



TOUR INFORMATION FOR THE SOLOMON ISLANDS with Santa Isabel extension

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING AUSTRALIA: United Kingdom citizens will need a valid passport, an onward or return air ticket, and have registered as an **e-Visitor** with the Australian Department of Immigration, in order to enter Australia. An e-Visitor is valid for a year and is designed for people who live outside Australia and want to visit Australia for tourism for up to 3 months.

The Australian e-Visitor service is free of charge when you apply using the official site of the Australian Department of Immigration at http://www.immi.gov.au/e_visitor/evisitor.htm. If you don't have access to the internet please call the Australian High Commission in London for advice (tel: 020 7379 4334). Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Australian Embassy to obtain entry requirements.

ENTERING THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: An entry visa for the Solomon Islands can be obtained at Honiara, by citizens of the United Kingdom, the USA, and Canada. Other nationalities need to check with their local consulate as to whether a visa can be purchased on arrival. You will need a complete spare page in your passport to receive it.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously, you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

TIME DIFFERENCE: The Solomon Islands is 11 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Brisbane is 10 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

CURRENCY: The local currency is the Solomon Islands dollar. There are currently about 9.50 SI dollars to the pound. Credit cards are only accepted in large hotels which are few and far between on this tour, essentially only in Honiara. Currency can be changed at the airport on arrival. This is what we suggest doing as the rate there is usually (though not always) considerably better than in overseas banks. Once out of the airport there is nowhere to change currency easily.

As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature such as laundry, extra drinks, souvenirs, etc. ATMs (automatic cash dispensing machines) are the easiest and cheapest way of obtaining cash but are not widely available in the Solomon Islands.

Note: Traveller's cheques are not recommended as they are increasingly difficult to cash.

CLIMATE: It will be hot and humid throughout the trip with daytime temperatures normally in the 25-30°C range. We are visiting at the end of the dry season, but rain is possible at any time, especially in the hills. Rain showers can be quite heavy so a small folding umbrella and waterproof jackets and pants are a good idea. Some tracks may be wet and/or muddy.

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PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: Most walks will be of less than a mile in distance and on level ground over generally even terrain. Some days will be broken up into optional sections, with pre-breakfast excursions, morning/afternoon trips, and, on some nights, after dinner spotlighting for nocturnal birds. You will be able to choose all-day birding or a more relaxed schedule as you so wish. On other days, especially when we are travelling from one area to another, opportunities to take time off will be more limited. Generally, we will avoid difficult up-hill hikes on the tour and try to keep to level tracks. However, on the optional extension to Santa Isabel we cannot avoid a fairly long (3-4 hours) up-hill hike to the location where we will stay, and where most of the good birds are to be found. We'll usually return to the lodge in the late afternoon/early evening and we'll almost always have a break of an hour to shower and relax before dinner.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab. It is further recommended that most travellers have protection against Hepatitis A.

Malaria is endemic in the Solomons and you are advised to take prophylactics. We suggest doxycycline or malarone. For further protection, bring plenty of spray repellent and wear long sleeves and trousers when in the field. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

The warm, moist conditions can be conducive to fungal attacks such as athlete's foot and carrying an antifungal cream can be a good idea.

Be sure to bring a good supply of any regular medications you may be taking. You may wish to bring a small personal first aid kit containing such basics as aspirin, cold and flu medicine, Visine or similar eyewash, lip balm, your favourite medicine for upset stomachs and insect bite cream.

The sun can be very fierce even when the day is overcast so a high factor sunscreen is recommended. A high factor lip balm is also a good idea especially when going out on the water. Sunglasses are also recommended.

There are a number of medical clinics within the country usually attached to Missions. They vary in the standard of care available. Health insurance, which includes repatriation provision, is **strongly** recommended for overseas visitors. Should you get sick or injured in a remote area the cost of repatriation can be astronomical.

Insects and other pests – Mosquitoes can be a nuisance particularly in low lying areas, along the rivers and in coastal districts. Long-sleeved shirts and long trousers are advised and a good repellent which can go on your clothes as well as your skin is also a good idea. Snakes are rarely encountered and are usually non-venomous. However as with snakes the world over, most tend to be very shy and you are unlikely to see them.

Crocodiles inhabit most rivers and lagoons particularly in coastal areas. You are advised not to swim in rivers and be careful along riverbanks. Coastal mangroves can also provide cover for crocodiles. Always check with your guides before swimming.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

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ACCOMMODATION: This will vary from rather basic landowner lodges in many places to Western style hotels in Honiara and on Gizo. Single rooms may not be available at all locations, and in many places bathrooms will be shared (i.e. not en suite).

