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ISSUE 80



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Welkam Frens



Mr Brett Gebers

It took an awful lot longer than anticipated but we are now flying from Brisbane to Munda and returning via Honiara on Saturdays. This non-stop service will make it easier and cheaper for visitors to get to Munda and the surrounding islands situated in the amazing Marovo Lagoon. Our Twin Otter fleet provides easy connections between Munda, Seghe, Gizo and Suavanao. There are also regular boat services to a number of local destinations. The Marovo Lagoon is the longest saltwater lagoon in the world and is filled with lots of amazing things to see and do.

The Solomon Islands Tourist Infrastructure Development fund which we set up at the end of 2017 has made several interest free loans to qualifying resorts in the Western Province. The recent recipients include Agnes Gateway Lodge where there have been some significant improvements, Titiru Lodge on Rendova Island with additional rooms and Zipolo Lodge where the owners have ordered some prebuilt accommodation from New Zealand. Zipolo Lodge is aiming to have everything completed by the end of the year. Other resorts have been granted loans and are in the final stages of having their plans approved. We look forward to some exciting developments in the tourism infrastructure over the next year.

We are slowly working through our fleet of aircraft and refurbishing them as time allows. Our engineering team have done a terrific job on our Twin Otter registered as H4-OTA. It looks significantly better than it used to with new paint, seat covers and crystal-clear windows. H4-NNP is next on the list followed by the DHC-8 in July. The A320 is scheduled to be replaced early in 2020 so no refurbishment work is planned for it.

The World Bank has just committed US\$51m to up-

grading roads and some airport facilities in the Solomon Islands. This funding complements the commitment by JICA to upgrade Honiara Airport. All of which will have a significant impact on tourism in the Solomon Islands.

The worldwide problem with litter seems to be amplified in Honiara and we are working with a number of parties to find a way of addressing the issue. Unfortunately, many of the Honiara residents feel that it is normal to throw litter out of the car and bus windows. There are no penalties to dumping litter in the gutters and on the roads. Failure to curb the use of plastic and other non-biodegradable packaging materials will ruin the pristine waters of the Solomon Islands.

During a recent snorkelling visit to the Munda area, I was thrilled to see Belinda Botha's obsession with keeping the environment pristine being translated into action. The Dive Munda staff walked around the nearby beaches picking up the litter whilst we floated around viewing the magnificent coral and brightly coloured fish. We even stopped to pick up litter floating in the sea.

A recent article in a newspaper had a picture of over 50 kg of plastic removed from a dead whale's stomach. There are numerous appalling pictures of animals that have died as a result of becoming tangled in plastic or through swallowing it in the media. If we don't start doing something about this problem, there won't be a tourist industry. The very least we can do is to pick up litter and place in in the rubbish bin no matter where we are in the world. It may not seem like much but at least it is a start. Every bit counts.

Thank you for reading this magazine and if you are visiting the Solomon Islands we wish you a very happy stay in this unique largely unexplored paradise.

Tengiu tumas.

Mr Brett Gebers
Chief Executive Officer

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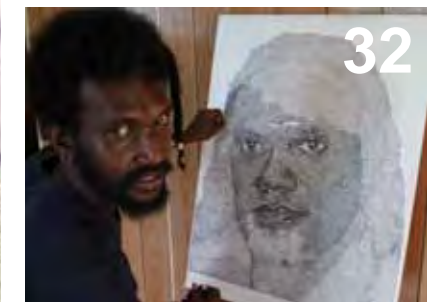


Cover photo:
Stephan Kleinlein

April 2019-July 2019

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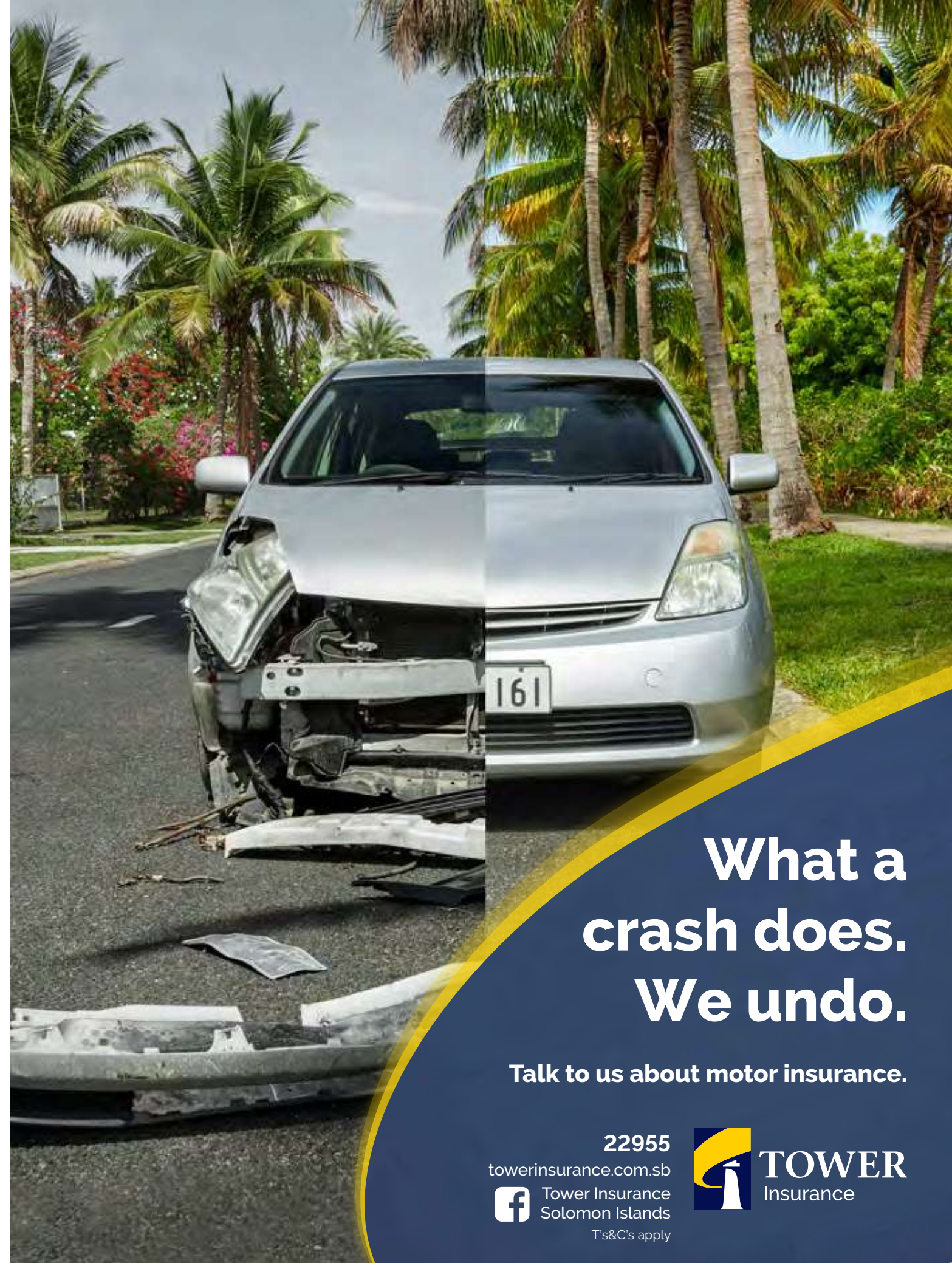
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Out & About



