

SOLOMON ISLANDS

September 8-20, 2016

Anacortes Diving Adventure Team



Kellie, Sue, Chris, Diane, Marle, Hope, Mike, Liz, Dale, Mary, Axel

Robin, Kelley, Bob, Kathy, Lisa, Barbara, Linda, Peggy

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Route—Seattle—Los Angeles—Fiji—Solomons Carrier: Alaska Airlines and Fiji Airways

Day 1

We departed Seattle on time and we were able to check our bags all the way thru to Honiara, Solomon's. However, they kept telling us we had to pick up our luggage in Fiji, which made no sense to me but we will see when we get there. The secret to LAX is to not go out of security when moving from the domestic terminal to international. Be sure to ask otherwise you are stuck in another long line. The new international terminal has a lot of nice places to grab a bit and hang out while waiting for your flight.

Our flight to Fiji was really easy, 10 ½ hours by the time we landed. There was confusion whether we stayed in transit or went through customs and immigration. We waited in the transit line and then they said no, so we had to join the other long line. Bad move. Once we made it to luggage only Kathy's luggage had come off since she didn't have her bags tagged all the way. Our bags just were not showing up and no one we asked knew what was going on. Finally, with all the confusion they had them outside in a container and at which point they decided to unload and made us take our luggage. Oh well. We just had to lug it over to the Fiji Gateway Hotel where we had a day room for some quick horizontal time. This is so worth it! Back to the airport with all our bags and it was super easy to just drop them off since we also had our boarding passes. No long lines to wait in. So excited for our next flight because we are just a few short hours away from landing in the Solomon's.

The flight was uneventful and we land in the Solomon Islands which is partially covered by some pretty black thunder heads. Once we pass through customs we grab all our luggage, which thankfully all showed up and we are met outside by the Bilikiki rep named Leonard. The gear is loaded into the bus and it is about a 30 minute ride to the boat. The traffic here is terrible and it is stop and go for quite a while before we break out of it. Once at the dock and all loaded onboard, the boat pulls anchor and we are off for about a 6 hour cruise to the Russell Island group. The crew gives us a full briefing on how things work on and around the boat and then dinner is served. Eyelids are already heavy from all the traveling we've done, so shortly after that most everyone calls it a night.

Day 2



Of course we are up early since we went to bed around 8:00 pm and find coffee as we wait for the sunrise. I really hope this doesn't happen too often that I am up before the sun! A full breakfast and then the briefing and finally we are off and diving. The water is a nice 82 degrees and the sun is shining so what more can you ask for. This is the checkout dive and there is still plenty to see with the highlight being a nice Crocodile fish. Back to the boat for more eating and then dive 2. This dive is Leru Cut and it literally is



a crack in the island where small streams of sunlight beam down and sparkle in the water. It is so amazing and beautiful here. We exit the cut and Tina is trying to call in some Sharks from the deep, which worked and we saw at least 3 come up. After that, the group drifted along the wall and enjoyed large Sea fans and soft corals. Time for lunch, and then right back at it for dive 3 which is Mirror Pond. We swim thru a short, shallow cut and when you surface you are surrounded by the jungle. It is flat calm in here and that is where it gets its name. This is also the place where they have seen a Crocodile in the water. The entire time I am back there I am uneasy as I don't know how I feel about seeing a Crocodile. I think it will scare the %\$# out of me! Luckily, no one saw it today. The hard corals here are amazing as we drift on down the reef. After the 4th dive it is time for the locals to come



out with all their produce for the boat to buy. Tina is very busy choosing what fruits and veggies she wants and she has to be careful to buy from each of them. There is no bartering and no one is talking, Tina just hands money out as she takes the baskets of produce. The chief is here with his wife and she pretty much runs the show. After all the produce is purchased several of the group hand out some gifts that we brought like pencils, paper, hair clips and even some floaty's for the kids. Time for dinner and then one more dive to finish off the day. There are only 6 of us hearty souls willing to take on the challenge of one more dive. Nothing like a full stomach to go diving on. Oli is leading the dive and we find all kinds of cool critters like soft Coral Crab, Pygmy



Cuttlefish, blunt end Sea Hare...pooping (Axel was witness to this) and Mary found an Ornate Ghost pipefish. It was a great night dive sparkling with brilliant bioluminescent. Where did the day go as it is now 10:30 and time for bed.

