

## **Dan and Sue's World Cruise**

*Adventures and misadventures of our 98 day world cruise aboard Cunard Line's Queen Anne*

## ORIGINATION

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

One of my Bucket List items was to visit Australia. This dates back to my Navy days in the late 60s. My ship, the USS Chicago CG-11, did two tours to Viet Nam. Our job was to patrol the waters off North Viet Nam to monitor communist aircraft taking off from bases in Hanoi. On our return home, many ships had the opportunity to visit Australia on the way back to our home port in San Diego. Twice we were scheduled to stop there for some R&R (Rest & Relaxation). But, in both cases, our visit was cancelled and the scuttlebutt, (Navy jargon for unreliable information) was that the Navy Wives Club were instrumental in the getting those port calls cancelled.

So, Sue and I started looking at RV caravans tours of Australia and New Zealand offered by Fantasy Tours. This is a company that organizes RV tours like we took part in a couple years ago when we toured the Maritime Provinces of Canada. We didn't care for the long air flights and cost. So, we started looking at cruises to the area. This morphed into looking at World Cruises. We ended up committing to this Cunard Line cruise which originates in Hamburg, Germany on January 7th and terminates there on the 29th of April. We will board in New York and disembark in Southampton on April 27th. Sue has two sisters living in the UK. One near Coventry, England, and the other in Scotland. So, we plan on spending time there visiting and touring. We will either return to New York aboard the Queen Mary II, which leaves on January 16th, or fly back to Mason City. To be determined.

Here is a list of our destinations. The lines are extended days at sea.

JAN 18 New York (Embark)

JAN 21 Miami

JAN 24 Cartagena CO (Columbia)

JAN 25 Panama Canal

JAN 28 Puerto Quetzal GT (Guatemala)

JAN 31 Cabo San Lucas MX (Mexico)

FEB 03 San Francisco

FEB 04 San Francisco

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FEB 09 Honolulu

FEB 10 Honolulu

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FEB 17 Apia WS (Samoa)

FEB 19 Nuku'alofa TO (Tonga)

FEB 22 Auckland NZ (New Zealand)

FEB 23 Auckland NZ

FEB 24 Tauranga NZ

FEB 25 Bay of Islands NZ

FEB 28 Sydney AU (Australia)

MAR 01 Sydney AU

MAR 03 Brisbane AU

MAR 05 Airlie Beach AU

MAR 07 Yorkey's Knob AU

MAR 11 Darwin AU

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MAR 16 Manila PI (Philippine Islands)

MAR 18 Hong Kong

MAR 19 Hong Kong

MAR 22 Phu My VN (Vietnam)

MAR 24 Singapore

MAR 25 Singapore



MAR 26 Port Kelang MY (Malaysia)

MAR 27 Penang MY

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APR 03 Mauritius (island country in the Indian Ocean)

APR 07 Durban SA (South Africa)

APR 10 Cape Town SA

APR 11 Cape Town SA

APR 13 Walvis Bay NA (Namibia)

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APR 20 Dakar SN (Senegal)

APR 23 Tenerife SP (Canary Islands)

APR 27 Southampton (Disembark)

## PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Friday, December 13, 2024

There are lots of things to do in preparation for the cruise. What and how much to take; International phone use, worldwide internet access; shore excursion reservations; April 15th taxes, required visas; medications, etc.



First, figuring out how to pay for it! The total amount is due now! I had to transfer money from my investment accounts into to my local checking account. This is normally not a problem but, since I had recently made some deposits in the areas I wanted to draw from, I had to wait for some transfer paperwork to take place. This resulted in a couple extensions to my invoice with Cunard. They accommodated and we are locked in.

Since we are committing late to this cruise, we are in the minority of the nearly 3,000 passengers who have already booked and reserved cabins and shore excursions. So, Sue and I started booking available shore excursions online. We spent three days going over available excursions and paying for them online. Surprisingly, only a small percentage were sold out and we are looking forward to

some great experiences on our voyage. We chose stateroom balcony amidships which has "obstructed view" which they told us only consists of some vertical cables which may have something to do with the life rafts situated just below our balcony.

We both have a Passport and a Passport Card. But, unbeknownst to us, our passport doesn't entitle us to enter any country. Visas and/or ELT (Electronic Travel Authority) are required for Australia and a NZTD (New Zealand Travel Declaration) for New Zealand. Both have a phone app that can be used which requires declaring you haven't been arrested for anything or convicted of a drug offence among other questions. The app also takes a picture of your passport and a photograph of yourself. It also, of course, charges for these services. In US\$, 12.86 for Australia and \$68.11 for New Zealand. Now we wait 72 hours to see if we are granted permission. Vietnam also requires some kind of visa for entry but, as I understand it, that will be taken care of on board before we arrive there.



Unlike some other cruises I, we, have been on, the Queen Anne is oriented toward luxury and not so much toward family entertainment such as water slides, gaming, and other options you would look for on a Disney or Princess cruise. Cunard Lines even have an afternoon "Teatime" where white gloved waiters serve cakes and desserts along with the mandatory tea. Just what we need! Another temptation to put on pounds. Welcome to the English way of doing things! You are expected to "smart dress" for dinner and even more smartly for the twice weekly gala nights if you intend to break bread at their sit-down restaurants. There is always the buffet alternative if you want to forego the "dress up". This means I need to pack some dress clothes and perhaps, even buy a suit as the one I have doesn't fit. Sue needs to buy some dresses.

Now that the cruise is paid for, we are getting offers of other packages that are available. Their drinks package, which includes soft drinks, specialty drinks (mocha, slurries, etc.) alcoholic drinks up to \$13.50 with a maximum of 15/day, is \$49.50/day per person. Both adults in the stateroom are required to purchase, so that means for our 98-day cruise, it would cost us \$9,702! I don't think so. Mixed drinks, without the package, run from \$8-13, beers around \$7, soft drinks around \$3. [Cunard Drinks Package Guide: Worth It Or Not \(2024\)?](#) (Tap and follow link, if interested)

Internet packages for our 98-day voyage, which I will need if I am going to do this blog, cost \$2,058 for one device and \$4,116 for up to four devices! This package includes voice or video streaming which Sue needs for her online puzzles she likes to do. She has a device that she thinks will work for both of us and get by with the least expensive option. We will see!

Several days after our confirmation, I received an email offering upgrades to our stateroom. It is a bidding process starting with the top-level staterooms which are basically an apartment several times the size of our 180 square foot balcony stateroom. Bidding for this starts at \$30,190 and goes up to \$64,845 PER GUEST! No thank you very much! Our balcony stateroom upgrade to the same thing without an obstructed view was \$1,880 up to \$4,085, again per guest. They asked when I signed up if I would take a free upgrade if one became available, I told them we would. We will take our chances and see how we get along with what we booked, keeping in mind it will be our home for over three months. One of the disadvantages to agreeing to a free upgrade is that it must be taken, even though the upgrade may take us away from our mid-ship position on the lower decks. I did not know this at the time it was offered. Sue has some trouble with motion sickness so this may be a concern.

This is a test:



## Check-in

December 28, 2024



The Saturday before Christmas we were invited to Dean and Linda Tjaden's (the boys' mother) for a pre-Christmas dinner with them and the boys' families. This is a yearly event for them but since we are normally gone south this time of year, it was a first for us. We had a great time and was very appreciative of the invite.



Marge (Linda's mom), Doug (Linda's cousin), Linda, myself and Sue

Two of my three boys live in Des Moines, and they called a couple days before this and invited us down there to spend Christmas. This worked out well for us as we had some serious clothes shopping to do for evening dining aboard ship. We drove down and enjoyed celebrating Christmas with the boys and their families. The day after Christmas was spent shopping before driving back to Charles City. So, between JCPenney, T. J. Maxx and Goodwill, we scored a new suit, sport coat, shirts and pants for me and several dresses for Sue.

Today, I received an email from Cunard stating that since it is now 21 days before sailing date, we could go online and do our check-in process. We logged on to our "My Cunard" website that is unique to our particular stateroom and were able to download and print our Boarding Passes and Baggage Tags. They also required us to supply information for the charge cards we would be using during the cruise. They did the usual \$1 charge to make sure it worked. Sue had no trouble with hers, but mine was declined. Since I had been hacked recently and had to change

accounts, they have tightened up my protection. Since the charge came from the UK, they declined it. It wasn't long before I got an alert message on my phone asking if the \$1 charge was legitimate or not. After I answered Yes, I tried again, and it went through.

A company called Luggage Forward offers a service to have our bags picked up here at the house and transported to the ship. This would save having to lug them around the airports and to and from our motel in Brooklyn. Plus, not having to pay the checked baggage fee. It cost about \$169 each for under 50 pounds and \$189 for up to 75 pounds. We decided it would be worth the cost. We are close to being ready!

January 4, 2025

Well, we survived the New Year, watched the ball drop in New York from bed! Not very exciting, but also not a good time to be out on amateur night celebrating even if we had felt like it.

It has been really cold here in northern Iowa, down to single digits overnight. We have gotten fairly thin-skinned by skipping northern winters the last 15 plus years by going south to Arizona and Florida but mainly to South Texas Rio Grande Valley. We are anxious to board the Queen Anne and head south again.



We received our shipping labels from Luggage Forward with instructions to have them ready for pick up on January 8. I think mine is ready and weighs 46 pounds, just under the 50lb limit.

Sue is still working on hers but I'm sure it will be close to the max. They provided a list of things not allowed:

- Medication, OTC, prescription, or vitamins
- Food (Includes coffee beans and spices)
- Alcohol (including perfume and hand sanitizer)
- Tobacco
- Pressurized containers (includes sunscreen)
- Valuables or currency
- Electronics (excludes cables and converters)
- Lithium based, or Alkaline batteries (includes tracking devices and range finders)

We will still have a carry-on to take on the airplane, and if Sue doesn't pare down her items, we may have to check a bag as well! Good Grief! We are only going to be gone four months!

More to follow.

## Getting Close!

Sunday, January 12, 2025

Over the last week we have been trying to use up freezer and refrigerator items before our departure this coming Thursday morning. When we go south for the winter, we normally have the water shut off at the curb for a couple of reasons. If we should happen to lose or furnace and the pipes freeze, we won't flood the house, and it also saves us from the minimum charges for water, sewer and garbage pickup. Since we plan to leave early Thursday morning, it will either have to be shut off Wednesday afternoon or ask our neighbor Larry to be here to do it Thursday afternoon. He has done this for us before and since he has agreed to drive us to the airport, we will impose on him for this additional duty. Thank goodness for great neighbors. Larry and Barb also look after our house and property while we escape for the winter. We really appreciate their efforts!

We got another surprise from Cunard Lines in an email suggesting that we may have to get a visa or ETA for our visit to the UK. Sure enough, starting January 1, 2025, they are requiring U.S. citizens planning a visit to obtain one or the other depending on the purpose of your visit. We just need an ETA (Electronic Travel Authorization) like we did for Australia and New Zealand. It can be done with our mobile phone or online. Sue gets hers done without much trouble and uses her Credit Card to pay the 10 British Pound fee which amounts to \$12.98. I, on the other hand, am having nothing but trouble. First, was getting past the point where the app takes a picture of your passport. After about six tries, it finally accepts it then it gets stuck at the point where I take a selfie. It keeps saying the service is down and to try again later. After several restarts, I get a message saying I have had too many failed attempts, and I am locked out for three hours!

As I write this, we have snow flurries outside with windy conditions. It isn't expected to amount to much thankfully, not like the storms east of us. Although we have planned for a one-day cushion for our arrival in New York, it looks like the weather should not be a problem come Thursday.

So, after watching my Hawkeye women's basketball team get beat by Indiana, I tried again to get my ETA completed. I got past the Passport photos without any problems, but they asked if my passport had the emblem at the bottom (see red arrow) and if it did, it meant that there was a "biometric chip" embedded, and I needed to scan it. I spent about 5 minutes trying to "find" my chip by rubbing my phone, as instructed, over the cover of my passport. I gave it to Sue to try and after several more attempts, it finally discovered it.

Next step, take a selfie, which after several tries, it finally accepted my photo and after giving over my credit card information, they accepted my application. It wasn't long and I got an email, saying I was approved. UK, here we come!



Thursday, January 16th...Travel Day!

Finally, our travel day arrives. We get up at Oh Dark Hundred, that's 5AM for all you non-military types. We shower and do some final packing. Our neighbor Larry will ride with us to the airport and bring back our pickup so won't have to stay parked at the airport for four months. I called yesterday to City Hall and scheduled a 1PM water shut-off. Larry will also be here for that as they need someone to verify the water is off. We have a breakfast pizza we have been saving as most everything else is cleaned out of the fridge. After doing some final cleaning, we pick up Larry and head for Mason City airport, about a 45-minute drive.

Everything goes well and we leave on time for our 55-minute flight to Chicago O'Hare. It seems like our taxi to the terminal takes about as long as the flight! We go directly to our gate which is about a 20-minute walk. We wait about 45 minutes and boarding starts for the nearly 300 of us on the 737. It is a full airplane our take-off time is 1PM....which comes and goes! Captain finally comes on and says there is a mechanical problem, and we have to have mechanics come aboard. After a couple more apologies and appreciation for our patience, he tells us the mechanics have to remove a rear panel and check out the oxygen supply. Evidently some idiot light isn't coming on or something. After waiting over an hour some other guy comes on and says they are required to announce that we have been there long enough, they have to offer passengers the option to leave if they so wish. Some do, but not many. After another half hour, the captain says everything checks out and we can leave as soon as they get the panel back on and do the paperwork. We finally get in the air about the time we were supposed to be landing in LaGuardia.

We deplane and debate whether to take a taxi or call Uber. The taxi stand is close by and has a sign listing typical fares to popular destinations. One is downtown Manhattan, which I know is on the other side of the East River, and the fee is listed as \$55. Since we are already in Brooklyn, I figure how bad can it be to our hotel. After getting in the taxi and overcoming some language difficulties, he quotes us \$77.75, and it will take about 45 minutes in current traffic. Yikes, but in for a penny, in for a pound and we take off blending into the heavy traffic amongst occasional horn honking. At least he has a mounted credit card machine which they want you to use.

We arrive at our motel around 7PM, pay the cabbie and get checked in. We haven't eaten anything since our breakfast pizza, except for the minuscule fruit bar handed out by the flight attendant. We decide to have a Domino's pizza delivered rather than venture out to one of several restaurants within walking distance. The pizza arrived, not what we ordered and not very good and was \$40 with tip! Welcome to the Big Apple. Tomorrow is another adventure.

## A Day in the Big Apple



We start our day with the complimentary breakfast which we hope will last us most of the day. We would like to visit the 9/11 Memorial since we are here and fairly close. But how to get there? Bus, train, taxi or Uber. We quiz the desk clerk, and she recommends taking the train/subway and conveniently there is a station only a 2-minute walk from our hotel. The temperature is supposed to be close to 40 degrees in Manhattan today, so we dress accordingly and head for the subway.

There are several options to pay, you can use a machine to buy a ticket, purchase a long-term pass which locals use, I assume. She suggests we just use our charge/debit card at the turnstile. It costs \$3 to board, and you can ride all over New York for that \$3 if you don't exit the subway. We received directions to take the D train to either 36th street or Atlantic Ave. and transfer to the R train which will take us under the East River into Manhattan and exit at the Courtland station, which is at the memorial complex.

The ride was an experience, which is what we are looking for.



9th St. Station



We did not realize it, but the hotel we booked was in the heart of Brooklyn's Chinatown district. And it shows, Asians everywhere, most are not speaking English but of course they are probably fluent. But of course, NYC is a melting pot, and we experience this throughout the day as most of the conversations around us are not in English but lots of languages, French, German, Spanish and others I could not begin to recognize. We did not see a lot of homeless persons today, but keep in mind the temperatures outside. There were a few exceptions.





We exited the Courtland Street station and found ourselves looking at the Oculus. This sculpture rises above and covers shops and pathways to subway stations. It looks like a winged bird rising up out of the ashes of the twin towers.



Inside the Oculus



The Oculus with One World Trade Center in background

Speaking of those, in my ignorance, I did not realize the reflecting pools (actually, basins) are surrounded by granite slabs with the names of 2,753 victims of 9/11 engraved on them, were two in number. One for the north tower and the other for the south tower. I assume they are located at the original footprint of the towers.

We make our way to the museum and purchase two standard tickets, which didn't include guided tours, for \$25 dollars each, a discount because we are veterans. Nice to be recognized occasionally.



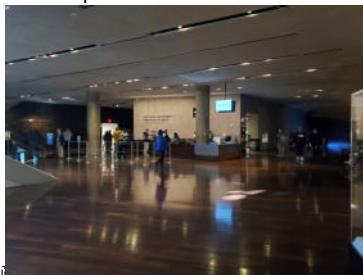
View of the Oculus from North reflecting pool

As we enter the museum, we notice the subdued lighting, I assume it is to set a somber mood.



South reflecting pool

Most of the museum is below ground level and as we wind our way down the passageway, lighted displays come and go triggered by our movement. Pictures are welcome everywhere except the enclosed area where there is a



picture of every one of the victims with an associated biography.

There are many displays of twisted steel and support beams and other artifacts from the wreckage. Also, there are several motorcycles on display which have been built or customized to honor the victims, police, firefighters and first responders.

There is a large piece of the communications tower that was on top of one of the twin towers. Also on display was a fire engine that was damaged beyond repair by falling debris. We spent well over an hour there and found it very

tastefully done and worth the visit.



This is part of the communications tower that was atop the north tower



Damaged NYFD engine



Rectangular support beam bent back over itself

From there we went back to the Oculus and made our way underground to the One World Trade Center. This is the 1,776-foot-tall building that replaced the twin towers. Interesting that the year of our independence is also 1776, was this by design? It has an observation floor that is called the One World Observatory. We purchase our tickets, senior price \$43 each and with added taxes and fees, total \$101.26.



We line up to board one of several elevators for the 43 second ride which will take us 1,250 feet above ground. It is an amazing ride with the elevator walls projecting a video of our ascent. There are several



YouTube videos of this ride if you are interested. [\(9\)](#)

We exit on the spacious observation floor which gives us breathtaking views of the surrounding area. There is a little haze in the air but otherwise clear viewing. We rent a pad that identifies all the well-known structures and gives a description of the more popular ones. This was an additional \$10 but we thought it was worth it. There are a lot of visitors but I'm sure not nearly as many if we would be here during tourist season. Lots of languages again, English being in the minority and Asians by far the most.

They have a complete restaurant here as well as the ever-present gift shop. Sue buys her lapel pin which she has a collection of. I used to buy shot glasses but gave up on that many years ago.

We make the tour around the 360-degree viewing area, taking lots of pictures, a few I will share here. After well over an hour, our septuagenarian bodies are telling us we have had about enough excitement and walking for today. We head for the exit and experience another thrilling ride down as the video walls make it seem like we are in a glider, circling our way around the skyscraper on the way down.



This is a view of the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridge crossing the East River



View to the SE with Brooklyn in the upper left and a part of Governor's Island, upper right



Looking into the sun at Liberty Island and Ellis Island

We are able to access the R Train in the below ground area of the One World Trade Center without having to go outside. I'm beginning to think there is about as much below ground around here as above!

The R Train takes us back under the East River where we eventually connect with the D Train and exit at 9th street which is a short walk back to the hotel. We arrive about 5 PM and spend a quiet night after experiencing a small part of NYC life.

Rain is expected tomorrow afternoon; about the time we are scheduled to travel and board the Queen Anne. I will spend the time composing this blog and listening to my Iowa Hawkeyes who are on the west coast taking on UCLA. Boarding time is between 3 and 4 PM, we will take a taxi or Uber.

Next publication will probably be at sea, between here and Miami.

Until then....

## Underway!

January 18th, 1st day at sea.

We take a car/taxi, that the hotel clerk called for us, to Pier 12 where the Queen Anne is docked. The ride took about 15-20 minutes, and the charge was only \$16, I added a generous tip as I expected it to be much higher. We give our bags to a porter who will take them aboard for us and we go into the terminal and join the line of returning passengers and others like us who are boarding for the first time. There doesn't seem to be much of a line compared to other cruises we have been on. We get our boarding passes verified against our passports and proceed up the enclosed gangway and board the ship. We are welcomed by crew members and told to go to our muster station D, which is where we will go if there is some kind of emergency, this is a requirement, and they scan our boarding pass to register that we were there.

We are on the 2nd deck, our cabin 4167, is on the 4th deck, there are 14 total decks above sea level. Since our cabin is an odd number, we know that it is on the starboard (right side looking forward for you land-lubbers). We locate the stairs amidship and climb two decks and go aft to our cabin where our two suitcases that we had pre-shipped from Iowa, are parked in front of our door along with our two ship's ID cards.

Our cabin seems small at first but certainly adequate for our needs. We spend the next hour or so unpacking and putting clothes in closets and shelves. There are plenty of hangers, one thing we were warned there might not be. Only one of our three bags that we gave to the porter arrived and we are getting a little concerned because we are leaving the dock. I see a steward and ask him about it, and he said they were still sorting so that was reassuring.

As indicated in earlier communication, a bottle of sparkling wine and two glasses were waiting for us. We poured ourselves a glass and did our best to take a selfie of ourselves toasting the start of our adventure.



We were a little concerned how restrictive our "Obstructed View" balcony would be. It really isn't obstructed that much but we are directly in line with the first of a series of lifeboats. So it restricts our view down, but there is not much to see there anyway. And, because we are recessed inward because of the lifeboats, our forward view is somewhat restricted. But overall, we are pleased with our location, low down and amidships.



It is getting dark, and we have a nice view of Manhattan skyline across the East River all the way from the UN building south to Ellis and Liberty Island. The Statue of Liberty is lit up and her green color with the lighted torch is easy to see.



Manhattan skyline, UN to the right, One World Trade Center on the left

Our remaining two bags arrived around 7PM and we spend the next half hour putting things in place and then dress for dinner. We opted for open dining which means we can be seated anytime between 5:30 and 9PM. There was a note that said a reservation for 8:15 had been made for us for this evening. Tonight is a "Smart Attire" night. It is either that or a "Gala" which happens twice a week we have read somewhere. Smart attire for men is at least a collared shirt and long pants. Gala evenings require a suit, sport coat or tux with accompanying tie or bowtie. For women, appropriate dress or gown.

We are assigned the Britannia Restaurant, and open dining is on the 3rd deck balcony which surrounds the Early and Late Diners on the 2nd deck which is visible through the open area below. It is a busy place and seems like there are as many waiters and bus people as patrons. We give the Maitre' D our room number and he assigns us an escort to lead us to our table. There are a lot of tables for 2, some larger tables for 6 or 8. They are all set with linen tablecloths and napkins and salt and pepper shakers that seem to weigh a pound each! The pepper, as we found out later, is so fine it seems to float away and right up my nose! The saltshaker has an opening not much bigger than two or three grains of salt and is frustratingly hard to use. We later saw people unscrewing them and getting salt that way!

Our waiter comes and hands us the menu to peruse followed by the wine steward. We decline the wine for tonight, maybe on one of the Gala dinners. There is a nice selection of appetizers, entrees and desserts. We order two appetizers thinking we would split them, a risotto and a baby shrimp cocktail. We each also order Cesare's salad. For entrees, Sue orders a chicken eggplant dish, and I go with a beef dish. After ordering our waiter comes back and sets four forks and four knives of various sizes and shapes, for the each of us! What are we going to do with all this hardware? Our desserts arrive and we BOTH are served the risotto; it is not a large portion but tasty. When we are finished, our waiter picks up the dishes and the used fork and one knife whether it was used or not. Now we are getting the picture. Next comes the shrimp. Small portions thankfully, and quite good. Waiter comes and collects dishes and more hardware. Next the Cesare's salad, same operation. We are down to one sharp knife and fork when our entrees arrive. Sue's chicken was a little dry and my beef was a little chewy but not bad. We were still a little hungry believe it or not, so we asked for the dessert menu, and I ordered a pudding, and Sue ops for a brownie with orange sauce. We were out of silverware now so here he comes with more forks and spoons. If we would have ordered dessert to start with, would we have a collection of over 20 knives, forks and spoons?

We find our way back to 4167 and retire for the night. It has been quite a day, and we will let the slight motion of the ship rock us to sleep.

## Comments:

**19.01.2025: Joanne Robinson**

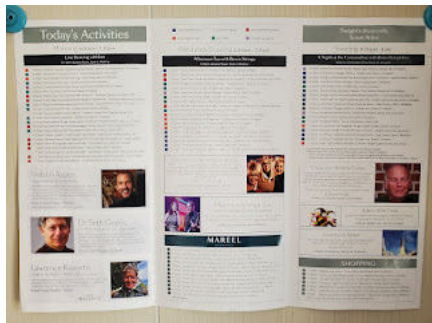
Loving your blog. Keep it going. I think it would be reassuring to have the life boats right off my balcony like that. Can you reach out and touch them?  
Looking forward to reading more.

## Getting our Sea Legs

January 19, 2025, 2nd day

We get a "Daily Programme" each day with lists the activities scheduled for the day. It is a very useful tool to help you plan your day and evening.

While at sea, there is a brief paragraph from the ship's Navigator telling you where the ship is and where it is going. Ships position can also be viewed on our television where it shows us to be off the East Coast. There is also a camera on the ships bow that can be viewed in real time. I reproduced the Navigator's message below:



Reverse side

From our Navigator: "Upon our departure from New York yesterday evening, Queen Anne proceeded down Buttermilk Channel, keeping Liberty Island and the Statue of Liberty to the starboard before heading back down Anchorage Channel. After disembarking our local pilot in the Ambrose Channel, Queen Anne altered south to proceed down the Off New York Traffic Separation Scheme. Throughout today, Queen Anne will continue south through the North Atlantic Ocean, following the coast of New Jersey, Virginia and North Carolina on our starboard side."



Front side

They talk about the "local pilot". This is the highly paid local port official that all ports require be on board to navigate the ship to and from its docking pier. I guess they don't trust the ship's captain and navigator to do it. I believe this is required of all ships, no matter what type, even military. A tugboat brings them on board when coming into port and picks them up as we are leaving.

We both get a pretty good night sleep and wake to seas that are a little rougher than when we retired for the night, but not extremely so. We decide to try the Britannia Restaurant again for breakfast to see what it is like as opposed to going to the buffet on the 9th deck. So, we dress casual and head aft. Breakfast is on the 2nd deck of the restaurant, the 3rd deck where we ate last night is closed. I assume there is a lot less participation for breakfast. The events of last night are repeated and we are seated and menus provided. It is a complete menu with fruits, pastries, cheeses and meats trays, juices of all kinds and color and of course, entrees. Sue normally eats light in the morning whereas I enjoy a big breakfast and normally don't eat again until dinner. Sue gets avocado toast with fruit, and I opt for the Traditional Cunard offering of what amounts to Bangers and Hash, i.e. sausage, hash brown potatoes, mushrooms, black pudding, a thin slice of ham and a couple of over easy eggs along with my tomato juice and coffee. Sue gets tea and cranberry juice. Thankfully we didn't have to go through the silverware exchange like last night.

A British couple was seated beside us and we soon struck up a conversation. They boarded in Southampton, England and will disembark in San Francisco after spending a couple days touring. They will then fly back to England. It is their first trip to the U.S. I would have to say, Americans are probably in the minority on this voyage since it originated in Hamburg before stopping in Southampton. We will undoubtedly pick up more Americans in Miami and San Francisco, but the majority will probably remain British.

The breakfast was OK, but I doubt I will order the Cunard Traditional again.

We spent most of the day exploring the ship and visiting the shops. I had good intentions of finding the gym to start my daily workout that I promised myself. Tomorrow should be soon enough.

Around 6PM we dressed for dinner. I had nothing since breakfast, but Sue had a light lunch during tea time at the buffet on the 9th deck. We checked in on the 3rd deck Britannia, but our escort took us down the stairs to join the Early diners, they must have had a two-seat table they wanted to fill. The menu had the usual items with some differences, Sue ordered an appetizer and a Cesezar's salad as did I, but I also wanted to try their Duck Consommé.

We both ordered the Grilled Lamb Rump with roast potatoes, mushrooms and what tasted like parsnip slices. Sue could not pass up the Zaatar-Roasted Cauliflower entree as well. For dessert, we both ordered the Caribbean Banana and Rum Cake. Tonight, I ended up with 7 utensils, Sue had six laid out. My extra being the spoon for my Duck Soup.

Everything was quite good tonight, especially the lamb. the only complaint we had was the mint sauce had a little too much vinegar. The dessert was delicious and came with both a fork and spoon, our choice.

There is a lot of entertainment around the ship at night, but neither of us are big fans of sitting and listening to comedians or singers or musicians. So, we retired to our stateroom for a quiet evening of TV or Sue's online puzzles.



The seas have gotten rougher during the day and the ship is testing our sea legs. It was more noticeable in the restaurant which is as far aft as you can go. Sue has not been bothered with sea sickness so far. We will keep our fingers crossed.

January 20th, 3rd day at sea.

After a restful night we head aft to the Britannia for breakfast. We are seated at a table for six and at which one couple is already seated. We can tell immediately that they are British by their accent. After ordering we are soon joined by another gentleman that looks the part of a liberal professor with his bowtie and white hair combed back with a little ponytail. He tells us his wife is probably lost and he got tired of waiting for her. She soon joins us after about five minutes and says she took a wrong turn and ended up in the restaurant that is restricted to the next level of staterooms called the "Grille Balcony's". They are from Boston he soon dominates the conversation. He is very widely traveled and knows the area where the Brits are from. He said he spent the first 21 years of his life as an "army brat" and had done extensive world travel. Our meals come and I make the mistake of putting my lemon peel from my tomato juice on the small plate to my right. He politely informed me that this was his "bread plate" and offered a way to remember which was which. He made his left and right hand into an "ok sign" and said the left hand was shaped like a "b" and the right like a "d". This represented bread on the left and drinks on the right. How

could I have lived 78 years and not known this! I told him I appreciated the reference, but in my world, we don't have bread plates. But in truth, I am glad to learn this so hopefully, not create any more faux pas during this voyage.

When we get back to our cabin, I happened to check the weather back in Iowa. Good Grief, it is minus 24 degrees F wind chill with actual temperature of -9 degrees. Glad we are headed to Florida!

We received a written invitation to a Welcome to Cunard event at 10AM in the Queens Room. This is a major area with a stage where a lot of the activities take place. We arrive and our invitations are placed in a container that they will draw prizes from as the presentations take place.



The MC is a Canadian that has a long history with Cunard Line and he explains the basics of getting around the ship and every so often he draws a name and gives out a prize to be used aboard in the various departments. Our names were not drawn. We did see a woman carrying a small dog. We read earlier that the only Cunard ship that allowed pets was the Queen Mary II. This must be a Service Dog we assume. She was a prize winner as it turns out!

Today is Inauguration Day. We return to the stateroom and watch the British Sky News channel which is covering the event along with every other channel listed. I tried watching MSNBC and CNBC, the only American channels offered. I couldn't stand watching this ultra liberal coverage. Why they decided on these two channels is a mystery since they probably have the least viewing audience of any network or cable channel.

After watching the swearing in ceremony, I figure it is time to start exercising so I put on my shorts and t-shirt and head down to deck 1 fwd where the spas and gym are located. They have quite an elaborate array of exercise equipment. Lots of treadmills, ellipticals, rowing apparatuses, dumbbells, etc. Everything to make yourself into a lean, mean fighting machine. It is about half to three quarters full. I climb aboard one of the free treadmills and set it to my normal walking speed of 3 mph.

I select Rome on the video display which makes it look like you are walking through the streets past the Coliseum and other well-known historical ruins. I walk for 3 miles which takes a little over an hour and consider that good enough for my first outing. I will expand my efforts as the cruise goes on, hopefully.

The Daily Programme listed a veterans get-together at 4PM in the Commodore Club on Deck 12 Fwd. We attended one of these on our Alaska Cruise and enjoyed it, so we head up there and find more than a dozen veterans visiting together. Sue finds common ground with some Air Force veterans but there are no Navy vets or Army people which I have any common interests. We visit for an hour or so before heading back to our stateroom.

Tonight is Gala Night with a theme of Red and Gold. So, I break out my brand new JCPenney suit, and select a white shirt and tie that has gold and red in it. Sue has a floor length dress that is quite a festive red, orange and gold colors and she complements that with a red shawl.



This is a small part of the exercise room

We head aft to the Britannia and check in. Our escort again takes us down to the 2nd floor and seats us with a British couple at a table for four. They are a very pleasant couple to visit with. They boarded in Southampton and will cruise with us to San Francisco where they will fly back to England, this seems to be a common occurrence. We order our appetizers and drinks; the featured entree is Chateaubriand. Sue and I both order it. As for the British couple, he orders the Chateaubriand as well and she has the Trout entree.

The meal was excellent, the best so far. As we exit the dining area, there are opportunities to have your picture taken since you are all gussied up, a rare occasion for us. We allow the photographer to pose us in various ways and will have the opportunity to review and purchase any that strike our fancy. They will be available in the following day or two.

By the time we finish with the photographer, it is going on 9PM and we head for barn. The seas have a gentle roll to them, which should put us right to sleep.]

Tomorrow we will arrive at the Port of Miami. We have no excursions planned, but do intend to go ashore for some shopping. We think this might be a good time to try room service for our breakfast.

We fill out the order form and select it to be delivered between 7 and 7:30 and hang it on the outside door handle. It has to be out there before 1AM.

## Miami and beyond

Tuesday, 21 January



We were already tied up at the docks when we awoke this morning. Never felt the slightest bump! The pilot must have done a good job bringing us in.

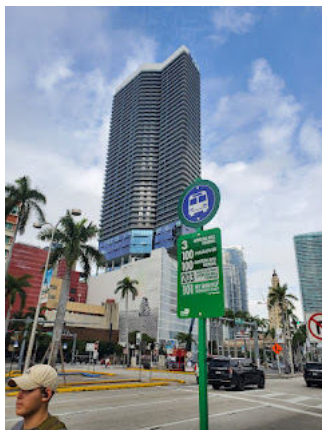


Our pre-ordered breakfast arrives and it is quite good considering. I should have taken a picture for posting, maybe next time.

We take our time since we aren't leaving until 5:30 which gives us plenty of time. The ship provides a shuttle service to the Bayside Marketplace where there are all kinds of shops. We are looking for an electronics store where I can purchase a new power cord for my computer. I seemed to have left mine plugged into the desk outlet at our Bronx hotel. That is why I had to use Sue's computer for the last couple of blogs. There is a store here and they do have a Universal Power cord with about 15 different barrel type connectors which I require. Sue has a Type C connector which is why we couldn't share hers. The owner is kind enough to open

the package and make sure one of the connectors work. Would you believe none of them did! He couldn't believe it.

Sue had done some searching for a Best Buy near our dock and there was one in South Beach. Now how to get there. We googled and found out the No. 100 city bus would take us within easy walking distance of a Best Buy. The bus stop was not far away and we did not wait long before one came along.



Miami Bus Stop

Our fare is paid by touching our debit card to the sensor, which turned out to be \$2.25 each. We boarded and there was standing room only. I commented on that to the young man standing next to me and he said it was always like that. A younger woman did offer her seat to Sue which she gladly accepted. It was about a 20 minute bus ride with several stops along the way, over the causeway to South Beach. We could follow along on the Bus App on Sue's phone so we knew where to get off.

We saw the Best Buy sign high up on the building across the street. We had a little trouble finding the entrance which turned out to be a parking garage! Best Buy was on the 3rd floor along with three other stores. We took the elevator up to the 2nd floor but that is all the further it went. Another set of elevators would take us to the 3rd floor or higher, but it wasn't working! So we had to walk up the ramp where the cars drive. Other people were in the same predicament. There were stores on the 5th floor also. We finally find the store and the young man was very helpful and provided us with another type of universal power cord that had fewer options but did indeed have my connection. Wallah! So that was a \$65 dollar mistake corrected with some difficulty.



Bayside marina area.

We did other shopping at a nearby Walgreens before finding the 100 Bus back to downtown Miami and the Bayside Marketplace. This time our debit cards would not work on the machine and the driver just waived us on and off we went. Thank you driver! The drivers are all enclosed in plastic barriers for their protection and cannot do any transactions.

Back at the marketplace Sue can't pass up the Gelato counter.



There are many flavors to choose from. We have one of these aboard ship as well that can be purchased. We go through security to get back on board and head for our stateroom. We have a couple hours before dinner so I work on this blog and Sue does her puzzles.

We dress for dinner and are seated in a line of tables for two. A Canadian couple is on our left and after our orders are taken, an elderly woman and what I can only assume is her granddaughter, are seated on our right. They are speaking German and probably boarded in Hamburg. The Canadians are veteran cruisers and are disembarking in San Francisco. Sue orders the Roasted Pork Belly and I do the Grilled Sea Bream since I am in the mood for fish tonight.

As usual, I also order a couple of appetizers and a salad. I'll post the menu for those that are interested. Sorry about the quality of photos...I'll try and do better.



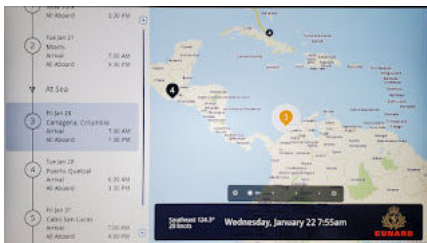
This was my Bream, very good!



Sue's Pork Belly

Wednesday, 22 January

We slept in a little this morning and didn't open the balcony curtains until around 8AM. We were a little surprised to see land. Turning the TV to the Navigation page, we see that we are off the coast of Cuba.



