This will be a genuine cultural experience where you will participate in a variety of activities and experiences.

It's a lovely safe environment, with no snakes or other nasties to be worried about apart from the usual mosquitoes. You can safely:

- paddle around in the lagoon, exploring the mangrove labyrinths

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- 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 and a night 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.

You'll be accommodated in a village hut that looks no different from any other on the outside but is comfortably fitted out with basic furnishings, clean bedding, a big bowl of fresh fruit and green coconuts to drink. Out the back you have your own private bathroom with sit-down toilet, soap and towel. The bed is fitted with a big mosquito net.

The food is delicious: don't you worry about that. Fresh fish and fresh chicken are commonly served, with a great array of fruit and vegetables cooked in local style. Breakfast is tea with fresh-baked scones or village bread (BYO Vegemite).

Overnight village stay, Auki (includes all meals, clean drinking water, bottomless tropical fruit and coconut juice.)

NB If you prefer the relative comfort of Auki Lodge, you can skip the overnight at the village and make Day 5 a day trip instead. This option must be requested at the time of booking. Your guide will travel with you to and from the village by public transport, returning you to Auki Lodge by 5pm. This makes no difference to the cost of the package, but if overnighing at Auki Lodge you'll pay extra for meals whereas meals at the village homestay are included.

DAY 6: Wednesday or Friday MALAITA (EXCURSION DAY 1)

DAY 7: Thursday or Saturday MALAITA (EXCURSION DAY 2)

For Day 6 and Day 7 there is a choice of excursions. You must nominate your preferred option at the time of booking this package.

Excursion option 1: East Malaita hike and paddle

Departing your village stay early in the morning a guide will accompany you on a 30 minute truck ride further down the south road to Maoro village. Here you will pick up a couple of hiking guides and commence a 6-hour jungle hike across the spine of Malaita Island. The trail begins behind Maoro village and features heavy tropical vegetation that you and your guides will hack through with machetes in places to get through. There are some steep spurs to climb in the early stages of the hike, then you pick up the Kwaimanafu river valley which is a steady climb to the remote bush village of Gwaimaoa. The trail then descends via the Kwaimbaita river valley towards the east coast of Malaita. The upper Kwaimbaita river is rocky and shallow, not navigable for canoes. You will make multiple crossings as you follow the valley down. As far as hikes go this one is of moderate difficulty in dry weather but can be tough going if it is raining. The only special items you will need to bring are a water bottle, a little first aid kit with sunscreen and something to treat scratches

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and insect bites, and a pair of comfortable walking shoes (it's not Mt Everest - trainers or sneakers that can dry out by the fire at night will be fine). Tonight you will overnight at Lalibaola, a small village not marked on the map but located near Gwari. You should arrive by 3pm in time to rest up and enjoy some time with the village people before dark. Your hiking guides from Maoro are related to the Lalibaola people so your visit will be very welcome. Accommodation here will be a little more Spartan than your Auki village stay because you are really out in the sticks now, but that's why you chose this excursion, isn't it? ☺

Overnight village hut, Lalibaola village, East Malaita (includes village-style meals, clean drinking water and bottomless fresh fruit).

DAY 7: Thursday or Saturday MALAITA (EXCURSION DAY 2)

Breakfast at Lalibaola village then hike down river to the estuary and paddle a dugout canoe with your guides up the east coast (mainly mangroves) to the offshore islands of Kwai and Ngongosila which are heavily populated, and then on to Atori, a government outpost at the head of the road from Auki. Total paddling time is about 4 hours, with stops at villages en route and plenty of time in the afternoon to explore Kwai Island.

Overnight in a church guest house at Atori or on Kwai island. Your guide will arrange this and settle the payment.

DAY 8: Friday or Sunday (EXCURSION DAY 3)

From Atori, board a public passenger truck heading for Auki. The road is unsealed but relatively smooth - passing through jungle, over bridges with small waterfalls etc and stops at villages en route. Your guide will settle payment for the fares.

The trip takes about 4 hours (ask to sit in the truck cabin if you find the ride in the back too hard on your back) and depending on what time you get away (passenger trucks depart when full of passengers, not according to any schedule), you can expect to arrive in Auki anytime from noon onwards. The rest of the afternoon is at leisure in Auki.

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

Excursion option 2: North Malaita road trip

Departing your village homestay early you'll take public transport into Auki with your guide, and then board another public truck bound for North Malaita. Trucks depart at regular intervals but you may have to wait a while.

The journey from Auki to Malu'u takes about 5 hours and is a little bumpy but very scenic. You'll pass through dozens of bush villages and seaside villages. The truck makes many stops to pick up and drop off passengers, and to allow passengers to buy fruit and betel nut from roadside markets. There are also plenty of opportunities to "go behind a tree", with allocated spots for men and women at each stop. (If you are a female travelling alone, you will be accompanied by a female guide who will organise these kinds of things for you...)

For the first two hours of the journey - from Auki to Fauabu (pronounced *fow-amboo*) you won't see the sea as the road courses well inland. There will be plenty of verdant rainforest contrasting with the white crushed coral surface of the road. From Fauabu through to Malu'u the road hugs the coast and the sea views are stunning all the way.

There is no official lunch today - you can graze on fresh fruit, fried fish, doughnuts and other goodies from the roadside markets throughout the day, pay-as-you-go.

Arriving in tiny Malu'u township late in the afternoon you will have time for a

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stroll around - yes there are even a couple of the ubiquitous Chinese shops here too - before settling in for the evening at the guest house. Overnight Malu'u Rest House (basic but comfortable 1.5 star accommodation - includes meals). Your guide will also be accommodated here.

