

Another group of islands to explore ... great! Before we entered the country, we applied by email to obtain the FSM Cruising Permit. Simple form to fill, no fees. You can download the form online ( ) and email it ( - we did not send anything in the mail or fax) We got our 3-month initial cruising permit by email, we printed it out and presented it when checking into Kosrae and had no problem at all. Several other cruisers who did not have their permit in hand for diverse reasons had a few difficulties on arrival as Immigration need to first see your cruising permit. Our advice: do not apply too early, apply when you are pretty sure of your arrival date, ask enough time and do not hesitate to email several times to first get confirmation that your demand was received and to remind them to send you the signed permit by email. We had a new permit issued for an extra 3-month when we were in Pohnpei without difficulties.

**KOSRAE:** After a slow but uneventful (much better than rough and exciting with breaking gear!) passage from Kwajalein, we arrived in scenic and well-protected Lelu harbor. We anchored at N05deg19'72- E163deg01'37 right in front of the ACE hardware (back of the store, looks like a warehouse (no sign). Anchor in 30-40ft, muddy bottom ... lay out plenty of chain to avoid dragging when occasional wind shifts are experienced. Sometimes whirlwinds are experienced and you need plenty of swinging room.

We read back in old late 80's ssca bulletin that Ted Sigrah, the owner of ACE was a great friend of cruisers so we looked for him. He has since passed away, but fortunately his eldest son, Smith and brothers took on the relay in welcoming cruisers on their island. Very interesting to peruse in these numerous visitors books signed by cruisers (several we knew ☺ over more than 30 years! You are welcome to tie your dinghy to his seafront concrete steps and pass between their house and the Ace Hardware store. We recommended Smith to become the SSCA CS for Kosrae.

Kosrae is the Eastern state in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and should not be missed. Very laid back, this island is fun to visit!

What a contrast to the low-lying islands of the Marshall Islands! Big mountains, some waterfalls and great soil for growing food!

To go around the island, hitchhiking is the easiest method but getting in one of the 10 taxis only takes a phone call.

The entry formalities were painless with Customs & Immigration clearances made ashore in Tofol. I showed them our Cruising Permit obtained in advance via email and it was fine.

When back at Ace Hardware dock, I met the Quarantine officer who came onboard to check for restricted animals or plants, ... Alas for Zenne & Zwetke, pets are not allowed ashore, but are confined onboard. The only fee on arrival is US\$25 for quarantine.

I went to the phone company (FSMTC) to get a SIM card for my mobile phone so we can have easier contacts with shore facilities all thru FSM during the next 4 months. I also bought 2 refill cards, one used for the phone and one we used to top up our a wifi account (\$5 for 64Mb). Fine for checking your emails and search the net but not a great rate to down or upload big audio and video files! It might be better then to pay by the min at the internet-café. Speed is ok. Some places on the island have wifi coverage. As far as anchorage goes, Lelu harbour repeater antenna is not functioning since months now but by luck, cruisers are welcome to dinghy (or go by road) to the Pacific Tree Lodge resort where wifi is accessed from their restaurant terrace. Nice to have dining and enjoy the setting in the natural mangrove tree park too. Mark & Maria are great people, very helpful and their prices very

reasonable so may as well patronize their friendly resort. Unless other cruisers are there to show you the low-tide route by dingy, it's best to go there at high tide or by car first and ask Mark to make you a map of the route. The resort offers inexpensive meals and they organize theme nights with discounted dishes. They have pizza & movie night, lobsters & mangrove crab happy hour nights, etc ... Two cruising couples took advantage of the special cruiser's discounts to take their PADI Open Water course. We went diving with them and were impressed by the abundance of healthy coral reefs! You can also dive on both wrecks in the harbor. All dive sites around the islands have small boat moorings where you are welcome to tie your dinghy to dive (they are not big boat moorings). Since the seas can be a bit confused, it might be easier to go diving with Mark when you want to dive outside the harbor. You can also ask them to book hiking tours. We recommend going with guide Salik to the Menke ruins (easy 3 1/2 h RT) and had a dip in the river (what a treat after 14 months in flat river-less Marshalls!). Another fun hike is to go with Hamilton to the Olum waterfalls & WWII Japanese tunnels. We also walked to the Lelu ruins, which are right behind Ace Office Supplies store, from there we crossed to the other side of Lelu island and walked around the island's East coast, along the harbor pass, back into the harbor. Once the paved road ends, you can trek along the footpath, along the mountain edge to the beach and back to the paved road towards the main dock.

To stay in the anchorage in the South, Utwe bay, you need to obtain permission from the village chief and port authority in advance. The reason is perhaps to protect the pirate Bully's wreck with said treasure still buried in the area! You can also moor on one of 3 giant moorings in Okat anchorage on the NW side (we hear there is wifi there as the anchorage is close to the airport. Okat is also a port of entry/exit, but is far away from anything except the runway, and a small boat marina with snack store.

We asked the police if we could use our mini-scooters around and the attorney general was consulted, as they never saw such small bikes! Yes, we can drive them around Kosrae after we pay the registration fee for motorcycles of \$5/year. Kosrae is perfect to drive with bicycles or mopeds because the paved road is in excellent shape and not much inclines. After some engine fine-tuning and mechanical problems, we enjoyed driving around to look, take photos/videos, trade for local food, The wx here is quite wet but beautiful sunny days are legions too!