A new Brisbane-Munda-Brisbane Solomon Airlines service has been welcomed by thousands of people in the Western Province and local tourism leaders.

The flights, which operates on Saturdays, will bring tourists directly to some of Solomon Islands' most spectacular cultural, dive and fishing locations.

Tourism Solomons CEO Josefa Tuamoto says: "We are hopeful this new service will act as a catalyst for increased confidence in the Western Province's tourism future, in the process attracting major investment in much needed infrastructure which the country desperately needs.

"We hope the new service will stimulate investment in good quality accommodation inventory.

"Our hotelier and tour operator colleagues have been gearing up for the new service for the best part of 12 months and are obviously very excited and eager to welcome visitors."

The new flight offers seamless connections with Solomon Airlines' domestic

services to Gizo, Seghe in the Marovo Lagoon and Suavanao on Santa Isabel.

Shopper's paradise

What is new in Honiara town? Kalico Haus and Gifts is what's new!

Kalico Haus and Gifts offers Solomon Islander locals and visitors a taste of contemporary island souvenirs and Australian-branded items.

Situated at the end of the Solomon Motors building right in the heart of Honiara, Kalico Haus and Gifts offers well-priced new clothing for ladies, men and children. Lava, bags, sandals, perfumes, oils and sunglasses are all available, and imported monthly, so there is a steady turnover of stock.

Kalico Haus and Gifts is also passionate about high-



quality Solomon Islands-made gift items. The shop offers an extensive selection of the finest handmade items such as earrings, bracelets, necklaces, bags, bowls, stone carvings, timber carvings, soaps, oils and hats.

Kalico Haus and Gifts is well worth a visit during any travel or vacation to Solomon Islands.



The Pride of Honiara

Our fully refurbished 100 rooms, 4 executive suites and 14 executive rooms, all boast splendid sea views, quality facilities and contemporary furnishings.

The New Capitana Restaurant offers international cuisine. Panoramic views of the historic Iron Bottom Sound can be enjoyed over drink and snack on the Raratana Terrace in front of Capitana Restaurant.

Traditional furnishings imported from Japan complete your dining experience at the popular Hakubai Japanese restaurant. Dine at the sushi bar or enjoy table cooking such as Teppanyaki, Shabu-shabu, Sukiyaki, and Yosenabe.

Our New Conference Centre accommodates from 20 - 150 people and is equipped with a modern communications system.



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Out & About



Improvements for Solomons International Airport

The Solomon Islands International Airport will be upgraded in time for the 2023 Pacific Games, courtesy of the Japanese government.

The project will cost an estimated US\$290 million and will involve improvement to the terminal buildings, upgrading of the airport aprons, construction of a new taxiway and renovation of the existing one, and improved safety provisions.

In 1942 Japanese forces commenced construction of the original airfield at Henderson but it was completed by American forces when they took control that year. It was abandoned after WWII but re-opened 50 years ago as a modern civilian airport.

Japan is also funding a second major road upgrading project, the stretch between the Fisheries Buildings and the airport.

New Zealand's first husband casts off



Pictured (from left to right) Mike Bhana; Tourism Solomons marketing officer, Alice Afia; Clarke Gayford; Warren Green and Tourism Solomons marketing officer, Brenden Mautoa

Popular New Zealand fishing show 'Fish of the Day' made another visit

to the Solomon Islands recently to film around Honiara, the Florida Islands, Tulagi and the Western Province.

Clarke Gayford, New Zealand's 'first husband', new dad and husband to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, hosts the program, which is watched by 350,000 fishing-mad Kiwis each week. The travel and fishing program also screens in Canada and some 20 countries around the world.

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11 Reasons

the Solomon Islands is great
for family get-aways

Words Kylie Travers
Photos by Katrina Walsh and Gerald Rambert

The Solomon Islands—this friendly, happy and most beautiful of island nations—is a perfect place for children to let their imaginations and spirits run wild.

The Solomons has everything you need for your next family holiday. From lush wilderness to friendly locals, snorkelling historical sites to wild adventures, a trip to the Solomons will be a life-changing experience for you all.

Here are 11 reasons why!

Solomons is adventure

Private islands, cruising on a ship, exploring wrecks, climbing trees, swimming across reefs; everywhere you look there is a new adventure waiting to be had. Have a delicious BBQ on a gorgeous island while you swim at sunset. Get your kids away from their screens and jumping into real life in a way they've never experienced.

Solomons is culture

Each island has unique history and customs and locals keen to share them. Get up close and personal with warriors, listen to beautiful music and watch stories unfold through dance.

Be greeted by traditionally dressed villagers as you come ashore. From the matriarchal society of Roderick Bay through to crew performances—if you do the incredible Solomon Islands Discovery Cruise as I did—Solomon Island-





ers are proud of their culture. You'll feel their joy as they share their traditions and customs with you and your family.

Solomons is shipwrecks

World War II becomes intimate when you are an arm's length from the numerous shipwrecks in Solomon Islands waters. Some are just below the surface and visible through snorkelling, while you can dive to explore other, much deeper wrecks. Go back in time with your family by exploring these wrecks, experiencing history in a way you will never forget.

When you cruise through to Roderick Bay you'll come face to face with a shipwreck of a different kind, the MS World Discoverer. Originally a spectacular cruise ship, it is now part of life there. Children climb the wreck, jump off the side, swing off trees around it into the water and even have a zipline going between the trees and the wreck.

Here you will experience the true freedom and joy of Solomon Islands children. You won't want to leave; this was the spot that made my kids decide they want to live here!

