Solomon Islands

Santa Isabel & Makira Mega Endemics



Black-faced Pitta by Adam Walleyn

For the adventurous birder, few destinations offer the excitement, isolation and exceptional endemic birdlife of the Solomon Islands' remote forested interior. Our Santa Isabel & Makira Mega Endemics tour ventures well beyond the usual birding circuit, exploring two of the archipelago's most fascinating and biologically distinctive islands. Cloaked in extensive tropical rainforest, these rugged landscapes harbour an extraordinary collection of highly localised species, many found nowhere else on Earth. This is a dedicated expedition for serious birders and world listers, combining challenging forest exploration with opportunities to encounter some of the rarest and least-known birds in the Pacific.

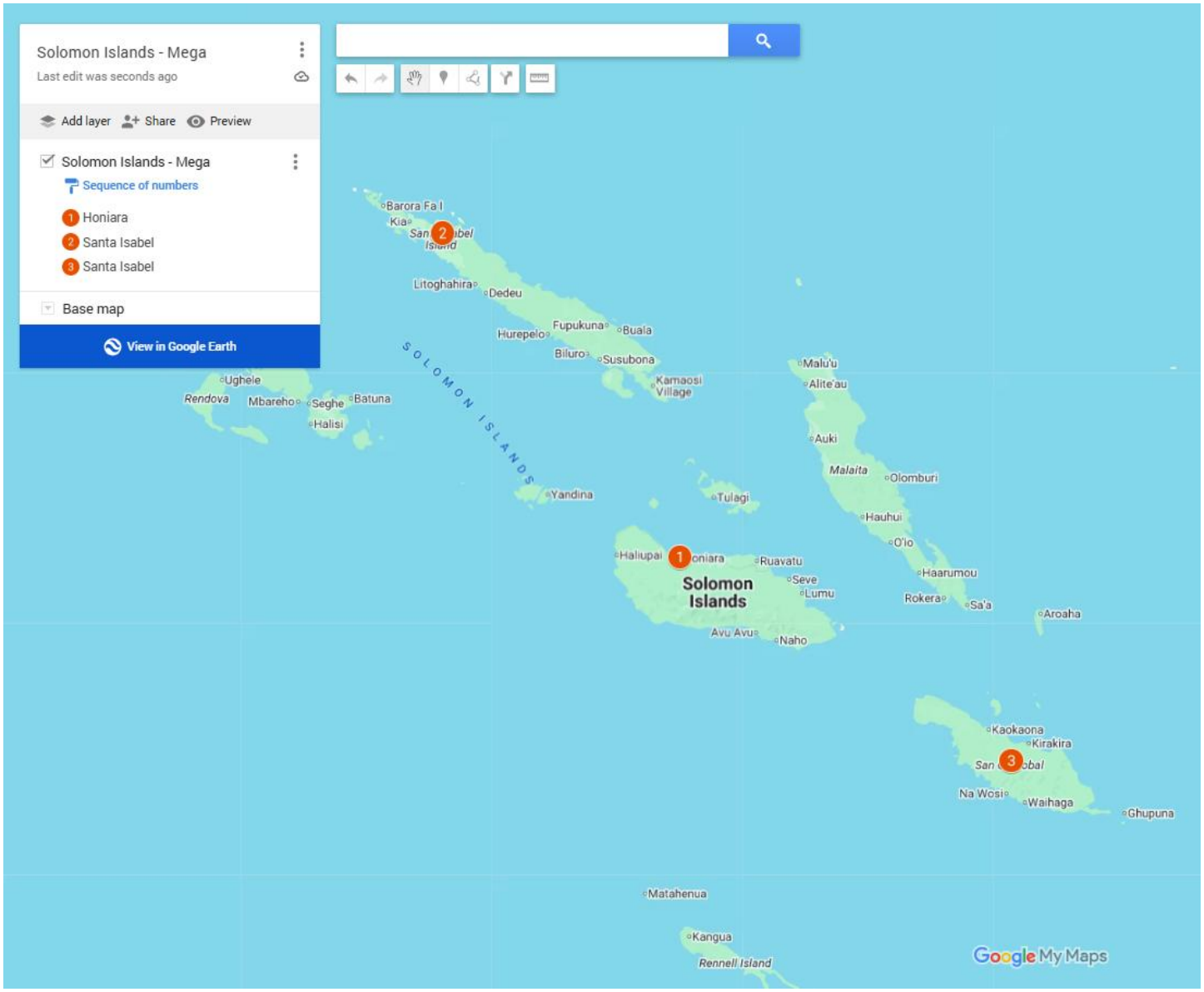
Our adventure begins on Guadalcanal before heading north to Santa Isabel, where the remote highland forests surrounding Tirotonga provide access to several exceptional species. Foremost among these is the spectacular and notoriously elusive Black-faced Pitta, undoubtedly one of the most desirable birds in the Solomon Islands. Other outstanding targets include Fearful Owl, West Solomons Owl, Solomons Frogmouth, White-eyed Starling, North Solomons Dwarf Kingfisher and the exceptionally scarce Imitator Sparrowhawk. Working alongside experienced local guides, we will explore remote forest trails and search carefully for these highly sought-after species.

