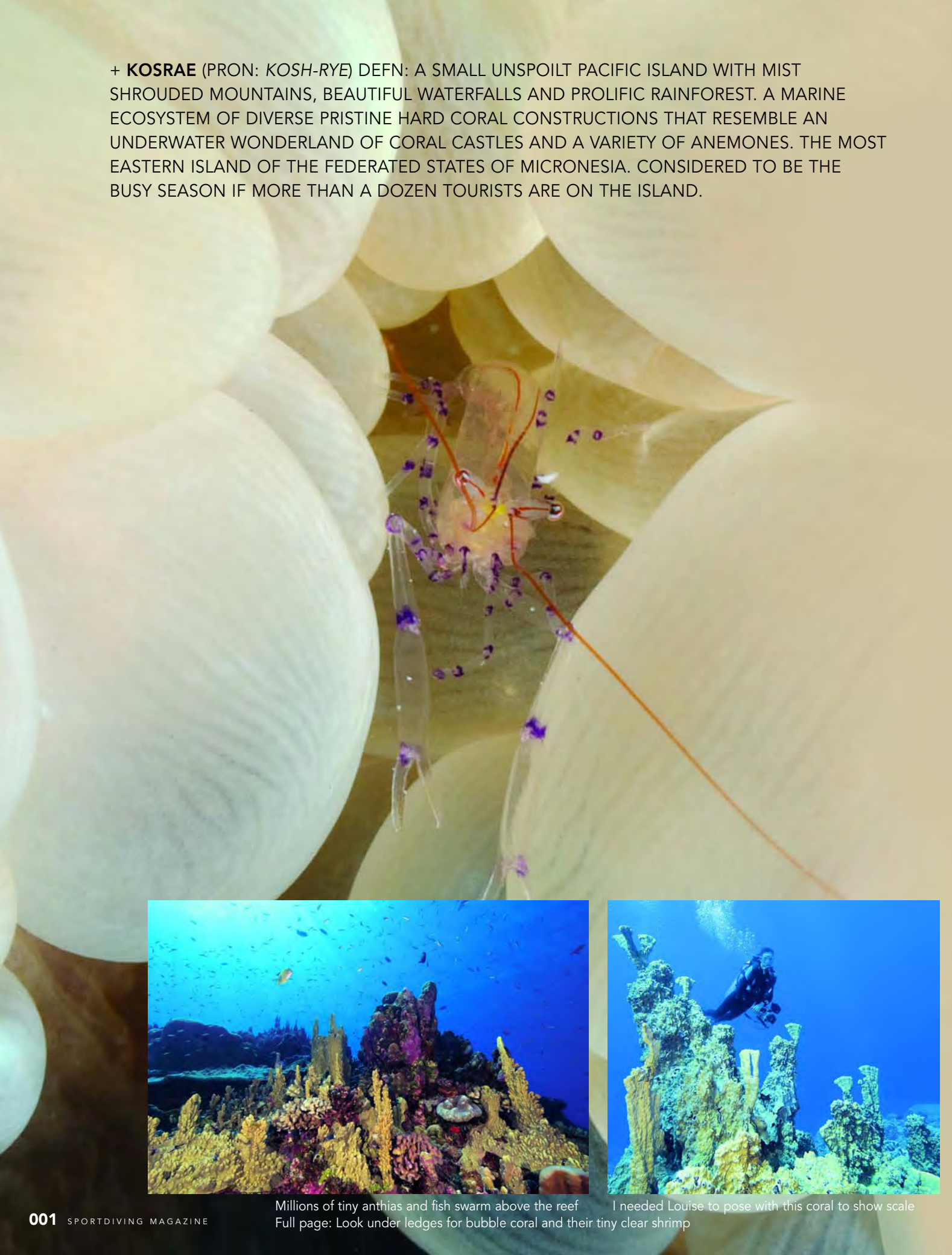


+ **KOSRAE** (PRON: KOSH-RYE) DEFN: A SMALL UNSPOILT PACIFIC ISLAND WITH MIST SHROUDED MOUNTAINS, BEAUTIFUL WATERFALLS AND PROLIFIC RAINFOREST. A MARINE ECOSYSTEM OF DIVERSE PRISTINE HARD CORAL CONSTRUCTIONS THAT RESEMBLE AN UNDERWATER WONDERLAND OF CORAL CASTLES AND A VARIETY OF ANEMONES. THE MOST EASTERN ISLAND OF THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA. CONSIDERED TO BE THE BUSY SEASON IF MORE THAN A DOZEN TOURISTS ARE ON THE ISLAND.



Millions of tiny anthias and fish swarm above the reef
Full page: Look under ledges for bubble coral and their tiny clear shrimp

I needed Louise to pose with this coral to show scale

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C O R A L



The second last stop on the way to Honolulu from Guam is Kosrae. It's on the same flight plan as Chuuk and Phonpei and is an idyllic remote island that fires the imagination immediately you see it. Tall mountains covered in an emerald rainforest are shrouded in mist and ringed by mangrove flats which are in turn surrounded by a fringing coral reef and an indigo sea. As soon as you descend into the waters of Kosrae you face incredible vistas of hard coral cascading down the slope into the depths. It isn't simply the health of the corals but the incredible complexity and density of the structures that astounds

you. Pyramids of coral spires, cascades of flat corals, brain corals, capricorn corals and many other types of hard coral all compete for space. Kosrae considers itself to have just one dive site – it continues right around the island. The people of Kosrae understand just how precious their coral reefs are and to protect them they have completely surrounded the island with a network of 56 mooring buoys to protect 73 kilometers of reef.

The waters of Kosrae aren't thick with pelagic action but offer enjoyable relaxing drifts over immense coral gardens complimented with anthias and small fish.

Hard corals can be hard to photograph
Top: Clear water, bright sun and amazing corals make for great photo opportunities

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Top to bottom: This anemone was cradled within some beautiful capricorn coral; On the underside of many sea stars you can often find these tiny shrimp; Sitting here sure beats the stress of life back in 'civilization'; A red/orange based magnifica anemone



But you never know what you're about to see – it isn't uncommon to see schooling barracuda and several sites feature large gatherings of jacks. Turtles are out and about and on one site we found four that had gathered for a sleepover amongst the coral. On another dive two large stingrays head-to-tail cavorted around us, maybe in some form of mating display. On another dive I was drifting out from the slope enjoying the blue when another stingray came towards me, swimming in midwater.



Fish and cleanerfish are always interesting subjects and it was with awe that we passed over a small rise in the reef to find a huge solo barracuda hanging at 45 degrees with mouth gaping for a dental inspection. Our approach was as gentle as possible but we disrupted the peace and though one cleaner wrasse was reluctant to finish, his client headed off. I can tell you that a large solo barracuda comes complete with huge muscular jaws and an extremely vicious look. When one is coming straight towards you it can be more daunting than a shark – you just don't know how a large barracuda will react. My very wide angle lens made it look like a guppy!



The reefs surrounding Kosrae could almost be described as a big cleaner station as they seem to pop up everywhere. Besides the barracuda, we saw several eagle rays being cleaned including one event where nine eagle rays seemed to be jostling for best attended position.

A must-do dive is Shark Island; in a mild current this is a pleasant drift along a steep wall past a gentle slope towards an underwater point, drifting in the blue. I had five small reef sharks swim up to see what I was. As soon as they'd moved on I was surrounded by a large school of barracuda, with more and more appearing from the deep to join the swirl around me. During my 'barracuda dance' two eagle rays appeared, one curious enough to bank off and check out what all the commotion with the barracuda was about. A second dive on the same site again brought several eagle ray interactions.

But one of my most incredible experiences was at Hiroshi Point. I found myself on the edge of the dropoff at around 12 metres holding my breath to avoid spooking a green turtle heading my way. Suddenly I was surrounded by five eagle rays; completely unperturbed they swooped and turned about me. As they passed I followed in their wake, kicking hard until I was directly above them. And what lens had I chosen for this dive? Macro of course. Eventually they led me deeper and at 21 metres I decided to quit and search for macro subjects on the reeftop.

Other dives brought many anemones of various types including what appears to be a species *magnifica* with an almost red mantle, something I've only seen in magazines so far. Porcelain crabs are common on some anemones and it was interesting to see that often when you find one anemone, another of a completely different type would be right next to it, often touching the other. Small carpet anemones can be found, including the incredible lime green variation complete with popcorn shrimp. Vis was always very good on our trip, up to 50-plus metres on occasion. Amusingly we found that the dive boat would sometimes pull up at a site only for the divemaster to say that it was poor visibility and move on to the next

“ I was surrounded by a large school of barracuda, with more and more appearing from the deep to join the swirl around me ”

TRAVEL TRICKS

Getting there: Continental Airlines fly throughout Micronesia. Depart from Cairns or if you're from Western Australia you can go via the Philippines or Bali. Booking online through Continental can be confusing and expensive if choosing multiple stops, so I suggest using a pro travel agent like Dive Adventures. Most flights throughout 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 which was 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 23kg each.

Conditions: Two basic seasons wet and dry, but actually conditions vary little yearly. The 'dry' has somewhat less rain with somewhat more prevailing winds but in essence you can dive all year. Water temps hover around 27 – 29 deg. Visit during the Australian winter and experience uncrowded travel and diving, as the European and American tourists prefer to visit during their winter - the Oz summer.