Day 3

At 4:00 am the anchor is up and we have a small crossing to Mary Island. Today is wide angle all day. Big schools of Jacks and Sharks are on the agenda for today. Our first dive is Barracuda Pt, which is a slight drift to the point. We see several baby Black Tip Reef Sharks and out in the blue are 5 or 6 bigger Sharks. We deploy our reef hooks and hang out for most of the dive hoping they come in closer. The current starts pumping ½ way through the dive so we let go and drift behind the point. Once up shallow, Bob and I came across a huge school of Jacks in about 30 ft. We swam underneath and



came up inside the school, it was amazing. We will be parked here all day and dive the several sights available to us. After a short break we jump back in on Barracuda Point and enjoy another dive of swirling Jacks and Sharks. One Shark in particular swam straight at the group several times after Tina had gotten them all riled up. After lunch, we jumped on the other finger called Jack Pt. Same sort of fish action in the current. Oli at one time



looked like he was conducting the symphony. On all the dives you could hear the low rumble of the nearby volcano, at times it was very loud. The volcano known as Maravaghi is only about 60 miles away. Apparently tomorrow we will be even closer to it. Time to switch to macro so I can try and get a shot of the elusive Flame Angel. My plan was well laid so we would not be in the current, but wouldn't you know it the Flame Angel was in



the cut where there was the most current! We are exhausted after all the swimming today so we just surface for a boat pickup rather than swimming the rest of the way back. No night dive for me, just a little relaxation and down time. Hope hit her 400th dive today, congratulations Hope! A big thunderstorm is brewing off in the distance and we are getting rain showers occasionally. After dinner there are only 2 night divers, Axel & Mary and as soon as they are back on the boat we will pull anchor and cruise to Morovu Islands. Time for bed and fingers crossed it is not too rough.

Day 4

We awake to calm waters as the boat is anchored in a nice bay. The sun is out again with some clouds on the horizon. After the first dive we will go into visit 2 villages today to buy woodcarvings and weavings. Our first dive was on Toatave Island which was a nice wall and we saw the Elegant Dartfish and plenty of Long Nose Hawkfish.



We change quickly after the dive and off we go to the village.

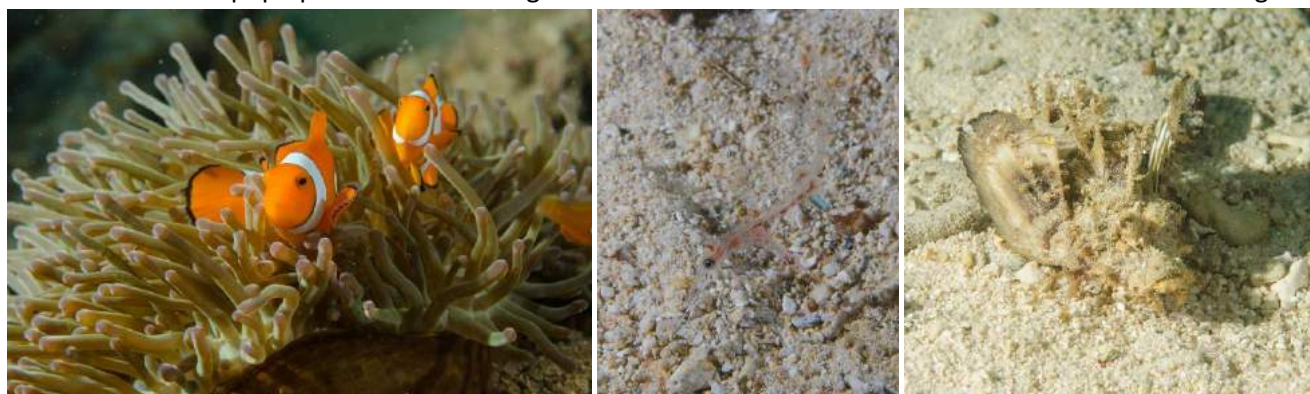
We arrive to find a lot of beautiful carvings with shell inlays, weavings and produce. We take a good look around and make a decision on what we want to buy. So, how it works is that you ask the price, the carver tells you and then you make a decision to buy or ask for second price. He then gives you a second price and then a handshake seals the