The #'s 3 & 4 are our next two Port Calls

We did bring a small set of binoculars and I can see that there are quite a few tall buildings that look like apartments or condos. I think we are seeing a group of islands just off the Cuban coast.

I think we will try the buffet for the first time for our breakfast. We do our morning chores, dress casual and head to the Artisan's Foodhall - Buffet on Deck 9, amidships.

The buffet is wonderful in the respect you could get most anything you could imagine if you could just find where on the stations to get it. Nothing was self service. You told the person behind the display case what you wanted and they plated it for you. I had striped bacon (this is what the British call our bacon), corn beef hash and steamed eggs. English bacon is a thin slice of ham that doesn't even look smoked. I also had them toast an English Muffin for me. Sue was happy with some assorted fruit plates and cranberry juice.



After breakfast we toured the two pool areas. It was a wonderful day with calm seas and partly sunny skies. There were quite a few sun worshippers about the decks on different levels.

I am tempted to run back and change into swim trunks and take a dip myself. However, I do need to work on this blog and Sue wants to take part in a Scavenger Hunt, so we head back to the stateroom.

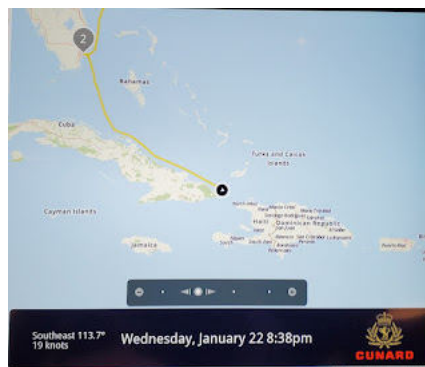


After a couple hours, Sue comes back from the Scavenger Hunt and she has found 9 out of the 10. She will work on the remaining one tomorrow. I put on my gym clothes and head for the treadmill where I do a fast walk for 3.5 miles over about 70 minutes and climb the equivalent of 500 feet. I also burned about 400 calories and earned what feels like a blister forming on my right foot.



We dress for dinner get seated by two single ladies from California traveling together. Sue spies one of her favorite meals on the menu, Seared Calf Liver. I choose the Roasted Turkey. The ladies both order the roasted chicken that looked very good. It is always on the menu along with the steak and fries and salmon. Our entrees were both very good and we leave after desserts of Dark Chocolate Fondant for Sue and Carrot Cake for myself. Excellent.

We work off our dinner by taking a lap around the ship enjoying the evening and calm seas at 19 knots. Tonight I will update this blog and listen to Iowa women's basketball game at Washington.



Our position this evening

## Comments:

23.01.2025: [blueKat](#)

Thanks for sharing. We enjoy following along with your adventure.

02.02.2025: [Larry Tjaden](#)

Enjoying your comments

## Cartagena, Columbia and the Panama Canal transit

Thursday, January 23, 2025

We awake to choppy seas and rolling waves. Not severely so, but enough to make squeaky noises around our stateroom. Sue, surprisingly, has not been affected. We wonder if it is because of the magnetic bracelet that I gifted her last year. Whatever the reason, we are grateful.

We breakfast at the buffet, which I suspect will be the norm. Mainly because the same things are there and readily available.

It is a fine day, a little breezy off the Port Bow under partly sunny skies. I decide to put on my swim suit and visit the pool areas. I spend time in the hot tub while Sue finishes her Scavenger Hunt.

Back in the cabin, we watch a video on Cartagena, which is our next port. We have scheduled a shore excursion, a 3-hour Fun Bus adventure.

The rest of the day was fairly routine, I won't bore you with the details.

Friday, January 24

I set my phone alarm to 6:30AM last night so we would have plenty of time to get around, eat and leave the ship for our 8:30 boarding time for our Fun Bus to "Old Town".

The alarm goes off and we awake feeling refreshed. We dress and notice that the ship is still cruising at 19 knots which we thought was a little strange since we are supposed to be tied up by 7AM. Opening the curtains, it is still pitch dark! I check the time on computer, and it is 1:47 AM! The TV time confirmed it, but my phone says it is 6:47. We have experienced this time shift on the computer and found out that if it is set on auto correct for time zone, it reverts back to UK time. We believe this is related to being hooked up to the ship's WiFi and internet through Starlink. This may be what happened with my phone. We undress and go back to bed!

I sleep fitfully and finally get up, again, around 5:30. Sue does as well, and we take our time getting around. I make myself some instant coffee with the provided electric hot water pot. The Artisan's' Foodhall doesn't open until 6AM and then only for Continental until 7AM. Sue has caught a head cold and is constantly blowing her nose. At least she is not seasick.



Docked at Cartagena, Columbia

We disembark around 8AM and see that there are three Fun Busses parked among the shuttles. We board one called "La Vagabunda" and wait as they are all filled to pretty much the max.



Our Fun Buses await us

They are all playing music way too loud and we convince him to turn it down some. Unfortunately, I did not get a close-up picture of the bus from the side. They are brightly colored and decorated to the max. They remind me of the Jeepneys of Subic Bay in the Philippines when we went there for R&R. The other ship you see in the picture is Norwegian Joy.

Our "Guide, Carlos" cranks up the music and the bass almost blows me off the seat. I cover my ears as he is up front screaming into the microphone demanding us to clap and wave our arms to the music. Good Lord, I signed up for three hours of this torture! I use a tissue from Sue's Kleenex pack and plug my ears. Now it is almost tolerable. Sue soon does the same.



La Vagabunda's cab

The link below is a short video as we left the dock. Not sure if it will work when published but I couldn't figure out how to incorporate it here.

<https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipNnBKXaPmce4vybcZgOUGpy7LdskJQIYkifpGcj>



Marina on the way to "Old Town"

As we make our way from the pier on our way downtown, we pass a marina with a view of the more modern area of Cartagena. Winding our way through narrow streets as our guide continues to encourage singing and swaying to the loud music. I expected a little more dissertation on the historical aspects of the area and obvious fort-like structures we go past,



but I got on the wrong bus for that. When we get into the residential areas it reminds me a lot of south Texas,



where you see pretty run down areas and right beside it a very nice home with fencing and landscaping. The business area, as well the homes that are very colorful and painted brightly with many colors and trim.

Many homes have fencing and walls topped with concertina wire or even broken glass to discourage entrance.



After about 45 minutes, the bus stops at a flea market type area as says we have 10-15 minutes get off the bus and do some shopping. Sue gets off but I stay aboard enjoying the quiet. We leave and the music starts again as we make our way through more narrow streets and along a very nice looking park that is well manicured and quite expansive. Before long we stop at a strip mall area where Carlos tells us we have an hour here. He leads us to his favorite shop where I am sure he gets a cut of whatever is spent.

Sue is looking for fabric items that her daughter asks us to get from each of the countries we visit. I am in the market for a straw hat. I also need a beer to calm my nerves! I find a shop selling cold drinks and select what looks like a local brew.

It tastes wonderful! I also find a hat that I like for \$12. I wanted to buy one of those famous Panama Hats that are actually made in Ecuador from the plaited leaves of the *Carludovica palmata* plant. I found one that I liked but when she told be it cost \$80, I was a bit speechless. She noticed and said special for me, she would let me have for \$70. I paid for the \$12 one that fit just fine. I will keep looking and see if I can find a better deal. They may well be worth it, but not today.



Cold beer, new hat, coffee beans



Sue at a shop entrance

We board the bus for our extended ride back to the Queen Anne. This is where things get interesting! Carlos' buddy starts by passing out cold beers to whomever wants one. There is a sign in the front of the compartment that says in Spanish, no alcohol allowed. That obviously doesn't apply today. Before long, he passes around a bottle of what turns out to be pretty darn good rum!



People are mixing it with Coke, that had been passed around earlier, mixing with water or drinking it straight, or with ice from the bucket that has been provided for each row of seats. The music never stops mind you and before long things start to get out of hand. Carlos encourages us to stand and dance, the younger woman in front of me gets up on the seat and does a pole dance.

The rum doesn't stop coming and even Sue imbibes a little. All of a sudden I don't mind the music so much as I partake in the Macarena and YMCA song.

[https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipPXHkv9Gq12bJPo\\_ovSp6HcgoyOe44zDW2j8yBX](https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipPXHkv9Gq12bJPo_ovSp6HcgoyOe44zDW2j8yBX)

The link above is a short video of Fun Bus after the addition of rum. I couldn't load it directly and not sure if posting a link will work.



It takes about another 45 minutes to get back to the pier and by this time, we are all feeling the effects.



The pier area has an Aviary which we walk through and I take a few pictures of the birds and some of the cute little monkeys that are scurrying around all over the place looking for treats.



There is also a Geocache located here and we try to find it. It is somewhere in the bushes around this sign.



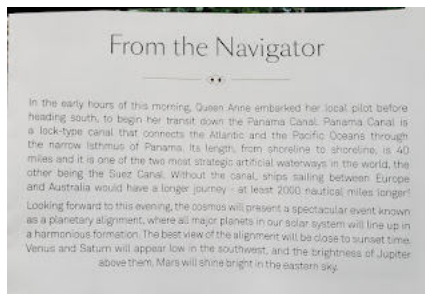
We look, along with a British gentleman, for about 15-20 minutes but alas, we have no joy. Disappointing because this was our only chance to get credit for finding one in Columbia.

Back aboard, we relax in our stateroom, recovering from our memorable visit to Columbia, albeit, not a very educational one. We decide to dine at the buffet this evening, not wanting to get dressed up for the Britannia.



Sue turned in early as her cold and the Cartagena experience has left her wore out. I listen to the broadcast of the Iowa vs Penn State game on my phone's The Varsity App as well as watch it streaming on the Direct TV app on my computer. This allows me to listen to the Iowa announcers and I can sync up the commentary to the video. It is fairly close game with Iowa leading most of the way. The last ten minutes are exciting as Penn State ties it up and we end up winning by one point.

Saturday, January 25th



We get up around 6:30 because we don't want to miss anything on the transit through the canal. One of the first things we see, other than a rusted out old container ship that probably ran aground decades ago, is the "Puente Atlantico" or Atlantic Bridge. It was completed in 2019.



the Atlantic Bridge

It is one of three bridges crossing the canal, the other two being the Bridge of the Americas and the Centennial Bridge, both on the Pacific side of the canal.

From Wikipedia:

"The **Panama Canal** is a **waterway** (a **canal**) in the **country** of **Panama** in **Central America**, that connects the **Atlantic Ocean** and the **Pacific Ocean**. Because of the way Panama twists, the entrance to the Pacific Ocean is farther **east** than the entrance to the Atlantic Ocean. This is the **opposite** of what one would expect.

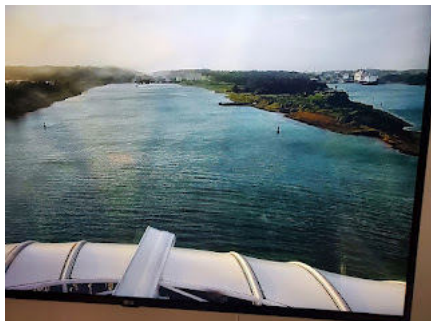
The Panama Canal is 77 **km** (48 miles) long and cuts across the **Isthmus** of Panama. At each end it uses three pairs of **locks** for lifting and lowering **ships** on different **water levels**. This saves ships 15,000 **km** (10,000 miles) compared to going around **South America**. Each year, about 14,000 ships come through the canal. By 2002, around 800,000 ships came through.

The old locks are 110 ft (33.53 m) wide by 1,050 ft (320 m) long and 41.2 feet (12.6 m) deep, with a usable length of 1,000 ft (305 m). The biggest **ships** that can go through the Panama Canal are called Panamax.

New locks opened in 2016 to allow ships more than twice as big, called New Panamax. They are 55 m (180 ft) wide by 427 m (1,400 ft) long, and 18.3 m (60.0 ft) deep. New channels connect to the new locks.

**Ferdinand de Lesseps** tried building a Panama Canal in 1880, but could not finish it. The project was started again in 1904 by the **United States**, under the presidency of **Theodore Roosevelt**, who spent ten years and 375 million **dollars** building it. The Panama Canal was finally finished in 1914, at the cost of approximately 25,000 lives. Most deaths were from disease, and before United States construction of the canal began. The US government owned and operated the canal until 1999 when the Panamanian government started controlling it."

We will transit the New Panamax series of canals. At the Gatun Locks, the first set of three chambers will lift us up 85 feet to the level of Gatun Lake, then make our way across the lake to the beginning of the actual canal to our next set of locks.

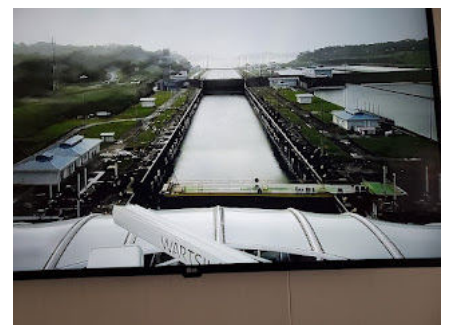


Entering channel to the New Panamax locks

We will bypass the Pedro Miguel Locks which are used for smaller ships and take the larger canal down to our next set of locks that will lower us down 85 feet to the Pacific level. Before that however, we will pass under the Centennial Bridge. This marks the location of the Continental Divide. Rivers on this side will flow toward the Atlantic and on the other side make their way to the Pacific.

In some of my pictures, you may have noticed red buoys. Since our cabin is on the starboard side of the ship, this means we are going "upstream" and will always keep the red buoys to our right.

On the port side, they will be all green, This take me back to my Navy days and the slogan "Red Right Returning", which means when you are returning to port or wherever, always keep the red buoys on your right. This will keep you in the channel and away from hazards.



Inside the first of the 3 chambers



This shows the basins that are the source of fresh water filling and emptying the locks

We pass a dredge on the Pacific side of the bridge. I assume this is a constant job keeping the canal deep enough. This might also be a good time to mention that all the water used in the lock systems is fresh water. Why not sea water you ask. I'm told it is because of the

corrosive nature of the salt water that makes it impractical. That is why during the drought of 2023, the traffic was limited because of lack of fresh water.

As we approach the Cocoli Locks, there is already a container ship going through. We will be right behind it as I see our lock gate is opening up.

This set of three locks will lower us the required 85 feet to meet the level of the Pacific which means each one will lower us approximately 30 feet. The basins alongside take on the water as it is let out, gravity fed, no pumps required. This process will take 10-12 minutes per lock once inside the closed lock. The Bridge of the Americas is visible in the distance. This marks our exit from the canal.

As we pass under the bridge, I can't help but notice that the buoys off the starboard side are now green. Why? Because we of course, are on the other side of the Continental Divide and now the flow is toward the Pacific, and we are going downstream.

It took approximately eight hours from start to finish and each of the two sets of locks took about two hours to traverse. It cost the Queen Anne, \$415,000 for the privilege of using the canal. For comparison, it cost a 65 foot yacht about \$1,800. Cost is based on weight and length.



Norwegian Liner waiting to enter locks



Terraced hillside to prevent erosion



Centennial Bridge, close to area of the  
Continental Divide



Bridge of the Americas, our exit from the Panama Canal



View looking aft from the 12th deck. The fresh water basins on the left are the source of water for emptying and filling the individual chambers. No pumps are needed, all gravity fed.

We enjoy the rest of the evening dining on a table for eight, including a single woman from Australia, a single woman from the UK, and single man from Philadelphia and a couple from London. The Australian woman dominates the conversation as the single woman from the UK changes her seat to sit beside the single Philadelphian. All is well as we cruise the Pacific in calm seas.

Our next Port of Call is Puerto Quetzal in Guatemala on Tuesday the 28th. I probably won't post again until after our shore excursion. I'm not getting much response from people, so I am not sure how many are actually reading my posts. Please give me a "Like" or something to know that I should continue this because it is quite an effort and I need to know that Sue's and my friends are following or I'm not going to continue the effort.

### Comments:

**26.01.2025: Barb**

Love following all your adventures. Hope you can keep it up

**26.01.2025: ccyflyer**

Keep your blog going Dan. You are letting me go around the world at a minimum cost :-).

**26.01.2025: ccyflyer**

I couldn't get your two video links to load for me.

**26.01.2025: Luke Squier**

Keep them coming pops love hearing about your travels. Knowing you I am sure the party bus was torture, glad you survived the excursion. Wasn't able to see your videos by the way.

## At Sea enroute Guatamala

Monday, January 27

We've traveled northwest far enough now where we had to set our clocks back one hour this morning at 2AM. We are back in the Central Time Zone and directly west of Costa Rica as I look at our Navigation Map. The seas are a little rough with swells and white caps abundant. That may account for the fact the we are only gong 14 knots as opposed to our normal 19 knots.

Sue had a rough night coughing. She is considering going to the ship's doctor for some cough medicine. She seems to be better now that she is upright.

As we progress northwest we are traversing the Middle America Trench, the 18th deepest trench in the world. Currently, we are at a point that is 16,000 feet deep, yesterday it was reported at 11,000.

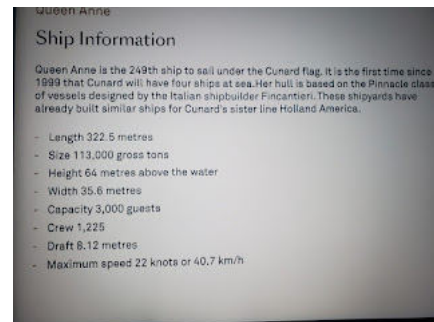
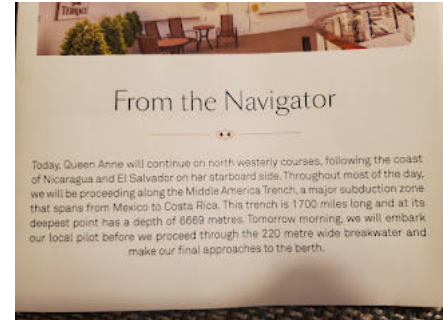
It's deepest point is 21,880 feet. The deepest trench in the world is the Mariana Trench located in the western Pacific just south of Japan, which is 35,843 feet at its deepest point. The captain reports this and other facts each day at precisely 12 noon.

Speaking of the captain, we received an engraved invitation to have cocktails with her. I assume this invitation goes out to all world cruisers aboard at one time or another.



Our invitation from the captain

I can't imagine her meeting with all 3,000 of us. About half the people I talk to are getting off at San Francisco. This world cruise is set up in segments and you can only get on or off at predesignated ports. They are Southampton, New York, San Francisco, Auckland, Hong Kong or Durban. One person told me that even though we are losing a lot of people in S.F., we will have a full ship when we leave.



FYI

Tomorrow, we arrive at Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala. We signed up for a six hour tour to the Pacaya Volcano. There is quite a bit of walking involved. I hope Sue's head cold is better by then.

### Comments:

27.01.2025: Curt 1941

Sorry to hear about Sue...Hope she is feeling better...

27.01.2025: Marge W.

Thanks Dan. Hope Sue feels better. Love the hat you purchased. Like the info on the "locks".

# Pacaya Volcano National Park trek

Tuesday, January 28

Sue had a better night with not so much coughing, so hopefully she is on the downside of this head cold. She is blaming it on the air conditioning, suggested to her by the person who sold her the cough medicine. We awoke in plenty of time to dress and go to the buffet breakfast and get prepared for the day.

It is a beautiful morning! Temperatures are expected to be in the mid 80's and skies are clear.

We disembark the ship and wind our way down to the gangplank and make our way through the myriad of shops selling all kinds of souvenirs and anything else to separate you from your dollars.



Sue on the long gangway to mainland

We are directed to Bus No. 28 or 29 for our trip to Pacaya Volcano Trek. We choose 28 and end up with 38 adventure seekers like ourselves. Our guide, Jose and bus driver, Pablo, welcome us to Guatemala.

We will have a nearly two hour bus ride to the volcano and Carlos informs us we are very fortunate to have



Carlos



such a beautiful day because a lot of time, the weather is not as cooperative. He said we will see five of the country's 37 volcanoes, two of which are active.

We head east into the interior and it is relatively flat, but I know before long we will be climbing in elevation. Guatemala was once described to me: crumple up a piece of paper and throw it down, that is Guatemala. This was back in my Army Reserve days. I belonged to a Combat Support Hospital that deployed down here for a two week active duty assignment. I was the Pharmacy Officer and we had a full complement of officers and enlisted to staff a complete hospital to take care of most any kind of medical care. We were housed at Joint Task Force Bravo, a military base shared with the Guatemalans, and helicoptered each day to different sites to treat the Mayan Indian population. Many times they had to clear enough area with machetes in order for us to land and set up shop, which was in school houses most of the time. But I digress, that is another story.

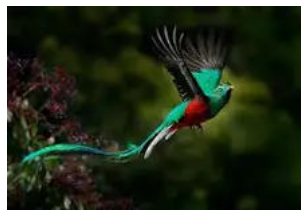
We wind our way through the town of Pureto Quetzal. Some areas are quite modern but there is a predominance of poor areas with many sightings of loose dogs, tethered horses and old cars and trucks.



The streets are very narrow and Pablo skillfully handles the large bus in and around traffic. Carlos tells us that Guatemala has 24 languages, Spanish being the official one. The Mayans have 21 different dialects and there are two "xinca garifuna" an indigenous group that is non-Mayan. The official currency is the Quetzal.



The Quetzal is also their national bird. It sports a tail that can be as much as a meter long! It is on their flag as well as their currency.



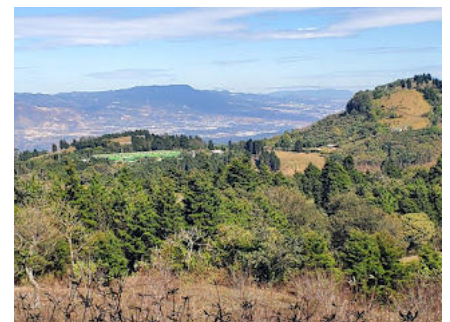
The Quetzal

We soon leave the small town and get into open area that reminds me of south Texas scrub brush. There are quite a few trucking centers and depots of land-sea containers.

This is obviously a major terminal and we see lots of loaded semis presumably heading for the capital Guatemala City with its five million inhabitants.

We continue to increase our elevation as Pablo leaves the four-lane expressway and heads toward Pacaya Volcano National Park. As he winds his way up the two lane road, we occasionally have clear views of the five volcanoes and smoke is visible from two of them.

We wind our way through a couple different villages that seems like we are always looking down on them and level areas are hard to spot. Shops are so close to the roadway, it seems like we could touch them.





How Pablo makes his way around sharp turns and through traffic is a wonder. We enter the gates of the park and an attendant comes aboard to check the head count. Admission was part of the excursion cost.

We finally arrive at our drop-off point and we pick up a couple more guides, one to be at the front of the pack and the other to bring up the rear. We are provided with green wrist bands to identify our group. Carlos will accompany us also and warned us that it is a steep climb and to do it at our own pace.

In addition, there are five horses with young riders who will tag along and offer us a ride if we feel that we cannot make the climb. \$30 for the ascent, \$45 for a round trip. There are also several kids, renting walking sticks (cane poles) at \$2 each. Sue gets one, mainly for the descent she says.

We are currently at 2.8km (about 9,200 feet) above sea level. Our climb will take us another 1,000 feet. We begin and it doesn't seem too difficult at first. The ground is hard rock at this point but it quickly progresses to a more loose rock which makes walking even more difficult.



Remember, at this elevation, the level of oxygen is only 15% as opposed to 21% at sea level! I'm quite a ways ahead of Sue who is struggling and I see she finally hires a horse. After about 1/2 an hour, I too am considering a ride. My chest is tight and aching and I am breathing rapidly. But I am stubborn and want to report to you all that I did it. And to add to the situation, where there are horses, there are abundant "trail apples". I try avoiding them but as time went on it became too much of an effort.

We finally come to the first rest area. Most of our group of 38 get there before me. The horses try to remain in the rear mainly because they kick up a lot of dust and make things worse. After resting about 10 minutes the group staggers out again and I feel somewhat rested. Carlos says we just finished the hardest part, I found out that he just said that to encourage us and the rest of the climb was just as hard or worse.

<https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipMZ98auLzk6RcJASWcUzmLeXIjx8GRjfkF8O6c>

(The above link is a video of the rest area with Guatemala City and Sue leaving aboard "Chocolate", you may have to copy and paste it)

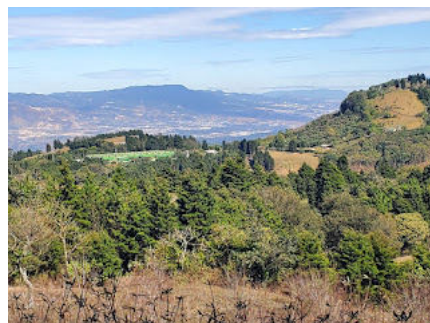
The views are stunningly beautiful when there is an opening and we can see. A lot of the time we are enclosed in vegetation or a rock wall on one side or the other. A couple more people opt for the horses. One young lad sees me struggling and urges me to rent in his "taxi".



Sue aboard "Chocolate"

But, I stubbornly refuse, even though I can barely get out the words. The temperature is in the 70s, but it is humid and I keep wiping the sweat out of my eyes. I should have brought my sweatband and left my straw hat on the ship. I also have a mild case of COPD and have an inhaler for but haven't had to use it since leaving Iowa. I wish I had it now!

Another rest area comes and goes. We get a fabulous view of Guatemala City and the surrounding area with five volcanoes and many other mountains as well.



Guatemala City in the distant background

One gentleman gets sick and vomits on the trail! We are told that he had "Altitude Sickness" brought on by low oxygen content. He gets on one of the two remaining horses to finish the trip. I am still soldiering on, even though my legs a right knee are suggesting otherwise.

We come to the last rest area and the boy with the only remaining horse says its my last chance or he will stable his horse in the nearby corral. I can't give up now of course. Carlos says we only have another 20 minutes of climb left and we will be at our highest point. Not quite true as it takes me at least another 1/2 hour because I'm taking baby steps by this time and the grade has not lessened as we snake our way to the summit.

Sue and her horse get there before me and she has dismounted and is walking around fresh as a daisy.



The "summit"

The views are indeed stunning but I am disappointed that we aren't closer to the crater. Carlos says that there are tours going there but it takes more than eight hours and most cruise ships aren't in port long enough. Carlos has brought a Guatemalan flag and we join others in getting our picture taken holding it in the stiff breeze that we are experiencing.

I come close to losing my hat on several occasions. And believe me, if it gets loose, it is gone forever.

Sue thinks she can manage the descent well enough and dismisses "Chocolate" to the stable. We make our way across and up to an even higher point before encountering our first taste of what would become our biggest challenge.

The slope looked like the downhill run of a ski slope! And this is how I attacked it, skidding down a step at a time. The surface was a granular mix of volcanic rock and dust and I am sure I wore off about two years worth of sole on my Sketchers.



Sue and I proudly holding the flag



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<https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipOEvf7B2M9ITaXX0JKVPYV89LJtF8OE6c9rV8xv>

Above: Two videos of the start of our descent. May have to copy and paste.

Sue had immediate trouble and Carlos ended up steadying her the first part and another guide joined in to help her through this most difficult terrain. My shoes are getting filled with pebbles and my socks turn black. We had about 20 minutes of this before coming to a more reasonable surface but still, a very steep decline.

Sue's legs would not support her any further and when she reached a point where it was possible, a four wheel drive pick-up was summoned to take her the rest of the way down. I will post a short video when we first started the descent. This video will give you an idea of challenging it was.

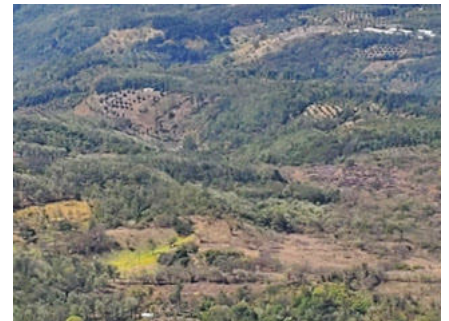
The descent did not take quite as long as the ascent of course, but it did take a little over an hour for myself. I stopped twice to remove my shoes and clean out the rocks and dust off my socks.

The views going down were just as spectacular from a little different viewpoint.



A homestead we passed on the way down.

This is the area where coffee beans are grown as the best coffee is grown at these higher altitudes in volcanic soil. Carlos said that Guatemala is known for its brand of arabica coffee bean. We can see these fields in the distance distinguishable by the rows of plants. They are productive after five years of growth and will last up to 35 years before needing to be replaced. Beans are harvested between November and March depending on region and climate.



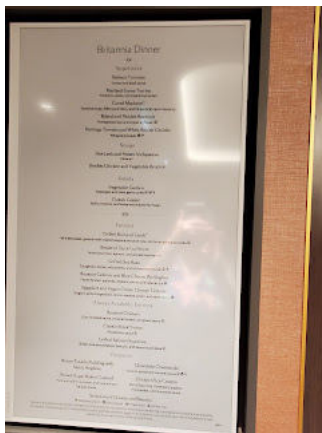
Enlarged view with some coffee fields visible



The bus was a welcome site and after a visit to the nearby "*baro*", I boarded and we were soon on our way back to the terminal. It was a much more subdued ride as everyone was tired out and Carlos did not bother us with commentary.

We arrived with about 45 minutes before time to board which allowed Sue to find some purchases in the ever-present marketplace, find a geocache, and most importantly, for Dan to have a local brew!

We board the ship and head directly to our stateroom and shower. We soon discover everything we have on is covered in volcanic dust as it shows up on the white duvet on our bed when I laid the pack on it. We shake ourselves off on our balcony, than head for the shower. I give our socks a triple rinse in the sink before thinking they are safe to put with our regular laundry. Sue repeats the procedure and hangs them up in our shower clothesline to dry.



We take it easy before dressing for dinner. Sue goes down a deck to take a picture of tonight's menu to see if we want to attend. We do as Sue likes the Grilled Rump of Lamb and I will have the Sea Bass. After a couple appetizers and a salad of course! If there is room, and there was, we will have the custard.

We had a strenuous day. Am I glad I did it, yes! Would I do it again? Doubtful, but who knows. We saw some wonderful examples of our beautiful planet and were blessed with a near perfect day. What more could one ask for?

I appreciate everyone responding to my plea for recognition. It gives me the impetus to continue.

If any of you have any specific questions, please don't hesitate to email me message me on Facebook, or include them in your comments.

Next stop is Cabo San Lucas located at the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula of Mexico.

## Comments:

**20.02.2025: Licoricetwist**

It sounds like a horse was an excellent idea. Though knowing Sue and her love of horses, perhaps it was even the highlight of the day?

I've often heard it said that the trip down can be harder than the trip up. I was slow going up Snowdon, but my legs were like jelly (Jello) while descending, even with 2 sturdy walking sticks to take the weight!

## Cabo San Lucas, Mexico



It was a little breezy on the open 10th deck

Wednesday evening, 29 January

We dressed for dinner as it was a Gala Night and we had our cocktail reception with Captain Inger Klein Thorhauge at 7:45PM. We were seated at a table for two beside a couple from England. They had done a considerable amount of cruising, but this was their first Cunard ship. They said it was good in comparison but not nearly their best experience which they said was on the P&O line, another UK based and owned by the Carnival Corporation. They will depart the ship in Australia.



Our waiter, a female who said she was from Zimbabwe, gives us our menu and we both select the beef filet although I was torn between it and the halibut. It is unusual to have a woman for a waiter, nearly all are men and the women seem to have other roles such as serving coffee, water and bussing tables. Others are in supervisory roles.

We have a pleasant dinner visiting with the English couple but did not have time for dessert. We must not be late for our Cunard World Club cocktail party. The large open-air Pavilion area has been reserved for us on the 9th deck. There is already a long line waiting for the doors to be open. Most men are sporting tuxedos and the women dresses and gowns. I regret not bringing my tuxedo as I think it would have fit. I bought it years ago in preparation for Caribbean Cruise. It is not long before we are allowed in and are met with a multitude of attendants offering drinks of either champagne, red or white wine, gin and tonic or some colored drinks I had no idea what they were.

There were also chefs serving hor d'oeuvres. I know we have around 1,000 World Club members on board and it seems most of them are here. It is very crowded around the pool area which is sporting a cluster of different size silver tethered balloons. We climb the stairs to the 2nd level which surrounds the lower pool area and find a seat opposite the big screen. I take a couple pictures and a gentleman offers to take a picture of Sue and I which heads this blog. I return the favor for a couple next to us.

Before long the Cruise Director comes to the microphone and welcomes us and introduces the Captain. She also gives her welcome and gives a short dissertation on the Queen Anne and this, her maiden world voyage.



Our Captain on the big screen

She tells us there are 1060 World Club Members aboard from 29 different countries. She takes a few moments to go through each and every country and how many are from each. The most, of course, is England which had some 600 and the U.S. was a distant 2nd with around 300 if I remember correctly. She tells us to enjoy ourselves and leaves to continue her duties.

We hang around for a while enjoying the evening and listening to the ensemble below the big screen. But we leave relatively early and head back to the peace and quiet of our cabin.

I guess we are "Party Poopers" but it is not in our septuagenarian DNA to stay up late and mix with the masses until late evening hours.

Thursday, January 30

Routine day at sea.

Friday, January 31 anchored in Cabo Bay, Mexico

We woke around 5:30 AM, plenty of time to clean-up, dress and go to the 9th deck for breakfast before gathering in the Queen's Room, the assigned area for our excursion. We signed up for the "Cabo by Land and Sea"

We are anchored out in Cabo Bay, there is no place for a ship this size, or anywhere near it for that matter, to tie up to a pier at the marina. By the time we get back to the cabin after breakfast, the lifeboat that is just below our stateroom and its neighbor to the aft, are both in the water. These and others on the port side will be our transportation to and from the marina as well as at least two local water taxi's. We end up being the second group of three. We are given a sticker with #2 on it in case we have Alzheimer's. Group one leaves and we follow about 15 minutes later and are boarded on a tender.

A short 10 minute ride and we are discharged on a pier where we walk with our #2 guide Ceci, to the large catamaran where all three groups will board and tour the largest tourist attraction of the area: El Arco, The Arch. It is located on the very tip of the Baja California Peninsula, the second longest peninsula in the world. It is 760 miles from the border town of Tijuana. Centuries of tidal and wind erosion have created these rock structures.



El Arco

known as "Lovers Beach" and the arch known locally as "El Arco" or "Lands End".

This area is unique in that it joins the Sea of Cortes, also known as the Gulf of California, to the Pacific Ocean. This interaction creates perfect conditions for whales, seals, sea lions and a multitude of other marine life. Jacques Cousteau spent a lot of time in this area doing research.



Our catamaran

Because of this attraction for marine life, Cabo is the home for the last 35 years, of the Bisbee's Black and Blue Marlin Tournament held in October every year. It cost \$5,000 for a team of four to enter and nearly 7 million dollars was paid out last year in prize money.

We see many seals and even a sea lion basking on the rocks enjoying the sun oblivious to all the traffic around them. Our host points out the landmarks, including a small beach area



Seals basking

On the other side of the formation is a larger beach named "Divorce Beach". There are many different kinds of crafts in the area, boats of all kinds and even paddle boards. We tour around the area for about 20 minutes before heading back. People start pointing out that they have seen whale spouts. The big spray of water that happens when they surface to clear the blow hole. Our captain steers us closer to the area and sure enough, we all see them. Then we see a whale surface and make that big arch we see all the time on TV and the captain says, here comes the tail, and sure enough we all see it. He says it is a humpback female with a calf and soon we see the calf surface and playing alongside his mother. What a bonus! Sue and I went on a whale watching boat when we were in Newfoundland. Sue got terribly seasick, and we saw no whales, so this was pretty special. I tried to get a picture but it was hard to time the surfacing so no joy there but I have the memory imprinted on my brain.

We headed back to the pier and boarded buses for the 2nd part of our excursion, a trip to a glass blowing demonstration at The Glass Factory, a local family business since 1990.

They use recycled glass from local hotels and bars to create their products which can produce up to 500 pieces of one-of-a-kind glassware daily. We watch as the artisan for our group creates a hummingbird with his beak in a flower in the space of about 20 minutes! They have a shop of course with thousands of glass works to purchase.



Decorative glass everywhere

Sue picks out a couple of small pieces to have as a memento. The place is covered in glass, floors, ceilings and walls. I priced a couple of the vases which are labeled in pesos (see pics).



Our 3rd stop is at the Puerto Vieja hotel that has a grand view of El Arco from across the bay. I think the tour company uses this as a bathroom stop mainly. They give us a free drink and the chance to order some food but our time there is short so we are advised to wait until the next stop where we will have more time. I take advantage of the bano and snap a few pictures.



Our next destination is a 45 minute bus ride to a Mission located in the town of San Jose del Cabo. The mission was founded in 1730 by

This vase: \$180

the Spanish Jesuits when they were settling this area. It has been kept up and holds regular masses. Ceci tells us we have an hour to explore and find ways to enrich the local economy.

Sue and I discover there is an Adventure Lab here. They are a form of Geocaching that take you on a tour of the area and ask specific questions that can only be answered if you are actually there. We enjoy completing this challenge which uses up about 1/2 hour and we spend the rest of the time looking through shops and enjoying the day.



Mission San Jose del Cabo



Queen Anne and MS The World in Cabo Bay

We return to the bus for our return trip to Cabo San Lucas. This whole area at the the end of the peninsula is simply referred to as "Los Cabos". And we see several businesses sporting that logo. The area between the two cities is quite desert-like and again, reminds me of South Texas.



