

Fluffy Cat Dives Truk (Chuuk) Lagoon

by

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Meow.....! I am a very fluffy kitty. My master is a dive instructor. I was his first certification. All those fish to chase...yummm... We have many underwater adventures. He brought me along to Truk (Chuuk) Lagoon at the end of 1996. He wanted to...

- Research accommodations suitable for his clients' preferences,
- Research Dive Operators who best match his clients' experience levels and preferences,
- Research Dive Sites,
- Become familiar with Truk (Chuuk) Lagoon's offerings—food, sights, environment,
- [I wanted to check out the fish and birds!]

This is our first trip to the South Pacific. It was a long trip from Miami: Miami-Houston-Los Angeles-Honolulu-Guam-Truk. I slept most of the way. And then the return! After experiencing the incredible beauty of Truk's underwater abundance, the Caribbean will never be quite the same for us.



This dive adventure included:

- **Truk Stop Hotel**
- **Blue Lagoon Dive Shop**
- **SS Thorfin**
- **Some of the Wrecks**
- **Miscellaneous**

Truk Stop Hotel

At the time this could be considered one-step above a diver's hotel. It was clean, with large air-conditioned rooms, two double beds, and an incredible, large shower which could easily accommodate four at the same time; it was very easy to rinse our dive gear. By now, the new

dock with rinse tanks and lockers will have been completed. Our group christened the new dock on our last day when Blue Lagoon picked us up there.

We won't miss too much the slow ride over a bumpy road sitting in the back of a pickup truck to/from the dock at the Truk Continental (now the Blue Lagoon Resort). I heard all sorts of new bird sounds and almost went hunting for them. We enjoyed several good lunches there during surface intervals, and the grounds are very attractive. Units were in a state of being refurbished.

The dining room at the Truk Stop Hotel served a variety of good, well-prepared cuisine. I even enjoyed the local delicacy, Spam from a can. While, in general, the pace is slower in Truk compared to the hustle-bustle USA, Fidel did an outstanding job in servicing all diners. One morning, I took a long walk to the airport and back, finding what we'd been told beforehand, "The citizens of Chuuk are a gentle, friendly people." I exchanged many friendly nods and smiles with people walking to work and children going to school. I purred loudly when the children all stroked my fur.

Blue Lagoon Dive Shop

Owned and operated by Kimiuo Aisek. At the age of seventeen he witnessed the sinking of the Japanese Imperial fleet in Truk Lagoon by US forces. His dive shop has an excellent handle on the locations of these wrecks. They get divers to them in record time, using 6-pack fanny-bangers which have shade and carry water. His son, Gradvin, runs a safe, efficient operation. We had the good fortune to dive with Randy and Dune, two of the most watchful and knowledgeable DMs we have encountered to date. They even help us dive kitties on with our gear. While the wrecks are long enough to accommodate a dozen divers if half stay at either bow or stern, ideally only six divers should be on a wreck at any time. Several times we dived a wreck where the Truk Aggressor was anchored and we felt we were being mugged by divers everywhere.

Blue Lagoon will soon be getting another, state-of-the-art dive boat, but will limit number of divers, and will not follow the trend of the cattle-boat operations. Imagine a larger boat, with few divers.

Blue Lagoon is able to accommodate the less-experienced diver, but most of the wrecks are deep with the deck around 70-90 feet. In order to do two or more per day of deep dives, a minimum surface interval of two hours between each dive is standard procedure.

While Marilyn, Robert and I are used to exploring on our own, we found it advantageous to follow Randy most of the time. The choice was left up to us and we maximized our diving pleasure. In order to enjoy these dives, we feel that computers are necessary, buoyancy control imperative, a certain amount of air consumption skills required and a good comfort-level maintained along with a good sense of awareness. I had to resist the temptation to chase fish on these deeper dives. If a newer diver can manifest these qualities, Truk Lagoon will be very rewarding. Else, it would be better to become more experienced before venturing there.

SS Thorfin

We spent one day with them, enjoying shipboard amenities and three dives. We began with a very hearty breakfast. Their homemade bread is incredibly good! They have state-of-the-art video editing and the ability to make/play all videos, no matter which format is used. Captain/Owner, Lance Higgs, has been dedicated to the SS Thorfin for over fifteen years, and his care is manifested in a beautiful ship, recently refurbished. We thoroughly enjoyed a tour of the engine room, learning more about the workings of a steam driven ship. The engine hissed at me. I hissed back! Then we boarded a 6-pack fanny-banger to experience our first dive with them.

Safety is one of Captain Higgs' major concerns. He has had onboard over the years many experts and has done much research on DCI prevention. The basic assumption is that you will do five dives per day all to 100 feet. Using the rule of thirds which is employed in cave/cavern diving, you head out until you are down to 2000psi, you head back and are ready to ascend at 1000psi, and you ascend to 60 feet, stop for 2 minutes, then ascend to 30 feet, stop for 3 minutes, then ascend to 15 feet and stop for 10(ten!) minutes. Following this procedure, we exited with our computers indicating we'd blown off quite a bit of nitrogen. If we are doing more than 2 deep dives per day, we plan to follow this procedure. Oh, yes, ascend at a rate less than 30 feet per minute. I had a wonderful time at these safety stops. Staying at each depth with no current, I was able to chase a lot of fish...as long as they didn't go up or down.

