



Solomon Islands Technical Itinerary

Marine Kastom Fees & local taxes: (payable on board only)

- 10 nights: 250 USD per person

The majority of the dive sites that might be included on this special itinerary are well beyond recreational no-decompression depth limits; therefore they are *only suitable for divers with advanced technical diving certifications and experience.*

MANDATORY minimum certification and experience: TDI Extended Range with Trimix, or equivalent certification (60+ metres) with deep wreck diving experience.

IMPORTANT: *Any guests who do not fulfil the minimum certification requirements stated above, or who our crew feel have insufficient experience or skills, will be denied participation in some or all dives.*

Some of the wrecks that may be included on this itinerary are at depths ranging from 60 to 130 metres; Divers who do not have certifications and/or experience for depths beyond 60 metres will not be able to participate in these deeper technical dives.

PLEASE NOTE: The accessibility of some dive sites is weather dependent and therefore their inclusion is not guaranteed.

WWII History

The Solomon Islands were the scene for some of the fiercest WWII battles in the South Pacific; with names such as Bloody Ridge, Red Beach, Skyline Ridge, and Henderson Field remaining to mark the brutal combat areas.

Due to the important strategic location close to Australia, the Japanese invaded Guadalcanal in 1942. In reaction to this, the Allied Forces launched Operation Guadalcanal, better known as the Guadalcanal Campaign, and continued to fight until the Japanese finally withdrew from the islands in 1943.

Code named Operation Watchtower, the Battle of Guadalcanal turned out to be a significant strategic combined Allied victory in the Pacific theatre; Along with the Battle of Midway, it has been called a turning point in the South Pacific war against Japan.

The numerous WWII wrecks are in various conditions with the highest concentration in the area known as Iron Bottom Sound between Guadalcanal and Florida Island; some of the wrecks remain fully intact, while others are in pieces, or completely blown apart due to the damage suffered in battle.

Notes:

- Diving on many of the deeper wrecks, including the Atlanta is weather dependent.
- If conditions permit, two or more dives may be offered at some sites to give guests the opportunity to fully explore the wrecks.
- Penetration diving is always dependent on the condition of the wreck and will be limited to those with appropriate certifications and experience.
- Unguided penetration is NOT allowed.
- Solo diving is NOT allowed.
- All guests are responsible for planning and adhering to their own dive profiles.
- We respectfully request that you dive conservatively at all times, stay within the bounds of your training, follow dive plans and computer guidelines and make all necessary decompression stops.
- It is *mandatory for all divers to have appropriate insurance* which covers the scuba diving activities and depths of this itinerary, including emergency evacuation and recompression chamber costs.

Itinerary Details

Due to the dive depths on this itinerary, we will usually schedule a maximum of 2 dives per day although a 3 dive may be offered where the first two dives do not exceed 45 metres. The schedule for each day will be determined by the Cruise Director dependent on depths and travelling distance between locations.

Number of scheduled dives: 10 nights: Up to 18

Whilst we attempt to ensure the number of dives we have scheduled is fulfilled, weather conditions and other factors can play a part in determining where the boat goes and which dives are possible on a day-to-day basis.

Safety and dive briefings are conducted in English. If you, or any of your group, do not speak or understand English, please contact us. The following is an example of the day-to-day itinerary.

Day 1: Embarkation from Coral Sea Resort at 18:00, followed by introductions, boat and safety briefings and dinner. There is no diving on embarkation day.

Days 2-9: Your Cruise Director will schedule up to 3 dives per day depending on which sites and depths are being dived. Village visits or land based excursions may be offered on selected days.

Meals provided before, between and after dives include:

- Light Breakfast
- Full Breakfast
- Lunch
- Afternoon snack
- Dinner

Complimentary soft drinks, tea, coffee and water are available throughout the day.

Day 10: For your last full day on board we will schedule a maximum of 2 dives to allow plenty of time for off-gassing before your flight home*.

Day 11: Following breakfast on board, disembarkation is scheduled for 09:00.

*We kindly ask guests to take note of their flight departure time to ensure they allow at least 24 hours between their last dive and flying

While we wish to show you the very best diving possible, a number of factors can determine which dive sites we visit. Weather, tides, currents and many other considerations influence the Cruise Director's decision of which route the boat takes and which locations are selected for diving.