This peninsula could very well have been an extension of California. Back in 1845 through 1847, the U.S. and Mexico were fighting over this territory and we ended up with what is now California and New Mexico. But, if a few different people would have been in power, this whole area might have ended up as the part of the U.S.

Sue does a little shopping at the pier area and we proceed to our pick-up point and wait in line to be boarded on one of the tenders to return us to the ship.

It wasn't a long wait, perhaps 20

minutes and we board one of our lifeboats for the 10 minute ride back to the Queen Anne. They pack us in quite tight and one of the ladies across from us is from Quebec and she tells us that the other cruise ship in the bay is none other than "MS The World". You may have heard of this ship, it is the one that you can buy and own your own condo aboard and live aboard it.



Inside our life boat



Pier area shopping, bars and restaurants

From Wikipedia:

**"MS The World** is a private residential cruise ship operated like a condominium complex, with large



MS The World

apartments that can be purchased. The residents, from many countries, can live on board as the ship travels. Some residents choose to live on board full-time while others visit periodically throughout the year.<sup>[1]</sup> The ship is operated by ROW Management, Ltd., headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, United States.<sup>[2]</sup>

The ship has 165 residences (106 apartments, 19 studio apartments, and 40 studios), all owned by the ship's residents. Average occupancy is 150–200 residents and guests."

Another reference says that in order to qualify to purchase a condo, you must have a net worth in excess of 10 million dollars. I have a little way to go before I qualify.

My next post will likely be after our San Francisco visit. Thanks for tagging along and again, if you have questions, please ask them and I will do my best to respond.

**Comments:**

**03.02.2025: Curt 1941**

Mexico looks like a fun and interesting place..Looking forward for more stories...

**09.02.2025: ccyflyer**

Keep pursuing that Ten Million, Dan!

## Port of San Francisco

Monday, February 3, 2025

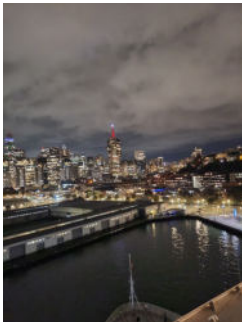
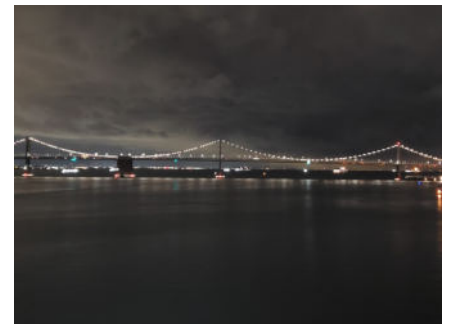
Guess who is coughing now! Yup, started yesterday. Last night it got worse when I laid down. After using cough drops and my inhaler several time during the night, I did manage to get some rest.

We are due to dock at 6AM. We are now in the Pacific Time zone and it is just past 5AM. Just a few days ago we were in the Central and Mountain Time zones.



Our bodies are still adjusting from the change and we wake up at a little after five and check the bow camera and we can see what I thought was the Golden Gate Bridge lit up in the distance.

We get dressed and go to the forward observation area to take some pictures. There are quite a few people there already doing the same. Before long the tugboats are helping us make a sharp turn to starboard to tie up to the pier. I was hoping we would go underneath the bridge but it is not to be. I remember going under it as a young sailor back in the 60s. What I found out later was that I was looking at the Bay Bridge, we had already passed under the Golden Gate.



S.F. skyline

The 9th deck dining room isn't due to open until 6AM, but they do have tea and coffee along with various juices. Cold cereal is also available. We have a small bowl to tide us over.

Custom and Border Protection requires a face to face inspection of all guests, regardless of nationality and whether you are going ashore or not. We are assigned to Immigration Group 31 and are to meet at 10:20 AM, 2nd Deck, Bright Lights Society bar and entertainment area. We are to bring our passports, Electronic Travel Authorization and/or Visas, if required. They should be so strict at our southern border!

We are to be here two days. We did not schedule any excursions today as we are meeting Sue's lifelong girlfriend that was her neighbor growing up. She lives north of the city near Bodega Bay. We visited her several years ago when we were traveling through California on our way to Alaska. We have arranged to meet with her around 10:30 at a nearby Starbucks. Hopefully we won't be detained too long with CBP.

We head for our muster point around 10AM and find a room full of people, probably over 100 of us. At a little after 10, a crew member escorts us all to the gangway and into the waiting terminal where there is already a long line waiting to be called to one of thirteen stations where CBP agents are checking our passports. One agent has a dog who politely sniffs us all as we pass by. We snake around the barricades for probably 25 minutes before going to the station. U.S. and Canadian citizens go one way and everyone else another to be interviewed. It goes smoothly and we exit the terminal. There is a geocache close by that Sue wants to find before we head to Starbucks. We are checking our geocaching app when we hear our name called. Sue's friend Phyllis had walked over from Starbucks to see if she could see us and her timing was perfect. After hugs, we all three walk to the end of the pier where the cache is hidden. After some searching, Sue finds it magnetically attached to some fencing. We sign the log and record the find and head towards town.

Phyllis is knowledgeable about this area as she did live here for a time. Sue has a package she wants to send to her daughter and the nearest post office is about a 15 minute walk as the crow flies but Telegraph Hill is in the way and we are not in the mood to climb it so we circumvent it and finally arrive after at least a half hour walk not without some hills as well. It is in Little Italy which is obvious with the green, white and red flags prevalent as well as the Italian restaurants and pizza joints.

Sue mails her packages and we proceed to Chinatown to explore and find a place to eat. It is surprising how quickly it changes from Italian to Chinese and we walk down Stockton Street which has many markets and it is obvious this is where the Chinese do their grocery shopping.



We walk through a few of these open air places and it is amazing what is available from raw ducks and chickens hanging to dried fish of all kinds and a lot of vegetables that we have trouble identifying.

I wanted to mention the abundance of driverless Waymo taxis that we see. They are all over the place. I am tempted to try one just to say that I did but I'm sure it requires downloading the app and setting up a way to pay for it. I wonder what the regular taxis, Uber and Lyft drivers think about them.



Not under refrigeration!

We pick out a restaurant from our phone App but when we get there, they have a long line waiting and we are somewhat time constrained because Phyliss needs to catch her bus back to Bodega Bay around 2:30. So we walk a little further and settle on a 2nd story restaurant which is less busy. We order a pork Dim Sum appetizer which seems to be very popular in this area. It is a dumpling type offering that is stuffed with different meats or whatever. It is rather bland tasting but after adding some of the supplied sauce, quite good.



A pair of Waymo's in traffic



I don't know what these are but they are pretty proud of them!

The girls order soups and I settle on a BBQ pork something or other which turns out to be a lot more veggies than pork. But it was OK and filling. Our waitress brings us a complimentary dessert, some kind of pudding which was good, than another round of some kind of pastry which was tasty. We leave and ask the Chinese boy at the entrance to take our picture.



The Three Amigos!

I want to make a few comments about the homeless in the area. There are a lot more here than we saw in New York but of course the weather has a lot to do with that. They weren't everywhere but you couldn't walk more than a couple of blocks without seeing at least one. They weren't bothering us and on only one occasion did one ask us for money. However, I did have to steer around some feces obviously left by them on more than one occasion. This is sad, and I can't help but think there must be some humane answer to this.

Phyliss walks with us part way back toward the docks but than she has to split off to her bus terminal. We really enjoyed reuniting with her and hope to hook-up again sometime.

We made our way back to Pier 27 and the Queen Mary. If we would of had more energy, we would have liked to explore Fisherman's Wharf, but we were tired. Sue's watch said we had covered over five miles and we both felt like it. So, we boarded the ship and made a early night of it.

Tuesday, January 4th 2nd day San Francisco

I had a decent nights sleep until I woke up to do my nightly visit to the toilet. My coughing returned as soon as I laid down. Sleep came and went after that. I gave up around 6AM and got up and showered which seemed to help my cough owing to the humidity. Beside my voice being a couple octaves lower, I didn't feel bad, just tired.

Upon opening the drapes, we saw that it was raining. Our luck may have run out on our good weather. I checked the weather app radar and it does not look promising for our trip to Alcatraz and Sausalito. Our bus leaves at 9:30 and we are not sure if we have to go through CBP checkpoint again or not.

It took no time at all to get through the terminal, no additional checking of passports. We make our way to the bus in a light rain. The bus is nearly full and we can't get a double seat so we sit behind one another. Just before we depart, our guide Jacob, says the seats reserved in front for disabled are not being used and asked if anyone would like to move up. Sue quickly raises her hand and we end up with choice seats that allow us to see forward! There are two busloads of us and our bus will tour Sausalito first before going to Alcatraz Island.

We have to cross the Golden Gate to get to Sausalito and prior to crossing, he takes an exit to the Golden Gate Bridge Plaza and Welcome Center. This a nice park-like area where there are restrooms and trails and of course a gift shop. It is also the area where you can get on a trail that will take you to the bridge so you can walk across it, yes it does have a sidewalk.

Bicycles can also use this sidewalk. There is no charge for walking or bicycling across but the minimum charge for cars and motorcycles is \$9.25. Fees go up as high as \$70 for multi-axle trucks. It is all done electronically by reading your license plate. Fees are only charged on the south bound traffic into San Francisco.

We take a few pictures and Sue buys a pin at the store and the bus leaves after a 30 minute stop. Jacob says that even though the weather is rainy and cold, it is a good day for pictures because normally there is a lot of fog and you can't even see the top of the bridge unless you are going through it. The rain washes away the fog.



We cross the bridge, which is actually highway 101, a major north/south artery along California's western border, and make the short drive to Sausalito.

From Wikipedia: "Sausalito's population was 7,269 as of the 2020 census. The community is situated near the northern end of the [Golden Gate Bridge](#), and prior to the building of that bridge served as a terminus for rail, car, and ferry traffic.

Sausalito developed rapidly as a shipbuilding center in World War II, with its industrial character giving way in postwar years to a reputation as a wealthy and artistic enclave, a picturesque residential community (incorporating large numbers of [houseboats](#)), and a tourist destination. The city is adjacent to, and largely bounded by, the protected spaces of the [Golden Gate National Recreation Area](#) as well as the San Francisco Bay."

Jacob gives us an hour to look around, shop, eat or whatever. There is an Adventure Lab here so Sue and I do that which takes us to interesting sites the length of this small town. Unfortunately, the rain continues and combined with the winds, touring is not very pleasant. We return to the bus, fairly soaked even though we were prepared for the rain.

On our way back to the bridge, Jacob tells of several notable, recognizable personalities that lived here, including: William Randolph Hearst, Otis Redding, Janis Joplin, Baby Face Nelson, Frank Oppenheimer and Shel Silverstein to name a few.

Jacob says we have time to tour the Presidio, which is just located off the south end of the bridge. San Francisco Presidio was operated as a military post by Mexico from 1822 until 1846, when the United States Army took it over after winning the Mexican-American War. The Presidio was an important military post. It played a role in every major American conflict from the Civil War through Desert Storm. In 1994 it became part of the National Park Service. In 2005, it became financially self-sufficient mainly through the rental of the former barracks and officer quarters to the general public.

Jacob tells us that San Francisco has 3 cemeteries, two of which are here on Presidio and one of them is a Pet Cemetery. The other is the Golden Gate National Cemetery for veterans and it is not accepting any more interments.



Golden Gate National Cemetery

It has been over 100 years since anyone was buried in San Francisco. In 1902, it became illegal to bury new bodies in the city, and by 1921, bodies were being moved to new land in nearby Colma. By 1941 nearly all the cemeteries were gone, and largely forgotten. Colma currently has about 1500 residents, but it has over 1.5 million graves! Hence the phrase, "Its great to be alive in Colma".

The bus drops us off near the Alcatraz pier, which is only a couple blocks from the Queen Anne. We wait in the rain and wind for the next ferry.

We finally board after about 30 minutes and are thankful to get out of the elements for the short cruise to Alcatraz Island.

I would have liked to get some pictures as we approached but the weather was so bad I didn't want to go topside. We disembarked and onto the island landing area.



The prison complex is on a hill and we have to climb the equivalent of a 13 story building to get to the actual entrance. Just what we need, more climbing in the rain and wind. But we persevere and go through the entrance where we are given headphones and a recorder to give us an audio tour as we walk through the historic prison complex. There must be a couple dozen different languages that are available which gives credence to the worldwide popularity of Alcatraz. probably because of the movies like "Birdman of Alcatraz", "The Rock" and "Escape from Alcatraz". In all, there have been 21 movies and 14 TV shows featuring Alcatraz. The audio is narrated by actual guards and inmates from Alcatraz. It walks us through the cell blocks A, B, C & D, dining area, visitor window, exercise yard, shop and library.



The audio is narrated by actual guards and inmates from Alcatraz. It walks us through the cell blocks A, B, C & D, dining area, visitor window, exercise yard, shop and library.

Alcatraz was first designated a military prison in 1859 through 1933, and a Federal Penitentiary from 1934 to 1963 when Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy ordered it closed because it was deteriorating badly and the focus of incarceration was being shifted from punishment to rehabilitation.

And make no mistake about it, this place was a punishment! When I first saw the cells, I was surprised at how small they were, 5ft X 9ft and 7ft high!



Two shelves, a sink, toilet. a bed and a metal table and chair. The rules of the house: You are entitled to food, clothing, shelter and medical attention. Everything else is a privilege. Inmates were given a list of 53 rules of what you can do and what you cannot do. Most prisoners were Caucasian.

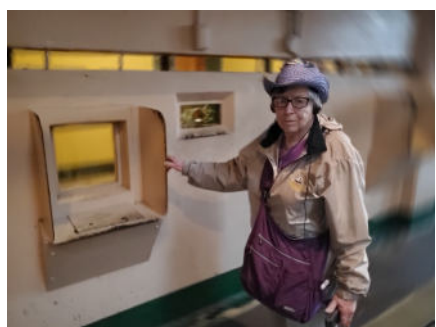
Blacks were segregated and housed on the top tiers of B and C block. All other races were mixed in with the whites. D block was the area where solitary confinement was located. Ironically, these cells were somewhat

larger, but that was a small consideration to the isolation.



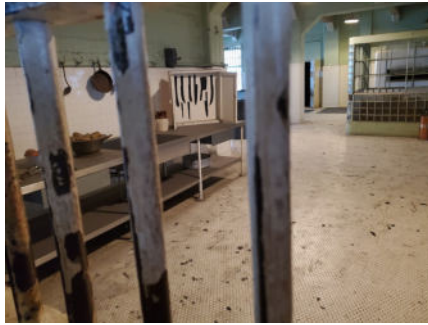
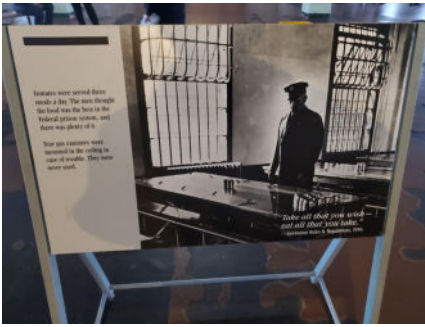
Sue outside a isolation cell

I could go on, but I think the pictures I took will tell a better story. It is a fascinating place and I can't help but think if our youth would be required to tour this place and get a sense of what incarceration would be like, they would make better decisions when they come to a crossroad in their young lives.

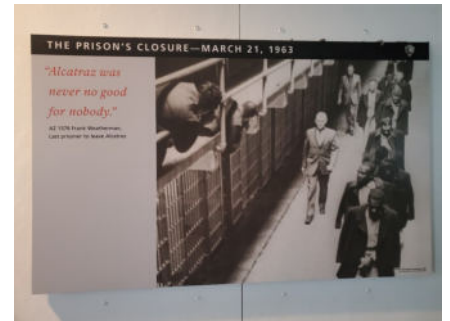


Visitor window





Kitchen area



**Comments:**

20.02.2025: Licoricetwist

You guys have amazing stamina for touring! I remember Fisherman's Wharf being a lovely but expensive range of touristy gift shops and eateries. Similar feel I guess to Mystic Seaport. Is Sue not having trouble with the bus rides? I find they can be as bad as boats.

## Coughing my way across the North Pacific!



Sunrise over Diamond Head, Oahu

We left San Francisco in the early evening and I took a video of us going under the Golden Gate as we left San Francisco Bay entering the Eastern Pacific. I hope to post a link to it.

<https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRlb3MicBIGCgQqAggBKPKjvMrPMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipMR11vRvNCwMTpthsY9VjeuRWhDS8gz>

(Again, you may have to copy and paste the above link.)

My cough is getting worse and more persistent. Thankfully we have five full days at sea before arriving in Honolulu on February 9th. That should give me time to get through this and hopefully feel well enough to do some activities there. We did not schedule any excursions as we explored the island very well when we were there for about 10 days two years ago. We took in all the highlights such as Waikiki Beach, Pearl Harbor and the Memorial, Diamond Head and Dole pineapple plantation. This visit we plan to do some geocaching, and Sue hopes to get together with a former Air Force friend and his wife that live here. They worked together in the same shop at Beale Air Force Base in California.

Unfortunately, my condition goes downhill, and I experience coughing fits that leave me exhausted and my chest and stomach muscles aching from all the heaving. Consequently, I spend most of my time in the stateroom as I don't want to go coughing all over the ship. We order room service a few times to further restrict my movement. Nights are the worst as my wheezing keeps me awake and I make good use of my Albuterol inhaler. I can't help but think that rainy day to Alcatraz contributed to my pneumonia-like symptoms. Between my inhaler and ibuprofen, I survive and start to feel better as we approach Honolulu.

Sue and I are on the balcony watching the sun come up over Diamond Head and I hear the now familiar sound of a humpback whale clearing its blowhole.

We look aft about 100 yards and see the spray, then it's humpback as it dives down. We witness this several times, not sure if it is the same whale or a pod of them.

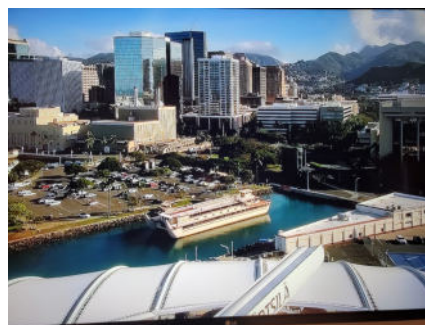
We enter Honolulu Bay and get tied up at Terminal #2. We have a nice view of the Honolulu skyline and are looking forward to getting off the ship for a while. Cunard makes available continuous shuttle service to the Ala Moana Center, the world's largest open-air mall.



From Wikipedia: "The **Ala Moana Center**, commonly known simply as **Ala Moana**, is a large open-air [shopping mall](#) in the [Ala Moana](#) neighborhood of [Honolulu, Hawaii](#). Owned by [Brookfield Properties](#), Ala Moana is the [eighth largest shopping mall in the United States](#) and the largest open-air shopping center in the world.

Ala Moana is consistently ranked among the most successful malls in the world. With assets totaling \$5.74 billion as of January 2018, it is the most valuable shopping mall in the [United States](#). It is anchored

by [Bloomingdale's](#), [Macy's](#), [Marshalls](#), [Neiman Marcus](#), [Nordstrom](#), [Ross Dress for Less](#), [Saks Off 5th](#), and [Target](#)."



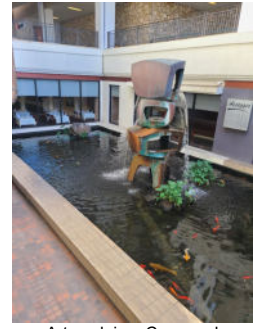
Honolulu from the bow camera.

From there, Waikiki Beach is only a 15 minute walk. The mall has an Adventure Lab which we decided to do and it takes us to five different artworks in the open-air area. This place is huge and it takes us about 30 minutes to walk to the different areas and identifying the artwork and answer questions to complete the Adventure Lab.

We wanted to do a little shopping as well so we venture inside and visit a Long Pharmacy and Target. I am really getting wore out by this time and convince Sue to return to the ship. It is still early, around 1PM, so Sue calls her Air Force friend and they arrange to meet at the pier around 9AM in the morning.



There are a lot of free-range chickens around Oahu, reminds me of Key West.



Art work in a Coy pond

After a quiet afternoon and evening, I accompany Sue to the pier to meet up with Tyrone and his wife Miriam. I decide not to go with them as I am still coughing and don't want to expose them and slow them down. I did want to meet them however and get a picture of them for the blog.



They are both Hawaiian natives and have an upholstery repair business here. I believe he learned the trade as part of his military job where he and Sue worked in the parachute shop and used industrial sewing machines to repair the chutes as part of their duties. This isn't their first reunion as they have seen each other at previous Blackbird reunions held in Nevada.

I return to the ship and decide to take advantage of the beautiful day and make use of the pool area while most people are ashore. As expected there is plenty of room and I take a quick swim then sit for 20 minutes in the jacuzzi, hoping it will loosen up my muscles and humidify my lungs. Feeling refreshed, I sunbathe for a while before returning to my stateroom.

Sue returns mid-afternoon with several shopping bags. One of their stops was at the Pearl Harbor Naval Base Exchange, Navy's version of a department store. Sue bought me three Hawaiian shirts which I'm sure will be very appropriate for some upcoming port of calls as well as aboard ship. She said she had a great time with her friends and enjoyed reminiscing.

We leave Honolulu February 10th, around 6PM and we stand on our balcony hoping to see more marine life but I guess we've used up our luck. It is not long before we are in open water and heading southwest toward our next port, Apia, Samoa. We are due there on February 17th for just one day.

Wednesday, February 12th, 2025 At Sea

We are now five hours behind my home state of Iowa and the Central time zone. Tonight at 11:59 we set our clocks and date AHEAD 24 hours. We are crossing the International Date Line. So, when we wake up tomorrow, it will be February 14th. February 13th 2025, gone forever. We won't get it back since we will be heading in a westerly direction until we are back in Iowa. Too bad it wasn't a Friday the 13th.

Speaking of 13, I mentioned we don't have a 13th deck between 12 and 14 deck. We also don't have a number 13 lifeboat! We have three lifeboats outside our cabin, they are numbered 17, 15, and 11...no 13. If I found myself overboard and a number 13 lifeboat came along, would I turn it down, of course not. I'm wondering if this is universal in the cruise industry.

One other note before I close this out. I had forgotten how vast the Pacific is. I spent five years aboard two ships sailing both the Atlantic and Pacific. At that time, I never gave it much thought, but the oceans and seas contain 97% of our planet's water and cover 71% of the earth's surface! Only one percent is fresh water and the remainder is made up of polar ice. Why are there water shortages anywhere? Come on Elon and you other geniuses. Figure this out. There has to be an answer.

## Comments:

13.02.2025: Marge W.

Hope you are feeling better? I'm enjoying your blog.

# Crossing the Lines

February 12, 2025



IDL Certificate

We crossed the International Date Line last night on February 12th and this morning is February 14, 2025. We didn't change the time, just the date. There is no ceremony per se, but we did get a certificate stating the fact that we did indeed cross the IDL

My cough is better, but not gone. The good news is that I am sleeping better and feeling more rested and I'm not having to use my inhaler near as much. Thanks for all the get well wishes!

Today being Valentine's Day, the ship had an enormous bouquet of Red Roses in the atrium of the Queen's Room. The dining rooms were also all decked out with hanging hearts and cupid etc.

It is also a Gala Evening which requires tuxedos or at least a dark suit and tie and gowns for the ladies. The menu doesn't impress us enough to go to the trouble to dress up, so we opt for the buffet which often has much of the same menu.

Saturday, February 15

Initiation Day! We crossed the equator last night at 2AM but the actual ceremony takes place in the Pavilion Pool area at 2PM this afternoon. As you remember, ship's company that hasn't crossed the equator and gone through an initiation are known as Pollywogs. Those that have been initiated carry the title of Shellbacks. They gave an opportunity to sign up to be initiated on a first come first serve basis. They indicated the applicant must be fit and able to climb stairs and perform some rigorous activity. Sue opted not to participate. I, of course, am a Shellback from my Navy initiation back in the 60's. We arrive at the Pavilion shortly after 1PM and there is already standing room only! I found out later that they had initiated 160 guests and crew which was a record for them.



The captain's table with the Judge at the podium

The ceremony consisted of the judge reading the charges against the pollywogs and then the arrival of King Neptune with his entourage, including his bearded wife! The Shellbacks all voted "guilty" to all the charges read. I hope to post links to videos that I took. The Pollywogs had to parade by one of the Shellbacks who held a fish which they had to kiss. In my day, we had to kiss the Royal Baby's belly and that was not very pleasant as his belly was all greased up with something awful.

After that they sat at the head of the pool and Shellbacks poured some made up items like jello, custard and egg noodles over their heads before being allowed to enter the pool and clean off. Pretty mild all in all. It was a fun time and I am assuming they got an actual Shellback certificate for their efforts. We left before all 160 were done as it was a little tedious and the music was way too loud as usual.



Pollywogs grouped at the head of the pool.

Initiation links:

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[https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKMrlgI3RMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipN1T\\_aaNikIRfdLbsDvTeZTeu5ZLJGLI](https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKMrlgI3RMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipN1T_aaNikIRfdLbsDvTeZTeu5ZLJGLI)

<https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKMrlgI3RMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipMfW4gf0Q0zRxTtnTbgfwWeGPJiuV>

You will probably have to copy and paste the links to view and hear.



Equator Crossing Certificate

Next stop: Apia, Samoa

### Comments:

18.02.2025: [Larry Tjaden](#)

Enjoy!!

20.02.2025: [Licoricetwist](#)

I'm glad your cough is improving. Such a nuisance on holiday!

## Apia, Samoa

February 16, 2025

We were invited again to a Captain's 7:45 PM cocktail reception exclusive for the world cruise sailors like ourselves.

We made the mistake of eating first and then going to the reception which featured some very nice prawns and sandwiches to go with the provided cocktails of champagne, white and red wine, and gin and tonics. They also had a quite impressive turtle ice sculpture.

We were not hungry but we did partake in the cocktails.



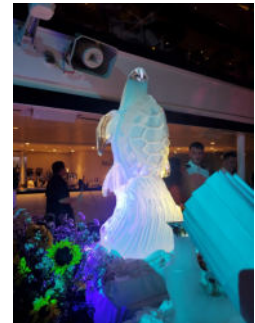
Sue enjoying white wine

It was really warm and when we finally scored a table I took off my jacket draped it over the back of my chair. Not long after, the lady at the table next to us somehow managed to upset the table with a lot of red wine and other various cocktails and splashed my coat with the aforementioned red wine! Glass breakage, spilled wine everywhere and waiters scrambling to clean things up and one of the crew took my jacket and stateroom number and said they would have it cleaned for me. No apologies from the lady were forthcoming who acted like this was a

normal thing for her. We finished our drinks and after the captain appeared and did her little speech, we headed back to our stateroom.



Before wine spill incident



Sea Turtle Ice Sculpture

February 17, 1025 Apia, Samoa

Our arrival time in Apia was 8AM and we were up well before that and showered and dressed before heading to the breakfast buffet. After eating, I managed to video our surroundings on the upper decks. It looks very inviting and the temperature is a very pleasant upper 70s. Our excursion doesn't leave until 10AM so we have plenty of time to prepare.

[https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKP6OseLRMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipP9sf7NRcY\\_I7XBQY11OqnOgFaE-ywxEgMm4psl](https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKP6OseLRMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipP9sf7NRcY_I7XBQY11OqnOgFaE-ywxEgMm4psl)

A little bit about Samoa, as opposed to American Samoa, which is on the other side of the Equator. We are on the island of Upolu which is the 2nd largest island of the Samoans but it is the most populous with three quarters of Samoa's total population. Apia is the capital. An interesting sideline is that the author, Robert Louis Stevenson, best known for his novels: Treasure Island, Kidnapped, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, lived here and was much revered as there is a museum dedicated to him. He died early from complications of tuberculosis at the age of 44, and is buried here on top of one of the mountains.

Polynesia, which Samoa is part of, is loosely described as a large triangle of islands with Hawaii, New Zealand and the Easter Islands at its corners.

We gather in the theater, as do all tours here, because there is not much room on the pier. We are the last group to depart and there are about 60 of us which are loaded onto three mini-buses. We board the bright green one which holds about 20 persons, two seats on one side and one on the other. Sue and I sit on the single seats on the left.

Samoa drives on the left hand side of the road, like New Zealand. This was not always, they switched from RHD to LHD in September of 2009! They did this because they had a strong relationship with New Zealand and Australia and their cars were a lot less expensive than the American cars. The change went fairly seamlessly as a lot of preparation and signage had been done in advance and it was well planned out.



A little cramped, but the A/C was good!



Our Green Hornet tour bus

From Wikipedia: "RHT (Right Hand Traffic) is used in 165 countries and territories, mainly in the Americas, Continental Europe, most of Africa and mainland Asia (except [South Asia](#) and [Thailand](#)), while 75 countries use LHT, which account for about a sixth of the world's land area, a quarter of its roads, and about a third of its population."

Off we go and thankfully our bus has A/C which some do not. We travel through the populated area and it is rich in colorful plants, coconut and papaya trees, lots of flowering bushes. People here are poor, but they take care of what they have and it is inspiring to be witness to it. Our first stop is a cathedral with some awesome stained glass and architecture. The island is mostly Catholic and as we travel around, there are churches in abundance. I see very few taverns or other places that would test your temptations.



My coconut drink



Inside the cathedral

On our way to the next stop, we go through some rural areas before stopping at a flea market which is not only for tourists but for the locals as well. I take advantage and buy a fresh coconut which she hacks an opening big enough for a paper straw and I can enjoy the sweet coconut liquid inside.

The last time I enjoyed this was when I was with the 73rd Combat Support Hospital. We were deployed to Central America and we were staying on the Dole banana plantation. While we were enjoying the pool area, a native was mowing the grass with his machete and he offered to open a coconut that had just dropped from a nearby palm and he hacked it open with his machete and gave it to us.

I also took a picture of this lady at her fruit stand. I could not identify all the fruits and vegetables she had there but I'm sure they were very tasty if you knew how to prepare them. I do know that locally ripened bananas are so much more sweet and tasty than the ones we are used to getting in our supermarkets that are ripened by gases.



I'll post some pictures that I took through the bus window as we headed toward our next destination.



The one below shows a typical residence with the elevated garbage cage to keep the omnipresent loose dogs from ripping the bags apart. These were everywhere and I did see a garbage truck collecting the bags at one point.

I think the thing to take away from this is the lush greenery you see everywhere and the flowering plants and shrubs. It is quite colorful and what you might imagine a Polynesian island to have.



Local Medical Clinic



Elevated garbage cage

We arrive at our next stop which is on a peninsula with a great view of our Queen Anne in the distance.



Our Queen Anne, home away from home!



A very good local beer.

We are served champagne and they also have a bar which I take advantage to sample their local beer which was very good, Sue takes advantage of the beach area to dip her feet into the South Pacific waters which she said was very warm.

Not surprising as the ambient temperature was in the 80s. There were also what looked like a local father/son enjoying the waters just off shore.

We board the Green Hornet and head back to the pier. We try to get the bus to let us off in the downtown area but they say they are not allowed to do that so we disembark at the pier and catch a ride on another bus to the downtown area. Sue has spotted an Adventure Lab which we do. I can't connect with my phone so I am just along for the ride on this one. Sue completes it and we hire a taxi to take us back to the pier for \$4, he wanted five.



Sue, testing the waters!

We head back to our stateroom and relax for a couple hours before dressing for dinner. We decide to do the formal dining and enjoy a nice meal of Beef Stroganoff. Problem was there were no noodles. How can you have stroganoff without egg noodles. They substituted rice of all things. We do not appreciate the English way. It was OK, I don't want to disparage it too much. But I am rapidly getting hungry for some real American food!

Next stop Nukualofa, Tonga

## Comments:

**20.02.2025: Licoricetwist**

It's fun to read your comments about English food 😊 It's going to be a long 3 months! I would normally do rice with Stroganoff, but I'll see if I can get noodles for when you're here. I'm sure I can.

# Nuku'Alofa, Tonga



Welcome gate at the pier

Video link of Nuku'alofa Harbour:

[https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRlb3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKI%2FcLLDSMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipOMbbbJ6P6vVECQP\\_bQGHfy3s](https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRlb3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKI%2FcLLDSMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipOMbbbJ6P6vVECQP_bQGHfy3s)

The Kingdom of Tonga became an independent nation under the British Commonwealth in 1970. It consists of more than 170 Polynesian islands, many are uninhabited. The capital, Nuku'Alofa is located on the main island of Tongatapu. Unlike Samoa, the major islands are low lying with no visible mountains. The people look very similar to the Samoan's, including their dress. The men wear skirts, often with a wide belt of some kind, a lot depending on what they are dressing for. In Samoa, these were called lavalava. Here they are referred to as tupenu's.

Tonga's current king is Tupou VI. He resides in the wooden palace built in 1867. He appoints a Prime Minister who is then voted on by the parliament.

These island people are very religious. As we traveled through the island, many different churches were present with the Wesleyan church being the most prevalent but Seventh Day Adventist has to be a close second. Catholics also have a presence. The schools are affiliated with one religion or another.

We have a bigger, older touring bus this time but with no A/C and we could have used it. Temperatures were in the 80s. Our guide, Babe, said we lucked out on the weather as it had rained all day just yesterday and there was even flooding in some areas.



King's Palace as viewed from Queen Anne



Our aging tour bus at the palace

Our first stop was at the king's palace, which we really had a much better view from the ship. It is closed to the public so I'm not sure the reason for the stop. Our next destination is quite a long journey to Captain's James Cook's landing spot back in 1777.



Typical graveyard

It gave us a good chance to observe the church's, schools and residential buildings and homes along the way. There were also many different burial sites that were decorated to the max with artificial flowers and other remembrances.

We did see some livestock, mostly cattle. Babe said that Tongans loved their BBQ pig and any celebration to be successful had to include roasted pig. She pointed out a horse that she saw and said they are a rare sight because Tongans loved to eat horse meat and actually eradicated them from the island! They are now a protected animal.



Farmland



Typical roadside market

Babe said that many individuals will grow and sell fruits and veggies at roadside market. Their main crops are squash, coconuts, bananas and vanilla beans. A high proportion of their food is imported from New Zealand. And, like Samoa, they drive on the left side of the road and American cars are nearly nonexistent. By far the most popular brand is Toyota.



Guide wearing his tupenu



School playground

We arrive at Captain Cook's landing area and are given time to take some pictures and make use of the public toilets that are available there. A couple other tour busses are also there and it is quite crowded. Although we have traveled quite a distance from our pier, this is an open bay area that extends quite a ways inland.



Another stand with quite a variety of goods!



Captain Cook's Landing

From here we travel to our final destination which is Oholei Beach and Hina Cave. This is where we will have an extended time of nearly two hours to enjoy the beach, the hospitality of our hosts which provide us with a meal and entertainment.



Before heading to beach



Stairway to beach

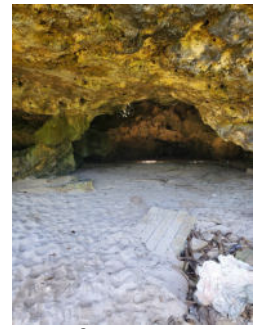
The beach and cave are down a steep set of stairs but we manage them along with most of the other guests. The cave is around the corner and rather anticlimactic but interesting all the same. It has some open areas at the top which must make some spectacular spouts if the water ever gets riled up enough to force it through these openings.



Openings in cave overhead



Inside looking out



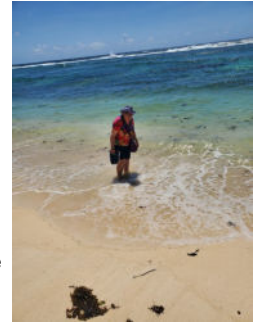
Cave entrance

Some of guests have brought along swimsuits and towels and they change and head for the South Pacific for a dip. Sue opts for a walk along the beach after removing her shoes and socks.



Beach area

We climb back up the stairs and enter the restaurant which has plenty of seating. I take the opportunity to order a gin and tonic as Sue is outside drying out her feet to put her shoes and socks back on. There are some musicians and a singer on stage doing their best to sing some popular UK and US songs. Sue joins me and she orders a bottle of water and I order the local beer called Maka.



Sue soaking



We notice some people coming in from outside carrying a leaf wrapped around some hot food. Sue goes out and they had a table set up with various samples of local delicacies. A couple from the U.K. joins us with their leaf. It is all quite tasty, even if we didn't know what everything was.

Little did we know, this was just the beginning as some of the locals started filling the inside tables with prepared dishes as well while we were being entertained by a group of dancers, three men and three women in traditional dress doing a local dance with occasional shouting and clapping. I filmed some of it but I don't think I can post it because I'm having a hard time downloading a link to the computer. I joined the line to get some of the offerings and was surprised to see a roast pig which the chef was carving and

giving us a sample. Afterwards, I managed to get a picture of one before they carved it up.

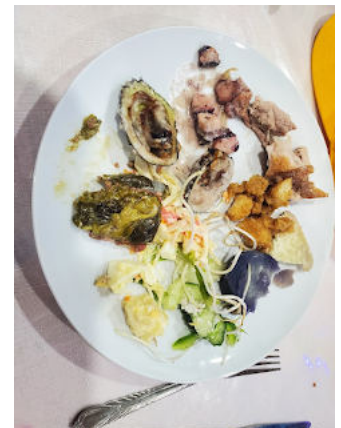


At least it wasn't a horse!  
(It was delicious!)

To end the festivities, a young native lad, I would guess around 14, did a live fire dance with a lighted baton. It was quite impressive! I did get a video and hopefully I can share it.

Link:  
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Our hosts had been very gracious and they lined up to shake our hand and thank us for coming.



Roast Pig, mussel, spinach or kale, assorted veggies, purple sweet potato, octopus

We had a busy day and got to see a lot of the island. We had made reservations to go see a Marilyn Monroe impersonator. She looked very much like Marilyn and did a decent job singing some of her songs. She also brought a couple of men on stage and interviewed them for a fourth husband!

Next stop: Auckland, New Zealand

## Comments:

21.02.2025: Licoricetwist

I never realised that Captain Cook was the same time as the Revolution. 🤔 Sounds like an interesting visit.

In our experience, Toyotas are excellent cars. We've had 3 (sequentially) for about 10 years each and never any problems. And of course they fit on UK roads, and if we choose carefully it even fits in the garage!

## New Zealand: Auckland

Friday, February 21, 2025

Just a quick note to say that I saw some flying fish today on our way towards Auckland. I haven't seen them since my Navy days which I remember it being a not uncommon sight. They emerge from the water and "fly" for about 4-6 yards before returning to the sea. They don't have wings of course but their fins may act like wings to keep them airborne for time. In my research, I found that they can actually be airborne up to 45 seconds and a documented distance of 1,300 ft! Anyway, I thought it worth noting.

Saturday, February 22, 2025

Today we docked in Auckland, New Zealand. We were greeted by a tug boat spraying her water cannon. What a nice welcome! It promises to be a nice summer day here with temps in the upper 70s with mostly sunny skies. We signed up for the Hop on/Hop off touring bus which has a route that takes us past and through most all of the highlights of Auckland.



Entering Auckland Harbor  
Sky Tower on the left

Auckland is known as the "City of Sails". And that is obvious as we enter the harbor and see hundreds of sail boats at anchor and in slips. It is said that one out of three New Zealanders, or Kiwi's, as they like to be called, own a boat of some kind or other. New Zealand consists of two main landmasses, North Island and South Island (not very imaginative!) and around 600 other smaller islands. Wellington is the capital but we are in the most populated city of Auckland. And our now familiar, Captain Cook, became the first European to set foot on and map the islands in 1769. Today, the majority of the 5.25 million population is of European descent with the indigenous Māori being the largest minority followed by Asian and Pasifika. The official spoken languages are English and Māori and a lot of the signage is in both languages. Three quarters of the population live on North Island.

You have no doubt heard of the volcanic "Ring of Fire". Well, New Zealand is at the foot of this ring and South Island has many active volcanos which is probably why many choose not to live there. The last major eruption was in 2019 on White Island and it killed 22 people. It has since had a minor eruption in May of 2024.

Our Hop on / Hop off ticket entitles us to use a distinct set of busses that have a red and blue route to take to most all the interesting places in Auckland. We gather at the theater again and when our time comes up, we are led to the pickup point. The busses are double decker, some open on top and others are not. The newer ones, which we are loaded on, are closed on top and totally electric. They have a recorded narration as we progress through the city as points of interest are noted. We thought we should do the entire 2 hour 10 minute circuit to get a good feeling of the city. We do this but by the time we get to the outer most perimeter of the route we decide to get off and do some geocaching and exercise our legs.



Michael Joseph Savage Memorial Park

This was at Bastion Point where a memorial to Michael Joseph Savage who was the New Zealand's first Labor prime minister, 1935–1940, overlooks the Waitemata Harbor. Like the Massey Memorial in Wellington, it is built on the site of a former gun emplacement dating from the 'Russian Scare' of the 1880s. The site also features a sunken garden and a reflective pool marked off by hedges and flowerbeds. It was beautifully kept up and a great place to explore. My phone is worthless in these foreign countries but Sue's plan allows her access to the geocaching app and gives us directions, mine doesn't.

Our hunt takes us past a huge banyan tree and I take Sue's picture. These trees can live for many centuries and are symbols of life, longevity, growth, stability and vitality.

We do find the cache which is in the form of a birdhouse hidden inside the tropical forest which I should have take a picture but didn't. Anyway, this earned us the New Zealand souvenir which we are trying to get for every country we visit.

After about an hour there we "Hop On" the next bus and the ride takes us through the 200 acre Auckland Domain. The Domain was set aside in 1880 as a 200-acre public reserve. It reminds one of New York's Central Park, albeit quite a bit smaller in size. The domain area was formed by volcanic activity 140,000 years ago. The large crater, which has a small scoria cone in its center, forms a natural amphitheater for large outdoor events like the annual 'Carols in the Park'. The level floor of the crater is covered with sports fields; a wooden cricket pavilion built in 1898 remains today. The rim of the crater offers panoramic views and is a great place to fly a kite.



Sue and the Banyan tree



Domain playing field in distance

The beautiful Wintergardens, opened in 1913, consist of two large glasshouses each exhibiting either temperate or tropical plants. Between the glasshouses is an enclosed courtyard with fish pond, fountains and classical marble statues. The atmosphere here is charged with romance and often attracts newlyweds for photos on their big day. Behind the Wintergardens, an old quarry forms the perfect location for an extensive native fernery.

At the top of the Domain hill stands the architecturally impressive Auckland Museum, a large neo-Greek building that was opened in 1929. A variety of sculptures have been installed throughout the domain and a brochure describing the walk to view them can be obtained from the museum.

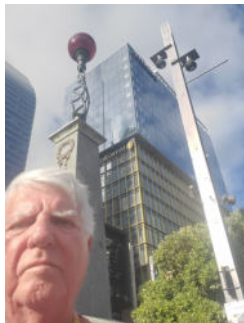


Museum at the Domain

We "Hop Off" the bus in the downtown area do some souvenir shopping. It is Saturday and there is a food court set up in one of the streets along with craft stands selling their hand made products. Sue finds a Kiwi necklace she likes. One of Sue's favorite appetizers is Calamari. It just so happens one of the food stands has seafood dishes and Sue orders Calamari, and I get six fresh oysters on the half shell. We are impressed with the quality which Sue says is some of the best she has tasted. My oysters, seasoned with hot sauce and lemon are excellent as well.

We have had enough for one afternoon and we are here for one more day so we head back to the ship thinking we would rest up and maybe come back later in the day for some evening walk abouts and geocaching.

So after resting and soaking up some sun aboard, we head back out and spend the next couple hours geocaching. We did one Adventure Lab which took us to some interesting places, two regular caches and one Virtual cache. We had to find this red beacon and take a selfie to get credit for the find.



Red beacon selfie

We now can add the New Zealand virtual souvenir to our collection. By this time I'm getting a little thirsty as it early evening and we come across a sports bar and Sue gets a ginger beer and I get a local pale ale.

There is a live horse race being televised where patrons can bet on the outcome on one side of the bar and on the other their is a rugby game on which is actually taking place on the South Island. Quite a few of the crowd here are cheering on one of the teams which must be local. We strike up a conversation with a couple and he tries to explain the difference between rugby and our football.



Rugby match

He knows a lot more about American football than I know about rugby. They seem to take their sport seriously here and follow their teams closely. I have a 2nd beer, a local lager this time and it is quite good. They have quite a selection on tap.



Sue ignoring the horse race!

We enjoyed talking with these folks, although sometimes you have to listen pretty close to get through their accent. I ask if I could take their picture and they were happy to oblige.



They told us their names, but I forgot!  
Great people

It is getting dark out and we are starting to get hungry again and our friends recommends the Ferry Building down by our ship as a great place for dinner. We bid them farewell and head for the pier area. There are several outdoor/indoor places to eat there and we select the Shucker Brothers for another taste of seafood. I order fish and chips and Sue has, of course, more calamari. These are much larger than the ones we had at the street vendor but just as good if not better. My fish was excellent as well, as were the chips (fries).



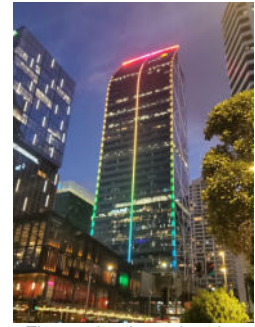
Beer selection

We aren't in port at night very often as most stops are in early and leave late afternoon or early evening. So I take advantage of our night and take a picture of the Queen and of a skyscraper behind us.

We have had a full day and left very impressed with New Zealand and it's people.



Queen Anne at night



These colors keep changing

Sunday, February 23, 2025

Happy Birthday Sue!

We awoke to another beautiful day for our 2nd day in Auckland. I can't stress enough how fortunate we have been with the weather! It is just gorgeous.

They have on our stateroom TV, a Queen Anne today segment. It is hosted by the Entertainment Director Michael Harvey, a Canadian that has been with Cunard nearly twenty years. He generally has a co-host, Louise who is his assistant. They outline the current days activities and anything you might need to know for going ashore or planning your day. At the end, they always list the people who are having birthdays on that particular day. Since it is Sue's birthday today, I record that segment and will post it, hopefully. I will also try an post the "Fly Through Queen Anne" video that precedes each daily program to give you an idea of the interior of the ship.

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(Above is Sue's BD announcement)

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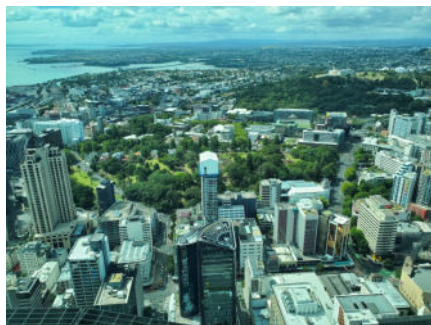
(Fly Through video above)

We thought that we would walk to the Sky Tower and take in the 360 degree view of Auckland. We quickly find out that this city is very hilly, it reminds me of San Francisco.

The tower doesn't look that far away but by the time we wind our way there we are quite tired. We enter the building but have to go down a two story escalator to get where we can make our way to the tower elevators. Of course there is a fee which as I recall was about \$25 U.S.



Queen Anne from over 600 ft. up



There are different levels, Level 51 is just an observation area, 610 ft high, which is where the elevator takes us. We walk around there and take a few photos. But, the real action takes place on the 53rd level. This is where you can pay to do a bungee jump from 636 feet! Or, if you are chicken and don't want to jump, you can walk around the perimeter of the tower, outside! I watch one gentleman jump off with the bungee, never to be seen again. I guess they unstrap him when he hits the bottom. There is a group of four, I assume family members, that have paid for the outside walk. We watch as they are buckled in and given instructions. It is windy of course and I can't imagine walking around out there.

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Bungee Jump above

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Dj3FvTzipacA59gVUiUL7LLKVt01xBsX/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Dj3FvTzipacA59gVUiUL7LLKVt01xBsX/view?usp=drive_link)

Sky Walk above

I might have considered doing this 60 years ago. I did, in my stupid years, climb our local water tower and hang a dummy of our high school principle from the platform. But now, I can barely step on the clear glass window on the deck that has nothing under it but air! Hopefully I can post the video I took of the sky walkers.

We leave the Sky Tower and I need a pair of good sandals. I have a pair at home, but I chose not to pack them. Bad decision! I don't mind wearing sneakers and socks when I know there is a lot of walking to do, but otherwise, I like to have open toed sandals.

So Sue locates a Sketchers store not far from the tower and we go there and I purchase a nice pair for NZ\$149.00.

We need to start thinking about getting back to the ship but Sue wants to get some gelato ice cream so we head to the Ferry Building again where we knew there was a shop. There is a line and Sue gets in it and I head for Shucker Brothers where I know there is a beer waiting for me. When Sue finally joins me, we decide to share another order of calamari. So for the third time in two days we eat calamari, a perfect way to celebrate Sue's birthday.

We have an overnight voyage to our next destination of Tauranga. It will be a busy few days as we will be in a different port each day.

Until then.....



NZ Sketchers store

## Tauranga, New Zealand; Kiwi's and Truffles

Monday, February 24, 2025 (Southern Hemisphere, that is)

We are up just in time to view our passage into Pilots Bay where we will dock for our one day visit to Tauranga, New Zealand. Tauranga is the fifth largest city and the bay area was named Bay of Plenty by Cpt. Cook in 1769. He named it that because of the plentiful food sources that he found there. Today, it is the home of many kiwifruit orchards, avocados, citrus orchards and a variety of fresh seafood as well as thriving dairy farms.

It looks to be another beautiful day as our luck continues to bless us with great weather. Our scheduled tour "Truffle Treasures" doesn't start until 1PM, so we are in no hurry to get off the ship. So, we have a leisure breakfast but get filled up as we aren't sure when or what is in store for us on the excursion. We aren't due back from it until 5:30 when the ship is scheduled to leave.

We decide to leave the ship and do some geocaching which there are several close by, mostly Adventure Labs that we like to do. We go ashore about 9:30 and there is a Virtual cache close by which we find and answer the required questions to get credit for the find. The city is actually across the harbor from us and we are docked in Pilot Bay located on a peninsula that is terminated by the Mount Maunganui, an extinct volcano, a sacred Maori site with ocean-view hiking trails and a popular site for climbing and launching paragliders. It is 761 feet high and we see several in the air as we walk the bay side beach on a boardwalk. This is one of the most popular holiday destinations for New Zealanders and foreigners alike. There are lots of sail boats anchored and sailing in the bay along with kayakers, swimmers and families enjoying the beach.



Queen Anne across the bay

Sue takes advantage of the beach area to dip her toes in which seems to be a thing with her. We are doing an Adventure Lab that will take us part way up the hiking trail where we get a good view of our Queen Anne across the bay. This is one of five different locations that will take us to the other side of the peninsula which will be the Pacific Ocean and good surfing waves crashing ashore.

We find all the locations and it takes us back toward our ship but on the opposite side of the peninsula. But it is just a short walk back across and we get back in plenty of time

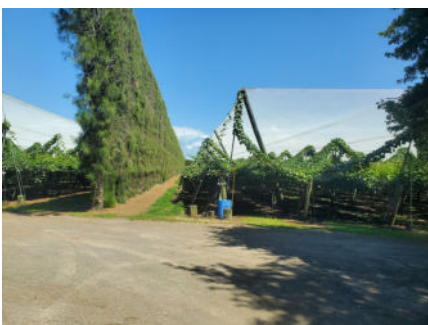
before our 12:30 date to hunt truffles! It was about a three and a half mile excursion. We see several signs that are trying to educate about the warning signs of a tsunami that might be on its way, like a long and strong earthquake or an unusual change in the sea level. We worry about tornadoes, these people worry about tsunamis! Remember, New Zealand is in the Ring of Fire!



Sue dipping with Mount Maunganui in background

We get back and board our little bus since there are only ten of us. An earlier group that took this same tour had 21. We head out and our guide/driver Cheryl says that since Covid, there has been quite a population explosion in this area and we enter a four lane highway that is only six years old, built to accommodate all the newcomers. As we get further away from the peninsula, we enter a largely farming area where we see lots of cornfields and grazing cattle which Cheryl says are dairy cows. The corn (maize) is used as silage to feed the dairy cows. I don't see any sheep, which she informs me this area has very little sheep and the few that there are, are in the hilly areas and not here in flatlands. We are headed for a kiwifruit orchard. This area, the Bay of Plenty, is the third largest producer of kiwifruit behind China and Italy. Their rich volcanic soil and climate make the perfect conditions for growth. The kiwifruit was imported from China as was called Chinese gooseberries at the time. It is their #1 export with avocados #2.

They grow three kinds of kiwi, Gold 80%, Green 19% and a new variety, Red 1%. The gold is sweeter, green is tart and the red is in between. Kiwi fruits are very susceptible to bruising which ruins them.



Kiwi orchard showing netting and wind barrier

Even strong winds can bruise them and an occasional hail storm is devastating. They protect them by covering them with high density polyethylene nets which also helps keep the birds from eating them and reduces chances of sunburn.

They also surround the fields with single row evergreen trees and/or bamboo. These require constant trimming but are necessary for wind protection.

They cannot be machine harvested due to their bruising sensitivity, so hand harvesting is required. Unfortunately, there aren't enough hands for the harvest and workers have to be imported from neighboring islands as far away as Tonga and Samoa. Much the same as our southwestern vegetable and citrus growers

import Mexican laborers to do the job.



Hanging gold kiwi soon ready for harvest

We board our bus for our next stop, Trufflewood. Lance and Nikki Dodd and their two teenagers run this farm which happens to have a grove of hazelnut and English oak trees whose roots have been innoculated with the truffle

spore. This was done by the previous owners who started this relationship with touring companies to help educate the public and hopefully increase the demand for their product.

The below commentary was borrowed from the website: foodunfolded

Truffles are notoriously difficult to cultivate. But in France, thanks to centuries of practice, an amazing 95% of truffles come from agriculture. To get this right, farmers raise saplings from seed in a controlled environment, before introducing truffle spores into the root system, where they grow in a symbiotic relationship with species like oak, beech, hazel, or fir. Truffles also grow symbiotically with trees in the wild. But the spores are spread with the help of wild animals like pigs and bears. Read on to find out more about how truffles, "the black diamond of the kitchen", are grown.

What are truffles?

Truffles are fruiting bodies (aka spore

-producing organs) of the fungi family 'Ascomycota'. Functionally, they are pretty much like mushrooms, except they grow under the soil. The main biological function of a truffle is to spread spores, which in turn gives rise to new offspring.

**How are truffles grown?**

Since truffles grow under the soil, the way they spread spores is slightly different from how mushrooms do it. Truffles use their unique aroma to attract 'fungivores' who enjoy snacking on them.

When consumed, most of the flesh is digested, but the spores pass through the animal's body unscathed. These spores get back into the soil via the animal's feces, which is usually deposited in a nearby area. This is especially important because the spores will need to find their way to the roots of their host trees, which are often local to specific ecosystems.

Unlike most plants that can convert sunlight into energy in a process called photosynthesis, truffles are instead totally dependent on certain trees to carry out this process for them. In return, the truffle helps its host tree by using its hyphae to reach nutrients and water from pockets of soil that the tree cannot reach by itself.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of symbiotic relationship between fungi and the roots of a tree is called mycorrhiza.



Much like animals, humans are attracted to truffles because of the scent they produce. The aroma and taste of truffles is often described as musky, earthy, and pungent and can be attributed to the pheromone androstanol and other volatile compounds.

Truffles need to be recovered (foraged) from under the soil. Traditionally, this was done with help from pigs. Sows are attracted to the scent of truffles because truffles contain the pheromone androstanol which is a sex hormone also found in the saliva of male pigs. However, it is incredibly difficult to convince the sow not to eat the truffle after she works hard to locate it. Dogs on the other hand, are also great sniffers and will happily settle for an alternative treat. Therefore, truffle hunters today prefer to use trained dogs for their foraging trips. (End borrowed commentary.)

Lance and Nikki gave us a tour of their truffle grove and explained some of the difficulties of maintaining and cultivating their truffles. Lance sprayed the bottom of our shoes before entering the area so as not to bring in any unwanted contaminants. Pine trees are the enemy of truffles which he has plenty on his farm but he doesn't want them near his truffles. The oak and hazel trees have been alternately planted with enough space between to let in the right amount of sunlight to promote truffle propagation. In the wild, truffles are much like our well known morel mushrooms. When you are lucky enough to find one, there are generally many more in that same location because of their underground spore network. Nikki can locate them without the use of dogs by noticing the earth being pushed up by the truffle. When she locates one, she marks it with a stick and a clothespin, she calls it a pig. She has brought her bucket of pigs with the hopes of locating a new one. We are not allowed in where all the truffles are so as not to disturb them. She does discover a clod of dirt that was slightly raised and sure enough there was a truffle under it.

She exposes it and obliges us by taking a picture of it with our cameras. She then marks it with a pig and covers it back up with loose dirt and gently packs it down so it will continue to grow. It is currently about the size of a golf ball. Harvest usually takes place in August and is done by getting down on your hands and knees and if it has a strong enough smell, it is harvested.

Black truffles generally sell for \$300 to \$800 per pound, White truffles are more expensive.

These are blacks, although the picture shows it to be kind of a raspberry color which may be due to it's immaturity.



Look close to see stick "pigs"



truffle



Backyard area

We return to the farm house and they have prepared several dishes that have been flavored with truffle powder. A cheese, a jam, butter, macadamia nuts, and a avocado spread along with veggies, crackers and breads.

They also have generously provided us with a local wine and beer as well as soft drinks. The offerings do have a distinct taste, a musty earthy type which I think you can appreciate. She also passes around some small truffles that she had frozen and thawed to look at and smell.



truffles from previous year that were unsuitable for sale



Panhead beer



Their backyard was beautifully landscaped with flowering bushes and ferns and trees. The veggies that were served with our snacks mostly came from their gardens as well.

Their daughter, through her school I believe, has become involved in beekeeping.

had some available for sale and Sue took the opportunity to purchase some.

This area is well known for their honey, especially a type called Manuka. They



Sue purchasing some honey

We said goodbye to our gracious hosts and wished them well. It was an enjoyable experience as well as an educational one.



## New Zealand, Bay of Islands; Glow Worm Cave and Kauri Forest

Tuesday, 25 February

Today we are anchoring out in the bay for our one day visit to the Bay of Islands. Indeed, there are 144 islands in this group. We see quite a few of them as we sail in slowly to our anchorage. We are quite far from the pier, they say a 20 minute boat ride but it turned out to be closer to 30. It must be quite a shallow bay. It is a large bay, 9 miles across!

We signed up for the Glow Worm Cave and Kauri Forest Excursion. We met in the Queen's room at 9:15 and were escorted to the tender boats.



Our tender Captain

They hold 150 passengers and they really crowd us on but I don't think we were quite at capacity for comfort sake. Remember we have around 3,000 guests aboard that want to get out to their excursions, so it is quite a process when we have to tender everyone in. Our excursion was scheduled for 10AM and we do make it in time. But, after the bus was loaded with around 50 passengers, it wouldn't go anywhere! As soon as the driver put it in reverse an alarm went off and it wouldn't move!



Sights along the way



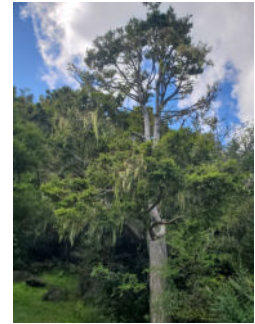
typical homestead

After several tries and getting underneath to wiggle wires or whatever, we were told we were going to commandeer a neighboring shuttle bus. So those folks had to offload and we took

their place.

So, as a result of that, we start out about a half hour behind schedule but they assured us we would get the full tour. Problem was the shuttle had no speaker system and the driver is also our guide. He tried to comment on things but it was a futile effort as we journeyed to our first stop at the Glow Worm Cave.

We arrive and since a lot of people need to use the restroom, we hope to have time to find a geocache located near the cave entrance.



Sights along the way



Cache is about 20 ft back through this opening

It is back in a cave like area and we have to use our phone flashlight to help locate it. Which we did after a little searching. We met a lady from Minnesota while we were waiting to board the bus and she was interested in geocaching. She left for the restroom but we will show her this cache before we leave as she wanted to experience what geocaching was all about.

These glowworm caves are not unique to New Zealand. They are found all over the world, but most commonly in New Zealand and Australia. They operate on the same principle as our fireflies, except they can't glow when they are in the fly stage.



Sue carrying a lantern

These are the larvae (maggots), especially the females that use their light to attract males and also other insects like mosquitos, that they catch in their web and feed on.

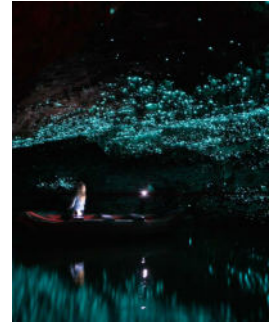
From their website:

"The Kawiti Caves are a few kilometres south of Kawakawa; they're also known as the Waiomio Caves. This cave system attracts many visitors with its bizarre karst features, stalactite formations and spectacular glow worm displays. The caves are owned and operated by the Kawiti family, who have guided thousands of travellers over the past 50 years, including American billionaire Bill Gates who visited in 2007.

Your 30 minute guided tour will follow a wooden boardwalk through a 200 metre limestone cave system. As you enjoy the galaxies of glow worms above, your friendly guide will explain the life cycle of the New Zealand Glow worm (*Arachnocampa Luminosa*) and the intricate webs used to catch their prey (mosquitoes and midges). You'll even get close enough to see the actual body of the glow worm and its stunning blue/green tail light, before you make the return bushwalk through a natural corridor of karst rock formations and pristine rainforest."

It was a fun time and I was happy to experience it. But I could probably make a business around experiencing firefly visuals in Iowa which would amaze New Zealanders just as much. Catching them in fruit jars like we did when we were kids.

From there we headed for the Kauri Forest. These are trees that have been compared to California redwood trees. In my opinion, since I have seen both, most of these trees however spectacular, do not compare to the redwoods in height or girth.



I got this from the internet, it is not our cave, but it looked very similar to this



Enroute to the forest

From the web:

The native Māori used kauri timber for boat building, carving and building houses. The gum was used as a fire starter and for chewing (after it had been soaked in water and mixed with the milk of the puha plant).

The arrival of European settlers in the 1700s to 1800s saw the decimation of these magnificent forests. Sailors quickly realized the trunks of young kauri were ideal for ships' masts and spars, and the settlers who followed felled the mature trees to yielded huge quantities of sawn timber of unsurpassed quality for building.

The gum too, became essential in the manufacture of varnishes and other resin-based products. The gum was obtained through digging, fossicking in treetops, or more drastically, by bleeding live trees.

More forest was cleared as demand for farmland and timber increased in the early and mid 20th century.

These forests must be maintained and protected from modern diseases and commercial logging. A lot of these trees we saw today are well over 500 years old.



Elevated boardwalk through the forest

Waipoua is home to Tane Mahuta, king of the forest and the largest remaining kauri tree in the country. The 1,500 year old Tane Mahuta is 51.5 m tall (169 ft.), with a girth of 13.77 m (45 ft, or about 14 feet in diameter). Our guide told us that for every 1 meter of diameter, it would equal approximately 500 years of growth.



Close-up of bark

Sue and I get our picture taken in front of a tree that was probably growing for the past 1,000 years!

This excursion wrapped up our visit to Kiwi Land, although we never did see a Kiwi bird. I asked about that and our guide said the only way you will probably see one is if you go to a zoo. They are nocturnal birds and zoo keepers trick them by reversing day and night so visitors can see them in captivity. But most New Zealanders never see them in the wild. They may hear them as they have a distinctive call but they hide out in the wooded areas and are seldom seen.



approximately 1000 year old Kauri tree

Next stop, Sydney, Australia.

## Sydney and beyond

Wednesday & Thursday, 26 & 27 February, at sea enroute to Sydney, Australia.

We really needed this two day break from all the activity from New Zealand. I needed to catch up on the blogs and rest from all the excursions we did. Both Sue and I are having some mobility problems with our hips and back. I'm glad we didn't wait another year or two to do this world thing.

Wednesday was an absolute gorgeous day at sea with very calm seas and a following wind with sunshine. Perfect for relaxing on our balcony or up on the outer decks. You could hardly feel the ship moving.

Thursday morning we had a few showers but not enough to really curtail any activity. They have the option to close the roof on the aft pool area if the weather becomes rainy or too cool.

There is a lot going on entertainment wise but I need to work on these blogs. Sue takes in a couple things but most of the stuff we don't really get excited about. We are content to spend most of it relaxing in our stateroom or balcony.

We hear from the Queen Anne Today show on TV that we will be disembarking around 1340 guests in Sydney! This is surprising to me, but it shows what a popular destination Sydney is. One of the people we befriended is getting off and will spend a month here before flying home to the states. We will certainly take a bunch of new guests (1315, I found out later) as well but I doubt we will be at capacity. Our steward, Regine, says he is only aware of four staterooms on this deck that won't be filled.

We had to fill out yet another Travel Pass document and everyone on board has to have a face to face contact with our passports and the immigration authorities before anyone can disembark. We went through this same thing in San Francisco. We are scheduled to meet at 8:30 in the theater for our tour group to be checked and then leave on our only scheduled excursion at 9AM. We will be here for two days, we have nothing scheduled for our second day.

We are in bed Thursday night around 9PM when the Captain comes on the intercom. We know this is something unusual because most of the announcements take place outside the stateroom, and if you want to hear them, you have to open the door or tune the TV to the Bow Camera channel and listen. In room announcements from the Cpt. happened twice before when they had an emergency and needed blood donors. Anyway, she says that they are experiencing a propulsion problem and we are only making 12 knots when we should be making 20. They are working on the problem but they already know we will be late arriving in Sydney by at least two hours. This is going to screw up a lot of plans for the people disembarking with travel plans moving forward. Also our excursion was planned for a 9AM departure and was supposed to last eight hours. So, she just wanted everyone to be aware of this and to be prepared for changes in schedule. She said new program times would be distributed in the AM with updates. In addition, we are to set our clocks back another hour at 2AM, so this adds to the confusion.

I wake up at 2:30 for my normal bathroom visit and I check the TV bridge navigation page which shows the time and ship's speed and direction. We are making 20 knots! Hooray. They must have gotten it figured out. The delay is a bit of a blessing as we had set our alarm to get up at 5:15AM in order to get up and dressed and out to see our arrival in Sydney. They had made such a big deal about the iconic harbor with the Opera House most of us are familiar with the Harbour Bridge. The Opera House's Danish architect supposedly got his inspiration from when he was peeling an orange! So, this delay will allow us to sleep in a little longer.



Our first view of the landmarks.

They opened up the forward observation deck which is normally restricted to the crew. It gives an unobstructed view forward for our entrance into Sydney Harbor. It is another beautiful day and there is quite a crowd gathered and more coming as we get closer in. A couple of tugboats welcome us with their water cannons and escort us in.



Quite a welcome. There is also two people dressed up in inflatable Koala bear costumes. I take Sue's picture with them and they are busy doing the same for others.



Link to Sydney welcome:

[https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipN8Uwq2Dc7NS\\_LTdFLWdVzHoXqPrERp2tXN5Q6K](https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipN8Uwq2Dc7NS_LTdFLWdVzHoXqPrERp2tXN5Q6K)

We will be tied up at the OPT, Overseas Passenger Terminal. This is a much desired pier as it puts us right downtown and between the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. This is known as the Circular Quay (pronounced "kee").



The iconic Opera House

I take lots of pictures while we are getting tied up as we have time before we need to meet in the theater to wait to be escorted to the terminal for the mandatory passport and declaration requirement. We are as predicted over two hours behind schedule and by the time we wait in line for nearly an hour, we finally board our tour bus and we leave just before noon for our Discover the Blue Mountain excursion. We originally were scheduled to leave at 9am and return at 5PM.

We make our way through the city and before long we enter NorthConnex tunnel. This tunnel is the longest tunnel I have ever been in. It is 9 km (5.6 miles) long. A twin tunnel with three lanes of traffic in each tunnel. It links the Pacific M1 Motorway to the Hills M2 Motorway. But it is by no means the longest tunnel in Sydney! The WestConnex is 22.4 km (14 miles)! It takes about half an hour to get out of the city and I am somewhat surprise to see all the trees and other greenery, from palms and flowering bushes, ferns and the cream-colored trunks of the Eucalyptus Gum tree. There are also huge Moreton Bay fig trees, also known as the Australian Banyan.

The surrounding area is getting quite hilly and we occasionally pass through towns but they don't slow us down on this M2 Motorway. Not much agriculture going on. probably too hilly for that. Mostly vegetable production, nursery and flora, and poultry, both meat and eggs.

We are constantly climbing and we finally get to our first destination which is a Mountain Heritage Hotel just outside the town of Katoomba.



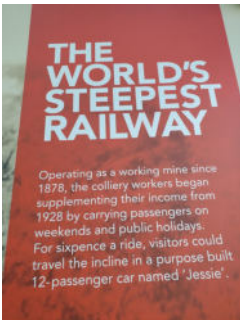
Hotel grounds

It is perched on the a ridge which gives fantastic views of the Blue Mountains and their accompanying valleys. the grounds are meticulously groomed and I can see why it is rated 4.5 Stars. We were given a choice earlier of either baked chicken or rump steak and both Sue and I chose the beef as we find it lacking on board ship. There are three buss loads in our group and they manage to get everyone fed and out the door in about an hour. It was very good, better than anything we have gotten so far on the ship without paying and extra \$65 each to go to Sir Samuels Steak restaurant on board.

We are not far from our next destination of the Scenic World where we will board the steepest passenger railway in the world.



View from Hotel grounds



There is a line of course and after about 20 minutes we board and hang on for the 310 Meter trip down a 52 degree incline to the bottom where there is a series of trails for exploring the Jamison Valley rainforest.

Video link of ride, the first part is dark as we were going through a tunnel:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/p1toapDXrZxs4CZX6>

Our time is limited, unfortunately and I think they may have eliminated some of our options. This used to be the way they got their coal miners down to where the coal mine was. It was of course, much more primitive then and it must have been somewhat of a thrill going to work this way. At the end we are directed to a boardwalk that will take us to where we will catch our ride in a gondola back up to where our bus is waiting.

The boardwalk takes us by the original mine entrance and they have a display of the coal cars used and a bronze statue of a mule pulling a coal car.



There is also a display of the tools used back in the day. The mine was active in the 1880s and operated until the Great Depression forced its closure.



coal cars



coal mining tools

We are the next to last gondola ride back to the summit. We go through the mandatory gift shop and Sue buys a smashed penny souvenir from each of three machines that used to cost two quarters plus your own penny.



Inside the gondola



Now, they provide the penny and you use your credit card to pay AU\$ 3.50 for each penny! I wasn't paying enough attention but I wondered what they were using for pennies. Australia hasn't had a penny coin since 1964.

We are the last to board the bus before we head back toward Sydney. I think they cut out part of the tour because I believe we were supposed to have a gondola ride across Jamison Valley which would have been pretty cool. They do make one more stop at a scenic overlook and we get out and snap a few photos.



Rock formation called "The Three Sisters"

It is 7PM when we arrive back at the OPT and we have a short walk to get back aboard and relax before considering what to do for dinner. We end up at the buffet and each have a quarter baked chicken with soft-serv ice cream for dessert.

Saturday, March 1

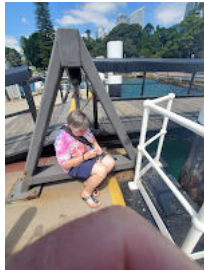
We have a free day today so we take our time and to do a walk-about around the area and do some geocaching as there are several within easy walking distance. Another picture perfect day and it is a Saturday so we share the area with other people taking advantage of the weekend to enjoy all the shops along the various wharfs between the bridge and the Opera House.

A lot of the people are photographing our Queen Anne as she is the dominant figure along this wharf. One cache takes us to the pontoon docks just past the Opera House and there are three Asian fisherman there.

I try to ask if he is having any luck but he doesn't seem to understand what I'm saying. Anyway we find the cache which is magnetically attached to a steel support beam. We sign the log and take a few pictures from this angle of the Opera House, ship and bridge. On the way back there is a park with some very large Fig Trees which has the cache hidden inside the crevice's of the trunk.



Overlooking the Jamison Valley rain forest



Sue signing log



Australian Banyan Fig Tree

I find it but was hesitant to probe around in spaces I'm not sure what is lurking in there to bite me. I do locate it and Sue logs our find and I place it back and something in there brushes my fingers! No bite, but that is always my concern.



White Ibis



View from floating dock



Cache was inside crevice on right



On our way back to the wharf, we visit Cadman Cottage. One of the oldest parts of Sydney, the Rocks has more than 100 heritage sites but Cadman Cottage is the oldest residence. Built by convicts in 1816, just 28 years after the very first British settlers stepped foot in Australia, the design was copied from English pattern books and is widely attributed to the famous colonial convict-turned-architect, Francis Greenway.

As most of us know, convicts from Britain and Ireland were sent here to do hard labor to help develop the area.

I borrowed this from google:

The history of Australian convicts includes the transportation of hundreds of thousands of people from Britain and Ireland to Australia as punishment for crimes. This practice lasted from 1788 until 1868. [🔗](#)

#### How it started [🔗](#)

- The British government began transporting convicts to Australia as a way to relieve overcrowded prisons and reduce the use of the death penalty
- The first fleet of convicts set sail for New South Wales in 1787
- Other convict settlements were established at Moreton Bay (Brisbane), Norfolk Island, and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania)

#### Life of a convict [🔗](#)

- Convicts were forced to work hard, often in manual labor like building roads, cutting timber, and making bricks
- Female convicts often worked as servants or in laundry and cleaning
- Conditions on board the ships that transported convicts were often terrible
- Many convicts died from disease

#### Legacy today [🔗](#)

- It's estimated that 20% of Australians are descended from convicts
- Many prominent Australians are descended from convicts
- The convict era is a complex and controversial part of Australian history

I thought that was worth sharing.

There are a lot of restaurants along the waterfront here and a lot of them have calamari, but we are not hungry since we had a late, large breakfast. Of course there are all kinds of shops as well. Sue is continuously looking for a purple hat to replace the one she has worn for so long and it is time to replace it. But, there are lots of hat of all kinds and colors but none like she prefers. She does however, buy some Koala bear stuff which is in every shop.

We make our way back to the OPT which contains Squire's Landing complete with restaurant and bar. James Squire is evident as his name is on a lot of different beers, including one of Sue's only acceptable beers, ie. Ginger Beer. We order one for her and I get a local lager beer.



We have had enough for one day and make our way back on board as the all aboard time is 4:30. We are looking forward to the "sail out" as it is referred to so we can get some more photos. We will spend tonight and a day at sea before docking in Brisbane.

