



Joe and Carol visit the Solomon Islands...

Sunset at Popcorn Pass on the last night out at sea.

It was great fun....lots of schools of fish and interesting topography with caves and overhangs. Wonderful bunch of people from Australia (actually two Aussie guys who hardly drank a beer... guess not all Aussies are alike.), Spain, NYC, Colorado, Florida.. a great mix. The crew and the boat, The Spirit of Solomon's, were both great. We dove from "tinnies", Austrian for an aluminum skiff. Wonderful layout and easy to dive from. Most dive sites were maybe 3 minutes from the mother ship. We could dive our dive and computers and the tinny was waiting for us. Most dives were 70-75 minutes. We dove 4-5 dives per day. Great place for dive junkies. A definite dive, eat, sleep/or tinker with camera gear kind of place.

The fish life was good.....many schools. You cannot compare the critter life of the Solomon's to Indonesia as the Solomon site seemed to lack a lot of the odd critters that seem to be in mass in Indonesia. That being said we had sharks, turtles, manta rays and lots of fish.



Great topography for wide angle shots, friendly fish like this sweetlips & colorful 2 spot blennies darting in the sand.



Snorkeling with mantas at Uepi Resort.



Many dramatic octopus on most dives.



Razorfish (shrimpfish) in staghorn corals. Titian Triggers nesting. Wonderful electric "disco" clams.



Our home for the week: Spirit of Solomon



Delicious buffets at every meal.



Sunsets with local villages every night.

The Spirit of Solomon is the sister ship to the Bilikiki. On the Bilikiki all the cabins were exactly the same: twin/twin and equal sized. On the Spirit, all cabins are a little different.... Which can lead to petty "my room is not as good as your room" stuff. It has cabins for singles which are nice for a single person...you pay the same and get your own room. They can hold 2 people as these cabins have 2 bunks. They are SMALL... very small, each has a sink. They share 3 showers and 2 toilets. At first... SMALL is all you see, then you adjust. It is nice to have the privacy, sharing a bath is not a bad deal. Singles get this cabin without paying single supplement so it does have that advantage. We liked the gathering area on the Spirit much better as it had a dining area on top and you could watch the beauty of the islands float by. Plus: the boat is nicer re: dining and working and hanging out space.... Much better.



Hammocks: a popular surface interval spot.



Dining on spacious open air deck while watching scenery drift by.

Crew on both are delightful...caring, good guides, safe. Food on the Spirit was excellent. The itinerary we had was wonderful.. good variety of dives and the visits from the locals was.... Wonderful. Every day we would pass a village and they would come out with dugout canoes laden with flowers and fresh produce. It was wonderful.. kind and happy smiles all the time. It was great. Polite kids with unsolicited "thank yous" flowed freely when something was given to them. Well mannered, appreciative all the time.



Everyday while passing villages, the locals would come to the ship with fresh produce, nuts, flowers & carvings.

Honiara is a pit... but you won't be staying there. We did meet some ex-Pats from Sidney that lived and worked there. We were introduced to the local coffee shop... Lemon Lounge in Honiara.. all professional business types having lunch and coffee. Coffee and food was...very good. Hotel stays in Honiara are nice, normal touristy spots and VERY expensive. \$200 a night for a regular kind of room. Hostiles are available at a much better rate.

The Honiara's Domestic airport is... disgusting... It is a necessary stop for getting out into some of the isolated village spots and Eco Lodges like Wilderness Lodge and Uepi Resort...both were wonderful places to stay.. those details to be reserved for a nice presentation in 2010...

Critter sightings very good... fishy for bigger reef characters but I felt lacked the bizarre and even not so bizarre normal ones... We saw no leaf scorpion fish, no frog fish, ornate pipefish, and those muck site things I really like. . We did one muck dive (A clean muck spot) the last dive and it was wonderful.. Robust pipefish which I will take credit for finding. There were lots of different sand gobies: normal, golden, 2-spot (so cute!!) and sand divers. Not those "lizard fish" but ones that look like pale, almost translucent eel like fish...pretty cool and skittish. I have them on video to be editedlater. A few nudibranchs, normal anemonae shrimps and lots lots of anemonae fish... Endemic: bonnet style one. .. All very cute and abundant. You may see mantas, turtles, sharks, mobulas. (??sp) humphead wrasses, baracuddas (lots) and big schools of jacks. Tuna too. Like I said... real fishy. Pam will have a grand time counting them next spring.

It is a go back place for me.... I was video camera hindered. The camera was fine. The housing is... tired. Currently at the Backscatter Hotel, in ICU on life support so I hear. I want to do with a real, functioning camera.... Looking forward to presenting a show on this fun place...the boat, the people on the boat and especially the locals make this a place to go back and see more. Underwater images by Joe. Topside and story by Carol.