DAY 7: Thursday or Saturday MALAITA (EXCURSION DAY 2)

This morning after checking out you will wait for another public passenger truck passing through Malu'u and travel another two hours to Kwailibesi (*kwai-lee-bessy*). This is a Seventh-Day Adventist Mission station right on the edge of the Lau Lagoon. Here you will check in at the mission guest house before venturing out to explore the lagoon for the afternoon. Right in front of the mission station is a myriad of reefs dotted with artificial islands similar to those of the Langa Langa Lagoon near Auki but far less frequented by visitors. You'll take a paddle-powered canoe ride over the reefs, stopping off at artificial islands to visit with the locals. The artificial islands are great for escaping mosquitoes and enemies, but the downside is that all water, garden food and other goods have to be paddled in from the mainland every day and it's hard work. Despite the missionary presence, animist religion is still practised here. Wear a hat and sunscreen while out on the water. (You can pay extra on the spot to hire an outboard-powered canoe if you wish). Overnight Kwailibesi Mission Guest House (basic but comfortable 1.5-star accommodation - includes dinner and breakfast only).

DAY 8: Friday or Sunday (EXCURSION DAY 3)

Today you'll wait with your guide by the roadside for a passenger truck for the rather long journey back to Auki - this may take up to 8 hours but these trips are always great fun and the time passes quickly. Passengers sing, chat, tell jokes and fool around to pass the time. Usually there is a trussed pig or chicken somewhere on the truck and this can also be quite entertaining by the time the passengers imitate its noises or tell each other that it looks like somebody they know, etc. You and the other passengers will all be great friends by the time you arrive in Auki (unless you are sitting in the cabin with the driver missing out on all the fun...). Once again there is no lunch provided today - buy fresh food from roadside markets. If you arrive early, the rest of the day is at leisure in Auki. Overnight Auki Lodge (room only, pay as you go for dinner, breakfast, snacks and drinks).

Excursion option 3: Extended Auki village stay

If moving around is not your cup of tea, you can opt to stay put at your Auki village stay and enjoy 2 more nights getting to know your host family and the rest of the village. This is a little heart-wrenching at the end because after 3 days you will become rather attached to these hospitable people but you will have a firm appreciation of their culture, lifestyle and more than a few words of local language. You will also have the opportunity to become adept at balancing and paddling a dugout canoe, scraping mangrove pods with a bivalve shell to cook mangrove soup, and "sewing up" sago palm leaves to make roof and wall sheets for traditional houses. An extended cultural exchange experience. On Day 8, transfer back to Auki to have your last night at Auki Lodge in readiness for an early morning airport transfer tomorrow.

Excursion option 4: Auki based day tripping

If you prefer the relative comfort of Auki Lodge, you can spend Day 6, 7 and 8 at Auki Lodge and take short day trips around Auki by public transport with

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your guide. Suggested outings:

- additional day trips to your allocated village stay village (bush walks, garden trips, canoe paddling, cooking, attend church in the village, learn handicrafts, impart some of your own skills to the villagers)
- Fiu River (30 minutes ride north of Auki - fast-flowing shallow river excellent for swimming and rubber-tubing or bamboo rafting)
- Bina Harbour (1 hour ride south of Auki - eco-timber sawmill, minor anchorage for coastal vessels, pineapple country)
- Kilu'ufi Hospital (15 minutes ride north of Auki - the provincial referral hospital, worth a visit if you are interested in health services. You can wander through the wards chatting with locals... sometimes whole families camp out under the sick person's bed)

DAY 8: Friday or Sunday

MALAITA (EXCURSION DAY 3)

Arrive back in Auki from your excursion option.

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

DAY 9: Saturday or Monday

MALAITA / HONIARA / FLY OUT

06:00 Check out of Auki Lodge and transfer by shuttle bus to Auki airfield.

07:45 Depart Auki on **Solomon Airlines flight IE231** to Honiara.

11:40 Depart Honiara on **Air Niugini flight PX85** to Port Moresby.

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 safety equipment and is not recommended for non-swimmers.
3. This tour involves travel in open-back trucks without seat belts.
4. Water provided for drinking in villages is piped from mountain springs and is clean and safe to drink. However, boiled water can be provided on request.
5. Malaita 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. Malaita is a mosquito area - bring your 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 and Auki. You can use your credit card to withdraw cash advances in local currency (Solomon Islands dollar SBD\$).
8. In Malaita there are about 10 different language groups although everybody also speaks Pidgin, the lingua franca spoken throughout the Solomons, and most Islanders also understand English as long as you speak slowly and clearly so they can find their way through your accent. Only some of the older villagers may have no English at all. The Kwara'ae language is also understood throughout Malaita (it is known as "Pidgin-belong-Malaita") and even though English is widely spoken you may find the following phrases helpful for breaking the ice with the locals:
Good night - rodo lea (*roddo-laya*)
Good-bye - aya
Okay / thank you / pleased to meet you - lea liu (*laya-leeoo*)
Very pretty - ofaa liu
I'm full - nauk abus (*nōk ah-boos*)

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I'm hungry - nauk hioi

I'm hot - nauk ok-ok

I'm tired - nauk maruk

I need to pee - nauk oga mim

I need to drink - nauk oga kafo

Yes - iu (*ee-oo*)

No - noaa (*no-aah*)

Of course! / Absolutely!- ima tai lai

Let's go - kul leak na'a (*kool-lay-uck-nuh*)

There is no universal word for "hello" in Kwara'ae, they use different greetings for different times of the day and they are all quite difficult to pronounce correctly, so stick with the English word "hello" which everybody understands. A casual form of greeting in Pidgin is "how?" which should be restricted to people that you have already formed a friendship with and not people you are meeting for the first time.