



CHEESEMANS' ECOLOGY SAFARIS

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Solomon Islands

Snorkel the Coral Triangle's Hidden Gem

April 18 to May 1, 2021



Trumpetfish
© Peter Pinnock

SAFARI OVERVIEW

Snorkel the vibrant waters of the Solomon Islands, with their colorful coral reefs rich with iridescent fish, shimmering tropical lagoons, and jungle-clad volcanic islands. The Solomon Islands are composed of almost one thousand islands in the South Pacific. Populated by people who maintain a subsistence lifestyle, the region has been unchanged for hundreds of years. The walls, reefs, pinnacles, and coral gardens throughout the islands' harbors host an impressive array of soft and hard corals. With a diversity of fish and invertebrates, expect varied wildlife sightings such as nudibranchs, pipefish, pygmy seahorses, mantis shrimp, rays, sea turtles, and sharks. You'll enjoy two to three snorkeling excursions a day, complemented by visits to intriguing cultural villages and invigorating jungle hikes on uninhabited islands. Look for cetaceans while the ship charts its course toward new snorkel sites. Join us on this expedition in partnership with the Oceanic

Society (www.oceanicsociety.org) and Planet Deep (www.planetdeep.org) to snorkel and explore one of the most biodiverse marine ecosystems in the world: the Coral Triangle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel among fish in the pristine shallow reefs of one of the most biodiverse regions in the world.
- Visit ultra-remote parts of the Solomon Islands including Tetepare, the largest uninhabited island in the South Pacific, and Marovo Lagoon, the world's largest enclosed reef lagoon.
- Support whale and dolphin conservation by recording cetacean sightings, including the rare and enigmatic Omura's whale.
- Join an optional workshop after the trip to learn about cetacean identification and conservation.

LEADERS: Benjamin Kahn, Johannes Hennicke, and Wayne Sentman.

DAYS: 14, including estimated travel time. 11 nights aboard the *Bilikiki*.

GROUP SIZE: 17.

SHIP: The *Bilikiki*. See the *Ship* section on page 4.

COST: \$8,930 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 6.

CONDITIONS: This is a **non-smoking tour** for people who are very interested in spending the maximum time in nature. See the *Conditions* section on page 9.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Apr 18	Travel to Honiara, Solomon Islands.		
Apr 19	Arrive in Honiara.	Hotel in Honiara	---
Apr 20	Embark on your snorkeling adventure.	On board the <i>Bilikiki</i>	B, D
Apr 21	Snorkel the Russell Islands and survey for whales during afternoon transits.		B, L, D
Apr 22	Snorkel and explore Mborokua Island on foot, one of the most remote islands in the western Solomon Islands.		
Apr 23	Snorkel Marovo Lagoon the world's largest reef lagoon, to discover its biological wonders. Experience village life in local communities.		
Apr 24–25	Snorkel and survey Tetepare and Rendova Islands.		
Apr 26–27	Explore Kolombangara Island, well-known for its great biodiversity on land and in water.		
Apr 28	Return to Marovo Lagoon to explore different snorkel sites.		
Apr 29–30	Return to snorkel the Russell Islands.		
May 1	Disembark in Honiara and join our cetacean identification and conservation workshop or fly home.		B

OPTIONS

- Extend your stay by joining our cetacean identification and conservation workshop from May 2 to 4, 2021 in Honiara. Please ask for details.

LEADERS

Benjamin Kahn



Benjamin is a marine mammal ecologist who specializes in oceanic cetaceans. He is the Director of the Coral Triangle Oceanic Cetacean Program for APEX Environmental and co-founder of Planet Deep (www.planetdeep.org) a non-profit focused on the conservation of oceanic and deep-sea habitats. Benjamin has partnered with governments, other NGOs, local communities, and industry groups to help protect oceanic hotspots for cetaceans and other large marine life in the region. He is a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the World Commission on Protected Areas, and three IUCN Specialist Groups. He is also a technical advisor on the impact of marine debris on marine mammals for the Indonesia Waste Platform.

Johannes Hennicke

Almost as tall as a ship's mast, German native Johannes has spent more than a decade in the Coral Triangle and has been a Cruise Director in Raja Ampat and the surrounding regions. He is a founding member of Planet Deep (www.planetdeep.org) – one of the non-profit organizations we are collaborating with for this expedition. With more than 5,000 dives logged within the Indonesian archipelago, he is full of enthusiasm for the underwater world and loves to share it. When he is not on the ship spotting cetaceans and rare critters, he is busy building a sustainable resort on Alor island in Indonesia with his partner.



