

**ISLAND TIME:** Looking from the honeymoon suite balcony across to the Kolombangara volcano. That's Fatboys Resort's restaurant on the right.

# Fossicking at Fatboys

Rusting relics remind visitors to the Solomon Islands that here fierce battles were fought, writes **Richard Moore**

**S**URELY it is the mark of a great place to stay that when you walk into your room you just go "Wow." It's it even better when your second response is "Wow, oh wow."

That was my reaction to my over-water room at Fatboys Resort on the island of Mbabanga, about a 15-minute boat ride from Gizo in the Solomon Islands.

Fatboys is legendary, with wonderful water's-edge bungalows, an end-of-the-pier restaurant and bar, clear waters and an outlook over the lagoon to the volcanic island of Kolombangara. It is the perfect place to base yourself for sightseeing in the Gizo region.

You can visit Kennedy Island nearby where the future US president, John F Kennedy, ended up after his motor torpedo boat PT109 was sliced in half by the Japanese destroyer Amagiri on August 2, 1943.

Thirty minutes away by boat is the site of another war survival story, where a junior lieutenant, one Richard Moore (no relation), crash-landed his Hellcat fighter after being hit by friendly fire in a September 1943 dogfight.

He got out of the cockpit, inflated his rubber raft and paddled to the relative safety of a tiny island. That night, local people rescued him by dugout canoe and took him back to Gizo.

The Hellcat is in excellent condition. It lies in between 7m and 10m of water. It can usually be seen clearly from the surface.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** The author's luxury residence; museum owner Barney Paulsen and a US Thompson submachinegun; a US Stuart tank in the jungle on Tahitu Island. Dogtags found on the battlefields of New Georgia. The top one is that of Peter Joseph, the US serviceman the small museum is named after; a waterside bungalow at Fatboys Resort, Mbabanga Island.

If you feel like having a big day out from Fatboys — other than taking recommended fishing expeditions — head across Vonavona Lagoon to Munda, the largest town on New Georgia and one that offers plenty to tourists.

There are beautiful diving spots, a lively market and, for World War II buffs, some easy-to-reach sites.

The main one would be Peter Joseph Museum, named for a soldier whose military dogtags were found on a local battlefield. Owned by Barney Paulsen, the museum is a trove of battlefield relics including machineguns, grenades,

helmets, bullet and shell casings.

It is a fascinating glimpse of war and the weapons used. Not far away is an astounding spot where landing craft have been left to rust away. They were bulldozed off the beach nearby by US forces and are now covered in creepers and trees. On a wet, dark day they are very eerie to come across in their jungle resting place.

On the way back to Fatboys Resort, we were lucky enough to be taken into an inlet and on to the island of Tahitu.

Wading across a shallow, rocky shoreline, we walked up a track to be greeted by

Hudson, who led us through the verdant ferns and trees to a clearing in which a small Allied Stuart tank sat.

A very different outing from Fatboys was a 20-minute trek through towering coconut palms to Mbabanga, where you will witness everyday Solomons village life.

We had a delightful greeting and encounter with children from a small kindergarten and were given a personal tour that included seeing traditional mats being woven and were honoured to see the villagers' traditional way of life.

First impressions of Fatboys Resort were eye-catching to say

the least. Stepping off the small fibreglass commuter longboat which, in pijin English is fibreglass boat we were given a welcoming drink at the pier restaurant. While our bags were taken to our lodgings we got the chance to look at the surroundings.

From the restaurant there is a long pier and very pretty bungalows among the trees on the shore. Seeing one, my immediate thought was, "Who's the lucky devil who gets to stay there?"

Turns out it was me.

I suspect it was the resort's honeymoon suite but, despite my lady not being with me, I wasn't going to turn it down.

It consisted of one huge room, an ensuite shower and loo and a great little deck perfect for having an early cup of tea on or a late brandy while enjoying the view.

The bare, dark-wood floors were gorgeous, although the pink mosquito netting over the bed was a little too much for my tastes.

My travelling companions popped in to check out the accommodation and said, "Wow." Then "Wow, oh wow!"

I couldn't have put it better myself.

After a day touring, the relaxed atmosphere of the island bar was welcome. So was the buffet meal that included a huge local snapper and chilli lobster.

After that we adjourned to my balcony and yakked the night away listening to the gentle waves rolling in underneath us.

It was tough to leave Fatboys Resort, which was a marvellous place to chill out or use as a base to explore the area. And that view across to the Kolombangara volcano will stay in my mind for many a year.

**Richard Moore stayed on Mbabanga Island courtesy of Fatboys Resort and Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau. International and internal flights to Gizo Island were provided by Solomons Airlines.**

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