New Caledonia, Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa
South West Pacific Islands
28th July to 13th August 2019 (18 days)

Quite simply, this is a tour unlike any other! Each island that we explore on this epic adventure exhibits its own distinctive ensemble of characteristic and rarely-seen endemics, including some of our planet’s least-known species; and, although these oceanic islands and their bird lists are not large, they are nevertheless very special indeed. On this trip, we will be treated to a wonderful assortment of imperial pigeons, fruit doves (one of the most beautiful of all bird groups), parrots and lorikeets, kingfishers, hosts of flycatchers, monarchs, fantails, whistlers, honeyeaters and white-eyes, all of which are endemic and
consequently found nowhere else on earth. In the mid-80s, the Kagu was critically endangered and seemingly impossible to see. Now, thanks to concerted conservation efforts by the local park authorities, it has staged a remarkable comeback, and with special help, we have an excellent chance of seeing this “missing link” in the avian world. And while seeing this iconic species may well be the main focus of the tour for many of us, we should also encounter a remarkable diversity of other spectacular avian endemics.

We begin on the islands of Samoa, visiting the main island of Upolui. Here we will explore O Le Pupu-Pu’e National Park, where we should be able to find a large proportion the Samoan specialities, including the lovely White Tern, Crimson-crowned Fruit Dove, Blue-crowned Lorikeet, Flat-billed Kingfisher, Samoan Fantail, Samoan Flycatcher, Samoan Whistler and Samoan Starlings.

Moving westwards, we will next wing our way to the lovely Fijian Islands, where we will wander balmy, sun-bleached beaches and explore luxuriant forests only a short distance from our delightful hotels. We will visit three islands, Viti Levu, Taveuni and Kadavu, each supporting its own coterie of exciting endemics and near-endemics. Among mist-draped montane forests, we may be treated to such spectacular surprises as Orange Fruit Dove (an almost unbelievable colour!), the enigmatic Taveuni Silktail, Azure-crested Flycatcher (a real humdinger!) and a plethora of other attractive endemics, including Fiji Goshawk, Golden and Whistling Fruit Doves, Tongan Ground Dove, Barking Imperial Pigeon, Collared Lory, Maroon Shining and Masked Shining Parrots, Polynesian Triller, Fiji Bush Warbler, Slaty Monarch, Vanikoro Flycatcher, Fiji Shrikebill, Fiji Whistler, Fiji White-eye, Sulphur-breasted Myzomela, Fiji Wattled Honeyeater, the spectacular sounding Giant Honeyeater, Fiji Woodswallow, and the handsome Fiji Parrotfinch. We will also seek out some of Fiji’s most elusive and least-known species, including Long-legged Thicketbird and Pink-billed Parrotfinch.

Our next port of call will be Vanuatu, once known as the “New Hebrides”. Here, in this rarely birded archipelago, we will explore two islands, Santo and Efate, although the bulk of our birding will be on the large and mountainous island of Santo, the location of the archipelago’s capital Luganville. Vanuatu is a sleepy, seldom-birded and little-known hideaway that supports several interesting endemics, some of which are clearly related to those we encountered on New Caledonia, and which we will also encounter further along on this remarkable tour. Some of the birds we will search for here include Vanuatu Megapode, the endemic Tanna Fruit Dove, Vanuatu Kingfisher, the very attractive endemic Buff-bellied Monarch (which belongs to a genus endemic to Vanuatu) and Vanuatu White-eye. During one of our short sojourns on Efate, we will look for Blue-faced Parrotfinch.

Our final destination of the tour is New Caledonia. A seriously ancient chip off the once enormous Gondwanaland block, New Caledonia hosts, in addition to Kagu, one of the most extraordinary aggregations of endemic plants and birds, as well as several endemic mammals and reptiles. During our time on the mainland, or “Grande Terre”, we will seek out such specialities as White-bellied Goshawk, Goliath Imperial Pigeon (the world’s largest arboreal pigeon), the lovely Cloven-feathered Dove, New Caledonian and the rare Horned Parakeets, the endangered and most peculiar Crow Honeyeater, New Caledonian Myzomela, Barred Honeyeater, New Caledonian Friarbird, Yellow-bellied Flyrobin, New Caledonian Whistler, New Caledonian Cuckoo-shrike, Striated Starling, Green-backed White-eye, and the superb Red-throated Parrotfinch. During our time here, we will also visit the exquisite offshore island of Lifou where two species, Small and Large Lifou White-eyes, are found nowhere else on earth.
This is just a sample of what we can hope to see in these remarkable islands on what promises to be a most memorable tour. The islands of the Southwest Pacific have a lazy, relaxed charm about them and one of the features we can anticipate on this tour, in addition to many, many special birds, includes a fascinating collage of landscapes and culture, great food and some lovely accommodations.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...

