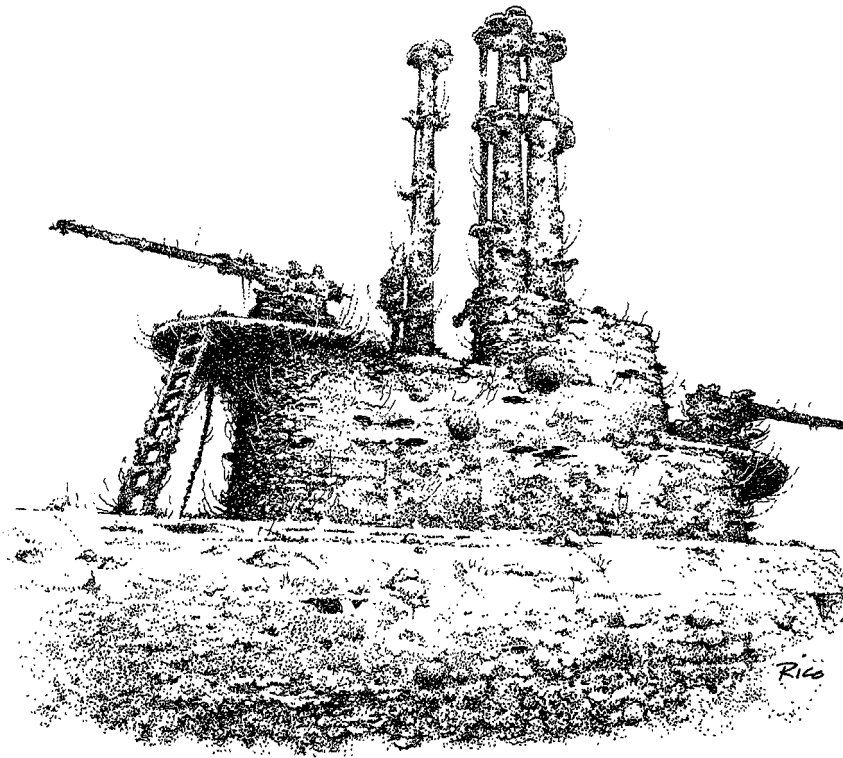


# BIKINI ATOLL, MARSHALL ISLANDS

An awesome 'Ghost Armada'



USS Apogon (Rico Oldfield)

Season: March-November  
Visibility: 25-50 metres  
Water temperature: 27-29°C

Bikini Atoll, just about as isolated a place as it is possible to be, is one of 29 atolls and five islands that comprise the Marshall Islands, which are scattered over 357,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean, north of the equator. Seriously remote, and with some seriously incredible wrecks, this holy grail for wreck divers is well worth the effort. There is simply nothing to match it, anywhere in the world.

By 1946 the Americans had amassed an incredible assortment of vessels in Bikini Atoll: submarines, landing craft, a WWI Dreadnought Battleship, a German battle-cruiser, the battleship *Nagato* (Japanese Admiral Yamamoto's flagship) and the immense *USS Saratoga* (an aircraft carrier with the capacity to carry 90 aircraft). Eighty four vessels were gathered to form this impressive but doomed fleet.

The 167 Bikini Island residents had been moved out by March 1945 in preparation for Operation Crossroads (they are yet to move back) and between 1946 and 1958 America's army and navy tested atomic and hydrogen bombs following a directive from President Harry S. Truman indicating that it was necessary "to determine the effect of atomic bombs on American warships". The first bomb missed the target ship by half a mile and sank only vessels within a hundred metres. The second bomb exploded 25 metres below the surface and was far more destructive, sending two million tons of water over a mile high. Many more vessels sank. Others were scuttled in deep water, and the biggest ghost fleet in the world was formed. More than half the world's supply of motion picture film was used to record the two bombs, Able and Baker, and the exile of the Bikini people.

More was to come. In 1954 the biggest nuclear device ever exploded in the

atmosphere was detonated and a fireball of intense heat measuring millions of degrees shot into the sky at over 300 miles per hour. Millions of tons of coral, sand, sea-life and sea water from the lagoon were sent high into the air. Today the Bikinians still wait to return to their island home, but the soil remains full of toxins and it is still not possible for them to eat the coconuts and coconut crabs that used to feature in their diet.

For the wreck diver, the devastating Able and Baker bombs achieved something positive. Bikini is simply the finest and best – the ultimate in wreck diving. Unlike Truk, this is a fleet of fighting vessels, not freighters. These boats were armed and ready for action at the instant of the sea's final embrace.

