

KIRIBATI

TARAWA: Not receiving any reply from Tarawa Radio, we anchored, in 15ft of good sand, in the quarantine area just west of the main jetty in Betio. Later, when we raised them, they called the boarding party that I picked up in our dinghy. The checking in was very friendly, the paperwork was painless and to our surprise there were no fees (as we had arrived within regular working hours. I wrote a letter to the customs & immigration dept to ask permission to stop a few days in Abaiang and Butaritari atolls after checking out of Tarawa to sail to Majuro and that request was also granted. Customs granted us 3 days at each island, what we understand is quite good and hopefully sets a new trend in allowing yachts to experience more of the outer islands. Check the tourism website, they have a full section concerning yachts. The main stated reason why it had been so difficult to get permission to stop enroute was that a few years back a yachtsman in Buritaritari took a local girl with him to Majuro. That kind of behavior is totally illegal in any country of the world and we are surprised that a yachtsman would take such risk with the local authorities as well as when arriving in Majuro with a passenger not listed on his outwards clearance papers from Tarawa! 3 years ago, we knew of a Frenchman getting in jail and his boat confiscated in Fiji after smuggling someone from Vanuatu into Fiji! Not very good examples of clean wake ... and situations making perfect reasons for officials to make regulations harder towards cruisers! We had a long and fruitful conversation with the tourism director, who is very keen to have cruisers experience more of Kiribati. We respected our 3 days per atoll to not spoil it for the following cruisers. Flouting the laws of visiting countries when you know the officials will know it is a bad idea as they might not get you ... but they will make life much harder to anyone following in your wake! Reason and reasonable talk with diverse officials as well as making them understand what they can gain by our visits is the way to go! Who won't agree with cruisers helping local people in so many small ways both in remote areas and in their business in developed areas???

The town of Betio and South Tarawa are well described in numerous accounts we have read before: overcrowded and dirty, the kind of place no visitor is impressed with! Amazing how many people can live in such a small area! But that is the capital and thus jobs and opportunities are. But people are friendly enough so we don't mind spending a few days going ashore to accomplish small chores. But once these were done, we were happy to leave the uncomfortable anchorage (long fetch make waters quite choppy and you get the long swell that bounced boats so much! Few sailors think about visiting North Tarawa, they only think about other atolls. We figured that, since the road going from South Tarawa (Betio) to the North point on North Tarawa is cut around 2/3 down and you have to take canoes to cross miles of small islets without road, the people living on North Tarawa are quite remote and thus must live the more traditional and uncrowded way like they do on other atolls. We asked around in Betio and natives confirmed it was true. Thus we sailed across the lagoon with good

sunlight to see any shallow reefs and we anchored off Abaokoro (01d28'93N-173d00'43E). Due to big tidal difference, you end up anchoring quite far from land but the island chain protects the anchorage (no swell here, only wind waves that were not bad at all in 15 kts of Easterly wind).

After a long dinghy ride, we finally anchored the dinghy went we could go no further and walked the last half a mile to the lovely sandy beach. We went towards a small community and met the friendly local constable, Beeni. When we inquired on how we could visit the whole coast towards the North point, he offered us the use of his motorcycle the next day. This was an offer we could not refuse since we discover to our dismay that our 2 mopeds we had checked at a garage in Rotuma would not start at all anymore! So much for the Indian mechanic boasting! Bennie and his family invited to share their lunch (he offered us the lobster they caught the night before) and to rest in their open house until our dinghy would float again. Because you perhaps guessed but during our one hour ashore, the tide continued to recede and now our dinghy was high and dry for another half a mile! With the weight of our 15hp, gas, ... it is quite impossible for both of us to drag it more than a few meters! So we chit chat and had lunch with them for about 4 hours, until tide came back up and we could tow our dinghy floating until deeper water where we could motor back to the boat again! This incident gave us our first taste of Kiribati hospitality. Most of the people in North Kiribati seems to have limited knowledge of English and the ones like the constable that do speak well English did spend some time in South Tarawa and/or get higher education.

The next day, we borrowed his 125cc HONGB (fooled me at first, I read HONDA as intended!) and Jackie in the back, I drove hesitantly at first and almost like a pro at the end (just kidding). We drove the 15 statute miles up and down the coast with numerous photo/video stops and talking with people. The wx has been nice and sunny since we arrived here ... and people hope to get rain soon ... but it has been a very dry season so far!

Beautiful, clean, white sand beaches + a quiet anchorage and very friendly people made this a needed resting stop for a week. We got to barter for lobsters and coconut honey, 2 treats! Got the help in some small ways and be happy to feel appreciated!

ABAIANG: We even caught a fish along Tarawa western lagoon edge during a nice daysail to this close by atoll. Easy navigation into the lagoon with good light. Some of the shallower spots were even marked with sticks! The waypoints of the Abaiang channel on the tourism website are correct and we anchored in front of the radio control tower where the town council and police station are located. When we landed the next morning, both the police officers and the town council were in meetings so we walked around the small settlements and spoke with some people. Later we had a chance to introduce ourselves to the chief of police and we presented our clearance papers with the special 3-day Abaiang visit. He welcomed us on the island and even offered us the use of a motorcycle to tour the island the next day. What we did, we toured the whole island to North first with a visit to the big church built around 1907 by a Belgian missionary who was

here from the very late 1800 until after WWII ... We also stopped in the village of Belgium! Took plenty of photos & video of nice beaches, houses, and people. A nice day of discovering the island! Our last day, we sailed North in the lagoon and anchored off uninhabited motus where we did some beach walking, swimming and relaxing. Next day, we exited the atoll by the middle pass. We did not find many details on the charts but we navigated with good light so we were able to navigate around the isolated shallower spots and reefs.

BUTARITARI: Another nice atoll to visit! Wide and easy pass to negotiate. The shallow reefs are few and easily seen in good light. Most of them are also marked with sticks. Protected anchorage south of King's wharf and easy dinghy access to shore from that wharf. We introduced ourselves to the local constable, as usual when coming into a new atoll and were free to ram ashore. You can find bread in small stores that also sell non-refrigerated foods. We hired a motorbike and spent a day touring both islands connected via a causeway. More of the same things as in both other atolls we visited: nice sand beaches, beautiful local dwellings on pilotis, taro patches in holes dugged, ... We then sailed across the lagoon to Natata islet where we spent 2 days hiking and bathing off the beach. Traded some lobsters with natives that came by on sailing canoes.

Notes about the Western Kiribati islands we visited. We are very glad we spent a few weeks here on our way to Majuro. It gave us some real cruising to agreement our passage. People are friendly and generous even if communication is sometimes not as easy in English. Wherever we spoke with people, we were offered smiles and often a drink of toddy (coconut flower honey drink) or tea. We were offered the use of a motorcycle and we exchanged gifts freely. We had been put off by articles mentioning beaches littered with trash and human excrement and were pleasantly surprised to have seen almost none of that in all 3 atolls visited! Except for Betio, well overcrowded and dirty, everywhere else was quite tidy and little trash was seen anywhere. So do not be put off by some negative comments you might have read somewhere, just keep your expectations low and you will always be pleasantly surprised! Checking in and out if staying less than a month was painless and completely free so why not spend a few weeks by yourselves in peace here in island exploring before getting into Majuro and the active yachting community there? And don't throw away your old sails ... they will make well-appreciated trade/gifts items here in the outer islands!