

Marshall Islands

The air is tangy with sea salt on the thousand or so slender, flat coral islands that make up the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Living on these narrow strips of land between ocean and lagoon, the Marshallese are expert fishers and navigators, having long been reliant on the sea.

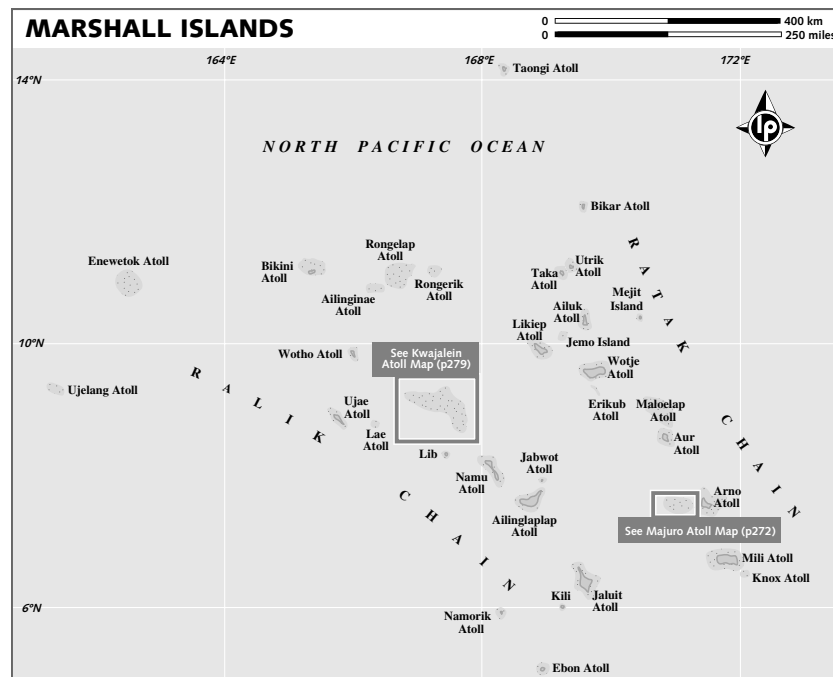
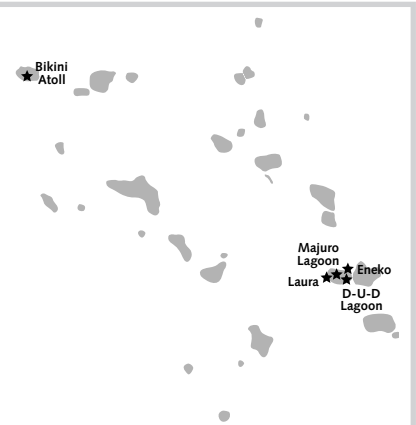
Local faces reflect the islands' history. In the late 1700s, after 2000 years of isolation, these Micronesian islands were variously visited, settled, colonised or occupied by British, Russians, Germans, Japanese and Americans (at first by missionaries, later by defence forces). Today the more developed atolls have a sense of all these influences, with well-stocked stores carrying international groceries, restaurants serving the food of several nations, and basketball courts on many street corners. On the quieter backstreets the Marshallese continue to live in family compounds, surrounded by flowers.

The two main atolls have quite different characters. While it's Westernised, the capital, Majuro, retains much of the languid feel of the tropics. In contrast, Kwajalein is leased to the US military for missile testing and is virtually closed to nonmilitary visitors, its local workers shuttled to the wall-to-wall tenements of Ebeye.

The RMI's charm lies in its outer islands which – except for the traumatic nuclear history of some – still retain the pristine feel of the tropical Pacific. If you have only a few days to spend here, don't run your schedule too tightly alongside that of Air Marshall Islands (AMI) – it generally serves outer atolls just once weekly, and delays of up to many days are common. You can still get a feel for the classic Robinson Crusoe lifestyle by visiting one of the small islands in Majuro Atoll, though divers often bypass Majuro and head straight to Bikini for WWII wreck-diving or Rongelap for nature-diving.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sail the waters of **Majuro lagoon** (p273) in a traditional outrigger canoe
- Dive WWII wrecks at **Bikini Atoll** (p282)
- Float in the **D-U-D lagoon** (p273) just before sunset and watch the early-evening action onshore
- Picnic on the pristine white-sand beach at **Laura** (p275)
- Overnight in eco-friendly beach accommodation at **Eneko** (p276)



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

On Majuro the daily temperature is around 27°C, with relatively high humidity. The northern Marshalls are quite dry, but some southern islands get up to 4060mm of rain a year. Majuro's wet period is September to November. Thankfully, full-blown tropical storms and cyclones are rare – the last memorable one was in 1918.

HISTORY

The Marshallese are thought to have come from Southeast Asia more than 2000 years ago. Over time, the settlers organised themselves into lineage groups and spread through the double chain of atolls. They developed their own lifestyle and social structure, befitting the sparse and isolated environment.

Outside Influences

The islands were first sighted by Europeans in 1526, by Spanish Captain Garcia de Loyasa. There was no further contact until 1788, when Britain's Captain Marshall 'rediscovered' them and they were given his

name. Traders and whalers visited in the early 19th century, but violent attacks by the Marshallese repelled them.

It wasn't until the 1860s that German trading companies started to build links with some of the islands and create a network of island stations for trade in copra and retail goods. Germany formally annexed the

MARSHALL ISLANDS FACTS

- **Capital city (and atoll):** Delap-Uliga-Darrit, or D-U-D Municipality (Majuro)
- **Population:** 65,000
- **Land area:** 181 sq km
- **Number of islands:** Five high islands, 29 atolls
- **International telephone code:** ☎ 692
- **Currency:** US dollar (US\$)
- **Languages:** Marshallese and English
- **Greeting:** *Yokwe yuk* ('love to you')
- **Website:** www.visitmarshallislands.com

GOVERNING THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

The two legislative bodies are the Council of Iroij, the Upper House, and the Nitijela, the Lower House. The Council of Iroij, comprised of hereditary tribal chiefs, acts as an advisory board.

The 33-member Nitijela meets on Majuro twice yearly and elects one of its members to be president. In the Nitijela, the representation of women is usually by a solitary senator; women have always been under-represented in the parliament.

The Council of Iroij has a membership of 12. Its main responsibility is to refer back to the Nitijela any bill affecting customary law, traditional practice, land tenure or any related matter. The council can also express its opinion to the cabinet about matters of national interest.

In November 2003, the ruling United Democratic Party (UDP) was returned to power in national elections, successfully fending off the challenge of the Aelon Kein Ad Party (AKA). President Note was returned to office with 20 votes in the Nitijela.

The election mirrored the increasing tensions in Marshallese culture and society as the country moved into the 21st century. The AKA sought to champion and maintain many of the values of the traditional system; the UDP, on the other hand, was generally seeking to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. The challenge of retaining tradition in a rapidly urbanised setting will continue to be a major issue for national politics.

Marshall Islands in 1885, and until German administrators arrived in 1906 the islands were run by Jaluit Gesellschaft, a group of powerful German trading companies.

World Wars & Nuclear Testing

During WWI Japan declared war on Germany and occupied German Micronesia in September 1914. The islands remained under Japanese rule until the defeat of Japan by American forces in WWII, when the Marshalls (along with what are now the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Republic of Palau) became part of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

The US moved in immediately after the war, resettling islanders and starting atomic bomb experiments on Bikini and Enewotok Atolls in 1946. Between 1946 and 1956 there were 67 powerful nuclear bomb tests; cumulatively, these tests were the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima bombs being detonated every day for 12 years. Though the bombing is long over, the Marshallese continue to grapple with the lingering effects of radiation (see p283), and entire communities have had to be evacuated and resettled (see p281). Kwajalein Atoll was later established as a missile testing site.

Independence

The Congress of Micronesia, composed of all the US Trust Territories, was formed in 1965. Aspiring to political independence,

the Marshallese withdrew from the Congress of Micronesia in 1973, and their constitution became effective on 1 May 1979. Independence itself came in 1986, and membership of the UN in 1991.

At independence, the Marshallese government signed a 15-year Compact of Free Association (CFA) with the US which, as well as providing economic benefits to the Marshallese, allowed the US to continue to use Kwajalein as a missile testing site. In 2004 the second CFA, Compact II, was signed. This 20-year deal provides about US\$40 million per year in the forms of grants and a trust fund, the goal of which is to provide income to the government after the end of Compact II. The second CFA negotiations also included an agreement to extend the lease for use of the Kwajalein missile range until 2066 after the current lease between the RMI and the landowners expires in 2016. Landowners refused to sign a new lease, however, and they have asked for US\$19 million annually for rental of the majority of the world's largest atoll lagoon; the US has offered to pay only US\$15 million per year.

Apart from cash infusions from the US, many Marshallese rely on subsistence agriculture. Copra production, a mainstay of the country, is recovering from the altered weather patterns experienced during the late 1990s El Niño event (see p61) and is subsidised by the RMI to assist outer-island economies. An astounding 42 million coconuts are harvested annually, a figure

which could double in five years. Majuro's copra mill produces cosmetic soaps and oils, and some vehicles on Majuro run on coconut oil as a diesel substitute.