We normally check the dining room menu before deciding where to eat. It was a good thing otherwise we would have missed an opportunity to try a different meat! Kangaroo! Some of you on Facebook may have seen this post already. Kangaroos are harvested from the wild only. There are no kangaroo farms. The government allows up to 20% of the kangaroo population to be harvested for processing and inspection.



Our Entree choices



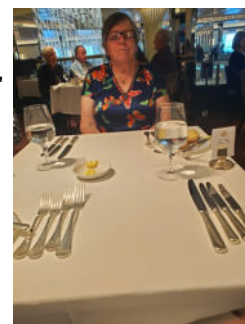
Appetizers and sides

There most always is a meat, fish or fowl and a vegetarian dish to choose from. The meat is most often lamb of some kind, rarely beef, more often pork. You can order more than one entree if you desire, no eyebrows will be raised. But after one or two appetizers, a soup and or salad, one is generally plenty. The kangaroo was very good actually.

I don't know what I expected, but I would order it again. It had a mild beef-like flavor, fine textured and not "gamey" at all.



Kangaroo plated



As you can see by the amount of silverware, I ordered plenty of appetizers and sides

### Sunday, March 1

While at dinner last night, there was talk of the an approaching tropical storm named Andrew. It was expected to be upgraded to a Cyclone and could get winds high enough to make it a Category 4. So we weren't too surprised when our captain came of the ship's intercom and gave us the bad news. Brisbane had shut down their port because of the now Cyclone Andrew. This meant of course that we would not be docking in Brisbane Monday as scheduled. We were very disappointed because we had an excursion booked for the local zoo and Koala bear sanctuary. This may have been our only chance to see a Koala up close and personal as well as a kangaroo. But there is nothing we can do about it and as the Captain said. these things happen while at sea and we just have to work around them. So, we will spend an extra day at sea before visiting Airlie Beach on Hamilton Island, a day earlier than planned. The same goes for our next stop at Cairns. We will however, be spending an extra day in our final Australian port, Darwin.

And indeed, Sunday night was the roughest the sea had been since we got on in New York. The stateroom was continuously creaking and rocking and rolling. But Sue, even though she is battling a head cold, didn't seem bothered by the extra movement. I didn't sleep well myself.

### Monday, March 2

The news is that we passed through and are north of Andrew. At one time, it was a Category 4 and is expected to hit the Queensland coast Thursday. They are still preparing for the expected flooding and high wave damage around the Brisbane area. We are actually in a part of the Pacific called the Coral Sea. That might ring a few bells with some history buffs remembering the Battle for the Coral Sea. It was the first

time since Pearl Harbor that the Japanese advance was checked. The Coral Sea is named because of the predominance of coral and particular, the Great Barrier Reef.

As I sit here on our balcony finishing this up to publish, it is a beautiful calm, sunny day. The Pacific is smooth with little or no white cap activity. We must be in a major shipping lane because we have been seeing cargo and container ships off to our starboard all day.



Getting piloted through the Coral Reefs

I currently count twelve, there might even be more off the port side. Some are heading north like us and some south. We almost always overtake them as their average speed is 14-16 knots where we are doing 20 knots. As I said that, I come to check our actual speed and it is 13 knots! I wonder why that is. Coincidentally, I see a small size boat making its way toward us. And with great timing, our captain makes her daily noon time announcements while at sea, that we have slowed to take on a pilot to guide us through this area. This is because of the shallow waters and coral reefs. So that explained both of my observations. We are now down to eight knots and probably have the pilot aboard.

I hope you are enjoying these ramblings as I try to make them interesting and informative.

I may not have another until after Darwin as we don't have much sea time in between. After Darwin, I will have six sea days before we dock in Hong Kong. A place where I have visited several times in my Navy days and it was my very favorite overseas port. It will be interesting to see how it has changed, particularly since it is back in Chinese control.

Until then....

### Comments:

**03.03.2025: ccyflyer**

Nice read, Dan. Thx

## Airlie Beach, Whitsunday islands, Queensland, AU

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

We wake up just as it is getting light out. We added another hour to our clock last night. So now we are only eight hours ahead of our Iowa time. It is just after 6 am and I don't see any islands yet but there may be some on the port side. We need to be in the Queen's Room at 8:45 to wait to go as a group to the tenders. Transportation is provided by a shore company and they can carry upwards to 500 passengers as opposed to our 150 capacity tenders. So, we shower and head to the 9th deck for breakfast. It is warm already, and the forecast is for 32 degrees C, or about 90 degrees F. We have plenty of time to eat and get back to the stateroom to change into our shore attire. We have booked an "Airlie Beach Highlight" bus tour. A scheduled three hour tour of the surrounding area with commentary from the driver.

By the time we get to the breakfast buffet we are anchored and we can see the populated areas in the distance but we are pretty far out. The town of Airlie Beach at last census in 2021, was just over 10,600. But now, it has nearly tripled! I think probably to the chagrin of the locals. We can see that it is very mountainous and hilly but also very green with vegetation.

Our old friend Captain James Cook, named these islands the Whitsunday Islands after sailing through the area in 1770 because he was passing through them on Whitsunday, a Christian holiday. These islands, all 74 of them, are Australia's largest offshore island chain. They are an extremely popular vacation destination mostly because of the GBR, Great Barrier Reef and all that it has to offer. There were lots of excursions to the GBR but they were all booked by the time we decided to come aboard.

We gather in the Queen's Room and wait for our turn to board these huge catamaran tenders which will give us a 20 minute ride to the docking area. They finally call our number and we board along with what seems to be half the ship. After docking we are herded to our bus, thankfully it is air conditioned as it is really starting to get hot. Our driver is a local who has lived here some 40 plus years. We leave the dock area and through the town of Airlie Beach and into the hilly countryside.

He tells us the mountains above us are part of the Conway Range which in turn is part of the Conway National Park. The forest areas are home to lots of indigenous animals, including tree kangaroos, Koalas and the one of Australia's largest snakes, the Carpet Python.

I never really associated Australia with palm trees but they are here in abundance. Different kinds of course and including a coconut palm which is edible. Gum trees also, which the Koalas like and ferns of all types. There is a orange/red flowering tree which the driver says is the Australian Flame Tree and also an African Tulip tree which is considered an invasive species. All this give a wonderful explosion of color as we travel.

We make our way to Shute Harbour which is a major area for boating and recreation. As we enter the harbor area he stops the bus for a view of the harbor and says that there is a fishing boat that is coming in that has powered wheels and can take itself out of the water over to where it can be loaded on to a conventional trailer. I watch in amazement as this is happening.



Tree kangaroo with baby



fishing boat with powered wheels!

I can't get my camera out in time to video this but I found a link to where my fishing friends can witness this, cut and paste if interested.

<https://www.google.com/search?>

q=fishing+boat+with+powered+wheels&oq=fishing+boat+with+powered+wheels&gs\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATIHCALC8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:3d3ab943,vid:8FBozV\_K37U,st:0

We continue our travels through rural areas where there are some paddies, as our driver calls them. Open areas where there are grazing cattle and cane fields. Yes, cane fields, sugar cane that is. This area is the major source of cane to be turned into sugar. Reminds me of south Texas where there is a lot of cane sugar that the illegal Mexicans hide in during the day. He says that one of the local cattle ranchers is selling off his land for housing development. He doesn't like it of course but there's not much he can do about it. Most of the cattle I see are Brahmans with their distinctive hump and long floppy ears.

We wind our way around through the hills to a place called Shute Harbour.

It is a major water taxi port for traffic going to Hamilton Island which is the jumping off place for Great Barrier Reef experiences. It has a large marina and plenty of larger boats anchored in the bay. A very scenic area.



Shute Harbour

We continue on to Airlie Beach where we have the option to disembark and take a shuttle back to the landing where can get the tender back to the ship.



We have several hours, so we choose to get off and look for a geocache. As soon as we step off the air-conditioned bus, the heat wave hits us. The temperature is in the 90s and being a coastal town, there is high humidity as well. We stay in the shade as much as possible and our



Shute Harbour

GPS takes us to the beach area. They have a large inland pool area complete with lifeguards. Not sure if is fresh water or salt but it is full of younger people having fun.

This area does not have a sand beach. The shoreline is lined with large rock rip rap for erosion purposes I assume. But there is plenty of grassy areas for sun worshippers exposing maximum amount of skin to get that perfect tan.



Pool area

Of course, I didn't pay much attention to any of that. We are geocaching after all.

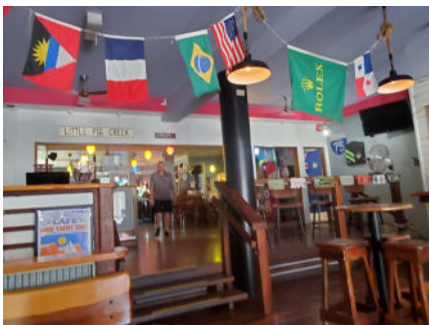
I take a picture of Sue by the Airlie Beach sign and you can see our ship just on top of Sue's hat. That is how far out we were anchored. About 1.7 miles.



Just a few of the sun worshippers

The geocache is located in the rip rap and we look for 10 or 15 minutes. The rocks are so hot you can't stand to have your hands on them without protection and we need to do that as we look around and under them for the cache. It is really hot and Sue is getting a little light headed so she heads for the shade and lays down on the grass. I keep on looking for a while but without any luck. We decide to go back on the main street and grab a cold drink and see if their calamari is any good.

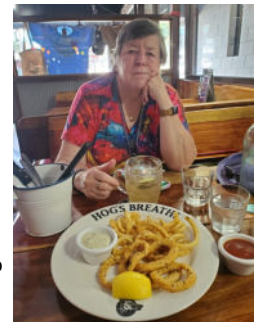
We find a place called "Hogs Breath". It is open aired but there is a nice breeze. She gets a ginger beer and I get a lager called XXXX.



Hogs Breath Bar

Both are very good and refreshing and needed for rehydration. As we have experienced before, when we ordered the calamari, they also bring a large bottle of water that we can pour into smaller glasses they provide. This was welcome as well. The calamari was good, but not up to what we had in Sydney. The bill came to AU\$48 which is about US\$30.

While there Sue was reading over the cache description and she noticed a clue that made us want to go back and give it another look. The clue was a pretty descriptive one and we still had trouble finding it. Finally I stuck my hand clear under one of those 120 degree rocks and felt a piece of paper. It was a replacement log. I'm not sure what happened to the container, but Sue had a zip lock bag that we put it in after signing and dating.



Hogs Breath calamari

Just as a side note, gas here is AU\$1.70/liter, which converts to about US\$4/gallon.

The heat has gotten to us so we go back to the shuttle stop and the timing was great as the bus was just loading to take us back to the landing.

We are some of the first to board this huge catamaran so we are in for a bit of a wait. It is fairly comfortable on the bottom enclosed area which we choose to get out of the sun. It does take about twenty minutes for enough people to come aboard and for another tender to be about to dock.



Catamaran tender

Another 20 minute ride and probably at least 15 for everyone to offload. It is a slow process as everyone has to go through security, empty pockets and run their bags through an x-ray machine. Not to mention using our card to electronically check back in.

It was a fun day despite the heat.

Next stop after a day at sea: Yorkeys Knob



Lower deck of catamaran

**Comments:**

**06.03.2025: blueKat**

We enjoy reading about your travels.

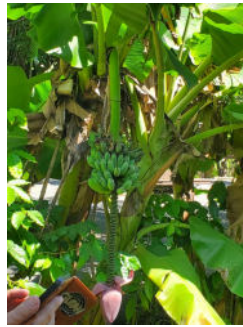
## Yorkeys Knob

This blog should have been posted a couple days ago but just as I was doing some finishing touches on it, I lost it all! I've lost some parts of other blogs before but was able, in most cases to recover them with the undo button. This time however, the auto save feature hit just at the wrong time and everything was gone forever. I was really upset because I had put a lot of time into it. I felt like chucking it all. But, after a couple days of cooling off while at sea en-route Darwin, I decided to do a quick version with mostly pictures.

Video Cut and Paste at the bottom.



We had booked a tour that included a trip to the Baintree Rainforestation. This included a ride in the WWII Army Ducks and time to explore their wildlife sanctuary.



Rainforest bananas

Bullet points from our visit:

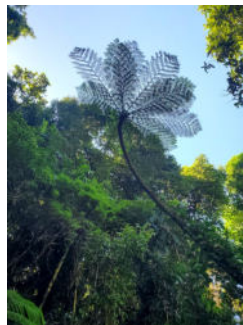
Our Army Duck guide was a Crocodile Dundee look alike.

The Army Ducks were made in Detroit, MI, mostly by women. Over 500 were provided to Australia.

Baintree Rainforest is the oldest in the world, 186 million years old! 10 million more than the Amazon.

Of Australia's 315 mammal species, one-third call Baintree home, including 13 species found nowhere else in the world.

We finally got to see koalas, kangaroos, wombats and crocodiles (and lots of other animals and reptiles) up close.



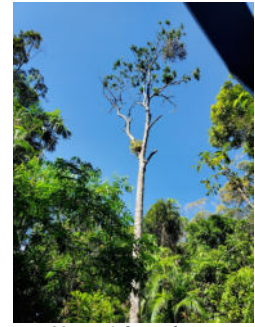
Inside the rainforest



I have a video of this Koala



Our "Duck" guide



More rainforest fauna



Northern Territories Kangaroo



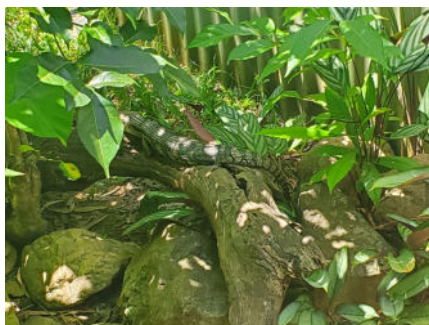
Jungle Carpet Python



Salt water crocodile



Lazy kangaroos



some kind of monitor

### Comments:

10.03.2025: [Licoricetwist](#)

How frustrating for you to lose so much! 😞 Easily done with a slip of the fingers. Is that the same kind of "Duck" they use in a Boston Duck Tour?

I'm excited to have figured out how to open your links! Copy-and-paste doesn't work for me. But when I select it, one of the options instead of "copy" is "Open" - and THAT works. 🙌 Great to get a feel for that rainforest trip, and the guide was witty and entertaining.

22.03.2025: [ccyflyer](#)

Thks Dan.

I'm hoping the below link will enable you to see my very unprofessional videos:  
P.S. It works....but you have to copy and paste.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/EFAPjWm9Bn7BKEnd6>

## Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

March 10, 2025

I've just posted my latest blog after losing it enroute to Darwin. So, I'm composing this on MS Word in hopes that it doesn't happen again.

While enroute from Yorkeys Knob to Darwin, a three-day sea voyage, our steward, Regine, collected our passports (mandatory) to be held until we clear Hong Kong, after first visiting Manila. Not sure why this is necessary, but I didn't like giving up our passports to anyone.

We continue up the NE coast of Australia and turn westerly to get around Cape York which is the northernmost point of the Australian continent in the state of Queensland. The cape juts north-northeast from the peninsula into Torres Strait, which separates it from the island of New Guinea. In my previously uneducated mind, I kind of assumed Australia was sitting out there away from everybody not realizing it had all these close Indonesia neighbors.

We have had great weather again on the seas. One night I was awakened by a thunderstorm, which Sue never heard. But I was sure it happened when I checked outside in the morning and everything was wet from the rain.

We arrived in Darwin, which was named after Charles Darwin, the British naturalist who had sailed to this area in the 1830s while working on his theory of evolution by natural selection.



Don't mess with Crocodile Dandee!



Darwin Wharf

His time here had a key influence on how species adapt to their environments and evolve over time. He, in part, focused on the duck-billed platypus, which I guess is understandable. It was predicted to be another very warm and humid day. And as we left the air-conditioned environs of our ship, we were feeling it.

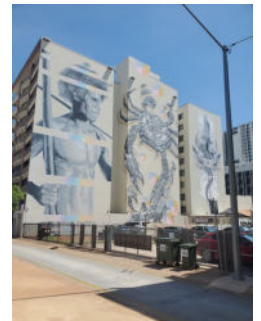
Darwin is the capital city of Northern Territory (NT), Australia. NT is the home of the famous Ayers Rock, but it is located in the SW corner of the territory about 1200 miles from Darwin, so we won't be visiting. When we arrived in Darwin, we set our clocks back 30 minutes. Yes, 30 minutes. We experienced this once before when we were touring St. John's Newfoundland. It is not as uncommon as you might think. There are even a few areas where the time change is 45 minutes. So, we are now 9.5 hours ahead of my home state of Iowa.

We did not schedule any excursions here because none of what was available didn't appeal to us. So, we just planned on going ashore, exploring and doing some geocaching to get a taste of the area. The ship provided a shuttle to the downtown area, a 10 to 15 minute ride. We will

be here two days, one more than originally scheduled to make up for the lost day in Brisbane.

Darwin is not a huge city, it is the capital city of the Northern Territory and has a little over half of the territory's population, about 150,000. Our shuttle drops us off at the Visitor's Center mid-town and we set out to do some Adventure Lab geocaching which takes us around the area to different murals that are present all around the downtown area.

Quite an impressive display actually. We complete the Adventure, but we need a regular type cache to get the Northern Territory virtual souvenir.





So, we head for the nearest one which is in an alley and somewhere in the water main coming up out of the ground. We search and don't seem to find it and an employee of the adjoining store comes out and asks us if we need help finding something. We explain that we are geocachers and she seems to understand. Anyway, she doesn't call the cops and we keep looking and finally find the cache on the other side of the alley, magnetically attached to the underside of a piping system. We earn our NT souvenir!

By this time, we are really feeling the heat which is all of the 91 degrees predicted. We found a sports bar, and Sue gets a ginger beer and I get another XXXX lager that I enjoyed at Airlie Beach. We drink our beer while watching a rugby game and have no clue what is going on.

My hair is way beyond needing to be cut. I found out that it cost US\$59 for a haircut on board. No thank you very much! So, we googled for a barber shop and found one that charged AU\$30. A bargain?? Absolutely! The barber was a Greek immigrant who came here

at 16 and set up his shop. He butchered me pretty much but who cares. He was entertaining and talked about having relatives in Canada and the U.S. I gave him AU\$40 and was happy to do it.

Afterwards, Sue finds a souvenir shop and contributes to the local economy. We wanted to find a grocery store to get some tonic for my G&Ts and some diet Pepsi.

We go into a Coles grocery store and find all that we need. I was originally going to get some peanut butter which I was craving and could not find on the ship. But just before we arrived, I found that they do have it on board if you know where to look. There are several things that I routinely eat at home that are not available here and I find that I'm increasingly anxious to get back home and do my own cooking!

We make our way back to the shuttle bus area and return to the Queen after about four hours of suffocating heat and humidity.

Tuesday, March 11, 2025, Southern Hemisphere

Another day in Darwin and the weather is a repeat of yesterday. Our first order of business was to find the cache just outside the wharf area in a hedge row of meticulously manicured bushes.



Sue contributing

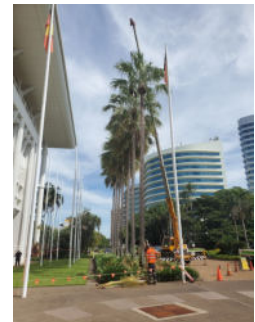


Sue signing the log

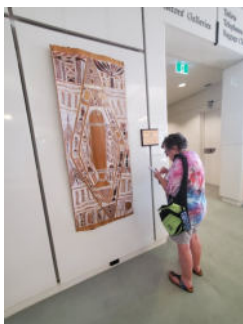
It wasn't where we thought it would be but after listening to Sue read the provided hint, I spotted it straight away (English term, I've picked up along with the Australian G'day greeting). We logged the find and boarded our shuttle back to the mall area where hoards of merchants waited for you to part with your dollars, whatever country you were from.

Sue spotted another Adventure Lab which took us to the NT Parliament House. The Supreme Court building was also located just across the street. The AL was inside the parliament building, and we had to go through security to get inside. It was a beautiful building with nicely landscaped grounds, in fact, a crew was trimming the palm trees located near the entrance.

The AL took us throughout the building requiring answers to questions you had to be there to answer.



A worker is suspended up there trimming!



Inside Parliament House

We took a few photos before heading to the mall district and more shopping.

After another hour or so of looking and looting, we had had enough and walked back to our shuttle area. It was good to get back in the A/C ship and out of the heat and humidity.

This visit wasn't really exciting, but it was a nice break from a busy touring schedule. Darwin has a lot to offer, it was clean, modern and growing. I would visit again.

Next stop: Manila, in five days.

**Comments:**

**13.03.2025: Marge W.**

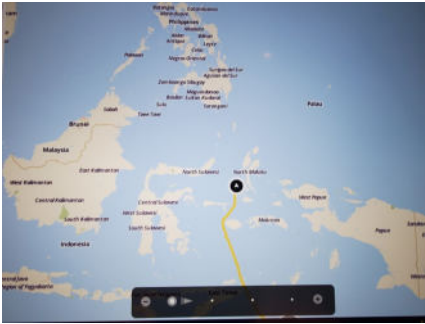


Outside Parliament House

I'm in awe of everything you are seeing and experiencing. Keep the pictures and blog going.

## Enroute Manila, Pirates and Darken Ship

March 11-16, 2025



We left Darwin and headed north through the Timor Sea on our way to Manila. It will take us four sea days and nights to travel through the myriads of Indonesian islands between New Guinea and Borneo. It is nearly 2000 miles as the crow flies, and it must be considerably more as we zig zag through this area. We often see mountainous land masses off the starboard of our balcony. We will traverse the Banda Sea as we skirt the island of Buru east of Sulawesi. Then into the Molucca Sea, around the northeast peninsula of Sulawesi, into the Celebes Sea. I know this sounds like a lot of gobbledegook, but I just wanted to make a point that this area is crowded with islands. Even though the water is deep, the last report was about a mile and a half! Can you imagine what this area would look like if you could drain all the water away! I'll move away from this for now as we are only about halfway to the Philippines and it's 7,641 islands, of which the seven largest islands compose 95% of the land area. Only one-third of the islands are inhabited.

Thursday, March 13

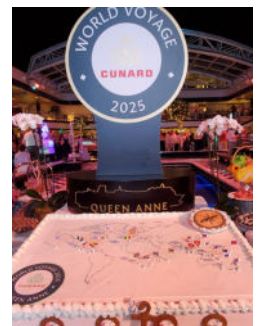
Pretty much a quiet day at sea. We were again invited to join the captain for a cocktail reception complete with hors d'oeuvres, ice sculptures and a large cake that showed the ship's route since leaving Southampton.

These are held in the Panorama Pool section and are for World Voyagers only.

Friday, March 14

Happy Pi day!! We set our clocks back yesterday for 30 minutes, and another hour this morning. So, now we are in sync with Manila time and eleven hours ahead of Iowa time.

Everyone on board has to apply for entry into the Philippines Islands (PI) by filling out the visa form online. And nearly everyone on board is having trouble and they are all showing up at the Purser's office to get help, the queues were so long they moved the operation to an entertainment area. Sue managed to get it done on her phone, but I could not get past a verification step. Come to find out, due to some phone settings, it works better on another phone. So, I ended up using Sue's phone. We must do the same for our visit to Namibia in Africa. Sue can't get this to work, but they won't help until they get everyone ready for PI. So much for the ease of international travel. All countries should be like the U.S. and just walk in!



Our Cruise Cake



Our Captain, in her daily noon announcements while at sea, always gives the UV Index as she warns us to use sunscreen and limit our exposure. The UV Index is divided into five categories from Low (1-2) to Extreme (11 or above).

We have routinely been in the 12-14 range! I have been working on my tan while at sea but try to limit my time to 15-20 minutes on a side. I have been at it a few days and do have some red spots but nothing serious. I normally tan easily and rarely burn under normal conditions, but these are not normal conditions!

We crossed the equator last night although no mention was made of it. They do plan another initiation ceremony, but I think it will be after we reach Singapore. Sue plans on taking part this time to get her Shellback certificate. We passed through the Molucca Sea and will soon be entering the Sulawesi Sea before entering the southernmost islands of the Philippines and the Sulu Sea. Our captain came over the intercom the day before yesterday and informed us that when we approach this area, there would be danger of piracy. It has been a historic hot spot and activity has been on the increase. Indeed, the

original travel schedule for this world cruise included going up the Suez Canal, but due to increased Somali pirate activity, other ports were substituted. Many passengers cancelled after that was announced, but they filled up again. She stated for security reasons, the ship's outside lights that are normally on all night will be shut off. She requested we do not go outside after 9PM and that we close our balcony curtains to maintain darken ship conditions. Other security measures would be taken as well. We do have a security department aboard which I'm sure has access to armaments if necessary. In today's announcement at noon, she again reminded us of those precautions and to be aware of charged fire hoses on the promenade deck. I assume these would be used to help dissuade unwanted boarding. Let's hope they are not needed!

We had signed up to go on a "Behind the Scenes" tour of the ship. This is an escorted tour to areas of ship that are not normally available to guest passengers. It cost US\$120 each but we thought it would be worth the time (estimated three hours) and expense. We were not disappointed.

We were instructed to meet in the Chart Room and were not allowed to take any cameras or recording equipment. In fact, a crew member from security was there to give all 16 of us a going over with the wand. Once cleared, we were issued a badge with ribbon to carry around our neck. Before we left the Chart Room, two actor/dancers from the resident stage performers gave us their history of how they got their jobs and what goes on to prepare for the various productions that continuously change throughout the voyage.

First stop after that was the Forward Mooring Deck where Staff Captain Horsburgh was introduced. This is the area where all the lines are stored for mooring or anchoring the ship while at the pier or anchored in the bay. He said these are all "lines". There is only one rope aboard the ship and that is on the Ship's Bell. Which, by the way, I haven't heard. In my Navy days we heard it all the time as the boatswain mate sounded it every half hour during the day. A deck crew member was on hand to demonstrate how he throws a small line, weighted with a sandbag, (we called this a monkey's fist back in the day) to a waiting shoreman or tug crewman. They in turn haul over the larger line. He does this from a platform that hydraulically folds down from the upper part of the hull. The line is then fed through an open in the hull and secured to large winches that are designed to keep a constant tension on the line to maintain the ship against the pier. This same procedure is repeated aft by another crew in the Aft Mooring Deck. Of course, this can be done from either side, depending on conditions. He pointed out that rat guards are still used, (required), and still effective. I have noticed them, and you may have also saw them in some of the pictures that I have posted. The anchor and chain, which are only present here in forward mooring, serve to keep the ship from drifting while anchored. He explained that the chain itself, when played out to the proper length, plays just as big a role in securing the ship. It weighs much more than the anchor itself. Also, the ship's electronic engineering, using advanced GPS, keeps the ship in position by constantly adjusting the thrusters and azipods (more on these later).

Our next stops were Decks A, B & C which are below Deck 1, the lowest passenger deck and normally off limits to passengers except for certain areas like medical and sometimes to board tenders. Deck C is the only one below the waterline and is obvious by the change in doorways which are designed to maintain watertight integrity in case flooding. These decks are where stores are kept, main food preparation is done, laundry, engineering, medical and crew areas for sleeping, dining and recreation.

The kitchen area was huge! Stainless steel counter tops, ovens, dishwashers etc. I'm sure our visit was timed to arrive at the least busy time. This area serves the main seated Britannia restaurant which they said could potentially handle over 15,000 items passing through during one meal period. They have a conveyor system which can wash, rinse and finally use ultra hot water to sterilize, all in a continuous 2-minute process! As far as returned food waste, they have "pulpers" that grinds all food matter into a fine pulped liquid that can be discharged into international waters, all in accordance with the Maritime Pollution governing body. It is fish food. They have two silo incinerators so that paper and light plastic can be burned. Aluminum, tin and glass is recycled to shore outlets.

We visited the butcher shop where several workers were cutting fish, red meat and chicken. All in separated areas. The provisions area has 21 refrigerated rooms and freezers to work out of. The Inventory Manager, the head of an eleven-man team, is responsible for loading, storage and issuing all the Stores. We replenish at major ports of call, generally around every 12 days on average. Here are some interesting quantities consumed for that time period:

Fresh Fruits & Fresh Vegetables	50 Tons
Meat	Eight Tons
Poultry (Chicken, Duck, Turkey)	Two Tons
Seafood	13 Tons
Dairy Products	Two Tons
Sugar	Two Tons
Fresh Milk	9,200 liters
Eggs	6,300 dozen
Flour	Four Tons
Rice	Two Tons

Can you imagine the logistics of getting this replenishment throughout a 100+ day voyage! Of course, it is preplanned months in advance. But there are always complications. Missing Brisbane due to Cyclone Alfred, for example, all those Stores that were scheduled to be loaded, had to be trucked to our next major port, Darwin. Because the following two visits in Airlie Beach and Cairns, we were anchored and unable to take on Stores.

From there we were given an overview from the ship's safety officer on how his department prepares and trains for different types of disasters that could occur. They train on a weekly basis and have to satisfy different countries' requirements before the ship is permitted to dock. He provided a display of some of their equipment from one of the many lockers strategically placed around the ship.

A visit to the Engineering space was next and it was like stepping into a miniature NASA space center with all the digital screen displays with accompanying control panels. Nothing like you might expect. We didn't get into the actual mechanical room where the four MAK diesel generators are located along with one Caterpillar 12-cylinder emergency diesel engine.

The four MAKs provide up to 12,600 kW of power with the help of two turbochargers for each engine, to operate the ship including the two main propulsion units called Azipods (Azimuthing, electrically driven propulsion pod unit). Yes, we are driven by electricity, not steam nor by mechanical drive train. These two pods can be used independently and have a 360-degree movement.



ABB Azipods

I was somewhat surprised to learn that we are being pulled through the water, not pushed. This is more efficient and the most efficient speed is 12-14 knots. Anything above or below requires more energy. The heat from the engines is captured to be used to provide hot water along with auxiliary boilers. Although disappointed that we didn't get to see the actual power plants, it was very enlightening to learn how modern cruise ships are powered and propelled.



We have four of these!

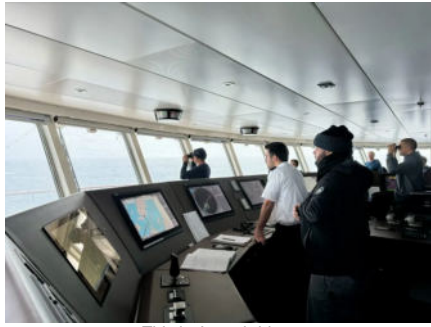
Next was the laundry. This is a very demanding part of the service area as you can imagine with all the staterooms, restaurants, crew and passenger clothes, towels from the various pool areas all demanding to be cleaned daily. I saw one pile of sheets that I'm sure would fill up our stateroom easily. Of course, they have heavy duty equipment to handle it all, but it still is very

labor intensive. Our bed sheets are replaced every 7-10 days and there must be some sort of schedule, so they don't all come at once. Tablecloths are replaced after every use and probably get turned over two to four times for each meal. We are informed that crew members are provided five sets of their particular uniform and are allowed to turn in four items daily for cleaning.

Our last stop was the bridge. It is located on Deck 8. We were met by the Watch Officer who introduced us to the other personnel there, another Deck Officer and a Navigation Officer, a Cadet doing part of her training, and two Able Seamen who are constantly on visual watch with binoculars. The bridge is manned 24 hours per day and is the operational center of the ship. Most shifts are four on and eight off giving ample time other duties and for rest.

The captain's presence is not always required but she is present during busy times (i.e. arrival into port, bad weather or heavy traffic). As expected, this area is quite spacious with continuous windows forward and to both sides. There is an overhanging area port and starboard, called the Bridge Wings, that allows visual sighting down both sides of the ship and a view window on the deck which comes in handy when they are docking.

The fully integrated bridge system comprises a series of sensors and items of equipment including: Gyro Compass, speed log, satellite navigation, radar, echo sounder and ECDIS (Electronic Chart Display and Information System). The information from these sources is all displayed on one user-friendly console giving immediate access to important information. There is also a repeater console located port and starboard. The ship's course is charted on the screen and is capable of fully autopilot operation to follow the charted course. There are



This isn't our bridge,  
but our looked very similar

always different things to deal with to stay on course including wind, ocean current and traffic. Standard rule is to stay a minimum one-half mile away from small boats and a mile for larger ships. It is interesting to note that what controls the ship, i.e. the Azipods, is a little joystick no bigger than a stubby pencil.

Toward the end of our bridge time, the captain appears and comes over and asks how we enjoyed the tour and what we found interesting. Most of us had comments for her and she was very pleasant and visited for about 15 minutes then offered to have our picture taken. One of the ships' photographers just happened to be standing by. She will be leaving us in Hong Kong to go on holiday. This isn't her first command. She was captain of Queen Victoria in 2010. I believe they have a rotating system of captains giving each adequate time off between command assignments.

One final note before I close out this blog. Our cabin steward, Regine is from the Philippines. He is married and his wife is four months pregnant.

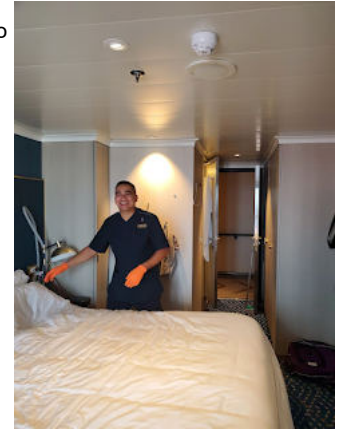
He will be getting time off while we are in Manila, and he is reuniting with his sister, but his wife is unable to travel. He is very accommodating and takes very good care of us. I have been tipping him every couple weeks, but today I gave him a little extra to enjoy with his sister. He shares in the 15% gratuity added to our stateroom cost, but I'm not sure what that really amounts to after it all gets divided up.

More after Manila!

### Comments:

22.03.2025: ccyflyer

Another great report about the ship!



Our steward, Regine

# Manila and enroute Hong Kong

Sunday, March 16



We were a little tardy getting into Manila and spent some time drifting around Manila Bay along with a myriad of other ships and boats. Something about having to wait for the lanes to clear.

Video: <https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipO8GEnlzNknee4h1LHevfMFeJB4wt3uk9lhT0nU>

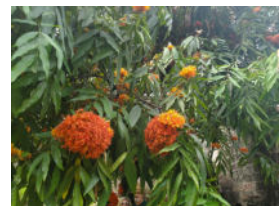
But none of the excursions were delayed to my knowledge. We met our new German geocaching friends, Jan and Dorothy for breakfast to plan our strategy to get a Mystery Cache in order to qualify for a Pi Day souvenir (We had 3 days from 3/14 to get a Mystery Cache). They both speak fluent English and Sue had been communicating with Jan (pronounced yon) to figure out how to solve the puzzle and find the correct coordinates for the hidden cache. We had an excursion scheduled for the morning and they had it free. We decided to meet after our excursion was over at around 12:30 and travel together via taxi to the cache location.

Our excursion included a Kalesa ride, a two wheeled, horse drawn cart around "Old Town" Manila, and a tour of Baluarte de San Diego, a 16<sup>th</sup> century fort and a visit to Rizal Park and finally a rolling bus tour of downtown Manila.



Water cistern

The courtyard now contains a beautiful tree with orange flowers that I think was called Coral Tree. The grounds also had a bonsai tree garden. Some looked in kind of sad shape but they all looked very old.



Coral Tree flowers

We next boarded the Kalesa, a two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage. They are brightly painted and decorated and the ones we had held four passengers. These were the primary mode of public and private transport in the Philippines during the Spanish and

Our first stop was the fort. Built from 1591 to 1594 to protect from invaders. It is shaped somewhat like the Ace of Spades. The most interesting part was the elaborate cistern system built to provide water to the fort and surrounding area. It also had lodging quarters, a workshop and a nice courtyard.



Bonsai Garden

American colonial period.

A couple boarded ahead of us and our driver, Kenzie, had Sue sit opposite them and wanted me to sit up front with him to provide the correct balance. This would help, Wilson, the grey horse pulling us, have an easier time of it.



Kenzie

He offered to take our picture before we started our tour around the Intramuros, the quarter square mile, centuries-old historic district, entirely surrounded by fortifications.



Wilson ready



Coral Tree?



The wall

Kenzie did a nice job of describing the different areas as we passed by. Some of the fortifications had barred areas where prisoners were held, and sometimes mass executions, by the Japanese during their occupation here in World War II.

We left Intramuros, entering Extramuros, which meant anyplace outside the stone wall. He took us around the area which boasted many

colleges and universities. Evidently, Manila is the place to come for higher learning.

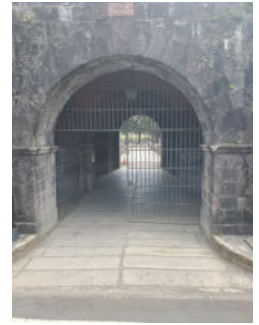


Look at that tangled mass of wires!

Very noticeable in this older section of Manila was the tangled mass of electric and phone lines stretched everywhere. Even worse than what I have experienced in border towns of Mexico. The ride took about 45 minutes, and we returned back where our bus was waiting to take us to the next stop.



Rizal Park



former prisoner area of wall fortification

Which was, Rizal Park and Monument. Jose Rizal is widely regarded as the Philippine national hero. He dedicated his life to advocating for the reform under Spanish colonial rule. Through his published writings, he exposed the injustices of Spanish rule and was influential in the Philippine reform movement.

His remains are contained within the monument which is located just outside the park area which is a lovely area filled with families

enjoying the day. It also contains a geocache, hidden in one of the numerous covered structures built to provide shade. We had to excuse ourselves as we intruded on a couple seated there to step up on the frame to retrieve the cache. Our first in the Philippines!