Solomons is wildlife

Where else do dolphins swim up to your boat and dive through the bow waves then whales float by, manta rays glide through the ocean and sharks swim right up to your vessel? Each mammal moves majestically through the water, almost as if they are putting on a spectacular performance

just for you.

Everywhere you explore in the Solomon Islands has unique wildlife, moving freely through their habitat yet content to let you be part of their world.

Solomons is snorkelling

Clown fish, angel fish, starfish, gorgeous corals, sea urchins, octopus and all manner of sea life come alive when you are snorkelling. Children take to the water as if they were born to do it and the whole world below the surface explodes vibrantly before their eyes.

As we snorkelled different locations around the Floridas and Russell Islands, crew members identified and explained different corals, sea life and WWII debris. They were thoroughly knowledgeable, and no question was too silly for me to ask.

Let your children come face to face with life under the surface of the crystal-clear waters of the Solomons.

Solomons is diving

Whether you are an experienced diver or want to learn, the Solomons is the place to do it. My first-time diving was perfect. The extremely experienced crew made me feel at ease, ensured I understood everything then took me under. It was simply breathtaking.

From the moment we descended, I felt the water cool and the stress of my day-to-day life melt away



as a new world unfolded in front of me. An array of fish I had never seen, colourful corals and the most profound sense of serenity had me hooked. It is an experience that will live with you forever.

Solomons is history

Bring history to life and make it real for your family rather than simply the stuff of classrooms and textbooks. WWII and unique island culture collide in the Solomons. Climb Hill 281 in the centre of Tulagi Island, explore Japanese U caves and visit numerous other sites from WWI to learn about our past.

As we explored Tulagi and the multiple historical sites, my appreciation for what other countries and our ancestors did to ensure we have our lifestyle today grew. Experiencing history, walking through it, seeing it, touching it makes it real.


Along with a military history, each village you explore has a special cultural history waiting to be explored. Unique clothing, instruments, customs, architecture, food and music are all openly shared with you. Be garlanded with gorgeous handmade leis, drink from fresh coconuts and be stamped with flowers on different islands.

Solomons is recharging

Switch off from the rest of the world, unplug and simply experience all this island paradise has to offer. With no mobile reception in some places, you get to disconnect from the frantic pace we live

at and reconnect with your family in a pristine heaven on earth. Let your worries slip away as you swim in the clearest water you will ever see, sip on a cocktail at sunset and create memories as you recharge here.

Solomons is sports

Paradise is all about relaxing for some; for others it's about the sun, surf and sand. In the Solomons, sporty families can surf on the beach or over reefs, water ski, wakeboard, try stand up paddle boards, and explore other watersports, all with experienced instructors to ensure your whole family is safe and having fun. 



Kylie Travers went from homeless single mother to multiple international award-winning speaker, writer and consultant. You can find her at www.kylietravers.com.au.

In brief:



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Wetkam to the Hapi Islands

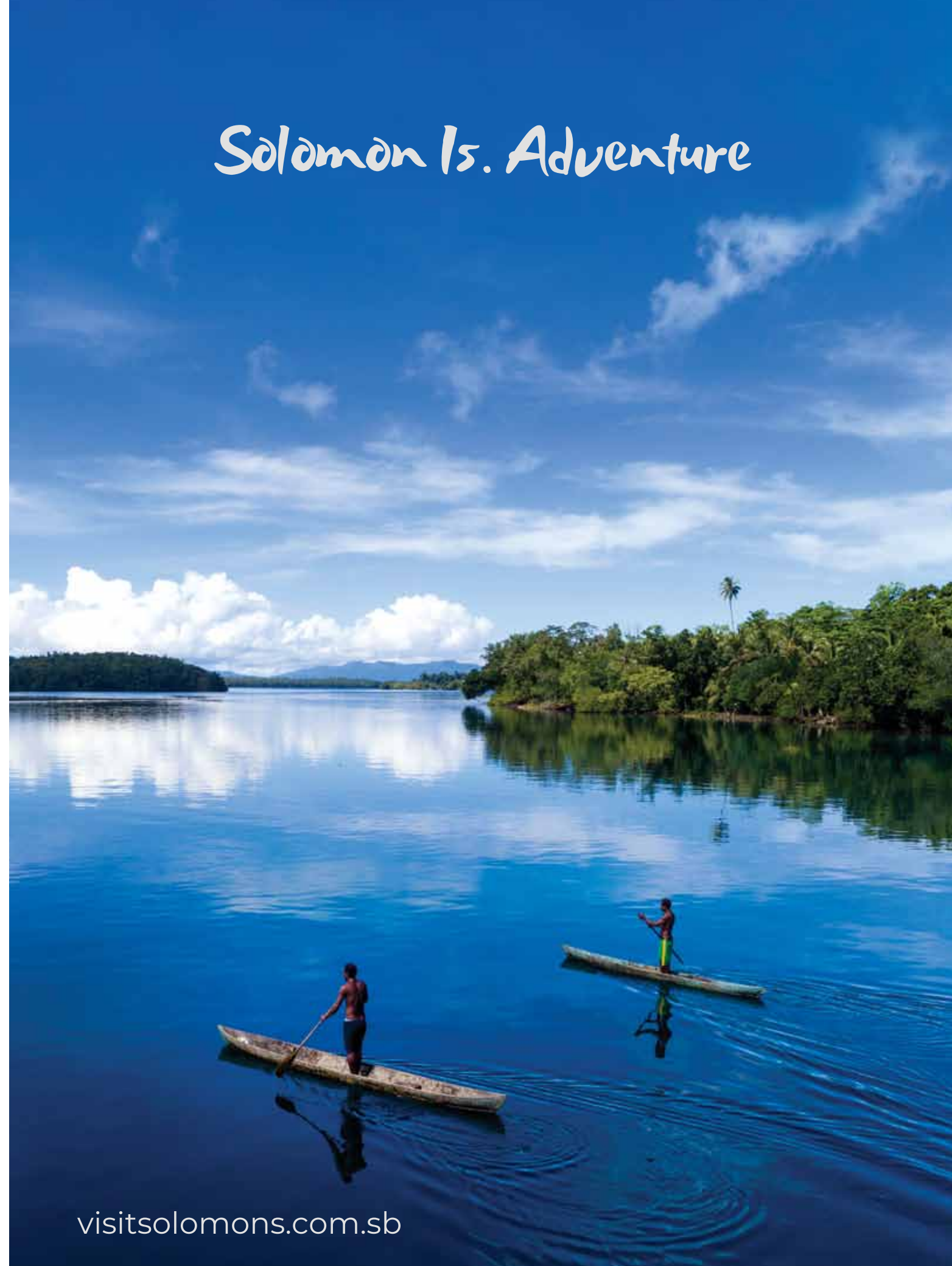


Words by Gabi Steindl
Photos by Stephan Kleinlein

“Miss, please step on the scale”. It took me a few moments to understand, before stepping onto the old-fashioned scales and my

weight was noted down next to my bags. I have never been weighed before at the check-in on any of my travels to over 70 countries. Holding onto the handrail of the Twin Otter, I banged my head on the tiny doorframe before taking one of the 16 seats. When my rather large board bag appeared,

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squeezed into the cabin by the co-pilot and then belted on a few fully reclined empty seats next to me, I knew this was going to be a real adventure.

