

11 DAY

# Secrets of Melanesia

EXPEDITION



 Wild Earth Travel

*Small Ships, Big Adventures*

2013 Departures

24 October 2013

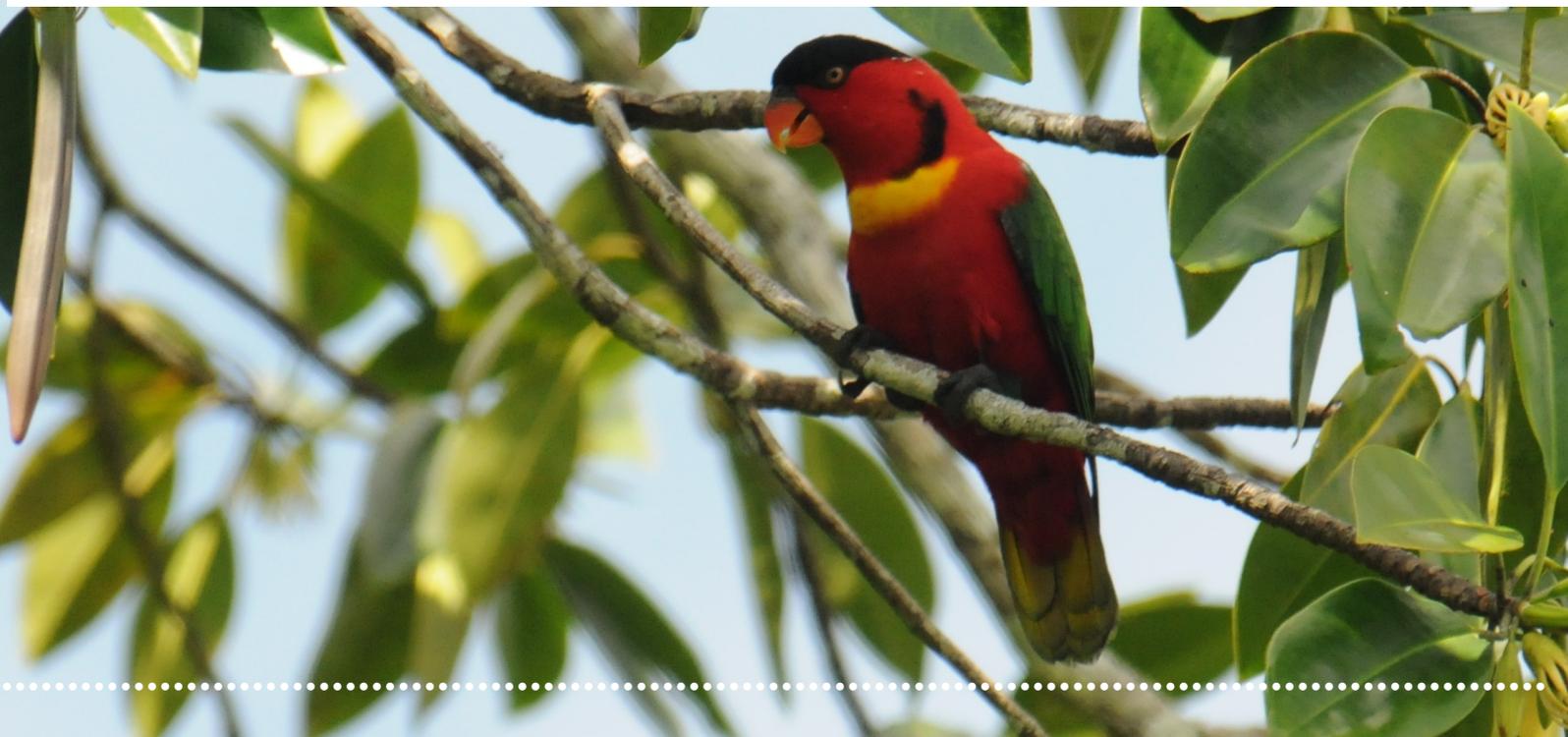


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## A once-in-a-lifetime experience

Sail into a world that few have ever experienced, idyllic islands and isolated villages where unique time-honored traditions and elaborately costumed dancers welcome us into their world. Sail from Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, to discover the beauty of the outer Solomon Islands. Relax as our ship glides into secluded bays, and takes us to remote oceanic islands where the art of traditional navigation lives today. In Vanuatu, search for endemic bird species or dive one of the world's most famous wrecks and discover hidden worlds, islands picture post card beautiful but yet to be discovered.

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: Honiara

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.