Jose Rizal Memorial

The next hour was taken up the rolling tour through the downtown area of Manila. I took a few pictures through the bus window, but it was mostly highlighting buildings and parks, golf course and other things I cared little about.

We ended the tour back at the Terminal Building where we were going to meet up with Jan and Dorothy. We waited a bit and Sue shopped at some of the shops there. Dorothy had had enough and wanted to return to the ship.



Jan & Sue

The three of us grabbed a taxi and settled on the price of US\$40 to take us to the geocache sight which Jan figured would take nearly an hour. What geocachers won't do to earn a souvenir, a virtual one at that! The cab ride was an experience. The traffic, although light according to our driver, because it was Sunday, was very chaotic. There were lanes but not many paid much attention to them, especially the motor scooters, which were everywhere! Almost all of them had two people aboard and our driver said a lot of them were taxis. Locals used them instead of cabs since they were more economical. They weaved in and out of traffic, cutting in front of us all the time and riding so close to us, only inches separating them from us and others. If this was light, I would hate to see it during rush hour on a weekday. Manila proper has a population of just under two million, but the metroplex is around 12 million! All trying to get to work, rush hour lasts about three hours he tells us.

It does take the better part of an hour before arriving at our destination and after several attempts to get him to find a place to drop us off, he finally does and of course he will stay in the area and give us a ride back. We find a cross walk to get across the street to where our GPS says the cache should be. The clue was something about tying your shoe but don't get your feet wet. We found a type of water main connection low to the ground up against

a wrought iron fence.

After some clearing away some debris (the cache had last been found in January) I finally found it tucked away underneath the framework for the piping connections. It was a metal bison tube containing the log. We all signed and dated it and replaced it like we found it. We had earned our Pi Day souvenir. Our cabbie was watching from the traffic and was soon alongside. On our way back, we came upon an accident. One of the motor scooter taxis was involved in a crash of some sort and the female passenger was lying in the roadway. There was plenty of help there to divert traffic until she could be taken care of, so we kept on our way. I can't think that this is unusual considering how they drive.



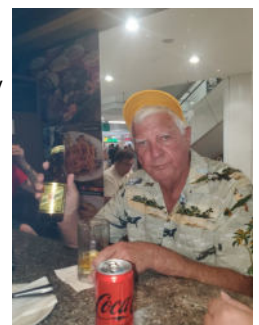
Found it!

We have the cabbie drop us off at Robinson's Mall where the shuttle can be caught to take us back to the ship. It is now around 3PM and none of us have eaten since breakfast. We went into the mall and found a TGIF Fridays. I wanted a San Miguel beer which is what most sailors drank back in the day. Sue had Mojito and ordered something called Crispy Spinach. Jan settled for a diet coke.



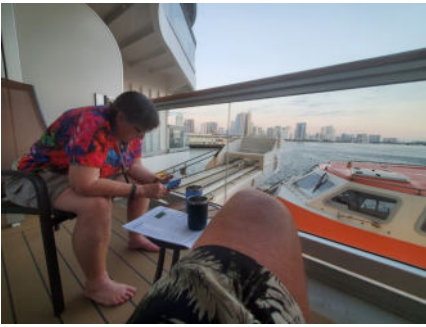
Crispy Spinach

We shared the spinach, which was quite good actually, I may have to try it at home. Jan and Sue wanted to do some shopping, so they left, and I ordered another San Miguel. While they were gone, a man came in a sat not far away and ordered a Hangover Burger. He sounded like an American, so I asked him what that was. He said he thought it was because it is so big it hangs over the side of the bun. Anyway, I asked where he was from, and he said Utah originally, but he now lived here. When he found out I was from Iowa, he said his grandfather, James Braddy, founded a town in Iowa on the Missouri border called Braddyville. (I later verified this on Google). Jan and Sue returned, so we quickly left to catch the shuttle back to the Queen.



San Miguel

Quite a day in all, Sue and I relaxed on our balcony and watched the sunset before exiting Manila Bay, heading for the South China Sea and Hong Kong.



I took a short video of the lighted Manila skyline. I tried to do a narration as well, but I don't think it was picked up.

Video: <https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipMZoiwciY8HbboWDA1xoOtJP89mK0CdB7VnPc9I>

This post was written Monday, March 17th, so Happy St. Pat's Day to everyone. Unfortunately, the weather has made the South China Sea the roughest we have encountered so far. Our stateroom was creaking and rocking and rolling when we got up this morning. Sue was OK through breakfast but as the morning progressed, she got seasick and made several runs to the bathroom. Fortunately, it only lasted a couple of hours as conditions improved somewhat, or she got accustomed to it, she recovered nicely. I'll post a few more pictures from Manila. Next stop is Hong Kong tomorrow. We will lose our internet due to some restrictions from Starlink or Communist China while there.



Through the bus window and wires, Star City's Ferris Wheel overlooking Manila Bay



Sue entering Rizal Park



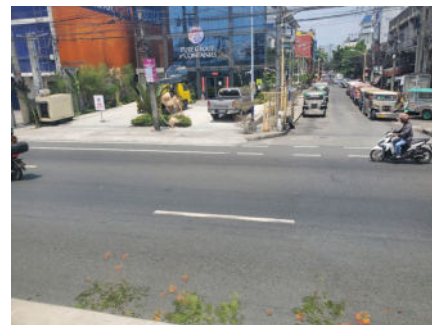
Jollibee...Philippine's fast-food chain they are all over the place, but so is McDonalds!



Jeepney taxi and spaghetti wires



Intersection with more jeepneys and spaghetti



Typical side street

# Hong Kong, revisited

Hong Kong

Tuesday, March 18, 2025



One of many!

As I write this we are currently at sea after a busy couple of days in Hong Kong. I was first here in the late 60s back in my Navy days. We came here several times during my two deployments aboard the USS Chicago for duty off the coast of North Viet Nam. This was my favorite port to visit for R&R (Rest and Relaxation). We would spend several days here while the ship refueled and replenished. The British obtained a 99-year lease over this area in 1898 and kept it until 1997 when it was given back to China. Consequently, there was a lot of English-speaking people here and there still is. I had other things on my mind as a young sailor in his early 20s, but I don't recall it being anywhere near the population it is now!

Hong Kong has over 9,000 high-rise buildings, of which over 4,000 are considered skyscrapers (over 100 meters or 328 ft). There are six that qualify as "Supertalls", i.e. over 300 meters, two more than New York City. Hong Kong has 7.4 million residents with a density of 18,244 people per square mile! Think about that for a minute.



Can you imagine living here?

Hong Kong has more inhabitants living at the 15<sup>th</sup> floor or higher, than any other city in the world! The reason being that flat land is at a premium, so buildings go up instead of out.



More housing.  
Notice laundry hanging to dry

The area generally referred to as Hong Kong, (a "Special Administrative Region") consists of Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories, an area lying largely to the north together with 230 large and small offshore islands. Hong Kong maintains separate governing and economic systems from that of mainland China under the principle of one country, two systems. Many mainland Chinese want to come to experience the freedoms allowed here. They want to come so badly that the government requires them to obtain a visa to travel here which is how they can keep it under control.

We arrive on time and Sue and I are up and about as we cruise slowly through Victoria Harbour into Victoria Bay and alongside the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal on the Kowloon Peninsula. The weather is considerably cooler than what we have been experiencing. Today's highs are only going to be in the upper 60s and there is a possibility of rain but sunny later on. This Terminal used to be the Kai Tak International Airport serving the Hong Kong area, but it was moved to Chek Lap Kok Island just off the western coast of Lantau Island in 1998. That airport is now the world's busiest for cargo traffic and the 8th busiest for passengers. It employs 60,000 people. What this amounts to for us, is a very long walk to even get out of this terminal to get to shuttles or other ground transportation. A 15–20-minute walk.

Our purchased excursion today included stops at four popular tourist areas on Hong Kong Island. After a short drive through Kowloon, we entered the Cross-Harbour Tunnel that would take us under the channel to Hong Kong Island.



Pandas are big here.  
No surprise!



The first stop took us to Hong Kong Park. A very nice eight-hectare park containing, of all things, a Tea Ware Museum which we didn't have time to explore (even if we had cared to).

We did do an Adventure Lab that took us around the park, but we only had 40 minutes there, so we didn't get to see as much as we wanted. They had nice aquatic areas with waterfalls and a Koi Pond which was well stocked. It also had an aviary which we discovered late in the visit so we didn't get to see many birds. One we saw was the rare Great Pied Hornbill. The males average over 6 lbs. and are very colorful and were also very noisy until I tried to get it captured on a video. The park was beautifully landscaped, but the disadvantage was that it was built on a hill and had some fairly steep climbs.

Our next stop was The Peak, the highest point in Hong Kong. It provides 360-degree views of the city and has many shops and restaurants. Our bus wound its way there but many tourists chose to take the tram, but there is always a long queue, and we didn't have the time to wait. We were given another 40 minutes to roam around and take pictures.

The weather had warmed up a little bit but the smog was still evident as we looked around.



Next, our bus took us to Repulse Bay. It has been Hong Kong Island's main swimming beach since the 19th century. It stretches nearly 300 meters and is known for its silky soft white sand.

I remember coming here in the late 60s with my Chinese girlfriend, Lo Mi Ling. You can tell by the fact that I remember her name that she made quite an impression on a young sailor from Iowa. Truth be known; she was probably a Communist Spy! There was not many swimming today due to the cool weather. There



This gives you an idea of the density

was, however, quite a Temple complete with Buddhas, and I saw several Chinese people with incense sticks doing their praying rituals.

Our last stop was Stanley Market. An area where many bargains could be found. We had over an hour here. Sue and I spent half of it looking for a geocache that was at a post office entrance. We just about gave up when Sue finally found it. We signed and dated the log and earned our Hong Kong China



Shopping alley

souvenir. Sue did some shopping and found some fabric to add to her collection.

We got back to the ship about 3:30 which gave us time to have a light lunch before getting ready to attend the captain's dinner on Hong Kong Island exclusively for World Cruise members. We were to be at the shuttle area at 5:30. It was a Gala affair which meant suit or tux for the men and gown equivalents for the ladies. We joined a long line of well-dressed passengers making their way to the shuttles. It was about a 45-minute ride to Hopewell Hotel that was hosting the event which I believe was about halfway up the drive to Victoria Peak where we had been earlier in the day.



Repulse Bay beach



Enjoying wine and canapes before dinner

The bus dropped us off at the lobby of the hotel, which oddly enough was on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor. We took the elevator to the 19<sup>th</sup> floor for the reception and dinner. in the Grand Ballroom. Soft drinks or red and white wine were provided by the staff which seemed to number in the hundreds. We were entertained by a four-piece quartet with Chinese sounding music. The crowd kept getting bigger and bigger and I wondered how many world club people were in attendance. Our reservation said we would be seated at table 99. In search of our table I did notice that there was a table numbered 107 and with each table seating 12 guests, there were nearly 1300 people attending. The wine kept flowing and there was entertainment up front with acrobats and dancers. Quite the show! We enjoyed the four-course dinner with the entrée being a wonderful beef filet. Better than anything we

had experienced so far on the ship.



Entertainment



Our table

Sue got in line for a gift of hand-held fans that an artist was inscribing our surnames into Chinese characters.

They had several stations doing this, but Sue was in her line for 45 minutes before finally getting our names inscribed just as the dinner chimes were sounding for everyone to take their seats. This was around 8PM, late for us.

We left shortly after dessert along with others, but there still were a lot of people remaining. With the bus ride back and the long walk, it was after 11PM by the time we got to our stateroom, tired, full of food and wine and ready for bed!



Personalized fan

Wednesday, 19 March

Since we had no excursions planned for our 2<sup>nd</sup> day in Hong Kong, our geocaching, well-travelled friends invited us to join them on a journey to see the Tian Tan Buddha located on the Island of Lantau. They had been there on a trip six years previous but wanted, I think, to give us the experience as well. Which we much appreciated as Jan had meticulously planned everything out which we would have had no clue how to do. He even purchased a travel pass for us that cost US\$20 each for an "Elder" pass which was good on buses, Ferrys and subway/trains. They called it an Octopus Card.

We met early for breakfast, and I was a bit hungover from the previous night's wine fest. We agreed to meet at the gangplank at 8AM to catch the shuttle bus to downtown Kowloon, then walk to the ferry terminal to go to Hong Kong Island, only to catch another ferry to take us to Lantau Island where the Tian Tan Buddha was. After the ferry, we needed to catch the Number 2 bus to take us to the Buddha. But we had about an hour before it was scheduled to leave, so we found a restaurant to get refreshment. I had a coffee; Jan had his Coke, and the girls got a fruit slurry of some kind that looked and tasted very good. While we were there, we asked to use the restroom, and it turned out to be quite an experience. The restrooms were outside and down and alleyway. The waitress gave us a key with a medallion on it that was needed to open the door using a sensor pad. For the men, it provided access to several urinals but the ladies, as reported by Sue, got you into a room, but she then had to use the key to open the #7 stall which was assigned to this restaurant.

We left just in time to catch what turned out to be a local bus making multiple stops along the way to let people off and others to get on. We continued up the mountain, along the curvy road which took nearly an hour. It provided a look at the area with a more rural setting. The couple of small towns we went through had multi-family housing but not the huge skyscraper-type buildings associated with the flatlands. We even saw some water buffalo grazing alongside the road. On our way we noticed Big Buddha perched on a distant mountain.

We arrived and went through the welcoming gate onto a courtyard adjacent to the stairway leading up to the Tian Tan Buddha. In the courtyard was the Twelve Devine Generals, aka Twelve Heavenly Generals. Each one represents a sign of the Zodiac.

We googled what sign our birth year occurred, mine was the Year of the Dog, Sue was the Year of the Rat and Jan and Dorothy were both Year of the Rooster.

We had fun finding "our General" and posed trying to imitate what the general was doing, including facial expressions.



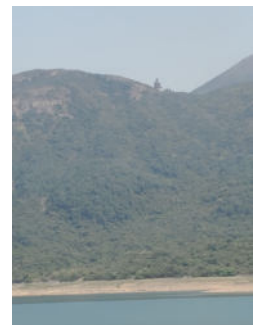
Sue's General



Imposing climb!



"My" Zodiac General



Big Buddha from a distance

From the bottom looking up at the buddha, was a little imposing. The climb consisted of 268 steps! But we would take our time and rest when needed. And it was needed, about three times! Once on top and looking at the 250 metric ton, 112-foot-high bronze buddha, I felt the

climb was worth it.

The statue symbolizes the harmonious relationship between man and nature, people and religion.

He is attended by six smaller bronze images known as "The Offering of the Six Devas" that are pose offering flowers, incense, lamp, ointment, fruit and music to the Buddha. These offerings represent the "Six Perfections" of generosity, morality, patience, zeal, meditation, and wisdom, necessary for the "Enlightenment of Life". The Buddha's right hand is raised, representing the removal of affliction, while the left rests open on his lap in a gesture of generosity.

The views were spectacular at this height, and we were blessed with another beautiful day I took advantage of the opportunity to take more photos.

The bonus was that there were two caches located here. A traditional cache and a Virtual. The Virtual required a picture be posted with the find to show you were actually here. The traditional cache was hidden alongside a path to one side of the Buddha.



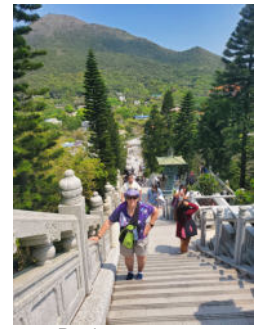
View from cache

All four of us looked for about ten minutes without success before Dorothy found it hidden behind a rock just off the path.

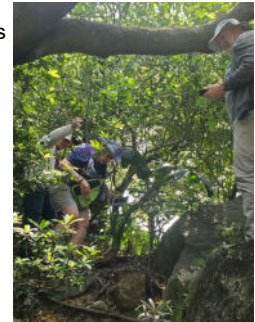
Back down stairway there was a plaza that contained a gift shop of course and a restaurant and further along a temple where incense could be burned along with your prayers.

The Tian Tan Buddha is an extension of the Po Lin Monastery, which we walked to and was able to visit certain areas and take some pictures. Other areas were

closed to us. I did not see a Monks while we were there. I believe these are the Monks that forged the 202 pieces of bronze to form the Big Buddha. The colors and architecture of the Main Shrine Hall of Buddha, and Hall of Bodhisattva Skanda were very impressive.



Resting part way up



Looking for cache



Hall of Bodhisattva Skanda

We were getting a little hungry, so we stopped at a vegetarian stand and Sue and I shared Fungus Fried Noodle dish which we assumed contained mushrooms, and Jan got something I had no idea what it was. (I don't think he did either!) Dorothy declined anything.



Where's the fungus?

We were provided chop sticks and a porcelain spoon. I need more practice with the sticks, but I managed to get my share even though there was not much fungus!

There is a Tram that we could have taken to get to this summit, but it was down for maintenance. This is why Jan opted for the local bus system. We are actually in the village of Ngong Ping and we need to take the No. 23 bus to Tung Chung where we can get on the Mass Transit Railway (MTR).



Having fun while waiting for MTR

This would take us down the Lantau Peninsula, underwater to a smaller island, transfer to another train, underwater to Kowloon, transfer to another train to our destination near where our shuttle bus would take us back to the Kai Tak Terminal. I think I got that right and thank you Jan and Dorothy for planning this adventure. I would not have attempted it on my own.



Aboard the MTR

The MTR ride was an experience in itself. Nice clean trains with no graffiti present. Very crowded with people coming and going as you would expect. Like in the U.S., most everyone had their heads buried in their cell phones. Seats were at a premium and we were often offered by someone younger to take their seat, which was appreciated.

After our last ride, we had no need for the Octopus travel card and Jan said we could get a refund for whatever we did not use. So after some searching we found the customer service kiosk and we actually got HK\$170 back which was about US\$20 for our two cards which meant we did all this travelling for US\$10 each!



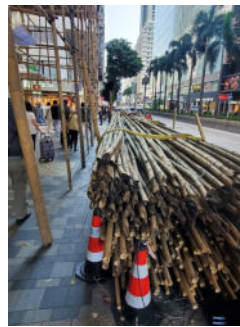
All bamboo

We had a bit of a walk from the train station to where our shuttle bus was but it gave me an opportunity to take a couple pictures of the bamboo scaffolding, they use here almost exclusively.

I did notice a couple places where steel rods were used but those sitings were rare. It is amazing to me how this is accomplished. The tape wrap they use must be reinforced somehow and strategically tied in a way to safely secure everything together.



Securing wrap



Bamboo stack



Under scaffolding

We had some time before they pulled up the gangplank to find a couple caches that were hidden on the elevated decks of the terminal building. These areas contain a restaurant and other shops and were handsomely landscaped. It also gave us an excellent view our sister ship, the Queen Elizabeth which was docked just forward of us.



Queen Elizabeth with Hong Kong Island in the background

She had just come from Vietnam and will stay here overnight, then head for Manila. It did take some searching, but Dorothy again came up with the find and we signed and dated the log. The other one was too far away, and we needed to get back aboard.

It was a great day traveling with our friends and we are indeed indebted to them for taking us along. But it was also very busy and we are looking forward to a couple days at sea to rest up and recuperate for our next adventure in Vietnam.

**Comments:**

**22.03.2025: Jan Rüten-Budde**

It was a pleasure to share this experience with both of you. Thank you for this excellent report!

# Vietnam, a disappointing return

March 22, 2025

We had set our alarm for 5:30 because we had an early excursion which we were to meet on the pier at 7:20. It was dark as I went out on our balcony but could make out some ships offloading their containers. We proceeded up the Thi Vai River to the port of Phu My. This is the port that cruise ships use to tour Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, and beyond. Saigon lies some 40 miles and about 45 minutes to the northwest. As it got lighter, we could see tall buildings in the distance through what could only be described as smog.



Our first Pagoda siting

We managed to find our bus, one of more than 30 that were waiting on the pier. Our guide "Victor" said we had 31 in our group. The bus was arguably the finest we had ridden on so far. Complete with power hookups for our phones.

We travel through a section of town before breaking out into some rural areas complete with rice fields, some freshly growing, others brown from recent harvest.



Victor

We passed impressive pagodas, tiered towers with multiple eaves built for religious purposes. We would see many throughout the day. Another striking feature was in contrast to other Asian cities and towns we visited was the amount of trash that could be seen everywhere. But what I will remember most about bus ride was the amount of motor scooters that surrounded us at all times. They are everywhere and all about the same size, 125 cc. Below is a video.



[https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKlZnrZXcMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipPYNQzUcZETC0-1xltEsQlpnDfODTvOxU-jw\\_Cq](https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKlZnrZXcMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipPYNQzUcZETC0-1xltEsQlpnDfODTvOxU-jw_Cq)



95% of all register vehicles in Vietnam are scooters or motorcycles. You see as many as four people, mom, dad and a couple kids, but most often, there are two. And, you see them with single drivers with cargo tied on the back of all types. From cages of live chickens to furniture and everything in between.

Our tour is "Countryside and Cu Chi Tunnels". It is scheduled to last eight hours. We are getting the countryside part as we travel toward Saigon. It will take us well over two hours of drive-time to reach our destination. We enter the city and the traffic is horrendous by Charles City standards. I took some videos, I hope I can show them.

Video below:

<https://photos.google.com/u/0/photo/AF1QipNLspuJabZP66TBb4PqhbWMEli8EzeQ4GerqB4z>



Waiting at a stop light

There are individual shops one after the other, all through the city. They generally sell just one type of item like brooms, clothes, phones, appliances, or furniture, none of them very big and undoubtedly family run.

There are many little restaurants, with or without seating. And stands selling BBQ chicken and other indescribables, soft drinks or snacks of some sort.

They should call this the "City of 2, 3 and 4 letter words! As we view the signage, very seldom is there a word over 4 letters! Occasionally you might see one, but it seems this is like their spoken language as well, very short and staccato-like.

When we get toward the center of Saigon, we cross the Saigon River. It originates in SE Cambodia and flows southeasterly for about 140 miles before emptying into the South China Sea. It was dammed up in 1985 for irrigation purposes. It is the main water source for Saigon's 9.3 million inhabitants (larger than NYC's 8.5 million!). We start to see some skyscrapers and business buildings. One exceptionally tall building is Landmark 81. It stands 461 meters and features luxury apartments, shopping centers, restaurants, and an observation deck. It is the second tallest building in Southeast Asia.





Landmark 81 on the left

We also go by Tan Son Nhat International Airport. This airport was originally built by the French in the 1930's, near the village of Tan Son Nhat which was, at the time, far outside of the city limits. It was occupied by the Japanese during WW2 which used it for a transport base. After the war, the French reclaimed it and became the Army's headquarters in 1956. The U.S. continually upgraded and expanded it and by 1968, it was one of the busiest airports in the world. It was one of the last dominos to drop before the fall of Saigon in 1975. It has reached it's capacity and a new airport, Long Thanh International Airport, is under construction 40 km outside Ho Chi Minh City which will accommodate up to 100 million visitors annually to this area.



Artist working with shells

It takes us well over an hour to get through the city and to our first stop for restroom and stretch break. It is at a place where handicapped people make artistic items for sale. Most of them pictures or plates with designs incorporating egg and oyster shell pieces (tiny pieces for the most part).

We are encouraged to support them and Sue, and I do by purchasing a dish that has both types of shell incorporated in a nighttime scene. It cost VND (Vietnam Dong) \$1,100,000! FYI, US\$1 = VND\$25,605. They need to do some serious downsizing of their monetary system.



We finally got to our destination and can see by the mass of tourist buses that this is going to be a busy place. We follow him as he tries to explain different areas to us but it is a losing battle as other guides are dominating the displays and doing their own explanations. We can only listen to what they have to say and try to get a glimpse through the crowd as to what he is talking about. What it amounts to is they have set up different areas to show the design of the elaborate tunnel system which was the Viet Cong's way of infiltrating Allied forces without being detected. They built this system of tunnels by hand with a right-angle spade and a wicker basket to haul it out.



spade and basket

I borrowed this from the internet:

"In order to combat better-supplied American and South Vietnamese forces during the Vietnam War, Communist guerrilla troops known as Viet Cong (VC) dug tens of thousands of miles of tunnels, including an extensive network running underneath the Cu Chi district northwest of Saigon. Soldiers used these underground routes to house troops, transport communications and supplies, lay booby traps and mount surprise attacks, after which they could disappear underground to safety. To combat these guerrilla tactics, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces trained soldiers known as "tunnel rats" to navigate the tunnels in order to detect booby traps and enemy troop presence. Now part of a Vietnam War memorial park in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly

Saigon), the Cu Chi tunnels have become a popular tourist attraction.

#### Digging the Cu Chi Tunnels

Communist forces began digging a network of tunnels under the jungle terrain of South Vietnam in the late 1940s, during their war of independence from French colonial authority. Tunnels were often dug by hand, only a short distance at a time. As the United States increasingly escalated its military presence in Vietnam in support of a non-Communist regime in South Vietnam beginning in the early 1960s, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops (as Communist supporters in South Vietnam were known) gradually expanded the tunnels. At its peak during the [Vietnam War](#), the network of tunnels in the Cu Chi district linked VC support bases over a distance of some 250 kilometers, from the outskirts of Saigon all the way to the Cambodian border."



They had displays of most of the kinds of "booby traps" set for the GI's. I tried to get pictures of most of them but they hurried us by so fast, it was a challenge.

I'll post what I can. Victor pointed out a sizable crater which he said was from a bomb dropped from a B-52.

When we finally got to where we could get down in the tunnels, time was getting short and they only allowed us to travel to the first exit point, which showed absolutely nothing except how

Punji stick trap

confined and small they

were. I understand, to accommodate the average tourist, they even enlarged them somewhat.



Sue taking a "selfie" in the tunnel

So, after discovering crawling on hands and knees was preferable to "duck-walking", what I would guess was not more than 30 yards we were forced to exit. Very



The person ahead of me entering the "enlarged" tunnel



Man traps



Punji Sticks, sharpened bamboo covered with urine or feces to infect whoever was unfortunate to step/fall on them.

disappointing! I was hoping to see sleeping areas, cooking areas and more, all of which was supposedly available further on and at lower levels. Most everyone started down the tunnels but some, after seeing how confining they were, excused themselves and did not go in.

When everyone was accounted for, they herded us over to where you could fire 50 caliber machine guns. I had no interest in that but there were several that did. So, while they did that, we took advantage of the snack and beverage area to purchase a local beer.

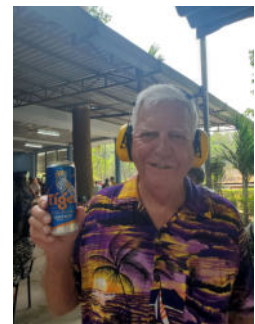
They didn't have a ginger beer for Sue, so she chose a soft drink of some kind. The 50 caliber rounds were so close they provided ear protection of people waiting which we took advantage of. The beer was very inexpensive, under US\$2.00.



We bused to our next stop, lunch at a large covered but open-air pavilion. It was a seven-course meal highlighting Vietnamese food. We had two vegetarians at our table who got a different meal which meant more of the meat and seafood offered for us! And on it came. It was all very good; chopsticks were provided but unused except for the Japanese gentleman across the table who had an enormous appetite as it turned out. As you can see from the menu, it was a nice variety and all very tasty.



Menu



Enjoying a Tiger beer

We left full and satisfied, ready for the return trip, retracing our way back through Saigon. Victor remained quiet, which we all appreciated since he was a talker, we enjoyed the break. It is a scheduled 2 3/4 hour ride, but we encountered an accident or something mid Saigon and went nowhere for about 45 minutes. We were going to be late getting back. Since it was a ship sponsored trip, we were not too concerned. We were due back at 4:30, all aboard was for 5:30. We did not get back until just after 6PM! A long day, and there was even another bus arriving as we were waiting to board.

We have one day at sea, then a series of port calls in Singapore and Malaysia, starting with an overnight in Singapore. We will be very busy, so there will be no more blogs until I can create something on our six-day voyage to the nation island of Mauritius.

### Comments:

25.03.2025: Marge W.

What an experience!!!!

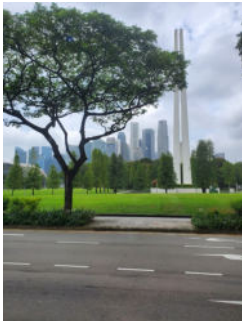
## Two days in Singapore

Two days in Singapore, March 24, 25



Marina Bay Sands Hotel  
over right shoulder

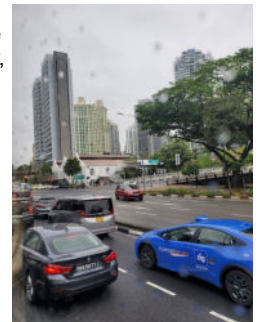
We arrive in Singapore after a two-night voyage from Vietnam. I was here 55 years ago as a young sailor and I remember we had quite a difficult time finding any taverns. I think the same applies today. It is an extremely clean city/state/country. It is all the above! It is the largest port in Southeast Asia and one of the busiest in the world. It was once a British colony but seceded to become an independent state in 1965. It is known for its multi-cultural society, with four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil.



Rain Tree with War  
Memorial "Chopsticks"  
in background

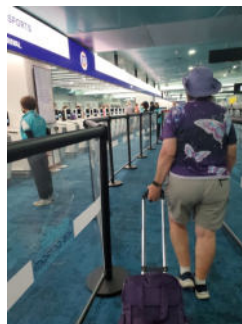
Only 5% of residents have a private residential home. 10% live in condos and 90% live in public housing (high-rise). It was voted the world's best place to live in 2015. Today, it is one of the world's most densely populated cities with more than 3 million people living in 600 square kilometers (about 232 square miles).

The government wants to discourage car ownership and promote public transportation, so they require residents who want to purchase a car to apply for a COE, Certificate of Entitlement. This, when approved, entitles you to purchase a vehicle. It costs upwards of US\$75,000! Just for the right to buy a car. Can you imagine if they would try something like this in the U.S.?



Street scene from bus

When we left the ship, we were given our passports back as we had to carry them with us here. Going through security was the most intense we had seen so far. First, we had to put our possessions through an xray scanner like in airports, then we had to insert our passports in a scanning machine, then we had to be photographed, and our thumb print scanned!



Sue waiting to be scanned.



Offloaded baggage

Good grief! This was just to get out of the terminal. Who knows where all this personal information goes from here. We often have to scan our bags when returning to the ship but this is the first time we were required to do it when leaving.

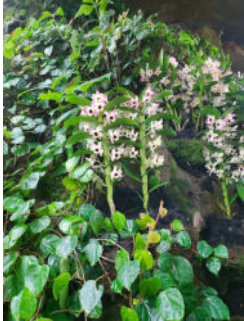
This is one of the major on/off ports for the Queen Anne. We will say goodbye to around 1,000 guests and say hello to a similar amount. The ship will offload your luggage from your stateroom if you wish and I took a photo of the offloaded bags as we came down the escalator.

After boarding our bus finally, our first stop on day one was at the



National Orchid Gardens.

It is a wonderful place full of flowers and plants, mainly orchids but much else. It even had an enclosed "cool house" that housed orchids and other flowers that prefer the higher elevation and cooler temperatures. It would be an orchid lover's paradise.



We toured around the city and were allowed free time to shop at a market area. The weather had been threatening rain and we often had to find shelter to keep from getting soaked, but the showers never lasted more than 5 or 10 minutes.

the showers never lasted more than 5 or 10 minutes.



Sue wanted to check out a temple that I had no interest in, so she left, and I shopped around the market area for a while then it started to rain again. I found a place that sold beer, and I purchased a 20oz, Tiger and it cost nearly US\$9! This is part of their "sin tax" to discourage alcohol consumption.

Singapore has a low crime rate somewhat due to their mandatory caning law that is still in effect for 35 different crimes. Convicted criminals of these offences undergo the cruel, humiliating act of being struck by specially prepared bamboo sticks that take from a week to a month to recover from. Some of you may remember an incident from 1994 when an American teen, Michael Fay, was convicted of a vandalism act in Singapore and was sentenced to imprisonment and caning. It became an international event that made world- wide news.



Street scene with shops

The tour took us to several areas that gave us some photo ops of the area but overall, it was a disappointing day because of the weather and what we thought was a below average tour guide.

Video, Singapore at night from the Queen: <https://photos.google.com/u/0/photo/AF1QipMx1jcs9piGmrjPKYPyIRZBbyCmlIGbJkhqdOAjC>

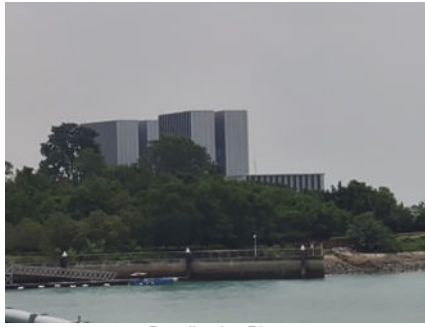
March 25, 2025

Today's forecast is better than yesterdays, so hopefully we will stay dry. Our first hour is a city tour which takes us by the Raffles Hotel, famous for the origination of the alcoholic drink "Singapore Sling".

It was invented int 1917 for the benefit of the ladies, who at the time were only allowed tea or fruit juices. So a guy by the name of Ngiam Tong Boon, invented this alcoholic drink that looked like a fruit drink. The ladies were happy. If you care to purchase one there today, it will cost you US\$26!



Raffles Hotel



Desalination Plant

Our bus then took us to a large reservoir formed by damming up the Singapore River before it drains to the sea. Singapore has a problem of providing enough fresh water for their millions and this was one answer. In sight of the reservoir was a huge desalination plant that is one of five that they have on the island to help provide fresh water.

Next stop was the Marina Bay Sands Casino Hotel, built with Las Vegas money and is one of Singapore's landmarks. It consists of three towers connected on top by what looks like shallow boat. (See opening picture above.)



Sue with checking out the harbor



Looking up at the 56th floor observation deck of the Marina Bay Sands Casino Hotel

Visitors like us can take the elevator in tower three to the 56<sup>th</sup> floor and go out on the observation deck for a nice view of the city.

Built in 2010, the \$7 Billion dollar hotel has 2,200 rooms which I am told are almost always 100% booked. There is also an iconic infinity pool located on the SkyPark, available to guests only. There are four floors of casino entertainment of all kinds.



2nd level of observation deck, the portion that bends out has the Infinity Pool

Locals have to pay an entry fee of SD\$150 to gamble. Another effort by the government to discourage gambling. A tower #4 construction has started indicating the success of this project.



Singapore Flyer, it seems like every harbor city has one



Green area is Gardens by the Bay, our next stop, the two glass domes is where we will be visiting. Notice the ships in the harbor

Video atop Tower#3:

[https://photos.google.com/u/0/search/CgZWaWRib3MicCBIGCgQqAggBKNKTy9ndMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipPAukr4tIYkP9-mbcCGRNlw3ZDWWATpl\\_Wq\\_3VL](https://photos.google.com/u/0/search/CgZWaWRib3MicCBIGCgQqAggBKNKTy9ndMg%3D%3D/photo/AF1QipPAukr4tIYkP9-mbcCGRNlw3ZDWWATpl_Wq_3VL)

Our last stop of the day took us to Gardens by the Bay. A major tourist attraction that was voted 8<sup>th</sup> best attraction in the world by Traveler's Choice. It has ten areas that tickets can be purchased for, and our time and tickets limited us to just two, the Flower Dome and Cloud Forest. I doubt it all could be seen in one day. I'll let the pictures give you an idea but needless to say it was impressive what little we did see. They are open until 9PM and the nighttime, colored lighting is spectacular from pictures I have seen.



Borrowed from website



View of the Marian Bay Sands from inside Flower Dome



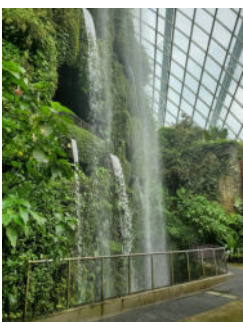
They like elephants in Singapore



Those are walkways up there!



They like dragons just as much as elephants



Indoor waterfall

Video of waterfall: <https://photos.google.com/u/0/photo/AF1QipPLrbt0-7JMKpTk3f2en09YJLTb9g5a5g0pyj-E>

Video of water activated  
gongs: <https://photos.google.com/u/0/photo/AF1QipNKD8DEiHRRVNPIdBNtnNmrZi3V3tnBHMirvSng>



Chinese lantern display

Beautiful!



How did they transplant this?



Bottle Tree



Seen a lot of these in Texas!

Next stop: Port Kelang, Gateway to Kuala Lumpur

## Port Kelang, Gateway to Kuala Lumpur

Thursday, March 26, 2025



A three-master docked alongside

After a quiet night at sea, we awoke to our Queen edging up to the pier at Port Kelang, the gateway to Kuala Lumpur just 20 minutes distant. We were recovering from a busy two days in Singapore and our tour today was to a museum, local drive around with photo stops and finally another observation tower. Things seem to be getting a little repetitive!

This area was built on its tin mining starting in the 1800s along with its rubber production. These were the two natural resources that made it such a desirable place for the British to command. Its history, like most of the place we have visited, consists of British rule, Japanese occupation during the war, then back to British control, then independence.

Our first stop was the museum with two floors sectioned off into four areas to display: Early History, Malay Kingdoms, Colonial Era and Malaysia Today.