My plan was to search for wind and waves, in a country that not many (if any) kitesurfers had ventured to before! I took an amazing action sports photographer, Stephan Kleinlein with me to capture this epic adventure. I knew it would be a challenge, but I was committed to pioneering kitesurfing and finding the best places for it.

First stop on tour was Gizo. My nose glued to the small Plexiglas window during the 50 minute flight, I was squealing with excitement at the multi-shaded, dazzling nuances of turquoise and blue expanding between the uncountable small paradise islands poking out like emeralds below.

I had to blink a few times to make sure I wasn't hallucinating, spotting the small landing strip for Gizo, located on the nearby island of Nusatupe — the entire island serving as airstrip and the surrounding turquoise water almost touching the runway. Already waiting at the jetty were Jeremy and Shamiyah Baea. By boat we headed to Sepo, the family's private island that their dad Patson inherited of his grandfather in 1950, home to "Oravae" (meaning "beautiful") Cottage. My palace was a simple but for me magical, wooden stilt bungalow with the vast expansion of surreal turquoise waters just below, an outside shower and a hammock on the deck.

The days at Oravae were filled with exploring by boat, freediving, surfing, and of course kiting! I got goose bumps

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landing by boat at the most beautiful white sand spit that I've ever put my kiter feet on. Launching my kite and gliding over translucent, azure glass with little sharks underneath chasing bright little

fish, and Jeremy and Shamiah stoking out on the sandbank, felt like somebody had pasted me into Photoshop. Freediving the Toa Maru, the Solomon Islands'

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biggest and most impressive wreck (at recreational diving depths) as well as one of the South Pacific's most intact WWII shipwrecks in general, just around the corner from Sepo Island, blew my mind.

Another highlight of my kiting in Gizo was launching off a tiny snow-white island, just big enough to put my lines out. Cruising around in another Photoshop backdrop blissed out by the beauty of nature, the wind suddenly stopped. Only just making it to the next island downwind, I landed Robinson Crusoe-style only narrowly escaping a bad encounter with live coral. Unscathed I pulled my kite up the beach. The owners of the island watched me from afar and must have thought an alien dropped in. Once Jeremy and Shamiah arrived with their boat, I could pay the 'kastom' fee. We enjoyed a yummy picnic on the beach that Ma Baea had packed for us, including cooked sweet potatoes, fresh seaweed and Ngali nuts, a delicious nut the size of a large almond that grows on the Canarium Indicum, a tall indigenous tree. Suddenly a "gang" of wild pigs appeared demanding the luscious coconut I was sipping on. After I had my share, I cracked it with a small machete and passed it to my new little snorting friends. Satisfied they trotted over to check out my kite and

had a bit of a splash in the ocean.

Jeremy Baea is the founding president (in 2014) of the Solomon Island Surfing Association that consists of about 25 members, yet only 10 have their own surfboard, so they share. I brought a surfboard, leash and lots of surf wax from Australia to donate to them, which would be the prize for the winner of the annual surfing competition at Christmas. It was a beautiful feeling to know for one of the locals the dream of "having one's own surfboard" will soon come true.

Big elephant tears rolled down my cheeks waving good-bye to the Baea's and Oravae from the little boat that took us back to the airport to fly out to Stop No.2 on my pioneering tour. 

This is part one in a three-part series on Gabi and Stephan's travels in the Solomon Islands. Parts two and three will appear in future editions of Solomons Magazine.



In brief:

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2019 - WHAT'S ON WHEN & WHERE?

May

South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society 48th Annual Scientific Meeting, Honiara

June

Wagosia spear fighting and yam harvesting festival
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MI SAVE Solomon Islands
 Tourism Exchange, Honiara

August

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Solomon Islands





Bannister's artistic genius now

Photos and words by Oligao Niniu

His eyes are as sharp as needle point, but he remains calm as he takes a few steps back to look at where the shadows fall on his new artwork, a portrait of a beautiful girl, created from nails and threads against a white board. Bannister Zovian, a 23 year-old multi-talented artist from Gizo, is taking his art into a new form.

Coming from a mixed Simbo, Kolobangara, Shortlands and Makira family of artists, Bannister works with many different art forms; pencil drawing in black and colours, brush acrylic painting,

spray painting, salt and sand art, haircut art, and Photoshop graphic art, but he chooses to concentrate on portrait art. What makes his first ever piece in the National Arts Gallery stands out from the rest of the work exhibited is his creative use of nails and threads to make portraits.

Zovian says he is inspired by the work of famous Japanese artist, Kumi Yamashita's, who uses nails and threads to create photorealistic portraits. He chooses prominent Solomon Islands leaders for his portraits because he believes that such well-recognised figures allow viewers to better relate to and judge his artworks.

Perhaps his most impressive black and white portrait work is of former Solomon Islands Prime Minister Rick Hou. One can hardly see pencil marks on the work as he did not sketch the portrait before weaving the threads. The darker areas, like the pupils of the subject's eyes are the result of repeated weaving to create density. He spent three months to weave the threads around 3365 nails on a white board.

As I looked at his other pieces of a beautiful smiling girl and another he was working on, I was convinced that there is much this young artist can offer to the world of art.

