

14 DAY

Melanesia Discoverer

EXPEDITION



 Wild Earth Travel
Small Ships, Big Adventures

2013 Departures

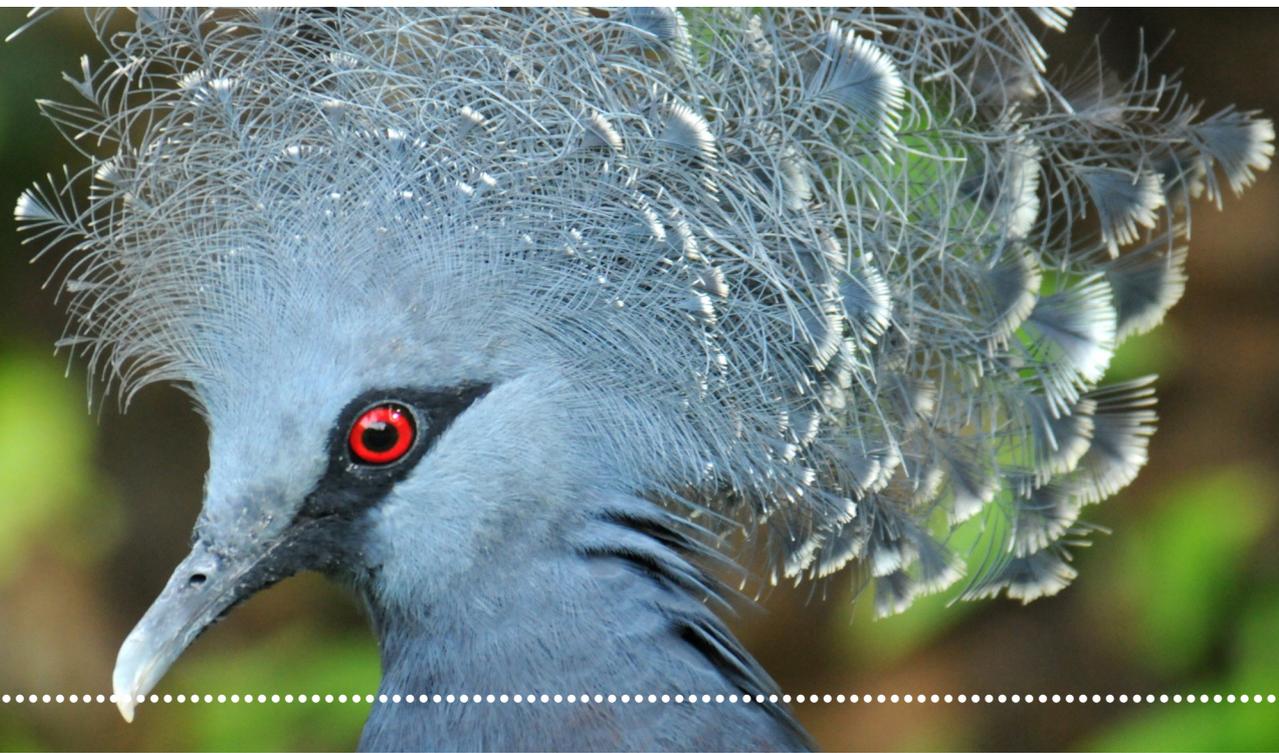
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THE TRAVEL AGENTS

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A once-in-a-lifetime experience

Uncover the hidden gems of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. From the culturally rich arterial of the Sepik River we sail north across the Bismarck Sea to the remote shores of Manus and Mussau Islands. Next delve into the history, culture and wildlife of New Ireland and New Britain before we cross the Buka Channel and enter a long isolated world as we are amongst the first travelers to return to Bougainville in over two decades. Sailing through the turquoise waters of the Solomon Islands, new vistas and unexpected encounters await.

For birders this itinerary offers once in a lifetime species on remote islands where few have been before. The birding potential is exceptional and to allow birders to maximise the opportunities there will be an optional specialised birding programme with customised excursions.

