

# Solomon Islands

The Solomons remains an undiscovered gem for adventure travellers, divers and those seeking an authentic Melanesian experience. Coral islands encircle huge lagoons, volcanoes bubble away underwater, locals practise magic and summon sharks. It's not a glamour destination, as there's little tourism infrastructure, but that keeps the crowds down.

This is a famous dive destination, thanks to the wealth of coral reefs, exciting underwater topography and hundreds of sunken WWII wrecks. It's a wonderful spot for snorkellers, too, and anglers will find the waters full of opportunities for sport and game fishing.

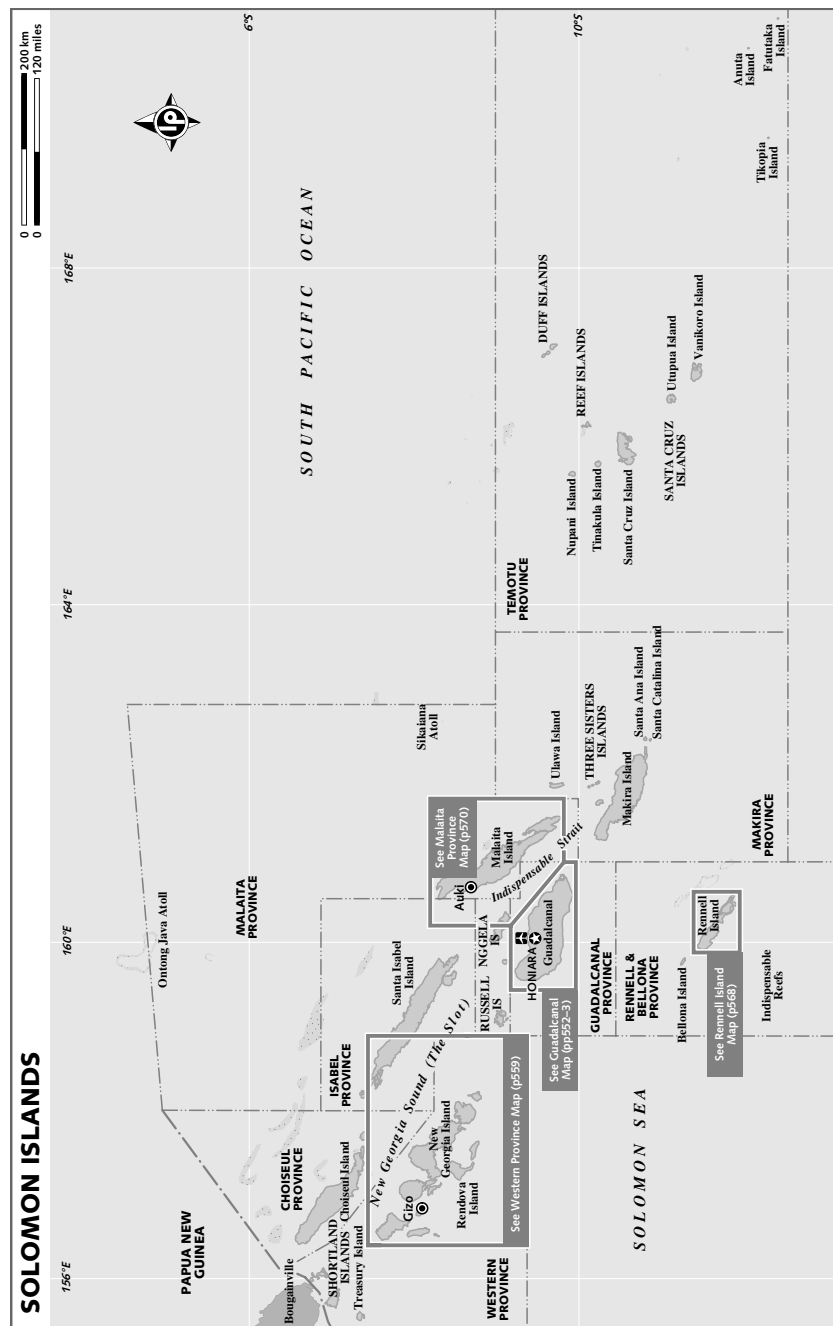
Some of the islands are large, with mountain interiors and fast-flowing rivers, while others are tiny atolls in stunning lagoons. The archipelago is the South Pacific's third largest and most of its people live a subsistence lifestyle that has barely changed for centuries.

It's hard to believe that until the 1930s these friendly, easy-going islanders were considered to be among the world's most violent and dangerous people. Head-hunting, cannibalism and skull worship were central elements of traditional culture, and sacred skull shrines remain as macabre and fascinating reminders of the old days.

Unfortunately, more recently the Solomons developed a dangerous reputation following the period of ethnic conflict in 1999 and 2000. In the ensuing years Guadalcanal and – to a lesser extent – Malaita experienced a major breakdown in law and order. The deployment of a regional assistance mission quickly re-established law and order, and it's now perfectly safe to travel anywhere in the Solomons except for rural Guadalcanal...and even there you can get around if you have a guide or officer to lead the way.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the wilds of **Malaita** (p569), staying in villages and visiting artificial islands and shark worshippers
- Skip across the surface of stunning **Roviana Lagoon** (p560) in an open boat, stopping over sunken WWII wreckage to dive and snorkel
- Hang out in **Gizo** (p559), surfing at Pailongge's excellent reef-breaks in warm crystal-clear waters free from surf-rage and eating out at **PT 109** (p561)
- Relax and dive around **Lola Island** (p563), visiting a nearby skull shrine and ruins of a head-hunter king's coral fort
- Paddle a traditional canoe and watch wildlife in the huge World Heritage-listed **Lake Te'Nggano** (p567)



## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

From late May until early December (the dry season) southeasterly winds produce pleasantly mild weather. Rainfall is light and rain periods are usually several days apart.

From mid-December to mid-May, monsoon winds come from the west or north-west bringing the wet season – a time of higher temperatures, humidity and rainfall. Short, sharp, torrential rains are followed by bright sunshine. Honiara's annual rainfall is about 215mm, which is drier than most of the rest of the country. Some areas, such as Guadalcanal's south coast, receive as much as 12.5m of rain! Cyclones can blow up between January and April.

Daytime coastal temperatures vary through the year from 27°C to 32°C. At night the temperature falls to around 19°C. The humidity can be oppressive and is highest in the morning, regularly reaching 90%.

The most comfortable time to visit the Solomons is between June and September, although humidity levels are lowest from October to December. The surfing season is from October to April.

## HISTORY

Papuan-speaking hunter-gatherers from New Guinea were settling the southern and eastern Solomon Islands by 25,000 BC. They were the only inhabitants for thousands of years, until Austronesian-speaking proto-Melanesians began moving in around 4000 BC. The Lapita people (see p39) appeared between 2000 and 1600 BC.

Most people lived in small villages on tribal lands, practising shifting cultivation, fishing, hunting, carving, weaving and canoe building. Rule was by *kastom* (custom) as recalled by clan elders, ancestors were worshipped and blood feuds, head-hunting and cannibalism were common.

Polynesians from the east settled the outer islands such as Rennell, Bellona and Ontong Java between AD 1200 and 1600, and their settlements suffered raids from Tongans between the 14th and 18th centuries.

## Spanish Exploration

Spaniard Don Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra left Peru with two ships in November 1567. On 7 February 1568 he saw and named Santa Isabel, and settled there. On 11 August, after

### SOLOMON ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and island):** Honiara (Guadalcanal)
- **Population:** 538,000
- **Land area:** 27,540 sq km
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 677
- **Currency:** Solomon Islands dollar (S\$)
- **Languages:** 74 indigenous languages, plus Solomons Pijin (English is widely spoken)
- **Greeting:** *Halo* (Hello)
- **Website:** www.visitsolomons.com.sb

six months of conflict, the voyagers set sail for Peru.

Mendaña returned almost 30 years later in 1595 with four ships and 450 would-be colonists. He came upon and named Santa Cruz, and established a settlement before dying there of malaria. After two months the settlement was abandoned and the survivors limped back to Peru.

Mendaña's chief pilot from 1595 was the Portuguese Pedro Fernández de Quirós, who left Peru with three small ships on 21 December 1605 and reached the Duff Islands early in 1606.

## Further Exploration & Early Trading

There was almost no further contact with Europeans until 1767, when the British Captain Philip Carteret came upon Santa Cruz and Malaita.

British, French and American explorers followed, and whalers began arriving in 1798. Sandalwood traders visited from the 1840s to late 1860s, buying pigs, turtle shell, pearl shell and *bêches-de-mer* (lethargic, bottom-dwelling sea creatures). The sandalwood traders were notoriously cruel (see p46) and from the 1860s firearms traded with sailors produced an explosive growth in head-hunting and slave raids; the diseases the Europeans carried also caused thousands of deaths. At this time missionaries were active elsewhere in the South Pacific, but they moved cautiously in the Solomons, which became known as the most dangerous place in the region. As resentment towards European

treachery and diseases grew, a number of missionaries were murdered.

## The Protectorate

In the 1890s about 50 British traders and missionaries were present in the Solomons, and Germany was active in New Guinea, the Shortlands, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and Ontong Java. On 6 October 1893 Britain proclaimed a protectorate over the archipelago's southern islands, which was extended in 1897 and again in 1898. Charles Morris Woodford became the first resident commissioner in 1896. In 1899 Britain relinquished claims to Western Samoa, and in return Germany ceded the Shortlands, Choiseul, Ontong Java and Santa Isabel to Britain.

Missionaries sought to eradicate local culture, declaring customs and ceremonies to be evil. Sorcery and head-hunting diminished, but islanders continued to die in huge numbers from European diseases. Between 1871 and 1903 blackbirders (slave traders) took 30,000 men from the Solomons to work in the cane fields of northern Australia and Fiji (see p46). Blackbirding was eventually outlawed and some islanders returned to the Solomons years later, bringing cloth and rifles.

The Kwaio Rebellion on Malaita in 1927 was a rejection of European values (see below). In 1928 several Kwaio rebels were hanged in the then-capital, Tulagi. Basiana, the defiant rebel leader, declared before his

death, 'Tulagi will be torn apart, and scattered to the winds', and 14 years later it was destroyed during WWII.

## WWII

In April 1942 the Japanese seized the Shortland Islands. Three weeks later Tulagi was taken and the Japanese began building an airstrip on Guadalcanal.

United States troops landed on Guadalcanal in August 1942. In the early hours of 9 August, while landings were in progress, a Japanese naval force left Rabaul in New Guinea to attack the US transports at Red Beach before they unloaded. This, the Battle of Savo, was one of the US navy's heaviest defeats – 1270 Allied sailors were lost.

The US forces gradually gained the upper hand, but at a tremendous cost of life on both sides. After six months the Japanese withdrew to New Georgia. During the Guadalcanal campaign, six naval battles were fought and 67 warships and transports sunk – so many ships were sunk off the northern coast of Guadalcanal that this area is now called Iron Bottom Sound. Around 7000 American and 30,000 Japanese lives were lost on land and at sea, many of them to disease.

As 1943 progressed, more islands were recovered by the Allies and by the year's end only Choiseul and the Shortlands remained in Japanese hands. The Allies recovered them after the Japanese surrender in 1945.

## Postwar to the Present Day

Tulagi was gutted during the war and the Quonset-hut township of Honiara replaced it as the capital. The economy was in ruins.

A proto-nationalist postwar movement called Marching Rule (Ma'asina Ruru) sprang up in Malaita, opposed to cooperation with the British authorities, whose rule had been restored after WWII. Marching Rule's members were regimented into coastal villages, dependent on community-based agriculture. The movement was also a cargo cult, holding the belief that remaining US forces would deliver goods, so the followers hacked out crude airstrips in the bush for imaginary planes to land, marched in quasi-military formation and shuffled paper on improvised office furniture. Mass arrests by British authorities in 1947 and 1948 caused the movement to wane, and it died out after US forces left in 1950.

### THE KWAIO REBELLION

On 4 October 1927 District Officer William Bell was in Kwaio territory (Malaita) to collect tax and confiscate rifles. With him were 14 Malaitan constables. A Kwaio called Basiana killed Bell, and in the ensuing melee all but one of the constables were killed.

The reaction in Tulagi, the capital, was immediate – and excessive. The cruiser HMAS *Adelaide*, dispatched from Sydney, shelled all the villages it could find, gardens were poisoned, and sacred objects were destroyed. The Kwaio claimed that more than a thousand people were killed.

Six Kwaio (including Basiana) were later hanged in Tulagi and 30 others died in jail. This ruthless action subdued the Kwaio but left a long legacy of ill feeling towards government and Europeans.

Britain began to see the need for local government, and a governing council was elected in 1970. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate was renamed the Solomon Islands five years later and independence was granted on 7 July 1978.

In the late 1990s long-simmering ethnic tension between the Gwalese people of Guadalcanal and immigrants from Malaita escalated into violence (see p550). Hundreds of people died, thousands were displaced and the national government was overthrown.

Soon the country's economy was in a shambles: the canneries and the country's only gold mine closed, tourism ground to a halt and the country was surviving on aid donations. Pacific neighbours feared that the Solomons would become a failed state. An election in December 2001 saw Sir Allan Kemakesa become prime minister. Sir Allan oversaw the deployment of Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (Ramsi) troops. The country is now rebuilding.

As we were going to press in April 2006 the first elections held since the Tension installed Snyder Rini as prime minister. This saw widespread rioting in Honiara, and Chinatown and the Pacific Casino Hotel were destroyed. Snyder Rini lasted just eight days (see the boxed text, p555).

## THE CULTURE

Solomon Islanders' obligations to their clan and village bigman (chief) are eternal and enduring, whether they live in the same village

all their lives or move to another country. As in most Melanesian cultures, the *wantok* system is observed here (see below).

## The National Psyche

There's an enormous sense of relief that things have 'normalised' after the ethnic tension. People are coming back to the Solomons – business and trade are doing better, and the Gold Ridge mine will reopen again soon. People are participating in good faith in the reconciliation process and want to get on with things after years of having to put everything on hold. Anger and cynicism about the political process briefly erupted again in riots in Honiara in April 2006 after a national election (see the boxed text, p555).

## Lifestyle

Beliefs, ceremonies, totems and traditional valuables vary between communities, but the Solomon Islands are quintessentially Melanesian (except for a few Polynesian outliers). Melanesian culture is deeply rooted in ancestor worship, magic and oral traditions. Villagers often refer to their traditional ways, beliefs and land ownership as *kastom*; it's bound up in the Melanesian systems of lore and culture (see p50). In Malaita the spirit of a dead person can live in a shark; the shark is thus offered gifts and worshipped.

Most Solomon Islanders live in coastal villages close to freshwater springs. Each family has a few scattered vegetable plots.

## THE WANTOK SYSTEM

Fundamental to the Solomons' culture and common to many Melanesian societies is the idea of *wantok*. In Pijin, *wantok* simply means 'one talk', and your *wantok* are those who speak your language – your clan and family. All islanders are born with a set of obligations to their *wantok*, but they're also endowed with privileges that only *wantok* receive.

Within the village, each person is entitled to land and food, and to share in the community assets. Any clans people, whether in Honiara or Hanoi, are expected to accommodate and feed their *wantok* until they can make more permanent arrangements.

For most Melanesian villagers it's an egalitarian way of sharing the community assets. There's no social security system and very few people are in paid employment, but the clan provides economic support and a strong sense of identity.

The *wantok* system affects everything: if you are tendering out a construction project and a *wantok* bids, you give the contract to the *wantok*. If your bus driver is a *wantok*, you won't have to pay. And if you have a *wantok* in the judiciary, maybe you won't go to jail.

In the political and public-affairs arenas, however, the *wantok* system translates as nepotism and corruption. In the Solomons it has undermined democratic institutions and hampered the country's development.

## SUP SUP & SHOPPING *Trudy Hairs*

Grocery shopping is probably everyone's least favourite activity, from finding a parking spot to coping with that wonky-wheeled trolley and the anxiety over which queue to choose. Just when you're feeling sorry for yourself, though, spare a thought for the women of the village of Ura in Malaita. Solomon Islands women traditionally grow the food for their family 'in the bush'. Getting the groceries is more than a drag, it's a gruelling hike through some pretty rough terrain. There are forests immediately surrounding Ura, but an injunction from the Solomon Islands High Court over a land dispute involving a teak plantation around their village has meant that women now have to walk up to three hours (return trip) to avoid the disputed land.

