



TOUR INFORMATION FOR THE SOLOMON ISLANDS with Western Provinces extension

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: This tour visits a number of islands in the Solomon Islands region. On the Main tour we travel to: Guadalcanal, Makira, Malaita, Santa Isabel, and Rennell. On the optional extension we travel to Western Province, where we visit the islands of Gizo, Vella Lavella, Ranongga and Kolombangara.

To enter Solomon Islands, you must also have a passport with more than six months validity. At the time of writing, British nationals visiting the Solomon Islands do not need a visa. However, you should have a printed copy of a return or onward ticket. Also, check with the [Solomon Islands Immigration Department](#) in case the situation has changed. Other nationalities need to check with their local consulate.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously, you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

FLYING VIA AUSTRALIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a valid passport, an onward or return air ticket, and have registered as an **e-Visitor** with the Australian Department of Immigration, to enter Australia. An e-Visitor permit is valid for a year. **IMPORTANT: If your homeward flight is via Australia you require a 'multi-entry' permit.**

The e-Visitor service is free of charge when using the official site of the Australian Department of Immigration at <http://www.immi.gov.au/e Visa/evisitor.htm>. If you don't have internet access, or have any questions regarding the type of visa required, please call the Australian High Commission in London for advice (tel: 020 7379 4334). Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Australian Embassy to obtain entry requirements.

ARRIVAL DATE and INTRODUCTORY MEEETING: The tour begins at 15:00 with your arrival at Honiara International Airport on Guadalcanal, followed by a 15-minute transfer by pre-arranged transport to our accommodation in central Honiara. Please note that if your flight is not scheduled to arrive until after 15:00, you need not be overly concerned, as the first scheduled birding excursion on our itinerary is the following morning.

After checking into the hotel, those who wish to do so can join the leader for a pre-dinner stroll down to the port and an introduction to some of the more common regional bird specialities found along the coast.

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Solomon Islands Dollar (SBD). Should you wish to bring cash it should be in small denomination US Dollars, as this is widely accepted throughout the islands (whereas English pounds are not). It is possible to change currency directly into SBD at the airport. Credit cards are accepted at most shops in Honiara and in Gizo. Any purchases of a personal nature on all other islands will need to be in cash.

As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature such as laundry, extra drinks, souvenirs, etc.

LANGUAGE: There are between sixty and seventy languages spoken in the Solomon Islands archipelago as opposed to the nation state of Solomon Islands, which covers a smaller area. The lingua franca is Pijin, and the official language is English.

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CLIMATE: The days are generally quite warm 25°-32° Celsius (in the 80's F) and summer clothes are suitable year-round. Although we will be on the islands in the dry season, rainfall will still be at around 200-250 mm per month, so please bring appropriate rain clothes. Please also be prepared for the possibility of cool, damp weather in the mountains (especially at night). The sun can feel intense, so please ensure that you bring sunscreen (preferably with a high SPF). Humidity can be high when in certain habitats so bringing light, breathable clothing would also be useful.

ALTITUDE: The highest elevation we visit is just over 500m above sea level.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Although the full tour sees us travel to 9 different islands, we do not do so at a frenetic pace, and will have the luxury of enjoying multiple days birding on the majority of islands. This tour generally has daily starts of around 06.00 (sometimes earlier), but the length of time we spend in the field varies from day-to-day, with some days only in the field from morning to midday before returning to our village for lunch and your choice of an afternoon siesta, snorkelling, or quiet walks on the beach or in the forest. Others will be full days in the field (including transport to our prime birding sites by vehicle or boat). In the case of the latter, meals during daylight hours will be taken in the field with a return to our lodging for dinner.

Although most of the birding will be along well-established trails and most walks are not overly challenging, there are some days which will require a moderate level of fitness with ascents along forested paths needed to access our birding site(s).

