

The Solomon Islands – A Wildlife Cruise in the South Pacific!

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Exclusive Charter

Outline itinerary

Pre-tour extension

19 Nov	Depart London.
20 Nov	In flight.
21 Nov	Arrive Brisbane & transfer O'Reilly's.
22/23 Nov	O'Reilly's, Lamington National Park.
24 Nov	Fly Honiara & overnight.

Main tour

22 Nov	Depart London.
23 Nov	In flight.
24 Nov	Arrive Honiara & overnight.
25 Nov/4 Dec	Wildlife cruise on board MV Bilikiki.
5 Dec	Disembark MV Bilikiki, depart Honiara.
6 Dec	Arrive London.

Dates

Sat 22nd November – Sat 6th December 2025
Pre-tour extension from Wed 19th November 2025

Price

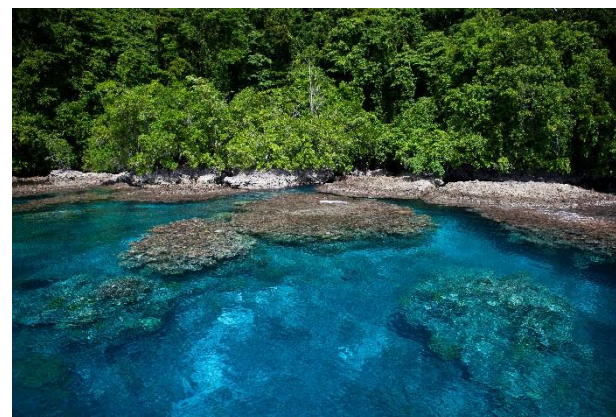
£11,995 (London/London); £10,395 (Honiara/Honiara)
Pre-tour extension: cost TBC

Grading

A (easy) – please see tour grading section

Focus

Cetaceans, marine life, birds, other natural history & local culture



From top: Spotted Dolphins (Chas Anderson), MV Bilikiki, Island in the Coral Triangle.



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Introduction

A nation comprised of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands in the South Pacific, the Solomon Islands lie to the east of Papua New Guinea and north-east of Queensland, Australia. This is a seldom explored paradise, where high levels of biodiversity, a unique culture and a fascinating history all blend tantalizingly together. The best way to explore this wildlife rich island nation is by boat, and so for this pioneering cruise Naturetrek has exclusively chartered live-aboard vessel MV Bilikiki. The nine guest cabins are all en-suite and air-conditioned, and, although not luxurious, Bilikiki is ideal for our needs. Indeed, she is the only such vessel in the Solomons! The local crew of 12 includes an experienced captain and full-time cook and so we are sure to be very well looked after throughout our voyage.



MV Bilikiki

We expect to fly to Honiara via Dubai and Brisbane (please note, however, that air schedules are only released around 11 months in advance, and so we can only confirm our route at this time). We will embark MV Bilikiki in the late afternoon, cruising under the guidance of professional marine biologist, Dr Chas Anderson. Our 10-night cruise will take us westward past the Russell Islands and out into the Solomon Sea, towards New Georgia and Marovo Lagoon (the largest double barrier reef lagoon in the world). Our voyage will take us past rugged jungle-clad islands, watching out for dolphins and whales that might include such species as Spotted Dolphin, Fraser's Dolphin, False Killer Whale and Blue Whale, and we will be looking out especially for Omura's Whale, a little known baleen whale that was only described in 2003.

Whilst we will enjoy plenty of time at sea each day, searching for and enjoying cetacean sightings, we will also make time for visits ashore to enjoy birds and other wildlife, and to visit traditional



Coral Reef, Marovo Lagoon

Melanesian villages. The larger islands are rugged volcanic outcrops, carpeted with lush tropical rainforest, whilst many of the smaller islands are reef cays. The forests support a rich birdlife, including many endemics, as well as a wealth of smaller creatures including birdwing butterflies and beautiful dragonflies.

As for the reefs themselves, the Solomon Islands lie within the Coral Triangle, the centre of global marine biodiversity. The

coral diversity is stupendous, and the reefs are thronged with colourful fishes ... so we can expect world-class snorkelling! We will anchor most evenings in sheltered bays and lagoons, making time to snorkel over these magnificent coral reefs.

As our journey to Honiara takes us via Brisbane, we are also offering a pre-tour extension to visit Lamington National Park, Queensland, to enjoy a little birding 'down under' and allow time to recover from jet-lag before continuing our journey to the South Pacific.

Itinerary

Please note that the following itinerary should be treated as a guide only, not an exact program. Flexibility is the key to all wildlife cruises and our exact route and programme will depend on weather conditions, wildlife encounters, the experience of the tour leader and the advice of the ship's captain and crew.