With training on new vegetable varieties, seed propagation, pruning and composting as part of the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) project, women in Ura now grow vegetables at their back doors, commonly referred to as *sup sup* or kitchen gardens. They still go 'to the bush' for root vegetables as they have always done, but they go less often now and they have their fresh veg in abundance on their doorstep. It's a small step with big implications, freeing up time for women to participate in skill workshops or community activities or simply to enjoy each other's company.

The Solomon Islands brings new meaning to the concept of isolation. Getting from one side of a province to another is often an expedition, and without access to an outboard motorboat you're not going to get far at all. Malaita, for

example, has just two roads – covering the north of the province only – while in Guadalcanal your Sunday-drive options are limited to around 100km east and west of Honiara. For men and women in the provinces, access to health clinics, markets, education and employment is very limited. There are very few ways to make money, which makes it hard to refuse the money that logging companies offer to access land. In a country where the overwhelming majority of the population relies heavily on natural resources, the long-term consequences can be devastating.

Live & Learn, IWDA and Australian People for Health, Education & Development Abroad (Apheda) facilitate discussion forums centred on these issues where men and women weigh up the short-term benefits against the long-term consequences so that they can make informed choices about their futures. Ura village is part of the AusAID-funded Solomon Islands Capacity and Sustainability Project, implemented by IWDA, Live & Learn and Apheda. The IWDA is an Australian nongovernmental organisation working with women across the Asia-Pacific region to support their efforts to improve their life choices and those of their families and communities, and to advance women's human rights. For more information on IWDA, visit [www.iwda.org.au](http://www.iwda.org.au) or telephone ☎ 03-9650 5574 in Australia.

*Trudy Hairs, an Overseas Program Manager for the IWDA, supplied this boxed text. This piece is a compilation of stories written by IWDA employees while on monitoring visits.*

## Population

The Solomons' 2005 population was estimated at 538,000. Melanesians represent 94% and Polynesians 4%. The large Micronesian communities who were resettled from Kiribati by the British in the 1960s are still called Gilbertese. The remainder of the population is made up of Asians and expats, mainly Aussies, Kiwis, Brits and Yanks.

The Solomons' population density of 14.5 people per sq km is one of the Pacific's lowest. From the early 1970s until recent times the population increased annually by 3.5%; the rate has now dropped to 2.68%, still among the world's highest. Death and infant-mortality rates are falling, and life

expectancy is now over 70 years (having risen from only 54 in the late 1980s).

About 86% of the population lives in rural villages. Urban drift caused Honiara's population to grow by 7% per year until the ethnic tension of the late 1990s.

## RELIGION

About 96% of the population is Christian. Of these, 35% are members of the Anglican-affiliated Church of Melanesia and 20% are Roman Catholics.

Islanders still practise pre-Christian religions in a few remote areas, particularly on Malaita; in other places traditional beliefs are observed alongside Christianity.

## ARTS Literature

*Ples Blong Iumi – The Solomon Islands, the Past Four Thousand Years*, by Sam Alasia contains contributions by 14 Solomon Islanders. *Zoleveke – A Man from Choiseul*, by Gideon Zoleveke, recounts the story of a Choiseul man who became a cabinet minister.

*From Pig-Theft to Parliament – My Life Between Two Worlds*, by Jonathan Fifi'i, tells of the author's childhood in Malaita, the Marching Rule movement and parliamentary life. *Kanaka Boy*, by Sir Frederick Osifelo, is the autobiography of the first Solomon Islander to be knighted.

James Jones' classic *The Thin Red Line* (1963) was been made into the 1998 film starring Sean Penn, George Clooney and Nick Nolte. This grim WWII story is fictional but set in Guadalcanal.

Often very funny and sometimes insightful, *Solomon Time* by Will Randall (2003) tells of a disenchanted English school teacher who spends a year trying to establish a chicken farming business on Rendova.

## Music

Solomon Islanders are incredibly musical people – it's a must to go to a local church service to listen to the singing. The local music scene is in its infancy, but a few artists are making names for themselves around the Pacific music scene, including Sharzy, a boy soul singer from Malaita, and 13-year-old protégé David Bogese from Isabel.

The Malaitan pipe bands (or bamboo bands) are amazing. In ensembles of 12 or so members, the band plays bamboo pipes in all sizes bundled together with bushvine. They're played as panpipe and flutes, and as long tubes whose openings are struck with rubber thongs to make an unusual

### RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Tipa's album *Maiae* (2005) is a classic example of breezy islander sounds fused with modern music and strong multipart vocal harmonies. Traditional string-band elements and percussion are layered with keys, guitars, drums and bass, and fantastic vocal arrangements. The songs are strong with catchy melodies.

### NGUZUNGUZU

The *nguzunguzu* (pronounced noo-zoo-noo-zoo) once adorned canoe prows to ward off water spirits, guide the craft through jagged reefs and protect the warriors aboard. The figurehead rests its chin either on two clenched fists (for war), a human head (head-hunting) or on a dove (peace). The best carvings are made of ebony and inlaid with nautilus shell, which make a striking contrast with the smooth, jet-black timber.

Although native to Western Province, the *nguzunguzu* has been taken up as a national symbol and is embossed on the S\$1 coin.

plinketty-plonk sound. Drums and tea-chest basses are sometimes incorporated, as are traditional costumes and energetic dancing. You can see them performing in Honiara's hotels.

### Carving

There are strong carving and artefact-making traditions in the Solomons. Once more widespread, pottery is now only produced in northwestern Choiseul.

Carvings incorporate human, bird, fish and other animal motifs, often in combination, and they frequently represent deities and spirits. Woodcarvings are inlaid with nautilus or trochus shell. Carvings of *nguzunguzu* (canoe figureheads, also carved in miniature; see above) and animals are produced from kerosene wood and ebony (ebony is rare and expensive). Decorated bowls and masks are widely available, as are stone replicas of traditional shell money. 'Riverstone' carvings are popular, too.

Look out for the *kapkap* – a pendant-like disk of open-worked turtle shell on a pale circular shell. It's worn on the forehead of a chief, often seen in archival photos. This is a classic form of traditional valuable that is made as far away as New Ireland in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and all the way down to Makira in the Solomons.

### Weaving

*Bukaware* baskets, trays, table mats and coasters are made in many parts of the Solomons and are woven from the very tough *asa* vine. Gilbertese make sturdy brown

sleeping mats out of the pandanus leaf. Finely woven shoulder bags are produced on Rennell and Bellona.

### Tattoos

Tattoos are a traditional art form and their motifs or designs can be indicative of a person's age and social position – for example whether a boy has been initiated. Tattooing is more common among fairer-skinned peoples.

Facial engraving is practised on Malaita; a grooved, unpigmented design is made using a scraper bone against the skin. In northern Malaita men are tattooed below the eye and women decorate their breasts.

Chests are tattooed on the islands of Rennell and Bellona.

### Currency

*Kastom mani* (custom money) is used for paying bride price and other special transactions. Shell money is used in Malaita, while in the Temotu Islands red-feather coils are still used.

### LANGUAGE

There are 74 mutually unintelligible indigenous languages in the Solomon Islands, and it's common for people from villages only a few kilometres apart to be unable to understand each other. As a result, islanders who aren't *wantok* communicate in Pijin. Educated people generally speak English so you can get by without learning any Pijin. However, if you try a few words in Pijin you'll find that people lose their shyness.

Lonely Planet's *Pidgin* phrasebook has a large section on Solomon Islands Pijin.

### Solomon Islands Pijin basics

Hello.	<i>Halo.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Lukim iu (bibaen).</i>
How are you?	<i>lu stap oraet nomoa?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Mi stap gudfala (tanggio tumas).</i>
Please.	<i>Plis.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Tanggio (tumas).</i>
Yes.	<i>les.</i>
No.	<i>Nomoa.</i>

### ENVIRONMENT

The Solomons has more than 4500 plant species, including 230 varieties of orchid. Tropical rainforest covers the islands, although

### BEST EATING

Although eating in the Solomons is hardly *haute cuisine*, there are opportunities for fine dining. The top-end hotels have good restaurants, but we also recommend the following:

- Try splendid crayfish hotpot or sizzling chilli prawns at PT 109 (p561) in Gizo.
- Thai chicken curry, grilled reef fish and fresh greens, or even just a cocktail at sunset – Fatboys (p561) off Gizo is the hippest bar/restaurant in the Solomons.
- Local oysters at Uepi Island Resort (p566) in Marovo make a great entrée to the superb three-course meals served there. Hard to beat as the Solomons' best.
- Honiara's Fortune Restaurant (p566) is a classy Chinese restaurant that hosts the capital's well-heeled gastronomes.
- Cool milkshakes, great coffees and monster cooked breakfasts at Lime Lounge (p556) in Honiara – an air-con oasis of calm in the crush of the big city.

much of it has been degraded by logging operations. Many plants are still used for building materials, food and medicine.

The spectacular marine environment is home to a rich variety of fish, corals, anemones and many other creatures, including eight species of venomous sea snakes. Several islands are breeding grounds for green and hawksbill turtles.

The Solomons has 173 bird species, 40 of them endemic. Some, such as the Rennell fantail and the slaty flycatcher of Vanikoro, are found only on one island.

Four rat species are larger than domestic cats and other land mammals include the cuscus and flying fox (fruit bat).

Among the lizards are the 1.5m-long monitor lizard, freshwater crocodiles and the very dangerous saltwater crocodile, which can exceed 5m in length.

More than 130 butterfly species are found locally, and 35 are endemic. The two largest forms, the Queen Victoria birdwing and the blue mountain birdwing, have wing spans over 25cm.

## Geography

The islands of the Solomons form a scattered double chain that extends 1667km southeast from Bougainville in PNG. The third-largest archipelago in the entire South Pacific, the Solomons cover over 1.35 million sq km of sea. The total land area is 27,540 sq km.

Of the 992 islands, 347 are populated. The largest islands are Guadalcanal (5336 sq km), Malaita (3840 sq km), Santa Isabel (3380 sq km), Choiseul (3200 sq km), Makira (3188 sq km) and New Georgia (2145 sq km). The country's highest peak, Mt Makarakombu (2447m), is on Guadalcanal. There are active volcanoes, and earthquakes are common.

The majority of the islands of the Solomons are fringed with coral reefs and shel-

tered lagoons; many have formed around volcanic cones, while others are former reefs that have been uplifted by volcanic activity. Rennell Island is the most striking example in the South Pacific of a raised coral atoll.

## GUADALCANAL

pop 104,000 / area 5336 sq km

The largest island in the Solomons group, Guadalcanal hosts the national capital, Honiara.

Honiara began life as the huge US supply depot that was developed to service the Henderson airstrip between Kukum and Point Cruz in 1943. Since then the capital has spread inland over nearby ridges, many of which were WWII battlefields.

### ETHNIC TENSION

For years the Gwale people of Guadalcanal had resented the fact that their traditional land was being gobbled up by outsiders attracted to the economic opportunities in Honiara. Much of their resentment was directed at migrants from Malaita. Not only were the Malaitans seen as land stealers, they also seemed to get all the good jobs.

Resentment and jealousy boiled over in early 1999 when a group of young Gwalese formed the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA). They began to terrorise and kill rural Malaitans who were forced to flee to the capital or back to their home island. The Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) was formed to protect the interests of Malaitans.

The Honiara Peace Accord was brokered in July 1999, but this soon fell apart and fighting resumed. The MEF gained the upper hand in weaponry and eventually took control of the capital, which effectively became a Malaitan enclave. Hundreds of people were killed during the hostilities. The MEF ousted the prime minister in June 2000, and soon after a cabinet minister was assassinated by the GRA (now called the Isatabu Freedom Fighters).

Following mediation by Australia and New Zealand (NZ), the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed in October 2000. A general amnesty was declared and many weapons were handed in.

However, what began as ethnic tension descended into general lawlessness, thuggery and intimidation. Though the conflict was confined to Guadalcanal, 'events' started happening elsewhere – the Western Province government hired former BRA soldiers (from PNG's Bougainville War) for protection after a brazen killing in Gizo and hostile boats entered Marovo Lagoon. The whole country was crippled and traumatised, and the fragile economy collapsed.

On 24 July 2003 the Ramsi, an Australian-led coalition of police from Pacific island states, was deployed to restore law and order. Security was quickly re-established and Ramsi remains in an on-going capacity while the country rebuilds.

Some have decried the Ramsi deployment as neocolonialism on Australia's part. That's bullshit. Support for the operation among Solomon Islanders is unanimous and there's a palpable feeling of relief now that the hostilities are finished.

In an interesting twist, the Malaitans – 23,000 of whom fled Guadalcanal to Malaita (many of whom were third-generation Honiara dwellers with no land to return to) – still control Honiara, though they cannot venture past its city limits. Malaitans are an indomitable force in the Solomon Islands and they've vowed they will burn Honiara in their retreat if they are forced to leave again.

The presence of Ramsi means that the Solomons are safe once more, but it doesn't look like the personnel will be leaving anytime soon.

### HONIARA IN...

#### Two Days

Collect a *Solomons Star* newspaper (S\$5) and slip into the **Lime Lounge** (p556) for breakfast – fresh fruit and yogurt or eggs as you like 'em. Wander through the modest **National Museum & Cultural Centre** (p555) and check out the carvers' shop in the grounds of the Mendana Hotel opposite. Walk 20 minutes up to the **US War Memorial** (p555) in the cool of the morning for commanding views over Iron Bottom Sound. Check out Honiara's **central market** (p557) for brilliant pineapple and watermelon, and buy a length of shell money (S\$50). Catch a bus to **Chinatown** (p555) and stay out of the midday heat in a breezy leafhouse with a cool drink. Later in the day go to the beachfront **Point Cruz Yacht Club** (p556) for a cold Solbrew beer, staying on for a pub-style dinner and perhaps some live entertainment.

On day two, get out of Honiara! Take a day trip by boat out to **Tulagi** (p558) in Central Province for diving or snorkelling and visit the megapode colonies on volcanic **Savo Island** (p558). Back in Honiara, have dinner at the **King Solomon Hotel** (p556) and ride its kooky funicular shuttle.

Since the Tension (see the boxed text, p550) independent travel on Guadalcanal outside the capital is discouraged. The visitor information centre recommends that people wanting to see rural Guadalcanal do a tour or take a guide rather than travelling alone.

### ORIENTATION

Guadalcanal is oriented vaguely east-west, with Honiara on the northern coast overlooking Iron Bottom Sound, the famous graveyard of WWII's Battle for Guadalcanal. The hills behind Honiara eventually become a mighty mountain range reaching 2400m that separates the Weathercoast people from those on the northern coast. There are no roads to the Weathercoast, and access is either by foot, boat or helicopter.

Honiara's central area, from the Mendana Hotel to Chinatown, can be covered in a 30-minute walk along Mendana Ave, the town's main strip. In this area are the

central market, the port complex, shops, embassies, banks, hotels and restaurants. The 11km urban sprawl along the coast has the settlements of Rove and White River to the west, while eastwards are Chinatown and Mataniko. Beyond are Kukum and industrial Ranadi.

### Maps

Hema publishes a *Solomon Islands* map (1:1.2 million) that's widely available. Ordnance maps are available from the **Ministry of Land & Housing offices** (☎ 21511) in Honiara.

### INFORMATION

#### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 911)

**Fire & Police** (☎ 999)

#### Internet Access

Patrons of Honiara's better hotels can generally use in-house facilities.

