

Chuuk Lagoon

Dive expedition March 2010

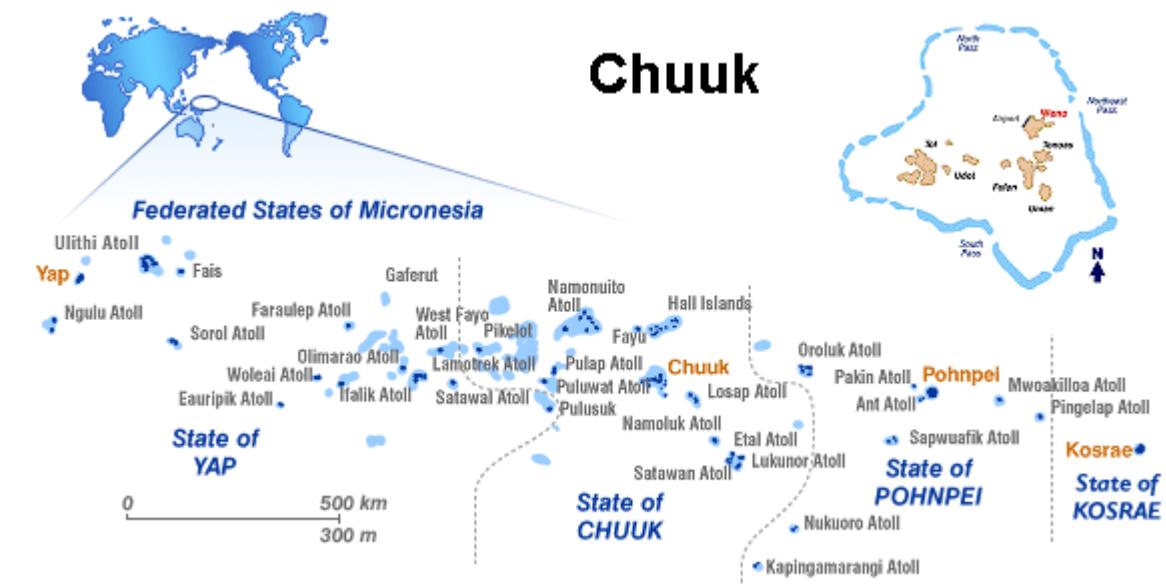
Dive team: Nigel Watson
Kevin Wilde
Paul Nesbitt

Truk is what the Americans call this island group and state of the Federated States of Micronesia in the Caroline Islands of the western Pacific Ocean. It was a site of a major Japanese naval base during World War II, the islands were part of the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from 1947 to 1978, hence the name Truk. After independence the Islands where renamed back to Chuuk, pronounced (chöök).

Back in January 2008 it was decided that organising a club trip to Truk Lagoon would be a good idea. After some initial discussion, cost estimates etc., 4 club members decided that they wanted to go. Unfortunately one had to drop out. So the dive team where Nigel Watson, Kevin Wilde and Paul Nesbitt.

Due to the popularity, remoteness and limited facilities in Truk Lagoon, when further enquiries were made to make a firm booking, we could only get places that were suitable for all at the end of March 2010, and so the long, long wait of two years was on. The three of us who decided to go were all Inspiration re-breather divers and really wanted if possible to be able to take our units with us. This raised a few issues, 1.Weight, 2.Cylinder availability, 3.High pressure oxygen availability, and 4.Sofnoline availability (CO₂ scrubber chemical). After discussions with the tour and charter operators we had solved these issues and were ready to take our re-breathers with us.

To get to Chuuk takes at least 3 days of travelling due to its location in the Pacific on the opposite side of the planet from England as can be shown here.