An early rickshaw

I'm not much of a history buff but I did try to visit each of the areas in the time allotted. Sue was busy trying to complete an Adventure Lab. I'll post a few pictures but for me it was mostly, Ho Hum.

Our excursion included a buffet, Malay style, that turned out to be the highlight of the day. It was at one of the large hotels downtown and they were ready for us and several other bus loads. They had several stations set up to visit and sample and all were local delicacies. I especially enjoyed their version of asparagus soup along with their fried bread, roti canai. It was a treat to sample everything and we both left stuffed and satisfied. I promised myself that I would try to duplicate this fried bread when I get home.



Our last stop was at the KL Tower. This tower used to be the tallest in Malaysia until the nearby Petronis Towers were built three years later. It features a revolving restaurant, and it reminds me of our

Seattle Space Needle.

They have an international competition each year to see who can climb the 1608 steps, 292 meters (958 feet). Last year saw 1,500 participants from 15 countries compete. It's called the KL Tower International Towerthon Challenge. They have different categories of participants and award prizes for each. Last year saw participants ranging in age from 11 to 73 years old.

Another prominent building here is the Petronas Twin Towers. A pair of skyscraper office buildings that are among the tallest buildings in the world. Each tower is 88 stories tall reaching a height of nearly 1500 feet. A two-story skybridge connects the two towers between the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> floors. An impressive sight to be sure.



Tower view of Kuala Lumpur

It was a fun day, not too stressful and we returned to the ship and managed to score a virtual cache to give us credit for visiting Malaysia.

I apologize for not doing justice to this wonderful city. I neglected to take pictures that would have been of interest. I'll try to do better.

Next stop: Penang, Malaysia



Petronis Towers

March 28, 2025

I'm sitting on our balcony, the morning after our sail away from Penang, Malaysia. I would have liked to start the blog after returning to the ship while things were fresh, but I just wasn't in the mood. I'm trying to get in the mood now. The sea is fairly quiet as we are about to exit the Straits of Malacca and go around the northern tip of Sumatra than proceed southwest, crossing the Equator for the third time, on our way to the island nation of Mauritius. We will change our clocks back one hour four times on the six-day voyage across the Indian Ocean.



Dragons "protecting?" the world

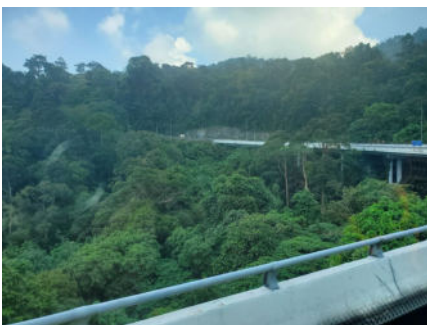
March 27, 2025, Penang, Malaysia

As we left the ship, ladies in burkas were handing out welcome gifts consisting of a nice souvenir shopping bag, hand fan, Malaysian notepaper, a local snack and a bottle of water.

We boarded bus #10 for our excursion which would take us around the perimeter of the island which makes up half of Penang. The other half is just across channel on the extended peninsula stretching down from Thailand to the north. The island half contains the capital city of Georgetown, a city of 2.84 million and the second largest metropolitan area in Malaysia. We were glad to leave the city and get into a more rural area.



Welcome gift



Mountain road

It is very mountainous here and the roads are narrow for our tourist bus to negotiate. Complete with hairpin turns and sharp corners, traffic, which there was not that much of, often had to stop to accommodate the bus.



I think the greenery area is a parking garage

Penang is the first country we have visited that the major religion is Islam. This is evident by the many mosques we encountered on our travels. Every

settlement of any size had one and most women wore burkas. There are, however, other religions permitted. With Muslim being just under 46%, Buddhist, 36% and small percentages of Hindu and Christian, Penang is unique among Malaysian states in that no single religion commands an absolute majority.

Muslims pray facing Mecca five times a day: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark. I didn't hear the call to prayer during the day, probably because we were in the bus, but I did hear it from my balcony, once we got back to the ship.



Small village mosque

The major race is Chinese, Malay and Indian, which has been a common occurrence ever since Singapore, all of which were formerly part of the British Empire and were responsible for bringing people from India, another one their territories.

The national language is Malay, but each race speaks their own particular language. English is the common language and is taught in all schools. We are driving on the left side of the road still, another left over from the British influence. It will be good to get back on the proper side of the road and I can stop trying to board the bus on the wrong side.

We are travelling through some pretty dense jungle type trees but our guide, Adelyn of Chinese descent, says they don't have any wild animals here, only snakes. I guess she doesn't consider monkeys to be wild animals as I catch glimpses of them in the trees and alongside the road occasionally.

Before getting into the mountains, I did notice some rice paddies, but level land is at a premium here so I'm sure it isn't grown in abundance.



Private housing in one of the mountain villages



Fruit stand

What is grown is fruit! These mountains contain over 200 varieties of fruit and edible nuts. We keep seeing signs for the Tropical Fruit Farm. A major attraction for tourists, but it is not on our schedule. We do stop at a roadside stand that has an area to accommodate our bus. There are many selections to choose from including: avocados, oranges, lemons, bananas, pineapples and papaya and others that I don't have a clue what they are.

I have seen a lot of Jack Fruit trees, not only here but back in Viet Nam as well. They can grow to be the size of a large watermelon hanging from trees. I had heard they were very sweet and tasty, and they had one cut open here to show the insides. I purchased a container already sliced up for \$2 and shared it with several people as it was more than I wanted, and others were curious as to its taste. Others had no



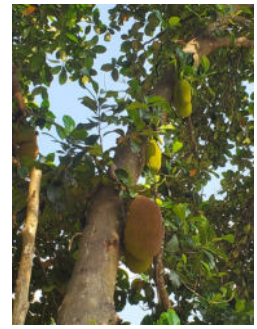
Jackfruit

interest! It tasted good but left my fingers quite sticky.

One of the most



Jackfruit, each segment contains a nut



Jackfruit tree with fruit

famous fruits that this area is known for is durian. It has been crowned the “king of the fruits”.

It is not in season now and Adelyn said it is very expensive. It has an intimidating spiky green shell on the outside. Inside it is filled with rich creamy pungent flesh. They claim nothing else tastes like it. There is a saying “Smells like Hell, tastes like Heaven”.



Durian

Its smell has been compared to garbage, raw sewage and sweaty socks! In fact, it has famously been banned from public transit, airports and hotels in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and others. There were none at this fruit stand unfortunately, or maybe fortunately!

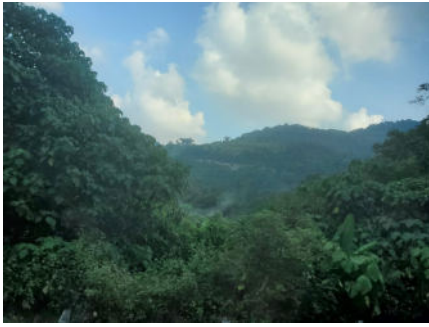


Typical mountain homestead



Another home

It has been great traveling through the rain forest with its spectacular views which I tried to capture through the bus window on several occasions. I also tried to get some pictures of the local homes. Most of them are in disrepair and not very tidy and in need of paint as are some of the multi-family buildings.



Typical view from bus



Typical apartment housing

Before coming completely out of the mountains we stop at Craft Batik, a facility that takes local, colorless fabric and hand paints designs on it as is or dyes it and produces clothing.



Drawing pattern

They also do block printing and logos to produce clothing for corporate

entities. They are well known for their quality and uniqueness. Sue contributes to their total sales with some very nice blouses.



Hand painting



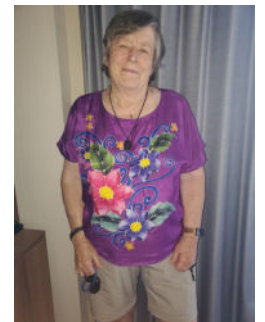
In-progress



Ready for next step



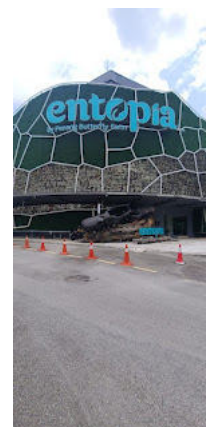
Block printing



One of Sue's blouses

Our next stop takes us to the Penang Entopia Butterfly Farm.

Which turned out to be much more than just butterflies. Besides the 15,000 free-roaming tropical butterflies, the tropical plants and trees along with a beautifully done waterfall, it had an underground display area that was dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the natural

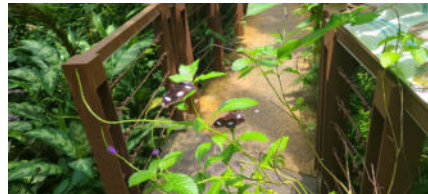




Sue with giant caterpillar



Butterfly on pineapple slice

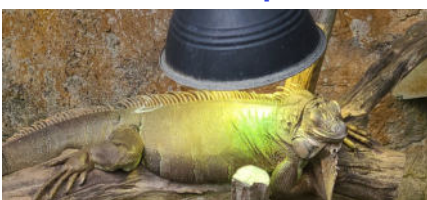


world, particularly the insects and other invertebrates that play important roles in maintaining ecological balance. Definitely aimed at educating kids, it was informative for all ages.



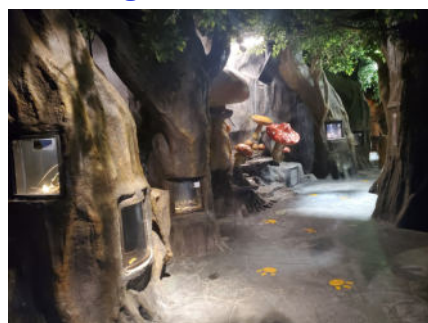
Pupa waiting to metamorphose  
into a butterfly

There was an impressive beetle display, ant farm, some aquatic creatures and even an iguana.



Resident iguana

It was a little tough finding your way out of the maze of displays which eventually took you to the ever-present gift shop before exiting.



"Underground" display

Video of reclining buddha:

<https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKluJzZneMg%3D%3D/vAAAJJb4FpqFEI8LJRfNC>

Our last stop was at the Thai Buddhist Temple which features one of the world's longest reclining Buddha statues (just over 100 feet long). Behind the Buddha is a columbarium in which urns of cremated ashes are housed. They are enclosed in glass so the decorated urns could be viewed. Sometimes, a picture of the person was affixed to the outside. Everyone had to remove their shoes before entering and no pictures were allowed.

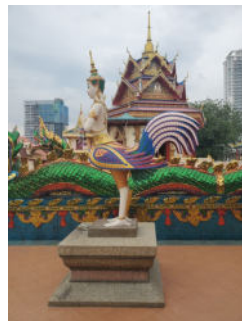
Video of Thai Temple:

<https://photos.google.com/search/CgZWaWRib3MiCBIGCgQqAggBKluJzZneMg%3D%3D/Dwtc6USjeYAlSwtFT4fFkAr-huph3A7ebvi>



Entrance

Across the street was the Burmese Buddhist Temple with similar structures. I took quite a few pictures but will only post a few. A lot of this was in brilliant gold. I wonder if it was actual gold, if so, there was a considerable fortune here.



Not sure what this represents



One of two dragons guarding the entrance

We managed to get an Adventure Lab done at the temple before being one of the last to get on the bus. We were ready to get back to the ship. It had been a busy series of stops the last few days with overnight sailings and we were ready for a break.



Both dragons



Incense burning in front of temple



**March 31, 2025**

As I get ready to publish this, our captain came on for his (our female captain left us in Hong Kong) noon address. He mentioned that we were in the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), otherwise known as the "doldrums". It got this moniker back when most ships were powered by the wind, sailors dreaded getting caught in the doldrums. Ships could become stranded for days or weeks and run out of food and fresh water to drink.



Smooth sailing!

And it looks like it today. The sea is flat with calm winds and cloudy skies. It reminds me of a time aboard the USS Albany, my first ship, during a deployment to the Mediterranean. The sea was glass smooth and as blue as the sky. The captain approved a swim call for all hands. Two beams were swung out port and starboard and rope ladders were thrown over the side to aid climbing back aboard. We edged out on the beams and dived or jumped into the sea 30 feet below. Our onboard marines stood by with rifles for shark watch and we enjoyed the swim of a lifetime. However, when I had had enough, I grabbed the rope ladder to climb aboard, and my left foot went below the waterline, and the barnacles sliced into my foot. Instant pain with the salt water. I limped around for a few days, but it was worth the memory.

**I think I'll head for the pool!**

**Next stop: Mauritius (pronounced: maw-ree-shuhs)**

Comments:

05.04.2025: ccyflyer

Thx for indicating how to pronounce the name.

## Mauritius, tiny island with a lot to give

April 3, 2025

Over 100 years ago, Mark Twain has been quoted saying, "Mauritius was made first, and then heaven, and that heaven was copied after Mauritius".



Port Louis, capital of Mauritius

I'm not sure I would describe the island as heavenly, but it is a beautiful area with flat lands for growing fruits and vegetables, primarily sugar cane, thanks to the Dutch. The Dutch, as it turns out are also responsible for the extinction of the Dodo bird that had no natural enemies before they came and brought in animals that preyed upon them until they were gone for good. But, I am getting ahead of myself.

Mauritius (pronounced: muh RISH uhs)

We were ready for a port call after spending six days at sea (with four time changes) while crossing the Indian Ocean to the tiny island off the coast of the much bigger island of Madagascar. Mauritius is only 30 miles wide and 40 miles long. It was first settled by the Dutch in 1598 and they tried for over a hundred years to turn it into a sugar cane producing island with the help of slave labor. But eventually it was abandoned, and the French took over in 1715 and they ran things until 1810 when the British seized the island, and it became the British Empire's main sugar-producing colony and remained a primarily sugar-dominated plantation-based colony until independence in 1968. All this explains why our guide, Elizabeth, is primarily French speaking, they drive on the left, and English is the common language. Most of the signage we see is in both French and English, but sometimes the English is missing.

One of the Island's claim to fame is it is the only place there was any trace of a flightless bird called the dodo. No one is exactly sure what they looked like, and you have to go to a museum to even see a skeleton of one.

There are statues around the area featuring the dodo exploiting their notoriety. As mentioned above, blame the Dutch for their extinction. They hunted the defenseless dodos for food, as did introduced animals brought in by the Dutch. The island is surrounded by more than 100 miles of white sandy beaches, and the lagoons are protected from the open sea by the world's third-largest coral reef, which surrounds the island. Another attraction for tourists!

We have a full day ahead as our scheduled excursion will take all day touring the highlights of the Southern region of the island. We have an early breakfast and are aboard our bus just before our departure of 8:45. We are docked at the capital city of Port Louis, population of around 150,000. Total island population is close to 2 million and growing. Our guide, Elizabeth, with her heavy French accent, says the island sees about 20 cruise ships each year.



dodos and the Mauritius flag

It doesn't take our bus long to get out of the city, it seems to be fairly typical but on the rundown side compared to others. It did have its share of architectural oddities, and I captured this building through the bus window.



Would you believe this is a commercial bank?

I noticed that nearly all business places, homes and apartments building were made from cement block and then covered or just painted. A lot of them were brown and black with mold. Elizabeth said that they have a severe water shortage at present and are in a period of drought. They are completely dependent on rain and an inland lake for their fresh water.

I do notice in between the towns of Phoenix, known for its brewery, and Curepipe, some fields of sugar cane and later on fields of other vegetables; cabbage, carrots and potatoes. Curepipe area also has some tobacco farms she said.

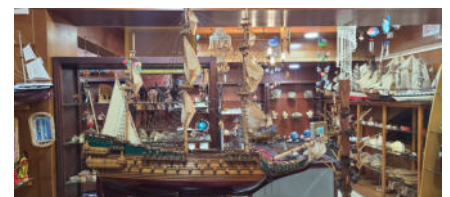
Our first stop was at the [Bobato](#) Ship Model shop in Curepipe, an unscheduled one I might add, maybe because this is Elizabeth's hometown. Perhaps a percentage comes her way. Regardless, it is quite famous and is a scheduled stop on other tours.

The models inside are amazing and the artisan's workshop is on the 2nd floor which we are encouraged to visit.



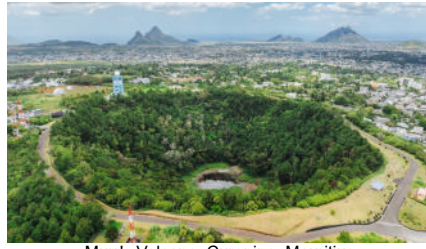
workshop

The models are quite amazing, and I inquire about one, amongst the hundreds that is on display, as to the price and she calculates it to be about US\$1,200. That's a little out of my budget so she shows me a smaller model of the HMS Bounty, more modestly priced around \$100. I do like it but am worried about getting it back in one piece. No worries she says, we pack good! Sue says, "where there is a will, there is a way". Uncharacteristically, I purchase it.



This is one I didn't get, I think mine came from the shelf on upper right

Our first "scheduled" stop is the Trou aux Cerfs (also known as Murr's Volcano). This is a cone volcano crater. It is nearly 2,000 feet high with a depth of 250 feet. The crater was formed less than 2 million years ago in the second phase of volcanic activity that created the island of Mauritius. To really appreciate this crater, it needs to be viewed from the above, so I'll borrow a picture from Wikipedia.



Murr's Volcano, Curepipe, Mauritius

There also was an EarthCache here that demanded answers as to its formation, etc. This volcano last erupted 700,000 years ago, so I think we are in no danger today.

Next came the Grand Bassin Sacred Lake. It is a 50 foot deep crater lake that a Hindu priest in 1897 had a dream about a sacred lake. He searched for it and claimed this was the lake in his dream. This area is 70% Hindu and pilgrims from all over the island started walking here to prey to Hindu deities and offer fruits and vegetables.



Grand Bassin Sacred Lake

Today it is one of the most important pilgrimage sites outside of India. Indeed, many Hindus can be seen preying and burning incense and offer fruits, often with incense sticks stuck in them, to help keep the birds from stealing their offerings as well as drawing attention to them. It is a somber place, and everyone is respectful of the pilgrims that are here.



Opposite shore



Some of the larger statues



Incense stuck in fruit

prayed for. Cow worship promotes values of kindness and nourishment, contributing to a holistic approach to well-being. So, not surprisingly, there is a cow sculpture, encased in glass on this site as well.



Sacred Cow

We board the bus and begin our ascent to the Black River Gorges National Park. It was proclaimed in 1994 and covers an area of 26 square miles including humid upland forest, drier lowland forest and marshy [heathland](#). Talk about curvy, narrow roads. We are on some now! Even though our bus is smaller (NMT 40 passengers), there are multiple times that we had to stop, or others had to stop for us in order to navigate around sharp corners and hairpin turns. Our driver even had to shut off the A/C to allow more power to his engine during the climb. Sue and I were looking forward to this stop because it had a geocache hidden on one of the trails which we hoped to find in our short time here.

We snapped a few quick pictures of the awesome scenery far below and headed for the trail. It was quite muddy and filled with tree roots and we quickly found out my sandals were the wrong thing to wear for this.

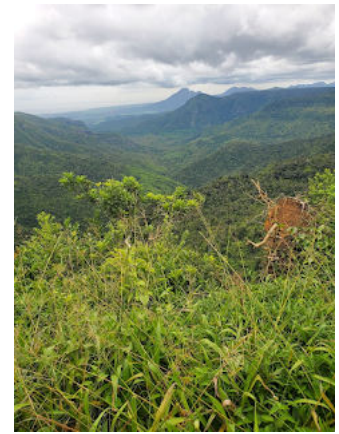
Sue's GPS leads us about 300 feet into the forest and we began looking and using our geosense to locate the cache. It wasn't long and I found the container hidden under a rock, between two tree trunks. We had earned our Mauritius souvenir! We were one of the last to board.



Muddy trail to cache



Sue signing log



Pictures don't do it justice!

It was now lunch time and just a short drive brought us to a mountain hotel restaurant, La Varangue sur Morne. They had a buffet set up and were expecting five tour buses. They seated us in an area with an open outside view, I think we got the prime area as there were already 2-3 bus loads seated inside and eating.

We were allowed to choose between beer, wine or soft drink. The buffet consisted of a rice dish, beef stew type meat, fish in a sauce, veggies and lentil soup. We loaded up and enjoyed it and had time to explore the outside area and take a few more pictures of the beautiful island landscape.

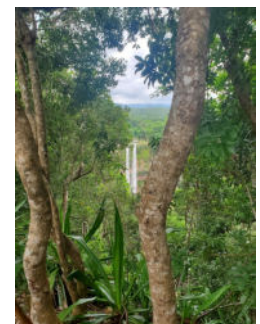


Hotel where we had lunch on patio to the right



View just outside the patio

Our last stop of the day was at a magnificent Chamarel Waterfall. This waterfall is fed by three distinct streams pouring into the Saint Denis River. This provides a powerful rush with a peak flow rate in excess of 40,000 cubic meters/minute. There were two viewing areas, one requiring a significant climb.



Through the forest



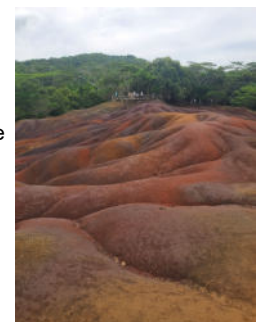
I took some photos from each viewing area amongst the other 100+ people that were there. There is a tour where a guide will take you on a three-hour hike down to where the waterfall splashes into a pool, and you can swim around the splash.

Just three kilometers from the waterfall is the Chamarel 7 Colored Earth Geopark. This natural wonder boasts sand dunes that display seven different colors, ranging from red, brown and purple to green, blue, yellow and pink.

The sand dunes were formed from volcanic ash that was exposed to rain and wind, which led to different colors appearing. The colors are believed to have been formed due to the cooling of basaltic lava at varying temperatures, giving rise to the different colors. I could not pick out the seven colors and our guide said because it was cloudy and the recent drought, the colors were not as prominent as could be. Still, it was quite

impressive.

In addition to the sand dunes, there was a fenced-in area that contained giant Aldabra tortoises. They are here because this was the home of their cousins, the native domed and saddle-backed giant tortoises which have gone extinct since the early 18th century. The Aldabra tortoises live to an average of 150 years, but a recent park resident was said to have lived 250 years!



Colored sand dunes



Tortoise nursery

This ended our excursion for the day and all that was left was to travel down the mountain and hope the driver kept the wheels on the road and the A/C on. I did notice that the island had a Kudzu



A "gaggle?" of tortoises

problem. This area, SE Asia, is where it originated and was introduced to the U.S. in the late 19th century and has become one of the most problematic invasive species in the southeastern U.S. It smothers other vegetation, including native plants, and was originally promoted to combat erosion. It is known for its rapid growth and ability to cover large areas. I asked Elizabeth about it and she was aware of it and knew it was a problem but she said no one worries about it here, except in the forest areas, like the park we just came from and there they are trying to control it.

We arrived back at the ship just before 5PM, ready to call it a day.

Next stop: Durban, South Africa.

## Durban, South Africa

Monday, March 7



South Africa's Big Five

Picture credit: Hilary E.; Geocaching HQ

First a little bit about Africa in general. I must admit that I, like most westerners perhaps, am fairly ignorant about this continent. It is the second largest after Asia and is home to 1.5 billion people and 20% of the earth's land area. It has approximately 3,000 different languages spoken, the most popular being Arabic, Swahili, French, and English. South Africa is one of 54 independent countries on the continent.

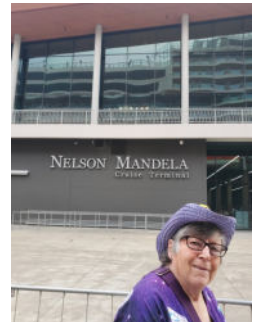
It has five regions: Northern Africa, Eastern and Western Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa. Mauritius, which was our previous stop, is one of many islands off the east coast and is part of Eastern Africa. Durban is a city in the country of South Africa and is part of Southern Africa.

We were warned ahead of time that immigration officials here demand a face-to-face passport check of everyone on board, even if no plans were made to go ashore. This could potentially result in some delays with excursion plans.

We were scheduled to dock at the Nelson Mandela Cruise Terminal around 6AM so we set our alarm for 5:30 and was at breakfast by a little after six, still dark outside. We were to meet in the Queen's Room at 7:15 to wait in the queue on board where we could at least sit while waiting.

It turned out that we were one of four buses going to the Phezulu Village and Reptile Park, a four-hour excursion scheduled to leave at 8AM. We finally were escorted out about 7:45 and stood in line to get our passports back from ship's personnel and wait in the immigration queue. They had about 14 stations set up, 12 for us and two for the crew. It went smoothly enough and after about 45 minutes, our bus left at 8:30.

We were warned earlier that Durban had issues with crime and pickpockets and not to travel alone, only in groups. Our tour was taking us away from town on a 90-minute drive, but as we wound our way through town, I saw many areas where homeless people were sleeping on the sidewalks, garbage was everywhere and people were going through it, filling their own bags with whatever they could salvage.



Litter in front of cemetery

There were cleaner areas to be sure, but it was sad to see the poverty that was prevalent. It's hard to understand why the city can't pick up all the trash! It was piled up all over and you could tell it had been there a while.



Market place



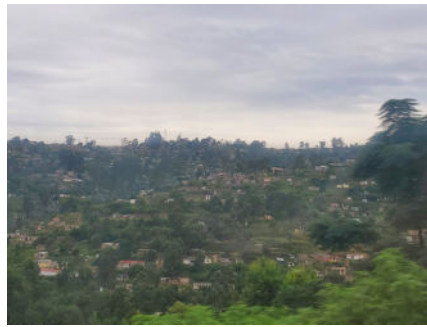
Street scene

alongside the road looking for a ride.

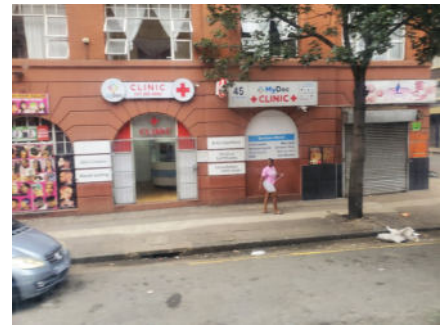
Once we got out in the countryside, it was, like other areas we visited, quite lovely. Although, it seemed like people were living in small houses all over the hills and there didn't seem to be much for roads to get to them. Our guide, Tina, said most of them commute to Durban for work by train, bus, bicycle and walking. We did see quite a few people



Entrance to Phezulu Village



Typical view of homes among the hills



Another street scene

Our destination, Phezulu Village, is a reconstructed Zulu village that was typical of what it was like back in the 1800's before the modern era. This included round thatched huts placed in a circular pattern.



A large, thatched auditorium provided seating for around a 100 people to watch the performers singing and energetically dancing. They wear the traditional Zulu attire which are colorful and full of meaning, each color having a distinct purpose. The auditorium faced a spectacular panorama of the "Valley of 1000 Hills". Our performers went through the progression of a young male proposing to a prospective bride, her acceptance after the offering of a cow as a dowry. Supposedly, a Zulu male could have as many wives as he had cows! They performed the male visiting the witch doctor to roll bones from a cape buffalo horn to see if she could bless the marriage. Then the wedding and celebration. This all took about 45 minutes and was very entertaining. I will post some videos, I didn't have a very good seat, but hopefully the sound will come through as well.

Valley of 1000 Hills video: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/SfoPPbRMnPhFBpLm8>

Male dancers' video: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/oKZZQ57ob5hX1bVv6>

Zulu singers (sorry about sideways): <https://photos.app.goo.gl/4zeoWCDWwyC9PkJq8>

Witch doctor's blessing: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/BLCK8HEPm12H2LRV7>



Sue posing with the boys



Me with the girls



Sue shopping for fabric and a souvenir pin

From there we went through their Reptile Park which contained crocodiles, alligators, snakes, tortoises, spiders and iguanas. Not all of which were local, but imported from other countries, including the U.S.



The big one is Ramses, he's 103 years old



One of many



Yikes!

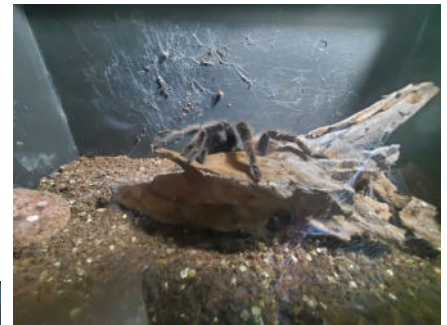
After returning to the ship and a brief rest, we headed back ashore to do a geocaching Adventure Lab that was close by. We were questioned by some security people around a railroad yard as to what we were doing.

We tried explaining but it didn't seem to register, I think they

were concerned about our safety more than anything and we assured them we were fine and would not be wandering off too far. We completed the lab and met up with our German friends to do what is called a Virtual Cache, which requires you to locate certain objects and answer questions to show you were there and often include photos as well. This cache required both and kept us busy on what is claimed to be Africa's longest promenade. It stretches eight kilometers from Durban harbor to an area called Blue Lagoon.



Part of the Adventure Lab



Also had some tarantulas



An area of the promenade leading down to the beach

It is wheelchair friendly and is a perfect place for family outings which we saw several with skateboards, scooters, three-wheelers, etc. It borders a wonderful sand beach which likely would have been busier if it had not been a Monday. While Jan and Sue were chasing down one of the answers to question, Dorothy and I took the opportunity to share a beer at the café located under the promenade.



Sharing a beer



Sue and Jan found some sand art while we were having our beer



More sand sculptures

It had been a fun day, and the weather was near perfect with partly sunny skies and just an occasional few drops of rain. But we had walked about 11,000 steps according to Sue's watch and we had had enough. So back to the ship, stopping for an unsuccessful attempt at finding a traditional geocache along the way.

Next stop: Cape Town, South Africa

## Cape Town, South Africa

April 10, 2025

Cape Town, South Africa



Sculptures at Kirstenbosch Gardens

A bit more about South Africa itself is in order. It is the southernmost country in Africa. It has nine provinces which are bounded to the south by 1,739 miles of coastline that stretches along the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. It has a population of 63 million people and growing. Pretoria is the administrative capital, Cape Town the executive capital having the seat of parliament, and Bloemfontein is regarded as the judicial capital. The largest, most populous city is Johannesburg, followed by Cape Town and Durban.

South Africa has eleven official languages: English, Afrikaans and nine ethnic languages of which Zulu and Xhosa are the most widely spoken. While most South Africans can communicate in more than one language, English is the most spoken and is the language of official business and commerce. Indeed, in all our travels here in Cape Town at least, all signage was in English only.

There are five racial population groups. The 2022 census figures for these groups were: Black African at 81%, Colored at 8.2%, White at 7.3%, Indian or Asian at 2.7% and other at 0.5%.

Cape Town is known as the country's "mother city", since it was the site of the first European settlement in South Africa.

Disembarkation was easier here since we did our face to face in Durban. We scheduled an all-day tour that would get us out of town and around the cape peninsula.

Our guide turned out to be Ron McGregor, a local historian, and the best tour guide we have experienced. He has even written a book entitled "The South African Story" which is in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

Our journey takes us through the coastal suburbs of Sea Point, Bantry Bay and Clifton. Most of the coastlines along here are very rocky and unsuitable for use as beaches.



Typical rocky shoreline

The few sand beaches they have are highly valued and open to the public. But to own an apartment in this area would cost upwards of 12 million Rand, about half million US\$. Unfortunately, the water is so cold, it is only used by wet-suited surfers. And we did see some great surfing areas with some brave souls taking advantage of them.

We pass some areas where Ron says around a thousand, day laborers come each morning to hopefully bargain their skills with locals looking for help and earn a day's wage to take home. This is their only way to earn a living, and Ron says a lot of these people come from Johannesburg where their chances are even less. They live in Squatter Communities and have no running water or bathroom facilities. He calls it semi-immigration. Immigration from within South Africa.

Our first stop is a scenic opportunity in the village of Hout Bay. We pull into a park with great views of the bay and an opportunity to visit the restrooms provided, which is always a good idea not to pass up. There are several locals selling their creations.

Carvings, paintings and wire and bead animals and insects that were hanging from a bush got my attention. The young man who was selling them said it took eight hours to make the "bee" that I was looking at.



I should have told him it might only take seven hours if he only made six legs instead of the eight my bee had. I paid him the asking price of 200 Rand (\$10).

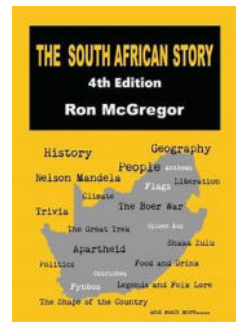


My 8-legged bee

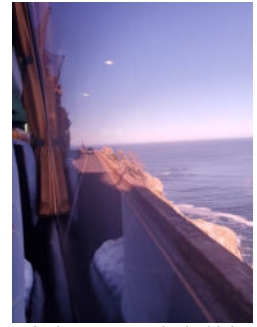
We snapped a few photos and left our next stop, Chapman's Peak.



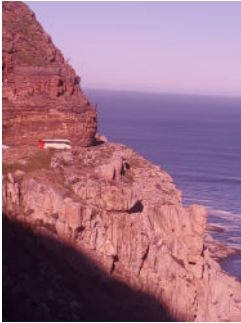
Hout Bay with Sentinel Peak



Chapman's Peak is a mountain on the western side of the Cape Peninsula, between Hout Bay and Noordhoek. The west side of the mountain falls sharply for hundreds of meters into the Atlantic Ocean, and a road, known as Chapman's Peak Drive, hugs the near-vertical face of the mountain.



And we were on the inside!



The drive offers great views of Hout Bay, Sentinel Peak and Noordhoek Beach, all while the road curves 114 times! This drive also hosts two annual races, the [Cape Argus Cycle Race](#) and the [Two Oceans Marathon](#). Ron says if the narrow roads and curves bother you, just look away or close your eyes! There were indeed some stunning views and our weather was again perfect.

We wound our way down and through Noordhoek Beach and Simon's Town on our way to the Cape of Good Hope, the most southwestern point of the African Continent. We passed an ostrich farm which are common in this area. We have seen in the shops we visited, ostrich eggs for sale, decorated in all kinds of ways.

We would have liked to purchase one, but transportation is again a concern. Ron says they raise them to the age of 14 months and then process them for their feathers and meat.



Wild ostriches, no commercial value

On the roadside, I saw a sign that said not to feed the baboons as they were dangerous. I asked Ron about that and he said they were indeed a nuisance and getting to be a real problem with homeowners as they are becoming bolder about foraging for something to eat.

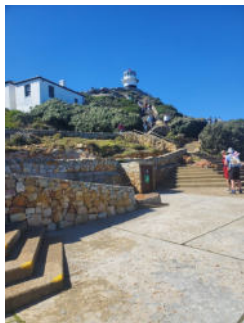
Video of the Cape at sea level:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Qb5AcyNf9EGAtetz5>

Video of ride up to lighthouse: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/38svgnDmip64J8NG8>

Video from just below the lighthouse: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Rhi2k3vFjHcxQ5mY6>

We arrived at the Cape and spent some photo time there. There is a lighthouse atop a peak there that was built in 1860, the most powerful of its time. Unfortunately, at night the light was almost always shrouded in mist and clouds.



Useless lighthouse

Consequently, many sailors lost their lives depending on it and it was taken out of service after about 50 years and another one built nearby at sea level. It has been restored and is now a tourist attraction. Ron said not to make the climb to get up there as the view was no better and we didn't have the time.

The waves were quite lively and crashed up over the rocky shoreline.

There were also a bunch of seals on the rocks just off the coast.



Seals on coastal rocks

We left the Cape and traveled up the eastern coastline of the peninsula to the Black Marlin Restaurant in Simon's Town.

On our way there, Ron

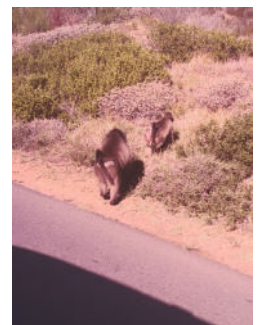
exclaimed, "we have a baboon sitting". Indeed, the bus had to stop as a group of them were on the road. I managed to get a couple of pictures as a pair of them crossed in front of the bus.



But not the most "southern" point



In front of our bus



Into the brush

We had a choice of either a seafood or chicken entrée, not a hard choice for us, especially since it was well-known for its seafood.

We ate outside with umbrellas to keep the mid-day sun off and enjoyed a wonderful meal which included your choice of beer, wine or soft

drinks.



Enjoying a local lager



Nice view while eating seafood

The meal was superb considering they hosted two busloads of us as well as their regular customers. And the scenery was outstanding as well.

Our next destination would take us to Boulders Beach Penguin colony, a part of the Table Mountain National Park. We made our way from the entrance along the rail-lined boardwalk to keep all the visitors corralled so they the bother to the penguins would be kept to a minimum.

