

Experience

WW2 around Honiara

Honiara's history is not just for the war-buffs, there is something to capture everyone's interest. We present you three of our all-time favourites. By Elio Stamm.

More than 70 years have passed, but the history of the brutal World War 2 campaign can still be experienced around Honiara in many different ways.

The wrecks: The sea in front of Honiara – the famous Iron Bottom Sound – is a graveyard for nearly 50 ships sunk during wartime. At Bonegi beach, just a 15-minute drive west of Honiara, divers can comfortably explore two of these wrecks directly off the beach. The wrecks, both Japanese transport vessels, are overgrown with corals, offering a wide variety of aquatic animals a new home. The wreck at Bonegi I, the 172-metre long Hirokawa Maru, starts at 3 metres and goes down to 56 metres. Five hundred metres further west, Bonegi II's Kinugawa Maru breaks the surface, making it interesting for snorkelers too. The Bonegi site is suited for scuba beginners, and the Tulagi Dive Center uses it to teach its open water students basic diving skills.

The trek: In October 1942, after the Americans had seized control of the area that is now Honiara, the Japanese attacked Henderson Airfield (currently Honiara's international airport) from inland. To do so, 7000 men under the command of General Masao Maruyama marched a 24 kilometre long trail through the jungle, starting close to the Bonegi wrecks west of Honiara

before crossing the Mataniko and Lunga rivers. The Americans were surprised, but managed to beat the Japanese. On their retreat, a lot of the wounded Japanese soldiers died, while others dropped their gear. Walking the Maruyama trail literally means walking over bones, artillery shells and helmets. Only the people of Mbrana village up Mount Austen, who own most of the land, can arrange safe treks. Finishing the full trail takes five to six days, but walking only parts of it is possible too.

Treks can be arranged by calling Chief William Besi on +677 746 94 22 or visiting him at Mbrana village up Mount Austen in the hills behind Honiara.

The museum: The average war tour around Honiara, includes a visit to the impressive Vilu war museum west of Honiara, however be prepared to visit the other, lesser known museum in Honiara, the Ranadi War Museum, based in Juergen Markwarth's garage. Markwarth, an Australian with German origin, is a former Solomon Airline pilot and a real WW2 fanatic. The museum is only one room at the moment, filled with small gear, from swords of Japanese officers to machine guns, with most of it coming from the Maruyama trail (see above).

To visit the Ranadi War Museum, call Juergen Markwarth on +677 772 42 48. 🌴

From retracing the steps of the Japanese to visiting museums, Honiara offers a unique insight into the Pacific's greatest battles.

