Eagle-Eye Tours

Secrets of Melanesia Cruise Itinerary

Link: Secrets of Melanesia Cruise

Tour Overview

Sail into a world few ever experience as we explore the rich history, cultures and wildlife of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu on this 17-day authentic expedition cruise. Visit idyllic islands and isolated villages where unique time-honoured traditions and elaborately costumed dancers welcome us into their world. From the culturally rich arterial of the Sepik River we sail across the Bismarck Sea exploring remote shores and villages still living traditional lifestyles, and delve into the history, culture and wildlife of New Ireland and New Britain.

Crossing the Buka Channel at Nissan Island we see reminders of intensive World War II action, then enter a long-isolated world as we are among the first travellers to return to Bougainville in more than two decades. Sailing through the turquoise waters of the Solomon Islands, new vistas and unexpected encounters await. Discover one of the conservation jewels of the South Pacific on Tetepare Island, while villagers on culturally-rich Malaita Island still make and use traditional Malaitan shell-money as a dowry and wear it as a status symbol.

Experience a kaleidoscope of cultures as we explore Vanuatu, where more than 100 indigenous languages are spoken. With over 80 habitable islands, islanders have closely guarded their own cultures and languages. Our expedition embraces some of these cultures and languages, as we explore one of the happiest places on the planet.

Throughout Melanesia there are spectacular reefs, which are home to masses of fish and coral gardens of every colour. These waters offer some of the greatest marine diversity and snorkelling in the world and everybody will have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty beneath the waves. Whether you are snorkelling or swimming, this ocean aquarium is waiting to be explored and discovered.

For birders, this itinerary offers once-in-a-lifetime species on remote islands where few have been before, and endemic birdlife such as the Solomon Sea Eagle, or the Vanikoro White-eye, may be seen. There is an optional specialised birding programme with customised excursions. You must register for this at the time of booking as space is limited.

This expedition includes the option to join a sea kayaking excursion with an expert guide. Kayakers are rewarded with tranquil, tropical settings and are a source of fascination to the locals who often paddle their canoes out to join them, and invite them back to their villages.

This is the itinerary for the 2027 dates. There is an optional specific birding extension with limited availability. Itinerary

Itinerary

Day 1: Cairns, Australia



Arrive in the urban tropical paradise of Cairns, gateway to natural wonders the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics World Heritage Rainforest, and make your way to the hotel where our group will spend the first night of the expedition. This evening meet your fellow voyagers and expedition guides over dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Cairns to Madang, PNG



Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before our flight to Madang, the picturesque peninsula surrounded by islands and waterways. It is a thriving community renowned for its traditional artists, and the richness of its surrounding forests. Enjoy a Madang and Environs tour upon arrival which includes a visit to the Coastwatchers' Memorial Light at Kalibobo, Madang museum and Bilbil Village before returning to Madang to explore the markets. Boarding your ship you will have time to settle into your cabin and familiarise yourself with the ship; we will also take the opportunity to introduce you to your Expedition Team and our voyage plans. You are invited to join the expedition team in the Observation Lounge and up on the Observation Deck as we set sail for the Sepik River.

Day 3: 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, the longest in Papua New Guinea, flows from the highlands to the Bismarck Sea. It is a rich arterial river that has fostered great traditional artists. We plan to explore the river by Zodiac, following tributaries and channels in search of local wildlife. Enjoy a warm welcome at Kopar Village where we will experience village life and a traditional Dragon Dance unique to this region. There is also an opportunity to purchase unique carvings directly from the artists.

Day 4: Manus Island



Seldom visited and little known, Manus Island is considered a jewel in the crown of Papua New Guinea. Biologically isolated the Manus Province is home to a high proportion of endemic species and our stop here is likely to be a birding highlight. Once the location of a detention centre, part of Australia's 'Pacific Solution', life on Manus Island continues according to traditional customs. Comprised of 10 villages and a population of less than 1,000, our visit to Derimbat Village includes taking part in an elaborate welcoming ceremony before exploring their village and unique way of life with a local guide.