One of El Niño's more positive effects was the redirection of schools of tuna towards the eastern Marshalls – new fishing licence deals have seen revenue from foreign fishing licences soar. The RMI's 2 million sq km of ocean boasts a catch of around US\$50 million annually, and the country receives 5% of the landed value of each boat's catch. There is, of course, a concurrent need to monitor the fishing industry and beware of overfishing.

Cruise ships inject about US\$30,000 into the local economy each time they visit, boosting the sale of local goods and services, and encouraging craftspeople to continue practising their art.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

The Marshallese are a softly spoken, laid-back people, whose gentleness is reflected in their traditional greeting, 'Yokwe yuk', which means 'love to you'. Don't be surprised if the locals are economical with words and not as expressive during first encounters as other Pacific people; historically, their encounters with outsiders haven't always been happy. Don't be put off by an apparent lack of response to questions or requests; just wait a moment and see what happens.

Lifestyle

Marshallese society has always been stratified and, despite increasing Westernisation,

social status still derives from kinship and chiefs continue to wield a great deal of authority. Ownership rights to the land are vested with the Iroij (the hereditary chief of several clans), but this is a matrilineal society so women inherit the right to cultivate and use land occupied by the clan. Mutual reciprocity and extended family ties and obligations remain strong. The average family size is 7.8 people, the highest among the central Pacific countries, and women have an average of four children.

Lifestyle changes, coupled with changes in diet, have led to an increasing incidence of diabetes and related illnesses. Because of high wage earnings in non-traditional occupations, the development of a cash-based economy and the availability of imported Western food, food habits have undergone a change for the worse. The traditional – and nutritious – diet, consisting primarily of breadfruit, coconut, pandanus, taro and protein-rich fish, chicken and pork, has been overtaken by canned and processed foods. Alcohol, smoking and substance-abuse are on the rise, particularly among the young, as is the crime rate.

In general, the people are peace-loving, tolerant and secular. Although most clothing worn nowadays is Western-style, women and girls dress modestly and you will see older women wearing loose-fitting, floral-printed *muu-muu* dresses. It is advisable for women visitors not to display too much flesh in public; longish shorts and T-shirts are fine, but skimpy tops and short shorts will encourage people to think, especially if

STICK CHARTS

The Marshalls are particularly difficult to sight from the sea because of their low elevation and the distances between the atolls. While travelling between the islands, early inhabitants learned to read the patterns of the waves by watching for swells that would show when land was ahead.

Stick charts were used to teach the secrets of navigation, and were made by tying flat strips of wood together in designs that imitated the wave patterns. Shells were then attached to the sticks to represent the islands.

Three kinds of charts were used. The *matang* showed wave patterns around a single island or atoll and was used to teach the basic techniques. The *medo* showed patterns around a small group of atolls and the *rebillit* mapped an entire chain, showing the relationships between the islands and the major ocean swells.

All the information contained on the stick charts was memorised and the charts themselves were not actually taken on journeys. While few present-day Marshallese understand how to read stick charts, many can still make them because of their popularity as souvenirs.

you're young, that you belong to a very old profession.

Population

The majority of the 65,000 islanders live on Majuro and Kwajalein Atolls, and over 95% are Marshallese. As elsewhere in the region, population growth is a huge problem, though the rate of increase declined from 4.5% in the 1980s to 1.5% by the end of the 1990s. About 40% of the population is aged under 14 years.

RELIGION

Christianity has played a significant role in shaping the attitude and behaviour of the people since missionaries first arrived in the islands during the 1830s. Most Marshallese are Christians – either Protestant or Catholic. As in much of the Pacific, evangelical churches are gaining popularity.

ARTS

Handicrafts of a consistently high quality are produced by Marshall Islanders, and their work is acclaimed across the Pacific. Originally developed in response to the requirements of a hard-working subsistence lifestyle, techniques such as weaving and model-making have since become sophisticated art forms.

Basketry & Weaving

Pandanus and coconut form the basis of the renowned craft of Marshallese weaving. Hats and bags, including the boxy white *kili* handbag made world-famous by former US first lady Jackie Kennedy in the 1960s, are made from *maan* (prepared

pandanus) or finely woven *kimej* (from immature coconut shoots).

Fans, made of *maan* and sometimes decorated with *kimej*, are both practical and beautiful. Work baskets for gathering and carrying food are made from *malwe*, sturdy coconut leaf-spines. Robust floor mats for sitting, and the finer sleeping mats, are made from *maan*.

Boat-making

Canoe-making was until recently a dying art but it has been revived in the Marshalls (see p273). As well as full-sized vessels, precisely made models based on authentic designs (including a steering oar and bailer), materials and techniques are an art form of their own. Stick charts (see p269), highly complex navigational tools used to sail between atolls, are also still crafted.

Dance

Of note is *jobwa*, the Marshallese stick dance; it's rarely performed and, traditionally, only when Iroij are in attendance. The dancers jump between 'dressed up' sticks about 1m long, which are flipped and twirled, accompanied by simple drumming. It's great to watch and action packed; if you hear of a stick dance happening, do everything you can to see it.

Usually performed at Christmas, the uniquely Marshallese 'beat' dances are also a delight for ears and eyes. Church-based – and highly competitive – groups perform a series of energetic dances interspersed with vigorous choral singing, during which gifts of sweets are distributed to (well, thrown at) the applauding congregation.

BEST EATING

Unsurprisingly, being in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the fresh fish is unsurpassed. The classic Marshallese diet combined fish, coconuts and breadfruit, and you'll still find these as staples in the outer islands. However, regular airline connections bring regular fresh freight deliveries, so fruit and vegetables are also on the menu. A range of influences over the years – Japanese, European, American and, more lately, Chinese and Korean – are reflected in the variety of food available.

- Blackened wahoo with a view at the Enra Restaurant (p277) in the Marshall Islands Resort.
- A sundowner and classic burgers at the Tide Table Restaurant (p277).
- Sunset pizza while watching the surf roll in at the Marshall Islands Club (p277).
- Any of the dishes at the White House (p277) Korean restaurant – delicious food, though less than atmospheric surroundings.

Literature

A small but active community of writers in the Marshalls self-published the first anthology of locally inspired writing, *Al In Aelon Majol*, in 2005. *The Trickster*, by former Majuro resident Jane Dowling, is a novel based on Marshallese legend.

Robert Louis Stevenson's 1890s classic of Pacific travel writing, *In the South Seas*, includes his observations of the Marshalls during his journey on the island steamer *Janet Nicoll*.

Music

Cha Nin Way and the Ukulele Boys are two popular local bands that play contemporary Marshallese music and lyrics. Most of the music you'll hear will be Marshallese versions of American hits, and Lamarin, RJ4 and Rosemelu (a band of women performers) can be heard at various venues around Majuro.

The ukulele is the current musical instrument of choice in the Marshalls; it's rare to see a bunch of kids walking down the road unaccompanied by strumming.

LANGUAGE

Marshallese is the official language, but (American) English is taught in schools and is widely understood.

Marshallese basics

Greetings.	<i>Yokwe yuk.</i> (Love to you.)
Hello/Goodbye.	<i>Ko na mauri.</i>
How are you?	<i>Ejet am mour?</i>
I'm well (thanks).	<i>Emman (komomol tata).</i>
Please.	<i>Jojj.</i>
Thanks.	<i>Komomol tata.</i>
Yes.	<i>Aet.</i>
No.	<i>Jab.</i>

ENVIRONMENT

As well as concerns about climate change and rising sea level, the Marshalls have very specific environmental issues related to the US nuclear testing which took place in the country. Some of the islanders who were directly exposed to fallout, or who lived on contaminated land, have since died from radiation-related ailments, while others have lingering health problems. See the Bikini (p281), Enewetok (p282) and Rongelap (p283) sections for more information.

Geography

Almost all of the Marshalls' 1225 islands and islets are part of 29 coral atolls. The atolls run roughly north–south for 1290km in two nearly parallel chains about 240km apart. The eastern chain is Ratak, which means 'Towards Dawn', and the western chain is Ralik, 'Towards Sunset'. Although there's only 181 sq km of total land area, the Marshalls spread across 1,942,500 sq km of ocean. The widest island, Wotje, is less than 1.5km across; the highest elevation, just 10m, is on Likiep.

Ecology

The Marshalls' coral atoll environment supports a limited ecosystem of coconuts, pandanus and breadfruit. Coconut crabs are the largest native land animal, and sea birds hug the shoreline and cruise overhead. The most varied and plentiful wildlife is underwater, so getting off the land and into the sea is essential.

