

Hong Kong to Southampton Voyage – Part 1

Great Adventure Travelogue

Hong Kong to Southampton Voyage

Part 1: Hong Kong to Penang, Malaysia

March 25-26, 2016

Dateline: Hong Kong

Latitude at Hong Kong 22.39 Degrees North, Longitude 114.12
Degrees East



Refreshments
on the Cathay
Pacific Flight

We got up at 3:00 a.m. to get ready for a 4:15 car service pick up to take us to catch our flight from Atlanta to Hong Kong via Chicago. Since we were going to be gone for 45 days, we packed like it was going to be several years – 3 bags weighing about 50 pounds each were checked, then I had a monster purse and roll-aboard and Gary had his Man Purse (a.k.a. messenger bag) and backpack. We flew American to Chicago, a flight of just over 2 hours and had a long layover in O'Hare, but we booked it that way on purpose to avoid stress in case of late flights and/or blizzards. We got some Hong Kong currency at O'Hare and got 680 Hong Kong Dollars for

\$100. US. We had a 3:00 p.m. flight on Cathay Pacific, legendary for their food and service, and had decided to splurge on business class. Cathay is an alternative name for Northern China dating back to medieval times. It sounds much more exotic than just plain old China. We would take an "Over the Pole" route which took us 15 hours and 50 minutes. So by the time we return, we will have gone around the world, except this is a shortcut so we don't have to cross the Pacific at its widest point, so that around the world may be debatable. The distance from Atlanta to Hong Kong is 8,380 miles, a mere 1/3 of the way around the world.

To get in the mood for Orient, we ate lunch at O'Hare at a place called Wow Bao (the two words rhyme). We ate dumplings (called "bao's") and a Thai rice bowl to get our taste buds ready. The plane and the flight were both wonderful. There were fresh orchids in a little wall mounted vase at every seat (although I suspect in coach the held off on the flowers). Each passenger in Business Class had a private cubicle and a seat that reclined flat for sleeping. We were served champagne to celebrate our departure, a great steak to rival Ruth's Chris (part of the best airline food ever), watched a few movies and went to sleep. We were awakened for breakfast an hour out of Hong Kong. This was easily the best flight we have ever taken, but we regret that we slept through most of it. Total travel time was 27 hours including the layover, but it seemed way too easy. We are really going to be whining when we come home from England on Delta coach, but then its half the distance and a fraction of the cost.



Hong Kong

Skyline

We arrived at 8:00 p.m. at night on the following day – exactly 12 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight time so we didn't have to change our watches. For purposes of clarity, I will express time in terms of UTC which is Universal Time Coordinated, formerly known as Greenwich Mean Time since Longitude Zero passes through Greenwich, England. Hong Kong is at UTC plus 8 hours and Eastern Daylight is at UTC minus 4.

We took a taxi from the airport which is actually on a separate island from Hong Kong Island, across Lantau Island, and across a bridge that reminded us of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. We were briefly in Kowloon, which is part of the mainland and then traveled through two tunnels to Hong Kong Island. We had reservations at the Renaissance Harbor View across the street from the Convention Center in the Wan Chai district. Our cab driver got lost and had to ask for directions a few times, but we knew we were closing in on the hotel when the Convention Center kept appearing. We knew that there was such a thing as an Octopus Pass which we could have used for the mass transit system, but we never bought one, despite good advice from friends who had lived there. It seemed like we were either in the wrong place to buy it, or had no time to buy it. Next time we will know.



A Chinese Junk

Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China. When it was turned over to China from the British in 1997, they were wise enough to leave it pretty much as it, instead of dragging

it back fifty years to align with mainland China. There is a deep natural harbor here which made it a natural place for trade. It became a British Colony after the First Opium War in 1842 with China.

Originally just Hong Kong Island was settled, but the colonization expanded to include Kowloon in 1860, and then further expansion took in the New Territories on the Chinese Mainland in 1898. The colony was overrun by the Japanese during WWII, but after the Japanese surrender, the British came back in full force. After the turnover giving Hong Kong back to China in 1997, the area is now one country with two systems. China is Communist with severe restrictions on just about everything, and Hong Kong is pro-capitalism, operating with minimal government interference, lower taxes, and free trade. It is the world's leading financial center with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. While the land mass is small, it is getting larger every day with massive land reclamation projects. It is described as the world's most vertical city with hundreds of high rise residential and commercial buildings. An estimated 90% of people use public transportation and this keeps traffic jams at a minimum.



Kowloon
Skyline

Fully rested and eager to explore, we set out on foot from the hotel to see what had changed since our last visit 10 years ago. The major change was to the harbor area itself. Developers have reclaimed acres of Hong Kong Harbor to build the Convention Center and now they are reclaiming land on

either side of it. The waterway between Kowloon and Hong Kong has become so narrow that many ships no longer transverse it. One of the highlights of our 2006 trip on the QE2 was to steam between the impressive skylines of Kowloon and Hong Kong. Ships now are not making the same passage. We were wondering if the intent was to join the two with landfill. We certainly hope not, it is still perfectly charming, but without the Star Ferries shuttling back and forth it wouldn't be the same.



