

# MIDWAY ATOLL

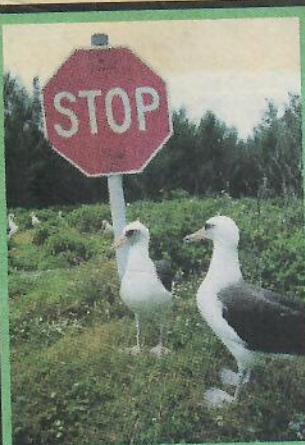
## NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

1998



*In the middle of the Pacific Ocean,  
where wildlife thrive and a fortunate few get to visit.*





## CONTENTS

REMOTE REMNANT OF  
VOLCANIC ISLE

4

MIDWAY'S RICH  
HISTORY

4-6

REMOTE WILDLIFE  
HAVEN

6-8

GIVING MOTHER  
NATURE A HAND

8

A UNIQUE  
EXPERIENCE

9

OCEANIC  
SOCIETY  
EXPEDITIONS

10-11

DIVING &  
SNORKELING

12

SPORT FISHING

13

MIDWAY COMMUNITY  
& TRANSPORTATION

14

ADVENTURE  
CALENDAR

15

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B. VAN WAGNER

Imagine a remote tiny island, ringed by powdery white sand and turquoise seas. Imagine an exotic haven for wildlife, home to hundreds of thousands of nesting birds, endangered Hawaiian monk seals, and threatened green sea turtles. Imagine unexplored big game fishing and some of the most unique scuba diving in the world. This is Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, now open to the public for the first time and offering experiences beyond your imagination.

Although Midway is perhaps best known for its pivotal role in World War II, this tiny atoll is carving out a new future in wildlife conservation and environmental tourism. Established in 1988 as a National Wildlife Refuge, Midway Atoll opened to visitors in August 1996, making history as the first remote island refuge in the Pacific to do so. Midway now welcomes wildlife enthusiasts, snorkelers, scuba divers, history buffs, researchers, sport fishermen, photographers, and others who seek a profoundly unique travel experience on one of the most remote atolls on earth.





**MIDWAY ATOLL . . .** A REFUGE NOT ONLY FOR WILDLIFE,  
BUT FOR TRAVELERS SEEKING A RESTFUL AND REMOTE HIDEAWAY.





## A REMOTE REMNANT OF A VOLCANIC ISLAND



Some 25-30 million years ago, a volcanic island emerged from the sea over a "hot spot" in the Pacific plate, close to what is now the Big Island of Hawaii. As the plate moved northwest, a chain of islands was formed, with Midway and Kure at the northwestern end. Japan lies 2,200 miles to the east, San Francisco 2,800 miles to the west.



Wind, rain, and waves have eroded the volcanic islands of the Hawaiian archipelago. As the land-mass at Midway submerged, reef-building corals

created a wreath around the sinking mountain top. Today the basalt of Midway's volcano is buried under more than 500 feet of calcium carbonate. What remains above the surface is the coral reef that rings the atoll and three sandy islands. The largest of these, Sand Island, is about 1,200 acres (about 1 by 2 miles) in size and is the only populated island in the atoll. The smaller islands, Eastern and Spit, are inhabited only by wildlife . . . lots and lots of wildlife!

## MIDWAY'S RICH HISTORY

The three uninhabited islands of the atoll were first discovered on July 5, 1859, by Captain Nick Brooks of the ship "Gambia." Originally named "Brooks Islands and Shore" the islands eventually took on the name used by the Navy to describe them: "Midway." In 1867, Midway became the first offshore islands to be annexed by the United States government.

In the 1890's, Japanese sailors commercially harvested seabird eggs and feathers on northwestern islands of the Hawaiian archipelago. To stop the "wanton destruction of birds that breed on Midway," President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order in 1903 placing Midway under the jurisdiction and control of the U.S. Navy.