These waters also offer some of the greatest diving in the world and while everybody will have the opportunity to snorkel and appreciate the beauty beneath the waves, we also offer an optional scuba diving programme for those wishing to maximise their underwater experiences.

ITINERARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1: Madang / Overnight Hotel

Arrive in the port town of Madang and transfer to the Madang Resort for the first night. This evening meet with your fellow travelers and the expedition team over dinner at the resort.

Day 2: Madang / Embark Ship

Madang is picturesquely situated on a peninsula surrounded by islands and waterways and is a thriving community renowned for its traditional artists, world class diving opportunities and the richness of its surrounding forests. This morning we will start the day with a visit to the Lababia Wildlife Management Area with its tall forest and rich diversity of wildlife, before returning to Madang to explore the markets with your guides. There will also be optional excursions depending upon your interests with birders leaving early for a morning birding excursion, and divers heading out with

the resort boats to explore the spectacular reefs, channels and wrecks.

Day 3-4 : Sepik River

Sure to be one of the highlights of our expedition, we have allowed plenty of time to fully appreciate this remarkable river, its birds, animals and the people that call it home. The Sepik River is the longest river in Papua New Guinea, flowing from the highlands to the Bismarck Sea. It is a rich arterial that has fostered great traditional artists. We plan to explore the river by zodiac, following tributaries and channels in search of local wildlife. We also meet with the villagers and marvel at their artistry, with the opportunity to purchase carvings directly from the artists.

Day 5: Manus Island

Seldom visited and little known, Manus Island is considered a jewel in the crown of Papua New Guinea. Biologically isolated, the islands are home to a high proportion of endemic species including the Superb Pitta which is likely to be one of the birding highlights of the expedition. Manus province has the lowest density of people in all New Guinea with its people still living a very traditional lifestyle. The waters around Manus offer some of the most spectacular and rich diving in the region, with these seldom explored waters promising a myriad of "first" diving opportunities.

Day 6: Mussa Island

Far to the north of New Ireland and considered a separate bio region we have allowed a full day to explore in true expedition style Mussa Island and its surrounding waters. Mussa Island represents one of the western-most extensions of the Lapita culture. Debate continues as to whether this was caused by reverse migration or possibly represents one of its earliest known sites as people moved out of Asia. Spend time with the local people to learn about their special culture and life on this remote outpost in the Pacific.

Day 7: Kavieng, New Ireland

Today we spend the day in and around historic Kavieng at the northern end of New Ireland. Significant evidence from the Japanese occupation remains around town but today the area is a developing hub for tourism because of the rich diversity of the surrounding land and sea. The birders will leave early for the highlands to the south while

The birders will leave early for the highlands to the south while the rest of the group spends the morning exploring locally. Later snorkel in the clear waters of the local reefs. Meanwhile divers will spend the day in the company of local dive experts exploring the very best diving that Kavieng has to offer.

DAY 8: Rabaul, New Britain

Six beautifully cone-shaped volcanoes ring Rabaul's dramatic flooded-caldera harbour. Visit the bubbling hot springs and take in magnificent views of the harbour and volcanoes from Observatory Ridge. We are planning a very special performance tonight of the Baining tribe's fire dance. Tribe members in huge, intricately crafted masks dance over red-hot coals in a centuries-old ritual to honor the local deity-spirits. Rabaul is world renowned for the excellent diving opportunities which divers will be sure to appreciate.

DAY 9: Nissan Island

A tropical atoll adrift in the azure waters of the Buka Channel, bathed in rich tropical currents Nissan Island's waters abound in marine life. Seldom has anybody had the opportunity to discover this world which promises abundant pelagic fish life and pristine coral reefs. Ashore there are still reminders of the brief but intensive WWII activities during which the islands were recaptured by Kiwi and British forces from the Japanese occupiers. During our time ashore we will meet with the friendly locals and search the dense woods for some of the elusive birds that occur here. Later snorkel over the coral reefs to discover another world.