Wayne Sentman



Wayne is the Oceanic Society's Director of Conservation Travel Programs, and in 2013, he received his Master's degree from Harvard University in Environmental Management and Sustainability. He has studied tropical marine ecosystems for over 15 years, working for the USFWS, National Marine Fisheries Service and with university groups leading snorkeling excursions in the Indian and Pacific oceans since 1992. Wayne has led research and ecotourism programs for Oceanic Society since 1998, including tours to Midway Atoll, Micronesia, Suriname, Belize, Tonga, Fiji, Kenya, and Raja Ampat.

SHIP

The Bilikiki

The *Bilikiki* is a large live-aboard ship featuring comfortable cabins, all with private bathrooms, and ample decks for relaxing. She offers 10 deluxe cabins, eight with double-sized beds and a single bunk bed, and two with twin single beds. All cabins are air conditioned and have hot- and cold-water showers. The ship is usually reserved for diving trips, but this charter is specifically booked to cater to a special snorkeling expedition itinerary for our group. See the *Deck Plan* on page 10.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Apr 18 ~ Travel to Honiara, Solomon Islands

Fly to Honiara, Solomon Islands on Guadalcanal Island.

Apr 19 ~ Arrive in Honiara

Arrive in Honiara for an overnight and to recover from your flights. Our local agent will transfer you from the airport to your hotel. If you would like to arrive earlier, we can arrange divergent airport transfer and extra nights at the hotel.

Apr 20 ~ Embark on the *Bilikiki*

Spend the day exploring Honiara on your own and board the ship in the afternoon. Relax on board before joining a trip briefing and meeting your new shipmates at the festive welcome dinner. Depart that evening for the Russell Islands about 30mi northwest of Guadalcanal Island. During daytime transits, you will search for whales, dolphins, and seabirds, and if you want to participate in surveys, you'll learn to use our Rapid Ecological Assessment survey techniques. The Solomon Islands have a large number of marine mammals, almost half of which are endemic to the region.

Apr 21 ~ West Russell Islands

The Russell Islands are made up of two scenic volcanic islands, Pavuvu and Mbanika, with rugged terrain and amazing beaches. Their numerous deep, sheltered bays are perfect for coral reef growth and offer exceptional snorkeling. Explore a variety of fascinating seaward reef environments, including sloping coral gardens and barrier reefs. Observe how the abundant fish communities take advantage of food brought to the reef by strong ocean currents and waves. Look for adult reef fish like sweetlips and blue tang hiding in the corals while the larger predators circle above. Swim through the beam of light illuminating the narrow crevice of the Leru Cut and pop your head out of the water to see the vine-clad vertical rock walls and listen to the soft hum of the jungles above.

Apr 22 ~ Mborokua (Mary) Island

Sail to one of the most remote and isolated islands in the Western Solomon Islands, Mborokua, also known as Mary Island. Mborokua is the halfway point between the Russell Islands and Marovo Lagoon. At sunrise, approach this volcanic island while looking for sperm whales and other oceanic cetaceans that frequent

these deep waters. Mborokua offers fantastic snorkeling and diving opportunities, including spectacular reef drop-offs and large schools of barracuda and trevally. Here, thousands of colorful damselfish, anthias, surgeonfish, and other species congregate in schools, creating breathtaking flashes of light as they move in unison.

With hundreds of coral species on the shallow reef floor, you will see firsthand how corals provide food and shelter for various fish species, and how the interactions between different organisms create an interdependent ecosystem. After snorkeling, you may have the opportunity to go ashore and explore the uninhabited island's jungles.

Apr 23 ~ Marovo Lagoon

Marovo Lagoon is the world's largest enclosed reef lagoon and earns its World Heritage status from its mix of biologically and culturally significant wonders. Its turquoise-blue waters are dotted with hundreds of small islands fringed with sandy beaches and covered by coconut palms and rainforest, making it an idyllic and pristine tropical paradise. Spend an exhilarating time snorkeling and exploring in this extraordinary lagoon.

Visit local communities on the inhabited islands to see the exquisite woodcarvings made by local woodcarvers; if you are lucky, watch one of the expert carvers at work honing his craft. See day-to-day village life for the subsistence fishermen who inhabit these islands; a special experience not to be missed.

Apr 24–25 ~ Tetepare and Rendova Islands

Navigating through the Blanche Channel and the west coast of New Georgia Island, you'll sail to the jewel-like Tetepare and Rendova islands. Ultra-remote, even by Solomon Islands standards, these islands are best described as some of the "last Edens."

On lush, uninhabited Tetepare, find green tree skinks, sea turtles, and mangrove monitors wandering on the black beaches, and hike into the pristine forest to find an astonishing variety of butterflies and birds. The island has been protected from logging by the Tetepare Descendants' Association, who manage and protect the island's resources as a conservation area. In the forests around the water, you might find large populations of the rare coconut crab, the world's largest land-dwelling crustacean that grows up to three feet across. The island is fringed with untouched coral reefs where you can snorkel amongst a spectacular diversity of fish, and maybe even spot a few of the resident crocodiles making the reef their home.

Hop to nearby Rendova, populated by indigenous people living a subsistence lifestyle, as they have for hundreds of years, from the abundant resources on the island, as they have for hundreds of years. Explore calm lagoons amidst stunning mountain backdrops and swim with Hawksbill turtles, reef sharks, and dolphins.

Information on whale and dolphin diversity and distribution in this region is very sparse, although the deep, open waters around the islands are suspected to host sperm, beaked, and blue whales, as well as many species of dolphins. Help scientists look for these cetaceans on the water between island visits and snorkels to broaden our understanding of marine mammals in the Coral Triangle.

Apr 26–27 ~ Kolombangara Island and North New Georgia Island

Kolombangara, meaning "Water Lord" in the local language, is made from the remnants of an extinct stratovolcano reaching 5,810ft. Enchantingly cone-shaped and almost perfectly round, it is lushly forested and has approximately 80 rivers and streams running down its flanks.

Above 400m, Kolombangara features one of the best examples of a mountain cloud forest in the Pacific region. The island's pristine forests are culturally significant to the indigenous inhabitants and are a biodiversity wonderland featuring several species of birds and frogs endemic to the island. Along the shores, several black sand beaches are treasure troves of weird and wonderful marine critters beloved by macro photographers.

The vibrant forests create prime nutrient-rich conditions for underwater life around the island. Snorkeling and diving are spectacular along the many drop-offs surrounding the island. History buffs may see airplanes and ships from WWII in the waters, now covered in corals and teeming with life. Back on board the boat, look for Fraser's and spotted dolphins, dwarf sperm whales, and other cetaceans that frequent the deep waters around the island.

Apr 28 ~ Return to Marovo Lagoon

Snorkel different areas of Marovo Lagoon. Marine mammals are frequently sighted in Marovo's waters including resident spinner, spotted, and bottlenose dolphins, pilot whales (in the deeper passages of the lagoon), and occasionally orca and dugong. The abundant and generally docile reef sharks of Marovo carry a special place in local culture, considered to be a key species in the ecosystem, and sometimes as guardian spirits.

Apr 29–30 ~ The Russell Islands

You'll return to the Russell Islands' rugged terrain and amazing beaches. Various whales and dolphins inhabit these waters, including a resident pod of short-finned pilot whales as well as spinner, spotted, Fraser's, and Risso's dolphins. It is a perfect end to your exploration of the remote waters of the Solomon Islands.

May 1 ~ Disembark and join our workshop or fly home

Disembark the ship after breakfast. Stay to join our 2-day cetacean identification and conservation workshop (not included), transfer to your hotel (not included), or transfer to the Honiara Airport.

COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$8,930

Costs are per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

We reserve the right to charge for cost increases that occur between when we set tour prices and the date of travel, for example, changes due to the cost of lodging and transportation. If you are a single traveler and you desire, we will find a roommate for you. If we cannot find you a roommate, we will not charge you a single supplement. If space is available, some cabins can be booked for a single occupant by adding 100% over the listed cabin cost. Single rooms are subject to availability.

Please note that we cannot guarantee a specific cabin number. If changes occur, we will do everything in our power to assign a cabin of equal or greater value as the cabin type specified in your reservation. Deck plan, cabin arrangements, and cabin amenities are subject to change by ship operator.

Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$2,000
Second	January 1, 2020	\$2,000
Final	October 15, 2020	Remaining Balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above. All reservations require a deposit to confirm reservation of your space. For reservations made after a due date, all past payments will be due with registration. By sending your initial deposit, you agree to accept our payment schedule and cancellation policy as a contract. If payments are still outstanding two weeks after the due date, your space may be forfeited.

Cancellations

Refunds are given depending on the time left before departure according to the following table. The cancellation fee of \$500 per person can be applied toward another tour if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable. Consider purchasing trip cancellation insurance that could reimburse your trip costs in the event of your cancellation.