Bannister's love for black and white portraiture

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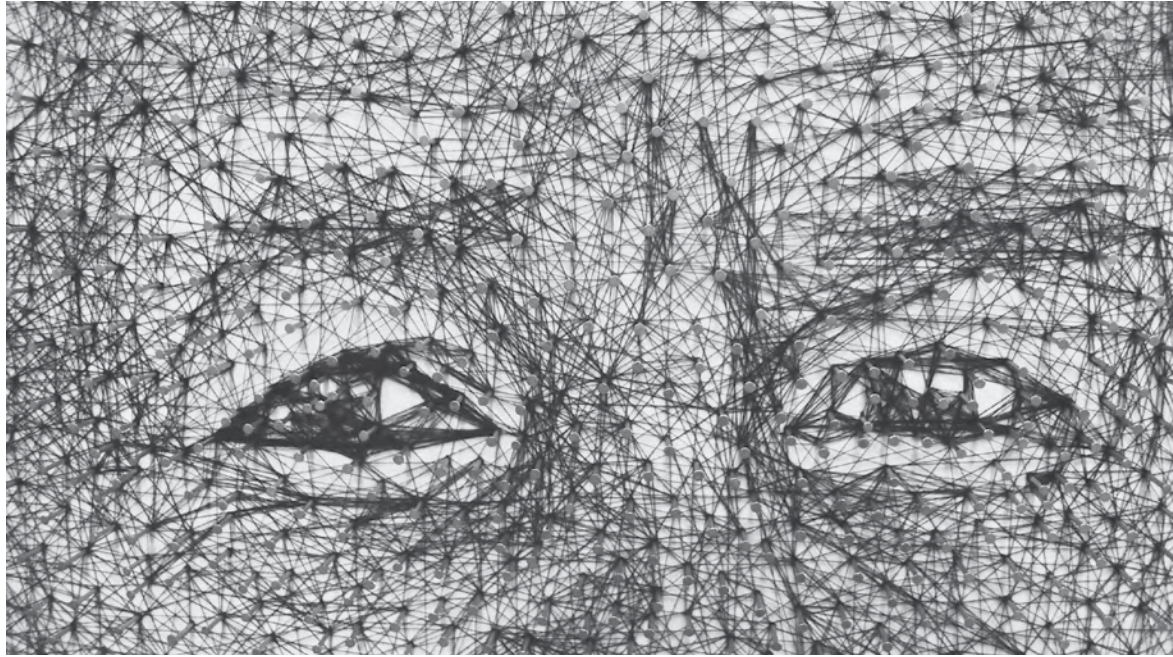


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enables one to find mystery in humanity. While each human being is unique in his or her own right, through art humans can explore their diversity and connect.

Leo Tolstoy said art is “a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings”—a medium that is often felt before it is consciously understood. Like Tolstoy, Bannister believes in the power of art—an expression of our shared human condition—to unite people.

“In my portraits, many found something beautiful, something moving”, he says. “Our arts gallery, my recommendation, is a place to visit because it gives you an understanding of art and culture, regardless of where you are from”.

Galleries must be places of beauty and welcome. They must welcome new forms of art. They must open their doors to people who visit them, as an instrument of dialogue between cultures and people, a tool for mutual understanding and fulfillment.

“I want to gift the same emotions that I live to others. My desire is to share the emotions that I’ve lived with in my 23 years, with people who visit my art pieces.”

While originally from Gizo, a laid-back town in Western Province, Bannister spends time in Namaruka, a west suburb of Honiara, a city with high youth unemployment; which is sometimes dismissed as a place of problems rather than solutions for a better future.

“I have friends who are struggling to make a meaningful living. But Honiara’s urban setting has its own challenges, and they turn to crimes”, says Zovian. “This has given me a purpose to influence a few of them with my artistic skills, by involving them in some of my art projects”.

Zovian says it is very challenging in the Solomon Islands to make income from artwork due to the limited available market. Yet there is no turning back for him. Instead he wants to excel at a global level. He wants to create his masterpieces. Time and again, he works to perfect his art skills, innovate and move into rare art forms. He admitted that the nails and threads art is just the beginning of his exploration of rare art styles. One thing drives him: “Art is my way of self-expression.”

“I’m a simple artist, but for me the beautiful thing is to be able to create portraits of others and enabling them to embrace them.”



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Julie's
passion for paint

By Gloria Hong

Art has always been part of Julie Fakaia's life. Julie, who hails from Walande in Malaita Province, says even as a child she had a passion for playing and mixing colours, and seeing what new colours emerged.



She says her parents ensured she became the artist she is today, supporting her passion and covering the cost of her painting equipment. "[It's] something I'm forever grateful for," she says.

Throughout her studies in New Zealand, Julie honed her painting skills. On her return home she worked with the New Zealand High Commission, but her love for painting and art continue to dominate her life. She now works as an assistant curator at the Solomon Islands National Art Gallery. Julie's paintings can be seen at the national gallery and in hotels across the country.

She says her work requires immense focus, and her larger paintings can take up to three months to complete. "With every job whether it's huge or small, I dedicate all of my time, effort and skills to bring out an amazing work of art.

"What inspires me is not only that people can relate to my art work, but they have always been appreciative of the effort I have put into my work. That kind of positive

response from my clients along with everyone who has seen my art works has given me a lot of encouragement in doing more, not for myself but for the whole art industry in this country".

Julie takes her inspiration from everywhere. "Every day is a learning challenge for me. Having said that, I have to push myself harder every time to acquire new knowledge, new skills and more importantly, to stay creative in what I do".

Julie has come of age as a Solomon Islands artist and has seen the burgeoning local art scene change over time. She says in her early days, there was little assistance to help artists connect with local and international markets, and that there was no copyright protection.

"Although we have wanted to be more progressive in what we do as painters and artists, we were threatened by not having a copyright law to protect us".

She says things are different now. "Our artisans are now able to attend cultural festivals, shows and exhibitions overseas. We used that platform not only to promote our cultures and traditions but most significantly our art work as individual artists."

Julie would love to see more local exhibitions to showcase the numerous skilled and talent art-

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Destination



ists that have not being able share their talent.

She points out that the art industry has grown and has diversified in recent years, thanks to support of the government and groups like the Artist Association of Solomon Islands.

Julie too is diversifying. She now designs matching bed linen and wall frames. Her work can be seen in hotels and resorts around country.

She encourages young people, especially women, to follow their passion and take up art. "Hard work is the most important aspect to achieve your goal. If you put all your time and effort towards your work, only then can one become successful in his or her career regardless of what gender you belong to".

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Underwater time capsules
The war planes of the Solomon Islands

A diver inspects the engine of a P38 Lightning off Seghe.

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Words and photos by Nigel Marsh

Flying over the Solomon Islands gives you spectacular views of lush jungles, rugged mountains, endless coral reefs, palm tree-studded islands and picturesque lagoons.

However World War II pilots and crew flying over these islands would have been in no position to enjoy these incredible views. At that time, the skies above the island nation were filled with Japanese and Allied fighter planes, dive bombers, seaplanes and flying fortresses, battling for control of the air, sea and land. Hundreds of planes were lost in fierce battles around the Solomon Islands, and while many of these planes disappeared in dense jungle or deep water, a number crashed in shallow water and today provide divers with a unique underwater experience, exploring a WWII time capsule.

