



Welcome Aboard Notes

Bilikiki Cruises

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Welcome Aboard

Bilikiki Cruises, Solomon Islands

We're pleased to have you join Bilikiki Cruises for your diving excursion in Solomon Islands. Often called the "Happy Islands", we hope your visit here will be the source of some great diving, new friendships and exciting memories.

Solomon Islands is not a well known destination, so to help you prepare for your trip, we've put together some notes on Solomon Islands, the people and the diving with Bilikiki Cruises Ltd. We hope they are helpful.

Malaria and Health

Anti-malarial medication is recommended and travelers should ensure other shots and vaccinations are up-to-date. Travelers to Solomon Islands should consult their doctor or local health unit about immunizations, vaccinations and oral preventatives for hepatitis A, malaria, polio, tetanus and typhoid.

There are numerous malarial prophylactics. At the moment Doxycycline is popular and effective against malaria. It is also an antibiotic and therefore offers some protection from coral cuts and other scrapes. Malarone is also being widely used and has very few side effects. Be sure to check with your doctor for his recommendations. The only one we ask you to avoid is Mefloquine (brand name Lariam). It's side effects can mimic decompression sickness which can make things difficult on board, to say the least.

It's not that there is an undue health risk in Solomon Islands; however medical care is not always immediately available, and a minor health problem -untreated- can ruin an otherwise perfect vacation.

Water and food aboard the ships of Bilikiki Cruises Ltd. or any of the commercial hotels, resorts or restaurants is not a problem, but elsewhere drinking water should be boiled and all food well cooked.

Contact Numbers

MV Bilikiki is well maintained and carries all necessary navigation and communication equipment. The ships maintain regular radio contact with the Bilikiki Cruises Ltd. office in Honiara, and limited message capabilities, for emergency or urgent communications, can be made available. Solomon Islands is a remote area but cell phone coverage is increasing in the Islands and in a **few** areas coverage is now provided by Solomon Telekom and Bemobile. Check with your provider or you could purchase a local sim card on arrival which normally provides (very slow) internet access on mobile devices. Otherwise internet access is not available on board ship. There is a satellite phone available for outgoing calls, and calls are charged by the minute. In case of emergency have your family or friends contact our office in Honiara.

Phone: + 677 20412 Fax: + 677 23897 Email: bilikiki@solomon.com.sb

Please keep incoming messages brief as they will need to be transcribed and read out over the radio. If you wish to reply you may then make an outgoing call via Satellite phone.

Passports and Visas

Passports are required for entry to Solomon Islands, and a visitor's permit will be issued for nationals of United States, most Commonwealth and most European nations on arrival, as long as the traveler holds a return or ongoing ticket. Passports must be valid for 6 months after your departure from Solomon Islands, so check your expiration date and renew your passport if necessary. We can help arrange visas for those originating in countries for which visas are required. If in doubt contact us for information in this regard.

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Electricity

Power throughout the ship is 240 V 50 cycle, using Australia style 3-prong outlets. There are also plenty of American style 110 V 60 cycle outlets for charging cameras, strobes, dive lights, etc. These outlets are only for charging purposes so if you intend to use hairdryers, shavers, etc. you will need to bring adapters.

Currency

The currency used in Solomon Islands is the Solomon Island dollar, and this is what is required for shopping around town, and for purchasing carvings and other handicrafts from villages while on Bilikiki. Currency from other countries can be exchanged at the airport, from any of the banks in town, or to a limited degree on board our vessels, from the managers. Payment for any on board extras such as bar drinks, boutique items, and gratuities are paid to the managers at the end of the trip. For these items currency from any country on world exchanges and Visa or Mastercard are accepted. Credit card transactions will all be converted to Solomon dollars for processing at the exchange rate on the day. Clients are fully responsible for any Foreign Transaction Fees and Exchange rate differences their card provider may charge. Please note that Travelers Cheques are no longer accepted due to increased bank security requirements.

Gratuities

While tipping is not common in the South Pacific, it is an accepted practice among live-aboard operations and others offering service to North American and European clientele. If you believe the service you have received warrants it, a gratuity to be shared among all the crew should be given to one of the managers at the end of the trip.

Nitrox

Nitrox is available at a cost of USD\$20.00 per diving day. Persons wishing to use Nitrox must be certified in it's use.

Dive Equipment Rental

There is a full range of dive equipment available to rent onboard, either by the day or for the whole trip. It is best to book gear rental before your trip. Current [Rental Equipment Rates](#) are available on our web page.

Diving

Diving facilities are second to none. Large dive decks offer individual storage for gear, racks and hangers for suits, freshwater showers, separate rinse tanks for photo gear, and easy access to the skiffs. Tanks are filled at the end of each dive then rigged for the next one. Bilikiki Cruises crew are trained to expertly handle your tanks and other gear. The only time you have to touch your tank is when you're diving and it's on your back!