Dates	Forfeited Amount per Person
On or before January 1, 2020	\$500
January 2 to October 14, 2020	\$4,000
On or after October 15, 2020	100% of tour cost

Included

- All leaders, transport, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Accommodations in Honiara on April 19.
- Ten nights on board the *Bilikiki*.
- Meals from breakfast on April 20 through breakfast on May 1, except meals listed in *Not Included* section.
- Transfers from Honiara Airport to your hotel on April 18 or 19, from your hotel to the ship on April 20, and from the ship to the Honiara Airport or to your hotel on May 1.
- Coffee, tea, and water while onboard the *Bilikiki*.
- Trip Materials – information about flights, packing, entry and departure requirements, airport transfers, gratuities, etc.

Not Included

- All airfare, airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. Airfare is approximately \$2,250 to \$2,850 between the US and Honiara, Solomon Islands, depending on origin.
- Passport and visa fees.
- Lunch on April 20.
- We can arrange extra hotel nights for an extra cost.
- \$250 per person for boat and harbor fees. We'll add the cost for this booking to your final trip balance.
- Gratuities – tipping is always discretionary. However, we suggest budgeting about \$25 to \$30 per participant per day for April 20 to May 1 with our leaders (about \$300 to \$360 total *per participant*)

- for the ship crew and staff.
- Wetsuit and snorkeling equipment (mask, snorkel, and fins). We will send you more details about rentals in the Trip Materials.
 - Mandatory emergency medical and evacuation insurance. For more information see www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance.
 - Optional trip cancellation insurance. For more information see www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance.
 - Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, medical costs or hospitalization, room service, alcoholic and other beverages, items not on the regular menu, etc. If you have special dietary needs, please indicate them on your Reservation Form.

SIGN UP

Please contact us first to check availability, reserve your space, and obtain a Reservation Form. To confirm your reservation, we require a deposit and signed form from each participant.

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OTHER DETAILS

Climate

The Solomon Islands are humid throughout the year, with an average temperature of 80°F. Water temperatures are normally 82 to 86°F. April to May and October to November are considered the “shoulder seasons” with relatively dry weather and calmer seas. Rain can be expected at any time, but usually only lasts a short while.

Fitness Level

No special skills are needed to participate, but you should be in general good health, and be able to climb up and down a ladder on your own. Participants should be adventurous and prepared for living aboard a ship. Practice snorkeling beforehand, to be sure that you are comfortable with your gear, and to determine that it's functioning properly. Please contact us if you have any health concerns that may make this trip challenging.

Flights

Airfare is not included in trip costs. Detailed logistical information and the contact information for our recommended flight-ticketing agent are included in the Trip Materials we will send you. Please let us know if you are arriving earlier or staying later as we are happy to assist you with any extra overnights that you might want to arrange.

Flights you (or a travel agent) book: Arrive in Honiara, Solomon Islands (HIR) by April 19. Depart from Honiara, Solomon Islands (HIR) in the afternoon on May 1.

Seasickness

Don't let a fear of seasickness scare you away! For all but the most sensitive, seasickness is rarely a problem in this region. It's a good idea to bring medication if you get seasick or are unsure, but you may find that you do not need it after a couple days once you have your "sea legs." Even those who have experienced seasickness reported that the incredible wildlife and overall experience were well worth the temporary discomfort. Read our suggestions for coping with seasickness at www.cheesemans.com/seasickness and contact us if you have any concerns.

Conditions

- **Non-smoking policy:** We have a strict non-smoking policy. Smoking is not permitted at any time or any place during our tours.
- **Maximum time in nature:** We try to spend as much time in nature as possible, sometimes resulting in long days, but giving you a more in-depth experience.
- **Itinerary route:** The itinerary route, stops, and plans are subject to change by unforeseen circumstances beyond our control, such as weather or road conditions.
- **Additional forms:** For some of our tours, you may be asked to fill out additional forms (e.g., medical questionnaire).
- **Medical conditions and travel risks:** Travel to remote places is exciting, but it is important to understand and accept the risks, both medical and logistical. Minor medical problems can usually be treated, but because you are often far from medical facilities, there can be no expectation for immediate medical treatment or evacuation, even in cases of trauma. Anyone with health problems needing close medical supervision should not consider going on this tour. Bring enough medication for the duration of the trip for any chronic medical needs since pharmacies are usually not available. When you send your deposit and signed Reservation Form, you certify to us that you do not knowingly have any physical or other conditions that would create a risk for yourself or for other trip participants.
- **Use of drones/UAVs on tours:** Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), AKA drones, are not suitable for use on most Cheesemans' Ecology expeditions due to logistical constraints and in many cases, local and national laws or regulations. In some cases, such as on our polar voyages, we operate under environmental regulations that ban the use of recreational drones. Do not bring a drone on safari without contacting us first.