Interestingly, in the same year, President Roosevelt also set aside Pelican Island Bird Reservation in Florida to prevent the unregulated commercial harvest of nesting birds. Pelican Island was to become the first protected area of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which now numbers more than 500 units.

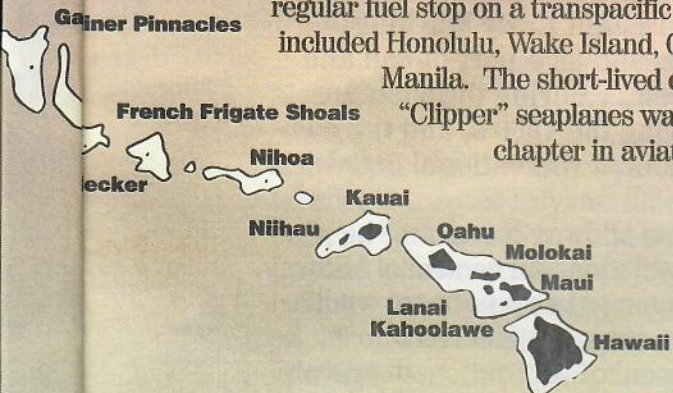


Admiral Nimitz inspects a bunker after the Battle of Midway



The first permanent residents of Midway Atoll were employees of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company. The Pacific cable provided a crucial link in worldwide communication. President Teddy Roosevelt sent the first message around the world through this cable, taking only 9 minutes. In 1903 a lighthouse was erected on the highest ground on Sand Island, but it was soon obscured by ironwood trees planted as a windbreak by Cable Company employees.

In 1935, Pan American World Airways established a seaplane base in the harbor and a small hotel on Sand Island. Midway became a regular fuel stop on a transpacific route that also included Honolulu, Wake Island, Guam, and Manila. The short-lived era of the "Clipper" seaplanes was an important chapter in aviation history.



Built in 1905, four buildings of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company still remain on Midway

To protect Hawaii from the increasing likelihood of hostilities with Japan, construction of the Midway Naval Air Station began in March 1940, and it was officially commissioned on August 1, 1941. On December 7, 1941, not only did the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, two of their destroyers shelled Midway later that evening.

On June 4, 1942, the Japanese launched a major air attack against Midway in hopes of using the atoll as a stepping stone for a future invasion of Hawaii. Unknown to the Japanese, the U.S. had broken their secret code and confirmed it by monitoring the Japanese response to a fake message about Midway. The U.S. Fleet then ambushed the Japanese Fleet north of Midway, inflicting heavy losses, including the destruction of four Japanese aircraft carriers.

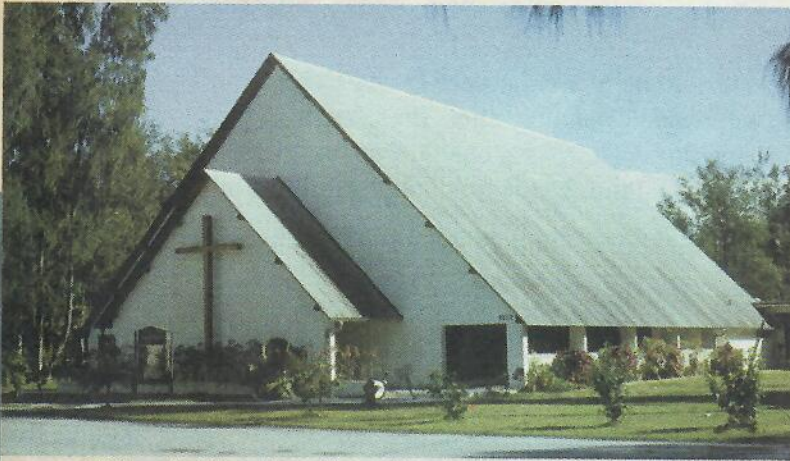
Outnumbering American forces four to one, the Imperial Navy of Japan clearly had the upper hand. American aircraft flew sorties with outdated airplanes from the airfield on



Eastern Island at Midway and from three carriers. Many pilots departed Midway uncertain whether they had enough fuel to return. Brave men fought an air and sea battle for three days, and more than 3,500 Japanese and 300 Americans paid the highest sacrifice. In the end, American forces had turned away what was to be the last major Japanese sea offensive and won a battle that proved to be the turning point of the war in the Pacific.