LAUNDRY: Laundry services may be available in a few places, but we advise bring travel soap with you and be prepared to wash clothes overnight from time to time. A lightweight metal clothes hanger or two may come in handy to help clothes dry more quickly.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical sockets (outlets) in the Solomon Islands usually supply electricity at between 220-240 volts. The plugs are the Australian configuration, 3 flat pins with the top two at an angle, so an international travel plug or two will be required and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

MEALS: Food is likely to be very basic. We have in the past been served such eclectic dishes as sweet potatoes with marmalade, and fern fronds with the juice from tinned fish (not the fish itself note). However generally it is less exotic and Western in style but fairly bland food is the norm.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee that all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all the special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room are the responsibility of the individual.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Internet access is only available in Honiara, and can be somewhat erratic even there. Please do not rely on regular internet connections in hotels and lodges. For those wishing to use mobile phones, signal coverage is generally quite good, and you should consider buying a digicell SIM card with top-up credit upon arrival at the airport.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is informal through the tour. Please avoid *light or bright colours*. Dark, muted colours help to prevent flushing the birds, particularly when we are in the forest. Lightweight, dull-coloured field clothing is recommended throughout. This includes several pairs of trousers and cool, comfortable shirts. Long-sleeved shirts, a dull-coloured hat, and sunglasses are recommended for protection from the sun and mosquitoes. Long socks are very useful so that you can tuck in your trousers and further avoid biting insects. Rain clothes are always essential in the tropics, including waterproof trousers, which are especially useful if we encounter rain while in a boat. A folding umbrella is ideal.

We will be on our feet for much of the day and it is most important that you have suitable protection and support for your feet and ankles. Light-weight boots (of gortex or some similar material) that come up to the ankle and have a good lug-sole are ideal. The protection, grip and day-long comfort such boots afford is far superior to the seemingly comfortable trainer-type shoes.

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The leaders will take Neos overshoes as there is a good chance that some tracks may be very wet and /or muddy. If you do not have these then rubber (wellington) boots are advised, and these are now readily available locally.

MISCELLANEOUS EQUIPMENT: You should bring the following:

Alarm clock	Water bottle
Sun lotion/block	Luggage locks
Notebook and pencil	Insect repellent
Small rucksack or shoulder bag	Earplugs (if a light sleeper)
Torch (and extra batteries)	Electrical adaptor
Motion-sickness tablets for boat trips	Simple First-Aid supplies
Light-weight folding stool for picnics	Hand liquid disinfectant
Pocket knife (packed in checked-in bags)	Personal medication

You might like to consider bringing a lightweight sheet or silk sleeping bag and a lightweight 'stand-alone' mosquito net. These are purely precautionary and nets are provided in malarial areas. However sometimes they may be a little worn and a hole in a mosquito net makes it less than useless.

Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear.

Note: The leader will carry a telescope for group use. Please note that the group scope should not be used for personal digiscoping. Should you choose to bring your own telescope you must be prepared to carry and maintain it for the duration of the tour. If you use a telescope regularly in your day-to-day birding, consider bringing it on tour.

The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, and we recommend this. It is available in some high-street chemist or direct from the Mosi-guard website: <http://www.mosi-guard.com> . Camping supply stores sell an insect-repelling chemical containing permethrin 0.5%, which can be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: The leaders will provide the following for group use:

Telescope & tripod	Basic first-aid kit
Reference books	Tape recording/playback equipment
Spotlight	Laser pointer

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

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If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself.** Please bring two smaller, lighter bags rather than one very heavy one (if international airline luggage restrictions allow). As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

On internal flights in the Solomon Islands there are strict weight limits. The amount allowed varies between 16kg and 20kg. Please leave any extra baggage in Honiara. Excess baggage may be a problem and get offloaded, and even paying excess will not guarantee that it flies with you.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and easy to obtain, but birds are more difficult to photograph. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

There will be occasions when photography of birds and scenery is possible and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However, if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

SAFETY ISSUES: The Solomon Islands are very low-key and the people friendly. By using reliable local people in each area we hope to avoid any problems. Do be careful with valuables, keep money well out of sight, and keep in sight of the group at all times.

The key to safety is using local people. Listen to what they say. Do not be ostentatious with your wealth.

TRANSPORT: Transportation will mostly be in small buses and minibuses. All participants must be willing to take their turn in the back seat and a daily rotation of seating positions will be instituted.

SMOKING: Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists, etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Birds of Melanesia: Bismarcks, Solomons, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia by Guy Dutton (Helm Field Guides, 2011) is very good and is the recommended field guide for the tour.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of field guides and major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

Subbuteo Books
Tel: 0870 010 9700
www.wildlifebooks.com

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

MAPS: Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

FINAL INFORMATION: Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc, and your international air tickets for the tour will be sent to you about three weeks before departure. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.