

AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS VOLUNTEERS

SOLOMON ISLANDS COUNTRY BRIEF



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Purpose

The purpose of this Country Brief is to provide information to volunteers across all Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) programs that will assist in the safe and successful completion of volunteer assignments in Solomon Islands (SI). The Brief provides information on important contacts, country background and history, cultural considerations, security guidelines, health and medical issues, transport, and other information for daily living in SI.

Contacts

Australian High Commission, Honiara

Cnr Hibiscus Ave and Mud Alley

Honiara, Solomon Islands

Telephone: +677 21561

Facsimile: +677 23691

Website: <http://www.solomonislands.embassy.gov.au>

Emergency Numbers

Police 999/911

Ambulance 999/911

Fire Brigade 988

AHI Assist:

24/7 Emergency Hotline: +61 2 9978 6666

Australian Business Volunteers, Policy No: 32089

For other contacts specific to your program please see supplement page at the end of this document.

Country Profile



Land Area: 28 450 km²

Population: 562 000 (2013)

People: 94.5% Melanesian, 3% Polynesian and 1.2% Micronesian.

Language: 74 indigenous languages and one lingua francas (Pidgin). English is the official language of business and education and is widely spoken.

Time: Solomon Island time is 11 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), which is one hour ahead of AEST. SI does not observe daylight saving.

Climate: Tropical; highest temperature and rainfall (November - April), slightly cooler with southeast trade winds for the remainder of the year

Religion: 95% Christian

Government: The National Parliament is a 50-member unicameral legislature elected for four-year terms by universal suffrage. Provincial governments and area councils also have designated powers from the Constitution.

The Prime Minister: The Hon Gordon Darcy Lilo

Governor-General: HE Sir Frank Ofagioro Kabui

GDP: 2 052 million (2014 PPP\$)

GDP per capita: 3,568 (2014 PPP\$)

Currency: Solomon Island's unit of currency is the dollar, which is divided into 100 cents. Current exchange rates can be found at: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Economy: About 85% of Solomon Islanders live a subsistence agricultural lifestyle. Other main industries in SI are timber logging, mining, fishing and cash crops including copra and palm oil, although there is majority foreign ownership in these industries. Most manufactured goods and petroleum products need to be imported. Tourism, particularly diving is becoming an important industry for the Solomon Islands.



History

The most commonly accepted theory is that Solomon islands was settled by several waves of migration starting around 10,000 years ago with Papuan speaking hunters and gatherers, followed some 4,000 years ago by Austronesian speaking agriculturists. Between 1200 and 1600 AD small Polynesian settlements were established in small isolated landmasses and atolls by a wave of back migration from Wallis and Futuna and Tuvalu. Before missionisation and pacification by colonial powers, most settlements were inland to provide security from raids.

The first contact in 1568 by the Spanish explorer Mendana located the archipelago and named after the legendary Isles of Solomon. Further contact with Europeans was limited until the nineteenth century, when whalers and traders began to visit the islands. In 1899 the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was established, the main objective being to keep order in the islands and other colonial powers out. Responsibility for education and health was left to the missionaries, which along with the lure of cargo proved major incentives for conversion to Christianity.

The Japanese invaded the Solomon Islands in the Second World War but by June 1943 the Allies retook most of the Western Solomons. Honiara was established as the new capital to take advantage of the infrastructure built by American forces during the war. After 1945 a growing mood of anti-colonial sentiment was manifested in the Ma'asina movement, started in Malaita. Although soon repressed by the colonial government, this movement prepared the way for the establishment of local councils in the 1950s, which by 1964 were established in most districts.

Moves to more representative government were made during the 1970s. In 1976 Britain granted the Solomon Islands internal self-government and independence on 7 July 1978. At independence, Solomon Islanders had very little experience and skills in managing and directing those systems. Independence was threatened by secessionist elements in the Western Province, whose people saw themselves as culturally distinct from the rest of the Solomon Islands and having more in common with Bougainville in PNG. Western Province leaders feared that the relatively prosperous West would lose the benefits it had built up for itself and were worried about political domination by Malaita. These fears have resurfaced repeatedly in the post independence period and the Ethnic Tensions since 1999.