**People First Internet Café** (☎ 26358; Anthony Saru Bldg; per hr S\$15)

**Solomon Telekom** (☎ 21576; Mendana Ave; per hr S\$30)

**Solosoft** (☎ 23386; Shop 23, NPF Plaza; per hr S\$15)

**TM Internet** (☎ 21055; Shop 16, NPF Plaza; per hr S\$16)

### Medical Services

**Bartimaeus Vision Care Centre** (☎ 24040; Chinatown Ave)

**Central Hospital** (☎ 23600; Kukum)

**Honiara Dental Centre** (☎ 22746; Mendana Ave)

### Money

The **NBSI** (National Bank of the Solomon Islands; ☎ 21874), **ANZ** (☎ 21111) and **Westpac** (☎ 21222) banks have branches on Mendana Ave, and there's also an NBSI in Chinatown.

### Post

**Post office** (☎ 21821; Mendana Ave) Solomon Post opens weekdays and Saturday morning.

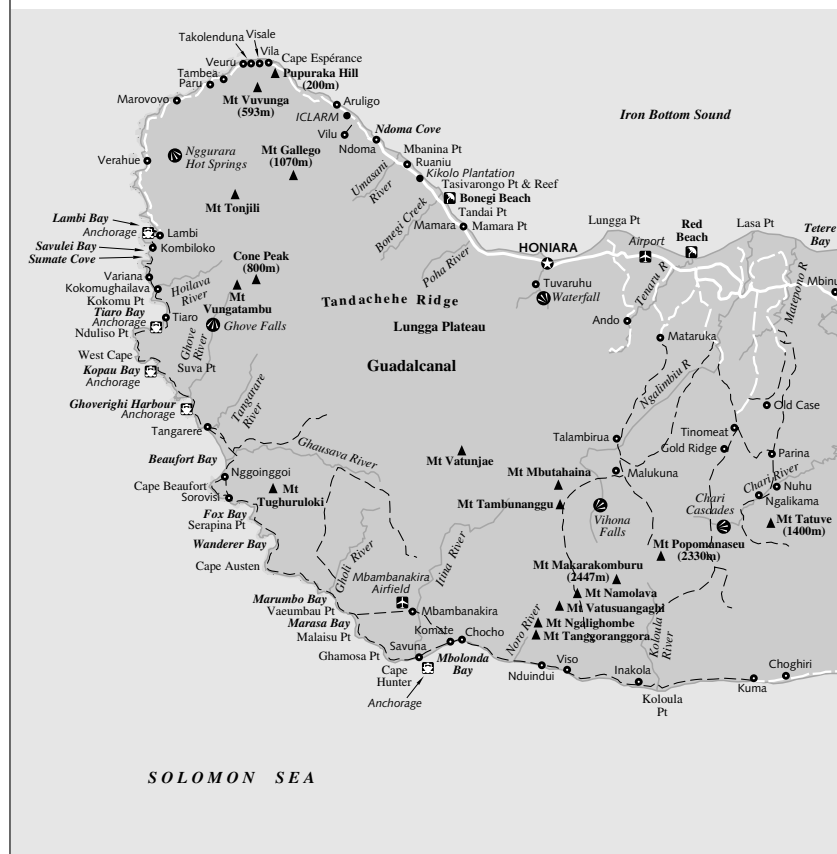
### Telephone

**Solomon Telekom** (☎ 39241; Mendana Ave) Fax and telex services, and card and coin telephones, next to the post office.

### Tourist Information

**Visitor information centre** (☎ 22442; www.visitsolomons.com.sb; Mendana Ave) Near the Mendana Hotel, the Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB) office is open

## GUADALCANAL



weekdays and Saturday morning. There is little printed material but staff can provide advice and contact isolated lodges and villages to make bookings.

### Travel Agencies

**Guadalcanal Travel Services** (GTS; ☎ 22587; [guadtrav@solomon.com.sb](mailto:guadtrav@solomon.com.sb); City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave) The country has one international travel agency. It offers hotel and flight bookings, plus tours.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands personnel quickly restored law and order in the capital, and there are now no palpable feelings of danger. However, seek advice before travelling around Guadalcanal outside Honiara.

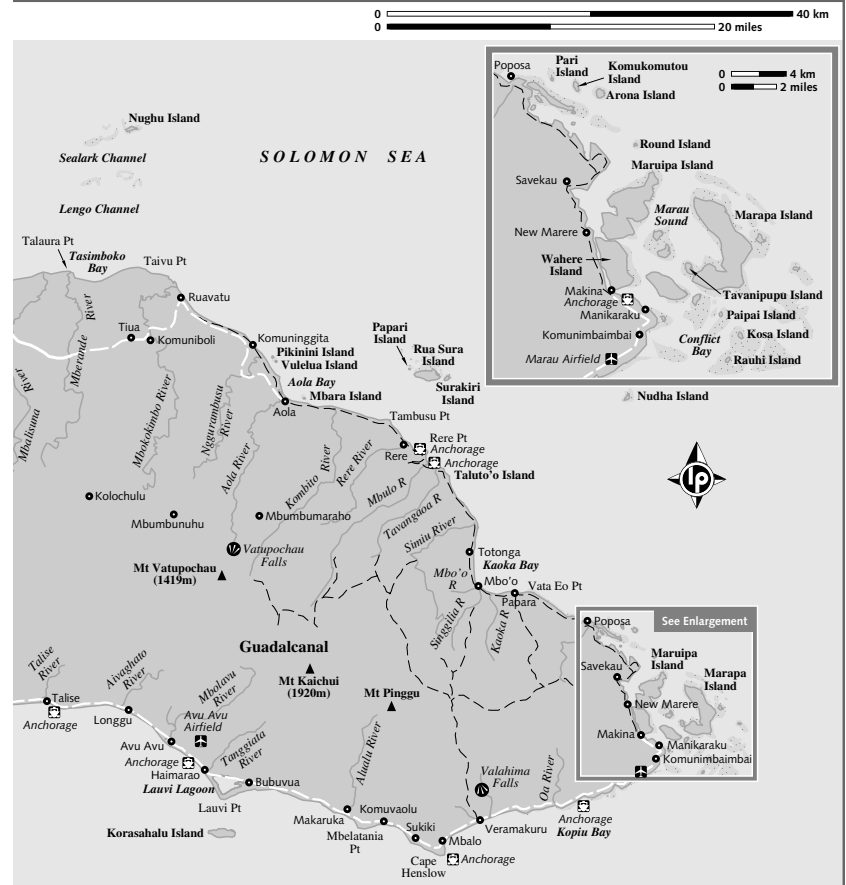
### TRANSPORT Getting There & Away AIR

International flights land at Honiara's Henderson Airport, and all domestic routes begin and end in Honiara. See p577 for details of international flights.

**GTS** (☎ 22586; [guadtrav@solomon.com.sb](mailto:guadtrav@solomon.com.sb); City Centre Bldg, Mendana Ave) is the agent for Air Niugini. The **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 20031; [www.solomonairlines.com.au](http://www.solomonairlines.com.au); Mendana Ave) head office is in the centre of town.

### BOAT

See p578 for inter-island shipping operators. Traders' boats gather beside the Point Cruz Yacht Club (p556).



### Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The standard taxi fare into town is S\$50. Major hotels do airport transfers for around S\$25 per person.

### CAR

**Economy Car Rentals** (☎ 27100; [economy@solomon.com.sb](mailto:economy@solomon.com.sb); Mendana Ave) has cars from S\$340 per day including insurance and kilometres. The office is next door to the visitor information centre. **Avis** (☎ 24180; [qcmotors@solomon.com.sb](mailto:qcmotors@solomon.com.sb)) is in Chinatown.

### MINIBUS

Honiara's minibuses are cheap, frequent (in daylight hours) and safe. They carry locals

and their *kago* (cargo) – kids, chooks, yams, pigs, anything. The flat fare around town is S\$3.

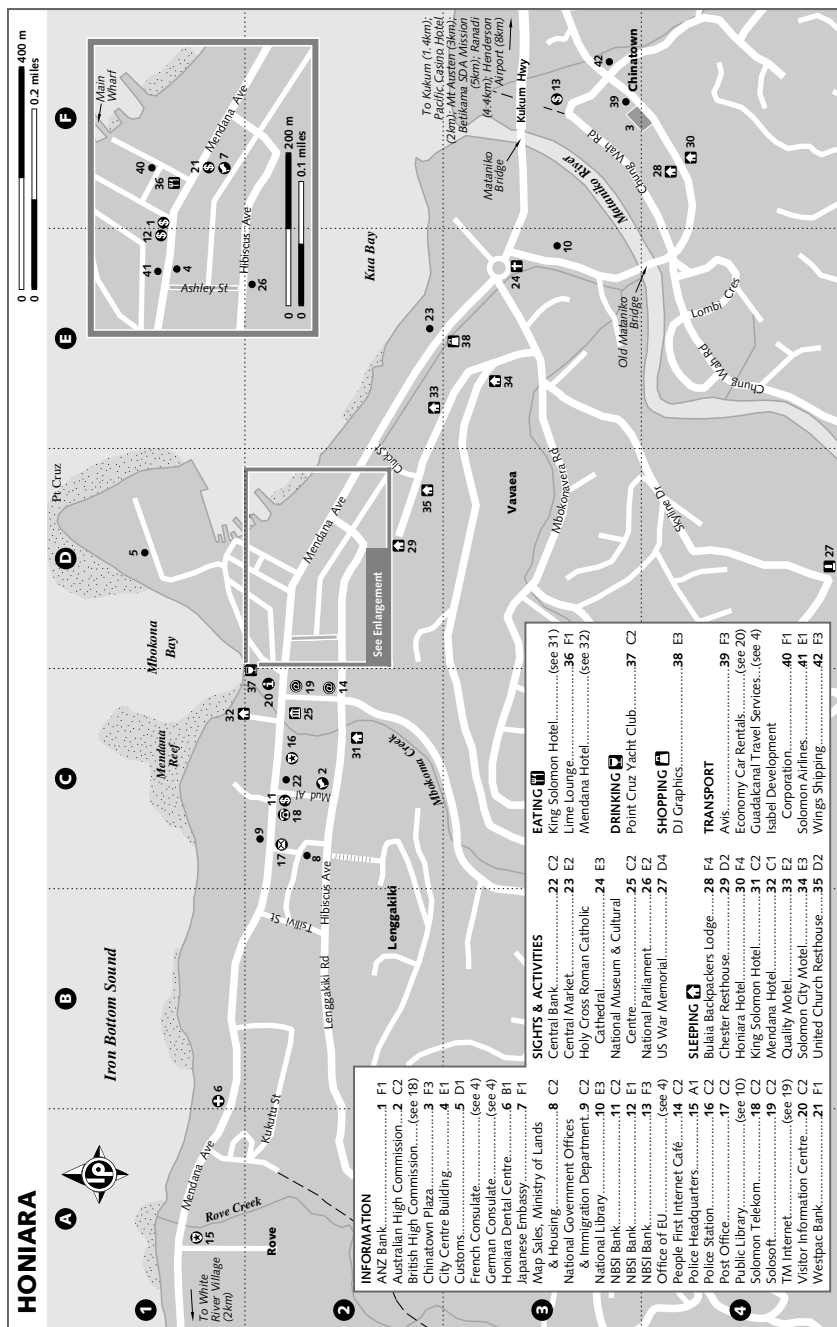
### TAXI

There are taxis everywhere in Honiara. They don't have meters, so agree on a fare before hopping in – S\$5 per kilometre is reasonable.

### HONIARA

pop 57,000

It's hard to find too much to like about Honiara. It does have good hotels, restaurants, cafés and bars; markets and a museum; a golf course; local dive and charter-boat operators; and the shopping, though not quite



### TROUBLE IN CHINATOWN

In April 2006, there was a sudden and unexpected turn of events in Honiara. An election – the first since the Tension – installed the controversial former deputy prime minister Snyder Rini as prime minister (PM). This news was greeted with two days of rioting and anarchy in the streets of Honiara, with the fury misdirected at the Chinese community. Chinatown and the Pacific Casino Hotel were both torched and razed to the ground. Australia flew in more troops to reinforce the Ramsi personnel and many Chinese fled the country. Quite clearly Rini did not have the support of the people. He resigned just eight days later when members of his own cabinet crossed the floor of parliament to vote with the opposition in a vote of no confidence. For many, Rini was a symbol of everything that was corrupt in the Solomon's government. When members of parliament then elected Manasseh Sogavare as PM, the violence in the streets turned to joy and everything immediately calmed down.

So why did the rioters target the Asian community if they were unhappy with a Melanesian PM? The Solomons is one of just a handful of countries that recognises Taiwan as an independent country, so Taiwanese largesse has supposedly lined the pockets of Solomons' members of parliament for years; within minutes of Rini being appointed PM, allegations were flying that he had bought the support required to secure a majority. Meanwhile resentment against new Chinese settlers has been bubbling away, with many Islanders believing that they have bribed their way to residency.

The tragedy is that Honiara's historic Chinatown is demolished and many long-time Chinese residents were terrorised and fled.

Milan, is great by local standards. But it is a hot, crowded and dusty place that's choked with traffic and litter. There's urban squalor on the edges and the main drag has a rather grim and harried atmosphere. It's not indicative of the Solomon Islands at all.

Since all international flights and inter-provincial travel routes come through Honiara, you'll end up spending *some* time in the capital, but there's no reason to spend more than a day or two buying some T-shirts, checking out the central market and visiting a war memorial. Honiara is also the centre of the Ramsi operation (see the boxed text, p550).

The circle-shaped **National Parliament**, on the hill above Ashley St, opened in 1993. There's a public gallery here.

In the town centre, the under-resourced **National Museum & Cultural Centre** (☎ 22098; Mendana Ave; admission \$52; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) houses interesting displays. Behind it are eight traditionally constructed houses, each from a different province.

The **Central Bank** (☎ 21791; Mendana Ave) displays woodcarvings from Rennell and Makira, along with traditional currencies, including Santa Cruz red-feather money, Malaitan dolphin-teeth and shell money, *mbarava* (white clam-shell carvings) from New Georgia and Choiseul clam-shell money.

**Skyline Drive** has commanding views over the town and leads to the **US War Memorial**, a hot 20-minute walk up from Mendana Ave. The locals have made some annotations.

Chinatown's main street, **Chung Wah Rd**, is one of Honiara's most interesting sights – it's lined with small shops and has a Wild West flavour.

### TOURS

Battlefield tours around Honiara can be arranged through the visitor information centre (p551) and Guadalcanal Travel Services (p552). The tours take about three hours and cost \$200 per person.

**Lalae Charters** (☎ 38888; www.lalae.com.sb) arranges game and reef fishing and general charters. The boat is moored at the Point Cruz Yacht Club.

### SLEEPING

Because of recent events none of the hotels have invested heavily in fresh paint and shiny new tap fittings. Even some of the better rooms have been neglected in recent years.

### Budget

**Bulala Backpackers Lodge** (☎ 28819; Chinatown; tw \$5150) Offers clean accommodation and has a minimart on the premises.

**United Church Resthouse** (☎ 20028; Lower Vayvaya Rd; bed per person \$570) This resthouse has a good view from the terrace. Alcohol and smoking are not permitted.

**Chester Resthouse** (☎ 26355; fax 23079; Lower Vayvaya Rd; tw \$5130) Five minutes' walk from the centre of town, and run by Anglican brothers, Chester has a laundering service. Alcohol and smoking are not permitted.

**Solomon City Motel** (☎ 26264; Vayvaya Ridge Rd; s/d \$100/170; 🚽) This clean, basic motel overlooks the central market and has a shared kitchen and lounge area.

### Midrange

**Quality Motel** (☎ 25150; qml@solomon.com.sb; Lower Vayvaya Rd; tw from \$5250; 🚽) Quality Motel overlooks the central market and Iron Bottom Sound. All rooms are self-contained and some have snowy TV and telephone. There's an on-site Asian-style restaurant and small store.

**Honiara Hotel** (☎ 21737; www.honiarahotel.com.sb; Chinatown; fan-cooled tw \$5270, self-contained air-con tw \$5440; 🚽 🍷 🍴) Another good option, with a pool, bar and restaurant. It's off Chinatown's colourful main street.

**Airport Motel** (☎ 36446; airportmtl@solomon.com.sb; tw from \$5250) This motel has a nice restaurant and bar, and is only a two-minute drive from the airport. It's also a good place for a cooling beverage after you've checked in to your international flight.