deal. Once you start to barter you have to be serious about it. This is not where you walk away or insult them by bargaining really low. The funny part was we asked the price for a mask he told us and then I never said another word and he kept going lower and lower until he said last price. Ok, sounded good to me. The group bought so much stuff that Oli ran out of money and had to go back to the boat for more. When we went to the second village everyone had bought so much that only a couple of pieces were sold. Back to the boat we go and time for another dive. We have moved over to Wikham Island where we will be for the rest of the day. When we jumped in the visibility was terrible, not sure it was even 30 ft. Which was a shame because this dive had the most soft



corals and huge Gorgonians we have seen, it was amazing. We also saw the real Clownfish, which looked like the false Clownfish but Kellie explained that the false Clownfish is not in this area. On the next dive we went to the opposite side of the bay and here it was more like muck diving. Here we found the very small Denise Pygmy Seahorse, which there were at least 3 on one sea fan and several more on another. On the way back to the boat we had 2 Devilfish pop up out of the sand right in front of us. Back on the boat for dinner and then the night

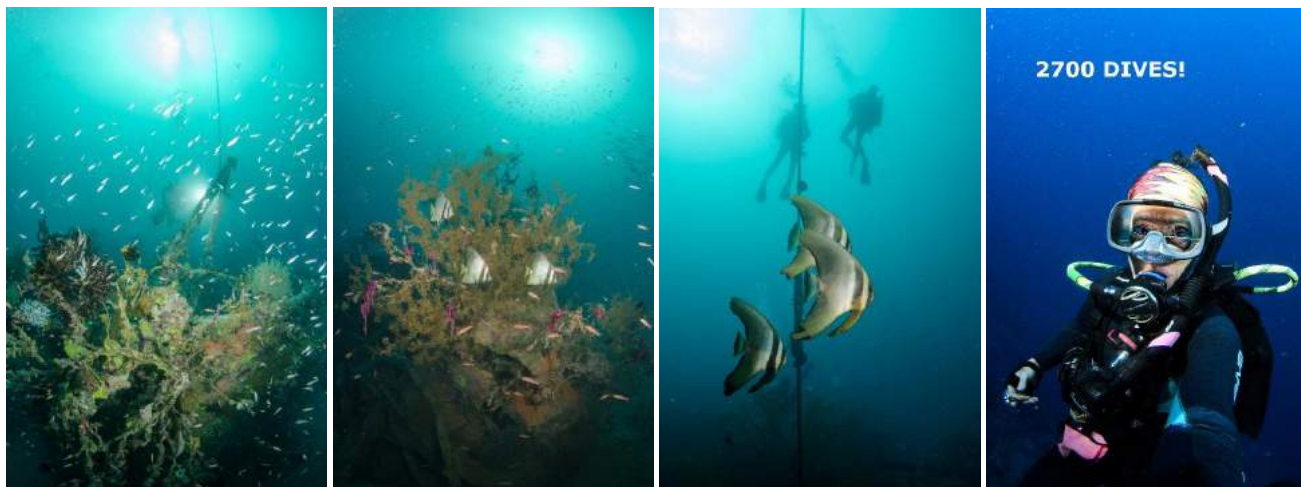


dive. Most of the group is going tonight as this is a good place for night diving. Plenty of weird things coming out of the sand and Bob finds a translucent Ornate Ghost Pipefish. Plenty of little crabs and shrimp all over the sea fans and then I find a really nice Ornate Ghost Pipefish. There was a giant Pufferfish wandering around and the Devilfish made a showing again. Time is up and we are back on the boat. Great way to end the day as we wind down and get ready to call it a night.

