

shop has new equipment to purchase, or you can rent, and is well equipped. The boat can hold 28 passengers and two crew. It is a 38' Custom Cat with a 14' beam, which makes it extremely, stable. She is equipped with twin 400 hp water jets for power, hot showers, twin dive ladders, and underwater sound system. All of the safety equipment you would hope for is on this boat including oxygen, first aid kit, GPS, radio, life preservers, etc. The boat does take on other dive operation divers and their dive masters, but there were less than 10 people on the boat. Fresh fruit and water or sodas are available for surface interval. The first dive is normally either the YO 257 wreck or the San Pedro wreck and Turtle Cove for the second dive. We were lucky enough to visit both wrecks on one dive since there was little current. There are usually turtles on every dive as well as eagle rays and lots of fish. We saw octopus on every dive. For some reason the dive masters like to catch the octopus and play with them. I don't approve of this practice, but that is not going to stop them. In 2003 we were fortunate to see a whale shark off the west coast of Oahu and unfortunately the dive master thought it would be cool to ride it and it left so some of the divers did not get to see it. The boat rides are usually less than 15 minutes. Diving is rather expensive. Two tank morning dive is \$99. Repairs and purchase of equipment is readily available in Honolulu.

**Ocean Concepts, JW Marriot Ilihani, November 2005, Gerrit Milks (gpmilks@hotmail.com), Seabrook, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm, choppy, surge. The diving and visibility varied from day to day based on weather conditions. There was not a lot

of colorful creatures and coral, but the lava formations and wrecks more than made up for it. Ocean Concepts was an excellent dive operation.

## KIRIBATI

Christmas island is roughly a three-hour flight due south from Honolulu. It's the world's largest coral atoll, 45 miles long and seven to 25 miles wide, although lagoons make up nearly two-thirds of the area. It was uninhabited until the 1950s, when the British chose it for nuclear weapon development and induced a small Micronesian work force to relocate there. When the British left, poverty and debris remained. The 4,400 residents are citizens of the Republic of Kiribati. There is a dive operation on Kiriitimat, but the reefs are in trouble.

**Christmas Island Divers, Shark Fin Hotel, May 2006, Rick Sekely (ricksekely@sekely.com), Salem, OH.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. Christmas Island Divers Association is a new PADI certified diving operation. Robert Lower, owner, is service oriented, enthusiastic and eager to please. Although there is no dive shop, they do have a garage with a compressor, dive tanks and basic equipment. Robert has a smaller faster boat to go to the furthest sites and a slower, longer more stable boat for closer dive sites or for rougher conditions. He did take us to the furthest and best dive sites (The Korean Wreck and Bay of Wrecks). We saw a total of 9 manta rays during our stay. Four of those were at the surface feeding and we watched them from the boat. We saw a squadron of 5 eagle rays on one dive and a couple others

throughout the week. There were good size Napoleon wrasse on most dives. There were many species of eels ... green morays, spotted, white face, snowflake, masked dragon. Lots of lion fish. Countless numbers of tropical fish; fusiliers, butterfly fish and angel fish including the emperor, flame and blue reticulated. We saw octopus, a few white tip, black tip and nurse sharks, turtles and too many dolphin to count (spinners and bottlenose). We saw schools of treacly on most dives, lots of 2-3' milkfish, a few large yellow finned tuna and a couple long-nose hawkfish. Mostly hard coral and a large variety; plate, lettuce, brain, finger and more. The hotel accommodations were basic. Our room/bungalow had no TV, hot water or air conditioning. We were told if we wanted air we could switch rooms, but being right on the beach we had enough breeze and were comfortable at night with the room fans. The water was somewhere between slightly warm and cold. The food was cooked and served family style and was good to excellent. We had lobster, tuna, chicken and pork, all served with rice or potatoes and vegetables. The hotel owner, Jim, brought coffee to our room every morning before breakfast. He also brought fresh yellowfin sashimi to our room every afternoon about an hour before dinner. We did not venture into town at night to the other restaurants or hotels. I think there were only three. We usually had a beer or two at the hotel bar, went to our room to review the days underwater pics, and tried to watch an entire movie on the lap top without falling asleep. Kiribati is a third world country and there are no luxury accommodations on the island. Overall, the diving was world class. I'd rate it one notch below Palau. We hired a guide and fished for bones with a fly

rod. Two of us caught 15 bone fish and 5 treacly in a few hours.