While WWII shipwrecks are the big drawcard for most divers exploring the waters off Guadalcanal, there is one plane wreck that is a must see – the B17 Bomber. This unique dive site is located west of Honiara and is regularly visited by local dive operation Tulagi Dive. The B-17 Bomber, also known as the Flying Fortress, was attacked by Japanese Zeros on 24 September 1942 and ditched near the shore. Unfortunately, the crew were either killed in the crash or later by the Japanese.

This huge plane now rests in 10 to 19 metres underwater on a silty slope, and is an impressive dive. While the tail



A group of lionfish reside on the Zero Fighter Plane wreck off Gizo.

section is missing and the nose section is broken apart, it is fascinating to see the engines, the machine gun turret, the huge wings, the cockpit controls and explore the fuselage.

During the war, countless airstrips were built by both sides throughout the Solomon Islands. Many of these airstrips are still in use today by Solomon Airlines. One of these is at Seghe, at the southern tip of New Georgia. Built in July 1943 by the Americans, this small airstrip was a base for dive bomber and fighter planes. During the war, two planes crashed into the water at the end of the airstrip; a Dauntless Dive Bomber and more interestingly, a P38 Lightning.

The P38 was a unique and versatile plane. It had twin booms and a central fuselage contain-

ing the cockpit, and a shiny stainless-steel finish. Resting in 8 metres of water, this unusual plane is covered in coral, but parts of its stainless-steel body work still shine through. Divers can look into the cockpit, inspect the props and machine gun, and swim under the wings.

Munda is another airstrip on New Georgia. Built by the Japanese in November 1942 and captured by the Americans in July 1943, a great deal of fighting took place in this area. The result was the loss of many planes, and quite a few are accessible through the crew of Dive Munda.

One of Munda's most intriguing plane wrecks was only found in 2011; a US P39 Aircobra Fighter Plane. The history of this plane is still unknown, but it may be one of two aircraft lost on 6 Sep-

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The gun turret of the B17 Bomber is now encrusted by colourful sponges.

tember 1943. This plane now rests in 28 metres of water on a clean sandy bottom. Its tail section is missing and the port wing is folded back, but divers will still have a great time investigating the cockpit, prop, engine and fuselage.

Not far from the P39 is another fascinating plane wreck, an intact Douglas SBD-4 Dauntless Dive Bomber resting 14 metres below the surface. This plane ditched on 23 July 1943 after being hit by anti-aircraft gunfire while on a bombing raid on the Japanese base at Munda.


Although this plane sits on a silty bottom, and the visibility is not the best, it is a brilliant dive with much to see. Divers can investigate the cockpit and gunner's compartment, and inspect the prop and engine, the massive wings and the tail section.

More plane wrecks can be seen off Gizo, the capital of the Western Province. Local dive operation Dive Gizo explores a number of plane wrecks, with the two most popular ones being fighter planes from either side of the conflict.

Located in only 9 metres of water in Gizo Harbour, divers can explore a Japanese Mitsubishi A6M Zero Fighter Plane. The history of this plane is a little unclear, but it appears to have been

dumped in the harbour. It now rests on the sandy sea floor and is a haven for marine life. The plane's tail is broken off and buried, and the port wing disappears into the sand, but divers can still inspect the cockpit, engine, prop and starboard wing.

The other impressive plane wreck off Gizo is a Grumman F6f Hellcat Fighter Plane. Shot down in a friendly fire incident, the pilot of this Hellcat executed a water landing on 16 September 1943, before it settled intact in 12 metres of water. Rediscovered by Dive Gizo in 1985, the plane has deteriorated a little over the years, but is still an exceptional dive.

Plane wrecks from World War II are still being discovered in the waters of the Solomon Islands, making this island paradise one of the top dive destinations in the world. 

In brief:

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The Grumman F6f Hellcat Fighter Plane off Gizo is now an artificial reef.

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Beneath Brisbane



Helen with a spotted wobbegong at Cherub's Cave.

Words and photos by Nigel Marsh and Helen Rose

The Great Barrier Reef is easily Australia's top tourist destination and diving attraction. Millions visit 'The Reef' every year, but very few of these visitors think about the other diving destinations in Queensland. However there are many adventures awaiting the diver prepared to explore south of the Great Barrier Reef, including the state's capital city, Brisbane.

Most divers that visit Brisbane take one look at the brown waters of the Brisbane River and assume that there is no quality diving to be found in the area. However Brisbane has superb diving on coral reefs, rocky reefs, shipwrecks and artificial reefs where divers will see abundant tropical marine life. The Brisbane River drains into one of the most beautiful bays in the world, Moreton Bay, which is dotted with islands and home to sea birds, dolphins, turtles, dugongs and a diverse range of fish species. Bordering the eastern side of the bay are two large sand islands, North Stradbroke Island and Moreton Island, and all of Brisbane's dive sites are found in the Moreton Bay Marine Park.

Inside the bay are broken up shipwrecks and small reefs, but the two most popular dive sites here are artificial reefs. The Tangalooma Wrecks were scuttled in 1963 to form a breakwater for small boats. Seventeen vessels, including old barges and dredges form the breakwater, in depths from 2m to 10m, and are great fun for a diver or snorkeller to explore. The wrecks are encrusted with corals and thrive with invertebrates and fish life. Several charter boats operate dolphin watching tours in the bay and stop at the Tangalooma Wrecks for a snorkel adventure.

The wrecks at Curtin Artificial Reef are found in deeper water, 10m to 30m, and offer one of the best dives off Brisbane. The Underwater Research Group of Queensland has been sinking ships, and other items, at this site since 1968, making it the oldest and largest artificial reef in Australia. You could spend a dive on just one ship, but most divers investigate several while underwater. The ships are decorated with corals and home to stingrays, moray eels, octopus, shovelnose rays, wobbegongs, turtles and some very large Queensland groper.

Flinders Reef is an all-weather dive site off Moreton Island and a true coral reef. The coral gardens here are very pretty and support a wide range of reef fish. Pelagic fish also cruise the reef and divers regularly encounter groper, stingrays, moray eels and turtles. Wobbegong sharks are common, as they are at all Brisbane dive sites, and three species of these unique camouflaged sharks



Nudibranchs are multi-coloured sea slugs that are common on the reefs off Brisbane.



A school of sweetlips and soldierfish at Flat Rock.



A colourful Abbott's moray eel emerges from its lair at Flinders Reef.



Green turtles are regular dive companions at Flinders Reef.

are found in the area – the ornate, spotted and banded wobbegong.

