

The following 2 reports cover the Marshall Islands

1. The Ratak Chain of islands

After 4 months in Majuro, we were thrilled to finally start to explore the outer-atolls! But first, a few notes about Majuro. The anchorage area is well protected from regular winds so you will have comfortable nights! We favored the Southern mooring field as water is cleaner there (we swam around the boat most days) and you don't have the wake of the tenders going between the big fishing boats anchored further out and the small harbor. Several options to land ashore exist and taxi transport is cheap to go anywhere in town (75c a ride in share-taxi). There are several ways to get wifi internet at a speed that often is not too bad despite numerous technical issues. The most affordable solution is to have a smart phone and take a monthly internet wifi subscription at 15\$/month. But keep in mind that NTA (sole phone company) will not let you connect any I-pad or any apparatus with a reasonable screen size. They want to force laptop and tablet users to use their pay-per-minute rates of 10c/min instead! Since they are the only game in town, not much users can do! Best way to get packages sent in or out is with the US Post Office. It generally takes from 6 days to 2-3 weeks to get stuff in from anywhere. We only had one problem with First Choice Marine when they sent us hatches by Surface mail - aka by boat!) It took 3 months to arrive here despite the USPS website giving an ETA of 2 weeks! With FCM not very responsive, it was quite frustrating! But as luck happens, we got these hatches the exact day we were leaving for our 3-4 month cruise in the Ratak chain of outer atolls! Avoid FEDEX if at all possible. The few times a supplier sent things Fedex, they got stuck in Guam. Only by a lot of bugging and requesting the office here to email Guam, and then following up again and again, were we able to finally get the packages. Totally defeats the purpose of Fedex as an express courier. UPS is a little better, but the office is a taxi ride or long dinghy trip away. A small boat fuel dock, and a floating dinghy dock is being constructed at Shoreline so yachts will be able soon to get fuel and gas at a proper dock, and have a lot less dinghy congestion at this landing. You need to see Internal Affairs to obtain a cruising permit. For each atoll you wish to visit, you will need to specify how long you intend to stay as well as during what time period you will be visiting (it's quite flexible). You will be informed of the fee that each atoll is levying. Most fees are paid on first check-in in the atolls but a few need to be paid in Majuro before leaving. Cost range from free, \$25 (majority), \$50 and \$150 or \$250. It is very important to anchor right away in front of the main town to check in with the mayor to introduce yourself, pay your eventual fee and be informed of what you can or cannot do! Since we knew that most charts are either incomplete or slightly off, I looked on Google Earth and saved jpeg of all passes with exact waypoints taken while I was online. If only Captain Cook could see me ... he would be amazed at the info we now have at our disposition before arriving in unknown places!

AUR atoll: A easy 77-nm overnight passage going North from Majuro. We heard that seas can be quite confused in the vicinity of each atoll but we lucked out, we had a very nice passage with East winds 10-13 and no sudden squalls! We entered Aur via the very easy South Pass (WP outside: 08deg10'444N-171deg06'376E / WP inside 08deg10'625N-171deg06'538E). We made one easy tack towards Aur island in the South corner and anchored in 25ft of good sand at 08deg09'166N-171deg09'844E. This is the first village you should visit to present your permit and pay the \$25 fee. We arrived on April 13th as next day was the annual Liberation Celebrations day. We, and the Finnish parents of one of the volunteer teachers were the only visitors on the island! After the flag raising and a few speeches in Marshallese, baseball matches went all day. Communal lunch was chicken (imported!) and white rice. We had local bananas and coconuts and were well catered to! The festivities actually went on all week with spelling B and other sports. It ended up with the Palm Sunday mass and celebration at the Protestant church. People from both Tobal and Aur village put on an all-day show of dances and singing and small shows that they had practiced for several weeks. Lunch was a copious basket-plate woven from fresh coconut leaves that were stuffed with local dishes as well as rice, chicken, and spam! Each year, each village alternatively hosts all feasts. The anchorage is a way from shore so we had a very nice breeze and had privacy on deck. You still have a short and easy beach access by dinghy to the shore. There is, however, a relatively large tidal difference (about 6-7 ft) to be aware of.

After a few days celebrating with the villagers, we decided to sail and anchor off some of the uninhabited motus on the way North towards Tobal island (the second inhabited island) so we could enjoy beachcombing with our Schipperkes as well as swim and snorkel around the lively reefs. Normally etiquette requires one to obtain permission to visit any islet from it's owner. The only catch is we don't know which island we will anchor at until we see one we like...then, try to describe which island it is to anyone..."you know, the one with the white beach and lots of coconuts". We did our best by asking the mayor AND the iroche (custom chief) We choose Pikiel islet about half-way to Tobal. Later that day, one of the motor launches stopped by and the driver, Boston, told us we were welcome to enjoy his island .. which we did for 3 days! Later in Tobal, we added into his cruisers visitor book. We anchored in front of Tobal village and had great contact with many people including James (acting doctor) and Terry.