We then journey south to Makira, an island renowned for its remarkable concentration of endemic birds. Several days exploring its largely undisturbed highland rainforests offer opportunities for a selection of specialities, including Makira Honeyeater, Makira Thrush, Makira Starling, Makira Flycatcher, Makira Fantail, Makira Cicadabird, Sooty Myzomela and the secretive Shade Bush Warbler. The beautiful Silver-capped Fruit Dove, White-collared Monarch and numerous other regional specialities further enhance the exceptional birding possibilities.

This is a physically demanding tour involving lengthy hikes through steep, muddy and often slippery rainforest trails, with accommodation in simple village homestays and remote forest lodges offering only the most basic facilities. However, the considerable effort required to reach these seldom-visited forests is rewarded by extraordinary birding opportunities, magnificent tropical scenery and encounters with welcoming local communities. For those with the necessary fitness, determination and adventurous spirit, Santa Isabel and Makira offer a truly memorable expedition into one of the world's last great frontiers of endemic island birding.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Honiara, Guadalcanal Island**
Day 2	**Honiara; flight to Santa Isabel Island, hike to Tirotonga Village**
Day 3	**Santa Isabel Island Highlands**
Day 4	**Tirotonga Village to Buala Township**
Day 5	**Santa Isabel Island; flight to Honiara**
Day 6	**Mount Austen**
Day 7	**Honiara; flight to Makira Island**
Days 8 to 12	**Makira Island Highlands**
Day 13	**Makira Island Highlands, hike to Kirakira**
Day 14	**Kirakira, flight to Honiara & final departure**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Birding sites in detail



Silver-capped Fruit Dove by Adam Riley

Mount Austen. Rising above Honiara, the forested slopes of Mount Austen provide an introduction to the birds of the Solomon Islands. Tropical forest, secondary growth and wooded slopes support several specialities close to the capital.

Our targets include the very tricky Guadalcanal Dwarf Kingfisher, Ultramarine Kingfisher, Spot-breasted Cuckoo-Dove, Brown-winged Starling and Chestnut-bellied Monarch. The forests also support pigeons, cuckoos, honeyeaters and other characteristic Solomon Island species. We will explore forest trails and lower-elevation habitats for both widespread regional birds and localised specialities.

Mount Austen was the scene of fierce ground fighting during the latter stages of the Guadalcanal Campaign. Japanese forces occupied the heights overlooking Henderson Field, and American troops fought a series of difficult engagements through the jungle and ridges during December 1942 and January 1943.

Santa Isabel Island – Buala & Forested Foothills. One of the largest islands of the Solomon archipelago, Santa Isabel has densely forested mountains, steep valleys and a relatively undeveloped interior. It was the first major island encountered by Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña during his expedition of 1568. Naming it Santa Ysabel, his party explored much of the surrounding archipelago, ultimately giving rise to the name Solomon Islands.