As the majority of the wrecks that may be included on this itinerary are deep, we may limit bottom times or even participation in some dives for some guests. Following is an overview of what you might experience on your trip. Please be aware that *the inclusion of some of the wrecks listed below is NOT guaranteed and also depends on the itinerary duration.*

Florida Islands

USS Aaron Ward (DD-483) - weather dependent

Depth 50 to 70 metres

A Gleaves-class destroyer, the USS Aaron Ward was assigned to escort and screening duties for transport vessels in Guadalcanal. Having been called in to provide coverage for LST449 (Landing Ship Tank 449) from an in-coming Japanese air raid, she was hit during the ensuing manoeuvres just off Lunga Point near Henderson Field and suffered severe damage to the forward and aft boiler rooms and engine room spaces.

Believing that she could be saved, 'The Ward' was taken under tow to be repaired at the Seabees yard in Tulagi Harbour. However, it became increasingly apparent that she was not going to make it and she eventually slipped below the water off Tinete Point, roughly 6 miles (9.7 km) south-east of Tulagi, at 21:35 hours on 7th April 1943.

USS Aaron Ward now rests in 50 to 70 metres of water sitting upright on the bottom and still largely intact. The 4 x 5" Mounts, 2 x 40mm Bofors, 7 x 20mm cannons and 5 torpedoes are all still easily visible, along with the screws (not seen on many ships). She is 348 metres long, so even with the depth of water, a couple of dives will allow you to see the entire wreck comfortably.

Around Tulagi

Tulagi Island was one of the most significant bases for the Japanese during World War 2 and the scene of several major battles as part of the Guadalcanal Campaign, which is considered the turning point of WWII in the South Pacific. The Japanese invaded the island on 3rd May 1942 and in the following months established a naval refuelling, communications, and seaplane reconnaissance base on Tulagi and the nearby islets of Ghavutu and Tanambogo. On 7th August 1942 U.S. Marines landed on Tulagi and nearby islands, heavily outnumbering the Japanese, and establishing it as a base for Allied forces.

The wrecks that are located around Tulagi include both Japanese and American seaplanes, cargo ships, minesweepers and heavy cruisers that were sunk during numerous land, sea and air attacks. On land, there is the opportunity to visit some of the

battlegrounds, Japanese caves and bunkers, as well as a British colonial house from when Tulagi was the administrative seat of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate prior to the arrival of the Japanese.

USS Kanawha - weather dependent

Depth 40 - 60 metres

The 476 ft (145 metres) long USS Kanawha AO-1, US Navy Fleet oiler was also a supply vessel for the US Marines. On 7th April 1943, the same date as Aaron Ward and RNZN Moa sank, Kanawha had been anchored in Tulagi Harbour where she had been fulfilling her refuelling duties and was awaiting an escort so she could leave. As she began her escorted departure from the harbour Japanese bombers launched an air attack. She took several hits including one that went into the oil tank forward of the bridge and exploded causing her to catch fire and another that hit the engine room resulting in a complete loss of power. Attempts were made to save her but she was too badly damaged and subsequently sank in the early hours of the following morning.

Although she sits on the seabed at 60 metres, her forward deck is only 40 metres deep and the stern deck is at 45 metres with lots to explore.

RNZN Moa

Depth 35-42 Metres

Moa was a Royal New Zealand Navy Bird Class minesweeper and submarine chaser and played a pivotal role in the sinking of the [Japanese submarine I-1](#) off Cape Esperance at Guadalcanal. On 7th April 1943 while in Tugali Harbour, Moa was hit by three bombs from a Japanese airstrike which broke her keel resulting in her sinking from the surface to the bottom in just 7 minutes. She is the only diveable New Zealand warship lost at war and the depth at which she rests offers plenty of time to explore with depth charge racks at the stern and the 4" gun at the bow being key areas of interest.

USS Minneapolis

Depth 14 - 25 metres

The heavy cruiser Minneapolis featuring 8-inch calibre guns was struck by two torpedoes forward of the number one mount during The Battle of Tassafaronga at Savo Island on 30th November 1942. She was towed back to Tulagi Harbour where the badly damaged bow section was removed and a temporary replacement constructed so that she could be sailed back to Pearl Harbour and the Naval Yards for a complete repair. The bow section that was removed now lies at the back end of the bay in 14 to 25

metres of water in the area where the US Seabees Shipyard was located. The discards from many other ships that were damaged and repaired during the Solomons campaign litter the harbour floor around the Minneapolis's battered bow making it an interesting site with lots to explore.