The guns stand silent now as a tribute to the brave men who fought to protect Midway





Midway's Chapel, as it used to stand, served hundreds of families during the Cold War & Vietnam War

War. As many as 3,000 people occupied Sand Island during the 1960's, and the community included a school, a chapel, and many family-oriented recreational activities.

In 1992, the Department of Defense announced plans to close Midway Naval Air Facility under the Base Realignment and Closure Act. In 1996, jurisdiction and control of Midway was transferred to the Department of the Interior, for management as a national wildlife refuge by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service, in turn, has entered into a cooperative agreement with a private company, Midway Phoenix Corporation, to operate the infrastructure at Sand Island and to provide for a visitor program — no more than 100 guests per week — that will help defray the operating costs. As a result of this unique partnership, Midway's spectacular resources are now accessible to the public.

## A REMOTE HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE

Midway offers one of the most incredible wildlife experiences in the world — truly “up close and personal.” The seabirds that nest on Midway have been protected for decades and show little fear of humans. Although the Fish and Wildlife Service strictly enforces rules to keep humans from disturbing the wildlife, often the creatures will themselves approach visitors with great curiosity.

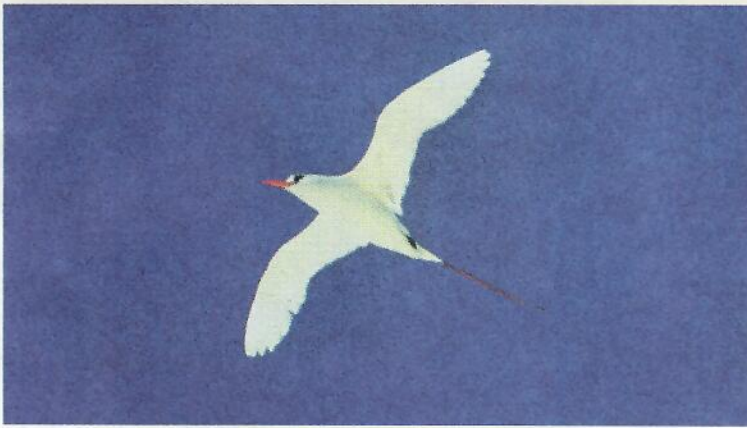
Approximately 45 highly endangered Hawaiian monk seals make their home at Midway and are often seen lolling in the sun on isolated stretches of beach. In addition, Midway's lagoon is an important feeding area for the threatened Hawaiian green sea turtle. They are frequently spotted within the harbor area at Sand Island.

Midway has approximately 200 spinner dolphins, nearly as many as there are human residents and visitors at the atoll. The dolphins lounge in the shallow lagoon waters during the day and forage in waters outside the atoll at night. Although the daylight hours are their primary resting period, the dolphins often may be seen per-



*Laysan Albatross*





*Red-tailed Tropicbird*

also common.

Midway is the nesting and resting place for 15 seabird species, including the world's largest colony of Laysan albatross, the world famous "gooney bird". Nearly 400,000 pairs of Laysan albatross share Midway with their slightly larger but less common cousin, the black-footed albatross. Both species arrive at Midway in late October and most pairs will lay a single egg by early December. Chicks hatch in late January or early February and, by spring, they are readily seen waddling from their nests. Heading out to sea in July, fledgling albatross may spend up to five years at sea before returning to land at Midway. Both species of albatross are widely known for their elaborate mating displays, their varied calls and their ungainly walk. In recent years, one or two very rare short-tailed albatross or "golden goonies" have also been seen by lucky visitors at Midway.