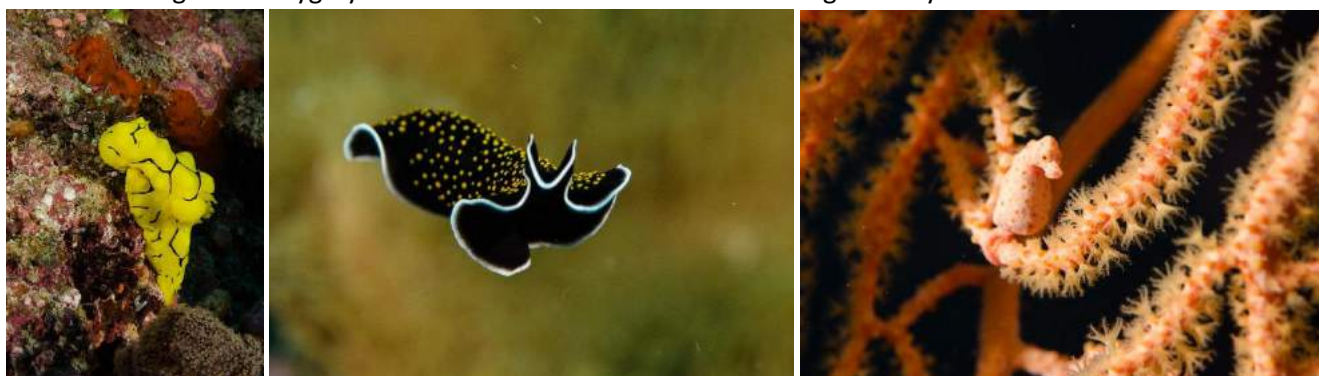
Day 5

Sunny skies again this morning as we get up at the regular dive call of 7:45 am. We are diving the Maru II which is a Japanese freighter that was converted with a cannon and carrying troops. The visibility is really good today which was about 50 ft compared to last week, you couldn't see 3 feet in front of you. There are several resident Spadefish, the Pinnate and the Longfin. They are so used to divers that you just wiggle your fingers and they come right up to you. Bob is always messing around when it comes to port holes in a wreck. I am laughing so hard as I try and take a few photos. He just can't





resist posing! This was my 2700th dive, way to go me! Time to motor to the next dive site and we are in the Morovo Island group now for the rest of the day. The second dive was Karanjou Island where we went out to the point to see if we could call up any Sharks. Oli is out conducting the symphony once more and sure enough we have several Gray Reef Sharks and a beautiful small Silver Tip. One of the Gray Reefs got really riled up and came straight at Liz's dome port. Wow, quite exciting. There was a nice Notodoris Nudibranch along the way as well. The 3rd dive was George's Place which is where George's final resting place is, he was the Chief of the local tribe. We are looking for the Pygmy Seahorse once more and Tina is leading the way. This dive had beautiful coral



heads as we swam along the wall. We found Flat Worms, lots of different Anemonefish, Nudibranchs and tons of fish life. Tina did her best to find the Pygmys but no luck. Axel was the big winner as he located a fairly big one on a different Sea Fan. Bob took a look around and found 5 others on the same fan. Pretty choppy out here as we motor to the last dive site of the day. Only 4 dives today, seems like a vacation! Robin hits her 50th dive, congratulations Robin! We have lots of nudi's, a Crocodile Flathead, and a small Blacktip Reef shark and lots of fish. Once on board we move the boat to our night moorage next to a fairly large village. Here we will have one more shopping opportunity for wood carving and weavings. A little party on the top deck with sundowners and some great snacks. Time for dinner and then everyone is clearing out about 8:30 pm, not much of a big party crowd. Hard to do when you are doing 4-5 dives a day.

Day 6

First thing on the agenda today....shopping. This is the last village for any shopping opportunity and they are set up and ready for us. Pricing is still way higher than I ever imagined and Oli & Tina are almost out of money. Apparently our group are big shoppers and have nearly wiped them out of Solomon dollars. We spot the trays we are looking for and quickly negotiate the price before someone else grabs them. Our first dive is on Mbulo Island and here there is a small Eagle Ray that cruises the reef. He went past us twice but never came in very close. Saw our first Turtle, interesting that we really haven't seen many of those. Bob located a nice soft Coral





Crab and Axel once again located a Pygmy Seahorse. Up in the shallows we found a pair of Clark Anemonefish that had a brood of eggs off to the side. The weather is good enough for us to try and make it out to Kicha Island which apparently they have only got out there once in 3 months. Last time they went, there were 15 ft seas! I guess we are lucky since we have about a 6-8 ft seas. We jump into some really nice visibility, huge sea fans and loads of schooling fish. We see a Turtle right off and I found a nice big Cuttlefish which Lisa had really wanted to see since she hasn't seen one yet. This is

Peggy's 800th dive, congratulations Peggy! We have a nice Silver tip and a gray reef shark come up out of the blue along with a huge school of Barracuda. The entire dive we listen to the volcano Kavachi rumble, it is so loud you can feel it vibrate your entire body. The underwater volcano is only about 6 miles away from this island and it is amazing to listen too. At the end of the dive we came up in the shallows to a beautiful hard coral garden. Absolutely an amazing dive. Once on board we quickly head back to Marovo Lagoon where it is much calmer and we will spend the rest of the day parked by Mbulo Island. The hard corals on the next dive are so abundant and in great shape. They are a rainbow of colors all the way to the surface. Next dive we head to the opposite side to try our luck at some more Pygmy's. Tina, Axel & Bob are all hard at work on 2 sea fans looking while the rest of us mill about waiting for the results. Finally Chris found one on a sea fan and then Tina found the other one. After the Pygmy's, it



was just a nice 70 minute swim back to the boat. Time for cocktails and an incredible lightening show off in the distance. Only Mary & Axel are night diving tonight while the rest of us relax until a big squall envelopes us with torrential rain. Everyone scrambles to batten down the hatches as the wind and the rain hit hard. After the night dive we will be moving back to the Russell Island group, about a 7 hour crossing from here, which of course is going to be a bit rough. Oh goody, better medicate for this one.

Day 6

Hard to sleep with all the rockin' and rollin'. Not sure what time we anchored but it was nice and calm in the morning. Our first dive was to Bat cave, here you swim through a tunnel and come up in a cavern where a bunch of bats are roosting. Unfortunately, all the bats were gone but still very interesting in the cave. Outside the cave there were Pygmys on one of the fans and Tina

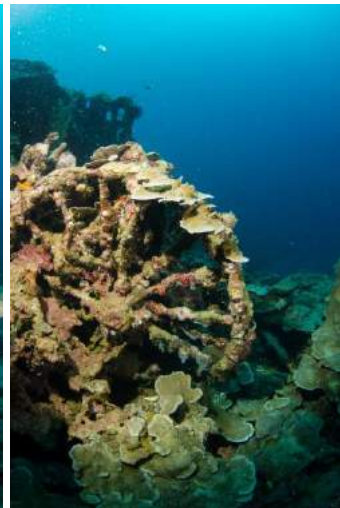




also located 2 red Pygmy pipefish. This was Lisa's 100th dive, congratulations Lisa! Time for a village visit to Karumolun, here they put on a nice show. The first was the men showing the warrior dance and then the women. Then everyone got involved and sang a few songs for us, the kids are so cute and entertaining. The village now has over 200 people in it and Chief Raymond said it is too crowded now. They have a church and they attend twice a day, 6 am and 6 pm. Dive 2 we are back into some current and shark action. The dive is named the same as the village and the hard corals here are once again in pristine shape. We drift out to the point and saw a school of about 20



baby gray reef sharks which was very unusual. A couple of larger sharks, one which was a black tip. Nice little Turtle and Cuttlefish, Clownfish and a Notodoris nudibranch. Time for lunch and we motor off to the next destination known as White Beach. Here we will be parked for the remainder of the day. The first dive we did wide angle to shoot all the trucks and machinery the military shoved in the water when they were vacating after