Diving is done mothership fashion with divers shuttled to the dive site in one of the two specially designed aluminum skiffs (called "tinnies"). Once in the water, the divers are tracked by their bubbles and can be picked up by the tinnie crew and shuttled back to the ship almost the minute they reach the surface. This eliminates long swims, current fighting and sitting in the hot sun while waiting for other divers to surface.

A briefing will precede each dive, and the Managers will outline the type of dive, what you can expect to see and recommendations regarding current, depth, and activities. Divers set their own profile in conjunction with their buddy, their computer and their previous diving activities, and are welcome to discuss their plans with the Managers for assistance and advice.

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The dive schedule is established by the managers, but this is flexible to accommodate the desires of all the passengers. An evening briefing usually outlines the plans for the next days diving, and passengers comments and input are welcomed. The ship does not follow a specific itinerary during the course of a cruise, and weather and diving conditions, and the preferences of the passengers, will all affect the dive sites chosen and the length of stay in any given locale.

In general, on a 10 day or longer cruise the ship will visit the Florida Islands, Russell Islands, Marovo Lagoon and Mborukua Island (also known as Mary Island). Seven day trips generally operate in the Floridas, Russells and Mborukua.

Most diving need not be deep as the reefs start close to the surface. Often the reefs drop off gradually allowing you to explore extensively at relatively shallow depths. You will find walls, however, often in close conjunction to a reef, making it excellent for computer assisted diving.

Just a word of caution. Solomon Islands is in a remote part of the world. The nearest recompression chamber is about 1,500 miles (2,400 km) away in Townsville, Australia. In a diving emergency, a light aircraft will be required to evacuate the patient from the ship to Honiara, then evacuation to Townsville is in a recompression chamber aboard a King Air turbo-Prop. Cost will be at least USD \$30,000. It is mandatory that divers aboard Bilikiki Cruises Ltd. vessels carry medical evacuation insurance. We recommend you contact Divers Alert Network (DAN) for information on Evacuation and Travel insurance. An internet search for Divers Alert Network will bring up their websites for various parts of the world. Remember you'll be doing a lot of diving, probably four or five dives per day, and that adds up to a lot of nitrogen. Pace yourself, and consider sitting out a dive every now and then.

[Water Temperature](#)

Divers in the Solomons are usually comfortable in a Lycra or at most an eighth inch (2- 3mm) wetsuit. Water temperature will be in the 82°F to 85°F (28° C - 30° C) range, but after multiple dives per day you may find that you need some thermal protection.

[Water Clarity](#)

Visibility will range from 75 to 125 feet, with occasional sites with much better visibility, and yes, you will have dives with visibility less than 75 feet. The Solomon Island waters are very nutrient rich. They support the entire food chain from microscopic creatures to major predators. Because of this, visibility may be less than that of some other world famous dive sites, but for this same reason you will find a multitude of large and small critters to observe and photograph. In some cases visibility may only be 10 or 15 feet, because of all the fish blocking your view!

[Photographic Notes](#)

Bring both macro and wide-angle lens for your cameras if you are into underwater photography. The Solomons are a photographers paradise, so equip yourself accordingly.

Most divers are now shooting in digital format, and it is best to bring your laptop so that you can view and edit your images. Bilikiki is fitted with 110 volt electrical outlets for battery recharging, and has large camera tables for checking equipment, as well as, digital projector and wide screen LCD TV with USB, HDMI & VGA inputs.

[Travelers Gifts](#)

Travelers to the Solomons often ask what they might bring as gifts to the people.

Keeping in mind weight limitations for your flight in, you can consider items like pencils, pens, notebooks, erasers, rulers and other school-type goods. These are popular with adults as well as the children. We suggest you avoid candy or other sweets. Instead, consider inexpensive toothbrushes,

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combs, hair clips, elastics, and hair bands, and other simple grooming aids. Old t-shirts, shorts or lengths of cloth that can be used to make skirts. Used or inexpensive reading glasses are very popular. Also, small coin purses.

Many Solomon Islanders count on fishing for their daily food, therefore fishing lures (plugs, etc.) and fish line are valuable for them. Mask, fins, and snorkels are also well received. And if you can manage the weight, elementary-level books and maps for the village schools will be very much appreciated.

Items you use that can be left behind at the end of the cruise, like flashlight batteries, pens and pencils, baseball caps or T-shirts, are also welcome.

Clothing and Dress

T-shirts, shorts and bathing suits are suitable on board attire, with a light windbreaker or sweatshirt for the odd cool or breezy morning, or after your evening dive.

On island excursions, T-shirts and walking shorts are generally acceptable, but ladies should be sensitive to local customs, and not wear bathing suits or abbreviated shorts or other brief clothing ashore. Ships personnel will be happy to advise you on comfortable and appropriate dress. Footwear is seldom required on board ship, although slip-ons or thongs are popular. For shore excursions and for travel, light-weight, rubber-soled slip-ons or laced shoes are excellent.

It is recommended that you travel light, with cotton shirts, blouses, slacks and shorts. There is never a need for anything more formal than a cotton sport shirt or blouse. Nor is there a requirement for a different outfit everyday. There are limited laundry facilities aboard ship and these are busy full time making sure that you have a supply of fresh towels and linen.

Climate

The islands are located just below the equator and enjoy a year-round tropical climate, moderated by the sea air. Rainfall averages 10 inches (250 mm) per month year round. January to Mid March, the southern summer, is generally wetter and warmer, with frequent short, sharp cloudbursts followed by bright sunshine. In the southern winter, May through December, the south-easterly trade winds produce pleasantly mild weather. Rainfall is usually light and several days apart. Humidity is generally high, particularly inland, but is significantly lower on the coast and aboard ship or on the small islands.

This close to the equator the sun is very intense, so expect to use plenty of sun block. Day time temperatures average in the high 80's to low 90's F (28 – 33 C) all year round.

Shipboard Life on MV Bilikiki

MV Bilikiki is among the great live-aboard dive boats of the world. At 125 feet long and 24 feet wide she is large and seaworthy and offers unparalleled comfort at sea. Passengers are accommodated in air-conditioned cabins and staterooms. Bilikiki has 10 double or twin-share staterooms all with private facilities. There is a large sun deck as well as open covered decks. The lounge areas are comfortably furnished and feature large tables, a bar, multi-format TV/DVD and an extensive library of reference material and recreational reading. Bilikiki carries a crew of 11, plus two managers who are responsible for diving and ships operations. The crew are well-trained, friendly, attentive and professional.

Meals are always important when you are traveling and diving, so the galley staff do their best to produce quality and tasty meals and snacks. Three hearty meals are served buffet style daily, and between meals snacks are always ample. The menu will usually include a selection from fresh and cooked vegetables, meat, fish, chicken, pasta, rice, bread or toast, scones, biscuits and of course, tea, coffee, hot chocolate and all the usual condiments to complete the meal. Occasionally pizza will be on the menu and desserts may be cakes, pie or puddings. There is always lots of fresh fruit, and fresh lime juice, called bush lime, is popular as a thirst quencher. Galley staff are also prepared to assist

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with special menu requirements, but we request notification of such needs well in advance of the departure date, to ensure that arrangements can be made and supplies obtained. Both ships have a bar with basic service including spirits, beer and wine. Soft drinks are also available. There is a charge for bar drinks and soft drinks.

[The Villages and Villagers](#)

You will be traveling in and among the Islands during your stay with us, and you will have many opportunities to meet the Solomon Island people. Solomon Islanders are a proud and friendly group who have been making passengers aboard the Bilikiki welcome since our first trips in 1988. You will be invited to visit their villages, schools and churches and they will be very pleased to display, and sell, their carvings, baskets and other goods. Ships managers regularly purchase fresh fruit and vegetables from the villagers and their canoes of produce make regular appearances when we are near villages.

While anchored off their villages the ship will be visited by these very skillful sailors in their dugout canoes. The boating and swimming ability of the children is quite remarkable and very entertaining.

Solomon Island lifestyle remains very traditional, with a smattering of western influence. Village houses are still built of palm leaf intricately woven to shelter the occupants, although some corrugated iron is used for building. Villages are usually clean and neat with clearly defined paths among the buildings. Please remember that these are private homes and visitors should never enter or look into individual houses without permission.

The Solomon Islanders raise crops in their market gardens near the villages and also raise chickens and pigs for food. Fish is also an essential part of their diet, and often when our ship is anchored off a village for the night, the village men and boys will come out to catch the fish that are attracted by the ship's lights.

[Carvings and Artwork](#)

A word about buy and sell in Solomons. The native carvings and artwork are outstanding. The artists follow traditional styles, and produce work using ebony, kerosene wood and stone, and the wood carvings are often inlaid with shell. Prices will range greatly depending on the size and quality of the piece and the price obtained, or expected, from the last customer. Pricing is always in Solomon Island Dollars, and exchange at current bank rate can be made with your ships managers. It is always wise to listen to the briefing by the ships managers about shopping as each village is different, and the managers can give you a good expectation of prices and quality. Some mild "negotiation" on prices is expected, but please respect the pride of the artists and avoid "aggressive" haggling or other activities that diminish the value of their work.

[Finale](#)

Have fun on your trip to Solomon Islands. You are about to be treated to some outstanding diving and world class hospitality. We hope you enjoy it.

On your return we'd be pleased to hear your comments about Solomon Islands and Bilikiki Cruises. Please contact Sam Leeson or Kellie Oldfield by mail, fax or email or phone at:

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