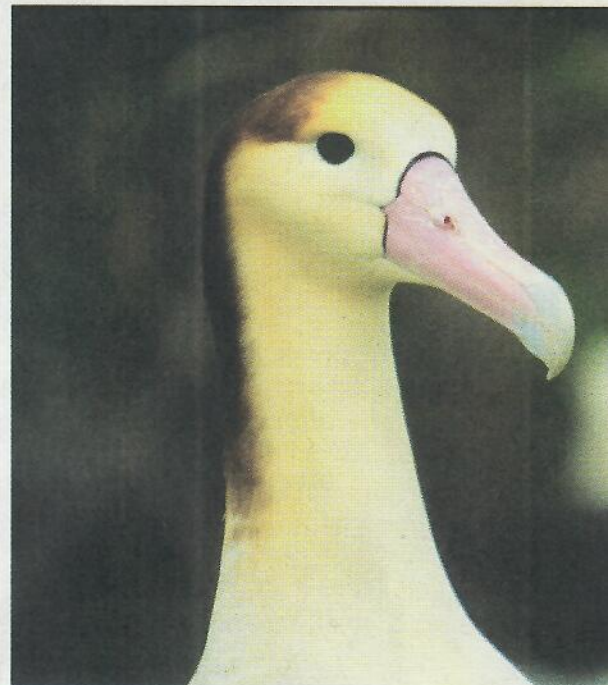
Among the other seabird species that call Midway home is the red-tailed tropicbird, an aerial acrobat that has mastered the art of backward flight



*Great Frigatebird*

forming their aerial leaps, spins and rolls, particularly by visitors in boats traversing the lagoon.

Midway's lagoon also supports more than 200 species of fish, including an abundance of brightly colored reef fish. The clear lagoon waters provide endless vistas of angelfish, parrotfish, wrasse, butterflyfish, surgeonfish and damselfish, including some species rarely seen in the main Hawaiian islands. Giant trevally (ulua), bluefin trevally, manta rays, and spotted eagle rays are



*Short-tailed Albatross*

but is clumsy on the ground. White terns dot the trees of Sand Island like Christmas ornaments, laying their single eggs directly onto a branch, building no nest at all. Downy white tern chicks grasp tightly to their precarious nest sites from the day they hatch.

Among the other terns that inhabit Midway are black and brown noddies, gray-backed terns and sooty terns. Sooties are by far



the most abundant. These four tern species are regularly observed by visitors to Eastern Island, where they share the diverse habitat with red-footed boobies, masked boobies, and great frigatebirds. This species, called "Iwa" ("thief") in Hawaiian, is best known for its ability to harass other birds returning to their nesting area with food, forcing them to regurgitate their prey in mid-flight over the water.



*Bristle-thighed Curlew*

The most common "night birds" of Midway are Bonin petrels and wedge-tailed shearwaters. Both species nest in sandy burrows. They appear each evening, like clockwork, as the sun sets, circling over their colonies. The shearwater's nocturnal serenade defies simple description and provides an experience that visitors will never forget.

Several shorebird species are regular visitors to Midway, especially during the fall and winter when their arctic nesting grounds are covered with snow. The most common species are Pacific golden plovers, bristle-thighed curlews, wandering tattlers, and ruddy turnstones.

## GIVING MOTHER NATURE A HAND

Managing Midway Atoll as a national wildlife refuge presents unusual challenges. The Fish and Wildlife Service has worked closely with the Navy's herculean effort to demolish deteriorated buildings, to remove dozens of above- and underground fuel tanks and to clean up contaminants resulting from a half century of military occupation.



A major effort is underway to rid the islands of exotic animals and plants that jeopardize the survival and impact the habitat of ground-nesting seabirds. Rats have wreaked havoc in the colonies of burrow-nesting seabirds, but have nearly been eliminated. Noxious plants, such as golden crown-beard and ironwood, are being controlled, and native shrubs and grasses are being replanted in their place.

## A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

National wildlife refuges are for wildlife . . . and for people too. Most of the 500+ refuges nation-

A wildlife biologist checks the band of a Laysan Albatross



## A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

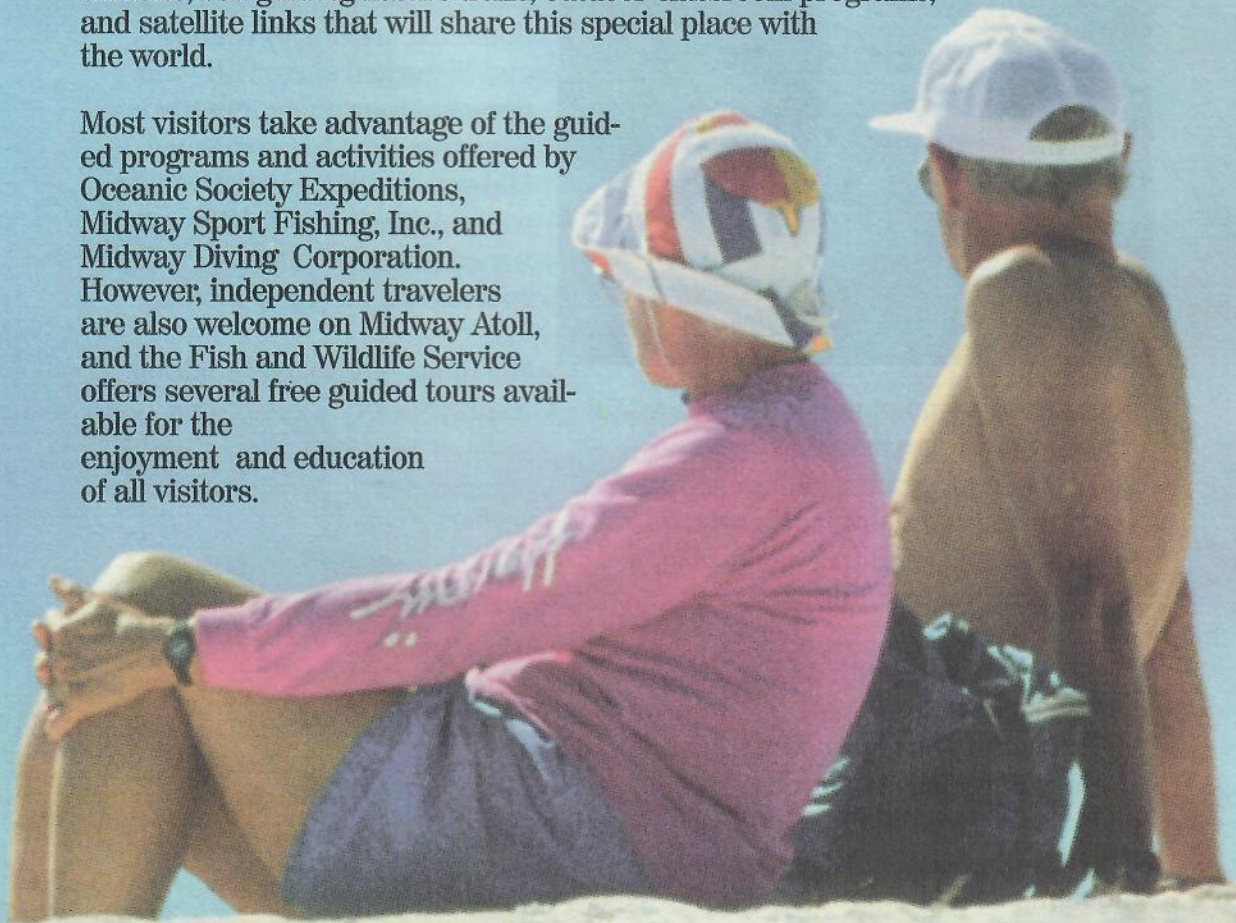
National wildlife refuges are for wildlife . . . and for people too. Most of the 500+ refuges nationwide are open for public visitation, focused on fish and wildlife-related recreation and education. On Midway Atoll, recreational activities such as fishing, diving, snorkeling, wildlife observation and photography, and birding provide outstanding opportunities to experience and learn about the fish and wildlife that depend on remote atolls for their survival.