### Top End

**King Solomon Hotel** (☎ 21205; kingsol@solomon.com.sb; Hibiscus Ave; d from \$5620; 🚽 🍷 🍴) This international hotel is an old favourite, set on a steep hill with a funicular shuttle that shunts people between the rooms and the reception and restaurant area. It's full of character and it has a pool built into the hill. All rooms are large and comfortable with TV.

**Mendana Hotel** (☎ 20071; kitano@mendana.com.sb; Mendana Ave; s/tw from \$5510/550; 🚽 🍷 🍴) The Solomon Kitano Mendana Hotel (usually shortened to the Mendana) is right on the waterfront and has the best restaurant in town. All the rooms are comfortable and there's a large airy foyer area that looks out over a sandy white beach – lovely to lounge in with drink a newspaper.

**Pacific Casino Hotel** (☎ 25009; www.solomon-hotels.com; Kukum; tw from \$5450; 🚽 🍷 🍴) At the eastern end of town, this large waterfront

hotel complex and casino offers a good standard of accommodation as well as gym facilities and sports courts. There are bars, a restaurant and various gaming rooms.

### EATING

**Lime Lounge** (☎ 23064; mains \$545; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This is the place to come for excellent breakfasts, light meals, good coffee and fresh fruit and yoghurt. There's great music and Australian newspapers and magazines are arrayed for patrons' use.

**Mendana Hotel** (☎ 20071; mains \$580-150; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Mendana puts on excellent eating in its restaurant from a varied menu of Western and Japanese dishes. Seafood is well prepared and salads are fresh and imaginative.

**King Solomon Hotel** (☎ 21205; mains \$570-120; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner) They've done some weird renovations to the front of the lovely leafhouse that is the restaurant and bar area of the King Solomon Hotel. A strange glass façade and boxy bar area have been added for no obvious benefit. However, the King Solomon boasts an excellent restaurant that's patronised by expats and prosperous locals as well as international patrons of the city's other hotels – an interesting mix of local glitterati. Seafood is the inclination of the menu, but chicken and vegetarian choices are also available.

**Pacific Casino Hotel** (☎ 25009; mains \$570-150; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Pacific Casino Hotel has a rather overly decorated restaurant on the waterfront offering fine Western and Asian cuisine. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served at tables that have a great view north over the Nggela Islands.

**Fortune Restaurant** (☎ 20629; mains \$580-210; 🍷) dinner) Also within the grounds of the Pacific Casino Hotel, the Fortune is an up-market Chinese restaurant offering Western and international dishes.

### DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The bars at Honiara's top-end hotels are popular and often offer live entertainment – bamboo bands, Micronesian hula dancers.

**Point Cruz Yacht Club** (☎ 22500) There are middle-aged expat guys who've been sitting on the same barstools here for 20 years. Each is a living time-capsule – '70s porn-star moustaches, polo shirts and high-rise khaki work shorts. These guys were dandy fashion

plates when they emigrated, but decades on they need a style update. The yacht club is next to the Mendana Hotel and has a happy hour on Friday evening. Frequented by expats, crusty yachties – who use the shower facilities and reprovision their vessels tethered offshore – and well-heeled islanders, it's an interesting place to enjoy a Sol-brew beer and the sea breeze.

### SHOPPING

Carvers gather under the leafhouse outside the Mendana Hotel and there are shops selling carvings on Mendana Ave. The shop in the National Museum also has some good pieces. *Bukaware* is available from vendors and shops.

The stallholders at the central market offer fresh fruit, fish and shell necklaces. The ladies sell shell jewellery and a guy sells WWII-era Coke bottles and other detritus – a GI's dogtag goes for \$5250.

**DJ Graphics** (☎ 22011; Mendana Ave) Opposite the central market, this place sells souvenir T-shirts.

### EAST OF HONIARA

**Mataniko Falls** is a spectacular thundering of water down a cliff straight into a vast cave below. Japanese soldiers hid in this cavern as well as others nearby. It's a two-hour walk from Honiara. See the visitor information centre (p551) about procuring a guide. At Tuvaruhu, cross the river and follow it south.

At **Mt Austen** you'll find a vandalised Japanese war memorial and an expansive view over Iron Bottom Sound towards Savo and the Nggela Islands.

About 6km from Honiara is the turn-off south to the **Betikama SDA Mission**. There's a large carving shop with a collection of WWII debris, and a crocodile in a pen behind the shop.

A memorial at **Henderson Airport** honours US forces and their Pacific islander allies. About 100m to the west of the terminal is the **US WWII control tower**.

### Marau Sound

Marau Sound is a large lagoon at the eastern tip of Guadalcanal with fringing reefs around clusters of islands. The Paipai and Aaritenamo reefs which enclose many islets are particularly dazzling.

The luxurious **Tavanipupu Island Resort** (☎ 29043; www.tavanipupu.com; per person full board \$5880) offers fishing, sailing, snorkelling and canoeing, but the primary attractions are the island location, stylish accommodation, excellent food and great hospitality. Currently, access is by boat only, since the Marau airstrip is closed. Transfers from Honiara cost \$56600 return in a vessel that can carry eight people. Tavanipupu Island is in Marau Sound, in Guadalcanal's eastern tip.

### WEST OF HONIARA

Independent travel is not currently recommended beyond White River, a Gilbertese village about 4km west of the town centre.

### WEATHERCOAST

Mighty rivers empty into the sea on the Weathercoast, where there's very little development due to the rugged terrain. There are no roads to the Weathercoast and no airstrips. Access is only by foot, boat or helicopter.

## CENTRAL PROVINCE

Central Province is made up of the Nggela (or Florida) group, Savo and the Russell Islands. There are dive operators and resorts in the Nggela and the Russells, where the scuba diving and snorkelling are world class, and there are many hidden beaches.

### NGGELA ISLANDS

pop 21,600 / area 1000 sq km

Also known as the Florida Islands, the rugged silhouette of the Nggela group is clearly visible on the northern horizon across Iron Bottom Sound from Honiara.

### TRANSPORT

Boats link Tulagi and Maravagi with Honiara. Small cargo boats take two hours to ply between Tulagi and the capital, charging about \$570 one way. Arranging a charter costs about \$51400 return.

### Mangalona (Mana)

This small island is near the northern end of the Nggela group. Canoe transfers per person are \$5100 from Honiara and \$550 from Tulagi.



## MEGAPODES

Known in Pijin as *skrab dak* or *skrab foal*, megapodes build large mounds of dirt and leaves in which their eggs are incubated by the heat from the sun and rotting vegetation. In volcanic areas such as Savo, however, the birds just lay their eggs in holes scratched into the hot sand.

After eight or nine weeks the young hatch, fully developed. Pecking their way out of their shells and scratching up to the surface through the soft sand, they can run immediately and fly shortly after.

Megapode eggs are considered a delicacy by islanders, and Savo's megapode-breeding area is divided into family plots. Care is taken not to over-harvest the eggs – there is a closed season each year when eggs may not be taken.

Based at the Maravagi Resort, **Dive Maravagi** (☎ 29065; scubacrew@yahoo.com.au) offers diving expeditions over WWII wrecks and coral gardens.

Relaxing **Maravagi Resort** (☎ 29065; bungalows A\$50 per person) is popular with Honiara's expats and is in an idyllic setting. The rustic leafhouse bungalows have ceiling fans, shower and toilet, and are set among large shady trees beside a sheltered cove.

## Tulagi

In the middle of the Nggelas, Tulagi was the Solomons' former capital; it was also a Japanese base during WWII. Tulagi has some provincial government offices, a post office, a branch of the NBSI, a library, a hospital and a Telekom office. There are WWII relics and reminders of the colonial era to explore.

**Dive Tulagi** (☎ 32052; www.tulagidive.com.sb), based at Vanita Accommodation, operates dives to attractions including the destroyer USS *Aaron Ward*, the oil tanker USS *Kanawha* and the corvette HMNZS *Moa*, sunk during the battle for Guadalcanal. Single-tank dives are A\$75.

**Vanita Accommodation** (☎ 32074; fax 32186; dm \$585, self-contained tw \$5130) has eight twin-bed rooms, a bar and restaurant. The standard is very basic.

## SAVO

pop 3500 / area 31 sq km

Savo, which is about halfway between the Russells and the Nggela group, is clearly visible to the northwest from Honiara. This rugged island has some spectacular hot springs, mud pools and geysers. The visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) can arrange a tour to see the thermal activity and the megapodes.

## RUSSELL ISLANDS

pop 5500 / area 210 sq km

Beef and copra producers Russell Islands Plantation Estates Ltd (Ripel) owns much of the Russell Islands. The area has submarine caverns, prolific reef growth and many sunken war wrecks. Live-aboard dive boats such as the **MV Bilikiki** (www.bilikiki.com) do trips around the Russell Islands.

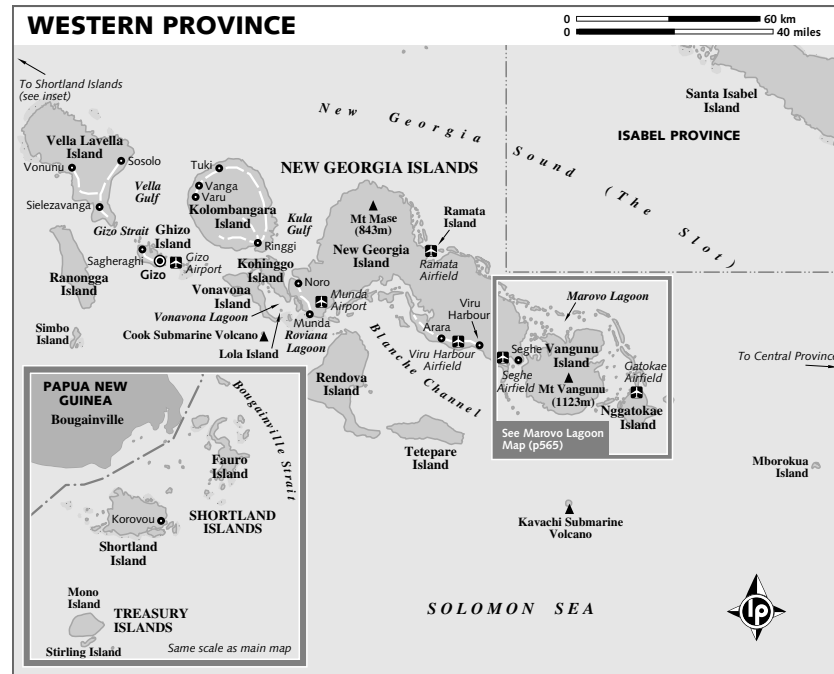
**Mbanika** and **Pavuvu** are two of the largest islands. **Yandina**, on Mbanika's east coast, is the subprovincial headquarters.

## WESTERN PROVINCE

pop 68,000 / area 5330 sq km

Western Province is spectacularly beautiful. Pristine lagoons, tropical islets, skull shrines, incredible diving and snorkelling are just part of what makes the New Georgia region of Western Province an essential place to visit. There's good tourist infrastructure – comfortable lodgings, reasonable restaurants – and well-serviced inter-island boat routes that are much cheaper than Solomon Airlines' domestic sectors. That said, the lagoons look exquisite from the air, the lush islands, white-sand bars and beaches, turquoise coral shallows and inky-blue seas come together in a breathtaking vista as you fly overhead. Tall volcanic islands draw heavy rain clouds while the islets, reefs and coral gardens sparkle in bright sunlight. Rainbows break out routinely and every panorama is supersaturated with hues and textures – muted thunderclaps and little electrical storms. 'The West' is also littered with the legacy of WWII.

Gizo, Munda and Marovo Lagoon make up most of the country's tourist industry you can tour all three at a comfortable leisurely



pace. The province has excellent accommodation options, including resorts located on Lola and Uepi.

## Transport

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

The **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 60173) office in Gizo is near the police station and the airfield is on Nusatupe Island; the boat between the airfield and town costs \$20. Daily flights link Gizo to Honiara (from \$825), via Munda (from \$380) or Seghe (from \$450). Other flights go to Choiseul (from \$440), Yandina (from \$675) and Ramata (from \$380).

#### Boat

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104; elite@solomon.com.sb) is an excellent alternative to flying. It does a Honiara–Gizo route taking in Mbunikalo, Gasini and Seghe in Marovo Lagoon; Ughele on Rendova; and Noro en route. The 12-hour Honiara–Gizo trip costs \$340 (\$370 1st class upstairs) and leaves Honiara's main wharf at 7am on Wednesday, returning Thursday.

Weekdays except Wednesday **Go West Tours** (☎ 62180; Agnes Lodge, Munda) runs a shuttle boat connecting Gizo to Munda via Noro or Mandou. The Gizo–Munda fare is \$5130.

## GHIZO

pop 6000 / area 37 sq km

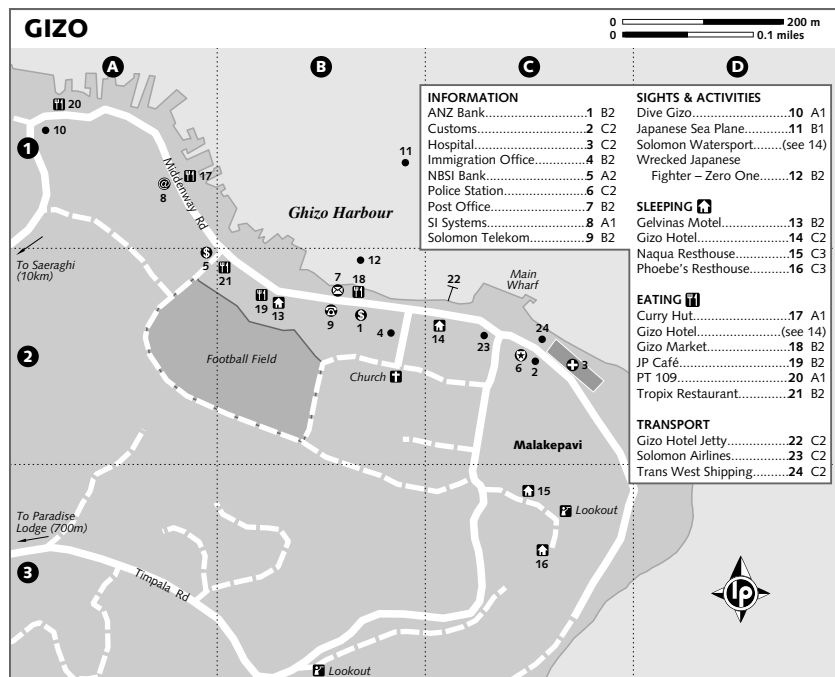
Western Province has some of the best diving and snorkelling in the world. You don't have to be a diver to appreciate the underwater world because many coral gardens and WWII wrecks are accessible without an aqualung.

Little Ghizo island is a dwarf next to its neighbours, but it has the Solomons' second-biggest 'city', Gizo (pronounced the same, spelt differently) – the most developed area outside the capital.

## Gizo

pop 4500

Sprawled along the waterfront with steep hills behind, Gizo is an interesting place that's full of character. The town would've been quite pretty in its colonial heyday



but some buildings are now in disrepair, gently rusting away under the tropical sun. Gizo was a WWII Japanese seaplane base – there are two wrecked Japanese planes in the waters just off Gizo’s market. Two worn monuments in front of the police station commemorate early European traders.

### INFORMATION

The Gizo Hotel will change travellers cheques, but at a poorer rate than the banks. Credit cards are accepted by tour operators and better hotels, but you’ll be expected to use cash for midrange or budget accommodation. The tiny post office is in a building in the market area of the waterfront.

**Ambulance** (☎ 60224)

**ANZ Bank** (☎ 60262; Middenway Rd)

**NBSI** (☎ 60539; Middenway Rd)

**Police** (☎ 60966)

**SI Systems** (Middenway Rd; per min \$51.50) Offers Internet access.

**Solomon Telekom** (☎ 60127; Middenway Rd; Internet access per min 80c) The Telekom office has card- and coin-operated public phones and fax services.

