



The unique shipwrecks of Bikini Atoll

After the Second World War, the USA collected a 'mock' naval fleet for the purpose of testing the impact of different atomic bombs on a large fleet. These nuclear bomb tests were performed in several remote locations in the South Pacific Ocean, known as the Pacific Proving Grounds. Bikini Atoll was appointed one of the designated testing areas within the Marshall Islands, where a grand total of 67 nuclear bombs have been detonated within the framework of [Operation Crossroads](#) and several other Operations.

Between 1946 and 1958, not less than 23 atomic bombs were tested at Bikini Atoll only, which resulted in a unique collection of shipwrecks consisting of war battleships, cruisers, and an aircraft carrier.

In March 1954, the notorious dry fuel hydrogen bomb 'Castle Bravo' was detonated in Bikini. This bomb was the US' most powerful nuclear device ever; 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. It left a 2 km wide and 76 metre deep crater in the lagoon of Bikini. More than 60 years later, the shipwrecks remain equally as impressive while they have become home to many kinds of corals and fish species.

The following is an overview of the wrecks that we may visit during your liveaboard.

Bikini Atoll

[USS Saratoga](#)

The signature dive of Bikini Lagoon: the USS Saratoga CV-3 Aircraft carrier. This 270 metres (888 ft) long and 29 metres (95ft) wide ship weighs 39,000 tons and rests upright in Bikini Lagoon at a depth of 52 metres with her bridge easily accessible at 18 metres depth and her flight deck at 28 metres. The majority of the Helldiver planes were swept off the flight deck during the [Baker test](#) and the remains of them are scattered across the seabed around the Saratoga, although there are also a few still inside the hangar which is no longer accessible. On the deck though, 350lb and 500lb bombs, air drop torpedoes and depth charges can all still be found.

Remarkable detail: the Japanese reported the USS Saratoga sunk 7 times during World War II. She did, however, suffer damage on multiple occasions during the war and was therefore chosen to be used as a testing target in Bikini Atoll.

[IJN Nagato](#)

This battleship was built for the Imperial Japanese Navy as the first super-dreadnought to mount 16-inch (406 mm) guns. Together with a cruising speed of 26.5 knots, this made her the Imperial Japanese Navy's flagship as well as one of the most powerful and versatile warships in the world at that time, and the most (in)famous Japanese ship being the one from which Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto gave the final order to start the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941.

After the Japanese surrender, the Nagato was seized and used for testing during Operation Crossroads in 1946. She landed completely upside down on the seabed at 52 metres (170ft). Her most prominent features are the four propellers at a depth of 33.5 metres (110ft), the 16" guns in the stern and bow areas suspended from her hull at 50 metres (164ft), and her unmistakable Pagoda mast from where history was made.

USS Arkansas

An American dreadnought, measuring 171 metres (562 ft) long and armed with twelve 12-inch guns and capable of a top speed of 20.5 knots. The USS Arkansas served in both World War I and World War II; escorting convoys in the Atlantic and bombarding shore targets during the invasions of Normandy, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

She was moored only 500 ft. away from the intended atomic bomb detonation in 1946 and was supposedly lifted up vertically within the blast column. She sank completely only 19 minutes after the blast, ending almost completely upside down on the sandy bottom at 55 metres depth.

[USS Lamson](#)

The American Mahan-class Destroyer ship was sunk very early on during the tests in Bikini Atoll and appears almost like a pirate ship underwater. With her length of 104 metres (341 ft), she might not be the biggest of the Bikini wrecks but that makes her perfect as you can really take your time to explore. Sitting upright in about 55m depth, with the decks around 48-50m, she features several guns, torpedoes, bombs and generally provides good access to divers along with great visibility making her a really exceptional dive.

USS Anderson

The 106 metres (348ft) long by 11 metres (36ft) wide Sims-class destroyer was built in 1939 and served at different locations during World War II, participating in fighting battles in the Atlantic and the Pacific using her machine guns, anti-aircraft missiles and torpedoes, taking down many enemy aircraft as well as assisting in anti-submarine warfare.

She now rests mostly intact on her starboard side at a depth of 52 metres. At the stern you can see the depth charge racks and the propellers and, past the gun turrets and torpedo tubes, amidst the debris on the forward superstructure, there is a compass as well as an interesting collection of artefacts such as a clock which stopped forever at 8:21.

USS Apogon

The Apogon is submarine of the Balao-class that headed straight for Hawaii and the Marshall Islands after her launch in 1943, whose active duties were patrolling designated areas in the South Pacific and attacking enemy (i.e. Japanese) ships. The Apogon lies completely intact at a depth of 48 metres with an average depth of 43 metres and is the only submarine that can be dived in Bikini Atoll. Divers can easily explore the conning tower, viewing binoculars on the bridge, and propellers which are covered by red sponges.

USS Carlisle

A Gilliam-class attack support boat, 130 metres (426 ft) long and 18 metres (58 ft) wide that served as merchant vessel transporter within the US Navy in the Second World War. Finished and acquired by the Navy in 1944, she arrived late into the war and was assigned to transport operations, of which she only performed 3. Hence, she never participated in any combat situations. She sank in 1946 as a result of Operation Crossroads' [Able Test](#), and now rests upright in the sand at 51 metres depth, with her deck at 40 metres.

USS Pilotfish

An American Balao-class submarine; she measures 95 metres (311 ft) in length and 8.3 metres (27 ft) wide and was previously used to perform lifeguard and offensive patrolling duty all over the Pacific. In 1946, the Baker underwater atomic bomb test compressed her hull and forced all the hatches and valves to open causing her to completely flood and sink. She now lies at 51m with the conning tower at 40m.

Kwajalein Atoll

[Prinz Eugen](#)

Being a war prize awarded to the USA by Britain after WWII resulted in the atomic fate for this German heavy cruiser. She survived the blasts of Operation Crossroads, even though she was already damaged, and she was towed to Kwajalein. Here, she ultimately capsized and sank to her final resting place in December 1946. Nowadays, a part of the ship is still visible above water.