MAJURO ATOLL

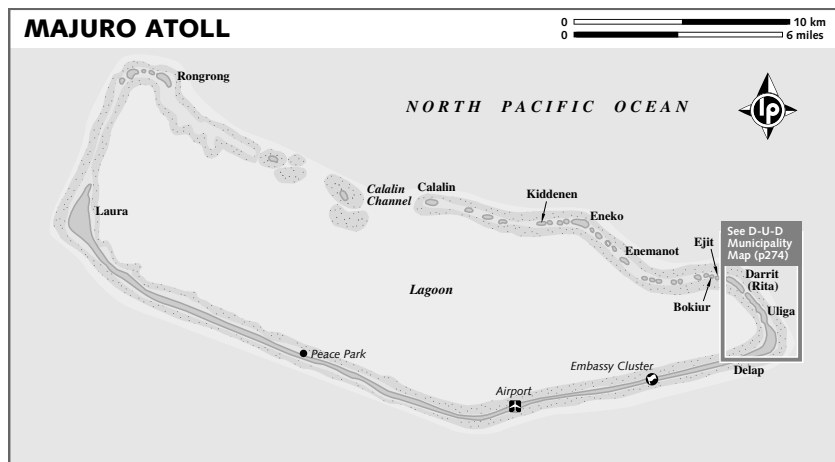
pop 30,000 / area 9.8 sq km

Oval-shaped Majuro Atoll is the nation's political, economic and transport centre, its 53 islets arcing in a slender 108km ribbon. When Robert Louis Stevenson visited Majuro in 1889 he called it the 'pearl of the Pacific', and while some of the lustrous

MAJURO IN TWO DAYS

Take an early-morning outrigger ride on the lagoon with **WAM** (p273), then pick up a picnic and head out to **Laura** (p275) to spend the day lolling on the beach and snorkelling on the shallow reef. Get back to D-U-D by mid-afternoon and enjoy a bit of culture at the **Alele Museum** (p274) before heading for sunset drinks and dinner on the veranda of the **Marshall Islands Resort** (p275).

Next morning, eat a hearty breakfast at **DAR Coffee Corner** (p276). Buy snacks and drinks at the Formosa Supermarket, then catch a boat across the lagoon to spend the day relaxing, walking and snorkelling on **Eneko** or **Kiddenen Islands** (p275). On return, shake the sand off your shoes and enjoy dinner and a sundowner at **Tide Table Restaurant** (p277).



may have worn thin, there's enough charm remaining to recall his description.

ORIENTATION

The larger islets are connected by a 45km paved road. Though it's heavily Westernised and the most populated of the Marshalls' atolls, Majuro retains a simple island flavour, especially if you get out of the downtown area. Take a trip to Laura at the far end of the palm-lined road for quiet beaches and a very pleasant drive.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

A limited selection of romances and thrillers are available, but serious readers should bring a supply of books.

Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel (☎ 625 4229;

Delap) Has a book exchange.

Formosa Supermarket (Uliga)

Payless (Delap)

Tourist Trap (Delap)

Internet Access

Marshall Islands Resort (☎ 625 2525; Delap)

National Telecommunications Authority (NTA; ☎ 625 3363; Delap; 📧 7am to midnight) The cheapest Internet café in town.

RRE Hotel (☎ 625 3250; Uliga) Ask at reception.

Tourist Trap (Delap)

Medical Services

Majuro Clinic (☎ 625 6455) Opposite the Marshall Islands visitor information centre and in the clinic below

the RRE hotel. There's a dentist above the main post office in Uliga.

Majuro Hospital (emergency ☎ 625 4144' switchboard ☎ 625 3399; Delap)

Money

There's an ATM at the Formosa Supermarket and the Bank of Guam.

Bank of Guam (Delap)

Bank of the Marshall Islands (Uliga & Airport)

Post

Post office (Uliga) Next to the Formosa Supermarket.

Tourist Information

Marshall Islands visitor information centre

(☎ 625 6482; www.visitmarshallislands.com) The helpful Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (MIVA) is in the Small Island area of D-U-D.

TRANSPORT

Getting There & Away

For information on flights to Majuro Atoll, see p286.

AIR

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) has an office on Small Island, and operates flights to Kwajalein (p286) and the outer islands (p280).

BOAT

State-run supply ships travel irregularly to the outer atolls, but private boats go more frequently. Drop in to the **Department**

of Transportation Office (☎ 625 3469) at Uliga Dock for details about supply-ship sailing schedules. Only Arno is served by regular public boats (see p281).

If you are coming by yacht, check out www.micobeachyc.com, a great site that will lead you to just about all you need to know. On arrival, yachties should check in with Majuro's **Port Authority** (☎ 625 8269), then head to the Shoreline Dock at the RRE Hotel and get the lowdown from other yachties. See if long-termers Karen or Cary are around.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Most hotels provide a courtesy transfer. The taxi fare to and from town is US\$3.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Cars can be rented on Majuro for around US\$50 per day from the following car-rental agencies.

DAR (☎ 625 3174; Uliga) Next to the eponymous coffee shop.

Jemenaaj (☎ 625 8131; jemenaaj@yahoo.com)

Majuro Motors (☎ 625 4422)

MGAS Rentals (☎ 625 6559)

Pacific Wheels (☎ 625 7497)

RRE Hotel (☎ 625 3250; Uliga)

TAXI

Shared taxis are abundant and cheap. The fare is 50c anywhere in the D-U-D area up to the Majuro Bridge, and US\$3 to the airport; go past the airport, however, and the price rockets. The rather endearing way of flagging down a taxi is to waggle as many fingers in the air as the number of seats you need; this way the taxi driver knows whether or not there is room for you.

D-U-D MUNICIPALITY

D-U-D – comprised of Delap, Uliga and Darrit (Rita) Islands – has the greatest concentration of commercial services. Government

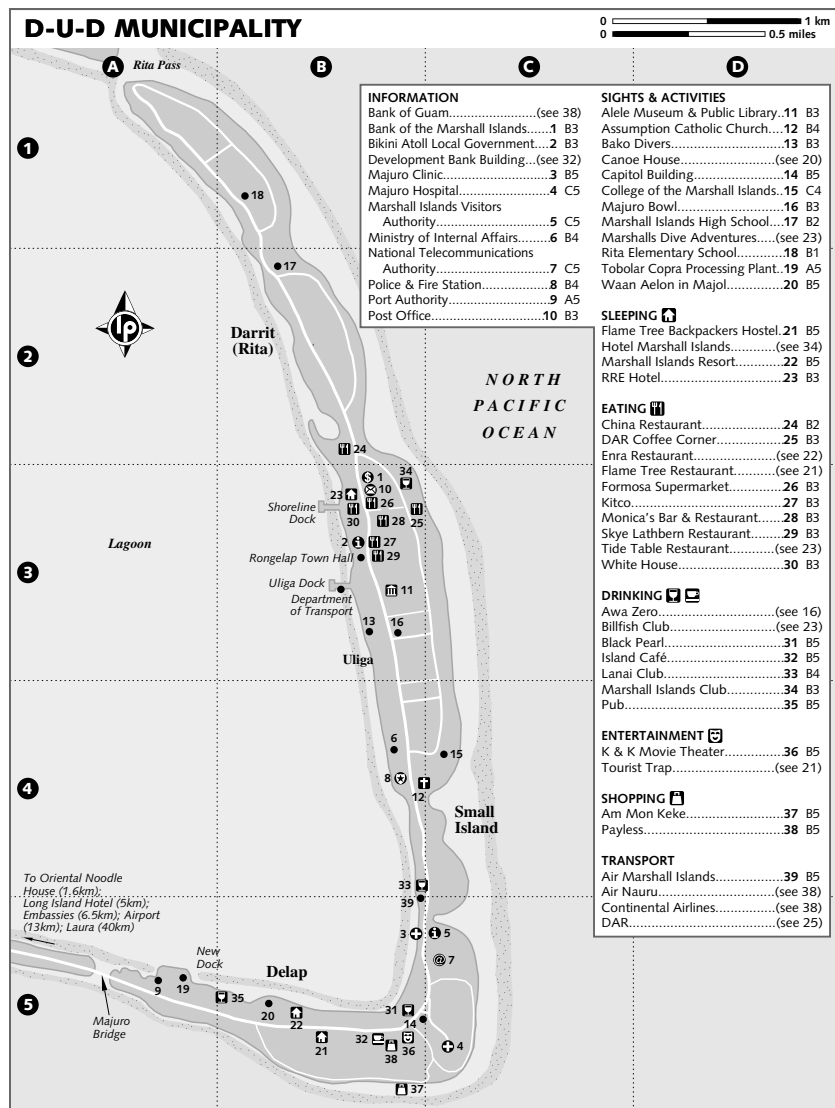
WAAN AELON IN MAJOL – CANOES OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

The ocean-going canoes that developed in the Marshalls are something close to genius. Living in relative geographic isolation and working with limited local materials – breadfruit logs and pandanus, mostly – the Marshallese crafted extraordinarily swift, stable, asymmetrically hulled vessels. Using their navigational expertise, the islanders could travel as far as Hawai'i in *walap*, ocean-going canoes up to 100 feet long and carrying 50 people. *Tibnol*, around 30 feet long, carried around 10 people and could fish both inside and outside the lagoon, and also travel between atolls. Small rowing *korkor*, sometimes fitted with a sail, could carry one or two people inside the lagoon's protected waters.

Until recently it seemed that traditional boat-building was another skill that would die out in the modern age, but there's been a resurgence of interest in the craft. So if you've ever wondered how it feels to ride in a traditionally built outrigger canoe, head down to the canoe house in Delap and, if the wind and waves are right, you can sail on a *korkor* on the lagoon with Waan Aelon in Majol (US\$20 for an hour).