Other wonderful reefs off Moreton Island include Smith Rock, Henderson’s Rock, China Wall, Hutchinson Shoal, Gotham City and Brennan Shoal. Divers into shipwrecks can explore the Aarhus, St Paul, Cementco and Marietta Dal. But one of the must-do dives in this area is Cherub’s Cave. There are some wonderful caves and gutters to be explored at this site, but most divers spend their time marvelling at the schools of fish, the friendly turtles, the abundant wobbegong sharks and the impressive grey nurse sharks.

North Stradbroke Island, or ‘Straddy’, has some of the finest diving in Queensland. Shag Rock is the most sheltered site in this area, and the smelliest, being home to hundreds of roosting sea birds. The rocky reef around the island is covered in coral and home to vast numbers of reef fish, but divers will also see turtles, cuttlefish, octopus, wobbegongs, stingrays and the occasional electric ray, called a coffin ray.

Flat Rock offers divers walls, gutters and ledges to explore in depths from 10 to 33 metres. Often swept by currents, Flat Rock is visited by pelagic fish, eagle rays and turtles, but is best known for its grey nurse sharks. The sharks gather at a site called Shark Alley over the winter months, and dozens can be seen at peak times.

Straddy’s most famous dive site is Manta Bommie. Over summer this shallow rocky reef, 5 to 15 metres deep, pulsates with marine life, including schools of stingrays, turtles, wobbegongs, shovelnose rays, eagle rays and dozens of leopard sharks. However, the main stars are the reef manta rays. Up to a dozen giant manta rays can be seen cruising the reef or hovering to get serviced by cleaner wrasse, making this a very special dive experience.

If you are heading to Queensland to dive the Great Barrier Reef, don’t bypass Brisbane as you will be depriving yourself of some of the best diving off the Sunshine State.



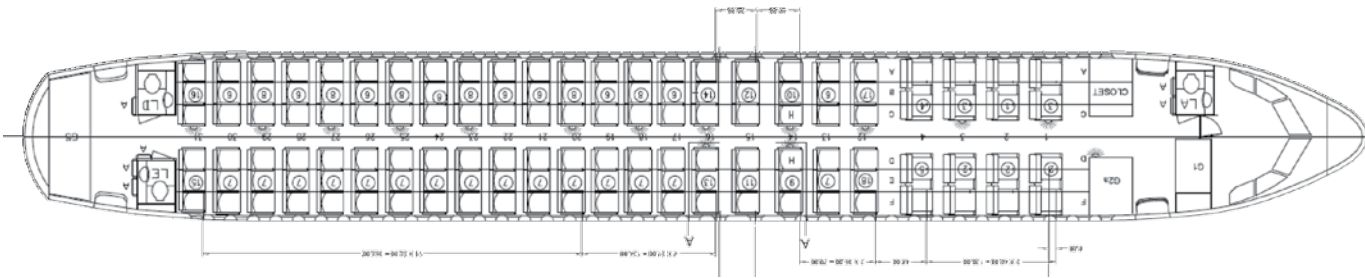
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AIRCRAFT: A320

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Range:	2040 km
Cruising Speed:	490 kph
Seating capacity:	36
Crew:	3 Crew including 1 cabin crew
Current Routes:	Honiara; Seghe: Munda; Gizo; Kira Kira; Santa Cruz
Aircraft in Fleet:	1

AIRCRAFT: Twin Otter



Length:	15.77 m
Wing Span:	19.81 m
Range:	1350 km
Cruising Speed:	338 kph
Seating capacity:	16
Crew:	2
Current Routes:	All Ports in the Solomon Islands
Aircraft in Fleet:	4

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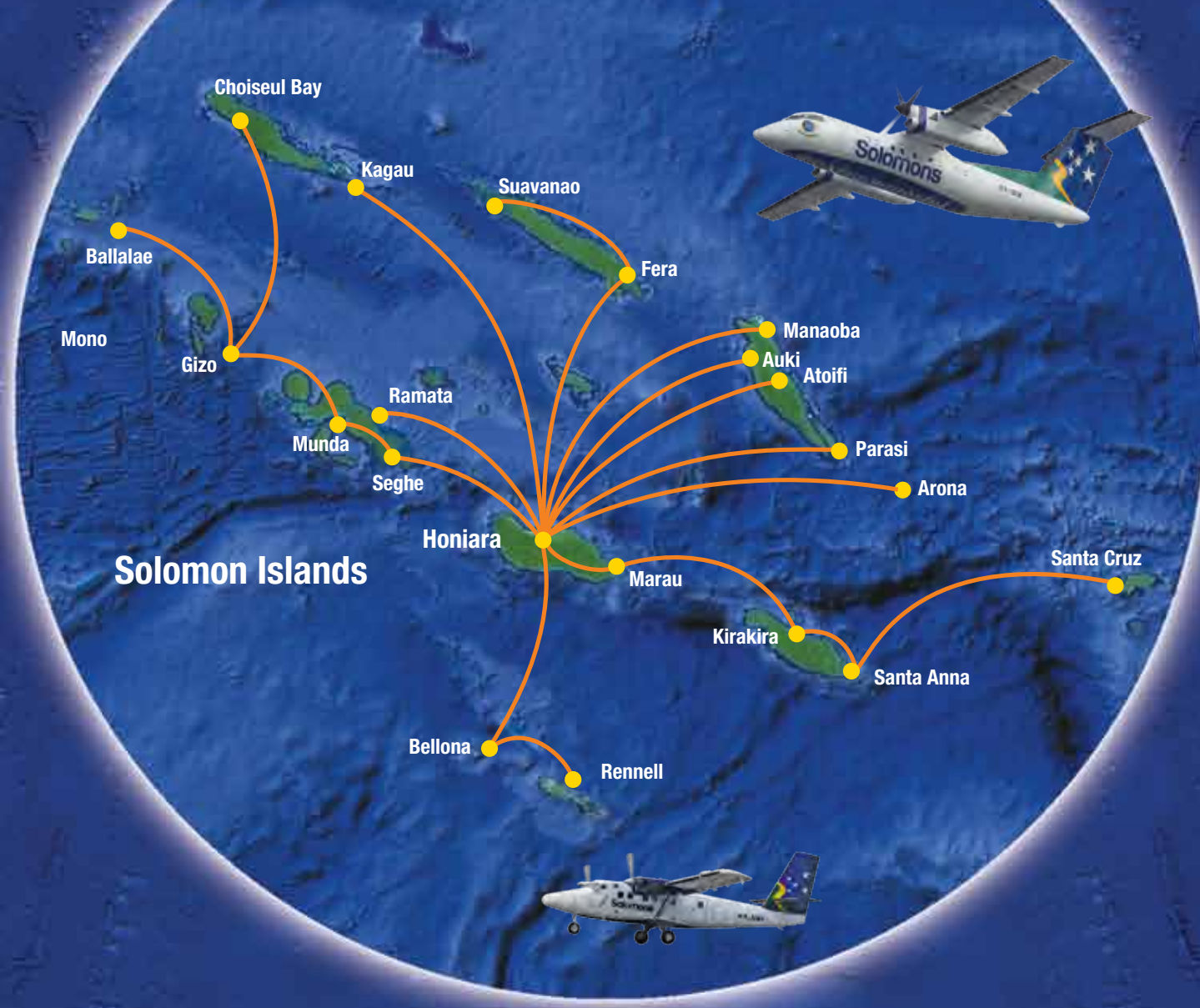
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ism development of the country and reiterated the airline's role in facilitating greater international air access to support sustainable tourism development whilst at the same time acknowledging the efforts by all stake holders who have contributed to make it happen.