Day 5: New Hanover



Today we plan to explore the remote beauty of the islands and villages of New Hanover, nestled within the New Ireland archipelago. This secret South Pacific paradise combines coconut tree studded spectacular white sand beaches surrounded by stunning turquoise water and wildlife filled jungles to explore. During our time here we can enjoy the warm hospitality and authentic slices of village life with the locals who enjoy subsistent, traditional lifestyles. Zodiac cruise waterways deep into island interiors and explore dense rainforests and jungles searching for birdlife including Melanesian Kingfisher, Redknobbed Imperial Pigeon, Knobbilled Fruit Dove and Mottled Munia. A highlight is exploring the vibrant underwater world of colourful corals and marine life snorkelling alongside Pipefish, Nudibranchs and Anemone Fish. Make sure you are out on deck to experience our thrilling passage as we sail through the narrow passage separating New Hanover from New Ireland as our adventure continues.

Day 6: Rabaul and Kokopo, New Britain



Six beautiful cone-shaped volcanoes ring Rabaul's dramatic, flooded-caldera harbour. Visit the bubbling hot springs and take in the magnificent views of the harbour and volcanoes from Observatory Ridge. As we explore the island, we will see fascinating reminders of the Japanese occupation, our tour taking in the site of the enormous volcanic eruption that all but destroyed Rabaul town, the underground bunker that was the hiding place of Pearl Harbour commander, Yamamoto, and joining the locals shopping at the bustling Kokopo markets.

Day 7: Nissan Island



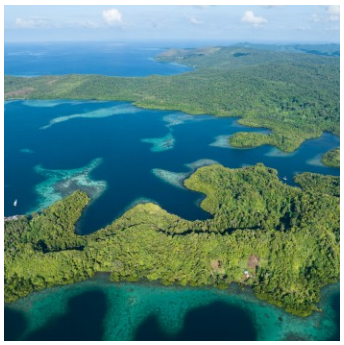
A tropical atoll adrift in the azure waters of the Buka Channel, Nissan Island is bathed in rich tropical currents that abound in marine life. Seldom have outsiders had the opportunity to discover this world promising abundant pelagic fish-life and pristine coral reefs. Ashore there are still reminders of the brief, but intensive, World War II activities during which the islands were recaptured by Kiwi, Australian and British forces from the Japanese occupiers. During our time ashore we will meet with the friendly locals from all three of the island's Balil Villages and search the dense woods for some of the elusive birds that occur here. Later the snorkellers will find plenty to discover in the coral reefs that surround Nissan.

Day 8: Bougainville Island



Today we discover the treasures of Bougainville, long isolated and in a strange way protected due to the conflict which swirled around its shores. High on many travellers' wish lists, this autonomous region within Papua New Guinea magnificently marries rugged, jungled terrain with amazing coral reefs offshore and is home to some of the greatest biodiversity in the region both above and below the water. Lying to the east of the country's mainland and north of the Solomon Islands, it comprises two main islands and several outlying islands and atolls making it both remote and hard to reach, but perfect for exploration by expedition ship. Discover Bougainville's strong ties and connections with the Solomon Islands, which is reflected in their music, culture and language.

Day 9: New Georgia Islands, Solomon Islan



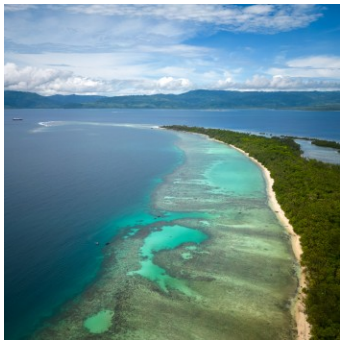
The volcanic New Georgia Islands are found in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands and are characterised by extensive reefs and lagoons, rugged terrain and an abundance of rivers. Nature enthusiasts will relish landing on Kolombangara Island, where we plan to visit the Imbu Rano Lodge and Conservation Area which protects the islands central peak and search for the rare Roviana Rail along with other endemic bird species. Browse markets and perhaps purchase some of the wood or stone carvings the Western Province is famous for.

Day 10: Tetepare Island



Uninhabited for 150 years, this rugged island cloaked in rainforest and fringed with coral reefs is home to one of the Solomon Islands' leading community-driven conservation projects Tetepare Descendants' Association. Receiving international recognition for its conservation and archaeological significance, three species of turtle, including the endangered leatherback, nest on its beaches while other species inhabiting the island and surrounding waters include dugong, the world's largest skink, endemic Tetepare White-eye and many more. A highlight of our voyage, this afternoon we plan to explore and and enjoy a drift snorkel of the fringing reef with its outstanding marine biodiversity.

Day 11: Malaita



Mountainous Malaita is home to one-third of the Solomon's total population and features pristine rivers and unexploited tropical forests. In the afternoon we hope to be invited by the world-renowned Kwaio People, led by Chief Esau, to discover their traditional way of life which the community have fiercely guarded alongside their ancestral lands. This invitation represents a rare privilege, and made possible by our ongoing connection with the community and assistance with their development of innovative community conservation programs. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to spend time in the company of some of the most authentic, yet innovative, communities in the region.

Day 12: Santa Ana, Makira



Experience a traditional Solomon Island's welcome on arrival at Port Mary on Santa Ana Island. Also known as Owaraha or Owa Raha, this stunning coral island, first sighted by Europeans in 1568, is ours to explore today. Delight in the local hospitality and culture as we peruse local handicrafts, explore the lush forests with our guides and meet the local children at the village school or bask in tropical waters. Birders will be on the look out for the tiny Sooty Myzomela, Island Imperial Pigeon, Solomons Rufous Fantail and Chestnut-bellied Monarch among others.

Day 13: Nendö, Temotu Province



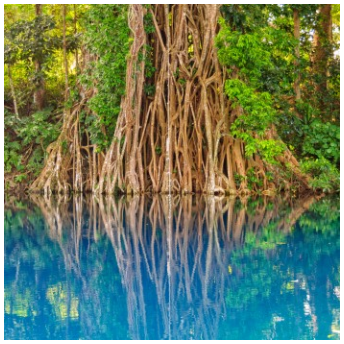
Nendö is the largest of the Santa Cruz Islands, which lie to the south-east of the Solomon Islands. The Spanish navigator Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira unsuccessfully attempted to establish a colony in 1595. Biologically these islands share more in common with Vanuatu. It is also the home of red feather money, sourced from the Scarlet Honeyeater. Watch the manufacture of red feather money, and join the locals in dances which reverberate through the ages.

Day 14: Torres Islands, Vanuatu



Today we sail to the rarely-visited pacific paradise and culturally rich Torres Islands, Vanuatu's northernmost islands. A collection of four main islets fringed with white sand beaches, clear azure waters, volcanic rock and cliffs topped with lush tangled jungles, our destination is Loh Island. After a warrior escort and welcome from the Chief we will experience the thrilling and rarely witnessed cultural wonder of the lēh-temēt – vibrant ritual headdresses known as temēt (primordial spirits) used during special singing and dancing ceremonial rituals. The colourful headdresses are regarded by the villagers as having the highest of supernatural powers and are destroyed immediately at the end of the dance ceremony. We will then have time to enjoy tours of the village, surrounding island or snorkel Loh's incredible underwater world.

Day 15: Espiritu Santo



Today we explore Vanuatu's largest Island, Santo; location of James Michener's Tales of the South Pacific. Indulge in a swim in the crystalline waters of Champagne Beach with its famed powdery white sand. This afternoon we will enjoy Zodiac cruises to the iconic blue holes of Santo. For those with an interest in the history of the island, there is a visit to Lugainville and Million Dollar Point.