Known universally as WAM, Waan Aelon in Majol means 'canoes of the Marshall Islands', and is a thriving nongovernmental organisation based on Majuro. Since the late 1990s, elderly master-builders from the outer islands have been sharing their skills with local young men (and one or two young women) and, together, re-creating some spectacular canoes. Traditional knowledge is 'owned' by individuals – one person might own the knowledge of navigation by the stars; another might be a master of the ocean swells or of the weather – and is closely guarded; it's an indication of how important Marshallese feel about preserving their boat-building that this knowledge is now being made available more widely.

WAM is providing much-needed employment and skills-training while also keeping tradition alive. The canoe houses and workshops are a living archive where old skills and materials – such as carving with timber – blend with the new, such as moulding with fibreglass. Among its plans for the future, WAM hopes to develop a small visitor centre, create a few low-key tourist bungalows on outer islands and implement some shoreline conservation initiatives. To find out how these plans are progressing, check out the WAM website (www.wamprogram.org) or email info@wamprogram.org.



offices are spread around Delap; particularly noticeable is the modern glass-encased US\$9 million Capitol building.

Next to the courthouse in Uliga is the **Alele Museum & Public Library** (☎ 625 3372; <http://members.tripod.com/~alelemuseum/Index.html>; ☒ 9am-noon, 1-4pm Mon-Fri), with small but good-quality exhibits of early Marshallese culture,

including stick charts, model canoes and shell tools.

On the town side of the bridge is the **Tobolar Copra Processing Plant** (☎ 625 3116). Like many Pacific islands, Majuro's first economic mainstay was copra – dried coconut meat – and its end-products of coconut oil and soaps can be found in the local shops.

Copra is still processed on Majuro; if you'd like to see how it's done, call ahead and book a time to visit.

People commonly wade across the reef to the islands north of Rita at low tide. The pleasant beaches of **Enemanot**, several islands beyond Rita, are popular for weekend day trips by boat to picnic and snorkel; ask at the visitor information centre (p272) or your hotel about getting there.

Laura, a quiet green refuge 40km from D-U-D, is the atoll's agricultural centre. Its tip is fringed with a gorgeous white-sand beach, Majuro's finest, that's popular for weekend picnics. Like all Marshallese land it's privately owned, but it's open to the public at US\$2 per person. The Japanese-built **Peace Park** halfway to Laura has a memorial to those who died in WWII. You can catch a public shuttle bus to Laura from the RRE Hotel car park every other hour during the week (US\$2.50). Public transport is more erratic at weekends; another option is to charter a taxi for around US\$20 one way.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Tropical fish, white-tipped and grey reef sharks and a few wrecks make Majuro a fine dive spot, and the water gets clearer the further you are from Rita. A popular dive site is Calalin Channel – also known as Shark Alley – but beware of currents. For an overview of Majuro's myriad diving opportunities, see p76.

The most experienced dive operator in town, and the one to go for if you fancy a shark dive, is Jerry Ross at **Bako Divers** (☎ 247 7254; www.bakodivers.com). He runs a full sales, rental and repair service for any dive gear.

Marshall's Dive Adventures (MDA; ☎ 625 3483; mda@e-mit.net), another excellent operation, specialises in Japanese divers; contact Satoshi Yoshii. MDA also sells and rents snorkel gear.

Local two-tank dives cost around US\$100, maybe a bit extra if you need to rent all the gear. Dive certification classes are available with both operators for around US\$350.

Other Water Sports

For decent **snorkelling**, head over to one of the islands in the small chain west of Rita. You should be able to arrange a pick-up/drop-off on one of the boats that take

TEETHING TROUBLE *Virginia Jealous*

On the way back from Laura, feeling peckish, we stopped at a roadside snack stall for a bag of boiled pandanus fruit. In shades of orange, firm-fleshed, sweet and strongly scented, it looked just the thing to refresh us in the midday heat.

Delicious it was, too. But what we'd failed to realise was that the aforementioned sweet, firm flesh was embedded in a fibrous seed not unlike a human hair ball. With fibres lodged firmly between every tooth and incapable of speaking, we picked and sucked our teeth in companionable silence all the way home.

overnighters to either Kiddenen or Eneko Islands; a return trip is between US\$20 and US\$30. Snorkellers without boat transport will find a shallow coral reef at Laura Beach.

For **sport fishing** contact MIVA (p286) for a list of charter boats available. The **Marshall's Billfish Club** (☎ 625 7491; billfish@ntamar.net) holds several tournaments a year; a record tuna caught in 2001 weighed in at a massive 323kg!

SLEEPING

Majuro has several decent hotels, and most of them provide free airport transfers.

D-U-D Municipality

Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel (☎ 625 4229; journal@ntamar.net; dm/s/d US\$15/25/35; ☒ ☒ ☒) Easily the best deal in town for the budget traveller – in fact the only deal at present – the Flame Tree will suit travellers who want to meet locals and have fun. There's a clean and tidy dormitory set up at the back, complete with kitchenette and lounge area, shared toilet and a few rooms with bathrooms. The rooms – not suitable for light sleepers! – are behind the bar, a happening place with live music on Thursday and Friday.

Marshall Islands Resort (☎ 625 2525; www.marshallislandsresort.com; r US\$130; ☒ ☒ ☒) Slap on the waterfront, and nominally top of the range as all rooms have unobstructed lagoon views. When we visited in 2005, the exteriors were grubby and dilapidated, the rooms were tatty and the pool (Majuro's one and only) was murky. Hopefully, a

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

RRE Hotel (☎ 625 3250; readmin@ntamar.net; r from US\$90, garden bungalows US\$150; 📶 📺 📺) The Hotel Robert Reimers could do with a bit of tender loving care, but it's comfortable and clean enough. The cheaper rooms are a bit tatty (carpet gets nasty very quickly when there's sea and sand outside), but they all have balconies. The garden bungalows are delightful – you can plop right into the lagoon off the steps at the back. The main attraction is location location location; set between shops and the Shoreline Dock, and at the water's edge, it's a great place for sitting and watching the world go by.

much-needed facelift is on the horizon. Seasonal discounts are offered, sometimes down to US\$85.

Long Island Hotel (☎ 247 6789; lihotel@ntamar.com; r without/with water views US\$65/85; 📶) On the way to the airport, this well-appointed, Chinese-run hotel opened in 2005.

Hotel Marshall Islands (☎ 625 3000; journal@ntamar.net) Above the Marshall Islands Club, this place was closed indefinitely for renovations when we last visited. If it's up and running again, it's a good option on the ocean side of town.

Surrounding Islands

There are several opportunities to get off the urban strip (such as it is) and experience a slice of the small island life without risking your onward flight bookings.

Eneko Island Cottages (☎ 625 5131; readmin@ntamar.net; cottage US\$50) Owned by the Reimers family, these two delightful cottages have the run of Eneko Island's beach and shallow reef. There's a fully equipped and insect-screened shared cooking and sitting area; you'll need to take drinking water. Return boat trip US\$20.

Serendipper Island Resort (☎ 625 3483; info@-mit.net; private use of island overnight US\$480) Come to this resort next to Bokiur Island if you want to splash out. Power is generated by a system of wind and solar generation; the back-up generator is run on local coconut oil. There's a composting toilet and cleaning is done using environmentally friendly products. There's just one single, sizeable

and stylish bungalow on the island, and, of course, the beach is private. Boat transfers are included in the price.

Kiddenen Island (☎ 625 3251; journal@ntamar.net; s US\$30) Budget travellers seeking something similar to Serendipper could try the large solar-powered lodge on tiny Kiddenen Island (also known as Three Bag Island – a somewhat disparaging reference to the annual amount of copra harvested from its small grove of coconut trees!). It's a great spot to chill out for a few days with a good book and a friend. There are kayaks for use, and decent snorkelling. You can walk to other islands at low tide, but bear in mind that all land is owned by someone – if you can get permission to walk around from someone, do so. There's rainwater to drink and a freezer to keep your wine and beer cold, though you'll need to take your rubbish back with you. The return boat trip is US\$30.

EATING

You should enjoy the cosmopolitan choice of food on Majuro – it's the exception rather than the rule for central Pacific countries. If you're after silver service you're in the wrong place, but good fresh food cooked in the style of several different countries is easily available, and the supermarkets stock a wide range of food for self-caterers.

DAR Coffee Corner (☎ 625 3174; big breakfast US\$4; 📶 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, Sun to 6pm; 📺) The excellent DAR, located behind the Formosa Supermarket, is simple, clean, cool and cheap. Fluffy 75c pancakes are an unbeatable morning starter, and local food served buffet-style from lunchtime onwards is excellent.

Formosa Supermarket (Uluga) The deli attached to the Formosa Supermarket has ordinary burgers and sandwiches from US\$2 to US\$3, and decent hot buffet lunches. The food can be packed into picnic containers if you'd rather eat elsewhere (and you probably will, as the ambience isn't exactly great).

Kitco (☎ 625 3208; lunch US\$4; 📶 lunch Mon-Fri) Almost opposite the Rongelap Town Hall, this classic old-style Majuro diner serves good square meals for the budget traveller. Look hard – it's a long, low anonymous, well, *shed* with the sign missing.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

White House (☎ 625 2668; meals US\$7.50; 📶 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The décor won't thrill you but the traditional and very tasty Korean food will. Try the fresh seafood combinations: the tuna steaks come with rice and *kim chi*, and a delicious surprise of mushrooms and broccoli on the side. It's popular with Asian tour groups, so you might want to eat early or late to avoid the rush.