the war. It was too expensive to take everything back to the US so the solution was to make it disappear in the ocean. The coral growth on the trucks is amazing and after 70 years the tires are still intact. This was Mary's 1200th dive, congratulations Mary! The locals slowly make their way over to the boat and we have several kids swimming underwater checking us out. The rest are waiting for Tina to buy all their produce and the kids are waiting for gifts. We hop in for one more dive before dinner and we decide to make it one long dive instead of doing a night dive. Up in the Mangroves there are Archer fish and Pajama Cardinalfish along with a warning to watch out for Crocodiles. Ok, that is freaking me out a bit. There are so many signal Gobies and Jawfish in the



sand along with everything macro. We spent a good 95 minutes cruising around while keeping my eye out in the shallows for those damn Crocodiles. My bladder and stomach demand that we get out of the water and get some dinner. We are located in a protected bay where it is flat calm which is a welcome site after the bumpy ride last night. Really hoping to sleep like a rock tonight.

Day 7

It was a nice calm night with the boat not moving until this morning. The sun has disappeared and we have a few rain showers but it doesn't look like it will last. Our first dive is on the Wreck of the Ann which was a small boat sunk just for divers. Apparently there was a resort that was in the works on the island and this was going to be its house reef. The resort never came to be but the wreck has grown all sorts of life on it and the visibility was



really good. Tina says it's the best she has ever seen here which was good since I was shooting wide angle. When we surface the boat is surrounded by the local villagers all waiting for Tina to buy their produce. It is quite the colorful scene with the dugout canoes filled with all the colorful produce. The second dive was planned for a pinnacle but the wind has picked up so we will be diving Table Kingdom on Kaukau Island. The hard corals are magnificent and huge! A nice little Turtle down deep and a couple of big yellow Notodoris. The visibility was some of the best we have seen the entire time we have been out here. The wind is up again today as we motor to Lologhan Island, here we will park for the rest of the day and have an "open pool" to dive any time you want. The dive is rolling hills of hard corals which are beautiful in a wide range of colors. Lots of schooling fish and plenty of Triggerfish which are nesting so we have to keep an eye out. A small Turtle with a Spadefish escort



comes by a couple of times and the visibility is fantastic and it looks like it goes on forever. The late afternoon dive we find a pair of Cuttlefish which were flashing amazing colors and patterns I think in some sort of mating



dance. It's just fascinating to sit and watch them. There were Surgeonfish up in the shallows spawning as well. Pretty amazing dive site. We decided to do a long 90 minute dive before dinner instead of a night dive. Up on the party deck we finish off the evening before dinner watching the full moon rising over the island. We have some calm before the storm tonight as we won't be pulling anchor until after midnight, but the wind is up so we will have a bit of a rough ride for several hours before finding protection. Oh boy, can't hardly wait for that. Hopefully everyone will be so sound asleep we won't notice. Yah, right.

Day 8

Another nice day in store for us. Our first dive is Freight Express with lots of Nudi's, Clownfish, little Blacktip Reef Shark and a Baramundi Cod that disappeared quickly. The second dive was a bit of a critter hunt in Maravaghi Bay with Flatworms and juvenile everything from Batfish, Razorfish, and Longfin Spadefish. The current is still



not right for the Manta dive so we went and did a dive called Velvia. Here we had a Blacktip Shark, lots of Elephant Ear Sponge and the schooling fish here were so abundant. Back on the boat the crew heads to check out the Manta dive to see if the current is running the right direction. There are 3 Mantas on the ledge so we are a go for dive. The briefing has your adrenaline running just trying to understand exactly what we have to do to survive this thing. We drop in in about 8 feet of water and cruise over the reef top in about 10 knots of current watching the guides until they give the sign to drop over the edge. No hesitation otherwise you are in a hellacious down current to 130 ft. No thanks! Everyone's adrenaline is pumping as the signal is made and you drop like a stone and come to a dead stop over the reef edge. Everyone follows the directions and we are all good and everyone does perfect. Two minutes of sheer terror followed by 55 minutes sitting on a wall watching

a couple of Manta's come cruising by. I think there were 3 total, one was all black and they did come relatively close. Magic fingers do work as one came a lot closer as we looked each other eye to eye. At the end we make



our way to 15 ft to do a safety stop and then shoot directly to the surface to end the dive. Definitely not for the new or inexperienced diver. After dinner we are doing a night dive and most of the group is going tonight as it is the last one and it is a good critter dive. We found lots of Nudis, a Leaf Scorpionfish, Spearing Mantis Shrimp, crabs and a whole lot more. It was a really good critter dive. Once again it is 10:30 pm and no one is up but a few of us. Better get to bed before we have to start all over again tomorrow.