On our second day on Santa Isabel we make a 2-hour hike from Buala Town on the coast into the highlands of the island, where we enjoy a 2-night stay at Tirotonga Village – and a much-hoped-for audience in the morning with the Black-faced Pitta and other specialities. There are options available for those not wishing to stay in the basic lodging in Tirotonga Village. See Accommodation section.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A. The Solomon Islands require some nationalities to show proof of measles vaccination. The UK Government website give details about entry and health requirements plus a lot more information about The Solomon Islands: check <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/solomon-islands/entry-requirements>

Mosquitoes can be a nuisance particularly in low lying areas, along the rivers, and in coastal districts. Mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are widespread across The Solomon Islands and you are advised to take a suitable medication (see your GP) and plenty of spray repellent. We advise you wear long sleeves garments and full-length trousers when in the field. Insect repellent will provide adequate protection. Many brands use diethyltoluamide (DEET) which, while providing the best protection, can be corrosive and therefore require care when using. There are many 'natural' and less-harmful repellents available from various camping supply stores. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/malaria/prevention>

Be sure to bring a good supply of any regular medications you may be taking. You may wish to bring a small personal first aid kit containing such basics as aspirin, cold and flu medicine, Visine or similar eyewash, your favourite medicine for upset stomachs and insect bite cream.

Crocodiles inhabit most rivers and lagoons particularly in coastal areas. Coastal mangroves can also provide cover for crocodiles. You are advised not to swim in rivers and be careful along riverbanks.

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Snakes are rarely encountered and are usually non-venomous. However as with snakes the world over, most tend to be very shy and you are unlikely to see them.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION - DURING THE MAIN TOUR:

Island: Guadalcanal: Rock Haven Inn – Honiara

Rooms at Rock Haven Inn are air-conditioned, have a double bed or 2 twin beds, a private bathroom and shower, a fan, TV, and coffee and tea making facilities. Honiara is the hub for inter-island travel through the Solomons, and we will therefore be returning to Rock Haven Inn for three overnight stays over the course of the tour. Because on such occasions we will be travelling the following day by plane or ferry, the Rock Haven Inn lodging is ideal, as it is located less than 15 minutes from the Honiara International Airport and less than 5 minutes from the Port of Honiara. Free Wi-Fi is available in the lounge of the lobby and there is a good restaurant as well as 24-hour security on site.

Island: Makira: Anuta Village

This idyllically-located and traditional Solomon Islands coastal village will be our accommodation over the course of the five days and four nights that we will be birding the island of Makira. Meals eaten in the village will be prepared for us and enjoyed alongside local villagers in the centre of the village.

Those clients travelling as a couple (or two birding friends who have requested shared accommodation) will sleep in their **very own traditional Solomon Islands home**. These stilt houses have a bedroom, living area and kitchen. Each house has a private shower in the cabin outside (please note no hot water is available in these remote locations) and a private toilet in a separate cabin outside the house.

Depending on the number of single-occupancy clients, and subsequent availability of lodging, those clients will either be staying in their own home with a bedroom, living area and kitchen or (if there are a significant number of single-occupancy clients on the trip) in large lodges with up to three separate self-contained rooms (each with locked door) and with a bed in each.

If in your own house, you will have a private shower in the cabin outside (hot water not available) and a private toilet in a separate cabin outside the house. If in the lodge, you and up to two other single-occupancy clients will have access to a shower in the cabin outside and a toilet in a separate cabin (also outside the lodge).

Please note this village is in a very remote location on the coast and there is no electricity apart from solar-powered lights. There is no Wi-Fi, although mobile phone service is available through certain network providers. The tour leader will have a mobile Internet device and mobile phone with signal for use in emergency situations.

Island: Malaita: Ferafolia Village

This is one of the most remote destinations where we stay on the entire trip – deep in the forested highlands of Malaita (length of stay: four days and three nights).

Lodging will be in a **private, traditional Solomon Islands home**. These stilt houses have a bedroom, kitchen and living quarters. Meals will be prepared for us and enjoyed with local villagers in the centre of the village. Each house has its own bathroom and shower (please note that hot water is not available). The bathroom and shower are each located in separate buildings next to the house.