The weekly Brisbane- Munda service will offer seamless domestic connections serviced by a dash 8 and twin otters to popular dive destinations in Gizo and Seghe in the western province as well as to a renowned surf destination at Suavanao, Ysable province.



BRISBANE

-Munda Direct Flights Launched

At last we have landed! Overcoming all the hurdles cannot be more satisfying than when we finally commenced our first direct commercial flight from Brisbane to Munda.

Our air bus A320 on Sat 30th March seamlessly did what was deemed impossible some years back loaded with the first batch of excited diving enthusiasts, leisure travelers, visiting friends and relatives together with top government officials gracing the inaugural commercial flight with CEO Mr Brett Gebers on board as host.

A colorful sending off at Brisbane international airport by staff, SI locals in Brisbane in Solomon Islands traditional attire set the tone for the 3hr 15min flight with an even more authentic Solomon Islands welcome on arrival at Munda where school children, national and



provincial officials, ordinary village folks flashing the infectious Solomon smile.

Now it is the country's 2nd international airport thanks to the New Zealand government's assistance, Munda will be a

catalyst for tourism growth not only for the western province but the Solomon Islands as a whole.

CEO Gebers is delighted that the national carrier is part of the new chapter in the tour-



REFURBISHMENT of Twin Otters

In its drive to deliver superior service to its valuable clients, Solomon Airlines engineering department began with the refurbishment of all its twin otters serving its domestic routes.

Manager Engineering Mr. Julai Tomadek proudly stated "This is our response to feedbacks we get from customers regarding our cabin interiors and we want to make it right for them." This is one of the most

important projects the engineering team embarked on this year

The refurbishment of the first twin otter H4-OTA began on the 28th of February. The process involves a complete replacement of interior sidewalls, ceiling, windows and seats for both cabin and cockpit. The refurbishment did provide new look and improved comfort to the interior of the otter. The exterior



on the other hand has been paint stripped and repainted to present the new paint scheme.

A successful test flight was carried out on the 5th of April and H4-OTA is now up and running. The next twin otter will soon be grounded for refurbishment. For the engineering team, it is a rewarding experience considering the level of effort placed into it by all team members, and it is paying off.

Your Guide to the Solomon Islands

Things to know as visitors to our shores:

Climate... Tropically warm and humid with coastal day temperatures averaging 28C (82.4F). April to November tends to be drier and November to April wetter.

What to wear... Light and casual. Keep brief beachwear for the beach.

Immigration... Commonwealth, United States and most European visitors do not need holiday visas but need return or onward tickets. People intending to work must have work permit.

Honiara... The capital is eight kilometres (4.97 miles) from Honiara International Airport.

Airport Tax... SB\$305 payable by passengers (12 years and over) boarding international flights, and these are generally added onto your air tickets.

Health ... Malaria is a problem. Take anti-malarial medication a week before arrival, once a week during your stay, and for four weeks after departure. Consult your chemist or doctor about an appropriate brand of tablet. Maloprin is usually recommended.

Currency... \$100, \$50, \$20, \$10, \$5 and \$2 Solomon Islands notes. Coins are \$1, 50c, 20c, 10c and 5c.

Business Hours... Government and some business offices open Monday to Friday, 8am to 4:30pm with a one-hour lunch break normally beginning at noon. Shops and some offices open Saturday 8am - noon.

Banks... Bank South Pacific opens Monday to Friday 8.30am to 3pm; ANZ Banking Group open Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm. Pan Oceanic Bank Limited opens 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday, and its Panatina Plaza branch opens 10am to 1pm on Saturday. Bred Bank Opens 9am - 4pm

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Tipping ... Not expected and not encouraged.

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International Air... National airline, Solomon Airlines operate out of Honiara International Airport. Other carriers include Fiji Airways, Virgin Australia, Air Niugini and Air Nauru.

Domestic... Solomon Airlines operates services throughout the country.

Electricity... 220-240 volts in Honiara and some outer island centres.

News Media ... The country has a vibrant media business offering choice in both English and Pidjin languages. Radio services are offered by state radio, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation and private operators and some religious bodies. Our Telekom relays BBC and other satellite TV networks while The Island Sun and Solomon Star are the two daily news papers, with a couple of monthly business and lifestyle magazines

Provinces

The Solomon Islands is made up of 992 islands which are divided into nine provinces:

Choiseul - Provincial capital: Taro • **Central** - Provincial capital: Tulagi

• **Isabel** - Provincial capital: Buala

Renbell/Bellona - Provincial capital: Tigoa • **Guadalcanal** - Provincial (& national capital): Honiara

Makira/Ulawa - Provincial capital: Kira Kira • **Malaita** - Provincial capital: Auki

Western - Provincial capital: Gizo • **Temotu** - Provincial capital: Lata

The Solomon Islands are divided into nine provinces as follows:

Province	Area	Population	Highest Point	Capital
Guadalcanal	5,336 km ²	141,403	2,447m	Honiara
Central	1,000 km ²	27,928	510m	Tulagi
Western	5279 km ²	81,214	1661m	Gizo
Ysabel	4,014 km ²	26,310	1,392m	Buala
Malaita	4,234 km ²	159,923	1,303m	Auki
Makira	3,188 km ²	40,386	1,250m	Kirakira
Temotu	926 km ²	24,412	923m	Lata
Choiseul	3,294 km ²	25,870	1,060m	Taro
Rennell & Bellona	276 km ²	3,025	220m	Tingoa



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