### ACTIVITIES

#### Diving & Snorkelling

Danny and Kerrie Kennedy have run **Dive Gizo** (☎ 60253; www.divegizo.com; Middenway Rd), at the western end of town, since 1985. Danny’s now the member for Gizo in the provincial government and involved in conservation and community projects. Nice people, they’ll meet you at the airport or wharf and drive you to your digs. They have a full dive shop and will take you over WWII wreckage and stunning reefs around Roviana Lagoon. Two boat dives and a picnic lunch cost A\$130.

**Solomon Watersport** (☎ 60646; www.solomonwatersport.com; Middenway Rd) operates out of the Gizo Hotel and offers activities such as diving, sailing, kayaking and windsurfing. It’s run by Hans Mergozzi, and he’s a nice guy too. Two-tank dives cost A\$125 per day.

Both companies can arrange sportfishing charters and hikes, including a two-day climb of Kolombangara’s volcano (A\$100 per person based on two walkers; includes transport, landing fees, guide, porter and one night’s accommodation in the village with a local meal).

INFORMATION		SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
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Customs.....	2 C2	Japanese Sea Plane.....	11 B1
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NBSI Bank.....	5 A2	Fighter – Zero One.....	12 B2
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Post Office.....	7 B2		
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		Gizo Hotel.....	14 C2
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### Surfing

Surfing is new to the Solomons, although the surf’s been here for ever. There’s excellent point surfing off Pailongge (pronounced pye-long-y), a Gilbertese village one-hour’s walk from town on Ghizo’s southern coast. The October-to-April swell rises to 2m or more. There’s a great left-hander nearer Titiana village, with a long paddle out to the reef’s edge, and a right at Pailongge. Dive Gizo employs a local surfer who’s finding new breaks all the time. Bring your own boards.

### SLEEPING

#### Budget

**Gelvinas Motel** (☎ 60276; amcd@solomon.com.sb; Middenway Rd; s,d & tr \$5250; ☎) Gelvinas, on the main drag, is central to all the action – night-times are quiet, but the early morning can be noisy as traders prepare for the day. The rooms are large, self-contained and quite comfortable, and each has a small balcony overlooking the main street. There’s a simple communal kitchen and each room has a fridge.

**Phoebe’s Resthouse** (☎ 60336; fax 60035; per person \$560) Phoebe’s is a great budget option on a hill overlooking the town and eastern beaches – it’s much quieter here than in town itself. Rooms share facilities, and there are commanding ocean views from the large airy common area with kitchen. Phoebe’s is popular with medical students from the UK and Australia who work at the hospital as part of their studies.

**Paradise Lodge** (☎ 60024; plodge@solomon.com.sb; dm/tw with private facilities \$570/180) Paradise offers self-catering and full-board options, with

a bar on the premises and inspiring ocean views. It’s a 15-minute walk to town or the owner will drive you. Three-course evening meals are available: beef, chicken or fish \$55; lobster \$65.

**Naqua Resthouse** (☎ 60012; fax 60278; r per person \$590, self-contained air-con s & d \$5220; ☎) The comfortable Naqua has an airy communal kitchen and spacious lounge area with good views. The rooms are clean and functional and it’s a short walk from town.

### Top End

**Gizo Hotel** (☎ 60199; www.gizohotel.com; Middenway Rd; s/d from \$5400; ☎) The Gizo Hotel is the best address in town, with bars, a pool and one of Gizo’s best restaurants. Standard rooms, all with private facilities, sleep three people and have a fridge, International Direct Dialing phone and all the other necessary equipment for leisure or business.

**Sanbis Resort** (☎ 60646; www.solomonwatersport.com/sanbis/sanbis\_home.htm; Mbabanga Island; per person incl breakfast A\$160) Hans and Rita Mergozzi run Sanbis out on quiet Mbabanga Island, 10 minutes by boat from Gizo. This new eco-friendly place has four stylish double beachside bungalows and two that sleep six. There’s a large communal lounge and bar area with views over the lagoon. Sanbis offers free transfers to Gizo during daylight hours and is part of the Solomons Watersport group operating out of the Gizo Hotel.

### EATING

**PT 109** (Middenway Rd; mains \$570-90; ☎ dinner) Named after John F Kennedy’s WWII patrol

### THE AUTHOR’S CHOICE

**Fatboys** (☎ 60095; www.fatboysgizo.com; meals around \$575) Fatboys bar and restaurant is terrific. It’s on Mbabanga Island, at the end of a pier that hovers over the exquisite waters of Vonavona Lagoon, and is only accessible by boat (\$550 return, 10 minutes from Gizo). The vast room has no walls and a high roof with rotating fans, creating a lovely airy space directly over the lagoon that stretches out in every direction. The bar serves cold drinks and cocktails, and the kitchen offers dishes with a seafood and Asian twist such as deep-fried crayfish (\$590) and red Thai curry chicken (\$575). There are billiard and *football* tables, DVD screens, a reading library and book-swap, plus kayaks tied up to the broad landings that offer great swimming over sandy shallows, but most visitors can’t take their gaze off the extraordinary view.

Proprietor Grant Griffiths is building a couple of luxury bungalows – one with a queen and three single beds at \$5600 to \$5800 per room, one with a queen and single for \$5400 to \$5500 and a third bungalow offering lodge-style accommodation for around \$5125 per person. It’s eventually expected to accommodate 20, and was expected to be complete by June 2006.

boat that sank off Gizo, and in a great waterfront location, this is the best restaurant in town. A blackboard displays half-a-dozen main dishes – local fish, chicken, vegetarian options – and they're all excellent. You can drop by for a cooling drink in the afternoon, but meals are only served in the evening.

**Gizo Hotel** (☎ 60199; Middenway Rd; mains \$580-120; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The Gizo Hotel dominates most things in town and naturally the restaurant is up to par, with well-prepared food and friendly staff. The changing menu incorporates fresh fish and seafood dishes as well as chicken, beef and giant plates of fresh tropical fruit – it's also the only place where you can buy an early-morning breakfast.

**Tropix Restaurant** (Middenway Rd; meals \$540-60) Tropix is a cheap and cheerful alternative, with ample meals and quick service. Simple fish and chips as well as more elaborate dishes are on offer.

**JP Café** (Middenway Rd) and **Curry Hut** (Middenway Rd) offer clean takeaway food – rice and fish, curry and boiled eggs.

### Around Ghizo Island

**Pailongge**, 6km from Gizo, is a neat Gilbertese village with several good surf breaks. **Saeraghi**, 11km from Gizo, has one of the Solomons' most beautiful beaches. It's about 500m before the village. **Nusatupe** is just big enough for an airstrip. Seven kilometres southeast of Gizo, **Kennedy Island** is where John F Kennedy and 10 shipmates swam ashore after their PT-109 patrol boat was sunk by the Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* in August 1943.

### ISLANDS AROUND GHIZO

War debris and natural attractions are the main drawcards of the islands surrounding Ghizo. Also known as Nduke, **Kolombangara** features a classic cone-shaped volcano that rises to 1770m; it's a two-day hike to the top and back. **Simbo** has two active volcanic cones in the south. **Vila Point** was an important WWII Japanese base and you can still see guns in the bush. A skull site at **Pa Na Ghundu** contains 12 coral-stone reliquaries; others are at Pa Na Ulu and Gurava. Righuru has two **petroglyph sites**, and there's another at **Vareviri Point**.

Butterflies and birds are the main attractions for visitors to **Ranongga**. The high western coast of the island falls into deep

water, while the eastern coast is lower, with terraces and onshore reefs.

Mountainous **Vella Lavella** is dominated by the dormant volcano Mt Tambisala – it is 790m high, yet its crater floor is close to sea level. There are megapodes in the island's Ulo River area, where there's a large thermal area, and parrots and butterflies are everywhere you look. Snakes and crocodiles are also plentiful.

In 1965 a WWII Japanese soldier was found still hiding in the bush on Vella Lavella; he was returned home to Japan with full military honours. There have been other alleged sightings since, including one in 1989 near Vorambare Bay.

Vella Lavella has two airfields: Barakoma has weekly connections to Gizo (from \$S380) and Choiseul Bay (from \$S430); Geva is serviced weekly from Gizo (from \$S390).

Cargo boats and motor-canoes ply between Gizo and Vella Lavella, but boat services are irregular.

### NEW GEORGIA ISLAND

pop 22,000 / area 2145 sq km

The area around New Georgia includes the islands of Vonavona, Kohinggo, Rendova and Tetepare. Munda, on New Georgia itself, makes a suitable base for exploring this part of the province.

### Munda

New Georgia's largest settlement is a collection of contiguous villages strung 6km along the shore from Ilangana to Kindu. An important Japanese base during WWII, Munda is close to the junction of Vonavona and Roviana Lagoons, and a good base for exploring the area's many attractions.

Munda has the airport terminal, government offices, an NBSI branch, a police station, hospital and Telekom office.

### SIGHTS

There are freshwater pools at **Ndunde** containing turtles and fish, and a small crocodile farm.

The US Dump is a pile of WWII material resting in the bush at **Kia**. It's a weird, somewhat otherworldly sight – landing craft, barges and other heavy equipment upended in a massive angular pile of rusty metal with 60 years of virulent jungle growth protruding through every opening. Nothing is rec-

ognisable, and you can almost imagine it as the remnants of a crashed UFO – Munda's own Roswell Incident. It's a 20-minute walk from Agnes Lodge (below) and worth the \$S20 *kastom* fee.

On the main road above the US Dump, Bolton Lizu operates a small **museum** of WWII relics.

### TOURS

Based at Agnes Lodge, **Dive Munda** (☎ 62156; www.divegizo.com) is operated by Danny and Kerrie Kennedy of Dive Gizo (p560); lovely Vizi Ahi Leve runs the Munda office. Dive Munda offers diving over numerous wall, wreck and reef sites (A\$145 for two boat dives).

Also based at Agnes Lodge, **Go West Tours** (☎ 62180) offers excursions into Roviana Lagoon, to Mt Bau and Holupuru Falls, and various WWII sites. There's a lot to see in the local area, including Roviana Island's Dog Stone and Skull Island. The lagoon has countless islands with long sandy beaches where you can be left for a few hours' swimming.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Agnes Lodge** (☎ 62133; www.agneslodge.com; dm/d/cottage A\$15/70/115; ☎) Right on the waterfront, Agnes Lodge is the centre of all things that happen in sleepy Munda. It's a short walk from the airport terminal. The dorm rooms are fan cooled and share bathroom facilities, but the self-contained rooms and cottages are air-conditioned, large and comfortable. There's a good restaurant and bar area, and a carver's hut on the grounds.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

The minuscule airport terminal has a **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 61152) counter.

Solomon Airlines connects Munda with Honiara (from \$S750), Gizo (from \$S380) and Seghe (from \$S380) daily. Flights go twice-weekly to Ramata (from \$S380) and Viru Harbour (from \$S380).

#### Boat

**Go West Tours** (☎ 62180) daily Munda–Gizo shuttle service (\$S130) stops at Goldie (\$S20), Noro (\$S45) and Ringgi on Kolombangara (\$S85) en route. It departs Munda at 7.30am.

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104) doesn't pull into Munda on its Wednesday and Thursday Honiara–Gizo route, but does stop at nearby Ughele (from Honiara \$S280) on Rendova and at Noro (from Honiara \$S300).

### Around Munda

The 10m **Holupuru Falls** are just north of the bridge over the Mburape River. Below the waterfall is a deep swimming hole. Stones and pillars stand on raised platforms deep in the bush atop **Mt Bau**, representing ancestral spirits. The site is about 9km inland from the coast at Ilangana on an overgrown bush trail towards Enoghae Point.

**Noro**, 16km northwest of Munda up the Diamond Narrows, is home to the large government-owned Soltai fish cannery. There's also an NBSI branch and a police station. There's no reason to stop in Noro, unless you want to see the fish cannery. **Noro Lodge** (☎ 61238; tw per person \$S120-190, tw with private facilities from \$S125) caters mainly to fishery workers. It's grungy but spacious and there's a licensed restaurant.

Notorious head-hunter Ingava ruled from a coral-walled fortress on **Nusa Roviana** until it was destroyed in 1892. His tribe had a dog, Tiola, as its totem, and people worshipped at a rock carved in its likeness before going head-hunting. Remains of the **Stone Dog** are still here. The fortress is up to 30m wide, and 500m of coral walls still remain. There's a giant's cave nearby. Nusa Roviana is 4km east of Munda. *Kastom* fees are charged.

**Roviana Lagoon** extends 52km eastwards from Munda to Kalena Bay, and has many small islets. **Nusa Hope Island** is home to a crocodile farm.

**Viru Harbour**, 30km southeast, was an important WWII Japanese base and is now a saw-milling centre. In the 19th century five coral-stone fortresses protected the sea entrance from head-hunters. Stone monoliths and coral-rock platforms stand on nearby ridge tops.

### Vonavona Lagoon

This beautiful lagoon extends 28km between the Blackett Strait islets and Nusaghele.

**Lola** is an idyllic island of about 40 hectares, 20 minutes by boat from Munda. There's excellent seasonal reef-break surfing off the southern end of the island. With

its white-sand beach and views across the lagoon to Kolombangara's volcano, **Zipolo Habu Resort** (☎ 62178; www.zipolohabu.com.sb; s/d/tr A\$55/80/100) has been run by Joe and Lisa Entriakin since 1989. The resort caters to many returning anglers who pose for photos with monster fish – me-and-my-barracuda photos are displayed around the bar area. Accommodation is in large fan-cooled bungalows with kitchens and fridges; bathroom facilities are shared. The meal package costs A\$55 per day or you can prepare your own. Zipolo Habu offers village tours, hiking, sportfishing and surf charters. Return boat transfer to Munda costs A\$60 per boatload. Some people visit Zipolo Habu just for the lunch – excellent fish and chips (S\$48) and burgers with chips (S\$65).

**Skull Island** sounds as if it might be in a pirate story for boys. In fact, the island is the final resting place for the skulls of countless vanquished warriors, as well as a shrine for the skulls of Rendova chiefs. Rendova's head-hunters dominated the Vonavona Lagoon, repeatedly wiping out the region's entire population (save for a few women who'd be 'adopted' into the clan). Skull Island is truly spooky – shell money, stone bracelets and other votive objects adorn the reliquary. It's on a tiny islet at the tip of Kundo Point on Vonavona. The *kastom* owners charge S\$20 to visit.

Due south of Roviana Lagoon, **Rendova** is home to about 3000 people. The Japanese had more than 20 large anti-aircraft guns at Rendova Harbour until US marines captured the harbour in June 1943 and used it as a base for PT boats; these included PT-109, which was skippered by John F Kennedy. Also called Mt Longguoreke, **Rendova Peak** (1063m) dominates the island; climbing the peak takes two days return. **Egholo Cove** is a large inlet with a rusting war wreck on the shore at its southern entrance.

The 120-sq-km **Tetepare** is said to be the South Pacific's largest uninhabited island. It's one of the Solomons' conservation jewels – a large rainforested island untouched by logging companies. Tetepare is managed by the **Tetepare Descendants' Association** (☎ 62163; www.tetepare.org). The island has important breeding grounds for leatherback and green turtles, dugongs and other rare wildlife. There is a research station, trained guides, canopy

platforms for bird-watching and accommodation huts. The association is looking to have the island World Heritage listed.

Visits to Tetepare incur a one-off S\$50 *kastom* fee, regardless of time spent. Accommodation is in a comfortable leafhouse (S\$200 per person) and is arranged through the Tetepare Descendants' Association. Walking and activities are offered, and one-way transfers cost S\$400 per boatload from Banaita and S\$1200 from Munda.

Australian biologists John and Katherine Read have been coming to Tetepare for years to assist in the establishment of conservation projects and the descendants' association. John has written a book called *Tetepare: The Last Wilderness Island of the South Pacific* (2006), which is a mix of amusing personal anecdotes, well-explained science and ecological issues, and good story telling.