The atoll recently received complete solar systems (post with 2 panels, 2 batteries, 6 lights, gauges, small inverters from the Taiwanese gvt. For a \$5 monthly fee to the local electric company in Majuro they get any future maintenance. So plenty of lights in the villages here with DVD players and more! Gone soon will be the era of coconut oil lanterns and the whole village in front of one TV screen! There are some very shallow reefs right in front of the village with very vibrant coral and pretty fish. Great snorkeling. Beach access is tricky at low tide, but there are a couple areas with a clear channel to the sandy beach. Easy navigation with very few, well visible, shallow areas on the way to one of the NW passes out of the lagoon.

MALOELAP atoll: Our passage from Aur was easy in 15kt of East wind and regular seas. After one tack we entered via the Southern pass (outside N08deg31'98-E171deg06'31 then inside N08deg32'33-E171deg06'47) and sailed all the way to Airik Island in the SE corner.

Calm anchorage in 30ft of good sand with isolated coral patches. The mayor lives on this island (when not in Majuro) so you can pay your \$25 fee to him. When we arrived, we were told the acting mayor was in Ollot. . The mayor, Benjamin, I had met in Majuro, happened to arrive the next day to stay a few weeks on his island so we checked-in officially with him here. This island hosts also the Queen of the lower Maloelap atoll. Nice community. A very small-uninhabited motu just north, only a dinghy ride away, was a nice little beach for us to relax on. We were able to help several people fix several things like replacing a fuse in SSB radio, epoxy glue a guitar, move the battery bank of the clinic to the new shed outside and other repairs. Not all repairs undertaken are successful as electronics are often hard to troubleshoot and parts needed are often not available ... but people are happy to get any help they can! We also checked many solar /battery systems and gave advice on upkeep. We received gifts/traded and left with plenty of limes & coconuts, a breadfruit & a beautiful handicraft. The queen gave us permission to stop at a small uninhabited atoll just 4 nm away, Kumaru Island. We anchored in 50-60ft of good sand (N8deg34'1-E171deg10'3). Beachcombing was fun as well as going at nite to look for coconut crabs & lobsters. Despite the 20-25kt of NE wind, we were well protected with only a small sideways swell.

After great sailing inside the lagoon, on one tack, we arrived at Taroa, the main Japanese base during WWII. Perfect calm anchorage in 25ft of good sand and a galore of WWII artifacts to look at, from the wreck in the harbor you can snorkel on, to the numerous pillboxes, guns, plane fuselage, concrete underground bunkers, a 3-story HQ building, huge fuel depots ... and more ashore. Small WWII concrete jetty makes dinghy landing convenient. We saw Zacharias, the council secretary, who introduced us around and showed us many WWII remnants. Most of these remnants just sit there and deteriorate slowly exactly where they were left at the end of the conflict ... some buildings are used by people but most are just abandoned!

We snorkeled scuba & filmed on the sunken wreckage of a Japanese freighter "Terushima Maru" easily spotted as two prominent masts of the large vessel still extend above the water at even high tides. The water is generally very clear and calm at low tides, and has a nice collection of marine life in and around the vessel.

Warning: this vessel has live depth charges Many Japanese warships, when sunk, carried their live depth charges with them. If pre-set to 33 feet, as was a custom, and the safety forks fell off, they detonated. Many men were killed in the water in this manner. The depth of the hold is about 35 ft deep. The depth charges sit on a mid-deck, at about 20 feet down. If they were to roll off, or the deck deteriorates and fails, they could detonate. You can see a few of them remaining as well as the rails used to roll those to the transom to dump them.

A short 4nm sail brought us to Ollot ('whoolit'). Anchorages can be a little rolly now as Easterly swell brought over the reefs at high tide tends to roll along the coast. Had plenty of contact with the local population. A few more miles up the lagoon brought us to Tjan island. Both anchorages in good sand between coral boomies. Here we were greeted by Ken, a very energetic native who lived in the US for his education as he is part of the Ratak chain family of traditional chiefs (Irojche) After having lived in the US system for all these years and had a boy there with a Marshallese girl, they moved back to an uninhabited island here. What a contrast! We traded for more fruits like papayas, coconuts, pandanus, ...with him and others.

