



POHNPEI

the village

: GLEN COWANS

> IMAGINE BEING IN A TROPICAL DIVE RESORT WITH NO AIRCONDITIONING IN A ROOM ELEVATED IN THE RAINFOREST LIKE A TREE HOUSE. SOUNDS LIKE ROUGHING IT, BUT IN REALITY IT'S A COMFORTABLE AND GENTLE PARADISE. YOU FALL ASLEEP AT NIGHT TO THE SOUNDS OF THE FOREST AND AWAKE NEXT DAY TO THE SERENADE OF THE BIRDS AT DAWN.

In 1971, way before 'eco-tourism' was heard of, Bob and Patti Arthur decided to move to Pohnpei and build a thatch hotel, a place in tune with nature where guests could totally engage with the environment. Many people said they were mad but they did it. The Village has been updated over time, and now you can be amongst the forest looking out over the ocean surfing the net with WiFi on your laptop, knowing that the environmental footprint you leave behind is about as minimal as it can get. We arrived late at night, and saw little more than subtly-lit stone pathways winding their way through the forest toward each hut, but we awoke to magnificent ocean vistas behind the surrounding trees.

Each morning we'd gather our camera gear, hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen, and walk from the Long House down a steep trail to the dive boats. The crew had loaded the dive gear on to the longboats, so all we had to do was find a cushion

and get comfortable. Underwater camera equipment was placed next to you on its own cushion. Travel to dive sites varied from 20 minutes to just over an hour depending on location and wind or sea conditions. Once there it was an easy backward roll. Between dives lunch was either at a secluded beach or on the boat. Served in the ultimate biodegradable lunch boxes the Bento Box contained rice and stir fry wrapped in a banana leaf - there's absolutely no guilt in disposing of your lunch wrapper over the side of the boat.

Arriving back at the Village each day around 2-3pm left plenty of time to rest, clean up, and check through your day's shots or video. Then it's back to the bar for a drink and talk to the friendly staff at the Long House, before a delicious dinner with a magnificent sunset. Book the outer gazebo, which is accessible by a small land bridge, for a romantic private dinner with the best views of all.



Main: The dropoff at Ahnd Atoll
 1 A manta ray in Manta Passage
 2 Clumping seaweeds
 3 Intricate sponge growth amongst the corals
 4 A ghost pipefish
 5 A nudibranch



1

1 A large sponge growing in the shadowed section of a reef wall.

2 Anemones are common; this one almost glowed in the sunlight.

3 I followed this baby blacktip as it cruised into the feeding fusiliers.

4 Around the 30 metre mark large gorgonians were common.

5 & 6 Nudibranchs are common, you just have to look hard enough.

7 Long spiralling seawhips hanging off the wall.



2



3



4



5



6

POHNPEI

must-do dive sites

Ahnd Atoll One of the furthestmost sites from the Village is Ahnd Atoll. Accessible only in calm weather, which was quite common during our 10 day stay, Ahnd is really picturesque – white sandy beaches, palm trees, and bright blue water that's considered the clearest in Pohnpei. Here we did an easy drift along a steep slope that became a steep wall as we moved into the passage cutting through the reef. The reef was littered with red clumping and long spiralling single seawhips, as well as gorgonian seafans. Deeper into the channel, the shaded vertical wall sections featured huge orange elephant ear sponges. To top it off, cruising through the channel below was our first Pohnpeian manta ray.

Mwand Wall A steep wall studded with huge branching green tubastrea coral trees, clumps of red whip corals, plus crinoids hanging off every exposed surface. At 30 metres and beyond, huge gorgonians beckoned. For photographers, this site also had plenty for a macro lens as nudibranchs, shrimp and tiny corals are also prevalent. In fact whichever lens you choose, a second dive is needed here just to capture what you missed the first time around. Keep an eye out for schooling fusiliers and the occasional Napoleon wrasse.

Areu Wall Another macro site or wide angle or both. I've never seen so many wobbly shrimp before, and not just on the bubble corals – if you looked hard they were everywhere. Huge corkscrew-like spiralling single seawhips, some over three metres long, had whip blennies hiding from you on the opposite side of the whip. Large black coral trees, anemones with anemonefish, gorgonians and trumpet-like sponges were worth exploring.

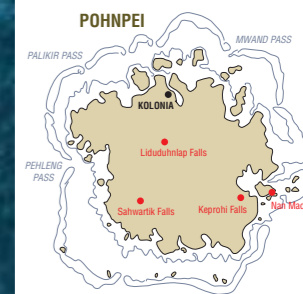
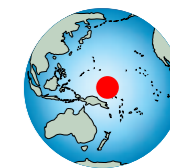
Manta Road This funnel-like pass has its narrowest point in just 17 metres and it's where the mantas come for a clean. It is only about 15 metres wide at the bottom, so it's almost impossible for the manta rays to sneak past you. We had seven magnificent creatures here; I was so busy trying to photograph the cleaning station that when I turned around I found myself within centimetres of a large completely black one – too close for my lens to focus let alone fit the whole creature into the frame, so I just looked into an eye and it looked straight back. Completely black manta rays are common in Pohnpei and we saw several. This site is also a great snorkel; when the current runs there's hundreds of fusiliers feeding in a huge mass at the surface, usually with several small blacktip reef sharks hassling them into a tight formation. The mantas are also often feeding, somersaulting through the same plankton the fusiliers are gulping down.