We enjoyed Kosrae fertile ground bounty like bananas, papayas, tangerine, local durian, breadfruits, hard & soft taro, ...green vegetables are available but it takes a lot of searching among the many roadside stands. Fortunately, taxi drivers were amenable to stopping at each one and waiting. (as reported by one cruising couple).

Some friends leaving Majuro decided to sail straight to Pohnpei ... we were very happy to have made the slight detour here, as this is a well worth a stop ... we stayed almost 6 weeks!

**POHNPEI** : before leaving Kosrae, we had obtained the permission to stop in Pingelap and Mokil on our way to Pohnpei (obtained from Pohnpei immigration via Kosrae immigration). We arrived off Pingelap at 10am so we had good light to try to find a possible anchorage. Alas, we did not find any possible anchorage anywhere along the lee side of Pingelap ... from the breaking protective outer-reef, the depth really plummets (we could not even get a reading on the depth sounder). So it's with regret that we left without a visit ashore. Since Mokil was 60nm away, we could not arrive before dark so we continued on to Pohnpei. Just before rounding the NW corner of Pohnpei lagoon, we had a big rainstorm with squally winds so we got our excitement at the end of the trip and for entering the pass (as did several other sailors when arriving). The main pass into Pohnpei lagoon and the way to the port area is well marked, easy, and straightforward. The local authorities do insist that yachts tie to the

main dock both for check-in and check-out time. Both times we ended up waiting hours for some officials to arrive so we could finish the process. Perhaps one day they will make the whole process easier to yachts and on themselves as well! Incoming fees were \$25 for quarantine and outgoing fees were \$65 to harbor authorities. These are flat fees independent of boat size or length of stay. Yachts that arrived outside of normal business hours or weekend had some overtime to pay. The fee varied, according to the affected yachties we spoke to; sometimes the fee charged was nominal, sometimes substantial. There didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to the amount charged.

After clearing in, yachts proceed to the inner anchorage at the head of the bay in calm waters. We had heard from others that the way in was very tricky with many hazards, and were given GPS points, and told to ask for a local guide. We eyeballed it in with good light at a relatively low tide, so it was fairly easy to see the shallows. It's really pretty simple: you basically stay close to the shore on your port side. From the dock, proceed in staying close to the dredged area that looks like an unfinished marina project, go straight towards a big pile of construction sand with a large cargo-type ship tied there, turn right following along that ship and some wreckage along the shore. Turn left again following the shore a 100 ft off or so, then you'll see some markers to show the way clear of dangers but these are just poles without red or green markings. One pole will be seaward of a lone bush and the shore, pass to the right of that, and pass to the left of the next marker and head toward the catamarans (these are local boats, so should still be there for some time). Some local speedboats may show you the way or some yachties previously arrived. You will see some local yachts at moorings on the East side, you have plenty of room to anchor west of them. Access ashore can be in 3 places as of now: our usual was at the old broken down Rumours bar & marina pier and boat ramp. You can tie at the dilapidated pier or right at the ramp. Walking 100 yds from the ramp, to the right on the path, you will find the house of the SSCA cruising station hosts John & Joan Ranahan. Enjoy meeting them, share potlucks and pick their brain for local life. Slightly to the right of the Rumours landing is the site of a new sportfishing boat marina in construction, where they do not welcome cruisers at this time. More to the right, just around a Chinese fishing boat wreck, you will find a small harbour where you can also tie your dinghy and access Rusty Anchor, the local yachties hang out in a huge unfinished building on the hill. Wayne, the Aussie owner provide free wifi access at the pub and in the anchorage so we all patronize his bar/restaurant with pleasure. On the east side of the anchorage, you can also tie up your dinghy at the small Polynesian village. Robinson, a guy from that village will probably dinghy out to greet you. He sometimes comes by with local produce to sell. From any of these 3 landing places, you can walk to the main road and access Kolonia walking. Taxis are \$1 a ride anywhere in Kolonia. If you bought a sim card in Kosrae, you can use your phone in the other 3 FSM states but your rate will be higher as they consider it roaming!

We stayed 2 months in Pohnpei because we were so busy exploring all the attractions the island has to offer, from the Pohnpei/FSM Cultural day on March 31<sup>st</sup> to hikes to great waterfalls, the ruins of Nan Madol, diving, surfing, a tour of the island by car, exploring some lagoon islands and eating in the numerous inexpensive restaurants in town. Many cruisers like Kolonia as it is not too big but big enough to support businesses we need from time to time. If you need some really good guy to fix any computer problems, we can personally recommend [Kalioedwin@gmail.com](mailto:Kalioedwin@gmail.com) 320-4514 located just before the causeway to the port/airport. Edgar Santos, the Pohnpei Visitors Bureau manager is also very helpful. The PVB is located in the botanical garden just after the public library. Internet access is no longer free at the library but \$10/month. You have a big ACE Hardware, several supermarkets and Simon's, a local produce market. Postal Warning: when using the USPS

to get packages in Micronesia (or Marshall islands) ... if you need it asap, and tracked, best is to use the Express Mail as sometimes the Priority Mail packages get put on the ship in Guam and then you might wait 6-8 weeks before getting them ... Express Mail and Priority mail that goes on the plane otherwise arrive in 10-15 days. They both go on the bi-weekly plane. If Express or Priority packages hit all the connections just right, you can get a 'em in as little as 7 days.

