

KIRIBATI (CHRISTMAS ISLAND)

Christmas Island is 1300 miles due south of Hawaii, about a 3-hour flight, but across the International Date Line. It's the world's largest coral atoll, 45 miles long and between 7 and 25 miles wide, although lagoons make up nearly 2/3 of that area. The island was named after the day in 1777 when Captain James Cook first happened upon it, but it remained uninhabited until the 1950s, when the British chose it as the site for their nuclear weapons development and induced a small Micronesian work force from the Gilbert Islands to relocate there. The British pulled out, leaving behind a few Micronesians and a great deal of debris. Today the island's 4400 residents are citizens of the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced cure-a-BOS).

MICRONESIA

Chuuk (Truk)

This is the world's most diverse wreck diving on hundreds of Japanese ships sunk during a battle in WWII, with lionfish on the bridge, giant clams on the deck, and bottles of ink and erasers for students of the vanished Japanese Empire still visible in the hold. . . . Most wreck dives - other than on superstructure - are in the 80'+ range, but there's fine diving even without wreck penetration. . . . Expect calm water, occasional poor visibility, little or no current,

and temperatures that can hit the high 80s. . . .

Blue Lagoon Resort, February 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Return trip; we were surprised at the deterioration of the wrecks. The coral is as beautiful as ever. This is a wreck diver's dream. Plenty of penetration and deep diving is available. New divers are in awe as many artifacts can still be seen. Diving the zero bomber is pretty cool. The dive sites are an average 30 minute ride from the resort. The dive masters know the sites well and will leave you alone if you are competent. (Ph: 800-367-5004 or 808-955-6221; e-mail info@castleresorts.com or reservations@castleresorts.com ; website www.castleresorts.com)

Kosrae

This small, unspoiled island didn't get jet service until 1987, and it still hasn't changed much. . . . Its high volcanic peaks are lush and green, and a close, fringing reef makes the diving easily accessible, but it's not high-voltage diving on a par with Palau.

Kosrae Village Resort, December 2001, Michael N. Hofman (mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com)

San Francisco, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 83 to 91 F, choppy. When we arrived we were the only people clearing customs and the immigration officer knew we were coming and got the hotel rep for us! The hotel and dive operation were started about