**Dive Kiribati, Captain Cooks, October 2005, Scott Johnson (scottyj96@aol.com), Palm Springs, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, no currents. I spent the week diving with Kim Anderson, the owner of Dive Kiribati; he and his staff were great! Talk about the Royal treatment — I was the only diver there! How Kim can remember all those great dive sites is beyond me as there are no moorings. The diving at Kiribati (Kitty-buss) was good and I compare everything with Palau. The numbers of small to medium tropical fish abound. On many reefs I saw two to three times the number of tropical fish than I have seen in Palau: surgeonfish, peacock flounders, nudibranchs, giant barracudas, spotted eagle rays, snappers (many to choose from), Moorish idols, trevallies, mantas, octopus, dolphins, occasional sharks, etc. I did not get to see all the big stuff ... they were out in the Poland area or Bay of Wrecks. That is where the big wrasse and the groupers are. I get seasick and we had a few windy days come up while I was there; got to the sites twice ... and we turned around twice. Unfortunately the pelagic population has been decimated due to shark fining and spear fishing for sport ... which is legal in Kiribati. Worthwhile diving destination. Easy access from the US, only three hours from Honolulu. But this is the 4th world! If you want contact with the outside world, bring a satellite phone. Accommodations are less than basic; I stayed at Captain Cooks, the nicest motel on the island. The food was great but the rooms leave a bit to be desired for a basic room. Also when you get travel insurance for this destination make

sure your Med Vac service includes the Coast Guard as they are the only ones who will respond ... within a few hours. With the new Air Pacific flight out of Honolulu, Christmas Island again has reliable air service.

## MARSHALL ISLANDS

**Bako Divers, Robert Reimers Hotel, May 2006, Tom Sheley, Two Rivers, WI. (dsheley@lakefield.net)** Air flight from Hawaii to Majuro on Continental Airlines takes about 4 hours. Because of the scheduling of the single air carrier you have three options on a stop over on Major prior to going on to Bikini (one, four or seven nights). I applied the four mainly to get my salt water equilibrium, and to make sure my gear caught up with me before flying on. Jerry Ross (Bako Divers) provided excellent service and attention. Jerry truly has his heart into what he does. I met up with three other divers that had arrived earlier and would also be going on to Bikini. Earlier in the month Jerry had given me the Internet address of one of these divers (happened to be an individual that had been to Bikini before in 2001). Direct communicating with someone else that had visited Majuro/Bikini was valuable to for me to prep me for this new adventure. My normal dive buddies did not accompany, so I latched onto these three new friends and thus made my overall trip so much better (gosh, I hate to travel alone). Majuro appears to be an environment somewhere between Chuuk (Truk) and Palau. Chuuk, because of the friendly people/kids and sometimes limited resources (examples vegetables). Palau, because Majuro has moved one step closer to a cosmopolitan environment with general air

conditioning, supermarkets, more modern hotels and a Yattie (Yacht) Crowd. The realistic visibility inside the lagoon was around 50 ft., and I understand it can get much better if you time your stay to take advantage of a large lagoon volume change that occurs with the new moon high tides. WWII interests are limited to a Grumman duck (single engine sea plain) and an end of the war dump area (called the parking lot) littered with trucks and small landing craft. There are a few other aircraft (see the web page) but their quality has greatly diminished over 60 years. All the shipwrecks are relatively modern, with the best being the 150-ft upright refrigeration freighter Cempac sitting on a 140 ft. bottom. A trip through the engine room (around 120 ft.) and crew's quarters provided the highest interest for me, although the spaces are a little challenging while wearing doubles (tight but it can be done). My new friends did some dives out on a nearby island and on the ocean side of Majuro, where visibility and fish life was fantastic (I am not into fish or coral). We stayed at the Robert Reimers Hotel, close to the center of population, about 5 miles from the airport. The hotel picked us up and got us back at the correct time for our flight. The hotel is on the lagoon. I recommend the bungalows if you are interested in a romantic setting, but the rooms in the hotel proper were well maintained and clean. There is a large supermarket (anything you want and the prices are reasonable) and a bank directly across the street. The Bako dive boat goes out right next door to the hotel. The other hotel (Marshall Island Resort — formally the Outrigger) is newer, closer to the airport and appears to be where most of the non-locals (example: