ACROSS THE TROPIC OF CAPRICORN

A VOYAGE FROM NEW ZEALAND TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA ABOARD THE MS CALEDONIAN SKY WITH PROFESSOR CHARLES HIGHAM

7TH FEBRUARY TO 1ST MARCH 2018

Noble Caledonia
If you were the owner of a large yacht based in the Pacific, this is exactly the type of itinerary you would plan. A fascinating mix of islands all the way from the northernmost reaches of New Zealand to Melanesia, taking in remote, but splendidly sophisticated Norfolk Island and Iles 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.

All are beautiful in their different ways and all have unique features and cultures. This 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.

At New Georgia on the outer reaches of the Solomon’s we will explore the majestic Marovo Lagoon, the world’s largest double barrier lagoon, a truly awe-inspiring place. These islands 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 4,000.

There will be much of the natural world to occupy us as we sail in a northerly direction through the South Pacific along much of the same route as Captain James Cook. The marine history of the region is a constant wonder from the early explorers and native migrations to the fierce battles of the Second World War. Join us in this faraway haven, where there still exists a savage beauty, which cannot fail to stir the most jaded of travellers. Many of the islands still possess a pristine beauty, much the same as they were when first discovered by the great explorers.

What To Expect…

Flexibility is the key to an expedition cruise; sometimes the whole day’s schedule will be changed to maximise your experience, something that would not be possible on a large cruise ship. Each day holds something new and below are some extracts from the ship’s log from a previous cruise which will provide you with an idea of what to expect.

Vanikoro – January
After another delightful breakfast in the warmth of the sun on the Lido deck it was back into the air-conditioning of the ship to hear the continuing instalments of our guest speaker, Peter Warwick’s historical tour de force of exploration in the Pacific. This morning’s offering concentrated more on Cook and his rise up through the naval ranks joining as a cadet in his twenties. Later in the morning we learned of the final sorry chapter in the French explorer La Perouse when his two ships La Boussole and Astrolabe were wrecked on the coral reef just off our landing spot on the west-facing beach at Vanikoro. It was too deep to anchor and so the MS Caledonian Sky drifted during the afternoon just outside the reef. A slight swell allowed the breaking waves over the shallowest parts on each side of the channel to be marked and as each Zodiac in turn arrived in the very shallow water adjacent to the beach a horde of vegetation-clad warriors came bounding over the surf to greet us. Once ashore everyone was presented with a flower or vegetation lei by a pretty girl and then asked to assemble for a speech of welcome by the chief. A few locally-made artefacts, food preparation and house repair examples were on display. Further down the coast a simple monument to the great French explorer La Perouse was on display outside a simple museum and rare artefacts. There was also a guided birding walk into the jungle and a few people made it over the river in a dug-out canoe to view another group of settlements. The snorkelling in clear waters with visibility in excess of 30 metres and fantastic corals made a great end to the day but more was to come in the form of a sighting of dwarf sperms whales and followed shortly by a superb double rainbow over the island as the sun was setting. The Lido deck had been transformed into a tropical island with palm fronds which made an interesting dining experience.

www.noble-caledonia.co.uk

Guest Speaker

Professor Charles Higham

Charles Higham read Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. In 1966, he became a lecturer in prehistory at the University of Otago, and was appointed the foundation Professor two years later. His archaeological fieldwork in Southeast Asia has involved a series of major excavations at sites covering the last 10,000 years, leading to the origins of early civilisations. His research has been recognised in his election as a Fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of New Zealand. He is an Honorary Fellow of St Catharine’s, his Cambridge College, and has received the Grahame Clark Medal from the British Academy for his archaeological research as well as the Mason Durie Medal, awarded to New Zealand’s leading social scientist. In 2016 he was created an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the Queen’s New Year Honours for services to archaeology. Charles is now a Research Professor at the University of Otago.
Our View

“This epic journey takes us nearly 3000 nautical miles from the northern tip of New Zealand to Papua New Guinea. Along the way we have the rare opportunity to follow in the footsteps of explorers like Captain Cook, who traversed these waters in 1774, and experience the beauty of these islands and the natural wonders they hold. We will snorkel in clear waters with numerous fish, have the chance to climb the volcanoes that entranced the explorers and visit small islands which have managed to keep western influences at bay. Our onboard experts will bring history to life and join us as we search for wildlife ashore or set up snorkelling platforms so we get the best from our time in the water.”

The Itinerary

Day 1 London to Hong Kong. Fly by scheduled flight.

Day 2 Hong Kong. Arrive this afternoon and transfer to our centrally located hotel for an overnight stay. Remainder of day is at leisure.

Day 3 Hong Kong. Enjoy a relaxing morning before an afternoon city tour of Hong Kong including Victoria Peak and Stanley Market. After the tour we will continue to the airport for our scheduled flight to Auckland.

Day 4 Auckland New Zealand. Arrive this afternoon and transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay. The remainder of the day is at leisure. Enjoy a Welcome Dinner tonight.

Day 5 Auckland. On a morning tour we 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. We will enjoy lunch in a local restaurant before transferring to the MS Caledonian Sky later in the afternoon.

Day 6 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. During the afternoon enjoy some free time to explore the charming historic town of Russell.

Day 7 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 8 Norfolk Island, Australia. 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. In the 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 Mt 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 noddiest, tropic birds and parrots.

Day 9 At Sea. Cruise the South Pacific as we head toward New Caledonia.

Day 10 Iles 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 we will have the option to join a nature walk around the 262 metres Nga peak. Alternatively join one of the snorkelling trips or simply find a spot on one of the beaches before we sail later in the afternoon.