Dawahk Pass This also brings clear Pacific waters into the lagoons. The reef itself features hard corals and many anemones. The dive starts at around 30 metres and follows the reef ridge in on the current, gradually rising along a bridge-like hump where either side of the ridge drops down into deeper water. As we approached the 'bridge' we saw dozens of reef sharks swarming just off the side. Regulars also seen here are swirling jacks, tuna and barracuda.

Pohnpei is often considered as just a transfer point to other places like Kosrae, Kwajalein, Yap, or Palau. But Pohnpei is actually a stand-alone destination in itself, well worth visiting in combination with the others.



7



> **LINK:**
www.visit-pohnpei.fm

POHNPEI

must-do activities

Like the rest of Micronesia, visiting Pohnpei is not just about diving, there are other must-do activities:



Nan Madol Ruins This 'Venice of the Pacific' is breathtaking. Built around 500 AD, this ancient metropolis was created from over 90 man-made islets covering more than 80 hectares. At high tide you can canoe the vast waterways, stopping to explore at leisure. The ruins themselves consist of breakwaters and giant constructions created from huge basalt pillars stacked into incredible formations. Many of the pillars are so large that there's still scientific speculation about how they were moved vast distances over the ocean; the locals believe magic was involved in their transportation. The construction and layout of this ancient city are incredible. At the time of first western

contact it was estimated that between 25,000 and 35,000 people lived within the walls of this Pacific waterway, but diseases brought by outside contact decimated the population.

Kayak excursions Take a kayak and head for the nearest island; explore the mangroves and keep an eye out for free-swimming moray eels as they hunt amongst the roots. Paddle quietly and you might sneak up on baby blacktip reef sharks in the shallows. If you make it all the way to the end of the island it's only another 200 metres more to Manta Ray Pass, so bringing snorkelling gear is also a great idea. This option is only for experienced snorkellers and paddlers.





1 Ahnd Atoll on a perfect day
 2 Inside a thatched hut at 'the Village'
 3 One of Pohnpei's many waterfalls
 4 Sunset from the Long Hut



Getting there: Continental Airlines fly throughout Micronesia. Ex Australia - Ex Cairns or Western Australians can go via the Philippines or Bali (at the time of writing this article). Booking online through Continental can be confusing and expensive if choosing multiple stops, so I suggest using a professional dive travel agent such as Dive Adventures. Most flights within Micronesia hub via Guam and if your stopover is more than a few hours it's possible to get day rooms at various hotels. We used the Ohana Bay View, central to the Tumon shopping district and the shuttle buses that visit the main shopping areas.

Baggage: Continental Airlines allow two checked bags per person up to 22kg each.
Conditions: Two basic seasons, Wet and

Dry, but there's very little variation in conditions. The 'dry' delivers less rain with slightly more prevailing winds but in essence you can dive all year. Water temps are around 27-29 degrees C. Travel during the Australian winter means uncrowded travel and diving; European and American tourists visit during the northern winter (Australian summer).
Entry and Exit Requirements: No visa is required for entry into the Federated States of Micronesia for visitors with Australian Passports. A US\$15 departure tax is collected at the airport on leaving the island.
Electricity: 110vAC, 60hz, US outlets (two vertical pins with round earth pin below), so make sure your chargers can handle 110volts and US adapters.

NUDIBRANCHS

- ENCYCLOPEDIA -

CATALOGUE OF ASIATIC - PACIFIC SEA SLUGS

A\$99.00

PLUS \$10 POSTAGE & HANDLING WITHIN AUSTRALIA

MOUNTAIN OCEAN & TRAVEL PUBLICATIONS
 Po Box 355 Upper Beaconsfield, Victoria 3808
 Email: books@motpub.com.au www.divetheblue.net
POSTAGE & HANDLING WITHIN AUSTRALIA: UP TO 3KG A\$10.00; 3-5KG A\$18.00; OVER 5KG, PRICE ON ENQUIRY.
OVERSEAS POSTAGE - EMAIL: books@motpub.com.au
 ALL PRICES INCLUDE 10% GST FOR AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTS.
 ALLOW 2-4 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED

A\$44

incl. GST

The Wreck of the S.S. President Coolidge

The SS President Coolidge is one of the world's most famous shipwrecks. With the use of narration and archived photos and film footage, this dvd explores the history of the SS President Coolidge from her years as a luxury passenger liner to her untimely demise in the waters of Vanuatu while serving as a troop transport ship for the US Military in the South Pacific during WWII. This along with stunning present day underwater footage demonstrates why the SS President Coolidge is one of the most famous wreck dives in the world.

TO ORDER: TEL 03 5944 3774 FAX 03 5944 4024
EMAIL: books@motpub.com.au www.divetheblue.net

POSTAGE & HANDLING WITHIN AUSTRALIA:
 UP TO 3KG A\$10.00; 3-5KG A\$18.00; OVER 5KG, PRICE ON ENQUIRY
 ALL PRICES INCLUDE 10% GST FOR AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTS.
 ALLOW 2-4 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED.