



BILIKIKI
SOLOMON ISLANDS



Welcome Aboard Notes

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Welcome Aboard

Bilikiki Cruises, Solomon Islands

We are very pleased you will be joining Bilikiki Cruises for your diving trip to the Solomon Islands. We hope your visit here will be the source of some great diving, new friendships and exciting memories.

The Solomon Islands are not a well known destination so to help you prepare for your trip we have put together some notes on the country, its people and the diving. We hope they are helpful but if you have any other questions please just email us at bilikiki@bilikiki.com.

Malaria and Health

There is not an undue health risk in Solomon Islands but some precautions do need to be taken. Medical care is not always immediately available and a minor health problem, if untreated, can ruin an otherwise perfect vacation.

While malaria is not as big a problem as it once was, anti-malarial medication is recommended and travellers should ensure other shots and vaccinations are up-to-date. Travellers to the Solomon Islands should consult their doctor or local health unit about immunisations, vaccinations and oral preventatives for hepatitis A, malaria, polio, tetanus and typhoid.

There are numerous malarial prophylactics. At the moment doxycycline is popular and effective against malaria. It is also an antibiotic and therefore offers some protection from coral cuts and other scrapes. Malarone is also being widely used and has very few side effects. Be sure to check with your doctor for their recommendations. The only one we ask you to avoid is Mefloquine (brand name Lariam). It's side effects can mimic decompression sickness which obviously can make things difficult on board.

Water and food aboard the ship is not a problem. In any of the larger hotels, resorts or restaurants it is normally OK too but is best to check. Elsewhere drinking water should be boiled and all food well cooked.

Communications

MV Bilikiki is well maintained and carries all necessary navigation and communication equipment. The ship maintains regular contact with our office in Honiara and has limited message capabilities for emergency or urgent communications.

In case of emergency have your family or friends contact our office.

Phone: (US Free call) 1800 663 5363 Email: bilikiki@bilikiki.com

We will get a message to the boat and if you wish to reply from onboard it is possible to make an outgoing call via satellite phone. The satellite phone is available for guest use and is charged by the minute.

The Solomon Islands is a remote area but cell phone usage is increasing and in a **few** areas during the trip, coverage is now provided by Solomon Telekom and Bemobile. Check with your provider (if they are unsure it probably won't work) or you could purchase a local sim card on arrival which usually provides (very slow and often unreliable) internet access on mobile devices on a few days of the trip and in Honiara. Solomon Telekom sims have the most coverage. Otherwise internet access is not available onboard.

Passports and Visas

Passports are required for entry to the Solomon Islands and a free visitor's permit will be issued on arrival for nationals of the United States, most Commonwealth and most European nations. A return or onward ticket is required and passports must be valid for 6 months after your departure from the Solomon Islands, so check your expiration date and renew your passport if necessary. We can help arrange visas for those travelling on passports from countries for which visas are required. The [UN site](#) is a good place to check if you think you may need a visa but if in doubt just contact us.

Electricity

Power throughout the ship is 240V, using Australian style 3-prong outlets. There are also plenty of American style 110V outlets for charging cameras, strobes, dive lights, etc. These 110V outlets are located in our charging/camera room. All outlets in the cabins are the Australian type.

Currency

The currency used in the Solomon Islands is the Solomon Island dollar (SBD) and this is what is required for shopping around town and for purchasing carvings and other handicrafts from villages during your trip. Currency from most other countries can be exchanged at the airport, in many hotels and at any of the banks in town. ATMs are increasingly common. There is also a convenient **cash only** money exchange onboard.

Prices onboard are in United States Dollars (USD). Payment for any onboard extras such as Nitrox, bar drinks, boutique items, rental equipment and gratuities are paid to the managers at the end of the trip. For these items Visa, MasterCard and currencies from any country on world exchanges are accepted. Credit card transactions will all be converted to Solomon dollars for processing at the exchange rate on the day, clients are fully responsible for any foreign transaction fees and exchange rate differences their card provider may charge. Bilikiki Cruises does not charge any fees for using credit cards. Traveller's Cheques are no longer accepted due to increased bank security requirements.

Please note, although Bilikiki Cruises accepts MasterCard, it is not widely accepted in other places in the Solomon Islands.

Gratuities

While tipping is not common in the South Pacific, it is an accepted practice among live-aboard operations and others offering service to North American and European clientele. If you believe the service you have received warrants it a gratuity, to be shared among all the crew, is greatly appreciated and should be given to one of the managers at the end of the trip.

Nitrox

Nitrox is available at a cost of USD\$20.00 per diving day. Guests wishing to use Nitrox must be certified in its use. There is no need to pre-book Nitrox, it can just be organised onboard.