As he went back to his own isolated island a few miles North, we decided to anchor up there and share with them some food recipes and more. We anchored at Enea Island at N08deg52'73-E170deg59'66 in 17ft of good sand. We anchored Bahamas style (anchors fore and aft) to avoid going over shallow reefs if winds were turning as it did once in Tjan during a rainsquall. We had no rain for about 2 months so that rainsquall was welcome J The lagoon has very few coral patches that present any danger and these are very easily seen so you can sail easily within the lagoon. We decided to exit at one of the NW passes we found on Google Earth, one that is easy to confirm even during overcast wx as it passes between 2 islands. The waypoints were spot on and we had a wide and deep pass to sail thru (lagoon side N08deg49'798-E170deg52'035 / ocean side N08deg49'777-E170deg51'641)

WOTJE : After a very calm overnight passage from Maloelap, we entered thru the very easy Schishmarev channel and made 2 tacks inside the lagoon to arrive at Wotje island proper to present our permit and pay the \$50 fee. This lagoon has also very few coral patches that present any danger and these are very easily seen so you can sail easily within the lagoon. The Cmap charts have these patches pretty well located too ... when you compensate for chart offset. We anchored in the most calm anchorage so far at N09deg27'484-E170deg13'855 in 25ft of good sand with few isolated deep reefs. Dinghy landing is easy at the 2 docks. There is a wifi antenna next to the power station (the Northern dock) so we could get internet access with our NTA card obtained in Majuro. (Have to take your laptop and sit next to the antenna at the power station building). We met plenty of nice people on this island including Wesley (our informal guide), Glen and his daughter at the power plant, Dancy (high school agricultural teacher). We traded for plenty of fruits (breadfruits, coconuts, papayas, coconuts, pandanus, vegetables). Plenty of WWII artifacts on shore to look at and an interesting wreck to dive on. The Japanese vessel Borudou Maru was sunk at anchor in 123 feet of water (you can contact HPO or email us for exact GPS position). The top of the upward hull is about 70 ft. We then sailed to the SE corner of the lagoon and anchored at Egmedio Island, next to the Toyotsu Maru wreck that you can see breaking the surface. Beautiful snorkeling. Plenty of fish around that wreck as you may see in our YouTube video. We also sailed to the NE corner of the lagoon and anchored next to Toleef, an inhabited

island. Just south of this island is a series of small islets that are very photogenic and nice to visit by dinghy. We had a nice visit of Ormed island where the locals were eager to trade so we got nice size lobsters, coconut crabs and fruits.

ERIKUB : We decided to check this uninhabited atoll (after getting permission from Wotje mayor) as a detour on our way to Ailuk. We experienced some excitement entering thru the Eastern pass (N9deg10'849- E170deg02'886) as the pass had blind breakers in some areas and you have to dodge your way once you have determined where the deep water was. Amazing blue colors in that pass that would make this an excellent pass to snorkel or scuba with milder wind conditions. But what a disappointment to not find any suitable overnight anchorage anywhere we checked! We checked the islets north of the pass as well as the one in the NE corner of the lagoon. We even checked the outside of the atoll just South of the Western pass (N9deg09'686-E169deg56'438 oceanside) that we used to exit the lagoon.

AILUK : This was the favorite atoll of the cruisers this season, several yachts that visited only one atoll in the outer islands visited here and skipped those in the south. This was one of our favorites too. Ailuk is known for still using and building traditional sailing outriggers, and it was great to see the natives using these instead of motor boats for their daily excursions to the copra islands or to go fishing on the isolated coral heads in the lagoon. They are very adept at handling them...they can zoom at 10-12 kts! They make a beautiful sight as they skim by so effortlessly. We also loved the views of the beautiful blue colors of the water contrasted with the white sand beaches and greens of the coconut palms as we sailed in the protected waters of the lagoon!

We had to tack several times to get here from Wotje because a strong Westerly flowing current pushed us out at least 30 deg to port. You do not experience it when sailing close to the western side of atolls but as soon as you are in the open, there it is frustrating your progress if you try to head North! Since we arrived at the atoll at night, we decided to hang around the west side in the lee until daylight (even then seas were rough with the strong winds we were experiencing). You want to stay at least 1 nm off the atoll's edge since your radar won't pick up the low fringing reefs. When the sun was high enough, we entered the lagoon by the deep and straightforward Marok channel (N10deg21'812-E169deg54'461). (Note: There is a pass on the South end of the atoll that we thought about using, but our friends on *La Gitana* reported it quite shallow looking and they used one of the Northern passes, all deep enough for inter-islands boats.) Once inside Ailuk lagoon, we had a very nice sail straight for Ailuk island, in the SE corner. We even crossed 2 local sailing outriggers carrying people and goods! Not long after we anchored (N10deg13'6-E169deg58'7) in 45ft of good sand with bommies around, we were visited by Emae, the mayor. He came to welcome us and check our paper as well as collecting the \$50 fee. The anchorage is breezy but is quite well protected in Easterly winds. Can get roly at high tide especially if the wind goes more NE. The island has a nice convenient modern dock where you can land your dinghy easily. It made it very