Cultural Considerations

Solomon's culture and tradition is described as *kastom*, the Pijin term for custom. Kastom is distinguished from the 'whiteman way' and denotes the traditional or pre-colonial past. Kastom is still very influential and often closely interwoven with modern ways. More than most Pijin terms, kastom has wide and flexible meanings, which depends on context for its precise meaning. It includes matters related to social and cultural relationships based on the fundamental constructs of land and bloodlines. These relationships include kinship, clan, line, language (wantok) and residence, relationships which are critical to the way in which the country operates and functions.

A 'Wantok' culture which basically refers to a term used to express patterns of relationships and networks that link people in families and the same localities. It is an identity concept; association are formed based on this system and wantoks always come first over someone who isn't.

The roles of men and women are closely prescribed in Solomon Islands societies. Public displays of affection between men and women are rare and frowned upon but affection and touching between same sexes is common. There is not a "dating" culture as such - marriage is traditionally viewed as an association of families, not a matter of two individuals. Great caution should be given to male/female relationships, which can be easily misinterpreted and can lead to conflict. It is very important to respect the social boundaries between men and women. Homosexual acts are illegal and penalties include jail sentences.

Since an overwhelming majority of Solomon Islands identify as Christians, some Christian traditions are noticed in everyday life, for example, grace at meals and prayers at meetings.

Dress and Appearance

Different types of work will have different standards. In most public service offices, men are expected to wear collared shirts and long trousers. Women wear skirts or baggy trousers/shorts to their knee or below. Short skirts and bikinis are not acceptable in the general community. Women generally swim in a dress t-shirt or lavalava. Traditionally it is unacceptable to expose thighs or the shape of your body.

Wear sandals and comfortable shoes for work. Sandals and thongs are acceptable for outside working hours and sturdy walking shoes or stout sandals for walking.

The most important advice about clothing is to seek advice about what to wear in the tropics. Clothing that is moisture wicking, breathable and durable is recommended as the climate is hot in most places.

Personal Behaviour

As a visitor to Solomon Islands, ABV volunteers should be aware of and respect local culture and customs. Respect should always be shown for traditional culture and older people. Be mindful of the following traditional customs:

- Try not to pass in front of people or make them pass in front of you. Try to pass behind people or allow them to move past behind you, for example when you're talking with someone in the corridor.
- Always greet people or smile an acknowledgment.
- Take your shoes / sandals off when you go into people's house.
- Sit down with people at the same level. If people are sitting on the floor, sit down or hunch down with them.
- Hospitality is a key feature of Solomon culture. Traditionally and still today, betelnut was brought or offered as a sign of peace and hospitality. Take a small gift when invited to someone's home for the first time or for someone's wedding or a festival.
- Presents are not usually opened at the time of giving, to avoid causing or disappointment by one's reaction.

A premium is placed on avoiding confrontation in SI culture, and it is important to take time to listen to people in the workplace and to try and reach consensus. Do not criticise someone in front of others avoiding shame is also important to Solomon Islanders. People value group initiative rather than individual initiative and generally feel more comfortable in a group environment. As in most Pacific Countries, time is more about a relationship than measurable units – be prepared for delays and times when nothing seems to be happening. Patience is key in these instances.



Security Risks and Personal Safety

The DFAT Smart Traveller website has up-to-date information regarding travelling in SI and current risks to personal safety, and is available at:

http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Solomon_Islands

ABV volunteers should read this information prior to departure to SI and check it regularly while in country [subscription to email updates to this page is available on the above link]. Australian citizens should register with Smart Traveller prior to departure – link to do so is also available on this web page. ABV volunteers are also advised to monitor local media reports while in country to keep abreast of any potential security risks.

Please take note of the following advice for personal safety while in country:

- don't increase your vulnerability by excess alcohol drinking;
- as most crime is opportunistic, consider carrying fewer personal possessions in public, including cash and expensive jewellery/watches;
- females should not walk alone at night; and
- if walking alone, let someone know your intended destination and estimated arrival time.

The Smart Traveller website link above also has further information which it is useful to become familiar with prior to travel – especially the 'Safety and Security', 'Local Travel', and 'Laws' tabs.

Cyclone season in SI is from November to May, however, tropical storms may occur in other months.

Health and Medical

Mosquito-borne illnesses are common in Solomon Islands. Malaria is prevalent in most areas of Solomon Islands and occurs throughout the year. Dengue is common too and there is no vaccination or specific treatment available for dengue. We encourage you to ensure your accommodation is mosquito proof; and take measures to avoid insect bites, including using an insect repellent at all times and wearing long, loose fitting, light coloured clothing. Sand-flies can be a real nuisance too.

Water-borne, food-borne, parasitic and other infectious diseases (including hepatitis, tuberculosis, filariasis and sexually transmitted infections) are prevalent, with more serious outbreaks occurring from time to time. We advise you to boil all drinking water or drink bottled water, and avoid ice cubes and raw and undercooked food. Seek medical advice if you have a fever or are suffering from diarrhoea. Local water supplies can be interrupted or polluted.

By Australian standards, health care facilities in SI are limited. Emergency and trauma cases are referred to the National Referral Hospital in Honiara on Guadalcanal, which also has an outpatients clinic open 24/7. Facilities in provincial areas are very limited.

National Referral Hospital
Honiara
+677 23600/+677 22200

In an emergency situation, swift contact with your ICM is highly recommended, or for Emergency Medical Assistance contact your emergency assistance provider.



Transport and Accommodation

Commonwealth visitors may obtain a visitor's visa on arrival for a period of one month, which may be extended up to three months with proper visa application and fee. All visitors must have a current passport, valid for 6 months from the date of departure, with a return or onward ticket. ABV in country team will assist all AVID volunteers with their visa applications for the duration of the assignment.

Flying and Airport Information

Honiara International Airport is located on Guadalcanal Island in the Solomon Islands. It is the only international airport in the Solomon Islands and is located 8 km from the capital Honiara. Flights are frequently delayed (or leave early without any notice!) so make sure that you are at airport well ahead of time and are checking schedules frequently.

Taxis and Public Transports

Taxis operate all over Honiara. There are no meters so discuss the fees before you embark on a journey.

Buses look like vans and hold about 12 people. Some larger buses exist as well. They are very affordable at about SBD3 per ride. They have set routes mostly on the main road with a few going up the ridge roads. Check for the sign in the front of the bus before entering.

ABV strongly recommends against volunteers driving private vehicles while in SI.

Work Travel

All volunteers must advise their Project Manager/ICM of any work/leisure travel in a timely manner, and ensure that any required travel forms are completed prior to the trip. Information required may include:

- date of travel;
- destination and route;
- details of any travel companions; and

- contact details whilst travelling (eg. travel accommodation telephone numbers and mobile telephone details).

Accommodation

ABV volunteers may be accommodated in a hotel, a furnished apartment or a furnished house. All accommodation has been security reviewed against a standard set by DFAT. In all cases accommodation will be secure, clean and waterproof with sound walls and floors. The following items are the standard volunteers can expect from their accommodation at their assignment location unless otherwise advised by the ICM or Project Manager:

- Beds with mattress, pillows, sheets and towels;
- Bathroom with running water in the shower or bath and a toilet;
- Air conditioning or ceiling fans;
- Lockable windows with insect screens and curtains;
- Some form of electricity;
- A small refrigerator;
- Table and chair;
- Cooking facilities where available;

Personal items such as international telephone calls, mini bar or room service are the responsibility of the volunteer.

