



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
EXPEDITIONS

PALAU: SNORKELING AND KAYAKING THE PRISTINE SEAS



ITINERARY

EXPEDITION SUMMARY

Identified by National Geographic's Pristine Seas project as one of the richest marine ecosystems on the planet, the Pacific archipelago of Palau is home to an aquatic wonderland of more than 1,300 species of fish and some 700 species of corals. This beautiful island nation is a world leader in marine conservation, with an ancestral tradition of environmental protection that dates back thousands of years, and an ambitious modern-day conservation program that includes the creation of a historic 193,000-square-mile marine reserve—one of the largest of its kind in the world. Set out on an unforgettable adventure to experience Palau's treasures firsthand. Snorkel and kayak among emerald islets in the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Rock Islands, experience the "underwater Serengeti" of Ngemelis Island, hike through lush forests and meet Palauan people who strive to honor and protect their natural heritage.

Please note: Due to local tidal cycles, some departures may operate on a slightly altered schedule in order to maximize snorkeling and kayaking opportunities.



WHAT TO EXPECT

This trip has an activity rating of moderate. While previous snorkeling and kayaking experience is not required, travelers should know how to swim, and be comfortable in water. We will snorkel 2 to 4 hours on most days. On kayaking excursions, we will paddle stable, one- or two-person kayaks for an average of 2 hours with speedboat support. Hikes are up to 2 hours on moderate grades along sandy beaches, through forests, and over volcanic terrain. Boat rides to snorkeling sites may be bumpy. Wet suit tops and snorkeling gear are provided.

EXPEDITION ITINERARY

Day 1: Koror, Palau

Arrive at Roman Tmetuchl International Airport (ROR) in Palau and transfer to our beautiful hotel overlooking a turquoise lagoon.

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort

Day 2: Nikko Bay

Meet fellow travelers, our local Palauan guide, and our National Geographic Expert at an orientation briefing this morning. Then travel by boat to Nikko Bay, where we will learn about a coral-spawning study that was completed here, and enjoy a private snorkeling excursion in Rembrandt's Cove. This evening, join the group for a welcome dinner.

(2 hours snorkeling)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L, D)

Day 3: Risong Bay / Mandarin Fish Lake

Board a speedboat for a visit to the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), which collaborated with National Geographic on the 2014 Pristine Seas expedition to document the biodiversity of Palau's marine ecosystem. Hear about the PICRC's involvement with the Pristine Seas project, launched by marine ecologist and National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Enric Sala, to explore and help save the last wild places in the ocean. At the center's aquarium, get an introduction to Palau's marine habitats, conservation efforts and geologic history. Make your way to Risong Bay and swim through a shallow passage lined with pink sea fans to the oasis known as Mandarin Fish Lake, named for the eponymous and elusive fish species that live here. In the shelter of rocky outcrops, snorkel among reefs swirling with diverse fish species including crocodile fish, pajama cardinalfish and gobies. After lunch, embark on a scenic hike to a perch overlooking a deep-water channel. Here, you'll visit a former Japanese bunker to view World War II artifacts. Later, launch kayaks to explore a stunning, stalactite-adorned cave and paddle through a tunnel to a lake filled with delicate corals.

(2 hours snorkeling, 2 hours kayaking, 1-2 hours walking/hiking)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L, D)

Day 4: Ulong Island

Snorkel in the sheltered lagoons of Ulong—one of the largest of the Rock Islands. Here, an astonishing aggregation of hundreds of bumphead parrotfish gather to spawn in the early morning. Snorkel among fields of branch corals and shimmering fish. Then, venture ashore to hike to an ancient village and learn how Palauans once lived in this remote paradise. Pitch in with a local conservation project by planting a giant clam in a marine sanctuary and witness the fruits of over a decade of planting efforts. Following a barbecue lunch on the beach, return to the hotel and enjoy the evening at leisure.

(3 hours snorkeling, 1-2 hours hiking)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L)

Day 5: Turtle Cove / Carp Island

Head to Palau's Outer Reef and explore the protected coves of Carp Island. Here, untouched reefs teem with fishes, turtles, white-tipped reef sharks, garden eels, and much more. An easy swim to the reef's edge leads to a clear blue-water drop-off where colorful sponges and gorgonian sea fans line the vertical walls. The margin between reef and open ocean is home to some of the Indo-Pacific's most prized fishes, including white spotted clown triggerfish and palette surgeonfish, along with an abundance of hawksbill and green sea turtles. From the coves of Carp Island we continue to Barnum's Wall and the epic chasms that provide hiding places to schools of bump head parrotfish and brown marbled grouper. The chasms are also one of the best places in Palau to spot a host of stingray and shark species, including the graceful spotted eagle ray, the feather tail stingray, and the elusive zebra shark. Explore the labyrinth of islands comprising Ngeruktabel. Snorkel among a myriad of colorful soft corals and swim through a spacious tunnel leading to a hidden lagoon.

