

Orion Expedition Cruises

9th May, 2008

Orion's 2009 Norfolk and Melanesian Islands Discovery expedition

Building on the popular inaugural voyage in 2008 this beguiling island meander, ranked by those guests onboard as one of the most culturally diversified and exciting *Orion* voyages to date, is to be further developed in 2009 to include even more remote island cultural experiences.

In the spirit of Orion's "*paths-less-travelled*", this 19 night itinerary includes two new destinations for *Orion* – Norfolk Island and Malekula (Vanuatu), as well as highlights selected from the 2008 voyage.

Departing Auckland on the 27th February, 2009, *Orion* will explore the picturesque New Zealand coastline around Te Rawhiti inlet (Bay of Islands) and visit the charming township of Russell, before heading to the historic penal settlement of Norfolk Island with its romantic and brutal history of HMS Bounty mutineers and their Tahitian wives. Next stop, the stunningly beautiful Isle of Pines, also once a penal settlement, in the French-Pacific territory of New Caledonia.

The brooding presence of Melanesia's "*Ring of Fire*" will become apparent as *Orion* heads to the volcanic islands of Anatom and Tanna Island, home to the still-practicing John Frum cargo cult. Join the expedition team to experience one of nature's most spectacular events – a trip up the side of the active volcano, Mt Yasur, to perch next to the rumbling cavernous mouth as it ejects lumps of molten magma high into the evening sky.

Poignant reminders of the War in the Pacific abound with *Orion* crossing Iron Bottom Sound, a naval battleground and final resting place for numerous US, Japanese, Australian and New Zealand ships. In Espiritu Santo, scuba divers will be able to experience an unforgettable dive on the world's largest accessible ship, the 22,000 ton President Coolidge. Rabaul has many WWII sites to visit including Admiral Yamamoto's command bunker; hand cut caves still containing remnants of Japanese ships, tanks and armaments are a must-see.

There will be plenty of time to enjoy the gentle sea breezes of Marovo Lagoon, the world's largest double barrier lagoon – slated for World Heritage status - swim or snorkel at idyllic Mateana beach or feed the sharks at Uepi.

Everywhere visited Orion's guests will enjoy a warm welcome, with plenty of music, dancing and singing and an invitation to join the locals in their beautiful villages. Intricate wooden and stone carvings, shell necklaces and woven baskets are all hard to resist - and buying locally means bargains abound.

Cue Nggela Island, reminiscent of a film set from Raiders of the Lost Ark. Huge trees crowd the shore line, overhanging a perfect white sand beach – but the

dominant feature here is the hulking remains of the doomed *World Discoverer*, an expedition ship beached in 2001, just 15 metres from shore and the local village. Perfect for snorkelling, if you can tear yourself away from the sensational rhythmic flutes and swaying dancers.

This voyage concludes in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, with guests invited to see the Baining Fire Dancers perform their amazing bare-foot dancing and trampling through a bonfire.

These destinations will appeal to anyone interested in experiencing the broad cultural and historic diversity of the South Pacific.

Fares Guide:

19 nights Norfolk and Melanesian Islands Discovery departs Auckland 27th February, 2009.

Fares begin from \$13,435 per person for an ocean view Category B stateroom

Suites begin from \$18,525 per person for a Junior Suite

Owners' Suites with French Balcony are \$28,135 per person

Ranked #2 expedition cruise ship in the world in the current Berlitz Cruise Guide, Orion is Australia's only purpose-built luxury expedition cruise ship, featuring an unmatched range of onboard facilities.

With 75 crew and a maximum of just 106 passengers Orion offers the highest staff to guest ratio and guest to public space ratio of any ship based in Australian waters.

Further information on Orion Expedition Cruises can be obtained by visiting the website www.orioncruises.com.au

For reservations or to obtain a brochure call Orion Expedition Cruises: 61-2 9033 8777 (Sydney callers) 1300 361 012 (regional and interstate) or your travel agent. Email: info@orioncruises.com.au

For further media information please contact:

**Michael Corbett
Public Relations Manager
Orion Expedition Cruises
Phone: (61-2) 4572 1885
Mobile: 0417 469 228
Email: mcorbett@orioncruises.com.au**