#### Day 2: San Jorge Island and Santa Isabel

Despite being one of the largest and highest islands in the Solomon Islands, most of Isabel remains unexplored and undiscovered. We will head for the remote southern shores and Thousand Ships Harbour which is nestled between San Jorge Island and the high peaks of

southern Santa Isabel. Here the rhythms of life continue little changed, with daily life centered around the village and family. The multitude of inlets, channels and bays provide numerous opportunities for divers to experience the thrill of a "first" dive.

#### Day 3: Malaita

Mountainous Malaita is home to one-third of the Solomon's total population, with pristine rivers and unexploited tropical forests. Anchoring in one of the harbours on the western side of the island, we'll spend the day ashore, including a visit to Langa Langa Lagoon, famous for its artificial islands. An excursion into the hills behind Auki provides good chances of sighting birds endemic to Malaita. The island is culturally rich, with shark worship common on the western side of the island. The traditional currency, Malaitan shell-money, is still made on the island and is used as a dowry, and worn as a status symbol. Listen out for the sweet sounds of traditional pan-pipe music being played by the locals.

#### Day 4: Makira & Santa Ana (San Cristobal)

Makira is the most easterly of the main islands in the Solomons archipelago, and covers some 3100 sq km. Nearby to the east lies Santa Ana, a small raised coral atoll. Sea caves on the island are believed to be the site of first habitation in the Solomons, dating back to 1280 BC. We spend time with the locals, who share with us their traditional song and dance, which incorporate Polynesian flavours. Santa Ana is renowned for its bone fish hooks and intricately carved wooden bowls and fishing floats. Join our naturalists for a walk across the island, looking out for colourful orchids and the elusive Melanesian megapode.

#### Day 5: Nendö – Temotu Province

Nendö is the largest of the Santa Cruz Islands, which lie to the southeast of the Solomon Islands. The Spanish navigator Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira unsuccessfully tried to establish a colony there in 1595. Biologically these islands share more in common with Vanuatu. This is the home of red feather money, sourced from the Scarlet Honeyeater. Today the islanders will perform the dances of their ancestors with traditional red feather sticks. Be on the lookout for *tema* – distinctive breastplates made from discs of clam shells with turtle shell overlays – integral to the men's ceremonial costumes.

## DAY 6: Duff Islands

On the tiny island of Taumako in the Solomon Islands' eastern province of Temotu live some 500 Polynesians who may be the only people in the Pacific still capable of building and sailing traditional voyaging canoes in completely traditional ways. To the northeast of Nendö, are the small isolated Duff Islands, a cluster of 11 small islands, where the islanders are renowned for their great navigating abilities and their mighty traditional voyaging canoes. In recent years there has been a resurgence in this dying art, so watch out for locals hand-crafting their vessels on the shore with adzes. Listen closely and you may notice that Duff Islanders speak a Polynesian language, despite physically resembling Melanesians.

## DAY 7: Vanikolo

Today we explore the archipelago of Vanikolo, with its five islands encapsulated by a dramatic barrier reef which offers superb diving and snorkeling. French explorer Jean-François de La Pérouse was stranded here after both his vessels, *La Boussole* and *Astrolabe*, struck this reef in 1788. On the shore we visit a monument to Le Perouse, erected by fellow explorer Dumont Durville in 1827. Some 900 people inhabit Vanikolo, with approximately 600 Melanesian islanders and 300 Polynesians originating from nearby Tikopia. Join the naturalists on a forest wander in search of two endemic bird species and float through the crystal clear waters.

## Day 8: Vanua Lava

This morning we arrive in Vanuatu at the northern outpost of Vanua Lava, the largest island in the Banks Islands which is crowned by the volcanically active Mt Séré'ama. Vanua Lava with its nearby Motu Lava and Reef Islands offers diverse landscapes, rich culture and a bountiful underwater world. Here we begin our discovery of Vanuatu, the happiest country in the world. The surrounding waters are home to the recently discovered Vanuatu Petrel which we will be looking for upon our departure.

## Day 9: Espiritu Santo

We take advantage of a full day ashore to make the most of Vanuatu's largest Island, Santo, the location of James Michener's Tales of the

South Pacific. Early morning offers a visit to Vathe Conservation Area for the birders in search of many of Vanuatu's endemic birds, all of which can be found on Santo. Resting in depths of 20m to 60m of tropical water, diving the wreck of SS *President Coolidge*, a military transport vessel which hit a mine in WWII, provides numerous technical dives options with swims through corridors and stairwells of the ship. Other opportunities include paddling up river in a dug-out canoe to swim in the breathtaking Blue Hole, a snorkel at Million Dollar Point, where the Americans dumped their equipment after the war, and a visit to Luganville township.