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Depending on the number of single-occupancy clients, and subsequent availability of lodging, those clients will either be staying in their own home with a bedroom, living area and kitchen or (if there are a significant number of single-occupancy clients on the trip) in large lodges with up to three separate self-contained rooms (each with locked door) and with a bed in each.

If in your own house, you will have a private shower in the cabin outside (hot water not available) and a private toilet in a separate cabin outside the house. If in the lodge, you and up to two other single-occupancy clients will have access to a shower in the cabin outside and a toilet in a separate cabin (also outside the lodge).

Please note this village is in a very remote location in the highlands of Malaita and there is no electricity apart from solar-powered lights. There is no Wi-Fi, although mobile phone service is available through certain network providers. The tour leader will have a mobile Internet device and mobile phone with signal for use in emergency situations.

Island: Santa Isabel: Maringe Lodge and Maringe Homestay in Buala Town

On the first and last night on Santa Isabel, the entire group will be staying the night at Maringe Lodge and Maringe Homestay in Buala Town on the coast of the island. The comfortable rooms at Maringe include a private bathroom and shower, a fan, TV, kitchenette with stove, refrigerator and coffee and tea making facilities.

Tirotonga Village

For two nights on Santa Isabel, clients have the option of either switching accommodation to Tirotonga Village in the highlands of the island, or should they prefer, remaining at Maringe Lodge and Maringe Homestay in Buala Town.

By staying two nights at Tirotonga Village, clients will be able to wake early and ensure they are physically in position at first light to start scanning for targets, thereby giving themselves the **absolute best chance** of seeing the easternmost dwelling pitta on the planet, along with a number of other specialities such as Solomons Frogmouth, Fearful Owl and Solomons Bobook.

The accommodation in Tirotonga is basic. Those clients sharing a room with a partner or travel companion will be staying in their own house, whereas those who have selected single-occupancy will be in a large lodge with self-contained rooms (each with locked door) and with a bed in each. All clients staying at Tirotonga Village (whether in double or single-room accommodation) will have access to shared showers (please note that hot water is not available) and shared toilets located in the outdoor cabins.

Please note the village of Tirotonga is in a very remote location in the highlands of Santa Isabel and there is no electricity apart from solar-powered lights. There is no Wi-Fi, although mobile phone service is available through certain network providers. The tour leader will have a mobile Internet device and mobile phone with signal for use in emergency situations.

If you would prefer not to stay in Tirotonga Village and would instead rather spend each night at the more comfortable accommodation in Buala Town (in your private room with private bathroom and shower), then this is absolutely fine. However, it is important to note that, to have a chance of seeing several of the primary target species on Santa Isabel, you will need to bird the local areas surrounding the village of Tirotonga. Therefore if you choose to sleep at Maringe Lodge in Buala Town, your only way of seeing these primary targets will be to make the 2-hour hike on each of these mornings from Buala to the birding sites in the highlands of Tirotonga. Should we have any clients wishing to do this, we have made arrangements for a local guide to be available to lead from their accommodation in Buala to Tirotonga and back on both of these days.

A local guide will also be available to take any clients, who believe they are unable to make the 2-hour hike to Tirotonga, on birding excursions in the lowlands surrounding Buala Town during the group's days in Tirotonga.

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**** Please let us know of your accommodation preference while on the island of Santa Isabel.**

** Please note there is no difference in cost for clients wishing to go with either option.

Island of Rennell: Moreno Guest House

Located just a few minutes' walk from the airstrip at Tingoa, the sizeable Moreno Guesthouse provides a convenient location. Rooms at Moreno include a private bathroom and shower, a fan, TV, and coffee and tea making facilities.

ACCOMMODATION - DURING THE WESTERN PROVINCE EXTENSION

Island of Gizo: Rekona Lodge

Surrounded by fruit trees and coconut palms, local family-owned Rekona Lodge is our base while in Western Province. Rooms at Rekona include 2 twin-bedded (no double-bedded) rooms, a private bathroom and shower, a fan, TV, dining area, microwave, kitchen, and coffee and tea making facilities.