Catalina Airplane

Depth 26 - 34 metres

The PBY Catalina is a U.S. seaplane or 'flying boat' which went down in 1943, apparently after hitting a small boat on the surface in the bay, not far from Tulagi. The Catalina was similar in design and function to the Kawanishi H6K, although more compact and with only two wing-mounted engines; she was also fitted with radar. The antenna can still be seen under the wing and, as she was in the process of landing when she sank, the wing tip floats are in the dropped position. She now sits the right way up at about 34m as if she was simply parked on the sea bed.

The Catalina remains mostly intact, although some sections are damaged or have broken off and lie on the sand around her. Both engines are detached from their mounts and lie on either side of the fuselage with their propellers stuck in the sand, along with the machine gun that would have been used by the waist gunner.

Ghavutu

Located just west of Tulagi, Ghavutu Island was a seaplane base occupied by various forces during the Pacific War. Built in 1939 by the Australian Air Force, it was originally known as RAAF Tanambogo until the invasion and occupation by the Japanese in May 1942. Also referred to as Tulagi Seaplane base, the old wharf site was home to the Japanese Navy at the start of the Guadalcanal campaign; Before the landing of the US Marines on the 7th of August 1942, an airstrike was launched by the US Navy to eliminate the Japanese Forces' flying boats.

Japanese Kawanishi H6K Mavis Planes

The Kawanishi H6K was a large, four-engined monoplane with twin tails and a hull suspended by a network of struts beneath a parasol wing. Built by Kawanishi to fulfil requirements from the Imperial Japanese Navy for a long-range reconnaissance/ bomber flying boat, they were used through much of WWII for maritime patrol duties. The Japanese Navy's designation for this aircraft model was "Type 97 Large Flying Boat"; the Allies' reporting name for them was Mavis.

As a result of the US Navy attack on 7th August, at least 7 Kawanishi reconnaissance/ VIP transport seaplanes were sunk in the area around Ghavutu where they were

moored. Some of them are reasonably well preserved while others are badly damaged or destroyed and little more than scattered parts.

Our favourite Mavis sites are referred to as M5 and M6; Both sit upright at a maximum depth of 34 metres and are big enough to keep you occupied for an entire no-decompression dive and more.

M5

This Mavis is largely intact and possibly one of the best underwater H6K Mavis seaplanes in the world. Resting on the sandy, silt-covered sea floor, with the mooring cable still attached to the nose ring, her nose cone is broken and bent upwards suggesting that the plane hit the seabed nose first when she sank. The cockpit is well preserved and, if you take a look inside, you can see the pilot and navigator seats, controls, gauges and various other instruments.

Part of the starboard side wing is missing, but the one on the port side is almost completely intact and still connected to the fuselage, with its engines still in place and supported by the wingtip float. Sections of outer skin were either burnt when she was bombed or have corroded over the years leaving the framework visible and allowing divers to see inside the fuselage.

M6

The Mavis known as M6 broke in half when she sank, resulting in her nose pointing upwards, and her tail section being bent forwards with the wings facing downwards on either side of the fuselage opposite to how they would originally have been positioned. Sometimes referred to as the "Phallic Mavis" because her bow stands erect off the seabed, the damage she suffered has left the rear section of the cockpit open giving divers the opportunity to venture inside and see what remains of the pilot's seats and controls.

Guadalcanal - Around Honiara

The Solomons' capital conveniently borders what is known today as Iron Bottom Sound. Originally called Savo Sound, the new name was assigned by Allied sailors for the great number of Japanese and Allied ships and planes that perished here during the Battle of Guadalcanal through 1942 and 1943. Relive history and combine exploring wrecks of cargo ships, planes, and submarines underwater with a land-based tour of the outdoor museum at Vilu which is full of machinery and remnants from the war.

Bonegi I, II and III

These 3 Japanese ships are located close to shore, west of Honiara. Each wreck is named after the beach she ended up on. Hirokawa Maru (Bonegi I) is a 156m (468ft) cargo vessel converted into a Boku Kikansen (anti-aircraft) armed transport ship; Kinugawa Maru (Bonegi II) is a cargo ship converted to an armed transport vessel, and Kyusyu Maru (Bonegi III) is a passenger-cargo ship converted to troop transport.

Bonegi I and II were run aground on 15th November 1942 while carrying out transportation missions during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. On the evening of the 15th-16th November 1942, the Japanese Navy was to provide cover for a transport convoy of some 7,000 troops. While the capital ships were involved in the melee off Savo Island, the transport vessels slipped by unnoticed and commenced unloading troops and supplies along the eastern shore of Guadalcanal. They were spotted by US Marine reconnaissance pilots the following morning and soon came under attack from the Marines' Douglas SBD Dauntless bombers leaving them ablaze and with many internal explosions from the munitions they were transporting. As loss was inevitable the ships were deliberately beached to enable more supplies to be offloaded from their holds.