Therefore to travel either Eastwards or Westwards is approximately the same distance and time. Because of this and due to the baggage allowances etc. it was decided that we would travel Westward via the USA. This would also mean that we would cross the International Date Line which really confuses your head and body clock. Our journey would take us across 14 time zones and 7 flights totalling approximately 30 hours in the air as follows:

1. London, Heathrow to San Francisco.
2. San Francisco to Hawaii, Honolulu.
3. Hawaii, Honolulu to Majuro.
4. Majuro to Kwajalein.
5. Kwajalein to Kosrae.
6. Kosrae to Pohnpei.
7. Pohnpei to Chuuk

There are some long flights, but the last 5 flights are on one plane that 1-2 hour hops. The problem is that they start the inflight entertainment, you just get watching a programme and they land. When they land they reset the entertainment system. Even worse you get to see and special announcement from the CEO of Continental Airlines and the safety video\demonstration. So by the time we arrived in Chuuk we thought that we had been starting in our own version of the movie "Ground Hog Day".

Anyway we left London on Thursday 25th March in the morning and arrived in Chuuk on Saturday 27th March in the afternoon. For the first night until we got onto the boat on Sunday afternoon, and then for a further 3 days when we disembarked at the end of our trip, we stayed at the "Truk Blue Lagoon Resort", which as you can see from the picture is very nice and peaceful, but also very basic with little\nothing to do, but definitely tropical.



So to the important bit the **Diving**. We had decided to use the Odyssey live-aboard, which was absolutely superb <http://www.trukodyssey.com> and definitely the best live-aboard I have been on.

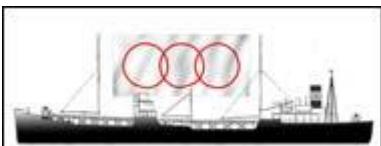


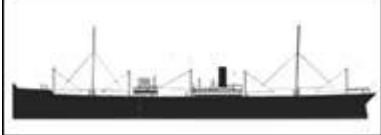
It was very clean, comfortable and roomy. The food choice was superb and very tasty. The crew were very helpful and a pleasure to live with for the week we were there. There were 16 divers on board, which a mixture of skill levels, from the three re-breathers to those with twin sets\stages and single cylinders.

The dive format was again the best we had experienced. We would all be up from breakfast for around 6:30am, meanwhile the boat would set off the first dive site. We would have a dive briefing at around 7:30. Afterwards the pool was open and you could go and dive any time you wanted, up to a maximum of 5 dives in any day. Most days we would leave for a new site at 13:00pm so you had to be back on board by then so they could move the boat where we would stay overnight and you could do a night dive if you wished.

The norm was for the open circuit divers to go and do two morning dives, followed by two afternoon dives and then a night dive. Most of the diving was in the 20-40 metre range. Since our re-breather gave us much better bottom times and we did not have to be concerned about gas consumption, we opted to do one long morning and one long afternoon dive. We would wait until all of the open circuit divers had gone in and then we would start our dive. This way as we were going in most of the other divers were on their way back out and so we could have the wreck to ourselves. This worked well for us and we would explore the whole wreck in one dive, being in the water around 90 minutes. This gave us lots of penetration time to go and see the engine rooms and holds. In the 5 ½ days that we were diving we did ~16 dives on the following wrecks:

Wrecks dived whilst in Chuuk Lagoon

KIYOSUMI MARU 	The Kiyuzumi Maru rests on the port side. It's worthwhile to talk to the guides before diving this ship. It would be easy to miss some of the more interesting features. The depth ranges from 40-100 feet. Most of the exterior is covered in algae and coral. There is a small lantern locker containing bronze lanterns and lantern parts on shelves. Access into the lower deck is possible through a rear entrance at deck level. China and pots have been seen on this wreck.
YAMAGIRI MARU 	A large combined freighter/passenger liner, the Yamagiri is lying on her port side. The wreck is fairly intact with the superstructure and pilot house interesting and accessible. Hold No. 5 contains 35.6cm (14") shells for second-line Japanese battleships, a steamroller and construction equipment.
FUMIZUKI 	An old design Destroyer, built in 1925, very fast, capable of 33.5 knots fully loaded. In Truk for temporary repairs. Note the railroad tracks for the old reload torpedo carriages, later updated to long lance torpedoes. Unknown reason for sinking, disabled by delayed action bomb exploding beneath her.
SHINKOKU MARU 	The second largest wreck in Chuuk Lagoon. The Shinkoku Maru was built in 1940 by Kawashi Jyuko Co. of Kobe for Kobe Sanbashi K.K. (Kobe Pier Co. Ltd). It was 150 metres long and 20 metres wide and was requisitioned by the Japanese Navy in 1941, four weeks before Pearl Harbour.
UNKAI MARU NO.6 	The Unkai Maru was an old ship when she sank. She was launched in the UK before WWI as the <i>Venus</i> and purchased by the Japanese who renamed her. The wreck is not too deep and she lies on an even keel. This makes the <i>Unkai Maru</i> a great dive for non-technical divers. She was sunk by several bomb hits that raised the bow out of the water before sinking.
RIO DE JANEIRO MARU 	Rio de Janeiro Maru sits at a maximum depth of about 34 metres, with the ship lying on its starboard side (note that at least one of the books on the Chuuk Lagoon wrecks says it is on its starboard side but then has diagrams showing her on the port side). It is located on the eastern side of Uman Island, perhaps a few hundred metres off the southern most end. As you swim down onto the wreck it is quickly obvious that this is a huge wreck, the fourth biggest in Chuuk Lagoon in terms of tonnage.
SANKISAN MARU 	The Sankisan Maru is a freighter that contained aircraft engines, medical supplies & several trucks. This is a popular dive and frequently visited. The masts contain heavy growth of soft coral and large anemones can be found anchored to debris on the deck. A dive between 50-80 feet is easily managed by divers and it's protected location in the lagoon makes it a good dive even during bad weather.
HOKI MARU	This captured New Zealand vessel (M/V Hauraki) sunk

	<p>upright with a slight list to port. Except for the bow & forecastle the fore ship was destroyed by an aviation gasoline explosion. The midship & bridge are devastated but contain pockets of interesting artifacts. The aft holds contain an assortment of construction equipment & supplies.</p>
FUJIKAWA MARU 	<p>The most popular wreck in Truk Lagoon, the Fujikawa Maru is a must dive. This is probably one of the best wreckdives in the world and features in many “Top X” wreckdives list. Whether your interest is in artifacts or marine life this wreck has it. Diving on the Fujikawa Maru was a spectacular new experience; a submarine forest of thick and colorful encrusting corals covering the masts, kingposts, cargo boms, deck railings.</p>
NIPPO MARU 	<p>In 1969, the <i>Nippo Maru</i> was filmed by the Cousteau expedition but not identified. It was then “lost” until rediscovered on 16 June 1980 by Klaus Lindemann. The Nippo lies on a sand bottom in 48 metres of water, lying in an east-west direction with the bow slightly shallower than the stern and having a slight list to port. The wreck is basically intact, with only slight damage to the bridge area and stern visible</p>
HEIAN MARU 	<p>This ship was a passenger and cargo liner, which was converted into a submarine depot ship. Originally, she was a passenger ship designed for luxury service between Yokohama and Seattle. It is the largest ship in the lagoon and lies in the old submarine anchorage. Long Lance torpedoes can be found. Periscopes lay in two companionways on levels below & aft of the bridge. Many artifacts can be found throughout this wreck.</p>
SAN FRANCISCO MARU 	<p>This passenger/cargo ship sunk upright, fully loaded with cargo & thus is often called ‘The Million Dollar Wreck’. Deck cargo includes both trucks & battle tanks. Hold cargo includes mines, torpedoes, bombs, artillery, anti-tank, & small arms munitions, aircraft engines & parts & oil/gasoline drums. Many artifacts remain in the bridge area.</p>
KENSHO MARU 	<p>This passenger/cargo ship sunk upright with a 15/20 degree list to port. The vessel was under repair at that time & there is little to be found in the holds. Many artifacts, however, can be found on the bridge & superstructure. The main attraction is the engine room which has good ambient light & is relatively easy to access. Penetrating to the lower engine room requires special skill. It is here that wrench/spanner sets, mounted on both the fore & aft bulkheads, can be seen</p>