Skye Lathbern Restaurant (☎ 625 3695; mains US\$5; 📶 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Next to Kitco, this place also serves up a good cheap feed, but the coffee could be better.

Monica's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 625 6686; mains US\$10; 📶 lunch & dinner) Upstairs in Uliga, Monica's serves great Chinese food, cooked by a real Chinese cook, and it has a well-stocked bar. Happy hour is 4pm to 8pm, with free appetisers, and there are private rooms if you fancy a bit of karaoke without embarrassing yourself too much.

Flame Tree Restaurant (☎ 625 4229; lunch US\$5, dinner US\$8-14; 📶 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The restaurant at the Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel serves a particularly fine lunch, with a wide selection including pizzas.

Oriental Noodle Restaurant (☎ 247 2088; main courses US\$5-13; 📶 lunch & dinner) Head over the Majuro Bridge for good eat-in or take-away Chinese food. Vegetarian options are available.

China Restaurant (☎ 625 7544; meals US\$8; 📶 lunch & dinner) This pragmatically named place can get pretty loud and smoky when there are Chinese boat crews in town (as can the Oriental Noodle).

Tide Table Restaurant (☎ 625 3250; burgers US\$4; 📶 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Upstairs at the RRE Hotel, this popular place serves excellent food – the classic burgers and salad are great – and has wide lagoon views. The bar is a good spot to catch up on local news, and the drinks are reasonably priced.

Enra Restaurant (☎ 625 2525) In the Marshall Islands Resort, the Enra serves fine food to accompany the wonderful lagoon views. Sunday brunch from 10.30am to 2.30pm is popular, as are the weekly pizza nights and lunch buffets, using local ingredients and fresh fish.

DRINKING

Majuro has a fair bit of nightlife. Marshallese night spots are very dark affairs, and the later it gets, the darker they get. Nothing really kicks off until 11pm, Thursday to Saturday.

Island Café (Mon-Sat) In the Development Bank building, this is the closest you'll get to café culture on Majuro; Starbucks aficionados will love it.

Flame Tree (☎ 625 4229) This place is usually rocking with live music from an accomplished Gilbertese musician on Thursday and Friday nights, and busy with locals most nights.

Long Island Hotel Club (☎ 247 6789) If you are staying out this way the club at the Long Island Hotel is the place to go, but bear in mind that taxis are hard to get past the bridge after about 10pm.

The Marshall Islands Club is good for an early evening drink and famous for its pizza – great for a feed early on in the big night out.

For night owls, Awa Zero, over the Majuro Bowl, often attracts a good crowd and has a reasonable dance floor. The Black Pearl, opposite the capitol building, has an OK house band, and the pub, on the bend in the road before the port area, hosts a late-night disco with almost exclusively Marshallese or Pacific island sounds; this place can get pretty wild and is not for the faint-hearted. Club Lanai near Air Marshall Islands office is very hit and miss, but if it's rocking, it's rolling.

Taxis run all night in D-U-D, so you shouldn't get caught out late without wheels. You can always walk home to your hotel; it's pretty safe, though women will probably feel more comfortable in a group of at least two.

ENTERTAINMENT**Cinema**

K & K Movie Theater (☎ 625 5615) Next to Payless in Delap; call or check out the *Marshall Islands Journal* for the current programme.

Sport

You'll probably find a ready partner for a night's bowling at the **Majuro Bowl** (☎ 625 3797). More informally, join an evening basketball game with the locals; there are courts on many street corners.

SHOPPING

Excellent Marshallese handicrafts include stick charts, carved models of outrigger canoes and intricate weavings such as baskets, wall hangings and purses made from pandanus leaves, coconut fronds and cowrie shells. There are a few local handicraft kiosks around Assumption Catholic Church, or try **Am Mon Keke** (☎ 625 5335). The main streets are lined with craft stalls if there's a cruise ship in town.

Some beautiful black pearl necklaces and earrings are for sale – mostly in hotel gift shops – but don't buy clam shells or black coral; these prohibited items are listed on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Formosa Supermarket and Payless have a decent selection of souvenirs. Tourist Trap under the Flame Tree Backpackers Hostel also has some handicrafts.

KWAJALEIN ATOLL

pop 10,000 (excluding US military) / area 16.8 sq km
Nowhere in Micronesia is the US military presence so pronounced as on Kwajalein Atoll, a US\$4 billion space tracking and missile defence facility operated by the US Department of Defense.

Measured by lagoon size Kwajalein is the world's largest coral atoll, its 97 islands surrounding an immense 2175 sq km body of water. The original main base for the US nuclear test programme, and an essential component in the development of the 'Star Wars' missile defence system, Kwajalein has been at the heart of US weapons of mass destruction development for nearly 60 years. The lagoon, sometimes described as 'the world's largest catcher's mitt', is the target and splashdown point for intercontinental ballistic missile tests (ICBMs); many come from the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, 6760km away, a distance covered in under 40 minutes. The Kwajalein Missile Range (officially called US Army Kwajalein Atoll, or USAKA) includes Kwajalein Island to the south, Roi-Namur Island to the north and some smaller islands between the two. Two-thirds of the lagoon is termed the Mid Atoll Corridor, and access to this area is severely restricted.

KWAJALEIN ISLAND

About 2700 US civilian contract workers and their families live on Kwajalein Island (Kwaj). Kwaj is US suburbia transplanted, with a golf course, swimming pools, baseball diamonds, tennis courts and the air-conditioned Marshallese Cultural Center.

A glimpse from the airport of these most un-Pacific luxuries is likely to be the only taste most visitors will get of Kwaj, as the island is absolutely off limits except as a transit point to neighbouring Ebeye. To overnight on Kwaj, you must have an official 'sponsor' who can arrange for your stay, so unless you have specific clearance to remain on Kwajalein Island (and this is very hard to get) you will immediately be escorted to the boat dock to catch a landing craft shuttle or water taxi to Ebeye. Irrespective of your nationality, Kwaj police do not have a reputation for hospitality, and you'll need to get off the island as soon as you can.

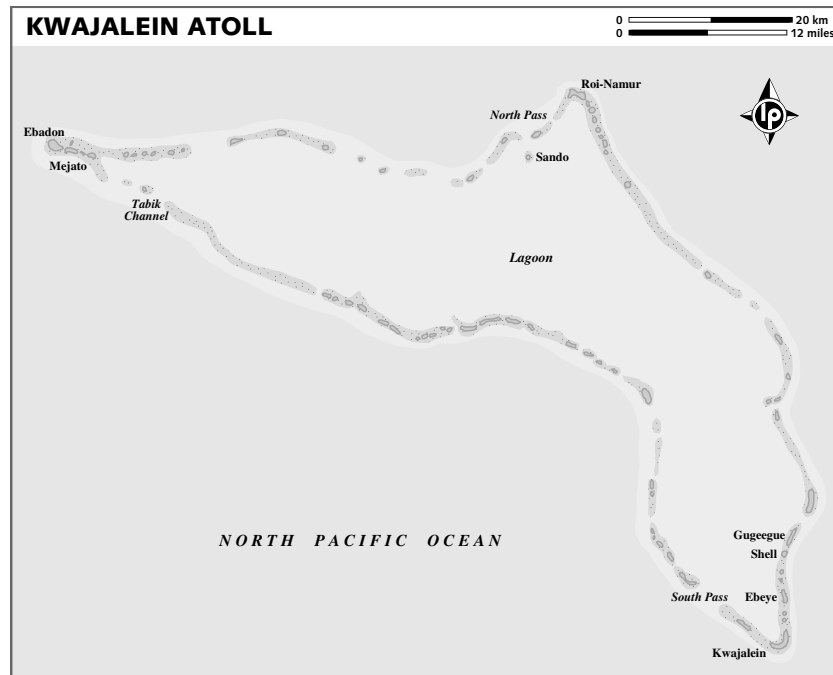
If you *are* an official visitor to Kwaj, WWII relics include a well-preserved bunker and a manicured Japanese cemetery, site of a mass grave for Japanese soldiers defending the island.

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) flies between Majuro and Kwajalein on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday (US\$310 return). Continental Micronesia flights also stop at Kwaj (see p286).

Flights are unable to land when missile tests are scheduled, and advance notice is usually very brief (if it only affects AMI it's likely to be given that day). Flying between Majuro and Kwaj is like crossing a border, so you will need to take your passport along with you.

EBEYE

Over 1300 Marshallese labourers work on Kwajalein Island and live on 31-hectare Ebeye Island, 5km to the north, where population density is higher than in Hong Kong. The workers support an additional 12,000 or so relatives and friends in mostly very simple accommodation; many are one-room shacks and lean-tos of plywood, tin and plastic sheeting, jammed together in tenement conditions with little water. Residents haul drums of drinking water in from Kwaj on the ferry; piped water is



only available at certain times, so fill up your containers when it comes. The electricity supply is getting better but blackouts are still common.

Needless to say, Ebeye is not a big tourist spot, but the people are very friendly, especially the children. It's different.