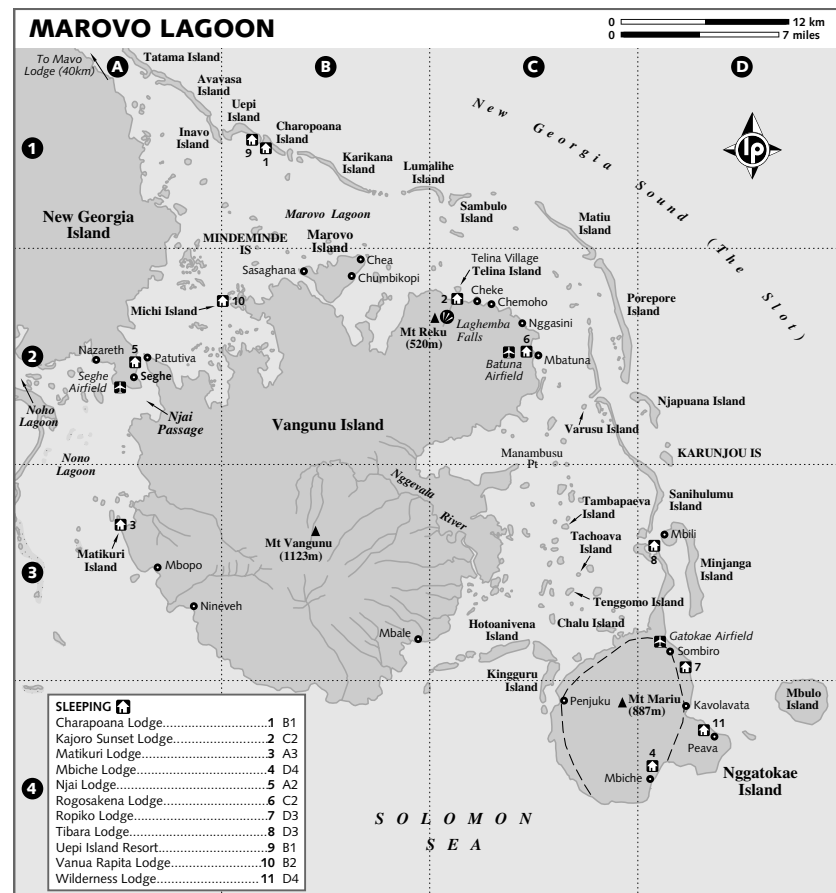
## MAROVO LAGOON

On New Georgia's eastern side, Marovo Lagoon is the world's finest double barrier-enclosed lagoon, bordered by the large New Georgia and Vangunu Islands on one side and a double line of long barrier islands on the other. It contains hundreds of beautiful small islands, most of which are covered by coconut palms and rainforest and surrounded by coral. World Heritage listing was being pursued until recently, when logging on New Georgia Island and Vangunu discouraged the proponents.

Several bare escarpments rise from sea level up New Georgia and Vangunu Islands and these sully the lagoon water after rains. Each is a gash, a wound in the heavily wooded island shorelines of the two major perimeter islands – ugly incursions on paradise. Run-off discolours the lagoon water, which the locals call 'Milo'. From the air the water changes from a brilliant aqua to a ruddy bluey-brown. The run-off falls out as sediment after a few days and the water is crystal clear again, but it chokes up the reefs. Logging has been very contentious around Marovo.

## Information

There are no phones in the Marovo Lagoon area, but bookings for the resorts and lodges in the Marovo and adjoining Noro Lagoon can be made through the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551). The lodges here are generally leafhouse style



with twin rooms, share facilities, attractive waterfront settings and no electricity.

European Union funding has been granted for the development of a Marovo Lagoon-specific website that will include email connections. The website will be ready in 2006.

## Transport

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

The guy at the **Solomon Airlines** (☎ in Gizo 60173) counter at Seghe airstrip has been doing the same job for more than 20 years: he rides up to the shed on a (newer) bicycle, radios Honiara and the Gizo airstrip to confirm the flights; he weighs your luggage and your

good self, and checks everything on *and* off the 'Sol Air' De Havilland Twin Otter aircraft. He's a one-man airport and Solomon Airlines ought to recognise his contribution. There's a new terminal under construction but it still won't have a telephone.

Flights connect Seghe to Honiara (from S\$650), Munda (from S\$380) and Gizo (from S\$450) on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. However, it's possible that *any* flight between Gizo, Munda and Ramata (to the west), and Honiara (east) may be rerouted through Seghe and it's also possible that a scheduled flight mightn't land at Seghe. 'Sol Air' is fickle and flirtatious with this little airstrip, and folks have learnt to be ever-ready and flexible.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Uepi Island Resort** (☎ in Australia 03-9787 7904; www.uepi.com; per person full board A\$210) Uepi (oo-py) is an essential place to spend at least a few days while in the Solomons. It is one of the lagoon's barrier islands, exposed on one side to the open sea and overlooking the lagoon on the other. Large self-contained bungalows that sleep up to six are discreetly arrayed among lovely bush gardens, spider orchids and coconut palms. They are fan-cooled but airy and each has its own leafhouse veranda. The food is excellent: breakfast and dinner are served in a breezy dining room with superb views, while luncheon – a platter – is brought to your bungalow to graze over as you please. There's a bar and a library-cum-bookswap facility, and a DVD player in the common area. Return boat transfers from Seghe cost A\$70.

You don't need to be a diver to appreciate the world-class tropical underwater world that supports gorgeous reefs, corals, giant clams and fish in great clouds of tens of thousands in impossible ultra-vivid colours. The humble snorkeller can see all of this at the end of the short Uepi jetty where the island falls away 30m to a deep tidal channel. All that and a shiver of sharks – black-tip reef sharks – swim around one of the jetties. You'll be assured that they won't eat you, and they won't, but it is unnerving in the extreme the first time you encounter them.

The resort has a full dive shop and can arrange overnight kayaking trips, village tours and sportfishing. The evening coconut crab tour is a highlight. Uepi is earthy, chilled-out and luxurious, and it's as popular with honeymooners and romantics as it is with divers.

### Boat

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104) stops at Seghe on its way to Gizo (S\$160) on Wednesday and Honiara (S\$260) on Thursday.

### Seghe

This subprovincial headquarters on south-east New Georgia's coast has grown up around the US-built WWII airfield. The area's largest settlement is strung out along the Njai Passage, which links Noro Lagoon to Marovo Lagoon. Seghe is the launching place for a trip into magnificent Marovo Lagoon.

A short boat ride from the airport terminal, **Njai Lodge** (per bed S\$75) has a kitchen, shared shower facilities and flush toilet. Contact Jack Forest at the **Gelvinas Motel** (☎ 60276; amcd@solomon.com.sb) in Gizo.

### Matikuri

The **Matikuri Lodge** (per person incl meals S\$120) can arrange guided walks from Mbopo village on Vangunu and also offers trips to Bareho, a Seventh-Day Adventist carving centre. It's a very friendly place. One-way transfers from Seghe are S\$30 per person.

### Ramata

**Mavo Lodge** (per person incl meals S\$100) is at the Marovo Lagoon's northern end. It offers fishing trips, excellent snorkelling, village tours, skull shrines and hikes. **Go Tours Travel**

(☎ 07-5591 2199; www.gotours.com.au) in Queensland, Australia offers fishing packages to Ramata.

**Solomon Airlines** (www.solomonairlines.com.au) flies to Ramata twice weekly from Honiara (from S\$720) and Gizo (from S\$380).

### Michi

**Vanua Rapita Lodge** (per person S\$110) is a short boat ride from the mainland. Transfers from Seghe are S\$30 each way.

### Charapoana

The **Charapoana Lodge** (d/full board S\$100/210) is next door to the Uepi resort (see above) and you can arrange your activities and transfers through the resort – a good choice for rustic accommodation on Marovo Lagoon.

### Vangunu

**Kajoro Sunset Lodge** (per person S\$120) is owned by local legend and master carver John Wein. John's narratives on tribal history and excursions to *tabu* (taboo) sites are fascinating. Transfers from Seghe cost S\$200 (shared).

**Rogosakena Lodge** (per person S\$130) is 6km west, near Lolovuro village, and just south of the airstrip at Mbatuna.

### Nggatokae

Nggatokae (gat-oh-kye) is a large volcanic cone that reaches its 887m peak on Mt Mariu's narrow crater rim.

**Tibara Lodge** (per person full board S\$130) is on the island's northern tip near the Mbili Passage, which is on the Honiara–Gizo shipping route. Chief Luton offers various activities, such as hikes, fishing and snorkelling. The wreck of a USAAF B24D bomber lies crumpled in the nearby bush.

**Ropiko Lodge** (per person full board S\$130) is a short motor-canoe ride from the Gatokae airstrip. Activities include a visit to Mbiche village and its fascinating *kastom* sites, lagoon tours, fishing and snorkelling. A wrecked Zero fighter lies just beyond the resort.

**Wilderness Lodge** (☎ within the Solomons satellite 0061 145 125 948; www.thewildernesslodge.org; per person full board US\$95) is a large leafhouse with two bedrooms which each sleep four. Activities include a hike to the top of Mt Mariu and to the crater rim of Mt Vangunu. There's also fishing and a boat ride to see Kavachi (an active underwater volcano). Children aged five to 12 are half-price; under five free. Boat transfers from Gatokae cost US\$50 per person.

On the weathercoast of Nggatokae island, **Mbiche Lodge** (per person S\$100) is an option for village-based leafhouse accommodation (see p573).

## RENNELL & BELLONA PROVINCE

pop 2400 / area 629 sq km

The Polynesian outliers of Rennell and Bellona are both rocky uplifted-coral atolls. Eastern Rennell has been a World Heritage site since 1998 but, despite locals' hopes, listing hasn't brought travellers to visit its famous Lake Te'Nggano. Rennell remains a remote and poorly serviced backwater where food can be scarce, fuel is expensive and there's poor infrastructure. You must be well provisioned with food and seriously cashed-up to visit the province.

Several bird species are endemic to Rennell, including the Rennell fantail and the rare Rennell white spoonbill. There are at least eight subspecies that have been identified. Dawn and dusk see great flocks of frigate birds, cormorants and boobies circling over Lake Te'Nggano. The unique Rennellose orchid is also beautiful.

### RENNELL ISLAND

pop 1400 / area 276 sq km

Surrounded by high cliffs, Rennell is a fine example of a raised coral atoll. At 130 sq km, **Lake Te'Nggano**, in the southeast, is the South Pacific's largest expanse of fresh water. The lake is the old lagoon floor and the tall cliffs that surround it are the old reef. Its western end has 200-odd coral islets and swamps. Four villages lie along the shore, including **Te'Nggano**, the subprovincial headquarters.

Boat charters around the lake are available, and guided rainforest walks cost S\$30 per person per hour. **Octopus Cave** on the northern shore is a very popular excursion. From **Tuangonga Bay** it's possible to clamber up to the cliff top for an amazing view of the lake and ocean.

It's said that Rennell and Bellona were occupied by small, fur-covered, subhuman Hiti people living in caves when the Polynesians arrived around AD 1400. They were wiped out over the centuries although there are still occasional 'sightings'.

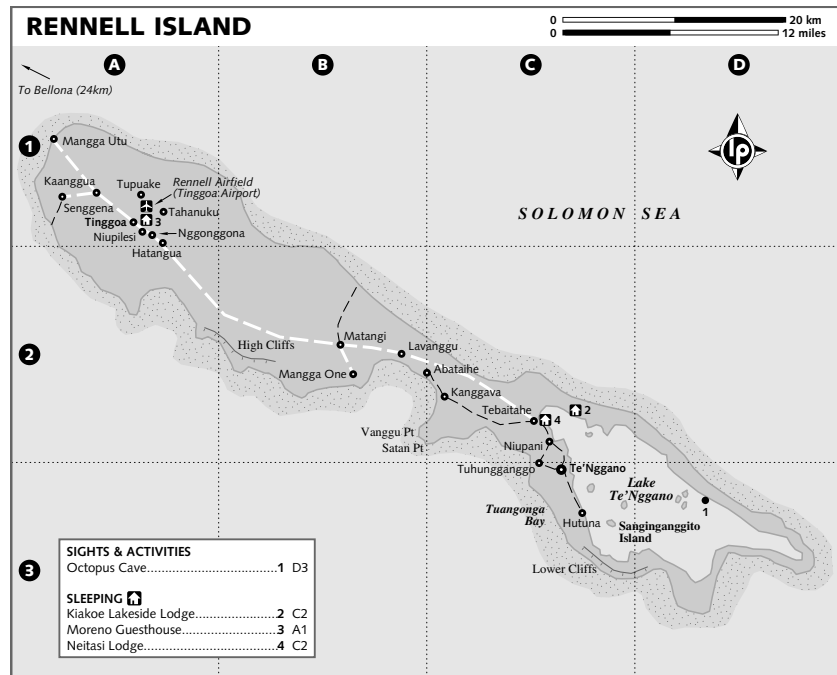
There is an Internet connection at **Hutuna** (hutuna@polfostaem.gov.sb) where you might be able to contact the lodges. It's a changeable thing – apparently it does work sometimes. There's also *sometimes* radio contact – discuss this with the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551).

### Sleeping

The island has a few simple resthouses which can be booked through the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) if the local 'polfostaem' email service is working. Alternatively, the visitor information centre can radio the subprovincial headquarters (once the radio tower is fixed) or even send a letter on a Solomon Airlines provincial flight. However, chances are you'll be making your accommodation arrangements 'on the fly' once you land in the province.

**Moreno Guesthouse** (per person S\$80) This is a clean, friendly place with shared kitchen facilities. It's near the airport and since flights depart Rennell early in the morning you'll need to stay here on the eve of your departure.

Other options:  
**Neitasi Lodge** (per person S\$70) A lovely leafhouse constructed on stilts directly over the water.  
**Kiakoe Lakeside Lodge** (per person S\$80) This place is on the northern shore. Canoe transfers are S\$30 per person.



### Getting There & Away

From Honiara, **Solomon Airlines** (www.solomonairlines.com.au) flies to Rennell (from \$610) via Bellona (from \$740) on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. The Bellona–Rennell sector costs from \$380. Rennell airfield is at Tinggoa.

### Getting Around

#### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The 50km of poor road between the Tinggoa Airport and Lake Te'Nggano runs through rainforest and takes at least four hours. Hilux 4WD charter costs \$1000, or you may be able to negotiate a 'fare' on another vehicle or hook up with some Ramsi personnel. The people from Kiakoe Lakeside Lodge meet most flights to collect cargo and offer transfers to the lake for \$250.

### BELLONA

pop 1000 / area 15 sq km

Densely populated Bellona has a fertile interior and is encircled by forest-covered cliffs rising 30m to 70m. The cliffs are mostly easy to climb, unlike Rennell's.

Since the 1970s many Bellonese have reacted against Christianity, deserting the large church-dominated villages and returning to their traditional lands.

Bellona also has an email connection (bellona@pipolfastaem.gov.sb).

### Sights

Bellona Island's most sacred ancient rituals took place at the Nggabengga site in **Matahenua**. Early Bellonese settlers lived in the caves around here, right up to the 1930s.

The **Tapuna** and **Saamoa Caves** are 1km north of Matangi. Hiti people are said to have lived in stone buildings inside them. Stone remains can still be seen in Tapuna Cave.

The Hiti Walls at **Ou'taha** are a weathered line of coral rocks – the remains of an up-lifted reef. The locals say that the Hiti built these huge coral structures before the first Polynesians arrived.

### Sleeping

**Suan Resthouse** (per person \$590) This resthouse at Tangakitonga has a kitchen, and meals are available. Bicycle hire and hiking and

snorkelling trips with lunch included can be arranged.

**Aotaha Cave Resort** (per person \$5130) This is a well-organised village-based resort on Bellona's east coast that enjoys cool sea breezes. It's a beautiful place, set around caves in the base of cliff, and some of the beds are in the cave itself. Meals are available on request.

### Getting Around

A tractor trail runs from Potuhenua in the northwest, Bellona's only anchorage, and continues to the southeastern tip at Ana'otango. The island's only vehicle meets every flight and ship, and shuttles passengers along its route.

## MALAITA PROVINCE

pop 123,000 / area 4300 sq km

Malaita Province is by far the most densely populated part of the country. The population is all Melanesian except for approximately 2000 Polynesians who live on the faraway atolls of Ontong Java and Sikaiana.

