



CHEESEMAN'S ECOLOGY SAFARIS

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Solomon Islands II *Snorkel the Coral Triangle's Hidden Gem* April 24 to May 6, 2023



Pipefish
© 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. 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 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 searching for cetaceans, including the rare and enigmatic Omura's whale.

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

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

GROUP SIZE: 17.

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

COST: \$9,450 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the *Costs* section on page 6.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
Apr 24	Travel to Honiara, Solomon Islands.		
Apr 25	Arrive in Honiara.	Hotel in Honiara	---
Apr 26	Fly to Gizo, or if joining from our Solomon Islands I trip, relax, and in the afternoon embark on your snorkeling adventure.	On board the <i>Bilikiki</i>	B, D
Apr 27	Snorkel and explore Ghizo Island and survey for whales during afternoon transits.		B, L, D
Apr 28–29	Snorkel and survey Tetepare and Rendova Islands.		
Apr 30–May 2	Snorkel and experience village life in the New Georgia Islands.		
May 3	Snorkel and explore Mborokua Island on foot.		
May 4–5	Snorkel the Russell Islands.		
May 6	Disembark in Honiara and join our cetacean identification and conservation workshop or fly home.		B

OPTIONS

- Begin your journey early on our Solomon Islands I trip from April 13 to 25, 2023 and **SAVE \$500**. Explore Kolombangara Island and experience the fantastic variety of snorkel sites along your island route. See full itinerary at <https://cheesemans.com/trips/solomon-apr2023>.
- Extend your stay by joining our cetacean identification and conservation workshop 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 24 ~ Travel to Honiara, Solomon Islands

Fly to Honiara, Solomon Islands on Guadalcanal Island.

Apr 25 ~ 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.

Apr 26 ~ Fly to Gizo and embark on the *Bilikiki*

Join from our Solomons I trip (<https://cheesemans.com/trips/solomon-apr2023>) or arrive from your flight to Gizo on Ghizo Island. Board the ship in the afternoon for a trip briefing, before meeting your new shipmates at the festive welcome dinner. 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.

Apr 27 ~ 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 28–29 ~ Tetepare and Rendova Islands

Navigating down 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 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 deepen our understanding of marine mammals in the Coral Triangle.

Apr 30–May 2 ~ 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.

May 3 ~ 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.

May 4–5 ~ 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.

During the afternoon, 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.

May 6 ~ Disembark and join our workshop or fly home

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

COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$9,450

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

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.

We cannot guarantee a specific cabin number, but if changes occur, we will assign a cabin of equal or greater value.

Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$2,000
Second	January 1, 2022	\$2,000
Final	October 15, 2022	Remaining Balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above.

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 trip if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable.

Dates	Forfeited Amount per Person
On or before January 1, 2022	\$500
January 2 to October 14, 2022	\$4,000
On or after October 15, 2022	100% of trip cost

Included

- All leaders, transport, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Accommodations in Honiara on April 25.
- Ten nights on board the *Bilikiki*.
- Meals from breakfast on April 26 through breakfast on May 6, except meals listed in *Not Included* section.
- Transfers from Honiara Airport to your hotel on April 24 or 25, from your hotel to the Honiara Airport on April 26, from the Gizo Airport to the ship on April 26, and from the ship to the Honiara Airport or to your hotel on May 6.
- 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 Gizo, Solomon Islands, and back to the US from Honiara, Solomon Islands, depending on origin.
- Passport and visa fees.
- Lunch on April 26.
- We can arrange extra hotel nights for an extra cost.
- \$250 per person, boat and harbor fees.
- Gratuities – tipping is always discretionary. However, we suggest budgeting about \$25 to \$30 per participant per day for April 26 to May 6 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 and 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 25. Book your flight from Honiara to Gizo on April 26. **If you are arriving from our Solomon Islands I trip**, see the *Flights* section in its itinerary for arrival information (<https://cheesemans.com/trips/solomon-apr2023>). Depart from Honiara, Solomon Islands (HIR) in the afternoon on May 6.

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.

Terms and Conditions

Read our current Terms and Conditions at <https://cheesemans.com/terms-and-conditions>.

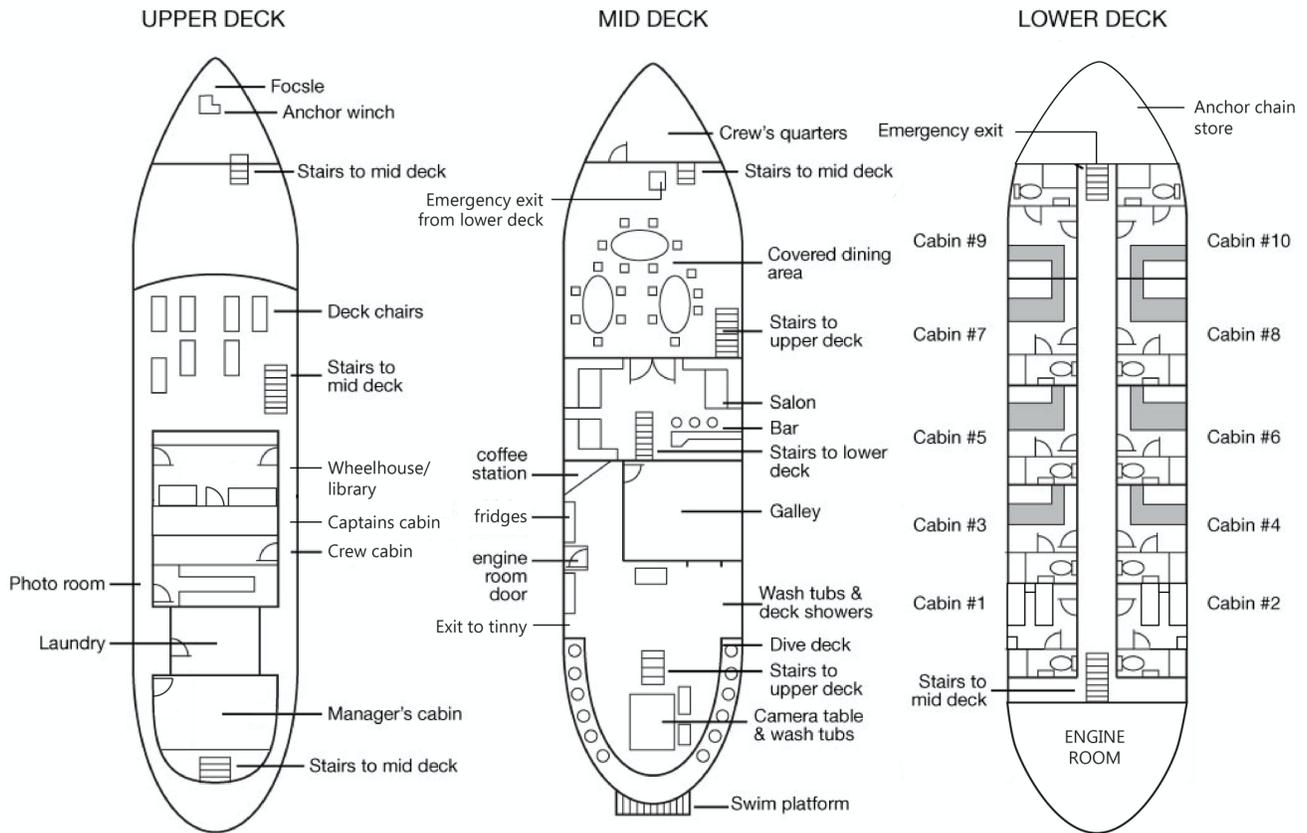
Conservation

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 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.