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THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

Day 1: Arrival in Apia, Samoa. Guests arriving from their various points of origin will be greeted at the airport, and transported to our hotel accommodation in Apia, the capital of Samoa. In the evening we enjoy a fine dinner and discuss our forthcoming adventures.

Days 2 & 3: O Le Pupu-Pu’e National Park, Samoa. We have two full days in which to explore the island of Upolu. Almost certainly one of the first birds we will encounter here will be Buff-banded Rail, which is unusually common and scuttles along roadsides and trails like a chicken! We should also be able to find most of the Samoan specialities here, including Crimson-crowned and Many-colored Fruit Doves, Metallic Pigeon, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, the lovely Blue-crowned Lorikeet, Flat-billed Kingfisher, Polynesian Triller, Samoan Whistler, Samoan Flycatcher, Samoan Fantail, Samoan and Polynesian Starlings, Cardinal Myzomela, Polynesian Wattle Honeyeater and Red-headed Parrotfinch.

Whistling Fruit Dove by Rich Lindie
However, the distinctly atypical Samoan Triller and Mao, a large and at times very noisy honeyeater, require a bit more work, and if we do not find them here we will visit a couple of other sites where we may get lucky.

**Day 4: Apia to Nadi.** Today we will catch a flight west across the Pacific to Nadi on the Fijian Islands.

**Day 5: Nadi to Taveuni.** This morning we will wing our way across exquisite turquoise seas, decorated with wonderfully untouched coral reefs to the island of Taveuni, our home for the next three nights. Our birding begins the moment we set down, as there may well be Pacific Golden Plovers and Fiji Woodswallows on the airstrip, perhaps even a Bristle-thighed Curlew if we are extraordinarily lucky. The drive to our resort takes us along the volcanic coastline, passing through villages and coconut plantations along the way. On the journey, we will watch out for frigatebirds, Pacific Reef Heron and the handsome Fiji Goshawk.

Our resort is located right on the beach and we should find a number of gorgeous birds and butterflies right in the hotel grounds, including Collared Lory, Vanikoro Flycatcher, Sulphur-breasted Myzomela and Fiji White-eyes, whilst Black-naped and Great Crested Terns often patrol the beach.

**Day 6: Taveuni.** A large proportion of the Fijian endemics can be found just a short drive from our very comfortable hotel. During our stay, we will explore a range of habitats from damp, misty, moss-adorned forests atop Des Voeux Peak (4,000 feet), to the humid lowlands.

We have a large number of species to find here, so we must be in the forest by dawn in order to maximise our chances. Characteristic species that we may encounter include Swamp Harrier, Fiji Goshawk, Many-colored Fruit Dove, Orange Fruit Dove, Tongan (Friendly) Ground Dove, Barking Imperial Pigeon (unusually common for such a large
bird), Fan-tailed Cuckoo, White-rumped Swiftlet, Pacific Swallow, Polynesian Triller, the lovely Pacific Robin, Fiji Whistler, Fiji Shrikebill, Slaty Monarch, Vanikoro and the gorgeous Azure-crested Flycatcher, Streaked Fantail, Fiji Bush Warbler, Island Thrush, Polynesian Starling, Fiji Woodswallow, Sulphur-breasted Myzomela, Fiji Wattled and Yellow-billed Honeyeaters, Fiji White-eye and the striking Fiji Parrotfinch. Of course, we will also seek out the enigmatic Taveuni Silktail, which many consider Fiji’s most special bird. This beautiful species, however, is as elusive as its affinities are unclear, so we will need a good dose of luck to see it!

Day 7: Taveuni to Suva. This morning we depart Taveuni and wing our way to Suva where we will spend the remainder of the day.

Day 8: Birding the central highlands of Viti Levu. We have all day to bird the mountainous interior of the weather (wet) side of Viti Levu. This, the archipelago’s largest island, still supports some luxuriant forests in the interior and hosts an exciting range of species, including the sensational looking but peculiar sounding Golden and Many-colored Fruit Doves, vociferous Barking Imperial Pigeon, possibly Fiji Goshawk, Masked Shining Parrot, the lovely Collared Lory, Black-throated Shrikebill, Long-legged Thicketbird and the wonderfully vocal Giant Honeyeater. In addition, we hope to see the truly rare and little-known, Pink-billed Parrotfinch.

Day 9: Suva to Kadavu. This morning we will enjoy birding around our lodge where we have further chances to see the fabulous Golden Dove and Masked Shining Parrot, as well as Giant Honeyeater, beautiful Many-colored Fruit Dove and Collared Lory. Thereafter we take our leave of Suva and wing our way to the island of Kadavu (pronounced Kun da vu). Kadavu is home to four species of birds found nowhere else in the world: Whistling Fruit Dove, Crimson Shining Parrot, Kadavu Fantail and Kadavu Honeyeater. Naturally, these four birds will be the primary focus of our attention as we bird this island’s forests.
Day 10: Kadavu to Nadi. After some final birding or perhaps a morning to relax and enjoy our attractive resort, we will fly to Nadi.

Day 11: Fly to Port Vila, Vanuatu, and onwards to Luganville, Espiritu Santo. This morning we fly to Port Vila on the island of Efate in the Vanuatu archipelago, from there we will connect with a domestic flight to Luganville, the capital of Vanuatu, located on the island of Espiritu Santo. This is the largest of the Vanuatu islands; and if time permits, we will commence our exploration of the island later this afternoon.

Day 12: Birding Espiritu Santo. We have a full day in which to explore this relatively poorly known island. Vanuatu is a sleepy, rarely-birded hideaway that supports several interesting endemics, some of which are clearly related to those we encountered on New Caledonia and which we will encounter further along on the tour.

Our plan is to spend much of our time birding local nature reserves. Within this protected area of lowland, coastal forest, we hope to encounter Vanuatu (Scrubfowl) Megapode – very shy, Swamp Harrier, MacKinlay’s Cuckoo-Dove, Tanna and Red-bellied Fruit Doves, Pacific Imperial Pigeon, Collared and the elusive Vanuatu Kingfishers, Polynesian Triller, Southern Shrikebill, Melanesian Whistler, Buff-bellied Monarch (perhaps THE speciality of these islands, this attractive bird belongs to a monotypic genus Neolalage), Streaked Fantail and Vanuatu White-eye.

Day 13: Espiritu Santo to Noumea. After some final birding for any species we may still require, or simply desire better views of, we take our leave of Vanuatu, and fly to La Tontouta Airport, well to the north of Noumea, the capital of New Caledonia. From here we will be transported to our attractive hotel on the outskirts of the “city”.

Day 14: Riviere Bleu Reserve. New Caledonia is geologically extremely old, having been cast adrift many millions of years ago from what we know today as Australia and New Zealand. As a result, its community of plants and animals have evolved in extreme isolation, to such a degree that the majority of its native inhabitants are found nowhere else in the world, thus providing us with a rare glimpse of this region’s forests as they were in Gondwanaland
times. Our birding will largely focus around the Riviere Bleu forest reserve, which encompasses some of the best remaining lowland and hill forest on the island.

Thanks to the efforts of Yves Letocart and the Department of Forests, many of the introduced predators, which have so decimated the island’s Kagu populations in the past, have been greatly reduced. This has resulted in a relatively healthy group of approximately 500 birds inhabiting the reserve. These strange, ghost-like, flightless birds, which resemble a cross between a Sunbittern and a rail with a long shaggy crest, are one of the most exciting and, until recently, amongst the most challenging birds to see on our planet.

Happily, this is no longer the case, and arriving ideally before dawn, we will listen for the Kagu’s puppy-like calls that are such a characteristic sound of the forest. In the past, this was about as near as one could hope to get to encountering one of these seemingly mythical creatures. Now, thanks to intensive conservation efforts, our chances of seeing this incredible bird are very good indeed.

