

**SNAPSHOTS — MY TRIP TO TRUK LAGOON
 OR DO YOU SAY CHUUK?**

Travel Tips
for You

**Students—Spring & Summer
 break trips: Legitimate or not?**

There are several companies that target high school and college campuses across the United States. Some are legitimate, some are not. *How can you tell the difference?*

- Choose your location wisely—make sure that your vacation won't be on some "toxic" beach or in a storm damaged wasteland!
- How long has the company that you are choosing been in business? Are they reported in the Better Business Bureau?
- What exactly will you get for your hard-earned money? Don't just look at the pretty pictures in their brochures, ask for a copy of the contract that you would be signing.
- Is there travel insurance—medical and lost baggage?
- What are the deadlines for payments and the cancellation policies? Try to put everything on a credit card—if there are problems, this is the best way to possibly recoup your money.
- Are there any additional fees? Such as entry and departure fees for certain countries, taxes, passports, other government fees?
- Will there be chaperones? How many? What does the company require from them—their responsibilities? (They should be able to get you out of any trouble as well as steer you away from it!)
- What paperwork will be needed? Keep this handy while traveling.
- What is the exchange rate? Is it

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No matter how you say it, Chuuk/Truk is a ship wreck paradise for all divers.

We stayed at the Blue Lagoon Resort, the best place to stay on the island. It is simple, clean, air conditioned and has balconies that overlook the water. We rented DVD's to watch since there are no TVs. It is so peaceful that, to me, this is a little piece of heaven. The first day there I came across a black cat (I named him Blackie, of course) who had two fang-like canines that you could still see when his mouth was shut. Blackie took to me, even before I started feeding him. He would sleep on my doormat all night and I would always find him there after each dive. I guess his tongue was a little too big for his mouth as he always slept with it just hanging out between his teeth. The second day Blackie brought a buddy with him. My first thought was that word had gotten out that I feed cats and I was going to find myself surrounded by who knows how many strays. As time went on word did NOT get out, much to my relief. Apparently Blackie and his buddy can keep a secret. Oh, by the way, the second cat was a tan tabby that apparently lost the better part of his tail in a fight a while back. I named him Bob.



After our three day layover in Guam we were primed and ready to dive the "Big Boys". Protected from wind and ocean swells, this lagoon feels like a large placid lake in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Doing a "Back Roll" off the boat and into the warm tropical water we found ourselves heading down toward the bottom. Surrounded in warm blue, the shadow of the Fuji Maru slowly appears. Its massive structure is astounding! The dive guide started the underwater tour at about 90 feet by entering the torpedo hole that sunk the Fuji Maru. It is amazing that with the force that took down these great ships any item would remain intact. We saw Saki bottles (broken and whole) everywhere and lots of them (The Japanese truly loved their Saki),

Travel Tips *continued*

SNAPSHOTS – MY TRIP TO TRUK *continued*

better to exchange prior to leaving, or wait until you get there?

- Do you know where the American Consulate is located in the area that you are traveling? This is ALWAYS a good thing to know in case of a major emergency.

A travel agent can help you determine all of these things and will be able to give you expert advice. The added protection of a travel professional will help your travel plans go smoothly.

You can visit w.travel.state.gov for more information.

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bullets unused and spent, china dinnerware and torpedoes, (still waiting to be sent on their way) to name a few items.

Other Japanese supply ships carried trucks, small airplanes (Zeros) and tanks. One ship actually had a medical area where they did surgery and the surgical tools were still there! It was apparent that these tools had been locked in the drawers during the battle and later were brought out for divers to appreciate.

These ships and their artifacts are memorials of the battle and the lives lost. To take anything is absolutely prohibited and divers respect that. I had heard of one diver that had been taking items and hiding them in the tank of the toilet in his room (unbeknownst to his roommate). He was found out by the other divers in his group. They put the items back and he was totally ostracized for the rest of the trip! He became a non-person (divers can be brutal to someone who has done something so unthinkable).



For those who may not be history buffs you too would marvel at the metamorphosis these Japanese supply ships went through to become artificial reefs. Colorful soft coral, schooling fish and starfish, fire red sea anemones that become homes to clown fish are all made possible by these ships. What a beautiful memorial that started out as ships of war.

We also did a couple of land tours. One of the divers in the group is a history buff. We went to the Japanese hospital which has been overtaken by the beauty of mother nature. There are villages out in the middle of these forests. As we walked down a primitive trail, before we knew it, we were surrounded by 7 or 8 children and their wonderful faces. I took a couple of pictures and, when showing them the photos, their eyes would get big and the laughs and giggles were like music.

You can't leave Chuuk until you have visited the Japanese Headquarters. This is a short boat ride to one of the islands. Upon arrival we were greeted by one of the elders in the local village. He led us through the forest on a trail for about 45 minutes that none of us could see and only he knew. The headquarters finally came into view. How magnificent! It, of course, was bombed out like everything else. You could, however, still see the way they reinforced this huge two story building, you could see where the bathtubs were (no showers for these guys). This is where the high-ranking officers lived while here. I could shut my eyes and almost see them laughing and drinking Saki when they were bored or going over strategies for their battle plans against the Americans.



One thing that was brought back to me over and over again was that no matter what mankind does, mother earth will always have her way and win in the end. My trip to Chuuk was a great experience and by the time I left I found myself calling her Chuuk and not Truk. Chuuk is the native name. I will always remember these islands as Chuuk.