### MALAITA ISLAND

pop 90,000 / area 3840 sq km

Deep valleys, sharp ridges and fast-flowing rivers have always obstructed cross-island movement on Malaita, and so the Malaitans speak many different languages. Malaita's rugged highland interior rises to 1303m at Mt Kolovrat.

Malaitan people have long migrated to other parts of the Solomons, particularly to Guadalcanal. Even today, in the post Tension era, Malaitan people dominate Honiara and are over-represented in Solomons' business, politics and power. It was resentment towards these successes and

incursions that led to the ethnic tensions of the late 1990s (see p550). They are an aggressive, dynamic people with deep traditions, rich cultures and a history of anti-authoritarianism that manifested in the Kwaio Rebellion (see p545) and the postwar Marching Rule movement (p545).

Malaita Island is still largely traditional, incredibly wild and difficult to get around. It's a great place to 'get lost' in, staying out in the villages with the Malaitans who, despite their reputation, are generous, warm and engaging.

Malaita has artificial islands that support whole communities. It has sacred caves and rivers, and strong traditions in carving, seafaring, and animist and ancestor worship. The crowded artificial islands in Langa Langa and Lau Lagoons (see below) are highlights.

### Transport

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

##### Air

**Solomon Airlines** (☎ 40173) flies from Honiara to Auki (from \$430) every day.

##### Boat

**MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104; elite@solomon.com.sb) runs from Honiara to Auki (\$140) on Friday and returns on Saturday; on Monday it runs from Honiara to Afio (\$180) near Malaita's southern tip, returning on Tuesday.

#### GETTING AROUND

Auki's Gwaunaru'u airfield is 10km from town. A ride into town costs \$20 on the Solomon Airlines bus that meets every flight.

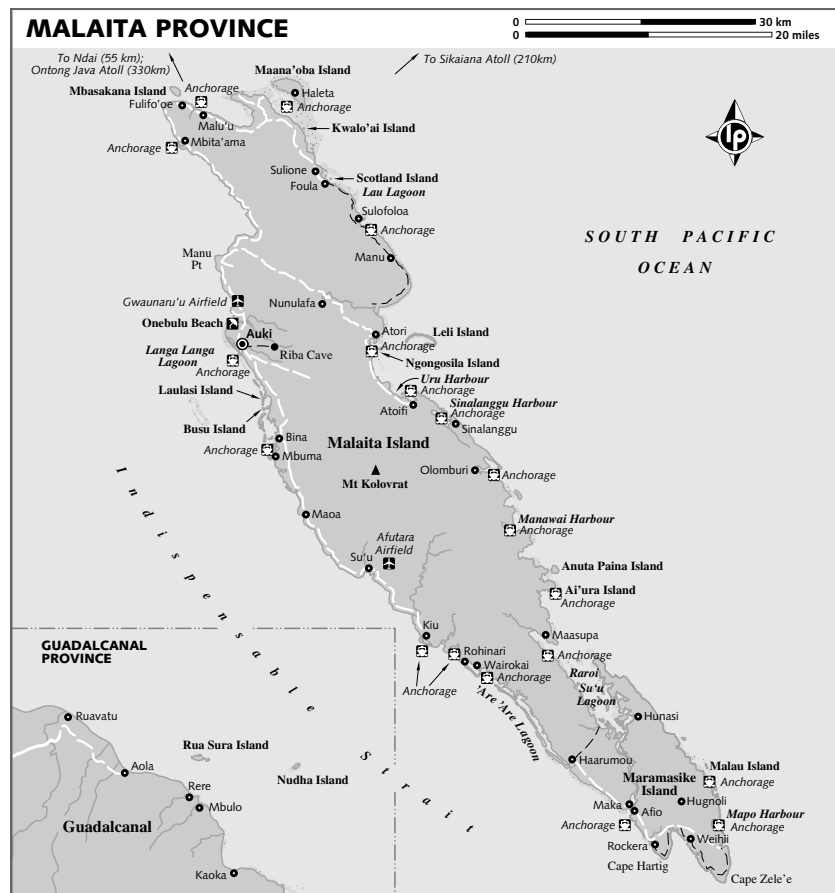
Very few vehicles travel Malaita's 325km of pot-holed roads outside Auki. The roads are genuinely appalling. Trucks leave carrying

#### ARTIFICIAL ISLANDS

Malaita has a large number of artificial islands, particularly in Langa Langa and Lau Lagoons. Some of these date from the 1550s and new ones are built each year.

Stones from the lagoon floor are collected and piled on a sandbar or reef until they reach around 2m above the high-tide mark. Sand is spread around, houses are built and coconuts palms are planted.

The largest islands exceed 1 sq km in size and tend to be very crowded; some are surrounded by a coral wall. Most, however, are very small and only have room for a few houses. Artificial islands were traditionally built as defence from head-hunters and tribal war.



people and goods up the 'north road' towards Malu'u from the wharfs in the early morning. Others leave for Foula and for Atori and Atoifi across the island.

### Auki

pop 4500

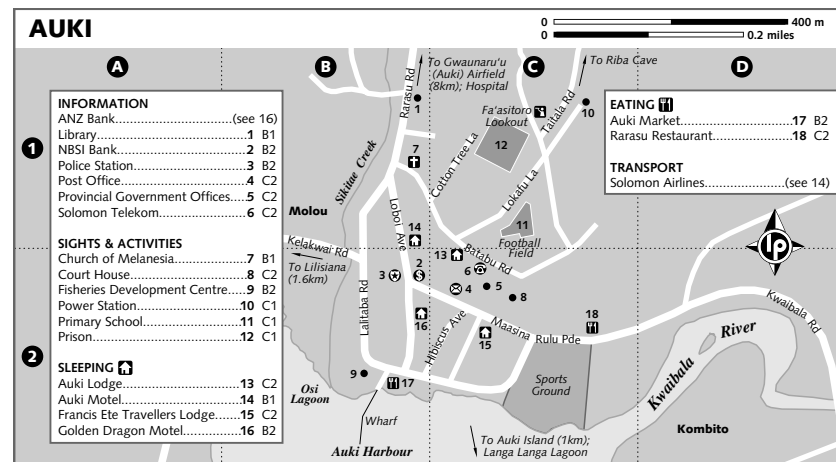
Although tiny, Auki is the Solomons' third-largest town. Along a few hundred metres of Lobi Ave, the main street, and in the blocks behind there are branches of the **ANZ** (☎ 40160) and **NBSI** (☎ 40484) banks, a hospital, provincial government offices, a **Telekom** (☎ 40152) and a **Solomon Airlines** (☎ 40173) office. There's also a wharf and lively market at the town's southern end, from where you can buy fresh food and see the harbour's

artificial islands. There are wonderful views over Auki and its harbour from the lookout behind the prison.

### SIGHTS

The 80m-wide **Auki Island** lies 1km from town. The artificial island was home to shark worshippers and there are *kastom* areas containing ancestral skulls. Men can visit these sites but they remain *tabu* for women. Locals sometimes ask exorbitant landing fees – S\$20 per person is reasonable. Canoes go to or past the island from the Auki Wharf, Lilisiana and Ambu.

A 1.6km walk from the wharf is the friendly village of **Lilisiana**, where women make traditional shell money and necklaces.



### SLEEPING & EATING

**Auki Lodge** (☎ 40131; Batabu Rd; s/d from S\$290/320; 📶) There is a range of room types at Auki's top hotel. All have bathrooms and the better ones have fridge and kitchenette. The lodge is pretty run-down but there's a homy atmosphere and a broad veranda. There's a bar, a restaurant that serves good local food and a lounge area with satellite TV.

**Auki Motel** (☎ 40014; fax 40220; Lobi Ave; per person S\$80, self-contained air-con d S\$200; 📶) The simple Auki Motel is basic but clean and decorated with Christian images and paraphernalia. The smoke- and alcohol-free rooms are fan-cooled and share facilities except for the two self-contained doubles. Excellent meals are served (breakfast/dinner S\$25/40), and there's a spacious lounge and veranda that overlooks the main street – nice for watching the world go by. It's above the Solomon Airlines office.

**Golden Dragon Motel** (☎ 40113; Lobi Ave; per person S\$125, self-contained from S\$185) This place has a basic kitchen and communal lounge area. It's upstairs above some stores; if no-one's around ask at the Auki Store opposite.

**Francis Ete Travellers Lodge** (☎ 40320; fax 40105; Maasina Rulu Pde; per person S\$80) This simple lodge has recently reopened after a few years' closure. It has fan-cooled rooms and share facilities and a dining room.

**Rarasu Restaurant** (☎ 40280; meals from S\$40; 📶 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Recently established with assistance of the EU Micro Projects Programme, Rarasu is a terrific place and

offers the best dining in Auki. It's licensed and serves fish and stir-fries and chicken and beef dishes.

### Around Auki

The large **Riba Cave** is an hour's walk east from Auki. There is a *kastom* fee and you'll need a guide and a torch. South of Auki, **Langa Lagoon** is famous for its artificial islands. One of these, **Laulasi**, is 400 years old. Tours can be arranged in Auki; ask at your hotel. At the mouth of the Fiu River, 9km north of Auki, **Onebulu** is the best beach in the Auki area.

### Northern Malaita Island

The 'north road' leaves Auki and follows the coast from Sisifu to Silolo, providing sea views. Long stretches of white-sand beach line the shore. Shell money is made at **Mbita'ama**, 65km from Auki. **Mana Ru-uakwa**, a marine cave at nearby Kwaiorua Point, penetrates inland, terminating in a deep hole. Islanders say sharks come here to sleep. Beautiful **Mbasakana Island** is surrounded by coral reefs and white-sand beaches. The friendly villagers can show you an interesting cave nearby.

The welcoming subprovincial headquarters of **Malu'u** is a good stop on the 'north road' between Auki (five hours over 82km of dreadful road) and Lau Lagoon at the 'head road' two hours away. There are good beaches here and the village has stores, electricity and piped water. A 4km

hilltop trail behind Malu'u leads to **A'ama**, where there's a *biu* (a tree house for initiated boys). **Uala**, which has a skull house, is 1km further on. **Malu'u Lodge** (per person \$580) has some fan-cooled rooms, a kitchen and share facilities. Make bookings through the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) or contact the **provincial government headquarters** (☎ 40253) in Auki.

This 35km-long **Lau Lagoon** contains more than 60 artificial islands (see p569 for more info on such islands). It stretches from the shallows between Uruuru and Maana'omba down to Lolowai.

### Central & Eastern Malaita Island

There's a road across the mountainous interior to the east coast around Atori that is washed out in the mid-year wet season. The route begins near Dala, and its most scenic spot is at Nunulafa, where it crosses over the Auluta Gorge.

It's possible to visit the traditional Kwaio people who inhabit the rugged east-central part of Malaita and worship sharks. Shark-calling rituals climax with a boy sitting astride a shark and riding it around the lagoon. The Kwaio stronghold is between Uru Harbour and Olomburi. Check with the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551), which can give advice on guides and other matters.

## SOLOMON ISLANDS DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATION

The Tensions put paid to any investment in the hotel sector and standards have slipped – most places are in need of some fresh paint and new drapes. Honiara, Gizo and Auki provide a range of options, and the standards can be quite good. Elsewhere, most of the tourist accommodation comprises small, traditional-style lodges. Booking your accommodation ahead will enable your host to meet you at the airfield or port – useful where there's no public transport.

Pitching a tent flies in the face of traditional Melanesian hospitality, and villagers will be offended if you turn down their offer to sleep in a dwelling provided.

### PRACTICALITIES

- The country's only newspaper is the daily *Solomons Star* (\$55), offering lively and independent commentary on Solomons affairs. It's delivered to the provincial capitals on the Sol Air flight and thus may not be available until after lunch or even the next day – back issues are sold in trade stores. It can be read online at [www.solomonstarnews.com](http://www.solomonstarnews.com).
- Local radio (SIBC) broadcasts programmes in English and Pijin on MW (1035kHz) and SW (5020kHz), with local and overseas features and news. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is at 630kHz MW. There's no local TV. Hotels with satellite TV can pick up CNN, BBC World and Australian programmes, as well as EmTV from PNG.
- The Solomons uses the PAL video system.
- Where electricity exists (often delivered by generator), the Solomons uses 240V, 50Hz AC and Australian-style three-pin plugs.
- The Solomons uses the metric system of measurement. See the Quick Reference page for conversions.

### Hotels & Resorts

Tourist-class hotels are confined to Honiara, Gizo, Munda and Auki – expect to pay from \$200 for a fan-cooled room with private facilities in Honiara, and less on the outer islands. Although basic by international standards, these hotels generally have rooms with or without private shower and air-con, depending on how much you're prepared to pay. A telephone, TV and tea-and-coffee-making facilities may be provided. Most have restaurants and bars.

There are a few plush resorts in Honiara and Western Province – expect to pay from \$450 for a deluxe twin room at these places. Elsewhere accommodation is offered in basic leafhouse-style lodges.

### Resthouses & Hostels

These comprise church hostels, provincial government resthouses and private resthouses. Most have ceiling fans and shared kitchen and washing facilities. They charge

around \$80 per person per night and most guests will be islanders. Alcohol and smoking are often forbidden.

### Village Stays

Most villages have a leafhouse set aside for visitors' use. The charge is usually nominal. If there isn't a leafhouse, you may be able to bed down in the local school or clinic.

Villages rarely have electricity and the water supply often comes from a stream or communal tap. The toilet is a hole in the ground, or a reserved place in the bush or over the reef. Bring enough food to share around – tinned meat or tuna, tea, coffee and sugar are useful.

Village stays can be arranged with locals who have an idea of what tourists want and expect. Visiting on this basis is highly recommended – it is a wonderful experience for the traveller and it puts money into local communities. The World Heritage Committee and World Wildlife Fund have helped villagers set up several 'village-based' lodges around Marovo Lagoon (see p564).

Contact the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) if you want to stay in a village or a lodge. Staff can make suggestions and organise bookings.

### ACTIVITIES

The Solomon Islands offers a range of outdoor activities, including hiking, kayaking, scuba diving, snorkelling, swimming, surfing, fishing, bird-watching and caving. There are also numerous archaeological and WWII sites to visit.

Golf, squash and tennis are played in Honiara and almost every village has a soccer (football) field.

### Diving

The Solomons is among the world's top diving destinations; see p73 for an overview. The extensive coral and fish life alone are superb, but there are also hundreds of sunken WWII ships and aircraft. Many of these are accessible and, having been undisturbed for 60 years, have a wealth of objects *in situ*; underwater visibility is usually good to around 30m. Dive operators rent all equipment and you must carry your certification (see p78).

Water temperatures in the Solomons are perfectly comfortable without a wetsuit, but

be sure that you wear a rash vest or some other form of upper-body protection from sunburn and skin grazes.

Some of the major dive operators: **Bilikiki Cruises** ([www.bilikiki.com](http://www.bilikiki.com)) With two live-aboard cruisers.

**Dive Gizo** ([www.divegizo.com](http://www.divegizo.com)) In Gizo and Munda, Western Province.

**Dive Tulagi** ([www.tulagidive.com.sb](http://www.tulagidive.com.sb)) Based in the Nggelas.

**Solomon Watersport** ([www.solomonwatersport.com](http://www.solomonwatersport.com)) In Gizo.

**Uepi Island Resort** ([www.uepi.com](http://www.uepi.com)) At Marovo Lagoon.

### PREARRANGED DIVE HOLIDAYS

Many divers prearrange their stay in the Solomons. Australian-based specialist companies offering package dive tours include the following:

**Allways Dive Expeditions** (☎ 03-9885 8863, toll free 1800 338 239; [www.allwaysdive.com.au](http://www.allwaysdive.com.au)) In Ashburton, Victoria.

**Dive Adventures** (☎ 02-9299 4633, 03-9646 5945; [www.diveadventures.com.au](http://www.diveadventures.com.au)) In Sydney and Melbourne.

**Diversion Dive Travel** (☎ 07-4039 0200; [www.diversionoz.com](http://www.diversionoz.com)) Based in Cairns, Queensland.

### Fishing

Most resorts and lodges can arrange fishing trips, and several tour operators specialise in fishing. Zipolo Habu Resort (p564) is a specialist fishing resort. Sailfish, marlin, shark, tuna, kingfish, Spanish mackerel, barracuda and wahoo are common. Always ask permission before casting off from the shore into the sea or a river.