Day 10: Bougainville Island

We plan to be amongst the first expeditioners to re-discover the treasures of Bougainville, long isolated and in a strange way protected by the conflict which swirled around its shores. Today it is emerging once again as a newly vibrant and remarkably pristine island paradise, home to some of the greatest biodiversity in the region both above and below the waters. Before the conflict Bougainville was renowned for some of the most spectacular diving in the world; these reefs await rediscovery. We plan to explore the area around Arawa which offers great opportunities to access the island's interior and reefs.

Day 11: Choiseul Island

Today we arrive in the Solomon Islands on the remote northern coast of Choiseul Island. Here the mountains tumble to the sea, broken only by torrents of fresh water cascading from the highlands. This was once the home of the Choiseul Crested Pigeon and while it no longer walks the forest floor many other species still enliven the forest. We zodiac cruise deep into the mangrove forest towards the Sui River Falls searching for Dugong and crocodiles. Here Kisa shell money was manufactured and used exten-

sively in trade around the neighboring islands. It is still valued and protected by the village elders to this day.

Day 12: New Georgia Islands

The volcanic New Georgia Islands are found in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands and are characterised by extensive reefs and lagoons, rugged terrain and an abundance of rivers. Birding enthusiasts will relish landing on Kolombangara Island, where we hope to see the rare Roviana Rail along with other endemic bird species. For those more interested in the marine environment, nearby Ghizo Island has some of the best and most exciting diving in the world with World War II wrecks and reefs that have some of the highest fish counts in the world. Ghizo township is the third largest in the Solomon Islands and those who wander down the main street will be greeted with small waterfront stores and an open air market. Perhaps you might be able to purchase one of the wood or stone carvings that the people of the Western Province are so famous for.

Day 13: Santa Isabel Island

The Arnavon Islands are northwest of Santa Isabel in the midst of an area rich in marine biodiversity and one of the most important rookeries in the western Pacific for the endangered Hawksbill Turtle. The islands also support a high diversity of terrestrial fauna, with 41 species of birds, six species of bats, and at least seven species of terrestrial reptiles. Sensational diving and snorkelling can be experienced around the islands. In the afternoon we zodiac cruise a chain of largely unpopulated islands off the north-western tip of Santa Isabel Island before visiting the village of Kia. This is the largest village on Santa Isabel Island and is a sight to behold as the houses are built on stilts over the transparent lagoon waters.

Day 14 Honiara, Guadalcanal

Located on the northern coast of Guadalcanal, by the Mataniko River, Honiara was founded by the British as a military base during World War II. Honiara was witness to the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, where the Allied forces eventually overcame a Japanese invasion. Today we enjoy the option of touring Honiara, visiting historical sites including Henderson Airfield, war memorials and the open-air war museum. A second tour heads to the rain-forested slopes of Mount Austen in search of some of the Solomon Islands' most spectacular birds including the Solomon Sea Eagle.

For those disembarking a transfer to your hotel or the airport will conclude your voyage OR join us to discover the Secrets of Melanesia.





TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- All meals and 24 hour tea and coffee station aboard the ship
- Use of snorkel equipment where available
- All shore excursions and activities throughout the voyage by Zodiac excluding optional specialised birding and diving programmes
- Programme of lectures by noted naturalists
- All onshore tips, service taxes and port charges
- Comprehensive pre-departure material
- Airport transfers at the beginning and end of your voyage

TOUR EXCLUSIONS:

Extensions, passport, visa, immigration fees, baggage/accident/travel protection plan, items of a personal nature such as bar, e-mail, and laundry. Gratuities to ship's crew at your discretion. Airfares are an additional cost.

PRICE:

Prices are per person, double occupancy unless indicated as solo

- Main Deck Triple: \$6,995
- Main Deck Twin: \$7,995
- Superior Triple: \$8,500
- Superior Twin: \$8,995
- Superior Plus Twin: \$9,700
- Mini Suite: \$10,700
- Suite: \$11,500

- Discovery Fund – Payment Onboard: \$500 pp
- Diving Supplement: \$800 pp
- Birding Supplement: \$500 pp

DEPARTURES:

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