Day 1

Fly Brisbane

We depart Heathrow this evening on a scheduled flight from London Heathrow to Brisbane, via a change of aircraft in Dubai.

Day 2

In flight

In flight.

Day 3

Arrive Brisbane, fly Honiara

Following our change of aircraft, we are due to arrive into Brisbane early this morning. From here, we continue our journey with a Solomon Airlines flight to Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, arriving in the mid-afternoon. On arrival we will transfer to a local hotel and overnight.

Day 4

Embark MV Bilikiki

We transfer to the port and board MV Bilikiki this morning. We begin our cruise travelling through Iron Bottom Sound (a reference to the numerous ship and plane wrecks lying there as a result of the fierce fighting that took place here during World War II), and after sunset tonight we will enjoy an orientation talk. On most other nights we will enjoy a fascinating pre- or post-dinner slideshow from our cruise leader.

Days 5 – 13

Solomon Islands Cruise

For the first half of our cruise we will slowly work our way westwards, past the Russell Islands, out into the Solomon Sea, and on towards the New Georgia Islands and Marovo Lagoon (the largest double barrier reef lagoon in the world). Along the way, we will constantly be on the look-out for whales and dolphins, flying fish and seabirds, keeping our plans very flexible to take account of local conditions and to make the most of our wildlife encounters. Each day we will journey past far-

flung islands, enjoying the scenery, cetaceans and birdlife. Although there has been relatively little cetacean research in the Solomon Islands, it has highlighted the splendid diversity and abundance of whale and dolphin species in and around the archipelago. Nevertheless, there is much still to be discovered. Our inaugural cruise in 2018 enjoyed sightings of 16 cetacean species, including Omura's Whale, a little-known baleen whale that was only described in 2003. Other cetaceans that we may see include: Spinner Dolphin, Spotted Dolphin, Striped Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin, Bottlenose Dolphin, Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin, Fraser's Dolphin, Rough-toothed Dolphin, Pilot Whale, False Killer Whale, Melon-headed Whale, Cuvier's Beaked Whale, Longman's Beaked Whale, Blainville's Beaked Whale, Dwarf Sperm Whale, Sperm Whale and Blue Whale. We will undoubtedly see plenty of other marine life too, including both flying fish and tuna which are abundant and should be spotted regularly, as may turtles.



Spinner Dolphin (Chas Anderson)

While out with the whales and dolphins there will also be plenty of opportunities for seabird watching. Many species have been recorded from the region, and in addition to the expected tropical Terns, Tropicbirds, Boobies and Frigatebirds we will pay particular attention to the tubenoses. Among others, these potentially include Heinroth's Shearwater, Beck's Petrel and Collared Petrel. As for land birds, there is a great diversity on the Solomon Islands, including many endemics and regional specialties. Among the possibilities are Solomon Island Sea-eagle, Island Imperial-pigeon, Solomon Cockatoo, Coconut Lory, Claret-breasted Dove and Pied Goshawk.

We will anchor early most evenings in a sheltered spot, allowing us the opportunity to snorkel over splendid coral reefs at the start and end of each day. We expect snorkelling on these magnificent coral reefs, alive with myriad colourful reef fishes, to be a real highlight of this cruise. We should also have the opportunity to snorkel on at least one war wreck.

Our moorings will also allow the opportunity to make some island visits using Bilikiki's tenders. While the capital, Honiara, is a bustling modern metropolis, many locals live in traditional villages, and indeed, 85% of all land, and associated reef areas, have customary ownership by local villages, tribal and clan groupings. As a result, in most areas permission is required from the villagers before going ashore or visiting the reefs, and so island visits are an integral, and delightful, part of any cruise through the Solomons.

For the second half of our cruise, we return towards Guadalcanal by a different route to that taken out, perhaps stopping at Mborukua Island (also known as Mary Island), with plenty more time for whale and dolphin watching. We will not use all the same anchorages, allowing us to snorkel on new reefs and to visit different islands along the way. In particular, because we have an exclusive charter, we can take as much time



Floating market

as we like to investigate cetacean sightings, and do not have to rush to keep to a pre-defined schedule. Our proposed route is therefore a guideline only, not a rigidly structured programme!

Finally, after dark, and far from city lights, the top deck offers stunning views of the night sky. On some longer crossings we will make up time by cruising at night. All in all, this promises to be a quite extraordinary wildlife cruise with cetacean encounters, magnificent coral reefs, lush tropical islands and warm, friendly local people.

Day 14

Depart Honiara

Having arrived back near Honiara the previous evening, we will sadly have to disembark Bilikiki after breakfast this morning. From the port we will transfer to a central hotel which will serve as a good base for anyone who wishes to explore town ahead of our departure. At around lunchtime hours we will transfer to the international airport for our flight to Brisbane, and onward journey home.