convenient for us to go ashore without getting my infected leg wet. Make sure you treat any small cuts or scratches right away or you might, like me, get a big infection requiring strong oral anti-biotics! (the dispensaries on the islands are limited in supplies).

Except for a few families living in Enejelar, everyone lives on Ailuk island. The island is fairly small with one village, very neat and tidy. Like all other main islands on every atoll it has some churches, a dispensary, a new school as well as an airstrip for weekly flights. The cargo boat from Majuro only comes here about every 3 months so the island is quite isolated. As usual we traded for local food like lemons, coconuts, breadfruits & bananas (eating and cooking varieties). Ailuk is a drier atoll than the ones south of it. Though they still had many food crops, papaya was rare. We checked the numerous batteries and solar panels and gave advice as well as troubleshoot some systems. We saw more sailing traditional canoes in this atoll than any other visited so far ... some cruisers made sails for them a few years ago and the impetus has been going strong since then ... nice to rely on wind instead of gasoline at \$8/gal! One of the past-times of the children (and men) is building miniature outrigger models and sailing them in the shallow waters at low tide. We think it's great to promote the tradition of sailing this way, so we organized a race with the kids and gave prizes to every participant. What a great time!

After 10 days of enjoying the main island, we decided to sail along the East side of the lagoon and anchor in front of any attractive uninhabited island with a good anchorage. Tempo, a retired school teacher living behind the visitor information booth (!) encouraged us to visit any of his several islands. You have several possible anchorages along the chain of small islands. We anchored at Uriga island N10deg15'25-E169deg58'79 in 25ft of good sand in front of scenic islets with sea channels between them at high tide. Easy way to go beachcombing! Great snorkeling on the reef just south of anchorage, that comes out of the shallows ashore, as well as some small nearby seamounts. We had more glorious sailing to our next stop, off Achactakku Island at N10deg23'53-E169deg57'87 in 30ft of good sand, just in front of a bigger seamount. We then sailed to Enejelar Island, where about 6 families are living. Calm anchorage in less than 40ft and good sand N10deg26'70-E169deg57'30. We traded for pandanus, coconuts & breadfruits and had a great potluck lunch before our departure. Very welcoming people, a favorite spot from our friends on La Gitana too.

Easy passage thru Eneman channel on our way to Utirik with only a rare isolated reef to watch for!

UTIRIK : We had a easy passage, (without tacking), to the outside of the atoll as we did not experience that strong westerly current we did coming from Wotje to Ailuk ... the wind was more to the East so that helped too. We arrived outside the Utirik passage at 4am so we had to hove-to until the daylight would let us see the reefs. Unfortunately the charts are vague and you cannot see the outside barrier reef on radar (very low) so keeping 1 nm away for safety, we actually were about 2nm. Alas for us, at dawn, we got a big squally area moving on us

giving us 30-40kts for a few hours, making us drift away even more! Then the wind progressively died down while we motorsailed toward the passage and into the lagoon. We had looked on Google Earth to get the exact location on that passage over the barrier reef. We found a minimum of 15ft of depth but friends found at least 25ft when they passed at low tide. The entrance channel is not so much a "pass" as just an area of deeper water across the barrier reef. Keep a good bow watch and use these waypoints only as a guide: outside WP is N11deg14'553-E169deg44'587 and inside WP is N11deg14'721-E169deg45'402. Crossing the lagoon, there are few bommies, but some are hard to spot, on the way to the anchorage off Utirik but watch out in the anchorage as we did not find any sandy bottom, all brittle corals and some very shallow areas (5ft!) difficult to spot with bad light. When checking our anchor, we were thrilled to see a manta ray swim by. A group of 5-6 manta rays hang around the area so you might be able to see them too if you ever visit this atoll. We met the acting mayor to present our permit and the \$25 fee. We met several friendly people ashore (as like on every atoll) and did trade for fruit and fish. In this atoll you don't have many different islands you can anchor off so we end up staying 10 days right here. We dinghied to the uninhabited island just North and watched many local people harvesting sea cucumbers for the Asian market. At \$30-\$50/kg for dried cucumber it is a better work than coprah, and Utrick is the most fortunate atoll of the Marshalls with all 6 kinds of cucumber present in the lagoon.

