

island escape

Tetepare is the largest uninhabited island in the South Pacific but that only applies to humans, in their absence the wildlife has been proliferating

# Tetepare

## The Last Wild Island

*The island of Tetepare offers Solomon Islands' biggest conservation area and is a paradise for eco tourists. If you want to swim with dugongs, tag turtles and spot crocodiles, you definitely should visit, suggests Elio Stamm.*



and is the great attraction here for a few lucky travellers.



The ocean can be rough in the afternoon. Guests approaching Tetepare in Solomon Islands Western province in a banana boat from the airport in Seghe or Munda need to be ready for sore backs, water-drenched clothes and salty skin. It is called the last wild island of the South Pacific and you get to know why right away. Instead of just landing at the eco resort after fighting your way over the open sea, your banana boat follows the island's coast for another 30 minutes. There is nothing but high cliffs and dense jungle, and a feeling of being in the middle of nowhere.

Tetepare, 30 kilometres long, is the largest uninhabited tropical island in the Southern Hemisphere. There are many stories about why the people that used to live here left 150 years ago, the most prominent being that after a series of head hunting raids the inhabitants started believing that it was a cursed place. Whatever the reason, tourists nowadays reap the rewards. Tetepare was never logged, and when the threat occurred at the beginning of this century, the island's traditional landowners decided to preserve the wilderness for future generations and founded the Tetepare Descendants' Association to manage the island as a conservation area.

The only accommodation on the island is two small bungalows for couples and one big wooden leaf hut for groups located on a hill surrounded by bush, but still close to the beach. It feels comfortable, but it is definitely not a luxury resort. Guests are expected to learn about what animals they should not hassle and which plants to avoid, before they get served a simple, but tasty meal made of local ingredients, including recently caught wild pig and plenty of fish. At night, oil lamps lead the way back to the bungalows.

Most of the staff are descendants of former Tetepare inhabitants and live on the nearby island of Rendova. They work shifts lasting one or two weeks on Tetepare and then return home for an equal amount of time to look after their gardens. They are not trained hosts and may be a bit shy at the beginning, but they shine at what they are there for: showing you around this paradise. Each group of guests is assigned a personal guide who is ready to go out on adventures at any time.

The wildlife is stunning. In between the bungalows of the eco resort, clumsy baby opossums try to climb trees after dusk, and it only gets better once you venture further out. You can snorkel in rich, untouched coral reefs amid sharks and dugongs, a bit further out with dolphins or join the rangers monitoring and tagging the turtle population. A special highlight is to spend the night at one of the turtle nesting beaches where green and leatherback turtles lay eggs in a complete trance and baby turtles make their way into the water after hatching. Adventurous visitors can go on the one-hour crocodile walk, on a track along the beach to a freshwater lake. Be ready for an adrenaline rush as young crocodiles sunbathing on the shores flee into the water while their big brothers get seduced to come closer by your guide expertly barking like a dog, one of the crocodiles' favourite snacks. Back at the lodge you might still feel a bit shaky, but can be sure of a memory you will keep for a lifetime. 🌴