Day 15

Arrive London

Following changes of aircraft in Brisbane and Dubai, we are due to arrive back into London this morning.

Pre-tour Extension to Lamington National Park

19 Nov

Fly Brisbane

We depart this evening on a scheduled flight from London to Brisbane, via a change of aircraft in Dubai.

20 Nov

In flight

In flight.

21 Nov

Arrive Brisbane, transfer O'Reilly's

Following our change of aircraft, we are due to arrive into Brisbane early this morning. From here, we transfer to O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat in Lamington National Park, our base for the next three nights. The drive from Brisbane to Lamington takes us initially through open farmland and eucalyptus woodland, then up into south-east Queensland's coastal mountain range where the magnificent Lamington National Park encompasses Australia's most extensive remaining tract of sub-tropical rainforest and one of its richest wildlife areas. Sitting on a plateau at 1,000 metres, amongst mountain peaks, cliffs and gorges, lies O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat. Just four years after the arrival of the O'Reilly family in 1911, Lamington National Park was declared, effectively isolating the O'Reillys from the outside world! To this day it remains a family-run guesthouse, and though it has grown over the years, it hasn't lost its character or family connections.



Regent Bowerbird

We will enjoy lunch on arrival at O'Reilly's, before checking into our rooms and having the afternoon to relax and recover from our long journey. For those that wish, the forest trails are waiting to be explored, and the first taste of Queensland's special wildlife to be discovered.

22 Nov

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat

Today we have a full day activity pass included in our stay, and so we plan to join the various guided walks on offer. The birdlife here includes King Parrots, Satin and Regent Bowerbirds, Noisy Pittas, Green Catbird, Paradise Riflebird, Albert's Lyrebird and Logrunners amongst the dense subtropical rainforests and eucalyptus woodlands, and will encounter gaudy flocks of Crimson Rosellas. We can also explore the magnificent higher altitude forests of ancient Antarctic Beech, with their own numerous bird specialties. Mammals are one of the star attractions, and the grasslands are grazed, even during daylight hours, by Whiptail Wallabies and Red-necked Pademelons (a small wallaby species). Northern Brown Bandicoot and Feather-tailed Glider are just some of the fascinating marsupials that we may see during our walks here, whilst Sugar Gliders and Mountain Brushtail Possums may be seen coming to the guesthouse feeders.

23 Nov

O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat & transfer Brisbane

Today we have another morning to explore the surrounding area, either independently or in the company of our Naturetrek tour leader, then late in the afternoon we will transfer to Brisbane for the night.

24 Nov

Fly Honiara

After breakfast this morning we will return to Brisbane airport in time to check-in for our flight to Honiara and join up with the remaining members of the Naturetrek group.

Extension Price

The price of the pre-tour extension is subject to the number of tour participants. Groups of 6 or more will also be accompanied by the Naturetrek tour leader.

1 – 9 participants: **£1,495** per person

10 – 14 participants: **£1,195** per person

15+ participants: **£1,095** per person

Single occupancy is available for the extension for an additional £465.

Tour grading

We have graded this holiday A (easy). There will be an opportunity for some easy, optional island visits. Getting on and off MV Bilikiki is usually easy, though if the sea is choppy, there will always be a friendly hand from the crew or Naturetrek staff should you require any assistance. Snorkelling and swimming activities are optional, but highly recommended! Snorkellers enter the water by jumping in or sitting and sliding in from one of Bilikiki's tenders, and climbing back up a ladder on the return.

NB - Although we have graded this holiday as 'easy', please be aware that the M/V Bilikiki is a liveaboard vessel, not a luxury cruise ship. The different decks are accessed by short – but quite steep – staircases and the vessel can roll somewhat if the conditions are a little choppy. As such an average level of fitness is required to get the most out of this holiday and we ask you to ensure that you are fit enough to undertake this cruise. Should you have any further questions on this aspect of the tour please give the Naturetrek office a call.

Focus

The holiday will focus on the region's whales and dolphins, marine life, birds, other natural history and local culture. There will be plenty of opportunities to enjoy the underwater life for those who wish to snorkel.

Weather

Located just a few degrees below the equator, the Solomons enjoy a year-round tropical climate moderated by the sea air. Rainfall averages 10 inches per month year round, ranging from 8 inches in the dryer season to 12 inches in the wettest months (January to March). There is no monsoon season with extensive periods of heavy rainfall, and so rain can fall at any time, though it usually blows over fairly quickly. Humidity is generally high, particularly inland, but is significantly lower on the smaller islands and on board our boat. The average temperature is around 27°C year round, and water temperature is around 28°C, making for incredibly pleasant snorkelling conditions!