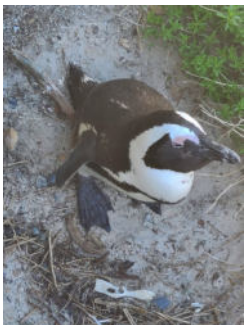


More humans than penguins

Penguin video link:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/xqnnfJoRJWuXzj7t8>

Another penguin video: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Q9qD8JE9r9FocmxL8>

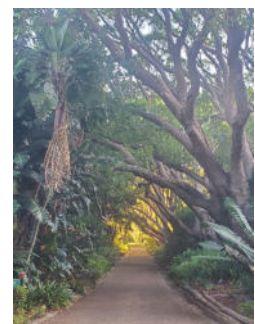
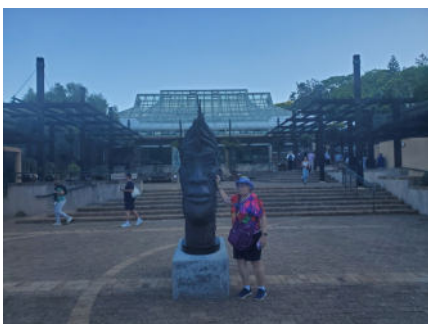


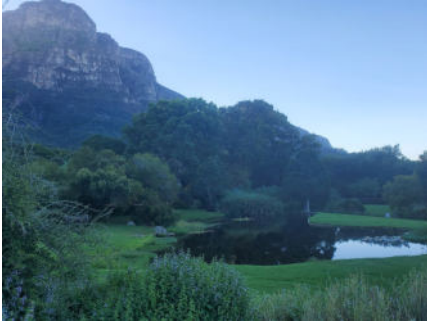
These are the African penguins. They can get to be about two feet tall and weigh up to 11 pounds. These penguins are critically endangered. They breed only here in South Africa and in neighboring Namibia. Only two percent of the African penguin population that existed in the early 1900s remains today, with fewer than 20,000 breeding pairs left in the wild. They used to be called "Jackass Penguins" because they produce a similar "braying" when vocalizing, but I did not hear that while we were there. I observed them and took photos but felt like we were intruding. I couldn't blame them if they took up residence somewhere less populated with humans.



That's kelp on the beach by the colony

Our last stop of the day was at the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Ron expressed his displeasure with the touring office trying to fit in too much in too little time. He said this stop should be a minimum of 2-3 hours to do it any justice at all. It really did turn out to be a seven most magnificent botanical gardens in the world. We explored precious little of the over 1300 acres of gardens. I'll post some of the pictures we took.

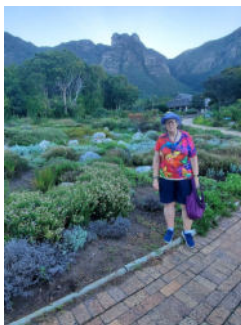




You don't see these in Iowa!



Serene!



Likewise!

On the way back to the ship, Ron pointed out the Groote Schuur Hospital where Dr. Christiaan Bernard performed the first human heart transplant in 1967. I remembered that making international news back then.

We got back on the ship a full hour later than scheduled, which interfered with some of the group's dinner plans. Ron said he would take the heat, but I think everyone appreciated his expertise and was forgiving for any inconvenience.

Tomorrow, Table Mountain.



# Cape Town, Day 2

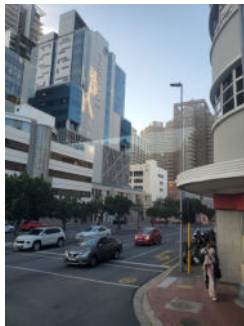
Day 2, Cape Town, April 11, 2025



View of Table Mountain with Devil's Peak on the right and Lion's Head on the left. Taken from Bloubergstrand, 15km distant  
Photo credit: Wikipedia

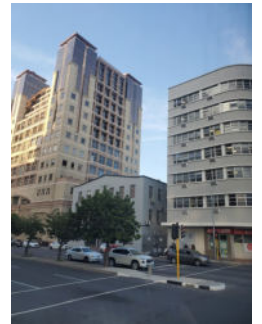
No trip to Cape Town is complete without a visit to the top of Table Mountain. It is obvious why it is named that way as it looks flat as a pancake from below. It stands about 3,500 feet above sea level. It can be seen anywhere from the city and is flanked by Devel's Peak to the east and Lions Head to the west.

We get a little better look at the city itself as we make our way to the aerial cableway which will give us our 5 minute cable car ride to the top. Cape Town is a much cleaner city than Durban. No garbage piled up around here and the buildings and shops are in much better shape.



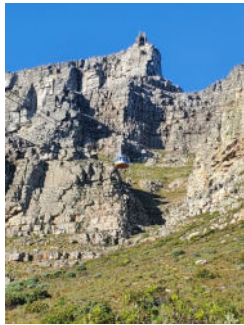
Street scene

I can see why people want to migrate here from less desirable areas. Our guide says they are not without crime, and we do see a lot of property protected by concertina wire and security cameras.



We arrive at the base of the cableway and our guide is ecstatic that the line to get in is much smaller than when she was here yesterday. The day before that was too windy and the cableway was shut down. Waits in the queue yesterday were well over an hour she said. Our time today is limited as we have to be

all aboard by 2PM.



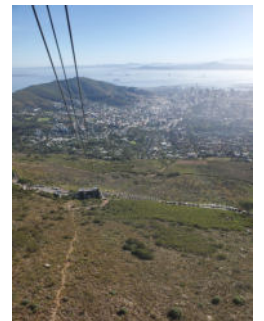
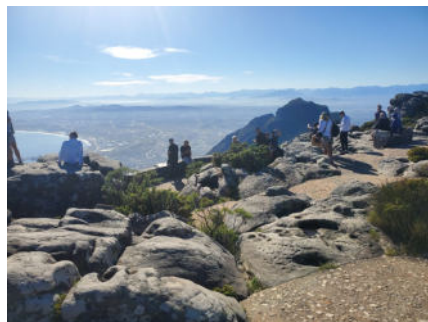
Our destination!

President Nelson Mandela proclaimed Table Mountain and Cape Peninsula National Park in 1998 and said it was this nation's "Gift to the Earth".

There are two cars coming and going which are timed to pass each other halfway. They hold 65 passengers, and the floor does a 360 going up and down to give everyone an all-around view. We only wait about 20 minutes for our group to be loaded and off we go for the 5-minute ride to the top. The views are pretty spectacular, even though I am not standing in the front row.

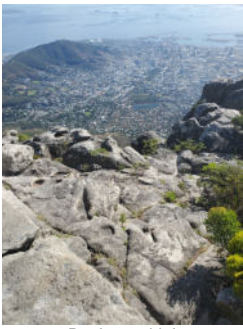
You can also hike up to the top. There are several trails, the shortest of which can be done in one to one and a half hours.

We are allowed nearly two hours to roam around, and it would take that long to circumvent the plateau but we try to see as much as we can in the time allotted. The surface is of course not tabletop smooth but very rocky with vegetation of small brush, flowering bushes and plants along with an occasional gecko. There are pathways which have been made easier to negotiate with the use of cement filling in spaces between the rocks.

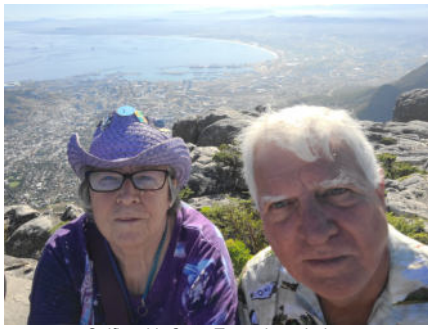


View from cable car

Some of the popular viewing spots have railings or stone walls. There were also some extended platforms that put you out over the edge. There were plenty of places that had no barriers whatsoever and parents had to be very vigilant with their children.

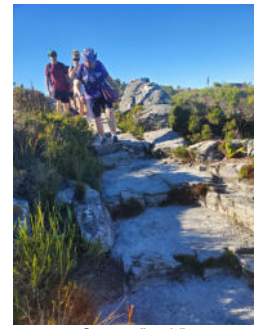


Don't stumble!



Selfie with Cape Town down below

A good video of the mountain and cable cars can be found here. [Professional 3-minute video](#)



Sue on "path"

Video from on top: [Table Mtn video \(2\)](#)

Devil's Peak from Table Mtn: [Devil's Peak](#)

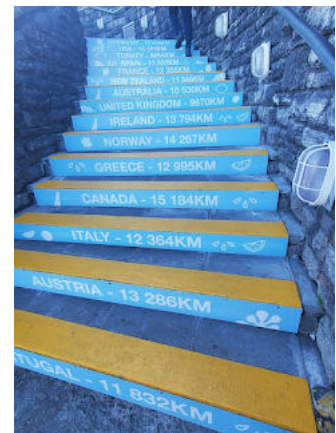
Camps Bay suburb from Table Mtn: [Camps Bay video](#)

Cable car from terminal: [Cable car view from Terminal \(2\)](#)

There is of course, a building where you can purchase souvenirs, complete with restaurant and restrooms. I thought they had a clever way to mark the steps.



Patio off the restaurant



Up at the top, USA 15,121 KM



Those dots you see on the road to either side of the cable terminal, are cars!  
I think they need to build a parking area.

We managed to get back in time to join our group for the descent. We all had to be accounted for because of our time restrictions to get back. Our guide allowed time for one more stop at Camps Bay, a wealthy suburb of Cape Town that has great views of the Twelve Apostles Mountain formation.

The bus lets us off at Camps Bay beach and we get 15 minutes to take in the sights. It does provide a good angle for the Twelve Apostles, which our guide says there are actually 17 peaks but, who's counting. She said apartments in this area go for about 5 million Rand (\$250,000), way above the ability of most residents to afford. Plus, everything has a 15.5% VAT, value added tax, that is added on at the end of all purchases. This goes directly to the government to pay for all services, including health care.



Camps Bay beach with sign warning for sharks.  
Water is too cold for swimming anyway.



Camps Bay below Twelve Apostles

We were back aboard the ship well before the 2PM deadline and we again had to surrender our passports. None of us understands why they are doing this because we must get them back in two days to go through Namibia immigration. Oh well, play along to get along.

Next stop, Walvis Bay, Namibia. A neighboring African country just to the north of us.

## Namibia, Camel Country

Walvis Bay, Namibia, 13 April 2025



When in Africa....

It is Palm Sunday morning as we pull into Walvis Bay while it is still dark. We had heard our foghorn blowing while lying in bed and it didn't stop until we were at our pier. When it finally got light enough to see, it was still quite dense, and we could only make out shapes about 100 yards across the shipyard.



Dunes Mall

We did not schedule any excursions for this port, so we were in no rush to get ashore since we were going to be here until at least 6:30 PM. We had a leisure breakfast and let the immigration line dwindle. We finally cleared immigration about 9AM and left for the shuttle bus to take us to a large mall.

There were a lot of freelancers waiting there, offering to take us anywhere and everywhere there was to see. We selected on young man and told him we needed to do some shopping first and he said he would escort us and show us around the huge mall. I'm thinking he just wanted to make sure we didn't hook up with someone else. We visited a pharmacy and a Checkers grocery store and bought some items to take back to the ship.

We told him we wanted to see the flamingos, the dunes area, and ride a camel. No problem, we negotiated a price of \$120 US which we thought was fair for a 3-4 hour drive. We would have paid much more for such an excursion on board.

His car was not new by any means, but clean inside and dusty outside and we chastised him about not being able to see through dirty windows. Just roll them down when you want to take a picture he said. His name was Ramos, and his wife had just delivered twins, boy and girl, last Christmas Eve. His native language was Afrikaans, but he had a pretty good command of English, which is the official language here, but only 3% speak it as a home language.

Oshiwambo is the most common language, but Afrikaans is the most widely understood. Here again, in this area at least, signage was all in English.

Our first stop was about a mile away to hopefully claim a geocache that was located by a park. Ramos said he knew where we talking about, but he didn't as it turned out. We had to use Sue's geocaching App to show him where to go. He of course had no idea what we were doing.



Ramos



Looking for the cache, it turned out to be across the street, behind the padlocked door on the left!

Sue located it after a few mis-directions, and it turned out to be a small room with a padlock that must have been designed for a guard shack for the gated community it was by. The padlock combination was 19 plus the address number of the nearest home. We opened the door and there was the logbook on a shelf and our geocache mascot, Signal the frog, was painted on the wall!

We have never seen a container like this before. We logged in and earned our Namibia souvenir. Ramos was impressed!

Our first stop was the beach area where we saw hundreds, if not thousands, of flamingos. The problem was, they were about a mile away. He said they tend to congregate where the tourists can only get close to them by boat. They were mostly white from what we could tell and had not yet taken on their pink color which comes from their diet.



Sue logging in and Signal, our frog mascot on the wall



Flamingos?, who knows!

Our next destination was the camel ride, which was located near the town of Swakopmund, a coastal city that offers a unique blend of German colonial architecture and cultural areas. This city is on most excursions' lists because of the architectural buildings of German heritage.

We were not very interested but thought as long as we were here, we would take it in.



Sand everywhere!

I should take a minute to mention that the most striking thing about this area is the lack of mountains or hills of any kind. We have been so used to being around mountainous terrain and this is somewhat of a welcome break from that. This area is known for its sand dunes and there are plenty of them around.



Nice homes between desert and ocean  
(can't see ocean because of fog)

As a matter of fact, the camel place also rents out four-wheelers to take out and play in the dunes. Much like we have seen in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico. In this area, as well as others, the desert goes right down to the seashore. Housing developments spring up occasionally to take advantage of the seascape, and I assume the cooling affect it has.



Camel Corral



We arrive at the Rent a Camel place and Ramos introduces us to our camel guide for our half hour ride. We paid our fee of NAD\$390 each, about US\$20, and were joined by another couple. We went through the process of boarding the camels after our guide commanded them to kneel. These camels are dromedaries, meaning they have one hump. There is a saddle-like seat, complete with handrails and stirrups and we climb aboard like we would a horse, but we sit to the rear of the hump.

Ronald, I think he said that was his name, tied Sue's camel to mine so close that her camel's head was right alongside my left shoulder. He/she was chewing his/her cud and rubbing on me. I hoped camels didn't slobber much or I would be a mess before this was over. I tried to make friends with him by scratching his cheek and rubbing his head which he seemed to enjoy. Ronald left us to help the other couple get aboard and while he was doing that, Maxie, my camel, decided it was time to get up, and up we went, and of course Sue's camel had to do the same.



Our rides await!



Just before Maxie decided to go back to the corral

I managed to stay in the saddle, but it was a good thing I was hanging on or I would have been back on the ground! Well Maxie headed back to the corral thinking the ride was over, not so fast Maxie. Ronald came and tied the other lead camel to Sue's saddle and off we went heading up into the Namid Desert. It was different than riding a horse, there was more movement, and you are up considerably higher, but it was fairly comfortable. Fifteen minutes out, stop for a photo op and fifteen minutes back and cross another item off my Bucket List.



Stopping for a photo op

Video: [Saddle up!](#)

Video: [Leaving the corral](#)

Video: [Starting our safari](#)

We were scheduled to go into town, but Ramos said the police had a check point set up and he said if we went through it, the police would ask us to get out of his car and check our papers and want a bribe to let us go. His solution was to have us walk back into the desert toward the highway and he would circle around and pick us up. We, of course, did as he suggested and walked the half mile back to where he was waiting for us. So, no town visit today but that was OK with us.



Kapana street scene

Ramos asked if we would like to see how the locals live and of course we did. He took us through the villages of Sea Point and Kapana. These were settlements of working-class people and some homes were extremely poor and others well cared for and decent.



typical housing in Sea Point

I commented that they were all dressed nicely, and he said that it was Sunday, (Palm Sunday as well), and that was part of the reason. He pointed out several churches of different denominations, schools and business places. These were obviously sleeper towns for people who left to work elsewhere. He was on the phone with a friend of his and I recorded some of his speech so you could hear the Afrikaans language.

Video: [Ramos speaking Afrikaans](#)



Street scene, Sea Point

After this he took us to Walvis Bay Salt Holdings, Ltd. This company is the largest producer of solar sea salt in sub-Saharan Africa. The company processes 100 million cubic meters of seawater per annum to produce more than 1,000,000 metric tons of high-quality salt per annum. The salt is used for the chemical industry and other general purposes including high quality table salt for the southern Africa market. And there just happened to be a virtual cache there.



Walvis Bay salt

Nearby is another major tourist attraction, Pink Lake. It indeed has a pink color which is due to the presence of salt-tolerant algae that reacts with a particular bacterium which gives the pink color. These bacteria have a pigment called carotenoids that gives the water a pinkish or reddish color. This is the same pigment that colors the feathers of flamingos their distinctive pink.



These carotenoids flourish in high-salinity conditions like salt flats or salt lakes. Pink Lakes's salty deposits remain after evaporation as result of high temperatures and low humidity. Ramos digs down in the salt deposit and gives us a souvenir to take. I sample the water by sticking my finger in it and licking and wow, it must be at its saturation point.

[Pink Lake video](#)

We ask Ramos to drop us off at a seafood restaurant near our ship and he obliges and says it will only be a short walk back to the ship. We pay him a little extra for his excellent service and we enter the 54 Anchors waterfront restaurant which is quite busy, probably due to the ship

being near and a Sunday outing for the locals.

Sue orders a Ginger Squid and I a local draft. We decided to just have appetizers of oysters, calamari and escargot. It took a while to get them, but everything was worth the wait. The raw oysters were small but excellent, the grilled oysters with mozzarella were a delight, the calamari were divine, and I think the escargot was even better than what we had on the ship, although they were a little smaller.



Seafood delight!

The short walk back to the ship turned out to be about two miles! We walked through the entire shipyard to get to the Queen. A crew member at the gangplank asked where we had come from, so we had to explain our journey. On board we had to check in with Namibia immigration to get stamped out and we were done for the day. An excellent day as it turned out.

Next stop, Dakar, Senagal. It will take six sea days to get there on the 20th

## Sue's Crossing the Line Ceremony

17 April 2025 Equator, west of Gabon, Africa, Atlantic Ocean



King Neptune  
Roman God of the Sea

The first time we crossed the equator, way back on February 15th, Sue opted out of taking part in the ceremony, thinking it would be too strenuous. After watching it, it seemed more fun than strenuous so this time, Sue signed up. I told her you are not really a Shellback until you've gone through the initiation.

More about Line-crossing ceremony and its history can be found [here](#).

The captain said he would hold the ceremony just as we were crossing the equator, which turned out to be 9:30 at night. And, as luck would have it, it was indeed a beautiful evening, perfect for the upcoming activities.

Sue put on her bathing suit and shift before heading up to the Pavilion Pool area on the 9th deck at 9PM, the time she was told to gather with the other Pollywogs. I stayed at pool level because I had her change of clothes and wanted to be close by. That was a mistake, because the area filled up with what seemed to be the entire ships complement minus essential personnel. So, I was not positioned well for pictures. I did take some from the big screen and recorded several videos. Some of the videos are a bit lengthy. Thankfully, my German friend, Jan, came to my rescue and he sent me some photos and a video from Deck 10. I am again in his debt.

The ceremony starts by summoning the Captain, Staff Captain and Hotel Manager and listing their crimes before the judge. The judge asks the assemblage: Guilty or Not Guilty. Of course everyone shouts Guilty! I think I caught some of the charges on one of the videos.

The Pollywogs were required to kiss the fish (Sue said it was real, freshly thawed), then they were subjected to being rubbed down with different colored substances that I assume came from the kitchen.



Sue kissing the fish



Sue being smeared with whom knows what.

Jan's video of the process (Sue is the middle Pollywog): [Sue getting the treatment](#)

The ceremony lasted about 45 minutes, and it was similar to the last initiation. There were only about 50 Pollywog guests this time, about half of the earlier initiation, and a smaller number of the crew which came after the guests. I think the initiating Shellbacks were a little harder on the crew members, especially the officers. During the initiation, our foghorn sounded, I'm thinking that was the exact moment we crossed. Part of foghorn may be in one of my videos.

There was a party planned on the Panorama Pool Area, also on deck nine but aft of the dining area. Sue and I went back to the stateroom where she showered before going to the party. There was a band playing, they had a special price of \$9.95 for some kind of King Neptune drink. We passed on that as well as the cakes that they were handing out as well. We stayed for a little while, but it was past our bedtime, so we called it a day. Sue the Shellback, slept peacefully.

My videos:

[Music build-up beforehand](#)

[The Judge introducing King Neptune](#)

[Ship's captain chastised by King Neptune and his response](#)

[Charges & sentencing to kiss the fish](#)

[End of foghorn and Pollywogs getting smeared](#)

## Comments:

19.04.2025: blueKat

Keep it coming, we enjoy reading your blog.

## Goree Island, Dakar, Senegal, Africa



Our "Queen" from the ferry to take us to Goree Island

Easter Sunday, 20 April 2025, Dakar, Senegal, Africa

Our German friends and we signed up for the excursion to Goree Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We met for breakfast before mustering in at the Royal Court Theater for our scheduled 9AM departure. Being it was Easter Sunday; the chefs outdid themselves with a display of chocolate eggs and bunnies at the intersection connecting the port and starboard dining areas at the Artisans' Foodhall-Buffer. They also served Hot Cross buns in honor of Easter. I took the opportunity to make a short video.

Video: [Easter display](#)

Goree is a small island, covering only about 70 acres and fully walk-able from end to end. Our plan was to stay on our tour initially, then break off and try and find the several geocaches throughout the island, including an Adventure Lab, which would take us to all the places of interest anyway, a bonus mystery cache, two regular caches and three Earth caches.



Approaching the island from our ferry

We chose this excursion because of its history as being the largest slave-trading center on the African coast, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was ruled in succession by the Portuguese, Dutch, English and French. And it also contained several geocaching opportunities. Dakar, and this island just off the coast, is the westernmost city and port in Africa. This was important because it was the shortest route to and from the Americas for commerce and the slave trade.

Promoters of the museum and Goree Island have claimed as many as 15-20 million slaves passed through here. Careful research disputes this and it is more likely somewhere between 26,000 and 103,000 between 1536 and 1848. Whatever the number, it was too many!

As luck would have it, the chartered ferry to take us to the island was able to dock just a short walking distance from the ship. There were three groups going on this tour and we all left together, about 200 of us. We had two guides and they each had helpers. The guides were

dressed in a Senegalese kaftan, also known as a boubou or m'ubb in Wolof, their common language. This is a long pullover robe with bell sleeves, typically worn with matching drawstring pants called tubay.

It was about a 30-minute ride to the island and one of the guides gave us a little history of the island on the way. It is a very popular tourist destination besides being a Sunday, so the ferries were constantly running, but from the main Ferry Terminal.

Our first stop, which included all three groups, was at one of the houses that held the slaves. There were up to 28 of these at one point. This one was preserved and made into a museum; the others have been converted to local housing.



Nice walkway on way to museum

Our guide introduced another speaker who would tell us about the museum and its history. He spoke some English, but said our guide would interpret for him. I recorded about half of his talk which I will provide a link.

Video: [Museum presentation](#)

He told us how the slaves were separated from one another, the healthy males in one area, the females in another, virgin females were kept for a lot of the caretakers here, and once they became pregnant were released to fend for themselves.



Typical slave quarters with narrow slots for windows

The children were separated from their parents. They all went to different destinations. The troublemakers were harshly dealt with and they were all in chains.

There was a "Door of No Return". Once they went through this, they would be loaded on a ship, never to see Africa again. I will share some photos of the rooms and the door.



"Door of No Return"

It of course was a depressing experience of man's inhumanity to man. Today it continues to serve as a reminder of human exploitation and as a sanctuary for reconciliation.

Our guide led us out of the slave quarters and there was a large queue of other groups waiting to go in and get the same presentation we just had. This was when we departed from the group and went in search of our geocaches. We were given a time to be back at the terminal and that should allow plenty of time to do our thing.



Adama, one of our guides at the slave museum

Adventure Lab (AL). On the way we walked through streets lined with locals begging us to look at their displays hoping to make a sale. Sue, always on the lookout for fabric had several opportunities and did find some that she liked and was able to do a little bargaining. But these people need all the help they can get, and we probably overpaid on some items but, so be it.



Sue bargaining for some fabric



Street scene

Our next AL destination took us to gun emplacement reminiscent of the "Guns of Navarone" movie. But they were pointed inward and probably have been for decades.



Navarone type guns

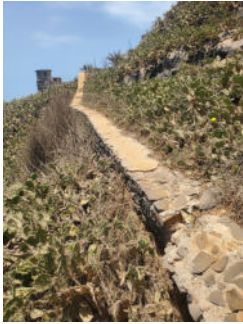
These guns were part of a French coastal artillery battery during World War II known as the "Batterie du Castel", particularly the Battle of Dakar. I believe this to be the highest point on the island, so I took a short video.

video: [Big guns & surrounding area](#)



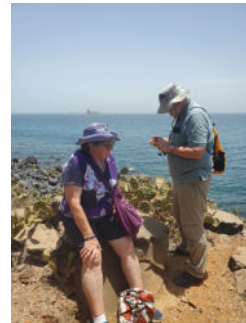
Jan and Sue signing log with Dakar in background.

From there we made our way down some precarious paths to try and find one of the traditional caches that was hidden down close to the seashore. We managed to find the cache and it was a wonderful view from there. We spotted a pair of snorkeling divers down in the water and wondered what they were looking for. Scallops, or abalone or lobster?

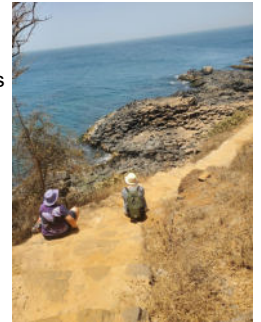


Path we negotiated to get to cache with cactus on both sides.

Who knows, but they were sure busy the whole time we were in the area. Another cache took us down even further and we had to negotiate a narrow path between cactus plants on either side. The cactus had some yellow flowers blooming and I'm sure they were the same type that I have photographed before in Texas.

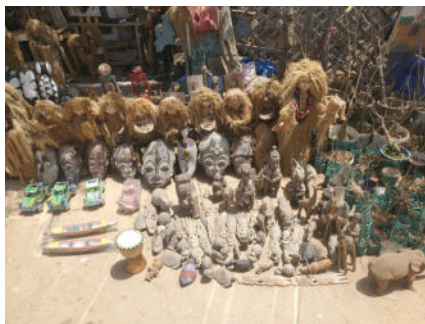


Sue and Jan signing log



Sue and Dorothy resting during climb

We had one more stop to complete the AL. On the way, we had to pass through a street-lined gallery of paintings and crafts by local artists.



Local crafts for sale



Artist working on painting

Sue stopped and was admiring one of them so of course she was pressured to buy it. He wanted \$80 for the one she was looking at, way too much in our opinion. She looked at some others she liked, and he came down in price on the original, then started talking about a package deal. One of the ones she liked was of the [Baobab tree](#), a common subject of paintings. Sue finally settled on three for \$70. They were all attached to frames, so we had to wait while he detached them so he could roll them up for us.



Waiting for the de-framing!

We should be looking for an extra suitcase!

The AL took us to the Freedom Statue where a woman is embracing a man, both standing on a drum, celebrating emancipation. The man's raised wrists have chains dangling from them.

The requirements were to answer some questions about the marble plaque attached to the base and to take a selfie for posting.



Freedom statue

There was one last cache to be had which was hidden under an air conditioner in an alley. Jan spotted it with his inspection mirror and Sue located it and brought it out for signing. It was a pouch made of duct tape with the log inside and a magnet to keep it attached.

By this time, we were all tired from walking and climbing around the cliffs. We made our way to one of the restaurants near the terminal and enjoyed a couple local beers.

Sue doesn't like beer unless it is ginger beer. She asked for it and the waiter came back with a beer and a glass of strong liquid ginger. Sue mixed them together and liked it so much she went to find out the source. It turned out that it was home-made. We will have to search for some recipes and try making it ourselves.

We had an extended wait in the queue at the terminal for our ferry. Dorothy was brilliant (another English term I've heard a lot) enough to bring an umbrella as the sun was quite hot.

We made it back to the Queen mid-afternoon, satisfied with our activities for the day.

We later enjoyed an Easter dinner of lamb shank, veggies and dessert.

Next stop, Tenerife, Canary Islands



Relaxing with a local beer after a hard day of geocaching.

## Tenerife, Canary Islands

Wednesday, 23 April, 2025

Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain



Mount Teide on Tenerife

The Canary Islands are located just 62 miles from the African country of Morocco, but they are an ["autonomous community"](#) of Spain. Even though Spain is over 600 miles away. Tenerife is the largest and most populous island and has a population of just under 1 million, nearly half of all the Canaries. Tenerife hosts more than seven million tourists each year, making it by far the most visited island in the [archipelago](#). Because of its temperate climate, it is a popular destination for Europeans. As expected, Spanish is the official language, but English as well as German are commonly understood.

Teide National Park, located in the center of the island, is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site and our destination for today. It contains Mount Teide which has the highest elevation in Spain as well as all the islands in the Atlantic Ocean. It also has the distinction of being the third-largest volcano in the world! Teide is still considered an active volcano even though it has not erupted in well over two centuries (1798). Its maximum height is 3,715 meters (12,188 feet), our adventure today will take us to about 3,500 meters (11,650 feet)!

We met our German friends for breakfast before walking from the ship to the car rental place. We got there just as it opened at 8AM. The attendant spoke nearly unaccented English, and I asked if he was from the U.S. He said he wished that we were true and if so, he would be there instead of here. Turned out he was Cuban. Jan mentioned that he went on Holiday there and they talked about those places as we checked in. I was going to be a second driver, but he required my passport, and I did not bring it with me. Dorothy was going to be doing the driving, which she seemed fine with. The mid-sized car had a standard shift, I think most of them did, but Dorothy was comfortable with it and didn't mind. Jan and I got in back at his suggestion although it was a tight fit, especially for him. He would help with navigation.

Jan and Dorothy had visited this location previously on a family holiday, and Jan returned for a second time to ride a bicycle up the mountain. That was 23 years and a few pounds ago.

Our destination was the Teide Cableway, an aerial tramway that goes up Mount Teide. Starting at its base station at 7,730 ft ASL, it ascends to the top station at 11,663. It carries 44 people and takes 8 minutes traveling at 26 ft/sec.

Our route would take us through the city of Santa Cruz de Tenerife and Dorothy did a great job of driving. This is the first time in a long time that we are on the right side of the road. Even in the city there were steep hills and not many streets went very far without going through a roundabout which required a lot of shifting as the car was not very powerful. Soon we were on the outskirts and got serious about gaining altitude. Curve after curve we edged our way upward on the two-lane seemingly narrow road which was full of sharp blind turns and hairpins. Video: [Dorothy negotiating curves](#)

The terrain when we started was quite desert-like with cactus, sand and rocks, but now as we climbed, we entered into pine forests. Some area quite dense, but most would make for fairly easy navigating aside from the continuous mountain climb. We passed several pull over viewing areas because we had one in mind that contained a geocache. Video: [Pull-over where cache is located](#) We arrived there only to find that the cache, although only about 50 feet away, was about 120 feet nearly straight up a steep incline. Jan and Dorothy did not feel safe attempting it and we should have as well, but Sue was already on her way. So, I followed, picking my way up grabbing on to rocks and tree branches. Video: [Climbing for the cache](#) The pine trees had recently been burned and still had black soot on their surface. New growth was sprouting everywhere but this was once a serious forest fire. We finally arrived and the view of the Orotava Valley was fantastic from up there. We both looked around and at first could not find the cache. It would have been sad to have expended all this energy and not score the prize. But we kept looking and I was happy when I moved a rock in a crevice and found the container hidden underneath. We logged our find and made our way back down, feet first.

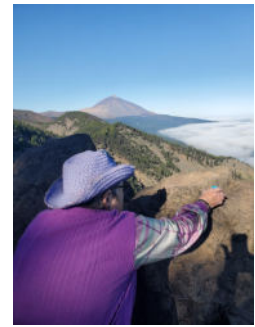


Climbing through burned forest for cache

Our next stop was an Earth Cache, called La Tarta, or "The Cake". While excavating to build this road, they uncovered this terrain that tells the story of the different volcanic eruption over the centuries or even millennia. Each one of the layers originates from a different eruption and was deposited over a period of days and weeks. They even built an overlook so people could view it from above, although we took our pictures from the road.



"The Cake"



Sue signing log with Mount Teide in background

As we continue to climb, the forest is thinning and eventually we are above the tree line. The topography is back to volcanic sand, rocks and brush. We pass by the Teide Observatory, in operation since 1964.

This is one of the three best spots in the world to observe the sky, along with Chile and Hawaii. The observatory is located at an altitude of 7841 feet. It offers tours but is not on our schedule.

Jan has pre-purchased tickets for the cable ride which included a time of 11:20. We arrive at the parking area which is quite full, and we must walk to get to the terminal. We have time to visit the ever-present gift shop for Sue's pin and some fabric. Jan and Dorothy collect refrigerator magnets.



Teide Observatory

Video: [Cable Terminal](#)

Our wait in the queue is not very long and soon we are on our way to the terminus which we can't even see from the base station. It was an ear-popping eight-minute ride, and we were glad to have dressed for the occasion as we can see splotches of snow in protected areas. The sun is shining however, and it is another beautiful day. I find it hard to believe that we have been blessed with such good weather this whole trip! Video: [Waiting for our cable car](#)

There are hiking paths going both directions, but our destination leads us to one particular direction where more caches are located. This involves more climbing! We make our way to the first one and since we are not supposed to deviate from the path, the cache should be within arm's length. We search for a short time without success, but Jan and I decide to proceed on. Sue and Dorothy will continue to look for it.



[Jan making our way to next cache](#)

Remember, we are at 11,000 feet plus, the oxygen up here is scarce. Both Sue and I admit to being a little dizzy. Altitude sickness is a real thing to take into consideration. Jan says the next cache is about 500 meters. So off we go. Why does everything seem to be uphill? People are coming and going because the path dead ends eventually and you can only go further if you had obtained a permit to do so. We pass an earth cache that draws our attention to a discoloration that is an opening for with an occasional wisp of vapor coming out that smells like sulfur dioxide which is indicative



Snow along the way

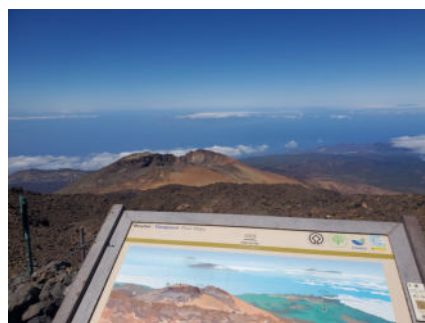
of volcanos that are still active giving off these gases. Smells like rotten eggs. I venture over to it to touch one of the surrounding rocks as required. They want to know if the rocks are cold, warm or hot. They are warm to the touch as expected. I hear a guide holler at me to get back on the trail, which I am happy to oblige.

We arrive at the coordinates for the regular cache, and we have no trouble locating it and recording the find. There is one more Earth Cache that Jan want to visit. It is at the end of the trail before further exploring would require a permit.

We take the required selfies to claim credit. We have been walking for over 30 minutes, and we are only supposed to be on the summit for one hour. But what can they do? We are confident there will not be a problem, it is designed to keep the traffic moving. But there is no way to see even half of the views up here in that amount of time.

When we get to a place where there are no people around, it is amazingly quiet and peaceful. I need to stop regularly to catch my breath and rest. It is a wonderful place for reflection and to take in the magnificence of the place we call Earth.

I manage to take a video from the cable car on our way down. My phone has already died once, but I brought along a portable charger



Sulfur dioxide gas escaping



End of trail without permit

to give it a boost. Jan points out our next stop on the way down. It is the Paradoras Hotel and Restaurant. We will have lunch there. It is where he and family stayed while on Holiday here. Video: [Return cable car](#)

Earth Cache for crater of Pico Viejo volcano

It was a short drive after disembarking the cable car walking back to the car. There was a long line of cars, but Dorothy drove up to the entrance and the guard arm for the hotel guests happened to be up, so we took advantage and parked close to the entrance. The lunchroom was just opening, and we enjoyed a lunch of some local favorites.

Sue had a crusted prawn dish, Dorothy, a cheese plate and Jan and I had the papas arrugadas. This is an iconic dish everyone says must be experienced.



Sue's crusted prawn and my "Papas" and dips

It is basically boiled new potatoes with a salted exterior, paired with red and green sauces. We shared our dishes, and it was all very good and most enjoyable.



Dining at Paradoras Hotel

We were running a little late, so we called for our bill and headed down the mountain. We were unfortunate to get behind a tourist bus, which there were many. It went very slow and had to stop on almost every tight turn to allow other cars to get by before taking up most of the road to get around. This was really putting us in a quandary, we were coming up to a fork in the road which the shortest route was to the right but if we had to follow the bus all the way it would take forever. We took the

left fork longer but hopefully less time.



We are on top of the clouds but we have to get down through them to get back.

This route took us down through the clouds which did not help the situation as they were quite dense and that slowed us down as well. Once through the cloud cover, we had to go through the city of Puerto de la Cruz, then on to a freeway to our destination of Santa Cruz. Before the freeway, Jan said google maps had us arriving at the car rental at 4:15! All aboard was at 4:30. It was at least a 10-minute walk from the car rental, so we were all a little anxious. Once Dorothy got on the freeway, she put the pedal to the metal and we managed to gain a few minutes, but time was still tight. The ship would not wait for people unless they were on a ship's sponsored tour, we were not!

Thankfully we had no traffic problems and we arrived at the rental kiosk about 4:10 and we all made it back before they pulled up the gangplank.

It had been a wonderful day and a fitting end to our shore experiences, with a little drama thrown in for good measure.

I hope you have enjoyed following along and I appreciated all the comments along the way. I may post another blog or two while we visit Sue's two sisters in England and Scotland. We will see how it goes.

Until then.....

## Comments:

### 26.04.2025: Jan Rüten-Budde

It was a pleasure doing some geocaching excursions with you! Afterwards we could not wait to read, what you would write about them.  
Thanks for providing such excellent reports!  
Greetings Jan and Dorothy

### 27.04.2025: Licoricetwist

It sounds like excessive excitement to finish! I guess one of those experiences good to look back on but not necessarily live through! 🤔