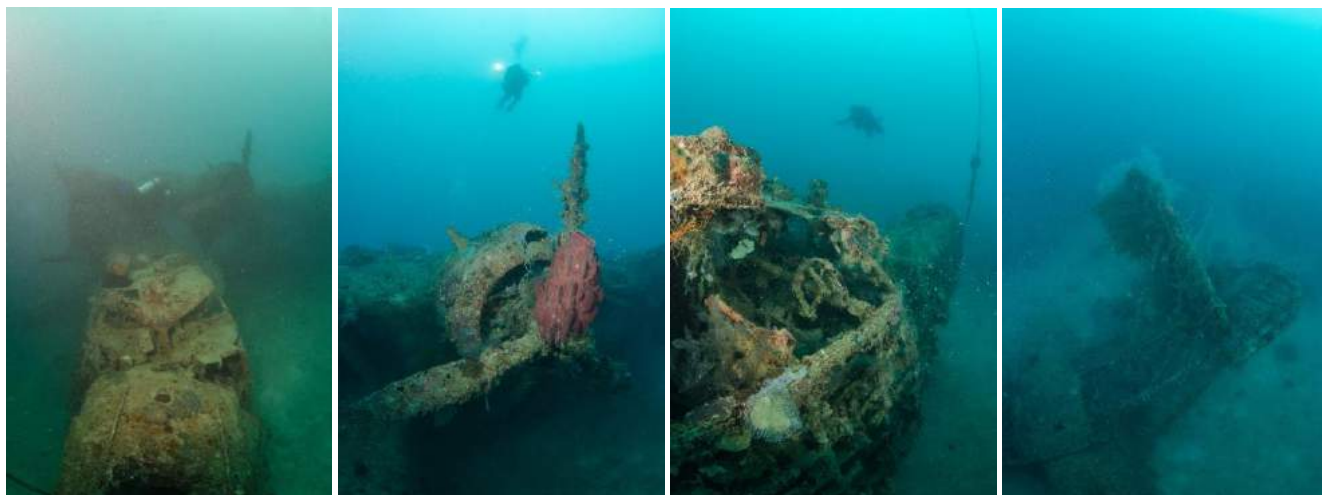


Day 9

A rainy morning and all our stuff on the line is soaking wet, yuck. Makes for a cold morning gearing up for the dive. We are back in the Florida Islands diving Petrol Point. Here we jump in and Tina sees a group of Mobula Rays off in the distance. It took a while, but they swooped in nice and close and there was about 15 of them. They are "mini" Manta's, pretty cool. This dive was Nudibranch stampede. Nudibranchs everywhere we looked.



This dive was supposed to have a Pygmy Seahorse but the fan it was on was sickly and the Pygmy was gone. Back on the boat it looks like the skies are getting lighter so we might possibly have sun for the Japanese sea plane wreck dive. It sits at 100 ft and it's going to be dark. Luckily, by the time we dove it the skies were a bit brighter but the visibility was lousy. Maybe 20 ft at best, but Oli says this was a good vis day because last week they had about 3 feet of visibility. It is a reminder as you swim around the Seaplane, that this was a brutal 6 month battle and a lot of lives were lost. Probably more so when we did the final dive and dove around the landing craft. Seeing this part of history is important because it won't be here forever. The sea will eventually erode it away to nothing. Back on the boat the clean-up begins as we try and get all our dive gear dry before departing in the morning. The crew stashes our stuff in the engine room to really dry it out, the bad part is you don't get it until 5:30 am the next morning. At 5:30 pm we are having a farewell party on the upper deck to