Day 16: Ambrym



Today we will visit Ambrym, renowned as the island of volcanoes and magic throughout Vanuatu. We plan to head ashore at a secret location on the northern coast where the traditional Rom dance is still practised and custom carving is alive and well. A walk through the forest brings us to the 'arena' where masked dancers emerge from the forest. The forests of Ambrym offer some excellent walks to go in search of the local birds and plants, accompanied by our naturalists. This afternoon enjoy a final snorkel excursion.

Day 17: Port Vila, Vanuatu

Arrive into Port Vila and disembark after breakfast. Upon disembarking a transfer to our central city hotel or the airport will conclude your voyage. To allow time for disembarkation procedures we do not recommend booking flights from Port Vila before midday. Note: During our voyage, circumstances may make it necessary or desirable to deviate from the proposed itinerary. This can include poor weather and opportunities for making unplanned excursions. Your Expedition Leader will keep you fully informed. This tour offers a variety of activities and excursions. Your personal interests will determine which of these you wish to join. Please note that some activities and excursions will run at similar times and it will not be possible to participate in both. Accordingly, refunds for excursions and missed landings are not available.

What to Expect

The focus and emphasis of every expedition is getting you ashore as often as possible for as long as possible with maximum safety and comfort. Our Expeditions are accompanied by some of the most experienced naturalists and guides, who have devoted a lifetime to field research in the areas that we visit.

Every day we offer a combination of interesting shore excursions and fun shipboard activities. The number of participants per group may vary as there are a variety of daily activities to choose from, but you can generally expect a group size of maximum 30. Our excursions onshore will involve a relatively low level of exertion, but you will need a reasonable level of mobility to get up and down the gangway and climb into and out of Zodiacs (with assistance).

There are opportunities for seeing birds and wildlife on the 'regular' program. There is also an optional specialized birding extension package with customised excursions. We will have an optional birding extension in 2027. You must register for this at the time of booking as space is limited. Clients on the birding programmes will be in small groups of 10 guest with a dedicated birding guide. The birding groups will have the opportunity to disembark the ship early in the mornings for excursions, have birding focussed options on shore landings, evening meetings, and a dedicated birding list. Space is very limited, so sign up early. For birders, this itinerary offers once-in-a-lifetime species on remote islands where few have been before, and endemic birdlife such as the Solomon Sea Eagle, or the Vanikoro White-eye, may be seen.

When the ship is underway, it is a wonderful time to join a naturalist on deck, take photos of the stunning scenery, or get caught up on some reading in the library. In addition, our resource staff will give informative talks at various times throughout the voyage.

Meals in the ship's dining room are a great opportunity to meet new friends and recount the day's adventures. Special diets can be accommodated with advance notice. Safety is also a top priority for us – our team has extensive experience in the field, and all of our Voyages are run in conjunction with operators with the highest safety standards. The Heritage Adventurer is equipped with a well-stocked hospital and medical doctor on voyages.

We know that everyone travels for different reasons. Over the years, however, we have found one common element among the guest who choose to travel with us – a thirst of knowledge and authentic experience. Knowing this drives us to ensure the highest quality learning experience on our trips, by taking time to carefully design each trip we offer.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• Discovery fund
• One night hotel accommodation in a twin share room (including dinner/breakfast)
• Transfer to airport and pre-cruise flight from Cairns to Madang.
• All on board ship accommodation
• All on board meals including house beer, wine and soft drinks with lunch and dinner
• All shore excursions and activities
• Programme of lectures by noted naturalists
• Post cruise airport transfer

Tour Price Does Not Include
• International flights to start/end
• Visas
• Extensions
• Travel Insurance
• Optional Kayaking $1455 (2027)
• Optional birding extension $500 (2027)
• All items of a personal nature
• Laundry
• Drinks
• Gratuities