Bonegi I (Hirokawa Maru)

Depth 59 metres

The shallow parts of the wreck have disappeared over the years but the deep sections remain more or less intact. Because of its location, the wreck offers plenty of options for all divers, starting just beneath the surface and stretching to nearly 60 metres. Much of the ship's central machine areas were heavily salvaged in the decades following her sinking, but the Hirokawa Maru's engine is still easily visible along with the crankshaft and gearbox at bilge level. At depth, the rear holds lie intact with some easy penetrations.

Bonegi II (Kinugawa Maru)

Depth 26 metres

Only 100 metres or so up the beach from Bonegi I, Kinugawa Maru was beached higher than the Hirokawa so most of her superstructure is now gone as a result of both salvage and 70 years of storm erosion and earthquake damage. There are still some significant features clearly visible like the engine block which protrudes above the water's surface. The aft section of the engine room is in only 8 metres of water, and her stern lies in 26 metres.

Bonegi III (Kyusyu Maru)

Depth 7 to 47 metres

Kyusyu Maru was part of the high-speed 'Tokyo Express' convoy that included Sasako Maru and Azumasan Maru, transporting Imperial Japanese Army soldiers and cargo through 'The Slot' to Guadalcanal. During the Allied Forces aerial attack on 14th-15th October 1942 she was hit squarely on the bridge by a bomb which killed the captain and other officers. The engineers below deck were unaware of this, so they put the ship on full steam until she was stranded on the beach near the mouth of Ruinin Creek. Her entire bow was angled upwards sticking out of the water with damage on the port side at the waterline; the forward king posts were bent backwards, towards the stern with the upper half of the centre funnel at the waterline, and the tip of the stern mast above the surface. She remained in situ until the late 1960s when, due to earthquakes and sections being removed for scrap, the rest of the shipwreck finally slid below the water.

Due to her location, Kyusyu Maru is also known as the Ruinin Wreck, as well as Bonegi 3. Following her abandonment, her superstructure is reported to have been used as target practice by the US Navy, Marine and Army Air Forces. During the 1960s and 70s, she was heavily salvaged, then Mother Nature did the rest of the damage. Though the architecture of the ship is largely destroyed, it is a great dive, with penetrations in the rear hold areas.

Resting on her port side at an angle of 45°, the ship is broken open near the engine area but more or less intact at the rear. There are boxes of ammunition in the holds and from there you can swim through the hull to the engine room where parts or the engines are still in place.

Azumasan Maru - weather dependent

Depth 39 - 85 metres

Built in 1932 as a 7,613 ton refrigerated cargo ship, the Azumasan Maru was converted to an IJN auxiliary transport vessel in 1941. She was unloading on the northern shore of Guadalcanal when the Allied fighters launched the aerial attack that resulted in the loss of Sasako Maru; The Azumasan suffered the same fate. She was hit by a B-17 Flying Fortress bomb causing her to catch fire and was deliberately run aground. She remained beached and burning for 2 days during which time she was bombed several more times until she eventually slipped off the reef and was lost to the deep off Ruani.

The Azumasan rests upright and intact with her bow at 39-50 metres, bridge at 60 metres, and stern at 80+ metres. Kawasaki motorbikes and sidecars can be found in the

second hold at a depth of 62m, another can be found adjacent to the back mooring at a depth of 74m.

USS John Penn - weather dependent

Depth 35 - 60 metres

Originally known as SS Excambion, the 137 metre long (450 ft) steamer began her life as one of the 'Four Aces' passenger-cargo liners running cruises from New York to and around the Mediterranean. Acquired by the US Navy in January 1942 she was renamed USS John Penn, then commissioned as Naval Transport AP-51 on 6 April 1942. She was deployed to the Pacific Campaign in December of that year and reclassified as an Attack Transport (now APA-23) on 1st February 1943 with the primary role of delivering supplies, equipment and troops to Guadalcanal.

On 13th August 1943 Japanese B5N 'Kate' torpedo bombers arrived at Lunga Point where USS John Penn had just finished unloading supplies to Henderson Field. One of the planes was shot down and crashed into the John Penn's superstructure causing ammunition to explode; around the same time she was hit near the number 5 cargo hold by an aerial torpedo, causing a secondary explosion and substantial damage to her aft section. She sank soon after, stern first, and now lies on her starboard side at 58 metres with the upper part of her hull at 35 metres. There are still a lot of artefacts on the wreck and a two tonne truck sitting upright on the sand aft of the funnel area.

