



Dive Munda, amplifying Solomons' tourism and environmental advocacy

Seven years ago, Belinda Botha gave up her job as an industrial psychologist. Her love of diving and the underwater world soon drew her to the dazzling waters and spectacular coral reefs of Magical Munda.

"There is something special about this place. It's got a special concoction of custom, culture, headhunting days, history, World War 2 and the people," she said.



In 2016, Belinda took the plunge and purchased a local diving business that was originally established in the 1990s.

Fast forward to 2021 and Dive Munda has become a multi-award-winning training center. Their services include scuba diving, free diving, snorkeling and tech diving, while their sister company, Solomon Islands Dive Expeditions, also runs Solomon Islands Discovery Cruises. *"I have been runner-up entrepreneur of the year and then entrepreneur of the year [at the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Business Excellence Awards] a couple years ago,"* shared Belinda.

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DIVE MUNDA

A full-time diver and SSI instructor certified, Belinda inspires her customers to develop a sense of exploring the unexplored and an urge to protect the unprotected.

"Our customers are ocean lovers, explorers, adventurers, divers, snorkelers and yoga lovers. What they bring is the fun, adventurous and appreciative culture. They take ownership and being responsible when they travel," she explained.

Belinda continued, *"That's why guests love to visit. We're making a difference and giving back to the community that we function and operate within.*



**"That's why we are who we are.
It's our ethos."**



It's because of our values and showcasing the best of what the Solomons stands for."

With a focus on the conservation and protection of the oceans, and educating people to safeguard their environments, she reiterated, *"that's why we are who we are. It's our ethos."*

Eager to pass on her diving passion, Dive Munda *"trained 16 local youths to be dive professionals along with the first 2 female dive instructors and the first 2 assistant dive instructors in the history of the country,"* said Belinda proudly.

DIVE MUNDA

This training has gone from strength to strength. *"In August 2020, Dive Munda partnered with Agnes Gateway Hotel, Scuba Schools International and Solomon Airlines to create a youth sponsorship campaign to train youths to be divers. We started with 20-30 youths and eventually a total of 100 youths were trained by the end of the year. Another 10 youths were trained in January 2021. Phase 2 of the campaign is currently ongoing with plans for a Phase 3 to begin soon,"* she described.

With an equal passion for both the ocean and land, Belinda has initiated and involved the Dive Munda team in a number of causes that are very close to their hearts.



They have partnered with Pack for a Purpose, an organisation that assists travelers to fill extra space in their luggage with items to support community-based projects around the globe. Through this initiative, visitors to Solomon Islands have brought much-needed items to support the Helena Goldie Hospital in Munda, including medical testing kits, books and other equipment.

Dive Munda also works with Plastic Wise Solomon Islands, an environmental conservation organisation, to help educate, create and raise awareness to curb plastic

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pollution within the community. *“Through this, we’ve held multiple beach clean-ups and partnered with local communities,”* said Belinda.

The company also partnered with NZ Volunteer Service Abroad and started a yoga teaching program to teach local youth to become yoga teachers to add to the tourism product offering of Munda.

Additionally, they established the Magical Munda Animal Health organisation where every year, a vet from Australia visits to spray and neuter stray cats and dogs to prevent animal homelessness and help improve community safety and sanitation. *“If we don’t understand how important it is to look after animals on land, how can we become passionate about what happens in the ocean?”* asked Belinda.

“We’ve held multiple beach clean ups and partnered with local communities.”



For five years, Dive Munda has been using digital technology to communicate, collaborate, share and engage with their audiences. Particularly during the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, this has enabled them to showcase the remote beauty and diversity of Solomon Islands with spectacular ocean visuals, while also raising awareness locally and around the globe about environmental causes and days of significance, such as International Coastal Cleanup Day and World Environment Day.

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Belinda shared, *"I have always used Facebook for whatever business I've been engaged in or worked with, and I truly believe that Dive Munda began the Facebook revolution in the Hapi Isles. When I came to the Solomon Islands, Facebook wasn't that big at the time. Once we started, you could really see people understanding the value of it and what Facebook is used for."*

"No other platform could really do it the way Facebook can. I don't think any of the projects, campaigns or anything we have done would have been successful without Facebook. It's instant



and cost-effective in how we use all those tools as a business to grow followers and friends," she emphasized.

She continued saying that, "Facebook is really irreplaceable and I don't think we can run our business without it. Especially through Covid in the last 18 months, it's just become essential for us as a business."

Belinda is adamant that the future is really linked to technology and social media, and that businesses such as hers, certainly cannot function without it. "It's a no-brainer that Facebook is the best tool out there to be able to connect with our customers, whether domestically or internationally."

Dive Munda is one of many integral parts of the Solomon Islands tourism sector. The transition from once being an industrial psychologist to now being a dive operator, environmental champion and educator, life could not have been more fulfilling... and this was Belinda's true calling.



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