(4 hours snorkeling)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L, D)

Day 6: Long Lake

As the morning tide rises, set out for a sand flat where kayaks await for you to paddle out beneath a canopy of mangroves into a mile-long saltwater lake that is home to the ancient Micronesian cycad plant and endemic Palau fruit doves. As you explore by kayak, search for juvenile eagle rays and endemic plants found nowhere else on Earth. Ride the tide back out of the lake and continue to a white-sand beach for a picnic lunch. Later, explore the opaque waters of the Milky Way lagoon, where visitors can enjoy a white mud bath made from the lagoon's limestone and calcium clay, which is believed to have healing powers. Finish your day with a snorkel among the multi-colored brain corals that thrive in the nutrient-rich waters of the Rock Islands.

(2 hours kayaking, 3 hours snorkeling)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L)

Day 7: Patch Reefs

The first snorkeling site of the day is home to dozens of "super mollusks," including giant clams that are more than a century old and weigh over 500 pounds. Next, it's on to Rainbow Reef to snorkel among shoals where fish drift on gentle currents while feasting on plankton. Have lunch on Ngeanges island—which, after a successful initiative to clear invasive rodents—bustles with native bird species. After lunch, enjoy a walk in the forest, searching for chicken-like megapode birds and their enormous nests. Cool off with a refreshing snorkel, watching dazzling damselfish dart in and out of a colossal turbinaria coral formation. Snorkel at a cave where local conservation efforts have helped protect the cave's corals from the predatory crown of thorns starfish. This evening, learn about Palauan culture with a performance by a traditional dance followed by dinner.

(4 hours snorkeling, 30 minutes walking)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L, D)

Day 8: Ngemelis Island

Experience an "underwater Serengeti" at one of the world's greatest snorkeling sites at Outer Reef Ngemelis Island, which the National Geographic Pristine Seas team identified as one of the most vibrant marine protected areas in Palau. After nearly 20 years as a "no-fishing zone," the Ngemelis Conservation Area allows for close encounters with Napoleon wrasse, bump head parrotfish and pyramid butterfly fish. You'll snorkel spectacular sites including German Channel, where the Pristine Seas team filmed majestic manta rays and waters vibrating with vast schools of fish. Later, enjoy lunch on the water, venturing out a few miles to spot spinner dolphins and sperm whales.

(4 hours snorkeling)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L)

Day 9: Mecherchar / Jellyfish Lake

Set off early to the island of Mecherchar, home to one of Palau's most famous natural wonders: Jellyfish Lake. This saltwater lake has been known to contain up to 20 million non-stinging golden jellyfish. These jellyfish, however, have had their ability to sting weaken since the basin was cut off from the ocean hundreds of years ago and they were no longer at risk of being eaten. You'll be among the first visitors of the day, enjoying a serene snorkel amid these harmless creatures. Later, hike back to the speedboat for a quick ride along the coast to discover a treasure of Micronesian history: a 2-ton relic of the world's largest—and heaviest—currency. On a private visit to the site, examine enormous stone money that was created by the ancient people of neighboring Yap—who traveled more than 200 miles by canoe to quarry the stone from the limestone-rich Rock Islands. Next, head to the quiet waters of Ngchus Cove and enjoy lunch on the beach. Afterwards, head to a secluded bay that harbors fragile yellow sea horses and other marine life. This evening, visit at a local museum and view the museum's exhibits, including an ancient bai, or meeting house, where community elders once gathered. Your local Palauan guide will discuss past and present politics, and describe how Palauans have maintained their culture, language and customs in the face of modernization. Return to Koror and join your fellow Guests to your adventure at a farewell dinner this evening.

(3-4 hours snorkeling, 45 minutes hiking)

Overnight: Palau Pacific Resort (B, L, D)

Day 10: Koror / Depart

Transfer to the Roman Tmetuchl International Airport (ROR) and depart on homeward-bound flights. Please note that flights from Koror generally depart in the early morning. Homeward-bound flights should be booked for the morning of Day 10 and not the following morning.

(B)

INCLUDES

- National Geographic Expert and lectures
- Professional on-site Expedition Leader
- English-speaking local guides
- Accommodations as indicated in the itinerary
- Non-alcoholic beverages at included meals
- Bottled or filtered water at included meals, group transfers, and activities
- Welcome and farewell receptions
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary (B=Breakfast; L=Lunch; D=Dinner)
- Activities as indicated in the itinerary
- Entrance fees to sites as indicated in the itinerary
- Airport transfers upon arrival and departure
- Ground transportation as indicated in the itinerary
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, hotel and lodge staff, and restaurant staff at included meals

DOES NOT INCLUDE

- International flights (to/from Koror/ROR)
- "Palau Pristine Paradise Environmental Fee" of \$100 (replaces departure tax and Green Fee), which is included in airline tickets
- Expedition Leader Gratuities
- Meals not noted as included (discretionary)
- Additional beverages (discretionary)
- Travel insurance (discretionary)
- Passport fees, visas, and visa photos as required
- Phone calls, laundry, and other items of a personal nature (discretionary)

ACCOMMODATIONS

Palau Pacific Resort

Located on the shores of the Pacific, the Palau Pacific Resort is an idyllic retreat that highlights the lush tropical surroundings that encompass it. Each of the airy guest rooms offers an en suite bathroom, a television, air-conditioning, a hair dryer, tea making facilities, complimentary Wi-Fi, an in-room safe, and a private patio or balcony. Other hotel amenities include an on-premise restaurant, bar and lounge, fitness center, spa, outdoor infinity pool, two tennis courts, hot tub, laundry service, and private beach.

www.palauppr.com/en

KOROR