Arriving near Buala, the island's principal administrative centre, we will head inland through secondary vegetation, cultivated clearings and increasingly extensive tropical rainforest.

The lower slopes and forest trails offer opportunities for northern Solomon specialities, including Red-capped Myzomela, Yellow-throated White-eye and the diminutive North Solomons Dwarf Kingfisher. Metallic Starling may occur around forest edges, with Glossy and Uniform Swiftlets overhead.



Guadalcanal Dwarf Kingfisher by Jonathan Slifkin



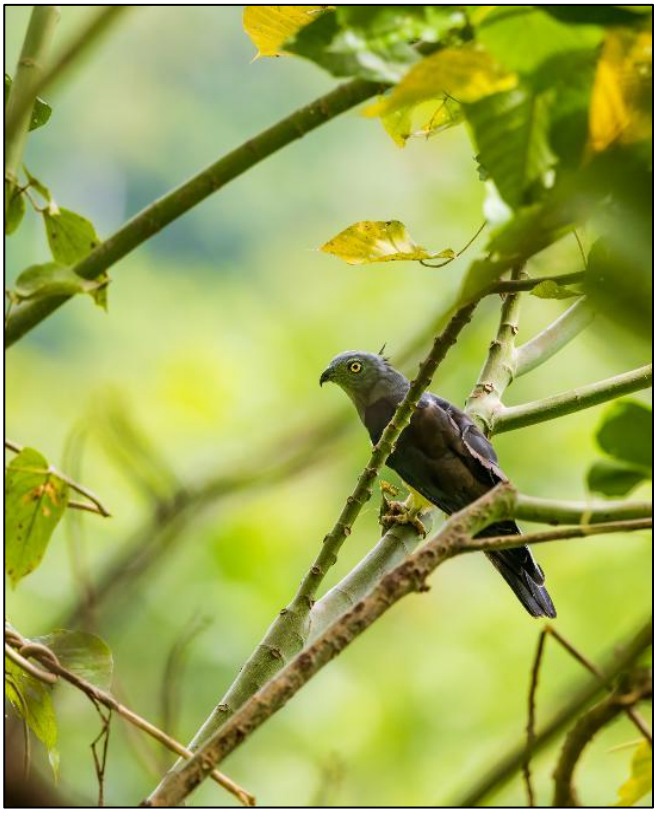
Metallic Starling by Ryan Chenery

We will also watch for the exceptionally elusive Imitator Sparrowhawk, a poorly known regional endemic previously recorded in these forests. Encounters with this scarce raptor are unpredictable.

Accessing the highlands involves a lengthy, potentially demanding hike through steep, humid forest, with muddy and slippery sections possible, particularly after rain.

Santa Isabel – Tirotonga & Highland Rainforests. Our principal destination is the remote highland village of Tirotonga, surrounded by extensive tropical rainforest. Reaching it requires considerable effort but provides access to rarely visited birding habitats. Staying in the highlands allows us to begin at first light in search of several difficult endemic species.

Our foremost target is Black-faced Pitta, one of the world's least-known and most sought-after pittas. This forest-floor specialist inhabits dense, shaded rainforest and can be exceptionally difficult to observe. With knowledgeable local guides, we will explore suitable territories, listen for calling birds and maintain patient vigils at promising locations. The surrounding forests also offer opportunities for White-eyed Starling, another rarely encountered Solomon endemic, while Pacific Koel and Oriental Hobby are additional possibilities.



Pacific Baza by Ryan Chenery

Santa Isabel is renowned for its nocturnal birds, particularly Fearful Owl, West Solomons Owl and Solomons Frogmouth. Our guides will help search suitable forest and, where known and accessible, established daytime roosts. Evening excursions may reveal calling or actively hunting birds.

Fearful Owl is a large, powerful forest owl whose secretive behaviour and low population densities make sightings highly prized. Solomons Frogmouth represents an unusual, geographically restricted lineage endemic to the northern and central Solomon Islands. Our extended stay allows time to revisit productive territories and search for species missed earlier. Accommodation is a simple village homestay with very basic facilities, but its location deep within the forest makes it an invaluable birding base.

Makira – Kirakira & Forested Foothills. Southeast of Guadalcanal, Makira is one of the archipelago's most



Solomons Frogmouth by Adam Walleyn

biologically distinctive islands. Its isolation, rugged terrain and extensive forests have encouraged the evolution of numerous endemic birds.

Historically known as San Cristóbal following the Spanish explorations of 1568, Makira remains little visited, particularly beyond its coastal settlements. Tropical rainforest covers the mountainous interior, while lower elevations include secondary forest, cultivated areas, river valleys and coastal vegetation.

Kirakira, the principal town, provides our entry point. Depending on time and local conditions, birding on the lower slopes and forest edges may produce Sooty Myzomela, Cardinal Myzomela, Pacific Baza, Chestnut-bellied Monarch and White-collared Monarch. The forests also support fruit doves, imperial pigeons, parrots and other characteristic Melanesian species. We will bird suitable habitats on our journey inland towards the remote highlands, where the greatest concentration of our target endemics occurs.

Much of this area is customarily owned by local communities. Experienced local guides and landowners will assist our excursions and provide access to seldom-visited forests.

Makira – Interior Highland Rainforests. Makira's mountainous interior is an important endemic birding region in the southwest Pacific. Tropical rainforest covers steep ridges, deep valleys and isolated upland settlements. The forests of eastern Makira, including the wider Bauro Highlands, are internationally recognised for their biodiversity and conservation importance.

These forests form the centrepiece of our visit. Reaching the best birding areas requires prolonged hikes through rugged terrain, with steep ascents, muddy trails and stream crossings.

A foremost target is Makira Honeyeater, an endemic representative of a distinctive genus confined to the island. This scarce forest species can be difficult to locate, requiring careful searching and patience. Makira Thrush, Yellow-legged Pigeon and Makira Starling are also sought-after forest inhabitants.



Yellow-legged Pigeon by Jonathan Slifkin



Claret-breasted Fruit Dove by Glen Valentine

Other targets include Makira Flycatcher, Makira Fantail, Sooty Myzomela and Makira Cicadabird, whose calls often reveal its presence in the canopy. The secretive Shade Bush Warbler inhabits dense vegetation and forest undergrowth, where obtaining views requires patience.

The canopy and middle levels support Silver-capped Fruit Dove, White-collared Monarch and Chestnut-bellied Monarch. Chestnut-bellied Imperial Pigeon, Cardinal Myzomela and other regional birds add to the diversity. Several days in the highlands allow us to explore different habitats and elevations, revisit promising sites and concentrate on difficult species. With local guides, we will adapt our activities to conditions, recent sightings and access.

We then return to Kirakira before travelling onwards to Honiara, concluding our Solomon Islands birding adventure.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	🟥⬜⬜	Demanding to strenuous. A physically challenging tour requiring excellent fitness, stamina & mobility. Multiple lengthy hikes, remote locations & very basic facilities. Only suitable for experienced, adventurous travellers.
Birding Ease	🟥⬜⬜	Demanding to very demanding. Numerous elusive, highly localised forest endemics requiring considerable patience & persistence. Dense vegetation, difficult terrain & occasional nocturnal birding.
Accommodation	🟥⬜🟩	Comfortable hotels in Honiara. Very basic village homestays & forest lodges on Santa Isabel & Makira, with shared facilities, limited electricity & in some locations, no running water or conventional showers.
Walking / Trails	🟥⬜⬜	Strenuous. Regular hikes of 4+ hours over steep, uneven, muddy & slippery forest trails. Good balance, stamina & previous hiking experience essential.
Vehicles / Roads	⬜🟨⬜	Variable road conditions. Domestic flights between islands. Highland birding sites primarily accessed on foot.
Photography	🟥🟨⬜	Challenging but potentially rewarding. Many targets inhabit dense, poorly lit rainforest & are difficult to observe/photograph.
Annoyances	🟥⬜⬜	Physically demanding hikes, hot & humid conditions, heavy tropical rain, insects, extremely basic accommodation, limited sanitation, unreliable communications & possible domestic flight disruptions.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 14;
- All lodgings;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All local community, landowner and reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Additional baggage and overweight luggage charges;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: Single accommodation is only possible during our nights in Honiara. Accommodation on Santa Isabel and Makira is extremely limited, and shared rooms or sleeping arrangements may be unavoidable, regardless of whether a single supplement has been paid. The single supplement is applicable where individual accommodation can be provided. We will make reasonable efforts to accommodate individual rooming preferences, but privacy and single occupancy cannot be guaranteed in the highlands.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Physical Fitness & Participation: This is a physically demanding tour requiring excellent fitness, stamina, mobility and balance, including the ability to undertake strenuous hikes of four hours or longer over steep, muddy and slippery terrain in hot, humid conditions. Guests must realistically assess their capabilities before booking. The Rockjumper Tour Leader reserves the right to assess each guest's physical suitability and exclude anyone considered insufficiently fit or capable of safely completing the planned activities. Any guests considered incapable of proceeding will be withdrawn from the tour before continuing to Isabel or Makira. The Tour Leader's decision in matters of guest safety will be final. Any additional accommodation, transport or associated expenses arising from exclusion will be for the guests account, with no refunds for unused services, subject to our booking conditions.

