



SOLOMON ISLANDS TO HOST 2nd ANNUAL SOLOMONS DIVE FESTIVAL OCTOBER 2-7, 2017 IN WESTERN PROVINCE

In celebration of the magnificent diving experiences the Solomon Islands has to offer the international dive community, the 2nd Annual Solomon Dive Fest 2017 will take place in the country's Western Province from October 2-7 2017.

This year will mark the 75th anniversary of the battle for Guadalcanal and the event will hold even greater significance for the people of the 'Hapi Isles' who take immense pride in the knowledge their home is the place where freedom for the Pacific was hard fought for and ultimately won.

Hosted locally by Dive Gizo, SIDE Dive Munda and SIDE *MV Taka*, dive excursions, cultural activities, photographic competitions, and workshops have all been combined into one very special event with focus given to two of the Solomon Islands' best dive locales - Munda and Gizo.

The festival also features the opportunity to experience a liveboard dive boat aboard SIDE's renowned *MV Taka*.

Getting involved in this year's event has never been easier thanks to our dive partners:

- Solomon Islands Dive Expeditions:
<http://www.solomonsdiving.com/solomons-dive-fest-2017/>
- Dive specialist tour operator Dive Adventures which has released an all-inclusive, value-added six- night package priced from NZD3335.00 per person twin share. For more information please contact Dive Adventures, email sydney@diveadventures.com.au, visit www.diveadventures.com.au or call 1300 657 420.
- Allways Dive Expeditions (Call 1800 338 239)
Email: allways@allwaysdive.com.au

- In addition, divers can also enter DivePlanit.com's dive competition for a chance to win a spot for FREE & automatically win a \$300 Dive Fest Travel Voucher
<http://www.diveplanit.com/deals/solomon-islands-dive-festival-2017-competition/>

The package includes:

FLIGHTS

Return flights flying Solomon Airlines ex-Brisbane to Gizo and Munda via Honiara plus all transfers

In GIZO

2 nights twin accommodation at Rekona Lodge or Gizo Hotel, breakfast and dinner

Attendance at the festival's opening ceremony, dinner at PT109 restaurant with kastom sing sing and dance

3 tank dive day with Dive Gizo with tanks, weights, dive guide and BBQ lunch

DAN seminar

SIDE LIVEBOARD DIVE BOAT - MV TAKA

1 night twin Standard cabin (shared bathrooms) on board with all meals and sailing from Gizo to Munda

Up to 4 dives with tanks, weights, dive guide and kastom fees

Photography workshop

(Upgrades to a twin deluxe cabin with private en suite available for an extra \$50 per person)

MUNDA

2 nights twin accommodation at Agnes Gateway Lodge

2 tank dive day with SIDE Dive Munda with tanks, weights and dive guide

Kastom lunch at Hopei Island and WWII Museum visit

Marine biology focused seminar

BBQ dinner with kastom dance performance

1 tank dive day with tank, weights, dive guide plus Skull Island visit

Cocktails and winner of Photo Competition announcement

Closing ceremony and dinner

1 extra night twin accommodation at Agnes Gateway Lodge, Munda (no meals included)

ABOUT DIVING IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS:

The Solomon Islands – the ultimate dive experience

Suspended like a string of deep green pearls from Papua New Guinea to Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands is the epitome of a hidden South Pacific

paradise, a true living culture, rich with art, dance and the iconic sound of the panpipe music synonymous with the 'Hapi Isles' as they are so aptly named.

This scattered archipelago of 992-odd richly forested mountainous islands and low-lying coral atolls has been attracting international tourism since 1568 when Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana first sailed into this tucked away corner of the South Pacific.

Mendana's legacy can still be found in the Solomon Islands today with many of the islands still bearing the Spanish names he gave them - Santa Isabel, San Cristóbal and perhaps the best known of all, Guadalcanal, the name synonymous with the infamous and very bloody World War II campaign in 1942 and the catalyst for the Allies ultimate victory over the Japanese Imperial Forces.

Since then and for the most part the Solomon Islands and their quiet, reserved people – a mix of Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian cultures – have been pretty much alone.