TOKE: Natives call it Taka. We asked the permission in Utirik to visit this uninhabited atoll as we heard it was a beautiful natural reserve with turtles, birds and plenty of fish (and sharks). We had an easy day passage from Utirik. The entrance channel is straightforward: outside WP is N11deg06'802-E169deg35'419 and inside WP is N11deg07'190-E169deg35'637. We tacked inside the lagoon to get to the anchorage. Keep a good watch for coral patches, some, need a good eye to spot them. Anchored in 50ft of good sand with a few deep coral formations at N11deg06'808-E169deg39'579. This anchorage is well protected from winds NE to SE. If you enjoy seclusion from time to time as well as little disturbed nature, this is one of these places you will really enjoy! This island is only seldom visited for a few days at a time by some families of Utrick to get coprah, coconut crabs and more. Good beachcombing on the ocean side as usual. Plenty of birds of different types are nesting here both in tree branches and under scrub brushes on the ocean side. We saw fresh traces of turtles so we decided to come back at night but were not lucky to see a turtle laying her eggs! But we saw some coconut crabs, nesting birds, and mice. Great snorkeling and good spearfishing between the islets on the barrier reef as well as isolated boomies. You might even see conchs like in the Bahamas! It was so beautiful to just sit on the beach and watch the sea birds soaring all around us, some even coming very close to check us out. It was fun to watch the young ones joyously try out their wings and practice maneuvers. Were really lucky to see a rare event of a group of eagle rays in very shallow water. As we drifted by in the current with our masks on we saw there was one large female being pursued by at least

5 smaller males, and even saw one male actually mount the female! Where was the UW video when we needed it!?

LIKIEP : After a easy overnight passage from Toke, we entered Likiep via the easy and straightforward southern pass [N09deg49'621-E169deg13'367 ocean side] and had to make one tack to sail to Likiep Island. A number of isolated bommies can easily be seen on the way anywhere in the lagoon with reasonable light. We were pleasantly surprised to hear someone calling us on VHF as we approached. It was Joe de Brum, manager of the Plantation Haus welcoming us and offering the use of a very sturdy mooring right in front of the hotel [N09deg49'588-E169deg18'317]. This mooring was installed a few months ago by some Majuro cruisers. There are numerous buoys in the harbor used for aquaculture, but the mooring is the one in front of the Hotel (building with several flag poles in front) at a comfortable distance from shore. Despite 25kt+ of wind, there was hardly a ripple on the water in this small natural harbour protected from all but Westerlies! This harbour also offers a very picturesque view of the beautiful Catholic church as well as hotel, school and other buildings meshed into the landscape. We went to see Joe to find out to whom to present our visitor's permit and \$50 fee.

Joe is celebrating his 80th birthday this year and is spry, animated, and very friendly. He loves to talk to visitors and has been the yachties' friend for many years. The hotel is really not operating since the time that Marshall Islands Airlines suspended service to the islands for an extended period. Now there is a flight at least once a week, weather-permitting, but still no guests arrive. The place is slowly "going native", as abandoned things accumulate, and upkeep loses priority. ... but Joe is happy to help cruisers when needed.

Joe took us on a tour of the island on his ATV Quad. He helped to build the grass runway which amazingly is over a mile long. It's hard to believe that the highest elevation in the Marshalls is in Likiep (according to visitor guides). All it is are some small mounts in the coconut plantation mid-island! We went down the ocean side road to the end of the island where Joe's brother, Orlando, is building a fancy villa for his daughter and American son-in-law who come from the states to visit occasionally. What a contrast to the native way of life. We got caught in a rain shower, so didn't get to see Joe's house and garden on the other side of the village.

You can tie your dinghy at that dock or you can beach your dinghy at the resort. We met Bill, originally from Majuro, because of his beautiful vegetable garden on the road between the main dock and the Hotel. It's rare to see an organized garden with green veggies, so we had to meet the gardener. Nice guy who's Mother is a gardener in the Laura region of Majuro. He just loves to plant and putter and try new things in his garden. Unfortunately we had just missed his harvest a week ago, when he gave away a lot of veggies to the neighbors. Also met Junior de Brum, Joe's nephew, who is manager of the Fish co-op, and Giant clam breeding program. They have freezers (all solar) where the villagers can keep fish or keep frozen food stocks for a small fee. No one has

refrigeration in the atolls, so this is a real boon. The clam farm is on the neighboring island, Lodo.

