

In search of lost lives

During World War II, some of the Pacific's most fierce battles took place in the Solomon Islands. During this time, thousands of military personnel were listed as Missing in Action (MIA). But through the efforts of the USA Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), dedicated individuals and groups and concerned Solomon Islanders, the remains of these long-lost warriors are still being discovered and identified. American, Mark Roche is one of those dedicated individuals who has spent time diving the ship and aircraft wrecks in the Solomon Islands with the help of Dive Munda.

"My guides at Dive Munda, Sunga Boso and Brian Daga, took me on numerous dives on known wrecks for a couple of days. They were intrigued with my knowledge of WWII Navy aircraft and asked if I'd take a boat ride over to Mbaeroko Harbour to examine a recently discovered wreck in the water. They were unsure if it was Japanese or American. As soon as I entered the water, I gazed down some 50 feet on the most perfectly intact Grumman Wildcat I've ever seen. It was flat on its back and, now bare aluminium, was gleaming in the light," said Mark.

While surveying the aircraft, Mark discovered a set of bones. And this began a long effort to identify this fallen naval aviator. The process saw the bones taken to the forensics lab at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, and many investigations from the DPAA. Eventually Mark discovered the bones belonged to a Lt. Irvin Rink. And with the assistance of Belinda Botha, owner of Dive Munda, and her team, Mark was able to lay a plaque on Irvin's plane commemorating his sacrifice.



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SIDC release 2020 schedule

Solomon Islands Discovery Cruises (SIDC) has announced its plans to operate two further itineraries in 2019. Operating ex-Honiara and timed to dovetail with Solomon Airlines' Brisbane-Honiara services, SIDC has employed the 30-metre *MV Taka* to operate the six and seven-day cruises, each of which have been designed to highlight two of the South Pacific's truly unspoiled and culturally-rich regions - the Florida and Russell Islands archipelagos. The cruise itineraries feature visits to remote villages along with plentiful opportunity to discover the region's amazing coral pastures and abundant marine life with daily dive and snorkel options SUP and surfing schools, 'scurfing', daily yoga classes and much more. Both areas are also rich in WWII history giving passengers insight into the infamous Guadalcanal campaign in 1942 via the many wrecked US and Japanese aircraft, warships and relics which literally litter the seabed.

The 2020 cruise schedule is as follows:

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|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 04-11 February | ex-Honiara to Honiara |
| 29 February – 04 March | ex-Honiara to Honiara |
| 07-14 July | ex-Munda - Honiara |
| 22-28 August | ex-Honiara-Honiara |
| 12-19 December | ex-Munda-Honiara |

More information visit www.sidcruises.com.au



Dive the wonders of Tulagi

Lying a short distance from the pristine Florida Islands, historic Tulagi is a mecca for divers. Its unspoilt reefs, caves and tunnels, drop-offs, soft corals and giant sponges are surrounded by an abundance of tropical marine life. Plus there are some amazing wrecks dives. An added attraction is the nearby Iron Bottom Sound, the resting place for some 200 ships and numerous aircraft lost during the fierce Guadalcanal campaign in World War II.

Dives here range between 40-70 metres and include the *USS Aaron Ward* destroyer, the *Kanawha* oil tanker and the *HMNZS Moa* which sank on 30 January 1943 after successfully sinking a Japanese submarine.

For those wanting to explore these waters, Travel & Co has released a seven-night package inclusive of NZD return airfares ex-Auckland, seven-nights accommodation at Raiders Hotel & Dive in Tulagi, five dives (one tank per dive), weight belts and weights.

Find out more at www.travelandco.nz/offer/dive-tulagi-solomon-islands.



Laura Hutchings, © Travel & Co



New Marketing Manager for Tourism Solomons

Changes at Tourism Solomons! Fiona Teama (who has held the role of Senior Marketing Information Officer) has been appointed to take over the Marketing Manager – a role previously held by the high profile and extremely popular Freda Unusi who had the role for 10 years.

Joining the national tourist office in February 2015 as a graduate trainee, Ms Teama most recently held management responsibility for all aspects of the NTO's key Australia, dive and romance portfolios. She also played a strong role in helping to promote the Solomon Islands to the Papua New Guinea market.

Announcing the appointment, Tourism Solomons Board Chairman, Chris Hapa said Fiona's promotion was a key component of the NTO's drive to strategically identify and prepare future leaders for the Solomon Islands tourism industry.

Introducing the 'Mamara Spring Water Walk'

Attention all trekkers! Unbeknown to many, the Solomon Islands offers some of the best trekking on the planet – remote villages, waterfalls, volcanos and primordial rain forest abound - and the latest on the list is the Mamara Spring Water Walk on Guadalcanal. This four-day trek from Tangarare in Western Guadalcanal to Kakabona just north of Honiara, offers a comfortably paced program that is suitable for most, but a certain level of fitness is required.

Nights one and three are spent as guests of local villages with night two under canvas accommodation on the banks of the Pusu River. The trek has been designed and led by Stanley Mataniata, a highly experienced bushman and former officer with the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Stanley is also a local wildlife expert and noted ornithologist. The your includes accommodation – village and tent – most meals, transport to and from pick-up points an all 'kastom' fees which are required to be paid to local villagers.

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