Information

There is a post office on Ebeye.

Air Marshall Islands (☎ 329 3036) The office is near the Triple J store.

Bank of the Marshall Islands (☎ 329 3603)

National Telecommunications Authority (NTA;

☎ 24 hr) Towards the southern end of the island. For calls to Kwaj go to the Kwaj dock, where they're much cheaper.

Sights & Activities

Kwajalein's lagoon contains more than 30 WWII-era Japanese ships. The diving highlight is the wreck of the German pocket battleship *Prinz Eugen*, which served as an escort to the *Bismarck* during its legendary WWII battle against the British *Hood*. Dive with Hideo Milne, if you can find him, as he knows the wrecks intimately; ask around

near the Mobil tanks lagoon-side for his small store. **Rongelap Expeditions** (☎ 625 7872; www.rongelapexpeditions.com) runs dive tours on Kwajalein's wrecks.

An 8km stroll up the causeway to **Gugeegue** (googeegoo) will take you through tiny islands, some inhabited and some not. Ebewaj has some Japanese remnants from WWII (look in the bush at the south end), and once you get to Gugeegue you can see the **launch site** of the Star Wars interceptors on Meck Island to the north, if you look closely. If you walk along the shore near the pass at the end, you can usually find **missile pieces** made of some very fancy metals, such as titanium. There is good snorkelling at several spots along the causeway.

Sleeping & Eating

There are two hotels on Ebeye and both are overpriced and often overbooked – you need to call well in advance. Add US\$2 plus 10% tax to the prices given here.

Anrohasa Hotel (Fountain's Hotel; ☎ 329 3161; r US\$95; 🍷) The rooms at this two-storey hotel have a refrigerator, phone and TV.

The hotel frequently has no water, which makes life interesting. A minimum US\$100 deposit is required. The on-site restaurant has a varied menu with US, Chinese and Japanese dishes.

Place Hotel (☎ 329 3210; s/d US\$50/60) In the middle of the island, past the AMI office, this place takes cash only. The rooms are nothing fancy, but it does have its own water so at least the toilet usually works. The owner is an ex-Kwajalein senator, who is good for a yarn if he's on the island and can fill in some of the gaps in your knowledge of Kwaj and the situation there.

Bob's Island Restaurant, sitting above the Triple J store and a block from the Anrohasa Hotel, has a water view, good prices and Ebeye's best food. A couple of good Filipino restaurants are usually operating somewhere on the island; ask locally. The Triple J store near the Ebeye dock has groceries. Signs are often rare on Ebeye, so it's easy to miss places; ask for directions.

Nightlife consists of the Recycle Bar disco on Friday and Saturday nights at the Anrohasa Hotel, and anything that might be happening at Mon La Mike. All are within a block of the Triple J store.

Getting There & Around

To get to Ebeye you'll need to travel via Kwajalein Island (p278). On return, you must show your ticket at the Kwajalein Dock before you can proceed to the airport; if you have an open ticket, obtain a print-out of your flight times. Don't expect any favours or flexibility from the security staff, they did not come here to make friends.

OUTER ISLANDS

In the quiet, traditional villages away from Majuro and Kwajalein, the people are friendly and a few usually speak English. Although some outer islanders still use the traditional *korkor* canoe (see p273), *boom-booms* (motorboats) are steadily gaining in popularity. Both kinds of boats are used for frequent *jambos* (trips or picnics) to uninhabited islands of the atoll.

Visitors to the outer islands are usually looking for great dive sites or decent sport-fishing, so if either are your thing you'll probably have to take a package tour. Serious

military historians planning to tour the islands should contact local WWII buff Matt Holly on Majuro on ☎ 625 3669. If you're pretty self-sufficient, can live without the nightclub scene and have time to simply island hop and hang out, the outer islands will suit you just fine.

Although many atolls do not have formal arrangements for visitors, the Marshallese are generally hospitable. Only a few atolls – including Arno, Bikini, Rongelap, Jaluit and Likiep – have guesthouses. Elsewhere you will need to radio ahead to the mayor of the island you wish to visit, and arrange for something to be set up, possibly in an island council resthouse or schoolhouse. Contact MIVA (p272) for advice about how to do this. Most outer islands lack electricity, running water and flush toilets.

Expect to eat fresh local foods like breadfruit, pumpkin, taro and fish prepared by your hosts. Usually a few stores stock rice, flour, tea and canned meats. Most outer islands are alcohol-free. If you are offered food it is considered very rude to refuse – at least have a taste – and as sharing of food is customary you may be asked to share a bite. Some fish can be poisonous through ciguatera toxin, which affects reef fish and those that feed on them; local knowledge is essential here, so do check before you eat a fish you caught. Barracuda is a no-no.

The atolls described in this section have been selected for their comparative ease of access and availability of accommodation, or for their historical interest – but if you're lucky enough to be offered the chance to visit any others, jump at it!

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) flies to most of the Marshalls' inhabited atolls once a week. Return fares from Majuro are US\$230 to Wotje, US\$280 to Likiep, US\$530 to Bikini, US\$710 to Enewetok, US\$185 to Jaluit, US\$122 to Mili and US\$450 to Rongelap. Flights usually hop across several islands at a time.

Boat

The RMI has several supply ships which service the outer islands, dropping off supplies and picking up copra. Passenger prices

are cheap and so is the accommodation; experienced budget travellers will do fine. Scheduling information is available from the **Department of Transportation Office** (☎ 625 3469) at Uliga Dock on Majuro. Arno is the only atoll that's served by regular public boats (see below).

Charters can be arranged to Arno and Likiep – contact MIVA (p272). If you are planning boat trips, give yourself lots of time – like weeks – and be prepared to miss your plane.

Yachtsies should check out www.meico.beachyc.com for details of destinations. Radio ahead from Majuro before visiting outer islands, and check in with the mayor of each atoll when arriving in the lagoon.

GETTING AROUND

The outer islands have few land vehicles but usually at least one motorboat. Trips to other islands within the atoll can generally be negotiated for a reasonable price. It should also be fairly easy to get someone to take you fishing, lobstering or coconut-crab hunting.

ARNO ATOLL

pop 2069 / area 13 sq km

With 133 islands, Arno is the closest atoll to Majuro (just 14km away) and the only one served by regular public boats. The Longar area in Arno is famous for its 'love school', where young women were once taught how to perfect their sexual techniques. The waters off Longar Point are known for their superb deep-sea fishing, where yellowfin tuna, marlin, *mahimahi* and sailfish abound.

Accommodation is in the RRE **cottage** (☎ 625 3250; treadmin@ntamar.net; per person US\$25). A public boat to Arno leaves from the RRE Hotel Shoreline Dock on Majuro at 11am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (US\$10 one way, plus US\$2 per bag).

BIKINI ATOLL

pop 13 / area 6 sq km

Home to the earliest known habitation in Micronesia, Bikini was selected by President Truman as the site for the first peacetime explosion of the atomic bomb.

Early in 1946 the US military governor of the Marshalls met with the Bikini islanders to inform them that their islands were needed for 'a greater good', and for experiments that

'would end all wars'. After deliberations, Bikini's Chief Juda – still awed by the US firepower that had recently defeated the Japanese Imperial Navy – responded that if the US wanted to use Bikini for the 'benefit of all mankind' his people would go elsewhere.

Bikini's 161 residents were relocated on the assurance that they could move back once the tests were over – at the time, they thought this would be about three months. A few months later the US exploded a nuclear device 152m over Bikini's lagoon, the first of 23 nuclear tests that would leave the islands uninhabitable, Bikinians displaced and their society irreparably disrupted.

The Bikinians were first moved to Rongerik Atoll, a place of ill omen in Marshallese legend. They became ill from eating poisonous fish in the lagoon and nearly starved from inadequate food supplies. Two years later they were moved to Kwajalein Atoll, and later to Kili Island. In the 1970s the Bikinians were told it was safe to move back home and a resettlement programme began. Although two entire islands had been blown away and the others were debris-covered and treeless (making a mockery of Bikini's name, which roughly translates as 'land of many coconuts'), the islanders remained on Bikini and tried to get their lives back in order.

In 1978 US tests showed that by eating food grown in the caesium-contaminated soil the Bikinians had collected huge levels of radioactivity in their bodies, so they were moved back to Kili once again. It was later reported that the relocation programme had been bungled by the US: the islanders were supposed to have been placed on Eneu Island, the other main island in Bikini Atoll, not on Bikini Island itself, which is eight times more radioactive.

The final cleanup of Bikini will require replacing all the current topsoil with imported soil, but even so there are likely to be long-term problems when it comes to eating anything grown on the island. The cost of that procedure alone is about US\$200 million, nearly double the amount of money originally allocated to the entire cleanup project. Eneu, which the cleanup workers are using as a base, is currently considered safe.

Bikini Atoll's local government operates from a building in Uliga. Go into the lobby and check out the nuclear murals if you

want to know what the Marshallese think of nuclear testing, and visit www.bikiniatoll.com for more information.