For a complete change of scenery, we sailed just 2 nm away to Lodo Island where only one small family lives permanently. On the SE side of the island, you can visit the giant clam farm where they breed them for the aquarium market, and on the NW side you can snorkel in the pools in the channel between Lodo and the next island, on both sides of a small islet.

You can also find suitable anchorages along the eastern islands and you can exit the lagoon via a west passage if you are going towards the Ralik chain.

Notes about the Ratak chain of lagoons.

We had originally planned to visit Kwajalein atoll after Likiep and then sail back to Majuro from Kwajalein. Looking at our tracks going north, a result of predominant winds and westward current, we came to 2 conclusions. First, if we cruise the Ratak chain again, we would sail from Maloelap directly to Ailuk and visit Wotje after Likiep on the leg back to Majuro, Second, sailing from Kwajalein to Majuro would be a very difficult sail with lots of tacking ... thus our decision to keep Kwajalein atoll cruising for a separate cruise departing from Majuro, exploring some of the Ralik chain on our way West towards FSM.

Outer-atolls are the best part of island countries and visiting them is the only way to really meet the true natives of the Marshalls, and appreciate your visit. We were surprised to see a majority of cruisers never leave Majuro during their time in the country. Most boats this past season seem to have come here to avoid the cyclone season in the South Pacific and kept comparing Majuro with Fiji! Some were quite disappointed in the little of the Marshalls they explored. Expect little and enjoy all the positive aspects, is our way of thinking. Try not to compare using a very selective memory ... enjoy all the great things that any place you visit has to offer! We heard reports of natives being aloof and not so friendly ... we were very pleased to discover that not to be the case. If you go around greeting everyone you see, even from afar, with "Yokwe" and a big smile on your face, people will usually return the greeting. Stop and let people approach you or even go slowly towards them, they might be a little shy because they see very few visitors and their English might be rudimentary ... but that does not make them any less friendly! Some cruisers reported islanders not growing their own food and having nothing to barter with ... we found, on the contrary, a willingness to trade their fruits, vegetables, seafood, coconut crabs as well as handicrafts! (We cruised Apr-Aug which seemed to be breadfruit, pandanus, and lemon season, which may have made a difference) In four months of cruising the Ratak chain, we never saw any other cruisers ... so if you are looking for rarely traveled cruising grounds, cruise the Marshall islands ... during the best season – April to October.

2. The Ralik Chain of islands

After another 4 months in Majuro, we were thrilled to go back exploring outer-atolls! The cruising community in Majuro is very welcoming with a social agenda

full of events, with weekly cruiser's dinners, monthly yacht races, flea markets, Xmas boat parades and cruiser's workshops. Just before we left, we had the chance to attend a very nice presentation about Palau by the crew of s/v Tiaka, who lived there for 25 years, and a very interesting workshop about Geo-referencing from Google Earth to CM93 charts using OpenCPN by Leslie s/v Carina, Naomi (Renova) and Heather (Tiaka). Do not miss any future SSCA webinars on the subject. A few updates about Majuro. The big fishing boat tenders cannot zoom in the anchorage anymore so less wake is now experienced in the Northern one. Matt Holly checked and re-arranged his Southern anchorage moorings. (Maintenance that was sorely needed) Anyone not renting a mooring at RRE (Northern anchorage) has now to pay a \$4/month fee to dispose of his garbage at the dumpsters of RRE. A new fuel dock has also been built so you can now get diesel and gasoline at the dock, as well as snacks. NTA wifi works well when it works ... Price per minute is still high but if you take the \$15/month flat fee for unlimited wifi via mobile phone coverage, it will be ok. Keep in mind that NTA has to look at your phone and register it's MAC address in their system so you automatically get logged in. They will not accept any iPad, iPod or other tablets as they want you to use the per min plan! Being computer savvy and creative like cruisers can be, solutions can be found! Be aware that USPS Priority Mail can be as fast as 5 days or as slow as 3-4 months because it sometimes comes by sea freight even though it's sent Priority. Apparently they do that when they have too much mail to send by plane!! Using USPS Express Mail should avoid that problem!

