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ACROSS THE TROPIC OF CAPRICORN

Here is a fascinating expedition from the northernmost reaches of New Zealand to Melanesia, taking in remote, but splendidly sophisticated Norfolk Island and Ile des Pins in the French Collectivity of New Caledonia. From here we follow the chain of Melanesian islands through Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and finally to the northern islands of Papua New Guinea. The region is ideal for exploring by small ship and particularly one as suitable as our MS Caledonian Sky. Her fleet of Zodiac craft will allow us to explore some magnificent places, especially tiny coral islets and lagoons such as the majestic Marovo Lagoon in the Solomon Islands, the world's largest double barrier lagoon and a truly awe-inspiring place. All the islands we will visit are beautiful in their different ways and all have unique features and cultures. They in fact form one of the most culturally complex regions of the entire world, with 1293 languages spoken across the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the islands of New Guinea. It is also a region of great antiquity; New Guinea has been settled for around 45,000 years, the Solomon Islands for 35,000 years, and Vanuatu and New Caledonia for about 4000. The maritime history of the region is also a constant wonder from the early explorers and native migrations to the explorations of Captain James Cook and more recently, the fierce battles of the Second World War. Afloat and ashore, our exploration will be filled with unforgettable images, remote idyllic islets, tribal villages unchanged for centuries, astonishing ceremonial dances, kaleidoscopic reefs and soaring whitetailed tropic birds. This voyage has something for everyone, whether your interest lies in natural history, military history, bird watching, photography, the undersea world or simply just being

one of the privileged few who are able to set foot on islands of astonishing richness and beauty. We hope you can join us in this faraway haven, for an unparalleled opportunity to explore one of the most intriguing places



on the map.

ITINERARY

Day 1 - Auckland.



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Arrive this afternoon and transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay. The remainder of the day is at leisure. This evening we will meet for a welcome dinner.

Day 2 - Auckland.

During our morning guided tour, we will explore the Auckland Domain and Auckland Museum which overlooks picturesque Waitemata Harbour and has an outstanding collection featuring exhibits on the New Zealand and the Pacific Island cultures showcasing an extensive collection of Polynesian artefacts. After lunch in a local restaurant we will transfer to the MS Caledonian Sky and set sail this evening.

Day 3 - Paihia.

Discovered by Captain Cook in 1769, this area is the cradle of European civilisation in New Zealand and has important historical significance for both Maori and Europeans. On a morning tour we will visit the Waitangi Treaty house where, in 1840, the treaty was signed between the Maori and the British Crown. We then continue to Kerikeri where the Maori first welcomed missionaries in 1819 and see the oldest buildings of New Zealand dating from the 1820s. This afternoon enjoy some free time to explore the charming historic town of Russell.

Day 4 - At Sea.

Enjoy a day at sea as we follow in the wake of past navigators sailing north. Maybe learn more at a lecture by the expedition team or find a spot on deck to relax.

Day 5 - Norfolk Island.

This morning we awake for a full day call at Norfolk Island which Captain Cook encountered in 1774 and named after the Duchess of Norfolk. We will have the opportunity to explore on a

morning tour visiting the beautiful St Barnabas Chapel. This afternoon a further choice of excursions will be available. Discover more of the historical Georgian settlement of Kingston with its convict settlements or visit the Botanical Gardens with its 40 endemic, or unique species, including 15 plant species considered to be critically endangered. For the more active you may wish to walk in the National Park towards Mount Pitt. The tracks wind through lush palm forests and stands of Norfolk Island pine leading to remarkable views of the island and the surrounding ocean. Keen birders may also spot noddies, tropic birds and parrots.

Day 6 - At Sea.

Cruise the South Pacific as we head towards New Caledonia.

Day 7 - Ile des Pins, New Caledonia.

Arrive at first light in New Caledonia, the islands named by Captain Cook in 1774 during his second voyage to New Zealand. These remote islands are close to paradise and we will use our Zodiacs to land at one of the remote beaches. From here there will be the option to join a nature walk climbing the 262 metres Nga peak for fantastic views over the whole island. Alternatively join one of the snorkelling trips or simply find a spot on one of the beaches to relax before we sail in the afternoon.

Day 8 - Tanna, Vanuatu.

After a morning at sea we arrive in Vanuatu at the island of Tanna, meaning earth in the local Kwamera language. Captain Cook was the first European to visit the island in 1774, landing at Port Resolution and having been attracted by the glowing light of Mount Yasur. This 361 metre active volcano is situated in the South East of the island and dominates the landscape. The



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adventurous may wish to join a journey to the crater. We will use local trucks to drive through the rainforest that covers the mountain before walking to the rim. Alternatively we may have the chance to visit a local village where traditional lifestyles are maintained and the local culture has been largely unaffected by western influences. Here we will learn of customs and also learn of traditional medicines, crafts and cooking styles.

Day 9 - Port Havannah.

Awake this morning off Port Havannah, situated on the north coast of Efate Island and our base for today's activities. There are a number of outer islands that we may be able to explore depending on weather and sea conditions. Lelepa Island is 160 acres of unspoilt tropical rainforest and palm fringed beaches. On a nature walk we will see the herbs used in local medicines before exploring Feles cave thought to be the resting place of the legendary Polynesian Chief, Roi Mata. Meanwhile on Moso Island we can meet the volunteers at the Tasiriki Turtle Sanctuary who will teach us about the rehabilitation of the hawksbill turtles and the attempts to increase their numbers. If time and weather permit we will also set up a snorkelling platform or offer a chance to swim from the beach.