Day 11 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, 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 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 12 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 un-spoilt 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 13 Espiritu Santo Island. Espiritu Santo is the largest of Vanuatu’s islands and 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 14 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 15 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, walk to meet the students at the village school or swim from the local beach.

Day 16 Honiara. This morning we cruise through Iron Bottom Sound, the site of intense WWII 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 WWII 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 colonized by tropical fish.

Day 17 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 18 Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia. 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 1600m 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 the villages which produce some of the finest wood carvings in the region. We will also find a suitable spot to snorkel and swim from the beaches as well as Zodiac cruises to look for local wildlife.

Day 19 At Sea. Enjoy a relaxing sea day as we cruise the Solomon Sea to Papua New Guinea.

Day 20 Rabaul, Papua New Guinea to Cairns, Australia. Arrive this morning at Rabaul’s dramatic harbour which is ringed by six cone-shaped volcanoes. After breakfast on board we transfer to the airport for our flight to Cairns. After arrival into Cairns we transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 21 Cairns. After breakfast in the hotel enjoy a day at leisure or choose to take a full day excursion to enjoy the underwater world on the Great Barrier Reef or the wildlife at the Daintree Rainforest.

Day 22 Cairns to London. After breakfast in the hotel transfer to the airport for our scheduled indirect flight to London.

Day 23 London. Arrive this morning.

Prices Per Person
Based on double occupancy

SPECIAL OFFER – SAVE £400 PER PERSON
FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY

Price Includes: Economy class scheduled air travel, overnight hotel accommodation in Hong Kong and Auckland on breakfast only basis, dinner on day 4 and lunch on day 5, 15 nights aboard the MS Caledonian Sky on a full board basis, wine, beer and soft drinks with lunch and dinner on board, shore excursions, expedition team, transfers, port taxes, gratuities, two nights hotel accommodation in Cairns on breakfast only basis. Not Included: Travel insurance, Australian visa.

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MS Caledonian Sky

Formerly known as Hebridean Spirit, this 114-passenger vessel began her new life with Noble Caledonia in May 2012. Built in the same shipyard as both MS Island Sky and MS Hebridean Sky, she shares the same attributes as her sister vessels, joining them as one of the finest small ships in the world.

Your Suite
On board there are 57 exceptionally spacious and well-designed suites. The passenger accommodation is arranged over four decks and all suites have outside views. All feature a sitting room area and some have private balconies. Each affords considerable comfort with en-suite bathroom featuring a country style wash basin, hot towel rack and vanity unit with sink and walk-in shower and/or bath tub. Facilities in the suites also include walk-in or spacious wardrobes, dressing table with large mirror and stool or desk, mini-fridge, flat screen television, telephone, programmable electronic safe, hairdryer, assorted toiletries, air-conditioning and heating. Bottled water, towelling dressing gowns and slippers are also provided for your comfort.

Your Space
The spacious and finely decorated public rooms include a large lounge where daily briefings and talks will be provided throughout the voyage and an elegant bar where a pianist plays periodically throughout the day. The bar also features a 24-hour tea and coffee station. In addition there is the Club Lounge on the Panorama Deck which features a bar. The onboard travel library is the perfect place to relax with a book and is stocked with reference books pertaining to the places the vessel is visiting along with a selection of games and two computers with internet access. Outside there is a rear Lido deck where meals are served in warm weather under shade. On the top deck there is a further observation and sun deck with bar service and comfortable deck furniture for sun bathing or relaxing with a book. There is also a small gymnasium on board and hairdressers with appointments made on request.

Your Dining
With only one sitting and a maximum of just over 100 passengers, the cuisine will be of a consistent superior quality. Where possible and when it meets his high standards, our accomplished chef will obtain local produce in markets. Such purchases enhance the well-stocked larders and bring a local touch to the varied menus. In the main elegant dining room, breakfast is served buffet-style, with certain items cooked to order and lunch and dinner is à la carte. To enhance your dining experience even further a selection of wines are included with lunch and dinner.
Your Day to Day Life On Board
On board the MS Caledonian Sky, you will not find endless entertainment, round the clock buffets and the people management which is so much a part of today’s big ship style. Instead the atmosphere on board is warm and peaceful and more akin to a private yacht or country hotel in which you can learn more about the wonders of nature, culture and ancient civilisations in the company of like-minded people. A little music in the lounge or bar after dinner, guest speakers and informative port briefings from our expedition leader, all contribute to make any voyage aboard the MS Caledonian Sky a memorable and joyful experience. Dress on board is casual and relaxed and there will be no ‘black tie’ evenings.

Exploring Ashore
One of the joys of expedition cruising aboard a small vessel is the flexibility it allows. Although we set sail with a set itinerary it is the unscheduled events that often become the highlight of the journey and with our fleet of Zodiac landing craft, we can explore inlets, fjords, bird sanctuaries, land in otherwise inaccessible places and be footloose in a way that would be totally impractical for larger groups of passengers.

Your Comfort, Safety & Security
Our vessel is equipped with the latest safety, navigation and communications equipment along with roll stabilisers to minimise the ship’s motion. During your voyage you will have the opportunity to visit the Captain and Officers on the Bridge to check the vessel’s progress by charts and learn more about your journey. On board you will also find a clinic and doctor and a lift that serves all decks.

This cruise visits out of the way destinations. You will be accompanied by an expedition team and some landings ashore will be made by Zodiac landing craft. Cruises such as this will appeal to the more adventurous and those who enjoy the natural world.