Entry and Exit Requirements: No visa is required for entry into the Federated States of Micronesia for visitors traveling on Australian passports. A US\$15 departure tax is collected at the airport as you leave the island.

Electricity: 110vAC, 60hz, US outlets (two vertical pins with round earth pin below). Make sure you bring chargers capable of 110volts and US adapters.



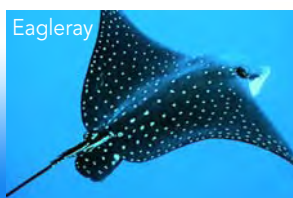
The reefs of Kosrae are dotted with incredible clams of amazing vibrancy

one. I'd look over the side into 30 metre vis and think, yeah right, that's pretty bad. I guess it is what you get used to.

Kosrae above water has much to offer. A mangrove outrigger tour with one of the last Kosraen 'story-tellers' is a fantastic half day out. Travel through ancient mangrove channels and listen to 'tall' tales of the giant man eating groper that hide in the deep lagoons on the edge of the mangroves. See fruit bats hanging from the trees, canoe past the last anchoring spot and wreck site of the pirate Bully Hayes and wonder just where it was he hid his treasure – people have been searching for it for years.

The Lelu and Menke ruins are also a great break from diving. Dating 1200-1400 AD, both are easily accessible by foot with the Lelu ruins being only a very short walk and the Menke a longer tour through lush rainforest. Both are glimpses of incredible constructions of an ancient civilization. Wonder at the stone masonry of huge basalt rocks made into tombs, compounds, streets and stone canals used for moving fruit and supplies around the ancient metropolis. You can still see the Suka stones where it was pounded during neolithic times into the mildly narcotic drink known in the south Pacific islands as kava.

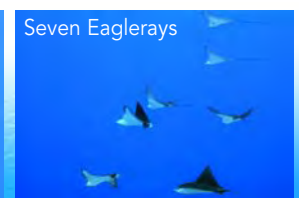
Top to bottom: Small blennies are everywhere and getting two to pose together was a lucky opportunity; This flatworm was swimming with the grace of a Spanish dancer; This pyramid of spires covered in Christmas tree worms was typical Kosrae.



Eagleray



Grey reef shark



Seven Eaglerays





Right: Some of the impressive mangrove trees bordering the island; Kayaking through the channels amongst magnificent mangroves



Take a small boat trip followed by a foot sucking squelch through primordial mangrove to visit the prehistoric 'Yela Ka' forest, the one and only forest of 30 metre high *Terminalia carolinensis* trees on this planet. Check the buttressed bases covered in moss and vines with tropical ferns growing from every opportunistic location. If they ever boardwalk this tour you'll be missing out on the true experience of mud underfoot. Several times I wondered how deep my foot was going to sink, does quicksand really exist and would I get my bootie back!



Kosrae people are warm, friendly and laugh so much it's contagious. They've lost much of their original traditions due to the early influence of the Christian missionaries. That said, it was only the influence of the missionaries that saved Kosraens from extinction. By the time the missionaries arrived the population had diminished to 300 due to the violence and disease brought by early whalers and pirates who worked these seas. The missionaries and Kosraens repelled the whalers and pirates. Early missionaries and the church are still highly revered by Kosraens today.



KOSRAE NAUTILUS RESORT

Has 16 comfortable rooms, its own restaurant, dive shop & 27 foot purpose built diveboat with a 250hp outboard to get you to dive sites quickly in comfort. Situated on the waterfront directly opposite the Blue Hole which is a great snorkel just a few paces over the shallow seagrass bed towards the outer reef. At the rear of the complex is a mangrove waterway ideal for your own relaxing exploratory kayak trip. All rooms are airconditioned with twin double beds, 26 channel cable TV, ensuite, mini bar & tea/coffee making facilities. The resort has alfresco dining alongside the outdoor pool or inside in airconditioned comfort. Doug & Sally Beitz, the operators of the resort are friendly helpful Aussies & do their utmost to make everyone's stay enjoyable. They fell in love with the island in the early 1990s & though having no diving, resort or boating experience (Doug was a firefighter) they moved to the island to help run the resort. They went back to Australia for eight years to raise their children. In 2004 Doug & Sally took over the resort fully & completely refurbished the whole operation into the bright & fresh Kosrae Nautilus Resort you see today.

Kosrae is a very quiet laid-back beautiful island that has amazing above water scenery and pristine diving. It's also somewhere you'd safely bring the whole family and no one would be remotely bored with the hikes, kayaking, boating tours and snorkeling. Kosrae is one of those places you can visit and no one else you know has ever been there or even knows where it is. And you're lucky (or unlucky!) if you even see another tourist on the street.