Some of the Wrecks

NOTE: Vis was 50 feet to over 90 feet on all dive sites, water temp. about 82–85 degrees F. Vis becomes much better from Jan. through May. Abundance of critters, corals, anemones and sponges. Mostly juvenile fish. none large enough for this kitty's meal...but fun to scare and watch them hide.

We dived the following wrecks — all with "Maru" following the name. "Maru" indicates they are not military ships, but rather supply ships employed from industry and heavily armed: Fujikawa, Yamagiri, Shinkoku, Heian, Rio De Janeiro, Kiyosumi, Gosei, Sankisan, Kanso, Hoki, Hoyo and Emily(flying boat = NOT "Maru"). Some were night dives.

Most are covered extensively over the decades by sea life. The incredible beauty reminded me of the idea, "**And they shall beat their swords into plowshares.**" The Battle of Truk Lagoon demolished Japan's supply base for their Pacific war machine and was a major turning point in WWII. It was a terrible event. Out of this death and destruction, has grown abundant beauty and great variety of life. Yes, these wrecks contain many interesting war memorabilia for those interested, but our main focus is on the living present rather than a dead past. This is why we spent most of our time exploring masts and spars and gun barrels completely encrusted with sea life.

Inside one of these wrecks is a Japanese warplane, a "zero." How tiny! Even little old me could fly it. I spread my front paws and started kicking hard. I dive-bombed, Marilyn. I dive-bombed Robert. I dive-bombed schools of fish until Robert caught me by my tail and Marilyn shook her finger at me..."No...No...Bad Kitty!"

Some of the highlights of these dives follow:

Shinkoku - we discovered a hot-pink and white anemone with feisty little clown fish. Some Lion Fish live on the bottom and we had another enlightenment. Lion Fish behave just as any other fish. They are NOT the aggressive attackers the media has made them out to be! We really enjoyed observing them up close. The DM had to bother them a little to get them out and swimming. I discovered they speak "fluffy kitty" and we exchanged viewpoints.

Fujikawa - Night dive! Everything in bloom! Many little brilliant yellow individual anemones? tube worms? I have GOT to learn the names of these critters!

Rio De Janeiro - Upside down. many life-encrusted spars in relatively shallow water and almost like a reef. Spent about an hour, most of it in the area near the propeller.

Emily flying boat - I found the surrounding reef - coral heads and sand patches - to be more interesting. Saw what appeared to be a lavender starfish with points sticking out.

Kanso - Slowly ascending 2 masts and observing all the beauty, it was very easy to take those rest stops suggested by Captain Higgs! And..chase those fish!

Hoki - We swam under it at 136 feet and found several banner angelfish as well as some other larger fish. As a second dive of the day, we almost clicked our computers from yellow to red zone. Again, ascending along the masts made the dive very interesting.

Hoyo - This turned into a night dive and by planning our dive we got about an hour of bottom time on this upside down tanker. This is the only wreck we felt we would like to penetrate. The holes at both bow and stern are cavernous. We went in only about 15 feet, and were definitely intrigued. We had only one light between us (Robert likes to bring out the colors during day dives), no reel, not certified yet (would have been had waves in Miami not been over 6 feet), it was night, and we had no guide. Call us "chickens of the sea". But a definite "must do" in the future.

Miscellaneous

Steel vs. Aluminum - Blue Lagoon Dive Shop uses Steel 80's. Marilyn was able to obtain smaller Steel tanks(67's?). How did Robert know his tanks were steel? When wearing a dive skin, he usually dives with about 12lbs. lead in salt water. With his usually empty BC he sank like a rock and had to add considerable air. He'd already lost some fat buoyancy during the previous several months and discovered through experimentation on future dives that he only needed bet. 5 & 6 lbs. with steel tanks. Later, using the Thorfin's Aluminum ones, he did fine with only 10 lbs. Marilyn also shed from 12 down to 8 with Steels and down to 10 with Aluminums. I don't require any lead when I dive on my little pony bottle. Air consumption lowered even more with less weight.

Robert and I did 16 dives and Marilyn did 14 - during six days. Every one was a learning experience filled with beauty, inspiration and mind-expansion. Speaking of learning experiences, on several dives there were some jellyfish present. These have almost no tentacles trailing and, having a diameter of about 10 inches Robert played with several by placing his hand over the

top and turning them upside down for a closer look. Hey! They also have stinging cells along their circumference. Next time when he shows off to Marilyn, he'll be a little more careful! Sometimes I would see these jellyfish caught amongst the coral, and fish looking a little like butterfly fish with needle-nose snouts/mouths feeding on them. I don't believe this is fair game for dive kitties.

During a surface interval, I free-dived on a zero in shallow water (15-20 feet), and on another day during the surface interval the sub-chaser, **Suzuki**, in 10 feet at the bow and around 40 feet at the stern. This could be an excellent "shallow reef" dive/penetration. Yes - I like to free-dive because I started out that way years ago and find it an excellent aerobic activity which keeps me in better shape. On land I have become the terror of the aviary...I always get that bird.

We are definitely now "hooked" on the South Pacific! Do we feel the long flight from Miami is worth the effort? You betcha! Especially when I can sleep most of the way and chase birds and fish in my dreams!

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