**ANT atoll:** Only 25 nm away from Pohnpei harbor and a world of difference. Here you are back in the atoll with low-lying islands fringed with coconuts and good snorkeling. Make sure to obtain permission from the owners in Pohnpei. The pass is well showed (but slightly off) on CM93 charts but exact position can be seen on Google Earth. I found that the pass was described better in the CM93 than in Google Earth so one should never rely to exclusively on GE

We anchored close to the north end of the island north of the pass in clear water - 25ft on sand with coral rubbles and a few well-seen bomies. The islands offer the usual walks and beachcombing. The pass offers great drift snorkeling when tide is coming in with great corals and great visibility. There is a dramatic wall on the north side.

We met Kimo, one of the 2 guys who live now on the tip of the pass southern island. Nice fellow you can trade with.

Passage to Chuuk atoll: We originally planned to stop in Lukunor & Satawan atolls in the Morlock group. Considering the light winds we experience now, the extra 120 nm to cover if we make that detour and our rare required arrival time in the Philippines in September, we decided to skip these islands so we have more time in Chuuk and the atolls on the way to Yap afterwards.

**Chuuk atoll:** We entered the atoll by the NE pass, the one used by big ships, easy and straightforward. The isolated reefs are well marked (not sure if lights are working as we entered early morning). We proceeded to Weno to clear in. After rounding the north side, around the airport runway, you can see the commercial harbour. We had called several times on VHF CH16 and only got a reply from Perry, the wx man, (he is also a Pastor), who called the port captain for us. The port office burned down just a week ago so they don't have any office at this time. We docked at the commercial wharf between a cargo & a Chinese fishing vessel to wait for the officials to show up. We arrived at 10am and by 4pm, we had seen the port captain, customs & immigration but not the quarantine officer. Since offices close by this time, we left the dock and anchored in front of the Truk Stop hotel, just a few hundred yards away. Remember that Chuuk is at GMT+10 not GMT+11 like Pohnpei. Since we arrived during business hours, we did not take the hints of overtime we got from Customs & Immigration who came during lunch time. Quarantine inspection fee is the usual FSM \$25 fee. The port captain told us during checking in that upon departure we will be charged a special anchoring fee (no matter where you anchor anywhere in the whole Truk lagoon!) of \$25 for the first 48h and of \$10/day thereafter. He agreed with me that this steep charge was one of the reasons the arriving yachts were not too pleased and do not stay very long! Mason Fritz, the Tourism Office manager understands also that this kind of tax actually results in the govt losing income versus charging low fees, which would attract more cruisers, who spend some good money to dive, dine and make other local expenditures. Perhaps someday the officials who impose that anchoring fee will also understand that lowering or abolishing that fee would attract a lot more dollars than now!

The wx is variable from May so make sure you can turn swing 360 degrees wherever you anchor.

From the Truk Stop or Blue lagoon anchorages you can access wifi from the local phone company.

We decided to first scuba dive some of the famous Truk Lagoon wrecks with the Truk Stop dive center. Cindy and local crew took us out to explore some of the wrecks. You go in a big fiberglass boat for a 2-tank dive. Being Nitrox certified and diving with it, I was able to extend my bottom time in order to get great video footage. We recommend going with the Truk Stop diving center as it is the most serious & well run one. The wreck diving WAS the best of the Pacific WWII wrecks that we have dived in the N and S Pacific. These wrecks were impressive, had lots of artifacts and cargo still left and identifiable, were well preserved for their age, and most impressive of all was the soft coral and marine growth that carpet many of the wrecks. It was the most prolific, and colorful of any wrecks we have dived so far. It was wonderful to see soft corals again. (hadn't seen them in such profusion since our days diving the Maldives and the Red Sea.) Ever since becoming Dive Instructors, we had heard about diving the fleet of Japanese wrecks sunk in Truk Lagoon by the US during Operation Hailstorm, as retribution for the attack on Pearl Harbor. We had always had the impression that the wrecks were deep, like 150-200ft. and it was "expert level" diving. So we were quite surprised when we found out that the majority of wrecks are well within sport diving depths, (many in 70 –140ft range). The wrecks are so massive that you can enjoy them without penetrating any where where you can't see light from the outside. Many of the ships are up right and some of the masts are only 30 to 60 ft deep and could almost be a "reef" dive by themselves, so covered are they in colorful marine growth. It would have been a great shame to sail by Truk \*Chuuk" without diving on the famous wrecks, just because we were told it was a "dangerous" place with "bad" locals.

We had been warned so often to not visit Chuuk as the hassle and thievery made it not worth it ... unless we were avid divers. We are ... so we came ... but as prepared as we could. We did not go out at night and we only went to town accompanied. You cannot go anchor anywhere in the lagoon without prior permission and you run the risk to be asked fees or have rocks thrown at you if you try to land on any island. We had been warned about thievery on yachts in Chuuk so we took our full safety measures like locking everything day & night, dinghy up on the davits at night or locked up at the stern during the day and most of all, we had our 2 Schipperke doing full 24/7 watch/guard duty on deck. We had no problem, nor any feeling of being unsafe. In fact, all but a few of the locals were very friendly and smiled and waved and loved looking at the dogs as they passed in their runabouts. They seemed pretty much like Pacific islanders everywhere.

The one time, we went by dinghy to town to buy diesel, we were hassled by a helper who wanted \$20 to assist me at the gas station and blackmailed \$1 to have tied to supposedly at a private wall! From what we could gather by talking to Mason and Cindy and others, it seems that the Chuukese are jealously territorial, will try to charge money whenever possible to outsiders (even other locals) or will be unwelcoming to strangers, and are easily provoked if opposed especially when drunk. They are some of the greatest "opportunists" when it comes to "borrowing"!

Our departure from Chuuk was quite eventful ... and stressful! I knew that the best time in the day to depart was at the beginning of the afternoon, so we have enough daylight to cover the 16nm inside the lagoon (clear of any dangers according to the charts) so we could reach the west pass (unmarked by islets or navigation aids) before dark. On the other hand, I knew that if we wanted to check out during lunch hours, the Immigration and Customs would be very happy to charge us with overtime charges! First thing in the morning, I had the Visitors Bureau secretary call both immigration & Customs to arrange our check out. Unlike most other countries we have visited before, they insist on yachts tying up at the main commercial

dock for both checking in and out procedures! Main docks are not designed for small yachts with high walls, dirty black fenders or sometimes worse, dangerous metals or concrete protuberances so it was not a good news that we had to dock. No choice as their foreign (US) training and little imagination or empathy, made it impossible for them to agree on anything else! I scheduled 130pm just after lunch time.

Mid-morning, the boat driver who was to take us to film the next island (old capital island) finally showed up and we went filming. But because everywhere we could land to film ashore, we would be asked to pay fees, or some could throw stones at us (!), the boat driver just let us film from the boat at a safe distance from shore. Yes, natives here in Chuuk, have a long time bad reputation of spoiled children and bad temper (especially when drunk). When we came back from that quick trip, I dove to retrieve our mooring and we proceeded to the dock.

The big old SS Thorfinn, a live-aboard dive boat, which has been here about 30 years and which we visited the day before was at the dock getting fuel. There was plenty of room behind him so we tied up there. On the other side of that dock were a cargo ship and a USCG visiting ship.

The Immigration lady tried to blackmail me into paying \$80 overtime charges because the law (!) tells them to come 1 hour prior ... thus, 12:30, which was during their lunch time! I argued with them as to the impropriety of these charges. refused politely and she did not push the issue! But we barely averted a catastrophe. Right in front of us, the SS Thorfinn had finished fueling, the Captain had his lines cast off and had his stern pivoting away from the dock. We thought he would back up and pass on our side. The first time, the captain yelled at us from his bridge to get out of the way as he could do nothing but bear down on us! We both thought he was joking! Why would he not inform us of that fact BEFORE casting his lines off? But on his second warning, we realized that indeed, he was bearing down on us, his bow sliding along the dock and his stern to starboard in a pincher, we realized quickly that this heavy monster was going to crunch us at the dock unless we moved out of the way very quickly. We had our docklines released in record speed and I started backing up along the dock. Alas, being tied up on the port side (left side), when backing up, the propeller tends to pull our stern (rear) to port (left) so our stern was bouncing on the wall! By luck the huge rubber dock pilings kept us from crushing our wooden hull into the concrete pier ... black rubber marks and some paint scratches are better than broken planking! Our luck was that the pier angled away to the left so the boat was able to pivot to the left and get out of the way of the unmanoeuvrable monster ! Thanks for Jackie who managed to fend our stern off the wall and tell me what was happening where she was, thanks to my calm (even if adrenaline was flowing quite high), thanks to the universe to give just the time we needed and a dock curving away ... No thanks to Lance, who just left without anything to say over the VHF! I think that 30 sec more and the ship would have crushed us against the dock! Now, we had to come back to the dock to complete our departure formalities! Now, I could resume my talk with the Immigration dragon lady about refusing to pay abusive overtime charges. She was charging for her as well as for Customs (she said) but I could see the Customs guy very embarrassed by the whole situation and not being part of it at all! (Probably only would get a little if anything of it!). The flaw in the system here in FSM is that these officials get to keep any overtime charges directly in their pockets. Collecting overtime when yachts or ships clear in or out on WE, holidays, or after hours is not enough ... best to even invent laws and regulations to make sure to charge more overtime! During that time, still no port captain came to clear us out so I knew we could not leave yet anyway! So I politely just refused to pay these abusive charges and called her bluff. Ranting and saying she would report us so we might have problems when we check in Yap, she reluctantly gave us back our passports, stamped, a sure sign that she knew she

was on shaky grounds! It was only at quarter to three that we finally saw the port captain who happily handed us the anchoring bill and port fees, a total of about \$300! (\$10/day) By luck, I had previously arranged with the Chuuk Visitors Bureau that they would have these local charges waived because of my video work and other promotion for the States. The port captain was aware of this (!) but a phone call to the right person finally cleared that up so he gave us his clearance with a smile and "bon voyage"!

It was now about 3pm local time so we had to use the engine to give us extra speed to exit the lagoon with still daylight over the pass ..we made it with about half an hour to spare, no more! What a day! Far from the yachting magazine of cruisers just sipping a cocktail in their cockpit at sunset with nothing else to care!

So, we can only agree on the cruising advice to skip Chuuk unless you are an avid diver ... and then, be forewarned!

**PULUWAT atoll:** Our first stop on our way to Yap. This atoll is part of Chuuk state. After an easy sailing with moderate East wind, we entered the narrow pass (we saw 10ft min depth) into the atoll. Many friendly natives soon visited us and we let them know what we could do to help anyone. You might or might not be asked for an anchor/landing fee. We had friends visiting earlier this year who were not asked any but we had other friends who were charged \$35 just 2 weeks prior to our arrival and we were ourselves asked \$50 by Joey & Alex with threats of not being able to set one foot ashore and even have to leave the lagoon if we did not comply with that fee. Not a very nice beginning! But I was able to negotiate it in exchange of some gifts and assistance to the villagers! Earlier, we had met several locals who were nice and interested to trade later for fruits & lobsters, and we had negotiated the regular \$35 anchoring fee (the second village) with the mayor's (also chief from the Catholic village) younger brother who accepted a gift instead! But now, just before dark, these 2, Joey & Alex pretended to be the only real representatives of the chief, who happened to be away from the island!)

Later on, we found out more about the deal of collecting anchor fees. Even tho this is a very small atoll with only about 300 people, they live in 2 villages, a catholic one and a protestant one! Each village has a traditional chief and the atoll has an elected mayor (who naturally is one of the 2 chiefs). The mayor was away at this time so the lower chief (Joey) tried to take advantage by collecting the fee, for himself! He admitted a few days later that he had been educated in Washington State and only came back here a few weeks ago when his dad passed away (the chief of his protestant village). He graduated in divine sciences (?) and is a protestant pastor even tho he is not the pastor here (there is one already). I asked him if Jesus asks to welcome visitors by charging money and threatening them if they do not comply, or if generosity actually reaps a lot more benefits! Like in every similar situation we have encountered before, I explained to him that cruisers, when welcomed, end up giving things and helping the local community in many ways ... and I think he got the point. The next yacht coming in may get fruits as gifts instead of an inflation-adjusted \$100 anchoring fee!

We visited many people and checked their solar panels, batteries, etc... fixed local canoes & fiberglass boats with epoxy ... and traded for fruits & lobsters! So if you bring with you some polyester resin, epoxy, or fiberglass ... there will be plenty of opportunities to help out ☺ While here, the atoll was visited by a big USCG vessel which gave some water safety training to some locals and mostly brought some cargo from relatives living in Guam, where the ship is based. Since the big ship cannot enter the atoll (too shallow for their big draft), the natives had to go out to the ship anchored 1 nm away (!) to ferry the goods to the island. The USCG fast tender boats made trips for hours and I even went to do one run as the ship did

not want to linger with the approaching typhoon! Since 2 days, we saw on the wx forecasts that a circulating storm started in Chuuk and was developing rapidly. The path of the storm was NW so it would pass close to Puluwat. By luck, this atoll offers the best protection you could get as it has an inner lagoon that is completely surrounded by islands so the wind does not have a lot of fetch to build up seas! We carefully eyeballed our way in (we saw 6ft min depth at medium tide) and we anchored on our 2 biggest and best anchors, able to turn 360 and be away from land or corals. The bottom is good sand so the anchors should hold very well! By luck, the tropical storm warning was canceled because the winds decreased so we lucked out again!

Two local canoes came back in time from a week trip in Pulap to catch some turtles. The skills of sailing canoe building are quite impressive in this atoll. They can truly build using only local materials. They are building a traditional canoe this year that they will sail to Okinawa, Japan next year. That project is paid by some foundation, who comes here a few weeks at a time to film the whole building process. They insist on all materials being traditional. Next year by sailing to Japan, they will demonstrate the old natural navigation of the old Micronesian sailing navigators who used only wave patterns, clouds and stars to navigate the Pacific. Once that canoe arrives in Japan, it will be placed in a museum! Now, you will never guess what Rapwill, the old navigator asked me to fix! A small portable GPS someone sent him! This GPS was dead on arrival here so it shows him (us) the fallacies of electronics versus his old skills handed from generation to generation!

**LAMOTREK atoll:** Our first atoll in the Yap state. We sailed via the Eastern pass at N07d28'12-E146d20'04 in the wide pass and found a minimum of 24ft depth. From there we sailed towards the anchorage, a 35-50ft white sand patch in front of Lamotrek island. Beautiful view of the island before sunset! Soon after anchoring, we had the visit of Francis, the Chief's translator. After his visit, we went ashore to pay our respect to the Chief, Manuel. Like usual, we briefly introduced ourselves, stated our reasons for visiting the atoll, offered our assistance in solar energy/LED lights & repairing broken things (if possible). We also offered a few symbolic gifts. The presents were received with pleasure and the chief told us that other cruisers had already made our publicity a few months before and the villagers were waiting for the trimaran with the LED lights! No fees asked here when cruisers offer help, as islanders have appreciated the assistance of numerous visiting cruisers since a long time! We did see in the chief's visitors book that some times \$5 was collected from visitors. The Chief's wife was so tiny and cute! She really took a shine to Jackie and gave her a lava-lava that she had woven herself, and each time we visited, she always wanted Jackie to sit next to her.

What a difference with Puluwat! Like Puluwat, the main structures are the huge, giant-beamed canoe houses built of thatch and breadfruit trees. But, the island is so much better kept ... people clean up around their house, there are clean pathways, you can see more flowers... a much nicer place to live in. We were invited to the graduation of kindergarten (☺ the kids had nice traditional make up and we all partook in a small island feast with (except for some white rice), only island foods. The people here seem to be more active and sharp minded. Perhaps it is due to the education system much better run than east of here. It seems many have been educated in Guam or the states and have used the education to improve village life. What a surprise to see the primary teacher's office with computers, printers ... all run by solar system with lots of deep cycle batteries (we even saw 10yr old Rolls batteries still running!), solar panels & inverters. No graffiti, and the school well-kept! It was great to see the children at work cleaning up the grounds! While some people might be a little shy to speak English, when they do, the language is quite good. It appears too that Yap state takes better care of their outer-islands, with better political representation on Yap



island. They still carve island canoes with their own breadfruit trees, using only manual tools. They are now building a big canoe to sail to other islands with big mahogany logs they received from Yap. Any old sails are welcome!

If any cruiser passing in 2013-14 has any old sails to give/trade away ... he will be warmly welcomed, as they need sails for the new canoe! Chief Manuel and interpreter Francis (principal of kindergarten) seem to have the welfare of their people at heart. We had the chance to film up close one of the sailing canoes and the women dancing. Our first Yap island confirm what we heard about them being more traditional ... no western clothing here ... men prefer to wear a fabric loin-cloth and women are bare-breasted wearing a lava lava wrap-around ... they only use fiberglass & outboards when really needed ... It was also nice to talk with the new generation who is reflecting on the future, on what direction they want to take ... and while they do not want to go back to the old ways completely, they want to backup from too much western ways ... we really hope they will be able to take as much as positive aspects of both cultures! It was nice also to hear that the people here do not want to charge anchoring/visiting

The island people seem to get along quite well and the ambiance was good .. you can tell vibrations! We filmed the ladies singing & we drank tuba (fermented coconut flower sap) with the men. When we were there, the passenger/cargo ship from Yap brought in the island high school students from Yap for the summer break, and they seem to fit right back on the islands. Some adults took the same ship back to Yap to go on vacation in the capital. All in all, Lamotrek is one of the atolls where we were felt the most welcome and we recommend it to our fellow cruisers :)

**IFALIK atoll:** The passage into the lagoon is a little tricky, as it does not correspond exactly to neither the CM93 nor GE! We arrived with SW wind and rain and a large SW swell and had to approach the pass cautiously very closely to be able to see exactly where the pass was. On CM93 it shows 2 small rock islets on the starboard reef ... on GE it does not show any rock, islets! In reality, there are 2 small islets with coconut trees but these are connected to the port side reef. On the approach, stay close to the island on your port side and follow roughly parallel to it's shore line and that will put you in line to see the channel between the reefs. In regular E to NE winds, it should be calm and easy to see in good light. Just inside the pass, watch for isolated shallow reefs just in front of you and keep mostly to the right side of the channel and follow along where you see the sandy shallows dropping off into deeper water. We had a SW swell push us through, between the surf that was breaking on both reefs each side of the channel. Kind of exciting the first time! Once pass the shallows, the bay opens up and there's plenty of room in 40-50 ft of water. Our anchor was barely touching the 50ft sandy bottom when natives in dugout canoes surrounded us. Our dogs did their job well in deterring young kids from climbing aboard uninvited! Soon after, we were visited by Mano, head of the 4 chiefs (4 villages here) who we invited aboard. He was dying to get some coffee and told us more about the atoll as we shared coffee and cookies. He warned us to keep anything off the decks as young people have stolen things off boats before! And young people are difficult to control by the chiefs! Looks like schooling off-island and action DVD movies have a worse negative impact here than other places. No problem, our 2 Schipperke will be on "Chuuk guard duty"! (years ago, we used to call it Venezuela security measures!). Next, chief Mano told us that they charge a \$20/pp landing fee and a \$10 anchoring fee! Sounds like cruiseship charges so I explained to him that while it makes sense for tourists who are visiting for a few hours only and not helping locals in any way, most cruisers, on the other hand, are very giving in many ways... from repairing things to offering gifts and trading more than fairly. He agreed and accepted our help/gifts instead of the fees. ( After talking to all the chiefs from the islands that wanted to impose fees, we got

the impression that the anchoring fee idea is something that Yap State told the chiefs they could charge to help them get cash into the islands.)

We arrived here just in time as we had westerly winds and rain for the next 2 days. Even tho, the west side of the atoll is only reefs, the atoll is only a mile or so wide, so we only gently rolled in about 10kts of wind, and even in 20 kts or more in squalls, we never felt uncomfortable or in danger. The bottom was good sand and we always anchor to swing 360 degrees. This was a good resting place before we continued west towards Yap!

It turned out that the natives were always respectful about approaching the boat after that first day. The fact that there were 2 noisy fierce-looking dogs may have helped. Many folks, young and old were eager to trade food-stuffs and we ended up with 4 complete bunches of bananas, breadfruit, taro, papayas (mostly green) drinking coconuts and lemons. We also traded for some lobsters, taking only the larger sized and refusing the small and female with eggs. Lobster is harder to come by because the natives have different rules among themselves as to reef access and we didn't want to cause someone to "poach" on someone else's reef. We had heard and read differing reports about Ifalik. Some mentioned that Chief Mano was always asking for things, one boat was not happy about the fees and said some people threw rocks at their boat. We find that an open, reasonable approach to dealing with people is usually the best plan, and sometimes we gently, and in a nice way, decline to give things that we don't want to give. Letting every one keep their "face" is always the best policy. Chief Mano agreed to waive the fees when he found out that Luc could convert a fishing beacon buoy that was found washed up on the beach into a solar powered LED light system for his house and out buildings. Luc showed some of the younger guys how to do the conversion so they could do it themselves if other beacons showed up on the beach. Ifalik was different in it's "ambiance" than either Puluwat or Lamotrek, There was a sophisticated system of major and minor plant-lined pathways to each of the villages, and there seemed to be a lot more groomed open space between dwellings so that the island had almost a "park-like" feel to it. Taro patches are more prominent and neatly kept. People were friendly when approached and spoken to (again, English is quite good), but are not as outgoing. The canoe houses were prominent features as in the other 2 atolls and canoe building and the making of elaborate bamboo fish traps are current activities. It's amazing to see how, in all the atolls, they can make the parts of the canoes fit together so exactly just by eyeballing it and then whacking away with a hoe-like tool with such fine precision. We didn't stay long in Ifalik, as a good weather window came up to jump the 250 mi to Sorol. But we will never forget the idyllic scene we witnessed as we exited the pass surrounded by a fleet of colorfully painted canoes rowing out to set out their fishing nets in the pass, and were passed by a large sailing canoe full of young people coming back in the pass from an excursion outside the reef. What a memorable exit!

**SOROL atoll:** The passage into the lagoon is actually an area on the southern side, where the outlying reef is deeper than the rest, not a "pass" per se. We entered at N08deg07'611-E140deg22'301 towards N08deg07'669-E140deg22'624 and found a minimum of 11 feet at mid tide. We anchored on 50ft of good sand at N08deg07'88-E140deg22'24. If you have a shallow draft, you could anchor closer to shore amidst the coral formations that reach 5ft from the surface. Good protection from N to E to SE here. Sorol is a deserted atoll (once populated by about 25 people). Good beachcombing and drinking coconut gathering around the different islets, as well as the remains of a motor catamaran and big Chinese fishing boat that wrecked themselves here. On the East island, we saw plenty of monitor lizards, some quite big. In the other islets, we did not see lizards but plenty of birds nesting and even a coconut crab out during the day. It was also very refreshing to see many recent traces of

turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs. In view of the numerous turtle breeding sites we have encountered in Micronesia, we cannot blame the Micronesians for the occasional turtle hunting and turtle egg gathering they do! We experienced some West and SW winds making the anchorage a little roly, especially at high tide when the southern barrier reef is submerged. We did some very successful spearfishing on the NW side of the atoll, outside and inside the lagoon around the last 2 islands on the western side of the atoll. The coral is nothing special, and not much of it, but the fish life was interesting, especially on the drop off outside the reef. At high tide, near the far western island, the southern reef is submerged and you can dinghy back and forth over the reef. We anchored the dinghy on the inside in shallow water and snorkeled the dramatic wall that drops straight down to over 100ft. The visibility was great, and we saw white and black-tipped sharks, a big Napoleon wrasse, a BIG sea turtle (probably waiting for nightfall to lay her eggs), schools of parrots and snappers, and an occasional large grouper. One other time, in the shallows, we saw the hugest bump-headed parrotfish that we had ever seen. I thought it was a 50 gallon black plastic garbage bag that had caught on a rock in the shallow water and was rippling with the waves, but on closer approach, the tail fin came out of the water and we could see the huge dark green silhouette of the fish as it just lay there not moving but for a couple fin flips! After visiting so many people in Micronesia it was nice to experience some solitude in this nice uninhabited atoll! We had some idyllic days of blue skies, fluffy white clouds, white sand, green trees, gliding birds, and a myriad shades of blue and aqua water all around us. Some days really ARE like the magazines show it!

**YAP:** The entrance thru the outer-reefs is well marked and lit at night. We still are happy to not have come in at night because once you arrive in the anchorage, you have to pay attention to shallow areas. We called port authorities on CH16 and were advised to proceed to the yacht anchorage close to the bridge. Look for the big fuel tanks. The commercial dock is further inside, on the other side of the man-made peninsula, and not visible from the bridge anchorage. We anchored at N09deg30'87-E138deg07'35. (40ft over mud) Some officials were already ashore, sitting at a small terrace in the back of a dive shop. (Right next to what we later found out was the Marina Bar and Grill. The marina existed at the time of the US presence, but there are not facilities now. The 2 small floating docks are owned by the 2 dive centers in that building. Meet the owners to ask about leaving dinghies there. I lowered the dinghy and went ashore with the boat papers to clear in with the usual officials: quarantine, customs, immigration, port control and even EPA. The extensive paperwork was filed leisurely by me with only quarantine & EPA asking to come onboard to inspect for plants, live animals and to make sure the heads will not be used (unless one has a holding tank). Easy & friendly check-in, what a contrast to Chuuk! Only fee was the usual \$25 quarantine fee. (6 months earlier, our friends on a French catamaran described a much different experience. They went to the commercial pier and all officials came aboard with big black shoes and it sounded like they gave them the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree and asked to see their holding tank, and wanted to charge them a fee for coming to the wall.)

It's a good thing that few yachts come here at the same time as the anchorage is quite small, especially with the varied wind directions we experienced and the amount of scope we had out. Three weeks earlier, some other friends anchored on the same side as the commercial dock area, close to the Manta Dive resort. (but they ran on to a shallow reef, and it looked very tight in there to us.) It is very calm this time of the year (July) winds are quite light and tracked all around the clock... we slept very well here, little noise (except Fri disco nite), no swell.