Flights and Extensions

Our preferred route is to fly with Emirates airlines to Brisbane via Dubai, and onwards to Honiara with Solomon Airlines. However, flight schedules are only confirmed around 11 months prior to departure, at which point we will decide on the best route for this cruise. If you do not wish to join the pre-tour extension to O'Reilly's, we would strongly recommend you fly out to Brisbane at least a day or so early, in order to give yourself time to recover from the long flight as well as mitigating the risk of missing the flight to Honiara in the event of a flight delay en route to Brisbane.

If you would like to discuss other extension options, please contact the Naturetrek office.

MV Bilikiki

For our cruise around the Solomon Islands we will travel on board our exclusively chartered 38m liveaboard vessel, MV Bilikiki. She is long-established in the islands (indeed Bilikiki is the only such vessel in the Solomons) and, though not luxurious, is ideal for our needs. Bilikiki has a local crew of 12, including an experienced captain and a full-time cook.



MV Bilikiki

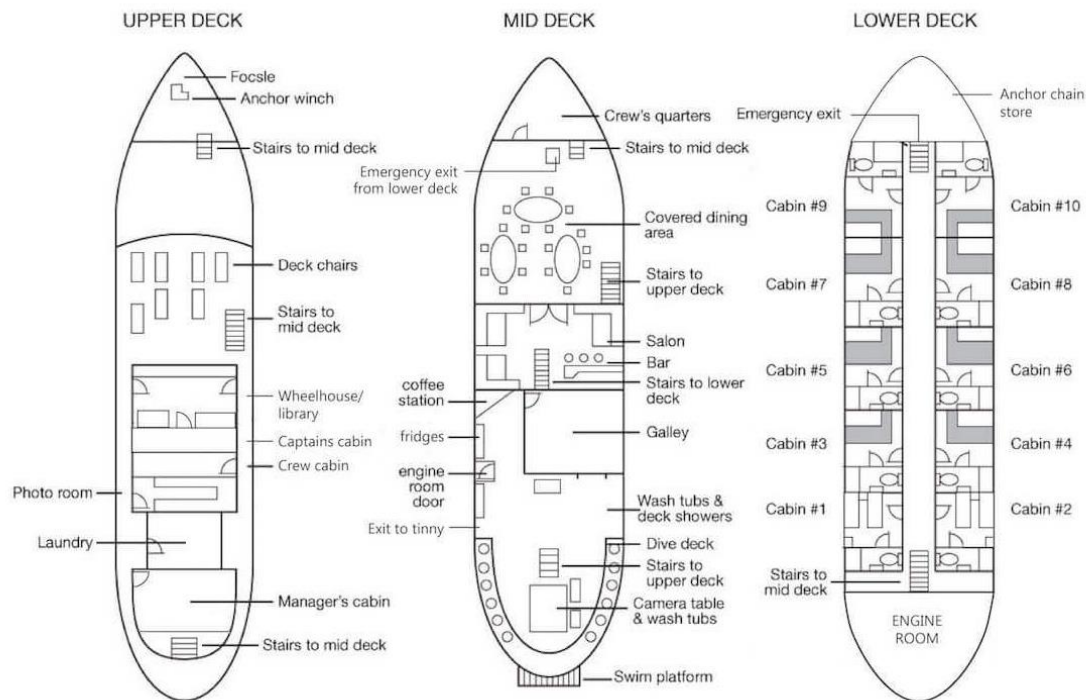
There are 9 guest cabins; all of which are en-suite and air-conditioned. The majority of the cabins have a double lower berth and a single upper berth, though a couple of them have twin lower berths.



Bilikiki's tenders

Food on board is plentiful, and caters to a variety of tastes. Fresh fruit, vegetables and fish are purchased regularly from villagers who come alongside in canoes at some anchorages to sell their produce. Snorkelling and shore excursions are carried out using the Bilikiki's tenders. While snorkelling, the tenders will stay on site and are ready to pick people up whenever they wish.

MV Bilikiki deck plan:



From left: guest cabin, covered deck area, sun deck

Extra expenses

All meals are included during your cruise on-board MV Bilikiki, though drinks (other than teas, coffees and bottled water) are excluded throughout the tour, as are crew tips, any applicable visa fees or departure taxes and all items of a personal nature. The overnight in Honiara will be on a bed and breakfast basis.

Accommodation for those joining the pre-tour extension, is booked on a full board basis (including teas and coffees). Drinks and items of a personal nature, once again, are extra.

NB - Please note that due to the volatile nature of fuel prices Naturetrek reserves the right to impose a surcharge on this cruise should fuel prices increase significantly and the boat operators request an additional payment. As always, however, we will do our very best to avoid such increases in costs.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to the Solomon Islands. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/solomon-islands> regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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