But in recent years an invasion of a different kind has slowly and surely been taking place – this time by steadily increasing numbers of international dive enthusiasts who are discovering for themselves just what makes these 'Hapi Isles' such a mecca for lovers of the underwater world.

For these islands their unspoilt coral reefs, literally teem with huge numbers and varieties of marine life.

Add to this the literally hundreds of shipwrecks and downed aircraft that litter the seabed, so much so that in one area just a short journey from the country's bustling capital of Honiara has been renamed 'Iron Bottom Sound'.

In reality and the one thing that makes the Solomon Islands' dive potential so unique is this amazing mix of WWII wrecks, technicolour coral pastures, steep walls, shallow reefs, tunnels, drop-offs, and a veritable pot pourri of demersal, reef and pelagic fish which literally swarm these bath warm waters. Definitely 'no wetsuit required'.

Most of the known accessible diving in the Solomon Islands is on Guadalcanal and the Western Province – the region to the northwest of the archipelago.

But each and every inch of this South Pacific paradise offers something for someone.

So where to go? While the destination abounds with amazing dive sites – some of which still lie waiting to be discovered – the following are some of the more popular, certainly more accessible dive sites

Honiara

Honiara is the perfect location from which to start a Solomon Islands dive experience. Dives on the famed Bonegi 1 and Bomnegi 2 are easily arranged and a short boat ride away lies Tulagi, the venue for the well-known dive site ‘Twin Tunnels’ and the many wrecks lying below Ghuvatu Harbour.

Of course, if you are there for some serious wreck diving, Iron Bottom Sound is literally littered with wrecks, including a recently discovered submarine.

Munda

Located north west of Honiara, from a diver’s perspective and home to one of the best dive outfits in the Solomon Islands – Solomon Island Dive Expedition’s (SIDE) Dive Munda - Munda on the Vona Vona Lagoon has it all. Swim-through caves, wrecks of planes and boats all within a short boat ride and reefs right in the min accommodation resource, the Agnes Gateway Hotel where the coral is still in pristine condition. Munda is also the place where water flow and currents create the perfect conditions required for barracuda and Jacks feeding frenzies. Barry’s Breakfast is just one such dive where you can hang in mid-water surrounded by swarming pelagics while Titan triggers patrolling the reefs below.

Gizo

Offering a huge variety of spectacular dive sites, divers visiting Gizo – and the home of the very reputable Dive Gizo - can choose from Grand Central Station which boasts the highest fish count in the world with more than 275 species recorded in its teeming waters. Wreck enthusiasts too are more than catered for with a 440-foot Japanese freighter, the *Toa Maru* and an almost fully-intact US Hellcat fighter aircraft lying in very shallow waters a short boat ride away from Gizo Town.

The Marovo Lagoon

Recommended for a World Heritage listing, the Marovo Lagoon is renowned as one of the best locations for diving in the Solomon Islands. Mantas and hammerheads abound along with barracuda, eagle rays and swarms of jacks. The flow of water through this area drives nutrients into the water which in turn brings in the whole food chain to feast at certain states of the tide.

The Russell Islands

A group of islands lying 40 kilometres off the northern tip of Guadalcanal, and a regular venue for divers enjoying an amazing experience aboard SIDE's luxury liveaboard vessel, *MV Taka*, the Russell Islands offer special geological features that make for iconic dives. These include the Mirror Pond Cave and Bat Cave where divers surface in an ocean water pool surrounded by jungle. There is also the Leru Cut, a 20-metre deep slot, some three-divers wide which penetrates from the rocky coastline deep into the jungle.

At Karumolun Point divers have the opportunity to see schooling Jacks and barracuda, the occasional squadron of devil rays, staghorn meadows, turtles and countless numbers of clownfish.

For more information about the Solomons Dive Fest 2017, visit, www.visitsolomons.com.sb, e-mail info@sivb.com.sb

The Dive package in US dollars is priced from \$1,355 per person:

<http://www.solomonsdiving.com/solomons-dive-fest-2017/>

W: www.visitsolomons.com.sb

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