### Hiking

The cooler mid-year months are most suitable for hiking. Most of the resorts and lodges offer walks up many of the nearby volcanoes. Climbing either Rendova Peak (p564) or Kolombangara (p562) involves a two-day hike, but their summits offer magnificent views.

### Snorkelling

Snorkelling in the Solomons is excellent. The warm, clear water of the lagoons and the countless colourful fish and corals make it a real treat. It's a good idea to bring your own gear, although most dive shops have rental equipment. Dive operators typically charge around A\$40 for snorkelling trips.



## Surfing

Surfing is just taking off in the Solomons and new breaks are being discovered all the time. The swell runs from October to April and can reach 2m or more at Pailongge on Ghizo, Lola Island in Vonavona Lagoon, at Poro on Santa Isabel and Tawarogha on Makira. The reef-breaks tend to be a long paddle from the shore, but the conditions can be excellent. Zipolo Habu Resort (p564) on Lola Island in Western Province offers surf charters, and Dive Gizo (p560) employs a couple of guys to help surfers find waves. Surfers should seek permission at the nearest village before entering the water. Bring your own boards.

## BOOKS

Hector Hothouse's *White Headhunter – The Extraordinary True Story of a White Man's Life among Headhunters of the Solomon Islands* tells the story of the Scotsman John Renton who lived in Malaita from 1868 to 1875.

*Lightning Meets the West Wind – The Malaita Massacre*, by Roger Keesing and Peter Corris, is the story of William Bell, the Kwaio Rebellion and the brutal reprisals exacted on the Malaitan people by the British afterwards (see p545).

Books on the Solomons' experience in WWII include Eric Felot's *The Coast Watchers*, Richard F Newcomb's *Savo and Guadalcanal Diary* by Richard Tregaskis. *The Big Death – Solomon Islanders Remember WWII*, by Geoffrey M White and others, is a collection of stories told by islanders.

*The Maasina Rule Movement*, edited by Hugh Larcy, is about Malaita's postwar movement opposed to cooperation with the British authorities.

*Happy Isles in Crisis* by Clive Moore (2005) is the first comprehensive study of the events in Guadalcanal that led to the period of ethnic tension that paralysed the country. Moore discovers many deep historical roots to the problem.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Banking hours in Honiara are from 8.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday (ANZ and Westpac open at 9am). Government offices open from 8am to noon and 1pm to 4pm Monday to Friday. Private businesses close half

an hour later and operate on Saturday until midday.

Most shops in town open from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday and until noon on Saturday – some open longer, including on Sunday.

## CHILDREN

The Solomons is a great place to travel with children. Kids are an ever-present part of village life and foreign kids are quickly absorbed into the local activities. Don't be surprised to see your two-year-old being carried around on the hip of a local seven-year-old girl – child-rearing is a communal responsibility in the Solomons.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

In 1999 and 2000 Honiara was the scene of bloody fighting between the Guadalcanal Islanders and Malaitans (see the boxed text, p550). Despite the riots in April 2006 (see the boxed text, p555), the Solomons is generally a safe country to travel through, and violence or hostility towards expats or tourists is rare.

In 2005–06 independent travel on Guadalcanal was not recommended outside Honiara, although the capital itself was quite safe. Seek advice from the visitor information centre in Honiara (p551) before venturing beyond the airport (11km east) and White River (4km west).

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Solomon Islands Embassies & Consulates

**Australia** High Commission (☎ 02-6282 7030; info@solomon.emb.gov.au; PO Box 256, 1st fl, JAA Bldg, Unit 4/19 Napier Close, Deakin, ACT 2600); Consulate (☎ 02-9361 5866; fax 9361 5066; 5th fl, 376 Victoria St, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010); Consulate (☎ 03-8531 1000; fax 8531 1955; 1 Southbank Blvd, Melbourne, Victoria 3006)  
**EU** (☎ 02-732 7085; 106255.2155@compuserve.com; Ave Edouard 17, 1040 Brussels, Belgium)  
**Japan** (☎ 03-5275 0515; fax 222 5959 5960; 16-15 Kirakawa-cho, Z-Chome, Shiyoda-ku, Tokyo)  
**PNG** (☎ 323 4333; silihcomm@daltron.com.pg; PO Box 94, Unit 2, GB House, Port Moresby)

### Embassies & Consulates in the Solomon Islands

**Australia** (☎ 21561; fax 23691; Mud Alley St, Honiara)  
**EU** (☎ 22765; fax 23318; ecsol@solomon.com.sb; City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

**France** (☎ 22588; fax 23887; Tradco Office, City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

**Germany** (☎ 22588; fax 23887; Tradco Office, City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

**Japan** (☎ 22953; fax 21006; NPF Bldg, Honiara)

**NZ** (☎ 21561; fax 23691; City Centre Bldg, Honiara)

**PNG** (☎ 20561; fax 20562; Anthony Saru Bldg, Honiara)

**UK** (☎ 21705; fax 21549; Telekom House, Honiara)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Independence Day is the Solomon Islands' most important annual festival, with celebrations held all around the country. Annual holidays in the Solomons include New Year's Day, Easter, Whit Monday and Christmas; see p829 for details of regional holidays.

**Queen's Birthday** First Monday in June

**Independence Day** 7 July

**National Thanksgiving Day** 26 December

## INTERNET ACCESS

Solomon Telekom has public email facilities in Honiara, Gizo, Munda and Auki – wherever there is a provincial Telekom office. Honiara has several Internet cafés (see p551).

The **People First project** ([www.peoplefirst.net.sb](http://www.peoplefirst.net.sb)) is an interesting and innovative undertaking designed to connect remote communities in the Solomons through the Internet. In some places where there are no telephone cables, shortwave radio is used as a means of delivering text-only email messages.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Most of the resorts and dive operators have websites or at least an advertising presence on the web.

**Solomon Islands Department of Commerce** ([www.commerce.gov.sb](http://www.commerce.gov.sb)) The country's official website has a number of useful links.

**Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau** ([www.visitsolomon.com.sb](http://www.visitsolomon.com.sb)) The Solomons' official tourism promotion organisation has a new website.

## MAPS

Ordnance Survey maps are available at Ministry of Lands & Housing offices in each provincial centre. The branch in Honiara (☎ 21511) has all of the Solomons' survey maps. Hema produces a map (1:1.2 million) of the Solomons that is widely available.

## MONEY ATMs

There are only two ATMs in the country: at Honiara's ANZ and Westpac bank branches.

## Credit Cards

The main tourist-oriented businesses accept credit cards, but elsewhere it's strictly cash. Westpac and ANZ banks give cash advances on credit cards; NBSI does not.

## Currency

The Solomon Islands dollar (S\$) has taken a hammering against international currencies in recent years; exchange rates are given in the following table.

A supply of coins and small-denomination notes will come in handy in rural areas, at markets, and for bus and boat rides.

Country	Unit	Solomon Islands dollar
Australia	A\$1	S\$5.51
Canada	C\$1	S\$6.53
CFP zone	100 CFP	S\$7.68
Easter Island	Ch\$1000	S\$14.10
euro zone	€1	S\$9.16
Fiji	F\$1	S\$4.22
Japan	¥100	S\$6.41
NZ	NZ\$1	S\$4.62
Samoa	ST\$1	S\$2.52
Tonga	T\$1	S\$3.62
UK	£1	S\$13.29
USA	US\$1	S\$7.29
Vanuatu	100Vt	S\$6.66

## Moneychangers

The National Bank of the Solomon Islands (NBSI), Westpac and ANZ will change money in most major currencies. The NBSI has a network of branches and agencies around the country; only the branches will change travellers cheques.

## Taxes

There's a 10% government tax on hotel and restaurant prices, but more basic places often don't charge it. All prices given in this book are inclusive of tax.

## Tippling & Bargaining

Tippling and bargaining are not traditionally part of Melanesian culture, but it's becoming increasingly acceptable to ask a

**HOW MUCH?**

- **Newspaper:** \$55
- **Bottle of soft drink:** \$55
- **Coffee:** \$510 to \$512
- **Single-tank scuba dive:** \$5400
- **Evening-meal course in a good restaurant:** \$570 to \$5110

**LONELY PLANET INDEX**

- **1L petrol:** \$56.50
- **1L bottled water:** \$510 to \$512
- **Stubbie of Solbrew beer:** \$512 to \$518
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** \$535 to \$550
- **Sausage in a bun:** \$59

carver for a 'second price' (often they'll tell you both prices at the outset). Haggling is considered rude.

**Travellers Cheques**

Stick to the name brands: Visa, Amex and Thomas Cook. Travellers cheques in Australian dollars can be readily exchanged at hotel desks and even some businesses.

**TELEPHONE**

The Solomons' international telephone code is ☎ 677; there are no area codes.

**Solomon Telekom** (☎ 21576) operates the country's telephone system; a teleradio (radio telephone) network connects isolated communities. Public phones are reasonably common in the larger centres and phonecards are widely available – the local Telekom office is the place to go for your telephone requirements.

**Mobile Phones**

Prepaid SIM cards from Solomon Telekom are available for purchase, although there is no mobile signal outside Honiara.

**Phonecards**

The cheapest way to make an international telephone call is from a public telephone with a prepaid phonecard. It's an excellent service, and cardphones are rapidly superseding coin phones right across the country.

**TIME**

Time in the Solomons is officially 11 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Local time is the same as in Vanuatu, one hour ahead of Australian Eastern Standard Time, and one hour behind Fiji and NZ. There's no daylight saving. When it's noon in the Solomons it's 1am in London, 5pm the previous day in Los Angeles, 2pm in Auckland and 11am in Sydney.

**TOURIST INFORMATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS**

The **Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau** (SIVB; ☎ 22442; www.visitsolomons.com.sb; Mendana Ave, Honiara) has little printed material to give you but the staff can contact isolated lodges and villages to make bookings.

**VISAS**

Every visitor must have a valid passport, onward ticket and adequate funds.

In theory, entry visas are not required – visitor permits for up to three months are granted upon arrival. The guidelines are ambiguous for nationals from former or continuing communist countries, the Indian subcontinent, Nauru and Kiribati. Nationals from these places should seek advice from a Solomon Islands embassy before travelling.

Visitor permits can be extended for three months at the **Immigration Department** (☎ 22585) in Honiara.

**WOMEN TRAVELLERS**

It's not usual for local young women to be out at night by themselves. Exercise normal caution in Honiara – after dark, take a taxi and stay in busy areas. Female tourists swimming or sunbathing alone at isolated beaches might attract unwanted attention.

Foreign women travelling solo around remote villages are very rare. In villages male travellers are sometimes accommodated in structures that are *tabu* for women, so it might not be possible for couples to sleep together. There may be other areas that women are not allowed to see, and these should be respected.

Melanesians are very sensitive about the show of female thighs so shorts and skirts should be knee-length and swimwear should incorporate boardshorts rather than bikini bottoms.

**TRANSPORT IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS****GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

The Solomons' only international airport is Henderson Airport (code HIR), 11km east of Honiara.

There are few direct flights to the Solomons – only Brisbane and Port Moresby currently have services to Honiara, and flights from these destinations are expensive. See p837 for details of air passes that include the Solomons.

Qantas no longer flies to Honiara. Solomon Airlines no longer has any aircraft other than its small domestic fleet. Air Nauru was flying Brisbane–Honiara four times a week with connections to Fiji, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, but it had its solitary Boeing 737 confiscated by US authorities after renegeing on financial arrangements.

At the time of writing Air Nauru was looking to renegotiate leasing arrangements on aircraft and fly these sectors again.

Solomon Airlines has offices in Nadi (☎ 722 831), Fiji; and Port Moresby (☎ 325 5724), PNG. It also has sales agents in Suva (☎ 315 889), Fiji; Noumea (☎ 28 66 77), New Caledonia; and Port Vila (☎ 23838), Vanuatu.

**ASIA**

The most direct route to/from Asia is via Port Moresby in PNG (opposite) or Nadi (opposite) in Fiji, though it may be simpler and cheaper and connections may be more frequent going via Brisbane.

**AUSTRALIA**

**Solomon Airlines** (www.solomonairlines.com.au; ☎ in Brisbane 07-3407 7266, in Sydney 02-9244 2189, in Melbourne 03-9920 3872) sells the Brisbane–Honiara sectors (one way/return A\$780/1040 plus A\$190 tax) on Air Vanuatu flights

**DEPARTURE TAX**

An airport tax of \$540 is charged for passengers boarding international flights leaving Honiara.

to Port Vila every Saturday, Tuesday and Thursday, returning the next day.

**FIJI**

**Air Vanuatu** (www.airvanuatu.com) connects Honiara with Nadi, routed via Port Vila, on Monday. The one-way/return fare is A\$890/1110 including tax. The Fiji sales agent is **Air Fiji** (☎ 679-672 3822).

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

**Air Niugini** (www.airniugini.com.pg) flies from Port Moresby to Honiara on Monday and Friday. One-way/return fares are A\$920/1090 including tax. Contact the Port Moresby main sales office on ☎ 675-325 9084.

**VANUATU**

An Air Vanuatu plane operated by **Solomon Airlines** (www.solomonairlines.com.au) flies from Port Vila to Honiara on Thursday. One-way/return fares are A\$650/1270 including tax. To book, contact Air Vanuatu (the Solomon Airlines agent) in Port Vila on ☎ 678-23838.

**Sea****YACHT**

The Solomons is a favourite spot for yachters who take refuge in the lagoons during cyclone season. Along with Honiara, Korovou (Shortland Islands), Gizo, Ringgi, Yandina, Tulagi Island and Graciosa Bay are official ports of entry where you can clear customs and immigration. There's a \$100 fee for sailing in Solomon waters.

'Crew wanted' notices are posted at the **Point Cruz Yacht Club** (☎ 22500) in Honiara. See p842 for more about yachting in the Pacific.

**GETTING AROUND****Air**

**Solomon Airlines** (☎ 20031; www.solomonairlines.com.au; Mendana Ave, Honiara) services the country's 20-odd airstrips with its De Havilland Twin Otters and Britton Norman Islanders. Baggage allowance is set at 20kg per passenger. Be sure to confirm your flight at least 24 hours before your departure. Domestic airfares in this chapter include \$160 in taxes. Note that travelling by boat is less expensive than flying between islands.

**Boat****DINGHIES**

Outboard-powered dinghies are the most common means of transport in the Solomons, supplying goods to stores all over the country. People pay a fare to travel a sector. Charters cost around S\$1000 per day for the boat and a driver, but maybe not fuel (S\$20 per litre in remote areas).

**INTER-ISLAND SHIPS**

Most shipping companies have offices near Honiara's main wharf. Getting around by freighter is a *slow* process.

**Wings Shipping** (Honiara ☎ in Honiara 22811) serves the Western Province and Malaita, **Trans West Shipping** (☎ in Gizo 60240; fax 60421) goes to the Western Province and Choiseul, and the **Isabel Development Corporation** (☎ in Honiara 22126; fax 22009) goes to Santa Isabel.

**PASSENGER BOATS**

The **MV Pelican Express** (☎ 28104; elite@solomon.com.sb) is an excellent service between Honiara, Western Province and Malaita. In Western Province **Go West Tours** (☎ 62180) offers a regular shuttle between Munda and Gizo.

**Bus**

Public minibuses are only found in Honiara. The flat S\$3 fare will take you anywhere on the route, which is written on a placard behind the windscreen of the bus. Elsewhere, people pile into open-backed trucks or tractor-drawn trailers.

**Car & Motorcycle**

The country has around 1300km of generally dreadful roads. International driving permits are accepted, as are most driving licences. Driving is on the left side of the road.

Hire cars are only available in Honiara (see p553).

**Hitching**

If you want a ride through the countryside, flag down a passing vehicle and ask the driver the cost of a lift. In rural areas most vehicles double as public transport.

**Local Transport****TAXI**

Taxis are plentiful in Honiara and there are small fleets in Gizo and Auki. They don't have meters, so agree on the price before you set off. The fare to the airport from Honiara is S\$50.