Day 10 - Espiritu Santo Island.

Espiritu Santo is the largest of Vanuatu's islands with some of the most beautiful white sand beaches, amazing blue holes, caves and renowned snorkelling. It was also a huge military base during World War II. We will have a choice of activities this morning. Either choose to snorkel amongst the corals and fish of the region at Million Dollar Point, named after the value of the military equipment dumped into the sea. Alternatively join an island tour including the Nekar Custom Village where we will learn about local traditions and customs, including their unique

water music, before enjoying time to swim in one of the nearby blue holes. Return to the ship for lunch and an afternoon at sea.

Day 11 - Vanikoro, Solomon Islands.

After breakfast we land on Vanikoro Island in the Temotu Province of the Solomon Islands, where French Explorer Jean-Francois de la Perouse became stranded in 1788 after both his vessels, La Boussole and the Astrolabe, hit the then unknown reefs of the island. Learn more about the island's history and the mystery of the lost La Perouse expedition that captured the imagination of the European public. We will be welcomed ashore by the local villagers before choosing to explore the village further, join a nature walk where we can look out for the endemic birds, the Vanikoro monarch and Vanikoro white-eye, or alternatively enjoy a swim or snorkel from the beach. Return to the MS Caledonian Sky for lunch and an afternoon cruising.

Day 12 - Santa Ana.

After a morning at sea, arrive at Port Mary on Santa Ana Island. We are welcomed with a stunning dance by the villagers with spears and mud face masks. Soak in the culture as we set foot on the shores of this lovely island. After the performance we have the opportunity to explore the town further with its plethora of local handicrafts, join a nature walk through the forests, and walk to meet the students at the village school or swim from the local beach.

Day 13 - Honiara.

This morning we cruise through Iron Bottom Sound, the site of intense World War II naval battles, and so named for the large numbers of Japanese and American ships and aircraft that sank beneath the sea, before arriving into Honiara. During World War



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Il the British founded Honiara as a military base. The town and the Mataniko River, which runs through it, were the front for many months during the battle of Guadalcanal. Today, this is a bustling town with lovely hibiscus and palm-tree-lined avenues. We enjoy a morning tour of Honiara including the bustling central market, parliament building and National Museum where we get an insight into Solomon Islands history. Alternatively discover the World War II sites including Henderson Field, the Japanese Peace Park and the US Memorial at Skyline Ridge. After lunch on board return to the city for some free time or join a snorkel excursion to Bonegi Beach to swim amongst war wrecks now colonised by tropical fish.

Day 14 - Marovo Lagoon.

Marovo Lagoon is the largest double barrier lagoon in the world. Thousands of islands scatter the lagoon, from tiny coral islets on the fringing reef to massive 1600 metre volcanic islands. Inside the lagoon, the islands are surrounded by spectacular coral formations and white sand beach, the lagoon waters shimmering in every shade of blue, turquoise and jade green. We have a full day here to explore and will visit one of the outlying villages which produce some of the finest wood carvings in the region. We will also find a suitable spot to snorkel and swim as well as Zodiac cruises to look for local wildlife.

Day 15 - Tetepare.

Tetepare is the largest uninhabited tropical island in the Southern Hemisphere and home to one of the Solomon Islands leading conservation projects. Managed by the Tetepare Descendants Association, they have ensured the island was saved from the threat of loggers and many areas remain untouched. A wide variety of plants and animals now live in the 120 square kilometres of lowland rainforest that blankets the

island. A total of 76 bird species, 25 reptile and 13 mammal species have been recorded here including skinks, dugong and the endemic Tetepare white eye whilst the beaches support three species of turtle including the endangered leatherback. Enjoy a guided walk in the forest with the local conservationists who will explain the work they are doing on the island.

Day 16 - At sea.

Day 17 - Rabaul, Papua New Guinea.

Arrive this morning at Rabaul's dramatic harbour which is ringed by six cone-shaped volcanoes. Our morning tour will include a visit to the Volcanic Observatory, which monitors 14 active and 23 dormant volcanoes in Papua New Guinea, and from where we will enjoy magnificent views over the bay and the volcanoes. Our next stop will be Mount Tavurvur, which violently erupted in 1937 and 1994, and where we will witness the Hot Springs. This afternoon will be at leisure to explore independently before we meet tonight to attend an astonishing performance of the Baining tribe's fire dance. Tribe members in huge, magnificently crafted masks leap and dance over crackling, red-hot coals in a centuries-old ritual to honour the local deity-spirits.

Day 18 - Rabaul to Cairns.

After breakfast we will make our way to the airport for our flight to Cairns. Arrive in Cairns this afternoon and transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 19 - Cairns

After breakfast in the hotel enjoy a morning at leisure before we transfer to the airport for your onward journey

Please Note:



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Itineraries are subject to change.



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YOUR SHIP:

YOUR SHIP:

VESSEL TYPE:

LENGTH:

PASSENGER CAPACITY:

BUILT/REFURBISHED:



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