

# Truk Lagoon ... Lead in...



Micronesia, a near magical word describes thousands of tiny mid-Pacific equatorial islands stretched over an area equal in size to North America. They exist in true versions of what is expected when using the overworked term 'Paradise', serving as small stepping stones across a very broad ocean. It comprises over 2,200 tiny originally volcanic mounts pushed up from pressures of interlocking plates beneath the ocean floor, now lying mostly dormant as low coral atolls after their original mountain mouths have either eroded or sunk back below the ocean surfaces over previous eons of time.

Truk is a one of a kind large Pacific atoll, still with many high mountainous islands protruding above the surface of a huge roughly circular 40 mile wide inner water body, or lagoon. Further numerous low islands, 90 in all, are scattered throughout from reef surface to opposite reef, providing shelter from nearly any wind direction as well as land for many indigenous people to comfortably live on them.



Truk's history of early Spanish domination was followed by German acquisition after end of Spanish-American war in late 1890's, and then a Japanese mandate from the League of Nations upon Germany's defeat in 1918. The Japanese brought most islands into self sufficiency, with high agricultural and maricultural exports to outer worlds through 1920's and '30's. Truk's great natural harbor for ships of all sizes via 18 navigable channels led the Japanese to later design it into their main Pacific naval fortress for planned aggressions to capture the entire western rim of the Pacific Ocean in their dream to create a huge maritime empire.

The Japanese era saw a great buildup of arms and bases in advance of a wide military blitz over the Western Pacific. The blitz was supplied heavily from facilities at Truk, where often more than 1,000 merchant and warships moored in readiness for further deployment.

Five airfields supporting close to 500 aircraft provided complete protection over Truk's Gibraltar-like facilities. A deep lagoon, high islands and circling barrier reef provided extensive natural protection. Patrol boats, torpedo boats, submarines, tugs, landing craft, gunboats and mine sweepers contributed to

the final defenses and service needs to maintain this big base.

Truk was considered the most formidable of all Japanese strongholds in the Pacific. This reputation caused an overconfident Truk command to relax their vigil against invasion, in spite of U.S. forces fast approaching from the East. Supplies from Japan had almost ceased, due to immense successes of U.S. submarines finally equipped with torpedoes that found their mark. Supply convoys receiving nearly 90% losses enroute to Truk, deprived the garrison of food, fuel and new armaments desperately required to maintain strength.



By early 1944, U.S. forces had amassed a huge armada of top line carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines for a major surprise sweep against Truk on February 16th, 17th and 18th. This attack, coded "Operation Hailstone", caught the Japanese totally unaware, and led to one of the most successful U.S. engagements of WWII.

After a follow up attack in April, 1944, Truk was reduced to rubble with over 70 shipwrecks, 400 aircraft destroyed or sunk, and the menace of this big fortress removed forever.

U.S. forces declined engagement with the 40,000 troops at Truk, and after these attacks, starvation consumed many of the defenders before the eventual surrender of Japan late in 1945.

About 20 years later, adventure divers such as Jacques Cousteau, Al Giddings and Klaus Lindemann discovered the wonders of this huge sunken fleet, replete with incredible vistas of war machinery, soft coral draperies, fish life and personal mementos.

The ruin and destruction of Truk's great battle support fleet is near legend after coming to rest on moderately shallow lagoon floors ...later gaining fame as the world's finest dive-able shipwreck emporium. Great hulks of once proud ships lie in quiet array on white sandy floors varying from 30 ft down to 250 ft. depths. Common wreck lootings have never been permitted, with thousands of war implements and artifacts scattered throughout.

Nature has worked full scale to beautify the destructions of war with some of the world's finest corals and fish life now abounding on the big sunken trellises. Sea life has increased many times from pre-war times likely due the numerous fish shelters created from the melee.

Truk remains without equal, its ghostly remains serving as the world's greatest wreck diving site in a

wonderfully comfortable location of warm waters free of perilous currents and open seas so common to other open ocean dive sites.



Truk's great legacy is somewhat lost on today's youthful divers due to very empty budget baskets of its local government failing to maintain its image and awareness of many other well advertised world destinations. A most frequent cry amongst small numbers of divers visiting today is "where are all the other divers? How do you keep this site so secret?" Local administrators just believe the world should already know where the best diving is.

Truk's minimal marketing today comes from limited efforts of a few local dive operators placing small ads and running websites for balance of information, besides word of mouth.

High attractions of Micronesia today, especially at Truk are the peaceful circumstances lacking any civil unrest or other natural disasters. Pleasant and friendly people exhibit smiles and willingness to be your friend without hands extended for favors.

Diving is conducted from 2 or 3 shore-side facilities and two respectable live aboard dive cruisers. One of these the SS THORFINN began operations 28 years ago as likely the world's original live aboard sport dive cruiser. After numerous rebuilds she remains one of the world's best and still largest in size and tonnage, continuing to operate on original huge steam engines. Another vessel, the slightly smaller ODYSSEY has developed a strong reputation as a solid performer during 8 years on location. BLUE LAGOON DIVE SHOP is the original dean headed for years by well known citizen Kimiuo Aisek who watched the destruction and battle from behind sheltering palm trees as a teenager.

Slightly expanded marketing budgets are slowly helping to spread knowledge and enhanced details of diving the Wrecks of Paradise. Seeming endless attractions of reefs and wrecks continue receiving ever fresh corals and fish life. The sites blossom with increasingly brighter and stronger macro life, as well as added pelagics. Spinner porpoises, dolphins, eagle rays, guitar sharks, streams of usual reef sharks, groupers, and many others are viewed more often over each of the sites in recent times. Macro fotogs at starb'rd bows of SHINKOKU MARU return from their dives in ecstasy after viewing the finest soft corals of their lives.

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