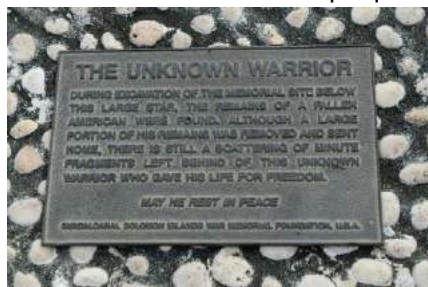
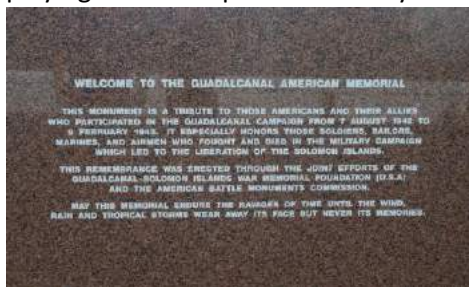


celebrate a great 10 days on the boat. The crew break out the bubbly for a toast and the party takes off from there. Lots of pictures are taken as a beautiful sunset and rainbow grace the skies for our last evening in the Solomon Islands. By 8:30 pm everyone is headed for bed as we travel the last 2 hours to Honiara.



Day 10

The group is up early as the packing begins as the gear comes out of the engine room. A little breakfast and then we depart the boat at 8:00 am. A small group of us decide to take the WWII tour to see where the battle took place on the island. The rest of the group is taken to a hotel to hang out until our 12:30 pm pick-up to head to the airport. Our guide was Chris and our driver was James as they take us to the first stop which is the US memorial. There is no US cemetery here as apparently all the remains have been taken back to the US. However, Chris tell us a story of him as a young boy when they started to build the memorial he and his friend were playing in the dirt piles when they found a human bone. There is a plaque dedicated to the Unknown Soldier



whose remains were found at the site, but Chris tells us that they now know the identity of the soldier. He has felt connected ever since and is now a tour guide. We then visited the Japanese memorial which is built on one of the highest points of the island and the view from here is spectacular. Of course this is why it was difficult to



overtake the Japanese. They drive us around and shows us all the important places pertaining to the war. It was very informative and we were all glad we took the tour. Back at the hotel we meet up with the rest of the group



and have a quick lunch before heading to the airport. Now I know why they have us going 3 hours early because the average person check in is 20 minutes and it is hotter than hell in here. Just a few issues at the counter of course as we try and check our bags all the way through to our final destination. After the first couple people in the group they have it down so the line starts to move a smidge faster. Do not make the mistake to go through security to early as it is just as hot in there as it was in the main area. You are better to sit outside in the fresh breeze until the plane lands. We did take over the smoking area outside once all the smokers left and cooled down until another group of smokers showed up. Our flight left on time and it was a 2 ½ hour flight to Fiji. The transfer in Fiji was quick and simple and we had a short layover of only 1 ½ hours. We say good-bye to Lisa as she catches her flight home. Our flight to Los Angeles was uneventful and we landed relatively on time. It is the big hustle for customs and immigration and we are very happy to have our global re-entry cards to make it super-fast. At this point the group is heading in all different directions and we say fare-well until our next travel adventure.

Summary

We enjoyed the people, the place and the culture which is still intact in this remote destination. It is a part of history that you want to experience before it is gone. This is a bucket list destination and the Bilikiki is doing it right. They have been here cultivating this amazing relationship with the local villages for a very long time. We have never had such fresh fruit and vegetables on a daily basis as we did on this trip. The pineapple is the sweetest I have ever tasted! The other thing was we never saw another dive boat or divers other than our group. Tell me where you are traveling in the world today that isn't over run with dive boats and divers? It was nice to reconnect with 2 dive guides we had met in the past. Tina and Oli did a great job as guides and produce buyers, we wish them well and hope our paths cross again in the future. Kellie and Sam purchased the Bilikiki 4 years ago after being long time crew members. They are doing a great job continuing the relationship that has been built with the local islanders so that everyone benefits from visiting divers. We look forward to a return to this destination in the future.



Bob and I would like to say thank you for traveling with us to this amazing destination. We are grateful to experience this adventure with you and we look forward to doing it again in the near future.

Kelley & Bob Scarzafava

Universal pose!



Dive site drawings

