

Picture Perfect

FUJIKAWA MARU, CHUUK

I F I HAD TO CHOOSE a single shipwreck to dive for the rest of my life, it wouldn't take me long to decide. Far and away, Chuuk's *Fujikawa Maru* is the best of the best.

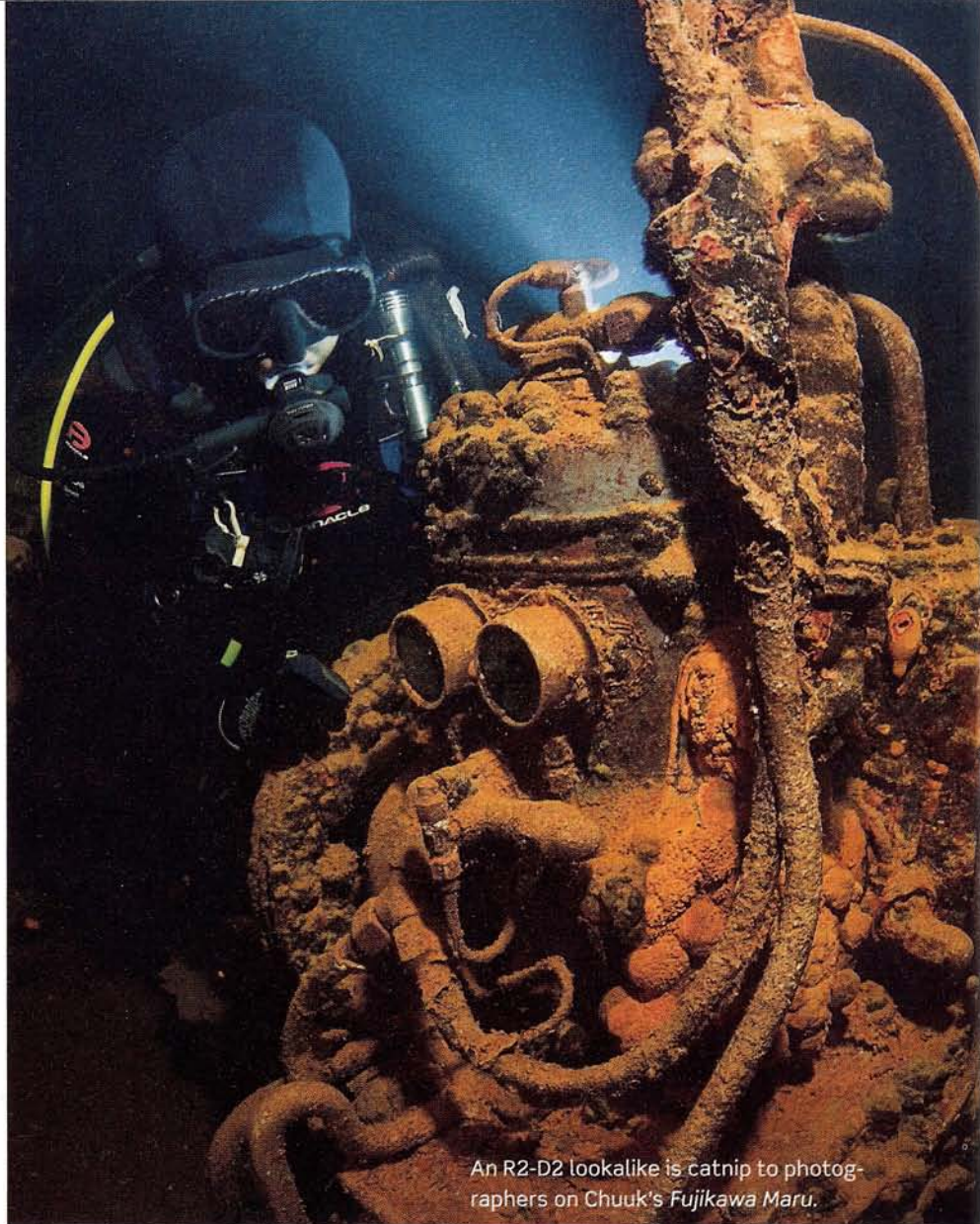
I'm reminded of that as soon as I splash into the water and see it sitting upright in the sand beneath me. Since the bottom is 110 feet below and the ship's masts almost touch the surface, there's a lot to see on this 433-foot-long World War II Japanese freighter.

From the moment I begin my descent, I am reminded of how beautiful a wreck this is. It sits in a part of the lagoon that generally enjoys clear water, and it's close enough to the surface to be bathed in sunlight. Its cargo and engine room are among the most photogenic in the lagoon.

My buddy and I decide to start at the bow and explore the holds in order. In the first we find instruments of war: shells, gas masks, airplane propellers, machine guns and more. Sitting atop a platform in the center of the hold is a tepee of three rifles with a gas mask on top. Although Chuuk's dive guides staged the scene, the weapons have been sitting undisturbed that way for years, a somber monument.

Next we head through the wall between compartments to cargo hold two — no need to go up, out and back in again. This hold contains some very special cargo: the remnants of several Japanese Zero fighter planes. Their cockpits, fuselages and wings are still largely intact, despite ignorant divers who have tried to have photos taken sitting in the cockpit. Guides and most conscientious divers are careful to look at but not touch these incredible historic relics. Holds three, four, five and six contain barrels, china, bottles, cable, stoves and galley supplies.

One of the real highlights of this wreck is its engine room. With a plentitude of natural light pouring in from all sides, this three-story space reminds me of an abandoned cathedral, crisscrossed



An R2-D2 lookalike is catnip to photographers on Chuuk's *Fujikawa Maru*.

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up high by catwalks and stairways and illuminated by sunbeams that pierce the darkness from above. Among the attractions we visit is the machine room, where an air compressor has attained fame as an R2-D2 impersonator, its gauges positioned to resemble a face atop a squat robot.

As we ascend up and out of the bowels of the ship, we swim from what remains of the bridge to the cross piece of the king posts on the forward deck. Perfectly positioned at a depth of 15 feet, my dive buddy and I are joined by our boat's other buddy teams for the safety stop. Together we enjoy scenic views over the bow, with its

coral-encrusted gun, and back toward the superstructure, engulfed in a rain-bow of soft corals.

As I bob there neutrally buoyant, appreciating the beauty of both the man-made structure and the marine life around me, I think, "Yep, the best darn wreck on the planet." — *Ethan Gordon*

Quick Guide ODYSSEY ADVENTURES

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- Nitrox, rebreather support • Gear, computer rental • Tours • Nearest airport Chuuk International (TKK) • trukodyssey.com

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