Valla Lavella and Ranongga:

On Day 3 of the extension we'll travel by speedboat from the hub of Gizo to bird the nearby islands of Vella Lavella and Ranongga, before returning later that day to Rekona Lodge on Gizo.

Kolombangara

On Day 4 in the Western Province, we again set off in the morning, by boat, from our travel hub of Gizo by boat, but this time to bird mighty Kolombangara. Tonight you have two options

You can either:

- a) Spend the night of Day 4 on Kolombangara in the very basic lodging of Imbu Rano Lodge - high on the slopes of a dormant / semi-extinct volcano. This option allows you to maximise birding time by being able to wake the following morning already in this remote location deep in the forest and take in the dawn chorus emanating from the surrounding slopes of the volcano. However Imbu Rano is very basic accommodation, and all clients who choose this option must be comfortable with sleeping the night in an open-style floor plan (no doors to separate rooms) with bunk-style beds and only one shower and toilet on site.

Or

- b) Return from Kolombangara to Gizo by boat with a local guide in the late afternoon (an hour and a half by speedboat) to spend the night in the more comfortable lodging of Rekona Lodge in the comfort and privacy of your own room and where you will have access to your own private shower and bathroom. Those choosing this option will then take the boat back from Gizo to Kolombangara the following morning where they will be escorted by a local guide to the birding site.

**** Please let the us know of your preference for Day 4 of the optional extension**

** Please note there is no difference in cost for clients wishing to go with either option.

LAUNDRY: Laundry facilities are available close to our accommodation in Honiara, as well as on Gizo. There is running water at all our village stays should you wish to wash any garments and leave to dry during our time there.

ELECTRICITY: While staying in the more populous destinations of Honiara and Gizo, as well as on Santa Isabel in Buala Town and on Rennell at Moreno Guest House, there will be electricity. Typically on the Solomon Islands the power plugs and sockets are of type G and I. The standard voltage is 220 V and the standard frequency is 50 Hz. An international travel plug is useful in these more developed locations where we stay, and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <https://www.power-plugs-sockets.com/>

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Please note that on some islands our accommodation in local villages will be in extremely remote locations. There will be no electricity at these sites apart from some solar-powered lights. It is recommended that you bring a head torch or a traditional hand held torch with you for use during your village stays.

FOOD: Food is unique and flavoursome with a variety of delicious local dishes. On some mornings we will have a traditional breakfast in local villages and on other mornings we'll have a picnic breakfast out in the field. Lunches will either be at popular local establishments or take the form of packed picnic lunches. Evening meals at restaurants, or in our Lodges and Inns, offer tasty fusion dishes prepared by experienced chefs and mostly include fish / chicken / vegetarian options. While staying in the local villages, we will be treated to traditional authentic meals prepared by and enjoyed alongside the local villagers. Here the majority of our meals will include fish, caught fresh from the ocean by village fishermen, as well as chicken and beef. Most meals will be served with local ground provisions and vegetables grown by the villagers on their personal vegetable patches.

Our tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee that all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all the special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink, juice or beer are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room are the responsibility of the individual.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: While on Guadalcanal, at Rock Haven Inn, free Wi-Fi is available in the lobby. At Rekona Lodge on Gizo, and Maringe Lodge and Homestay on Santa Isabel, there is also free Wi-Fi in the lobby. You should be able to get a mobile phone signal in populated areas on most of the islands (roaming charges may apply).