Fifty years after the first bomb Bikini was declared safe for visitors and May 1996 saw the first divers visiting the island. The diving is deep, some of the wrecks are below the recognized recreational limits, and stage decompression can be expected, but only air is used to dive and Nitrox is used for decompression purposes. The sea bed within the lagoon is at 56 metres and dives in the morning are usually to depths of between 30 and 40 metres, but increase throughout the week so that it should be possible to descend to 52 metres for a full dive on the stern of *USS Saratoga* (subject to local conditions). Subject to divers' profiles, shallower afternoon dives may be available. None of the wrecks have been salvaged. They lie as they sank, complete with all that floated through the sea with them on their last journey, creating the world's most amazing wreck diving.

**USS Saratoga**, launched in 1925 was, at the time of her sinking, one of the world's biggest aircraft carriers, longer than the Titanic. She had been hit by five kamikaze attacks and had seen action in WWII throughout the Pacific. As the world's only diveable aircraft carrier, she holds the limelight as the star of Bikini. With over 1000 watertight compartments and in spite of being moored a mere 300 metres from the Baker blast, it took over 8 hours for her to sink. She now sits upright on the seabed at 40 metres. *Saratoga* is enormous and divers will normally carry out their first, check-out dive to inspect the flight deck and bridge, 25 metres above the sea bed. Throughout the week divers will gradually explore deeper levels including the aircraft hanger deck (where you can explore three 'Helldiver' single-engine dive bombers and an 'Avenger' torpedo

bomber), the torpedo room (with rows of 500 pound bombs), the bow and storage quarters and eventually, the stern on the sea bed at 52 metres.

**USS Lamson**, a 341-foot destroyer, was capable of 36.5 knots and was armed with five 5-inch guns, three 21-inch torpedo tubes and four 50-calibre machine guns. She now sits upright on the seabed at around 50 metres, having been sunk on to her side by Able, and turned upright by the Baker blast. During her active life, USS Lamson spent a month searching for Amelia Earhart after she vanished on her trans-Pacific flight and saw active service at the battle of Guadalcanal. With her impressive array of guns and torpedoes, this is a very photogenic wreck and a great favourite with underwater photographers. Though her superstructure is badly damaged, the lines of the destroyer are still plain to see. The ghostly outline appears to be steaming along the sea bed, guns ready for action.

**USS Apogon** is a 311-foot Balao class submarine, which carried a crew of 6 officers and 60 enlisted men. In active service Apogon sank two Japanese vessels, three were unconfirmed 'sinkings' and she caused damage to two others. At one stage she was on sentry duty outside Truk Lagoon. She was armed with ten 21-inch torpedo tubes, one 5-inch deck gun and anti-aircraft guns. Unaffected by Able, Baker succeeded in sinking her, and she now rests upright on the seabed in 54 metres, looking for all the world as if she is ready to lift off and continue her journey once again. Her hatches are closed. The aft torpedoes are loaded and primed ready for use. It is possible to enter the hull. As one of the deeper dives, Apogon is usually dived towards the end of the week.

**HIJMS Nagato**, a Japanese battleship, was once the pride of the Japanese Fleet and Admiral Yamamoto's flagship and played her part in the attack on Pearl Harbour. On her bridge the plans for the attack were developed by Admiral Yamamoto. From here the orders were sent forward for the attack that caught Pearl Harbour unawares. Nagato was armed with eight 45-calibre guns, twenty 50-calibre guns, three machine guns, eight torpedo tubes and four anti-aircraft guns. She was launched in 1919 and rebuilt around 1935. She saw active service at the Battle of Midway and Leyte Gulf. She now lies upside down with the infamous bridge on the seabed by the side of the main superstructure. She lies in 51 metres of water, having been sent

to the bottom by Baker. It took four days for her to sink.

**USS Anderson** is a 349-foot destroyer which now lies on her side in 50 metres of water. She saw active service in the Pacific, having acted as a screen for battleships at the Battle of the Coral Sea and at Midway. She was damaged by grounding on a coral reef and was sent to Pearl Harbour for repair, but ended her days as one of the few ships sunk by Able.

On the last day there will be a trip to Bikini's **Shark Pass** where a remarkable population of sharks, including Grey Reef and Silvertip, can be found where the lagoon opens into the Pacific. The sharks are protected from the ravages of shark-finning fleets as the boats ceased coming to this area after the crew of one boat was killed by the nuclear fallout in 1954.

#### DIVING NOTES

Bikini's remote site is served only once a week by a commuter flight and therefore strict weight restrictions apply. The free baggage allowance on the flight is only 30 pounds with an excess charge of US \$1.50 per pound (subject to space availability).

Before each dive a full briefing gives divers the vessel's history and unique characteristics. A very comprehensive dive plan is delivered. On the ascent divers normally make a stop at 25 metres, and another at 15 metres. A three level decompression trapeze is attached to the dive boat offering stages at 9, 6 and 3 metres. Nitrox is supplied to divers at these stages to enhance decompression. The maximum depth of dives is 53 metres. Divers do not need to be 'tech' divers to dive Bikini's wrecks, but a minimum of 50 dives is recommended so that you are comfortable with buoyancy and ascent rate control. IANTD courses are available on the island: Advanced Nitrox, Technical Diver, EANx Wreck Diver (Wreck Penetrations) and Nitrox Blender courses are available. For those who wish to extensively penetrate the wrecks, it is essential that you have a cave diver qualification. We can make arrangements for you to book on weeks that have the same skill level.

Advanced Open Water divers with no previous knowledge of technical diving or decompression have dived Bikini and really enjoyed their trip. A willingness to

learn is all that is needed.

There is no rental diving equipment available (other than computers suitable for decompression diving) and the following is a list of recommended equipment in addition to mask, fins, gloves and boots: • Primary regulator – first stage, low pressure hose, second stage, BC inflator hose, high pressure hose, submersible pressure gauge • Secondary regulator: first stage, low pressure hose, second stage • BC/harness: back inflation preferred • Snorkel if desired (not used for the deep dives) • Wet suit: 3 mm or 5 mm and a hood • Primary light • Back-up light (bring two if you are going to do extensive penetrations – only for qualified divers) • Cutting tool • Dive-Alert and safety marker buoy (sausage style – can be substituted by a lift bag) • Dive computer (few computers are suitable for decompression diving: please check with us if you are uncertain) • Back up dive computer/ depth gauge and tables • Safety reel and lift bag.

On Bikini they provide twin steel tanks with isolation manifolds and the tank bands in place. They also have single 15 litre tanks with an H-valve for those who do not have BCs suited for double tank setups. Either setup is acceptable.

There is no decompression chamber on Bikini. The nearest chamber is at Kwajalein.

Divers visiting Bikini are required to have a medical evaluation by their own doctor and are also required to read a copy of W L Robinson's radiological status report (which we will supply).

#### BIKINI ATOLL DIVERS

Up to 11 divers can be accommodated in basic but comfortable air-conditioned rooms (there are some rooms with ceiling fans) with en-suite bathrooms. There is 24 hour electricity and hot water. Buffet-style meals are offered for breakfast, lunch and dinner. All food is imported from Hawaii, California or New Zealand. Water is made in the reverse osmosis plant. There is a pool table, table tennis table, a weights room and a large screen TV video room plus a DVD player.

Bikini Atoll Divers offer 7 nights packages commencing every Wednesday from March to November.

**£1536** (non-divers: £885)

**Includes:**

- Airport transfers in Bikini.
- 7 nights full board (breakfast, lunch and dinner) on a twin/share basis at Bikini Atoll.
- 12 decompression dives, dive guide, cylinders and weights, air fills and deco Nitrox.

**Important:** Single occupancy is not available at Bikini and divers travelling alone must book on a willing to share basis.

**Group Reductions:** There is a reduction of £182 per person for a group of 8 divers and a reduction of £339 per person for a group of 11 divers (plus a free place for a 12th diver).

**Deposit: £300** per person

**FLIGHTS**

The airfares shown here were typical economy fares available at the time of going to press. We will quote you the airfare applicable, based on current fare levels and booking class availability, at the time of booking. Our quote, which will include all taxes and fuel supplements applicable at the time of quotation, as well as our service charge, may be higher or lower than the airfares indicated here. The usual airfare deposit is £250.

**UNITED AIRLINES**

Midday departure on United Airlines from London (Heathrow) on Sunday, arriving in Honolulu in the evening, after a change of aircraft in Los Angeles. After an overnight stay in Honolulu depart on Monday morning for Majuro, arriving on Tuesday morning (after having crossed the International Dateline) for an overnight stay. Wednesday morning flight from Majuro arriving in Bikini in the afternoon. Return flights leave Bikini via Majuro on Wednesday afternoons, arriving in Honolulu very early the same day (after re-crossing the International Dateline!) in time to connect with a Wednesday morning flight to London (Heathrow), arriving at midday on Thursday.