**For underwater viewing, snorkeling, or diving expeditions, Midway's new Nautilus Sport Viewer gets you there.**

Future refuge plans include creation of a historical museum, interpretive exhibits, self-guiding nature trails, outdoor classroom programs, and satellite links that will share this special place with the world.

Most visitors take advantage of the guided programs and activities offered by Oceanic Society Expeditions, Midway Sport Fishing, Inc., and Midway Diving Corporation. However, independent travelers are also welcome on Midway Atoll, and the Fish and Wildlife Service offers several free guided tours available for the enjoyment and education of all visitors.





# MIDWAY

## GUIDED TOURS & RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS

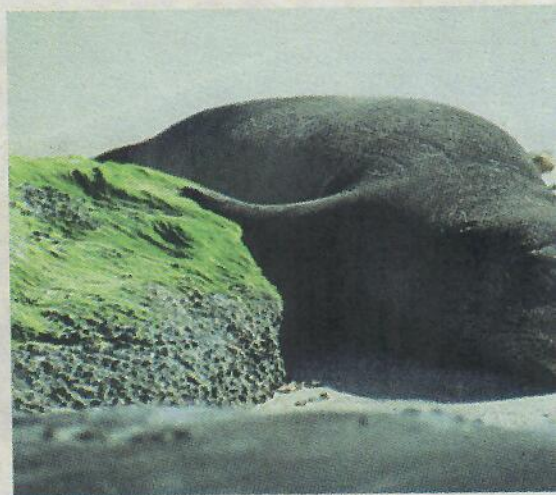


For visitors who desire a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to observe a remote island's wildlife in its natural environment, Oceanic Society Expeditions offers 8-day, 6-day, and 5-day small group tours led by biologists with first-hand knowledge about the atoll and an enthusiastic desire to share their expertise.

Participants enjoy daily educational excursions to wildlife and historical sites with their personal tour guide, but also have free time to experience Midway on their own. Evening presentations about Midway's varied past and unique wildlife species are included as well.

For those interested in taking an active role in helping Midway's wildlife, Oceanic Society Expeditions offers several participatory research and service programs, including seabird, spinner dolphin, Hawaiian monk seal, and coral reef monitoring, and habitat restoration.

Participants work with a field biologist as part of a research team to collect data on the nesting success of various seabird species, observe the behavior of spinner dolphins, or help biologists monitor the monk seal population.







Through the habitat restoration project, visitors may help to restore nesting habitat by removing noxious vegetation or replanting native shrubs.

Although daily tasks are assigned, generally research expeditions include some free time for exploration. No previous research experience is required.



Oceanic Society Expeditions, a non-profit organization, has operated ecotourism and research projects since 1972. Named by *Condé Nast Traveler* as an environmentally responsible organization and one of the best in operating ecological research programs, OSE conducts ecotourism programs worldwide and serves 8,000 travelers annually.



**OCEANIC SOCIETY  
EXPEDITIONS**



Call OSE Directly at: 800-326-7491 or 415-441-1106



# MIDWAY

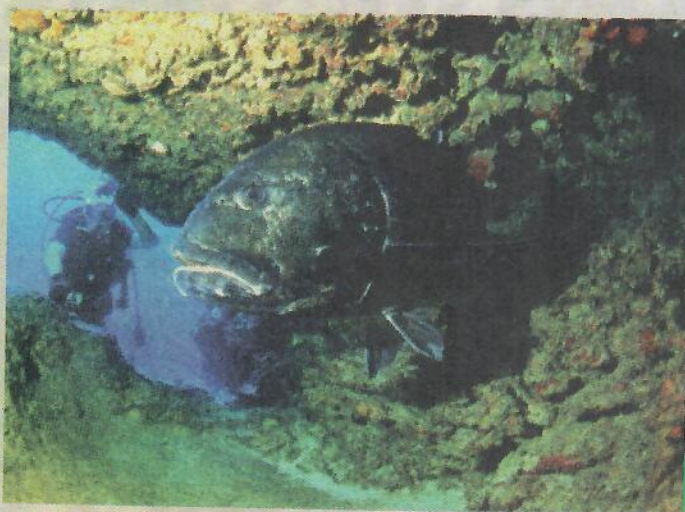
## DIVING & SNORKELING



Midway offers a full service dive facility, with exceptional diving opportunities from May through October. Scuba divers and snorkelers are met with calm, pristine waters and visibility often exceeding 100 feet. The atoll offers colorful corals, iridescent reef fish and the prospect of sunken ships and aircraft. Midway's diving contractor offers programs and equipment suited to the needs of experienced and first time divers alike.

The reef at Midway Atoll encircles the islands and a large shallow lagoon. Within the protection of the reef, snorkelers will find calm, clear waters ranging in depth from 4 to 40 feet. Among the brilliant coral heads are thousands of exotic reef fish, including angelfish, butterflies, parrots, tangs, surgeons, wrasses, and damselfish. Hawaiian monk seals, spinner dolphins,

green sea turtles, and manta rays also frequent the lagoon, so it's not unusual to see one of these underwater creatures.



Outside the reef is an unforgettable experience for the more adventurous diver. In depths of 40 to 60 feet, visitors will explore caverns, archways, ledges, and overhangs sheltering manta rays, groupers, snappers, and reef sharks. Documented shipwrecks dating back to the 1800's and World War II aircraft are waiting to be discovered in these virtually unexplored areas.

808-245-4718 or 888-574-9000



# MIDWAY

## SPORT FISHING

Uncrowded and unspoiled, the pristine waters surrounding the islands of Midway Atoll offer some of the finest sportfishing in the world. Offshore and nearshore fishing excursions are offered by Midway Sport Fishing, Inc. In keeping with the Service's goal to protect and preserve the atoll's precious fish and wildlife resources, the fishing operations at Midway are on a "catch and release" basis, with the exception of fish to be consumed on the island or to verify world records.

The waters surrounding Midway, unlike most other islands, have not been heavily fished. Commercial fishing vessels have been excluded from waters around the atoll for nearly half a century. As a result, the virgin waters of Midway are some of the richest in the world, teeming with game fish, and ripe for record-breaking fishing excursions.

Midway Sport Fishing offers blue water fishing offshore, for tuna (ahi), wahoo (ono), dolphin (mahi mahi) and blue marlin. Several world records have already been set for giant trevally (ulua). World class light-tackle and fly fishing is offered inside and outside Midway's 25 square mile lagoon for giant trevally, blue fin trevally, wahoo, yellowfin tuna, mahi mahi, amberjack, jobfish, occasional sailfish, and African/Pacific pompano.



770-254-8626 or 888-BIG-ULUA



# MIDWAY

## COMMUNITY & TRANSPORTATION



Midway is a special place where wildlife thrive and few people get to visit. Midway's wildlife share their island home with a small, tight-knit community of people — approximately 150 live and work on Sand Island. The “town” exudes the charm of a bygone era.

From the time visitors gather in Lihue, Kauai, to begin their Midway adventure, they become part of the Midway community. Travel to Midway is provided by Phoenix Air in a spacious Gulfstream airplane. The 4 to 5-hour trip allows plenty of time to leave the worries of home behind and get to know your travel mates.

On-island transportation, for both residents and visitors, is by bicycle, on foot, or by the occasional golf cart. Midway guests are housed in the remodeled military Bachelor Officer's Quarters, constructed in the mid-1950's. The island's earlier history is still represented in the turn-of-the-century architecture of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company buildings. In addition, the spirit of the Pan Am Clipper days is being revived with the construction of the new “Clipper House” restaurant and bar right on the beach.



The island offers an old-fashioned bowling alley, movie theater, library, tennis, racquetball, weight room, and gymnasium for the entertainment and recreation of

both residents and visitors. The Ship's Store, a small convenience store, provides snacks, some necessities, and Midway souvenirs. The All-Hands Club, the only remaining pub of days past, features shuffleboard, darts, foosball, pool, ping pong, and Saturday Bingo.



Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are provided at the old Navy Galley, a cafeteria-style dining hall with plenty of great food. Visitors in search of a late night snack can try the “burger and pizza” menu at All Hands Club. For a gourmet experience, the Ironwood Restaurant offers a delightful French cuisine.



# MIDWAY

## ADVENTURE CALENDAR

This calendar provides general information about when various seabirds, migratory shorebirds, and marine species may be seen on Midway Atoll. Some species are found only on Eastern Island, and some, like the short-tailed albatross, are so rare that visitors may not have the opportunity to see them. It is safe to promise, however, that visitors coming to Midway Atoll from November through June will definitely see lots of Laysan and black-footed albatross! The weather also can be highly variable, so use this information as a guide only.

### Key:

Abundant



Less Abundant



Few Present



FISH & WILDLIFE	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Laysan Albatross	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					
Black-footed Albatross	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●
Short-tailed Albatross	▲	▲	▲	▲							▲	▲
White Tern	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sooty Tern		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Gray-backed Tern		●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
Black Noddy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Brown Noddy				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Wedge-tailed Shearwater			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Christmas Shearwater			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bonin Petrel	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Red-tailed Tropicbird	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
White-tailed Tropicbird	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Great Frigatebird		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Red-footed Booby	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Masked Booby	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲		
Pacific Golden Plover	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruddy Turnstone	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Bristle-thighed Curlew	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Wandering Tattler	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Sanderling	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Hawaiian Monk Seal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hawaiian Spinner Dolphin	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Lagoon Fish (200+ species)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
WEATHER												
Average Temp. (High)	73°	73°	74°	76°	79°	85°	88°	88°	87°	86°	78°	75°
Average Temp. (Low)	63°	60°	62°	65°	68°	74°	75°	76°	75°	73°	68°	66°
Average Rainfall	4"	4"	2"	2"	2"	1.5"	2.5"	3"	3"	3"	4"	4"

# WEATHER

Between May and October, weather at Midway Atoll is typically beautiful — warm, sunny days and cooler nights. Air temperatures usually range this time of year between 70-85 degrees. Between November and April, temperatures will dip into the 50's, and strong winds will make it seem colder. Water temperatures will range from the mid-60's in winter to the mid-70's in summer months. It will rain on Midway any month of the year, but is generally more frequent in winter months. The annual rainfall total of nearly 40 inches provides a ready source of fresh water to support Midway's resident community.



# Midway Atoll is a place unlike any other . . .

a refuge not only for wildlife, but for travelers seeking a restful and remote hideaway. It's a place to reflect on a military past and an environmental future, to discover an unexplored undersea world and to revel in the magic of nature at its best.



## Midway Atoll

PO Box 3028, Lihue, HI 96766

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**808-245-4718**

**888-574-9000**

### Oceanic Society Expeditions

Fort Mason Center, Building E

San Francisco, CA 94123

415-441-1106 • 800-326-7491

### Midway Sport Fishing

3 East Broad Street, Newnan, GA 30264

770-254-8326 • 888-BIG-ULUA

### Midway Diving

PO Box 3028, Lihue, HI 96766

808-245-4718 • 888-574-9000

### US Fish & Wildlife Service

Box 50167, Honolulu, HI 96850

808-541-1201 • 808-541-2749