Conservation

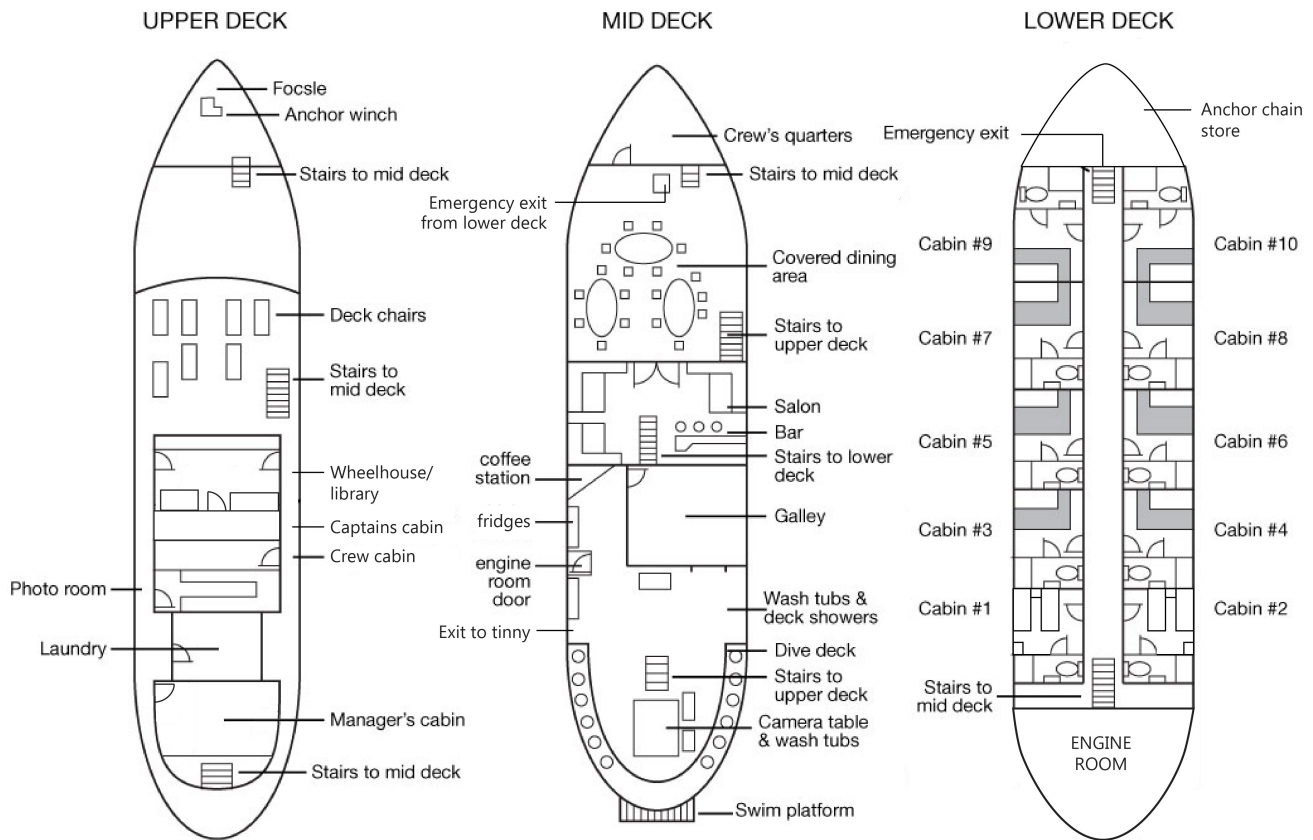
Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris is passionate about conserving the precious regions that we travel to and supports many conservation efforts. By visiting these areas, we contribute to sustainable conservation of these valuable wildlife habitats. We urge you to support conservation organizations that protect and restore natural habitats and write letters to tourism and government agencies to promote work in preserving wildlife.

In the Solomon Islands, traditional lifestyles are clashing with commercial logging and fishing interests. Several organizations support community conservations by asserting traditional rights to preserve the land and surrounding seas on which the local people depend. Read more about Solomon Island community engagement at www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/asserting-traditional-rights-community-conservation.

We aim to make all our trips carbon neutral by splitting the cost of carbon offsetting with our participants. For your convenience, the optional donation amount for your half of the carbon offset will be indicated on your invoice. We source high quality offsets through CarbonTree Conservation Fund, a non-profit we helped

found, supporting pioneering forest conservation in the Rio Bravo Reserve in Belize, a Nature Conservancy project (www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/latin-america/belize/rio-bravo-conservation-area/).

BILIKIKI DECK PLAN



Deck plan is not to scale and cabin sizes vary slightly.
See cabin descriptions under the Costs section on page 6.
Deck plan, cabin arrangements, and cabin amenities are subject to change by ship operator.