We found Colonia and the rest of Yap to be very clean, neat, and well maintained. The road system is very good with wide, well drained right-of-ways. Our feeling was that the state

government spends more of its money for the public good, and not just filling the pockets of corrupted politicians. Contrasted to Chuuk, it was a breath of fresh air. It was the most nicely kept of the 4 states of FSM and had the most number of traditional buildings, and displays of its unique culture. The Visitor's Bureau (VB) has put in cute road direction signs, and some very nice Memorials to US WWII Vets who crashed or were killed in Yap. The Yapese are proud of their cultural heritage, and are trying to preserve what knowledge they can. The Visitor's Bureau has some beautiful brochures and booklets explaining the history, navigation heritage, dance, WWII history, and the modern side of Yap and it's people. The Marina Restaurant is next to where I checked in and the food (Filipino chef) was good and prices reasonable. You are right in town, easy walking distance to the most modern grocery, and small shops. The US Post Office can be accessed by dinghy by going under the bridge into the inner lagoon. Enjoy domestic rates (as you can in Marshall islands and Palau). Provisioning is limited in Yap, During the 4 weeks we were there, the ship came in once, and within a week all the fresh veggies were gone. They had not had fresh garlic in MONTHS, and onions were also scarce. Local produce is available at the YCA grocery, or take the dinghy into the inner lagoon and look for a bright green building at the water's edge about 2/3rds in on your left side, say hello to Lucy for us. Fresh fish is available at the store at the very right end of the lagoon. \$1.15/ pound for any fish, from small reef fish to larger fish like Trevally and bonito. Tom, at the VB said most folks go directly to the farms themselves for veggies.

Fuel station is right here with a small dock so you can fill your jerry cans right into your dinghy, convenient! You also have paid wifi access on your boat with the local phone company cards. A good alternative is to meet Jeffrey, the hotel manager of the Yap Pacific Dive Resort, and introduce yourself.. He welcomes cruisers to use the pool, facilities and free wifi ... if you scuba with their dive center or take meals and drinks! We took 10 dives with them and found the whole crew very friendly and professional. From your boat, you can go by dinghy under the bridge to their dive center located just 300 yds away! We really recommend the shark-feeding dive, plenty of action there! If you like to see the mantas, Yap is famous for, you better come here between January and April when they mate as during the rest of the year, you won't see as many or (in July) you might not even see any! The tiny exotic Mandarin Fish is, however, guaranteed to be seen at a special site on a sunset dive. (and 80% chance to see mating activity, according to Dieter, the Dive Center manager.) There is also a small local dive center, Nature's Way, next to the Marina Bar & Restaurant, run by Su, a cute, but unusually outspoken, Japanese lady who let us tie our dinghy to her floating pontoon.

A short island tour by car will give you a chance to see the famous stone money "banks" and traditional boat and men's houses. You can see some of these right here in town so don't worry if you can't drive around. There are 2 cultural villages that put on a 3 hr presentation on Tue and Sat if there is enough sign-ups (see hotels or the Visitors Bureau), One major impediment for any visitors interested in walking around or snorkeling on his own is that Yapese are very serious about land and lagoon waters ownership, thus requiring advanced permission and fees often requested. Going without a local guide is not so easy. The dive centers pay quite expensive fees to the land owners, so it's not feasible to go with your own dinghy. One thing you CAN do is a dinghy trip in the inner lagoon and out to the NW reef area or the NE side. It was interesting to go through the German (aka President's) Channel under a bridge. You'll see a large piece of stone money with Japanese engraved letters and a local-style bamboo structure on stilts. Go with at least half tide that's rising, and be prepared to get out of the way if your are there near the time the dive boats go out and come back at 20kts thru the narrow channels. Sat. is a safe day, as most dive shops take that day off. Yap doesn't have as many land attractions and activities, so you probably won't be

tempted to overstay like yachts do in Kosrae and Pohnpei. The good thing is that you will be sooner on your way to Palau or Philippines.

Contact Immigration, Customs & Port Control at least 24h in advance so you can arrange a check-out time, right where you checked in. Painless too and no fees (they had just introduced a departure fee for air passengers during our stay, but we were not charged anything) ☺

### **Some thoughts:**

Looking back at our 6 months in the FSM, we are very glad we spent enough time in Micronesia as the atolls have lots to offer! Each state has a different feel and personality, and the outer atolls have their own flavor as well. We enjoyed them all. FSM-ers generally speak very good English, as this is taught as their common language among the different islanders. As far as the best time to visit Micronesia, here is what we learned from cruisers who crossed Micronesia. The ones who traveled across in Oct-Nov experienced fluky conditions from no wind to numerous squalls (30-50kt) from all directions ... they ended up motoring a lot, sometimes against the wind and seas ... they were quite frustrated and did not enjoy the passage much. The cruisers who waited after Xmas got steady conditions, more reliable tradewinds. The ones like us who take our time, started experiencing milder tradewinds or no winds starting about May. We ended up using the iron sail a lot but we had nice conditions while visiting the atolls. The GRIB Gods were kind to us and were generally accurate during this Jan-July 2012. We seemed to have the Universe on our side as so many times we grabbed a 2-3 day nice weather window, hopping to the next atoll, arriving just in time to be safely anchored when the rain cells and squally weather, or the westerlies set in for a few days.

Nicest officials to check-in/out and most painless: Yap / Worst officials: Chuuk.

We originally planned to visit Palau before continuing to the Philippines but we took longer to explore the FSM (no regrets) so we decided to postpone our discovery of Palau for next year when we have enough time. We signed up for the Davao to Morotai branch of the Sail Indonesia Rally in September since it gives us a perfect opportunity to discover a new area of Indonesia. August is a good time to be in Davao, Philippines as they have big festivities (parades, food tasting, pageants, ... ). The culture and food of the Philippines are calling us!