Activities

DIVING

Thanks to its ominous WWII and nuclear history, Bikini is one of Micronesia's premier dive spots. One highlight is the USS *Saratoga*, the world's only diveable aircraft carrier and largest diveable wreck, which still holds visible planes and racks of bombs. Another memorable dive is the *Nagato*, a Japanese battleship from whose deck Admiral Yamamoto ordered his warplanes to attack Pearl Harbor. You need to be at least a PADI advanced diver to dive here. Grey reef sharks abound, and spotting a silvertip on the wrecks is not uncommon.

Dive trips are organised by **Bikini Atoll Divers** (www.bikiniatoll.com), owned by the Bikini Atoll Council and operating since 1996. The company's aim is to both manage the numbers of people who visit the atoll, and to use income from Bikini's only asset for the local community. One-week packages costing US\$2750 per person include 12 dives, lodging and meals on Bikini at the eight-unit Bikini Atoll Resort and one night at the RRE Hotel on Majuro. The Bikini Atoll Resort has simple rooms, air-con from generator electricity, hot and cold water, and a recreation room with a VCR, pool table and table tennis. The price does not include the air fare from Majuro to Bikini (about US\$430 return). Check out www.bikiniatoll.com for more details.

SPORTFISHING

Sportfishing (mostly catch and release) on Bikini is good, with skipjack, yellowfin and trevally in the surrounding water. All visits are one-week packages, similar to the diving package, and cost around US\$3000; you cannot combine fishing and dive packages. Trips are usually booked up months in advance, though you may get lucky and be offered a spare space at the last minute. Contact **Brenda Waltz** (☎ 625 4265; saratoga@ntamar.net) for details.

ENEWETOK ATOLL

pop 853 / area 6 sq km

Enewetok islanders were evacuated to harsh and uninhabited Ujelang Atoll before atomic bomb tests began in 1948.

Over a 10-year period, 43 atomic bombs were detonated from Enewetok. A 9.8 megaton hydrogen bomb that exploded in 1958 on Enewetok blasted a 1.5km-wide, 6m-deep crater in the lagoon and fractured the rock to a depth of 426m beneath the crater's surface. Ironically, *'enewetok'* means 'island that moves', a name given long before the nuclear tests actually did move the island.

Between 1977 and 1980 a US\$218 million nuclear cleanup programme was undertaken. In part, this involved 700 US army personnel removing the top of Runit Island to a depth of half a metre, the contaminated soil being sealed under a 45cm concrete cap in a bomb crater. In 1980, after 33 years of exile, the islanders were allowed to return to islands in the southern part of the atoll.

Enewetok's local government operates from the Marshall Islands Development Bank building in Delap on Majuro, and runs its own ship; contact the local government office if you plan to visit.

JALUIT ATOLL

pop 1669 / area 11.4 sq km

Traditionally, Jaluit was the home of the high chief of the southern Rakik Islands, but by 1900 its main island, Jabwor, had become the well-established capital of the then German Protectorate of the Marshall Islands. It was administered by the Jaluit Gesellschaft, the German concession company that had been formed by the merger of all German trading interests in the Marshalls. The postal steamer *Germania* called regularly at Jaluit and enabled mail and passenger connections with Sydney and Hong Kong, tying Jaluit firmly into the network of world trade. A severe cyclone in June 1905 destroyed most of the German settlement on Jaluit, leaving it little time to recover before the ravages of WWI.

When the Japanese took over in 1914, they fortified the islands and started a fishing industry; the ruins of Japanese buildings and bunkers still remain. You can also see the wreck of the ship *Alfred* on the reef at Jabwor Pass, where it sank in 1899. Jaluit Atoll's planes and shipwrecks make some of the Marshalls' best diving.

For a close-to-nature experience, the **Jaluit Eco-Resort** (house per day US\$30) is definitely the way to go. The resort's five traditional houses each contain one or two queen-size

beds and shared facilities. Bring your own food or arrange meals with villagers if you fancy a local diet. Bottled water is available, and solar lighting, rainwater showers and mosquito nets are provided. Guided tours of mangroves, WWII relics and reefs are available, as is a traditional sailing canoe tour. The eco-resort is run in cooperation with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) as part of the Jaluit Marine Protected Area. Book through the EPA (☎ 625 3483; eparmi@ntamar.net) or the visitor information centre on Majuro (☎ 625 6482).

There may also be rooms at the **Jawoj Hotel** (☎ on Majuro 625 3829; meccorp@ntamar.net; per person US\$50; ☹), run by the Marshall Electric Company, with four double-occupancy units and two shared bathrooms. **Betto's Store** (Antari Jason; ☎ 625 3450; Majuro; per person US\$50) also has two small units.

LIKIEP ATOLL

pop 527 / area 10.3 sq km

Likiep is made up of about 60 islands around a shallow lagoon, with some houses built in Western style with porches and railings. In 1877 Jose deBrum, a Portuguese harpooner who arrived aboard a US whaleship, and Adolf Capelle, a German trader, bought Likiep Atoll from the high chief. They married Marshallese women and started profitable copra and ship-building companies. Look out for the **deBrum House**, built by Joachim deBrum in 1904. It's the only intact German-period wooden building in all of Micronesia, and retains much of its original furnishings. DeBrums and Capelles still own Likiep and operate it as a copra plantation. The sale of the island remains contentious, as current traditional leaders say that the sale document was written in a foreign language that the high chief wasn't able to read.

The **Likiep Plantation Hotel** (☎ 625 2229; likiephaus@yahoo.com) has 12 rooms and a restaurant. At the time of writing it had been closed for a while, but hopefully will be operating again at some stage. Alternately, arrange stays through the visitor information centre office on Majuro (☎ 625 6482).

MALOELAP ATOLL

pop 856 / area 8.8 sq km

Tarao Island (Tarawa Island), in Maloelap Atoll, was the main Japanese airbase in the eastern Marshalls during WWII; 3000

troops were stationed here. There are numerous twisted wreckages of Zeros and Betty bombers, pillboxes and guns, as well as the remains of an airfield, a narrow-gauge railroad and a radio station. The southern tip of the island has coastal defence guns, including a 127mm anti-aircraft gun and a Howitzer on wheels. Many relics are hidden under thick jungle foliage, so it's useful to have a guide.

Off Tarao's lagoon beach the Japanese freighter *Toroshima Maru* lies partly submerged, where it was sunk by US bombers. Periscopes and the mast can still be seen, but it's pretty well stripped, except for some live depth charges.

MILI ATOLL

pop 1032 / area 15.8 sq km

Friendly and accessible with fine beaches, Mili is a good choice if you want to visit an outer atoll. As a major WWII Japanese base, Mili has abandoned weapons, Japanese and US war planes and bombed-out buildings still scattered around. An intriguing story about the disappearance of aviator Amelia Earhart has her sighted under Japanese custody on Mili long after she vanished in 1937 (see p752).

The whole lagoon side of Mili Island is trimmed with sandy white beaches that are good for snorkelling, and at low tide you can walk along the reef to the neighbouring islands. The bad news, however, is that, while it's close to Majuro and pleasant to visit, the clam farm and small hotel that used to draw visitors are presently closed; check with the visitor information centre on Majuro (☎ 625 6482) for news of their current status.

RONGELAP ATOLL

pop 20 / area 8 sq km

'Bravo', the immensely powerful hydrogen bomb that exploded on Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954, sent clouds of deadly radioactivity towards inhabited Rongelap Atoll, 160km to the east. The fallout came down as powdery ash six hours after the blast. Signs of radiation sickness, including nausea, hair loss and severe burns, occurred within hours, yet it wasn't until three days after the blast that the US military evacuated the 82 inhabitants of Rongelap to Kwajalein.

The Rongelapese were returned to their atoll in 1957, but in 1985 they were self-evacuated with the help of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*, which moved the people to a new home on Mejato Island in Kwajalein Atoll, 177km to the south. Testimony by atomic energy officials revealed that the day before the bomb test a warning from US meteorologists of a wind shift in the direction of Rongelap had been ignored, and in 1995 the US established a US\$45 million trust fund for the Rongelapese. Rehabilitation of the island began soon afterwards, and a dock, power plant, desalination plant and airfield have been constructed, a precursor to possible resettlement. If people do go back to live on the island, they will need to import all their food to avoid radiation. The Rongelapese have continuing health problems – almost 75% of the people who were under the age of 10 on the day of the blast have had surgery for thyroid tumours. Do not eat local food from Rongelap.

Diving at Rongelap is spectacular if it is fish, not ships, that you want to see. The island itself is very pleasant, with the old church restored to its previous glory. The presence of some decent infrastructure means that you get an outer-island atmosphere with modern facilities, an unusual mixture.

Rongelap's local government has invested in a small cruise ship, the MV *Oleanda*, previously on service in Fiji and Tonga. The ship accommodates 18 guests, and packages include all meals and diving, kayaking and snorkelling off the boat. Contact **Rongelap Expeditions** (☎ 625 7872; www.rongelapexpeditions.com) for more details.

WOTJE ATOLL

pop 866 / area 8.2 sq km

Wotje, the main island in Wotje Atoll, is covered end to end with WWII remnants, including a large Japanese gun in the centre of the village that can still be moved on its pivot. The lagoon is also full of wreckage, including a few ships. The lagoon beaches of Wotje Island are quite beautiful and relatively clean. The island recently had a generator installed, so some power is available. The Litko Company may have a room, or you could contact the mayor. Contact MIVA (p272) for further information.