You should be aware of the difference in living standards between a country like Australia and a developing country like SI. Through our ICM teams, we ensure that accommodation provided is secure and clean, however many facilities taken for granted in Australia – air conditioning, hot water, television, western food - are not a given. In addition, roads are generally of poorer quality, footpaths are uncommon, and power and water supplies may be disrupted from time to time.

Daily Life



Major Banks in PNG are:

- ANZ Bank -- <http://www.anz.com.au/solomonislands/en/personal/>
- Westpac Bank - <http://www.westpac.com.sb/>
- Bank South Pacific -- <http://www.bsp.com.sb/>

ANZ and Westpac operate ATMs, including using international cards (Cirrus, Plus etc).

It is recommended that you inform your bank when you will be traveling overseas, and:

- activate internet banking to facilitate transfer of funds between savings and credit card accounts; and
- check on any extra charges associated with withdrawing funds from accounts whilst overseas.

Tipping is not encouraged in the Solomon Islands and receipts not provided unless specifically asked.

Business hours are:

- Banks hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am – 3.00pm
- Commercial firms: Monday to Friday 8.00am – 4.30pm with an hour for lunch and Saturday 8.00am – 12.00noon
- Government hours: Monday to Friday 8.00 am to 4.30 pm

Main national public holidays are celebrated as follows:

- 1st January – New Year's Day
- Good Friday/Easter Sunday/Easter Monday
- Whit Monday – dependent on timing of Easter (in 2015, May 25th)
- 2nd Monday in June – Queens Birthday
- 7th July – Independence Day
- 26th August – Repentance Day
- 25th December – Christmas Day
- 26th December – National Day of Thanksgiving

Each province has its own Province Day – if it falls on a Sunday, the public holiday is on the following Monday.

- 25 February: Choiseul Province
- 2 June: Isabel Province
- 8 June: Temotu Province
- 29 June: Central Province
- 20 July: Rennell and Bellona Province
- 1 August: Guadalcanal Province
- 3 August: Makira-Ulawa Province
- 15 August: Malaita Province
- 7 December: Western Province

Electrical current on the national grid is 240 volts AG 50 Hz. Australian plugs are standard. You might like to consider some form of surge protection for valuable electrical equipment and computers to guard against power surges and outages.

Digital mobile coverage is good in Honiara, Gizo, Auki, Munda and Noro. You can bring your own unlocked phone and get a Solomon Telekom SIM card which is available at the Telekom office.

Public telephones are relatively common and phone cards readily available from Post Offices, telephone exchange or several shops and hotels in Honiara. Phone calls are fairly expensive to Australia so you may wish to explore the use of Instant Messaging and use email.

There are many Internet cafes in Honiara. The major hotels and a couple of restaurants have wireless Internet access too. G3 mobile phones are able to be tethered to laptops to use the internet in the major centres. This connection is slow and patchy, however it is an option for checking email at home. Internet access is not cheap. Both uploads and downloads are counted so if you know how, configure your web browser with various tools to minimise your use of bandwidth.

You can find out about the wireless service (called "Bumblebee") in the Solomon Islands here:
<http://prepaid.telekom.net.sb/>

Your Host Organisation may provide you with an e-mail address but it is recommended that you also maintain a web-based e-mail address (eg Gmail, Hotmail or Yahoo) during your time in PNG which is especially useful for private after hours use.

There are two post offices in Honiara. There are not many street names or house numbers so the best way to receive mail is to have it delivered to your Host Organisation PO Box. If someone is sending you something from Australia tell them to put on the package that the value of the content is AUD20 (otherwise it may not reach or you will be charged a big duty tax). They should also inform you it is coming as you may not get notification that it has arrived. Mail to and from Australia can take between 1-4 weeks to arrive.

Food. The cheapest way to buy food is at the Market. Fruit, vegetables and seafood are available and are reasonably cheap. It is not appropriate to bargain at the market and you might find it useful to take a local to find out what everything is initially. Vegetables vary with the seasons and can be scarce during the wet season. There is a local tuna cannery and canned tuna (Solomon Taiyo) is a staple for locals. It's very delicious.