Sasako Maru - weather dependent

Depth 58 - 85 metres

Originally built as a passenger-cargo vessel, the 6,510 Tonnes (7,180 Tons) Sasako Maru was requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army in July 1941 and converted as troop transport IJA No. 806 with two anti-aircraft guns.

On 15th October 1942 while unloading near Bunani Point on the northern shore of Guadalcanal she came under fire from 25 'Cactus Air Force' fighter planes out of Henderson Field, including Douglas "Dauntless" SBD dive-bombers, F4F "Wildcat" fighters, USAAF P-39s, one P-400 "Airacobra" fighter, and one PBY-5 "Catalina" armed with two torpedoes. She was hit by a bomb that started a fatal fire and was deliberately beached with her bow ashore. Although her troops, tanks and guns were landed successfully, the ship was a total loss and subsequently sank.

The Sasako lies on her port side at 85 metres with her starboard in 58m of water to the gunwales; Her bow and stern sections rest on independent pieces of rock and it is

possible to swim under the middle section of the ship, which is at around 80 metres depth.

USS Atlanta (CL-51) - weather dependent

Maximum depth 130 metres

The Atlanta is the deepest, most challenging wreck that is dived in the Solomon Islands and is the only diveable wreck that was sunk during the naval engagement known as 'The Barroom Brawl'.

This 152 metre (500ft) long anti-aircraft light cruiser, armed with 5-inch (127 mm) guns, served to provide protection for US naval forces in Midway and Eastern Solomons battles. She was heavily damaged by both enemy and friendly surface gunfire during a night attack on 13th November 1942 and was subsequently scuttled, on her captain's orders, 5 km (3 mi) west of Lunga Point later the same day.

The Atlanta came to rest on her port side at a depth of 120 - 130 metres with her stern section broken off and her funnels resting on the sandy bottom. Very little exploration has been done on the wreck due to the training, logistics and support systems required to dive her so there is still much to discover. The damage she sustained is clearly visible although many other areas are still intact and well preserved. Her torpedo tubes remain loaded with torpedoes, dual-mount guns are still in place and pointing upwards, and her prop shafts extend from her damaged hull with the propellers still attached.

B17E - Flying Fortress

Depth 14 to 18 metres

Nicknamed 'Bessy The Jap Basher', on the 24th September 1942 this aircraft, along with three other B-17s, conducted a bombing raid on Japanese ships in the Shortland Islands. The bombers met strong opposition from Japanese Zeros and 'Bessy' was heavily damaged. Despite this, she managed to drop her bomb load on a Japanese cargo vessel then turned to head back to Henderson Airfield (Honiara). She continued to come under attack and was last seen descending, smoking into the sea around Vilu, west of Henderson.

In January 1944 the US Navy Seabees salvaged the rear fuselage and tail section so the wreckage is the front sections of the plane and includes the main wing and cockpit area. All engines are intact on the plane; the nose section has collapsed, but the cockpit is still in good condition with the pilot's seat and top turret intact. The ball turret rests in the sand behind the fuselage and other wreckage is scattered in the vicinity.

Submarine I-1

Depth 3 - 28 metres

The I-1 was a 97 metre (319 ft) long, J1 Class cruiser submarine, powered by twin shaft MAN 10 cylinder 4 stroke diesel engines and two electric motors. The I-1 had six torpedo tubes and carried 20 "Type 95" oxygen-driven torpedoes.

From the 14th January to the 7th February 1943, Japanese forces conducted Operation Ke for the evacuation of their troops from Guadalcanal. On 29th January the I-1 was on station in the area of Cape Esperance, where she was detected by the New Zealand ships RNZN Kiwi and Moa. The Kiwi and Moa dropped depth charges and drove the I-1 to the surface. A close-quarter battle ensued between the 3 vessels, during which the Kiwi rammed the I-1 three times damaging her conning tower and pressure hull and eventually the sub ran aground. The crew set destruction charges but they failed to completely destroy the I-1.

The I-1 was salvaged during the 1960s and 70s which caused a lot of destruction and left her bow section completely obliterated, but her rear sections are reasonably well preserved. Penetration is safe and easy from her midsection through to the stern. At the rear, you can see the dive planes, rudder, prop shaft and propeller, as well as the cutters that were used to break through submarine nets used to guard ports. Other interesting features of the I-1 include air-bank cylinders that were used for discharging ballast tanks and the huge electric motors that powered the vessel underwater.

