



CHEESEMAN'S ECOLOGY SAFARIS

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Solomon Islands

Snorkel the Coral Triangle's Hidden Gem

April 8 to 20, 2021



© Greg Lecoeur

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. 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 island's harbor 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 Marovo Lagoon, the world's largest enclosed reef lagoon.
- Support whale and dolphin conservation by searching for cetaceans, including the rare and enigmatic Omura's whale.

LEADERS: Dr. Chandra Salgado Kent and one other naturalist.

DAYS: 13, including estimated travel time. 10 nights aboard the *Bilikiki*.

GROUP SIZE: 17.

SHIP: The *Bilikiki*. See the *Ship* section on page 3.

COST: \$8,930 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 5.

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 8.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Apr 8	Travel to Honiara, Solomon Islands.		
Apr 9	Arrive in Honiara.	Hotel in Honiara	---
Apr 10	Embark on your snorkeling adventure.	On board the <i>Bilikiki</i>	B, D
Apr 11–12	Snorkel the Russell Islands and survey for whales during afternoon transits.		B, L, D
Apr 13	Snorkel and explore Mborokua Island on foot.		
Apr 14–15	Snorkel and experience village life in the New Georgia Islands.		
Apr 16–17	Snorkel Kolombangara Island with a high diversity of oceanic whales and dolphins.		
Apr 18–19	Explore and snorkel Ghizo Island.		
Apr 20	Disembark in Gizo and continue on our Solomon Islands trip or fly home.		B

OPTIONS

- Continue your journey on our Solomon Islands trip from April 19 to May 1, 2021 and **SAVE \$600**. Explore the remote islands of Tetepare and Rendova, while revisiting your favorite islands to snorkel additional incredible sites. See full itinerary at www.cheesemans.com/trips/solomon-apr2021-2.

LEADERS

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris carefully selects leaders who are experts in their field to ensure that your experience is the best it can be. A total of two leaders will provide a range of expertise for your trip.



Dr. Chandra Salgado Kent

Chandra's passion for marine ecology was born while scuba diving in a sink hole in New Mexico, studying mercury bioaccumulation in lakes and rivers. She is a professor at the Centre for Marine Ecosystems Research at Edith Cowan University, studying marine mammal ecology and bio-acoustics. As an international scientific expert, Chandra has advised organizations such as the International Whaling Commission, the Sustainable Development Institute in Australia, and the Brazilian government.

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 9.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Apr 8 ~ Travel to Honiara, Solomon Islands

Fly to Honiara, Solomon Islands on Guadalcanal Island.

Apr 9 ~ Arrive in Honiara

Arrive in Honiara for an overnight 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.

Apr 10 ~ 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 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. Overnight, you'll pass near to the historic WW II naval

battleground of the Iron Bottom Sound, named in remembrance of the dozens of US and Japanese warships and planes that sank there during the Battle of Guadalcanal from 1942 to 1943.

Apr 11–12 ~ The 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. 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 start to your exploration of the remote waters of the Solomon Islands.

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.

Between snorkels, you can help survey for whales as you travel to a new site. The Solomon Islands have an unusually large number of marine mammals, almost half of which are endemic to the region.

Apr 13 ~ Mborokua Island

Sail overnight to one of the most remote and isolated islands in the Western Solomon Islands, Mborokua or 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 14–15 ~ New Georgia Island

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 two full days snorkeling and exploring in this extraordinary lagoon.

Cetaceans 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.

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 16–17 ~ Kolombangara 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 18–19 ~ Ghizo Island

Located on Ghizo Island, Gizo is the capital of the Western Provinces. With approximately 6,000 inhabitants, it is also the second largest town in the Solomon Islands. During WW II Gizo was an important base for the Japanese and later for the US; for wreck divers, the waters surrounding the island present a wealth of sunken airplanes and ships brought down in battle.

The Ghizo area has many excellent snorkeling and diving sites, plus several sites of cultural and historic interest. In 2006, marine experts recorded the second highest reef fish biodiversity in the world in Ghizo (after Raja Ampat in West Papua, also part of the Coral Triangle). Large pods of resident spinner and spotted dolphins are often seen in the waters off Ghizo, frequently bow-riding and spinning alongside the vessel.

Apr 20 ~ Disembark and join our Solomon Islands trip or fly home

Disembark after breakfast to transfer to your hotel (not included) or to the Gizo Airport. Continue on our Solomon Islands trip (www.cheesemans.com/trips/solomon-apr2021-2) or fly to Honiara to catch flights home.

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 9.
- Ten nights on board the *Bilikiki*.
- Meals from breakfast on April 10 through breakfast on April 20, except meals listed in *Not Included* section.
- Transfers from Honiara Airport to your hotel on April 8 or 9, from your hotel to the ship on April 10, and from the ship to the Gizo Airport or to your hotel on April 20.
- 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 from the US to Honiara, Solomon Islands, and back to the US from Gizo, Solomon Islands, depending on origin.