There are a few supermarkets in town, but prices can be high as most things are imported. Some items that may be very expensive, or you may not be able to find at all, are dairy products, Italian spices, fresh mushrooms, and processed foods such as breakfast cereals and muesli bars. Always check the expiry date on the packets. There are many local stores and stores that sell basic necessities in case you run out. There are Hot Bread Kitchens (bakeries) around town - fresh bread doesn't last longer than 2-3 days in the humidity. Bread comes in white, brown and small, medium and large.

The large number of expats in SI has resulted in an increased number of places providing Western style café food, pizzas and coffee in Honiara. There is some fabulous and cheap food in the provinces including crayfish and mudcrabs.

Being a vegetarian in the Solomon Islands is challenging and is easier in Honiara than in the provinces as it's a fairly new concept. In Honiara you can buy TVP, canned beans (expensive), cheese (expensive) and tofu (the quality varies). Expat restaurants are aware of the requirements of vegetarians and some more local places are also able to cater to vegetarians, however, it's still important to clarify all ingredients in a menu item if you are very particular.

What to bring. You should consider bringing enough supplies of toiletries and sunscreen for your entire stay as all brands may not be available in SI. Insect repellent is also very expensive and necessary so it's a good idea to bring enough for your stay from Australia. Also consider bringing books, hobbies, music devices or laptop computer to fill in any spare time you have as you may not

have access to what Australians consider usual forms of entertainment. It is also recommended that you bring a surge protection device for any electronic devices you bring.

Previous Volunteer Contacts

The following is a list of volunteers who have recently been on an ABV assignment to SI and who have agreed to be contacted to provide information to other volunteers. You should feel free to contact any of these people as first hand practical advice will no doubt assist you in your preparation for your assignment as well as for the country.

Volunteer	Contact Phone/Email
Luke Purnell-Webb	noven@sylvanius.net
Christine Brunton	chris-b101@hotmail.com
Janice Norton	janxmiller@gmail.com
Joseph Cheetham	janwar39@tpg.com.au

Further Information

The following websites may be useful sources of more information, including tourist information:

http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/solomon_islands/

<http://www.solomonislands.embassy.gov.au/honi/home.html>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/solomon-islands>

<http://www.visitsolomons.com.sb/>

SI Pidgin – the basics

Bathe/swim/shower	waswas	be,stay,remain	stap
Do	dum	have	garem
Want	kaekem	of	blong
To,for,at,on,about,by	long	with	wetim
More	moa	better	moabetta
The best	nambawan	I	mi
You	iu	he/she/it	hem
We		You	
– the two of us including you	iunitufala	- the two of you	iutufala
- the three of us	iunitrifala	-the three of you	iutrifala
- if more than three	iumi	- if more than three	iufala
They/all	olketa	Yes	Ya
No	No/Nating	Please	Plis
Thank you (very much)	tanggio (tum us)	You're welcome	No waris/No
I'm fine thank you very much	Mi orait, tanggio tumas		
Hello	Halo	Good morning	Gud moning
Good afternoon	Gud aftanun	Good night	God naet
How are you?	Hao iu stap?	See you later	Okei/Lukum iu
I don't understand	Me (no) savi	Where is the clinic?	Hem is wea klinik?
I would like to buy food	Mifala laek fo peim kaikai		
Toilet	smol haos	Come at once	Kam fastaem
Where is the Police Station?	Stesin blong pulis hem is wea?		
Where is the hospital?	Hospitol hem i wea?	Go away!	Go-go baek!

AVID Program Supplement

In Country Management Team

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Country Director

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Project Manager: Julia Kendall, +61 2 6151 9910

Travel Policy

Please see additional procedures for travel at 'AVID Program Travel Guidelines for ABV Volunteers'

Security Plan

ABV volunteers undertaking assignments under the AVID program may require to complete a 'Personal Safety and Security Plan' upon arrival in country. Details of this plan, including the proforma should be available from the in country management team.