CLOTHING: Lightweight, dull-coloured field clothing is recommended. The following items are basic:

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|---|------------------------------------|
| Lightweight cotton trousers (zip-off legs are useful) | Long-sleeved shirts |
| Short-sleeved shirts | Shorts(optional) |
| Light sweater or jacket | Sun hat |
| Light-weight gortex walking boots with ankle support | Sandals |
| Water-proof jacket and trousers (useful on boat) | Long socks (to tuck into trousers) |

We will be on our feet for much of the day and it is most important that you have suitable protection and support for your feet and ankles. The protection, grip and day-long comfort such boots afford is far superior to the seemingly comfortable trainer-type shoes. Note that there is a good chance that some tracks may be very wet and/or muddy.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

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| Notebook and pencil | Alarm clock |
| Small rucksack or shoulder bag | Small canteen or water bottle |
| Light-weight folding picnic stool | Sunglasses and sunscreen |
| Luggage locks | Insect repellent |
| Head torch (and extra batteries) | Earplugs (if a light sleeper) |
| Motion-sickness tablets for boat trips | Shampoo |
| Hand liquid disinfectant | Simple First-Aid supplies |

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Folding umbrella

Personal medication

You might like to consider bringing a lightweight sheet or silk sleeping bag and a lightweight 'stand-alone' mosquito net. These are purely precautionary as nets are provided. However sometimes they may be a little worn and a hole in a mosquito net makes it less than useless.

The sun can be very fierce even when the day is overcast so a high factor sunscreen is recommended. A high factor lip balm is also a good idea especially when going out on the water. Sunglasses are also recommended.

Optional: Telescope and tripod, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear.

Note: We'll spend some time, on about half of the days, visiting coastlines, large wetlands and saltflats where having your own telescopes can be useful. However birds tend to remain in view for some time at these locations, so generally the leader's telescope will provide sufficient views for everyone.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leaders will provide the following:

Telescope and tripod
Reference books
Spotlight

Basic first-aid kit
Tape recording/playback equipment
Laser pointer

The leader's telescope is not to be used for personal digiscoping. Should you choose to bring your own telescope you must be prepared to carry and maintain it for the duration of the tour.

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself.** Please bring two smaller, lighter bags rather than one very heavy one (if international airline luggage restrictions allow). As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

INTER-ISLAND TRAVEL: There are no weight restrictions for luggage when traveling by boat between islands, however there are weight restrictions on flights between islands. The weight restrictions on luggage are listed below. Charges for over-weight luggage are the responsibility of the participant.

Carry-on luggage: One piece per passenger with a maximum weight of 7kg/15lbs. This must fit under the seat in front of you and be a maximum of the following dimensions: 48cm(w), 34cm(h), 23cm(d)

Checked luggage: One checked bag per passenger of maximum of 16kg (35lbs). Overweight charges range from USD\$2-5 per kilo. No single piece of baggage will be allowed on the plane if it exceeds 32kg in weight.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and easy to obtain, but birds are more difficult to photograph. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

There will be occasions when photography of birds and scenery is possible and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However, if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

SAFETY ISSUES: The Solomon Islands are very low-key and the people friendly. By using reliable local people as guides we hope to avoid any problems. Do be careful with valuables, keep money well out of sight, and keep in sight of the group at all times. The key to safety is using local people. Listen to what they say, and not to be ostentatious with your wealth.

TRANSPORT:

On Land: We will be travelling by minibuses or 4WD equipped people-carriers. The leader will arrange a seating rotation and participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

By Water: We will use ferries, speedboats and dingies at various times. Travel between some of the smaller islands will be by speedboat and dinghy. To limit sea spray from landing on your clothes, please wear a waterproof raincoat. Please also ensure that any optical equipment, which not on your person, is packed in waterproof bags.

By Air: We use scheduled flights between the islands.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists, etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group.

INSURANCE: There are a number of medical clinics within the country usually attached to Missions. They vary in the standard of care available. Health insurance, which includes repatriation provision, is **strongly** recommended for overseas visitors. Should you get sick or injured in a remote area the cost of repatriation can be astronomical.

Theft is a world-wide concern. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please be sure that you have appropriate coverage. Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact them for a quote and they will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Dutson, Guy. 2012. *Birds of Melanesia: Bismarks, Solomons, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia* (Helm Field Guides). **Recommended.**

Bennett, Judith A. 1987. *Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago, 1800-1978* (Pacific Islands Monograph Series)

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc, and your international air tickets for the tour will be sent to you about three weeks before departure. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.