Dive Equipment Rental

There is a full range of dive equipment available to rent onboard, either by the day or for the whole trip. It is best to book gear rental before your trip. Current [Rental Equipment Rates](#) are available on our web page.

Diving

The diving facilities onboard are second to none. A large dive deck offers individual storage for gear, racks and hangers for suits, freshwater showers, separate rinse tanks for photo gear and easy access to the skiffs (they are called tinnies in the Solomons). Our crew are trained to expertly handle your tanks and other gear. The only time you have to touch your tank is when you're diving and it's on your back!

Diving is done mothership fashion with divers shuttled to the dive site in the specially designed aluminium tinnies. Once in the water, the divers are tracked by their bubbles and can be picked up by the tinny crew and shuttled back to the ship almost the minute they reach the surface. This eliminates long swims, current fighting and sitting in the hot sun while waiting for other divers to surface.

A briefing will precede each dive and the managers will outline the type of dive, what you can expect to see and recommendations regarding current, depth, and activities. Divers set their own profile with their buddy but anyone is welcome to discuss their plans with the managers for assistance and advice.

The dive schedule is established by the managers but this is flexible to accommodate the desires of all the passengers. An evening briefing usually outlines the plans for the next day's diving and passengers comments and input are welcomed. The ship does not follow a specific itinerary during the course of a cruise; weather, diving conditions and the preferences of the passengers will all affect the dive sites chosen and the length of stay in any given spot.

In general, on a cruise of 10 days or longer the ship will visit the Florida Islands, Russell Islands, Marovo Lagoon and Mborukua Island (more commonly known as Mary Island). Seven day trips generally operate in the Floridas, Russells and Mary Island.

Most diving need not be deep as the reefs start close to the surface. Often the reefs drop off gradually allowing you to explore extensively at relatively shallow depths.

Just a word of caution, the Solomon Islands is in a remote part of the world. There is a chamber in Honiara run by volunteers but it is not always available. The next nearest recompression chamber is about 1,500 miles (2,400 km) away in Townsville, Australia. In a diving emergency, a helicopter evacuation will probably be necessary to Honiara with a private medical flight to Townsville. The cost will be at least USD \$30,000. It is mandatory that divers aboard Bilikiki Cruises Ltd. vessels carry medical evacuation insurance. We recommend you contact Divers Alert Network (DAN) for information on evacuation and travel insurance. An internet search for Divers Alert Network will bring up their websites for various parts of the world. Please remember you will be doing a lot of diving, probably four or five dives per day and that adds up to a lot of nitrogen. Pace yourself and consider sitting out a dive every now and then.

Both DIN and yoke tanks are available onboard.

Water Temperature and Visibility

Water temperatures are in the 28°C to 30°C (82°F to 86°F) range year round but with multiple dives per day you may find that you need some thermal protection. Most divers in the Solomons are comfortable in a lycra or 3mm wetsuit but if you feel the cold you may wish to consider extra.

Visibility generally ranges from 20 to 40m/75 to 125 feet with occasional sites having better or worse visibility.

Photography

Bring both a macro and wide-angle lens for your cameras if you are into underwater photography, the Solomons are a photographers paradise so equip yourself accordingly. During the trip the managers can give advice on which lens is suitable for which dive.

There are large camera tables for assembling and checking equipment and a ultra high definition TV with USB, HDMI & VGA inputs. There is a separate wash tank for cameras on the dive deck.

Clothing and Dress

T-shirts, shorts and bathing suits are suitable for onboard, with a light windbreaker or sweatshirt for the odd cool or breezy morning or evening. Footwear is seldom required on board although slip-ons or flip-flops are popular.

On island excursions, T-shirts and shorts are generally acceptable but ladies should be sensitive to local customs and not wear bathing suits, short (above the knee) shorts or other brief clothing ashore. Ships personnel will be happy to advise you on comfortable and appropriate dress. Flip-flops, crocs or other light rubber-soled shoes are suitable for shore excursions.

There is never a need for anything formal and a different outfit each day is not required. While some guest laundry is normally possible there are limited laundry facilities onboard and these are busy full time making sure that you have a supply of fresh towels and linen.

Climate

The Solomon Islands are located just below the equator and enjoy a year round tropical climate. Rainfall averages 250mm (10 inches) per month year round. January and February is generally wetter. Rainfall is usually

light and several days apart. Humidity is generally high, particularly inland, but is significantly lower on the coast and aboard ship or on the smaller islands.

This close to the equator the sun is very intense, so expect to use plenty of sun block. Day time temperatures average in the 28°C to 33°C (high 80's to low 90's F) year round.