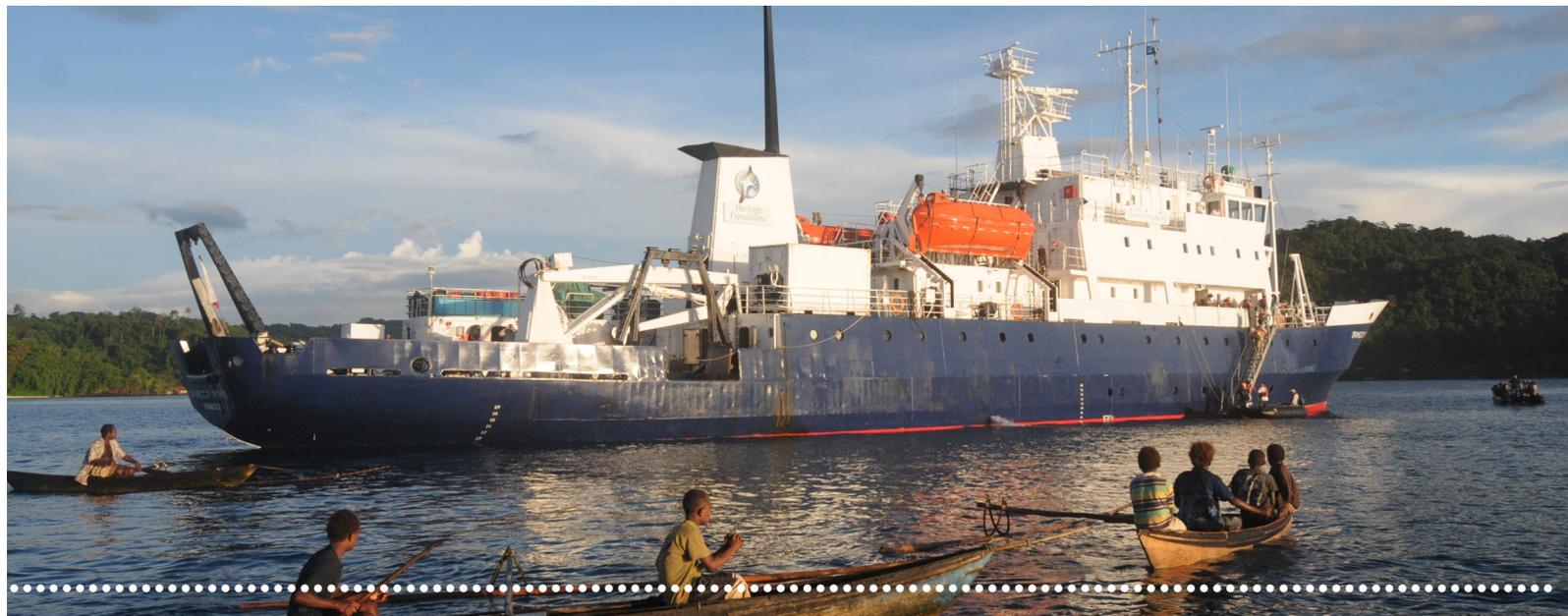
## Day 10: Malakula

Having crossed the Bougainville Strait we head for the southern end of Malakula Island, Vanuatu's second largest island. Visited by Captain Cook in 1774, Malakula and its coastal islands became known as The Cannibal Islands due to the fierce reputation of the Big Namba and Small Namba tribes. With some thirty languages spoken, Malakula is culturally and linguistically the most diverse region of Vanuatu. We explore the southern shoreline, home of the Small Nambas tribal group and the least developed and most traditional part of Malekula. Beautiful and rarely visited, the nearby low-lying Maskelyne Islands offer first-class diving and snorkeling opportunities, with coral gardens surrounding the archipelago. Be transported back in time as we witness the famed Masked Dances of Malakula and watch the men craft intricate sand drawings, their beautiful creations capturing hidden messages and stories.

## Day 11: Port Vila

Early morning we disembark in Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital on the island of Efate. Upon disembarking a transfer to your hotel or the airport will conclude your voyage.





### 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: \$5,995

Main Deck Twin: \$6,995

Superior Triple: \$7,500

Superior Twin: \$7,995

Superior Plus Twin: \$8,600

Mini Suite: \$9,250

Suite: \$9,995

Discovery Fund—Payment Onboard: \$500 pp

Diving Supplement: \$700 pp

Birding Supplement: \$450 pp

### DEPARTURES:

24 October 2013