This morning we will, therefore, depart early for the important Riviere Bleu Reserve to search for the Kagu in addition to several other really fascinating New Caledonian endemics: New Caledonian Goshawk, the huge Goliath Pigeon, Cloven-feathered Dove (a very strange and beautiful bird), Horned Parakeet (severely threatened – the Riviere Bleu reserve is one of its last strongholds), New Caledonian Parakeet, New Caledonian Crow, New Caledonian and South Melanesian Cuckooshrikes, Long-tailed Triller, Fan-tailed Gerygone, New Caledonian Whistler, Striated Starling, New Caledonian Myzomela, Barred and Crow Honeyeaters (the latter sadly now very rare), New Caledonian Friarbird and Red-throated Parrotfinch.

**Day 15: Fly to Lifou, birding all day and return to Noumea.**

This morning we will make the short flight across to the idyllic island of Lifou. Here we will search for two species found nowhere else: the very common Small Lifou White-eye, and the rather scarce and distinctly babbler-like Large Lifou White-eye. These forests also host several other birds of interest, including the lovely Red-bellied Fruit Dove and Cardinal Myzomela.
During the late afternoon, we will fly back to Noumea. Time permitting, we may bird near our lodge for Grey-eared Honeyeater. Other possibilities include Nankeen Night Heron, Buff-banded Rail, Dusky Moorhen, White-rumped Swiftlet, Rufous Whistler and Welcome Swallow.

**Day 16: Birding New Caledonia.** This morning we will visit an area where we have a small chance of seeing the enigmatic New Caledonian Thicketbird (Grassbird), in addition to such specialities as the exquisite Cloven-feathered Dove, South Melanesian Cuckooshrike, Red-throated Parrotfinch and the strange, tool-using New Caledonian Crow.

It is now also possible to see the Kagu at this site, giving us a second opportunity to encounter this extraordinary bird. Later in the day we will conclude our birding on New Caledonia with a visit to a couple of other sites, where we have another chance to catch up with anything we may have missed so far, or else to simply enjoy further and even better studies of the species we have already seen.

**Day 17: Final departures.** After breakfast this morning, we shall head to La Tontouta Airport where our amazing adventure will conclude.

**Please note: the present tour schedule will almost certainly be adjusted due to inevitable flight changes; we will, however, attempt to stick with the current itinerary as far as possible.**

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

**This includes:**
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 17;
- Flights from Noumea to Lifou and return in New Caledonia;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Ferry and boat travel;
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

**...and excludes:**
- Visa fees, departure tax, excess luggage;
- **ANY** flights (except the return Noumea to Lifou flight in New Caledonia)
• Any beverages;
• Special gratuities; and
• Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement:** The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

**Tipping:** As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, porters and restaurants) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

• This tour involves some moderate walking with a couple more strenuous hikes. You should be in good health and of reasonable fitness to undertake this tour. If you have any physical limitations or medical conditions of any sort please do let the Rockjumper office know in advance of the tour.

• We will be birding in some remote areas well away from modern medical facilities.

• Virtually all of the hotels are of reasonable standard during the tour.

• Transport is mostly in comfortable vehicles, each person having a window seat, and 4x4 vehicles where required. The roads are mostly in fair condition, although we will encounter some curvy roadways with potholes, while in a few areas we have rougher unpaved roads to traverse. Due to the nature of the topography, there is the possibility of landslides interfering with our trip, though we have minimised this risk by undertaking the tour during the drier season.

• Most days in the lowlands will be hot, humid and sunny, but overcast conditions are fairly frequent and some rain, heavy at times, can be expected. In montane areas, it will range from very cool to warm. The humidity is often rather high.

**ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS**

This tour does not include ANY airfares. The tour will begin with a welcome dinner at our hotel in Samoa in the evening of day 1. The tour will conclude after breakfast at La Tontouta International Airport, Noumea (New Caledonia) on day 17.
The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**FLIGHTS**
Faleolo International Airport, Apia, Samoa (IATA: APW) is the main port of entry for international flights for this tour and is well serviced by a number of major airlines including Air New Zealand, Fiji Airways, Samoa Airways and Virgin Australia. La Tontouta International Airport, Noumea, New Caledonia (IATA: NOU) is the main port of departure and is serviced primarily by Air New Zealand and Quantas. Please **DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**


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