Concessionary rates are available for connecting flights between Leeds/Bradford, Manchester, Teesside, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast and London. Please contact our office for details.

**£1678** for departures March to April (excluding Easter), November

**£1824** for departures May to June, September to October

**£1846** for departures at Easter

**£1924** for departures early July, late August

**£1992** for departures mid-July to mid-August

**Weekend Supplement:** £10 each way for departures from London or Honolulu on Fridays, Saturdays or Sundays.

**Includes:**

- Scheduled flights London (Heathrow)/Los Angeles/London (Heathrow) by United Airlines.
- Scheduled flights Honolulu/Majuro/Honolulu by Continental Micronesia Airlines.
- Scheduled flights Majuro/Bikini/Majuro by Air Marshall Islands.

**Sample Itinerary (including 1 night Honolulu, 1 night Majuro and 7 nights Bikini)**

**Day 1 (Sunday):** Depart London (Heathrow) in the afternoon. Arrive Honolulu in the evening. Stay overnight.

**Day 2 (Monday):** Depart Honolulu in the morning. **Day 3 (Tuesday):** Arrive Majuro in the morning, after having crossed the International Dateline. Stay overnight.

**Day 4 (Wednesday):** Depart Majuro in the morning. Arrive Bikini in the afternoon. Afternoon check out dive.

**Days 5-10 (Thursday-Tuesday):** Six days diving in Bikini Atoll.

**Day 11 (Wednesday):** Depart Bikini in the afternoon. Arrive Honolulu early the same day, having re-crossed the International Dateline. Depart Honolulu that same morning. **Day 12 (Thursday):** Midday arrival at London (Heathrow).

**OVERNIGHTS IN HONOLULU**

We can reserve rooms at the Best Western The Plaza Hotel for approximately £45 per person per night, payable locally in US\$, on a twin/share, room-only basis. The single occupancy rate is double. The hotel is very conveniently situated at the entrance to Honolulu International Airport and has a free shuttle bus service.

**HONOLULU STOP-OVERS: PEARL HARBOUR, THE USS ARIZONA MEMORIAL AND THE BATTLESHIP USS MISSOURI**

A day in Honolulu and a visit to Pearl Harbour will help to put your visit

to Bikini Atoll into perspective. Pearl Harbour is home to the battleship USS Missouri and the USS Arizona Memorial. It was on board the O1 veranda deck of the Missouri that General Douglas MacArthur and Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, along with other US and Allied officers, accepted the formal and unconditional surrender of the Japanese in 1945. Walk around the decks and superstructure and you will soon begin to realize the scale of the underwater treasures awaiting you in Bikini. The USS Arizona is the final resting place for many of the ship's 1,177 crewmen who lost their lives on 7th December 1941 when at 0810 she exploded, having been hit by a 1,760 pound armour-piercing bomb that slammed through her deck and ignited the forward ammunition magazine. It took less than 9 minutes for this huge battleship to sink with the tragic loss of so many seamen. The 56-metre memorial structure spans the mid-portion of the sunken battleship and consists of three main sections: the entry and assembly rooms, a central area and the shrine room, where the names of those killed on the Arizona are engraved in marble. A shuttle bus to Pearl Harbour is available from Best Western The Plaza Hotel at a cost of US\$5.

**OVERNIGHTS IN MAJURO**

The Marshall Islands Resort is a pleasant 'island style' hotel with air-conditioned rooms with en-suite bathrooms, restaurant and bar. Transfers from the airport are included. The cost is £33 per night on a twin/share, room-only basis. A single occupancy supplement of £30 per night applies.

**COMBINING BIKINI WITH TRUK**

Why not extend your holiday in Bikini Atoll with a visit to Truk Lagoon. Explore Truk's fascinating wrecks for the wreck treat of a lifetime. Following a Wednesday departure from Bikini and an overnight stay in Majuro, the flight departs from Majuro on Thursday morning and arrives in Truk in the afternoon. Return flights depart from Truk on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday morning and arrive in Honolulu, via Majuro, early the same day (after you re-cross the International Dateline) in time to connect with a Monday, Wednesday or Friday morning flight to London (Heathrow), arriving at midday the following day. Contact us for cost and itinerary details, which depend on length of stay in Truk.