MARSHALL ISLANDS DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There are several decent, if not luxurious, hotels on Majuro; one or two low-key, eco-friendly island resorts; and simple, local-style cottages on the more regularly visited islands. Outer islands generally host visitors in an island resthouse or with a local family.

Add a national hotel tax of 8% and a local tax of US\$3 per room per night to the rates quoted in this chapter.

ACTIVITIES

The Marshall Islands have excellent diving and snorkelling; the former is particularly good on Bikini, Rongelap, Kwajalein and some of the other outer islands. See p275 for dive operators and p76 for information about diving in the Marshall Islands. There's surfing and windsurfing for the experienced and adventurous, though you'll need a bit of local knowledge. There's also game fishing, with tours and boats available for charter, and plenty of WWII relics on land and underwater.

PRACTICALITIES

- Billed for years as 'the world's worst newspaper', Majuro's weekly *Marshall Islands Journal* (journal@ntamar.net) is essential reading for local information; it comes out on Fridays.
- Majuro receives cable TV, including CNN and BBC World. Ebeye gets US military TV, a strange and unique combination of news, soaps and military propaganda.
- DVDs are rapidly replacing videos in the Marshall Islands.
- Electricity is supplied at 110/120V, 60Hz AC. Plugs and sockets are US style with two flat blades. Adaptors are hard to find so bring one with you.
- The Marshalls use the imperial measurement system. See the Quick Reference page to convert to the metric system.

BOOKS

For a history of the islands in the words of local people, pick up a copy of the very readable *Life in the Republic of the Marshall Islands* edited by Linda Crowl et al.

On the Move in the Marshall Islands is a fantastic source of all sorts of information, including detailed nautical charts of each atoll. It's a labour of love put together by two long-term yachters and is only available on CD by mail order or from most tourist shops and hotels on the islands; you can order a copy from yachtseal@hotmail.com.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses and government offices are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.30pm. Government offices close from 12.30pm to 1.30pm.

CHILDREN

As elsewhere in the Pacific, children are welcome in the Marshalls. There are few child-specific activities though – no kids' section at the museum, playgrounds or holiday clubs – so come prepared with things to do.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

RMI Embassies & Consulates
Fiji (☎ 338 7899; 41 Borron Rd, Box 2038, Suva)
USA (☎ 202-234 5414; www.rmiembassyus.org; 2433 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in the RMI

Australia (☎ 625 7234) The Australian Navy Technical Mission Commander is the *de facto* Australian representative.
Britain (☎ 625 3828) The Honorary British Consul is Billy Roberts, CEO of the Marshalls Energy Company.
Japan (☎ 625 5437)
Taiwan (☎ 247 4141)
USA (☎ 247 4011)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

New Year's Eve Block Party Held on Majuro and open to all comers.

Coconut Cup Sailing Regatta In late March or early April, all types of sailing craft compete on a lagoon course, with associated festivities.

President's Cup Takes place on Constitution Day (1 May), and features inter-atoll canoe races, handicrafts and local food.

National Fisherman's Day Celebrated with competitive fishing during the first weekend of July.

All-Micronesia Fishing Tournament Takes place in early September.

Alele Week Culminates in a culture day in late September.

INTERNET ACCESS

There's good Internet access on Majuro (p272) and Kwaj, but none elsewhere.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Bikini Atoll (www.bikiniatoll.com) Excellent information on the past and present effects of nuclear tests in the RMI.

Digital Micronesia (http://marshall.csu.edu.au) Hosted by Charles Sturt University in Australia, this electronic library and archive is a good guide to most written resources available on the Marshalls.

Embassy of the RMI (www.rmiembassyus.org) Operates out of the Washington embassy, and as the official Marshallese government site has many useful links.

Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (www.visitmarshallislands.com) The indispensable Marshall Islands visitor centre site.

MONEY

The Marshall Islands' currency is the US dollar (for exchange rates, see the Quick Reference page). Credit cards are increasingly accepted on Majuro but have limited use elsewhere except on Ebeye, where you should expect a surcharge. Come with US dollars or travellers cheques if you can – banks are not happy changing other currencies, and if they do the rates are often poor. ATMs are available only on Majuro, and they're not always working.

Tipping is customary in the few 'top-end' restaurants but not elsewhere.

HOW MUCH?

- **Sunscreen:** US\$9
- **Insect repellent:** US\$3.60
- **Basic snorkel and mask:** US\$20
- **Postcard:** 50c to US\$1
- **One apple:** US\$1.70

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Gallon of petrol:** US\$3.70
- **Gallon of drinking water:** US\$1.70
- **Can of Budweiser beer:** US\$1.75
- **Souvenir T-shirt:** US\$15
- **Boiled pandanus roadside snack:** US\$3

TELEPHONE

The Marshall Islands' international telephone code is ☎ 692; there are no area codes. Calling Kwajalein Island from other RMI islands is like making an international call to the US. To make an international call, dial ☎ 011.

National Telecommunications Authority (NTA; ☎ 625 3363; 🕒 7am to midnight) is the place on Majuro to make international calls and send faxes. Phonecards are available at NTA exchanges and can be used for international calls, which cost US\$1.25 per minute during the day and US\$1 at night. Calls to outer islands use a radio telephone link.

A GSM mobile-phone system came into operation in the Marshalls in late 2005, and SIM cards are available in a variety of denominations.

TIME

The Marshalls are 12 hours ahead of GMT. When it's noon oajuro, it's noon the same day in Fiji, 10am the same day in Sydney and 2pm the previous day in Hawai'i.

TOURIST INFORMATION IN THE RMI

Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (MIVA; ☎ 625 6482; www.visitmarshallislands.com) is in the Small Island area of D-U-D on Majuro. You can download a recent version of its guidebook from the website.

VISAS

Visas are not generally required except for visitors from a few countries, including mainland China. On arrival, visitors are issued a 30-day entry permit that can be extended twice (for a maximum stay of 90 days) for US\$10 per extension by visiting the **Immigration Office** (☎ 625 8633; 4th fl Marshall Islands Development Bank Bldg, Delap) in Majuro.

TRANSPORT IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Continental Airlines (☎ 625 3209; www.continenta.l.com) includes Kwajalein and Majuro as stopovers on the 'Circle Micronesia' island-hopper route between Honolulu and Guam. The return fare is around US\$1000.

Japan Airlines (www.jal.com) may start operating from Saipan to Majuro; check the website for current information.

The demise of **Air Nauru** (☎ 625 3409; www.airnauru.com.au) in late 2005 means that the route it used to fly (Australia to Majuro via the Solomons and Nauru and on to Kiribati and Fiji) is no longer available. The airline may be revived in the future.

See p837 for details of regional air passes that cover the Marshall Islands.

Sea

If you are coming to the Marshalls by yacht, check out www.micobeachyc.com before you leave home. Don't be put off by stories of how hard it is to get around the islands: there is always a right way and a wrong way to get things done.

On arrival, yachties must check in with Majuro's **Port Authority** (☎ 625 8269), which issues a US\$50 entrance fee, and obtain a permit from the **Ministry of Internal Affairs** (☎ 625 8240).

The only atolls with 'real' docks are Jaluit, Likiep, Bikini and Rongelap. Along with Arno, Mili, Ailinglaplap, Namu, Aur, Maloelap and Wotho, they all have safe passages for entry into the lagoon. Some charge entrance fees (up to US\$100); check with **Hilton Kendal** (☎ 625 8298) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Uliga. Order a copy of the CD *On the Move in the Marshall Islands* from yachtseal@hotmail.com – it has detailed nautical charts and information for yachties about each island.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air Marshall Islands (AMI; ☎ 625 3733; www.airmarshallislands.com) flies to most of the Marshalls' inhabited atolls once a week (see p280) and has a service between Majuro and Kwajalein every day except Thursday and Sunday (US\$310 return).

Bicycle

Flat coral atolls are great for bikes but if you want to cycle you'll have to bring your own, as there's no bike hire.

Boat

Only Arno is served by regular public boats (see p281). State-run supply ships travel irregularly to the outer atolls; the **Department**

DEPARTURE TAX

The Marshall Islands has a departure tax of US\$20 for adults and US\$15 for children under 18.

of Transportation Office (☎ 625 3469) at Uliga Dock on Majuro can provide details (see p272). Private boats are more frequent.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVING LICENCE

Short-term visitors can drive on a home-country licence for 30 days. After that you need to get a local licence, which costs US\$20 (US\$10 for the card, and US\$10 for mandatory lamination!).

HIRE

Formal car hire is only available on Majuro (p273), and costs about US\$50 per day.

Insurance seems to be an optional extra, at around US\$15 per day.

There is no formal motorcycle hire, though you might be able to work something out locally.

ROAD RULES

Driving in the Marshalls is a revelation for the Pacific, particularly on Majuro. It's orderly and drivers obey the speed limit and road rules, picking up and dropping off in nominated stopping areas.

Speed limits and distances are posted in miles; driving is on the right-hand side of the road.

Local Transport

There are no regular public buses on Majuro, but shared taxis are abundant and cheap in central D-U-D and there are some taxis on Ebeye. Organised public transport is rare in the outer islands.

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