BIKINI: Luc had an opportunity to join the crew of M/V Wind Ward as first mate for a private charter booked at the last minute. One of the Japanese TV networks wanted some filming done in Bikini and Rongelap atolls with the most urgency. They sent 2 reporters to Majuro with no real idea how to get to these 2 remote atolls where nuclear testing had been done in the 50's. Unfortunately for them, the local airline Air Marshalls had no plane in flying condition! For months now, their 2 planes (?) are grounded for lack of parts. The only boat that could bring them to Bikini was the private charter boat Wind Ward that does surfing and tech diving trips! At US\$3,500/day to charter the boat, that is not a cheap information gathering trip! Luc was approached by the local agent for the TV team, as they needed an underwater videographer, and at about the same time by the Charter boat captain who did not want to sail with a short crew (since most of his crew was away for vacation time!). I had a few hours to decide if I was going or not but since I had wanted to join that ship a few weeks earlier when they had a regular diving trip to Bikini, it was not a difficult decision to take! I did not relish the long sea trip involved as Bikini atoll is about 450 nm away, thus a 48-hour passage on that rolly boat that does about 8 knots. And rolly it was! We had 20-25 knots winds most of that charter! The boat was rolling and jumping up and down in the rough seas ...

When we arrived in Bikini, the passengers rushed onto the tender to step on Bikini and regardless of any remnant radiation, kissed the ground! During our 3 days in Bikini, I dove 3 times with Brian on some of the ships that were sunk

during the US atomic nuclear tests in the 50's. Dove on the Japanese Imperial Navy flagship Nagato, on the USS air carrier Saratoga, and on USS Lamson. These were 140-165 ft deep dives. We dove using air and made our last decompression stops with pure Oxygen to add safety. I also used the small underwater video from the Japanese reporter to film for her the Bravo Crater rim, where the first hydrogen bomb was detonated. She had a small Geiger counter with her and took lots of readings ... radiation was quite low everywhere. At the time we visited Bikini, there were only 4 people there, Edward, the Marshallese who dove the wrecks more than anyone else since he is involved with Bikini since over 30 years. For living on Bikini for so long, he looks quite healthy! In 1989 (?) Bikini was opened to dive tourism and the Bikini Council built some accommodations, dive center, dive boats ... The operation was doing very well until a few years ago when Air Marshall got so mismanaged that the flights could not be relied upon anymore! For year now, the whole infrastructure is just sitting there and slowly rotting away. The Marshallese government does not want to admit they are incapable of running an airline and they forbid any private company to start a new airline! So inter-island traveling is by infrequent boats only!

Any sailors wanting to visit Bikini atoll on their own boat should first contact the Bikini Council in Majuro for a permit and this should be granted. No scuba diving is permitted at this time for safety and other reasons. If you wanted to dive, the best would be to contact the Wind Ward and make prior-arrangements with them. They have a recompression chamber onboard, all mixed gases and tech diving equipment. If you were anchored in Bikini when they visit, it is conceivable that you could join their passengers on their dives. The 9 shipwrecks are fairly deep (140-250ft) and are 3-4 nm away from the anchorage. Several cruisers went to Bikini to snorkel on the untouched reefs

RONGELAP : the WindWard had another lively overnight trip to Rongelap atoll. We stayed there for 2 days so the Japanese crew could take more videos, interviews and radiation readings. During the atomic testing in Bikini, the local population in Rongelap had not been evacuated and it was only when people got sick and died that the scientists admitted that radiation effects went that far! It is only now that the atoll is deemed to be safe to live on again and a construction crew of about 30 is building housing and infrastructure in a 3-4 yr building project. Anchorage is 20-50 ft good sand along the main island. There is a dock and easy access ashore. But not much to do here other than see how the constructions are advancing!

KWAJALEIN : Many cruisers are still confused about visiting this atoll that is partially occupied by US military. First you should treat Kwajalein like any other atoll in the Marshall meaning you have to obtain an entry permit in Majuro (Internal affairs) and first check in at Ebeye island by paying the \$25 fee at the town council office. You can now visit islands in the atolls (remember to try to get landowners permission as usual) EXCEPT all islands that are controlled by USAKA (US Army forces). These restricted islands are Kwajalein, Carlos, Legan,

Illeginni, Meck, Omelek, Gagan and Roi-Namur. The US is conducting secret missile testing here so you won't be welcome in these islands UNLESS somebody working on the base is willing to sponsor you. You might be issued day passes or even a 2-week pass that allows you access to some facilities. Several cruisers do work as private contractors so some visiting cruisers (mostly US citizens) were able to get sponsorships from them. (Sponsors accept full responsibility for your conduct for the period, and their jobs and accommodations are at stake if you do something inappropriate). That allows you to come into a marina, enjoy shopping at great prices (compared to Majuro & Ebeye), and on Kwajalein Island, the "Country Club"-like atmosphere. During missions, movements around the lagoon might be restricted, as the mid-atoll corridor is closed from East reefs to near Nell island, so keep your ears open to avoid trouble. Military stand by on VHF CH12. Ch 16-72 are also used. Kwajalein is the second international port of entry/exit so it is a good last atoll to visit if going westward before checking out of the Marshalls. US cruisers seeking work might also be lucky (or unlucky depending on one point of view).