- Remote accommodation: Much of our time on Santa Isabel and Makira will be spent in basic village homestays. Facilities are extremely rudimentary compared with conventional tourist accommodation. Shared rooms and bathroom facilities are common, hot water is unavailable, and some highland accommodation on Makira offers only pit toilets, with no showers or running water. Washing or bathing in nearby streams may be necessary. Guests must be comfortable with these arrangements.
- Meals and supplies: Food in the remote highlands will be simple, locally prepared and based on ingredients available within the communities. Meal choices will be limited, and specialised dietary requirements WILL NOT be available or catered to
- Electricity and communications: Infrastructure is extremely limited in the highlands. Some homestays have only basic solar-powered lighting, while others have no reliable electricity. Mobile phone reception is intermittent or unavailable, and internet access should not be expected. Opportunities to charge cameras, phones and other electronic equipment will be very limited.
- Climate and terrain: The Solomon Islands experience a hot, humid tropical climate, with rainfall possible throughout the year. Heavy showers can occur with little warning, making forest trails exceptionally muddy and slippery. Highland conditions may be somewhat cooler, but humidity generally remains high. Appropriate footwear, effective waterproof protection and adequate hydration are essential.
- Remote medical facilities: Several of our birding locations are far removed from modern medical facilities, and emergency assistance may be difficult to obtain quickly. Guests must be in good general health and carry sufficient supplies of any necessary medication. Comprehensive travel insurance is required, and emergency medical evacuation cover is strongly recommended.
- Domestic transport: Travel between Guadalcanal, Santa Isabel and Makira relies on domestic flights, which may be subject to delays, cancellations or changes at short notice. Such disruptions can affect our accommodation arrangements, island visits and the time available for birding. Guests must be prepared for changes to the published schedule. Regional aircraft may also have restrictive baggage allowances, which will be confirmed prior to departure.
- Birding expectations: Many of the species targeted on this tour are exceptionally scarce, secretive or difficult to observe. Endemics may require prolonged searching and considerable patience. Sightings cannot be guaranteed, and our activities may be adjusted according to recent observations and prevailing conditions.
- Local communities: Much of our birding takes place on customary land, accessed with the permission and assistance of local communities and landowners. We will be guests within remote villages, and participants are expected to respect local customs, accommodation arrangements and the guidance of our local hosts.

IMPORTANT: This is a physically demanding expedition into some of the least-accessible birding regions of the Solomon Islands. Excellent fitness, a flexible attitude and a willingness to accept very basic living conditions are essential. The rewards can be exceptional, but this tour is not suitable for travellers expecting conventional accommodation or an easy-paced birding holiday.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will begin with a welcome dinner at our hotel in Honiara in the evening of day 1. The tour will conclude here on day 14 after an internal flight from Makira.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Honiara International Airport (IATA: HIR) is the main port of entry and departure for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.