- Passport and visa fees.
- Lunch on April 10.
- We can arrange extra hotel nights for an extra cost.
- \$250 per person, 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–\$30 per participant per day for April 10 to 20 with our leaders (about \$275 to \$330 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.

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris
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OTHER DETAILS

Climate

The Solomon Islands are humid throughout the year, with an average temperature of 80°F. Water temperatures normally range between 82–86°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) on April 9. Depart from Gizo, Solomon Islands (GZO) in the afternoon on April 20. **If you are continuing on our Solomon Islands trip**, see the *Flights* section in its itinerary for departure information (www.cheesemans.com/trips/solomon-apr2021-2).

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.

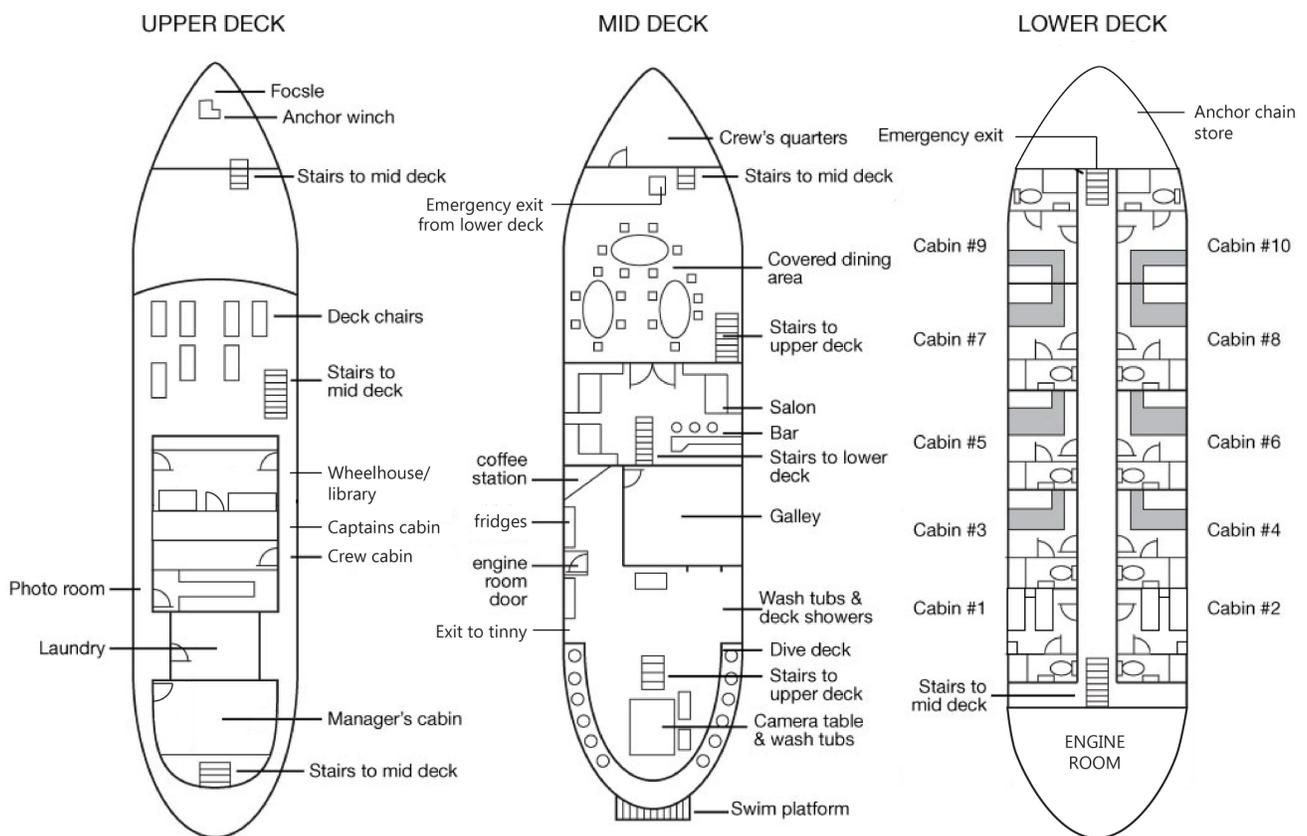
Conservation

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.

The Solomon Islands are particularly impacted by climate change, as rising sea levels threaten their low-lying islands. 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 Valdivian Coastal Reserve, a Nature Conservancy project (<https://tinyurl.com/ybgkwton>).

BILIKIKI DECK PLAN



Deck plan is not to scale and cabin sizes vary slightly.
 See cabin descriptions under the *Costs* section on page 5.
 Deck plan, cabin arrangements, and cabin amenities are subject to change by ship operator.