We had a quick and relatively comfortable sail from Majuro. Left one afternoon and arrived early morning after a 2-night passage. The Bigej pass (SE lagoon) is straightforward and we entered before light and proceeded all the way to the anchorage in Ebeye using exact GPS points taken on Google Earth and the radar, following the islands.

Ebeye is not as dirty as we heard and were quite surprised to see people cleaning up all around their houses, making the island much cleaner than Majuro. Perhaps it was a Xmas/New Year resolution that won't last ... or perhaps there is a new effort to really clean up the place?! Time will tell! Other than a smaller version of Payless Supermarket (but with surprisingly better prices for veggies and some shelf items), a snack bar, and a Chinese restaurant at Hotel Ebeye, the island offers no attractions and is packed wall to wall with residences. Wifi coverage is good in the anchorage, using the same NTA cards as in Majuro. We met our longtime friends Jack & Kathy on their trimaran at Nell island's scenic and protected anchorage (09deg06'580N-167deg18'860E). This anchorage is not well charted at all, on electronic maps, it shows the whole area as shallow reef ... Despite being on the west side of the lagoon with 20kts Easterlies, the anchorage was only slightly roly. We made ourselves a temporary mooring to avoid laying too much chain as the bottom is 60—80ft deep! Plenty of scenic islets to walk on and snorkeling spots both inside and outside the lagoon. We came from the outside of the lagoon and entered thru the wide and clear pass East of Nell island but we could have entered thru the smaller pass on the west side of Nell island. Once inside, navigate carefully to avoid isolated reefs.

We next anchored off 6th island (called so because it is the 6th island down from Roi Namur (NE corner of atoll and USAKA main radar base). We anchored in 40-50ft good sand, between coral formations at N09deg19'95-E167deg30'41). Nice deserted island to walk around and snorkel in the anchorage.

We then sailed South past Submarine Pass (about 14nm from Roi Namur) where you see a wrecked sub hull on the reef. Our friends told us of a 15-20ft sandy shelf where you could anchor with 360deg swing if you want to walk on the reef to check on the sub. But since it was so rainy & windy the day we sailed here, we decided not to stop neither for a day anchorage neither for the night. We decided to sail all the way (about 35nm from 6th island) to Bigej Island. This is the island North of Bigej pass. We anchored in 20ft of good sand with few isolated coral formations at N08deg53'89-E167deg46'12. The next day with blue sky and sunny wx we discovered how scenic this anchorage is. We put our dinghy at the old dilapidated dock and met the 2 friendly locals who live here. They offered us coconut water and papayas and welcomed us on their island. This island is visited on WE by many people working in Kwajalein base and Ebeye but is all calm during the week. We walked around, snorkeled in the anchorage and in the pass and were glad we stopped here!

USAKA does not control the numerous WWII wrecks so avid divers have the possibility to check these out. We read Matt Holly's WWII wrecks survey report and decided to dive on the following wrecks:

North Loi Wreck – N08deg48'00-E167deg43'80 in 70-75ft ... looked all around the "GPS position but could only find smaller remains (old rusted engine/machinery and wood remains) in only 50ft closer to land? But nice coral reefs there.

Akibasen Maru - N08deg44'667-E167deg43'477 bottom 150-160ft. Took us some work to find it. Luc jumped from the dinghy and dove in the blue with a line at the exact GPS location. Saw the wreck when about 60ft down and then saw a line with a buoy coming from one of the masts. Tied to that buoy about 20ft deep and we dove the wreck. Several turtles, not shy, were seen on this upright wreck as well as some small white tip sharks and a eagle ray.

Prinze Eugen - N08deg45'00-E167deg40'80 above water till 150ft. This one is easy to find since you tie your dinghy to the giant propeller sticking above the surface of this interesting and historic wreck, sunk quasi-upside down. This German vessel survived the Bikini atomic testing, then was towed all radioactive to Kwajalein for further study when it mysteriously capsized and sank at anchor! A must dive.

Looking back at our 14 months in the Marshall Islands, we are very glad we came and spent enough time here. Checking in and out was one of the most painless and inexpensive processes (even for non-Americans), the cruising community is active, fun and helpful, the outer-islands well worth visiting. A change from more touristy destinations where cruisers are only valued for the money that can be extracted from them!