Shipboard Life

MV Bilikiki offers superb live-aboard diving, at 125 feet long and 24 feet wide she is large, stable and offers great comfort at sea. Passengers are accommodated in 10 air-conditioned cabins all with their own en-suite facilities. There is a large sun deck as well as open covered decks. The lounge areas are comfortably furnished and feature large tables, a bar, TV and an extensive library of reference material and recreational reading. Bilikiki carries a crew of 12 plus two managers who are responsible for diving and ships operations. The crew are well-trained, friendly but shy, attentive and professional.

Meals are always important when you are traveling and diving so the galley staff produce quality, tasty meals and snacks. Three hearty meals are served buffet style daily and between meals snacks are always available.

There is meat, chicken or fish with every meal and the menu also includes lots of fresh fruit and vegetables (delivered to the boat daily). There are desserts every day for those with a sweet tooth.

Our chefs can assist with dietary requirements, but we request notification ahead of time so that we can be sure to stock any special items.

The ship has a bar with basic service including spirits, beer and wine. Soft drinks are also available. There is a charge for bar and soft drinks. You are welcome to bring a bottle of duty free liquor if you would like.

The Villages

You will be traveling among the islands during your stay with us and you will have many opportunities to meet the Solomon Island people. Solomon Islanders are a proud and friendly group who have been making passengers aboard the Bilikiki welcome since our first trips in 1988. You will be visiting at least one village to see traditional life, singing and dancing. If your trip includes the Marovo Lagoon area, other villages to check out and buy the hand made carvings and other art will be visited.

We regularly purchase fruits and vegetables from the villagers in their canoes that come to the boat, the local kids are naturals in the water and can be a lot of fun to watch.

Solomon Island life remains very traditional, with a smattering of western influence. Village houses are still built of palm leaf intricately woven to provide shelter, although some corrugated iron is used for building these days. Villages are usually clean and neat with clearly defined paths among the buildings. Please remember that these are private homes and visitors should never enter or look into individual houses without permission.

The Solomon Islanders grow crops in their market gardens near the villages and also raise chickens and pigs for food. Fish is also an essential part of their diet, and often when our ship is anchored off a village for the night, the village men and boys will come out to catch the fish that are attracted by the ship's lights.

Carvings and Artwork

The carvings in the Solomon Islands are exceptional and Marovo Lagoon is home of most of the carving villages. The artists follow traditional styles and produce work using ebony, kerosene wood and stone. The wood carvings are often inlaid with shell. Prices will range greatly depending on the size, material and quality of the piece as well as your skill at negotiations. Pricing is always in Solomon Island dollars and money can be exchanged onboard with our **cash only** currency exchange.

Some bartering is expected but it is a gentle, un-pushy affair and negotiations are carried out very cordially. Please respect the pride of the artists and avoid "aggressive" haggling or other activities that diminish the value of their work. Carvers are often keen to exchange carvings for things like T-shirts, batteries and dive masks but they do know the worth of things.

Traveler's Gifts

Travellers to the Solomons often ask what they might bring as gifts for the locals. Keeping in mind weight limitations for your flight in, you can consider items like pencils, pens, notebooks, erasers, rulers and other school-type things. We suggest you avoid candy or other sweets instead consider inexpensive toothbrushes, combs, hair clips, elastics and hair bands. Old T-shirts, shorts or lengths of cloth that can be used to make skirts are popular. Used or inexpensive reading glasses are also good.

Many Solomon Islanders count on fishing for their daily food therefore fishing lures (plugs, etc.) and fishing line are valuable to them. Masks, fins and snorkels are also well received. If you can manage the weight, elementary-level books and maps for the village schools will be very much appreciated.

Items you use that can be left behind at the end of the cruise like flashlight batteries, pens and pencils, baseball caps or T-shirts are also welcome.

And Finally....

We hope you have a fantastic time on your trip to Solomon Islands, you are about to be treated to some outstanding diving and world class hospitality. We look forward to having you onboard!

On your return we'd be pleased to hear your comments about the Solomon Islands and Bilikiki Cruises. Please contact Sam Leeson or Kellie Oldfield by email or phone at:

Email: bilikiki@bilikiki.com Phone: 1 800 663 5363 SKYPE: bilikikicruises
Postal Address: Bilikiki Cruises, PO Box 457, Nelson Bay, NSW 2315, Australia.

We are also on [Facebook](#) so like us, check out our updates and feel free to post some pictures from your trip.



Photos by: Michael Ziegler (Immersed Imagine), Tina Gauer & Greg Lecoeur.

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