Hong Kong
Waterfront at
the Convention
Center

We did see a family of mice that startled us, especially the daddy who was quite large, as we walked along the landfill projects, but thankfully they were the only rodents we saw. Hong Kong appears spotlessly clean and mostly rodent free – although we think they could use a few working cats to clean up the area. We were looking for a quaint harbor side eatery, but decided we are ahead of the times. On our next visit the waterfront should be developed. We could have walked a block or two in the other direction (away from the water) and found hundreds of restaurants, but we only learned this once we consulted our notes from our friends who used to live here. We did have a nice walk and noted that Hong Kong and Kowloon are still glittery and sparkly and can out-Vegas even Vegas itself with neon and lasers galore.

We had a small appetizer at the hotel and found it to be quite pricey and thus resolved that we would check out where the

locals have their noodles and dumplings, perhaps for lunch. We did see a steady stream of locals coming out of the local 7-11 stores with steaming bowls of noodles. The 7-11 stores seem to be different here in many respects: no hot dogs, no fountain drinks and no robberies, the latter of which we found appealing. We had thought we would be seriously out of kilter with the 12 hour time difference and be totally wide-eyed at bedtime, but a hot shower, a great bed and an Ambien worked wonders and we slept a full 8 hours.

March 27, 2016



Menu at the
Super Super
Cafe

We awoke early on this Easter Sunday, 12 hours off of Eastern Daylight Time, but that meant our watches had the correct time anyway. We decided to forego the hotel brunch at \$70. US. It is hard to eat \$70 dollars worth of food at any meal, much less at breakfast. Besides, we thought we should go native – maybe find the Hong Kong version of Waffle House, not fully realizing what that might mean. We found a place called the Super Super, as best we could tell since the name was written in the Chinese Alphabet and these were the only words we saw in English on the sign, but the menu had pictures along with English translations, and it was only \$27 HK dollars, or about \$5 US per person. There were some really interesting things we passed on – like the one that featured pork liver and one with fish bellies. We saw a particularly unattractive dish called “congee” that looked suspiciously like wallpaper paste, but

they say it is rice porridge. They offered a side of turnip paste (no hash browns here). I ordered eggs with a bun, which I thought should be pretty safe (as long as the egg in question was a chicken egg – here you never know. What I got was a boiled egg sliced with Spam-like lunch meat, along with a bowl of macaroni that had a few kernels of corn along with a few slivers of the same faux Spam in it. They also offered a steamed rice roll, in which rice was the only thing we recognized. And the sausage, you don't even ask what might be in there – This place could turn you into a vegetarian overnight, but it was billed as the Happy Sausage Breakfast and the sausage was shaped like a big smile. Gary ordered a coffee – big mistake. It was instant and he proclaimed it dreadful. I ordered lemon tea which should have been safe, except they put around half a dozen lemon slices in it that sort of overpowered the tea taste. We resolved to shop around a little before breakfast time tomorrow.



Gloucester
Road Hong Kong

We decided to locate a restaurant called the Chili Club that friends had recommended in the Wan Chai district only a few blocks from our hotel on Lockhart Street. We found the street, but not the number, but a helpful local man Googled it on his cell phone and got us the address. The restaurant, along with other businesses along this street, was closed, but we turned right by the Hay Hay Barbershop (we learned that if it supposed to be good they use the word twice – don't know how this went wrong with the Super Super, this morning's restaurant) and went over one street to Gloucester Road and

stumbled upon Starbucks and swooped down on it as if we had been lost in the desert for days. They had great coffee, identifiable breakfast items and even Free Wi-Fi. At this point Gary discovered that the camera on his IPAD was no longer working. We were able to Google an Apple Store and found one in Kowloon across the harbor.

Today we were going to explore Kowloon on foot, but first hoped to find the Apple Hospital to see if Gary's IPAD could be doctored. We took the Star Ferry and located an Apple Store next to the Harbour City Mall on Canton Road. The prognosis was not good and we were referred to the Critical Care guys on the second floor. The prognosis was not good there either – repair for \$300 or buy new for \$1,000. Gary decided to rough it and we would take pictures the old fashioned way – with a camera or on our cell phones. During the diagnosis process, the technician wiped out all the apps including email and Facebook, so Gary had to spend some time recovering those later in the day back in our hotel, so as to not go into this trip totally Cold Turkey.



Bargains on
Nathan Road

In the meantime, we had some exploring to do. We walked up Canton Road, which is sort of the 5th Avenue of Kowloon, with block upon block of designer stores – Prada, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Armani, Valentino and so forth. What is so ironic is that just a few blocks over on Nathan Road, there is ten times as much merchandise at a tiny fraction of the price in the knock-off markets for the same brands, with a letter changed

here or there,(e.g. Prada might become Prado, or a slight alteration in the logo where the LV on a Louis Vuitton bag might become VV) but at a glance it could pass for the real deal. Sometimes that glance needs to be from further away than others.



Orange
Shopping in
Kowloon

We walked up Nathan Road for what seemed like miles, stumbling across a number of markets including the jade market. There were great deals, but we are at a point in our lives where we are trying to simplify versus acquire “stuff” so we left the many bargains behind. We mostly marveled at all the commerce, but we did buy a wonderfully luscious orange to consume on the spot that we discovered to our chagrin was from California.

There was a whole “technology” market – open air just like the fish market where they sold everything from drones to ancient cell phones. We wondered who buys this stuff? I could see how you might want a knock off purse, but do you trust a knock off drone? We must have seen a billion watches for sale – and wondered how do watch sellers ever make a living?



Open Air Dried Octopus and Other Delights

At the fish market we were amazed that they do not refrigerate fresh fish as it sits in a stall for hours. We know because we often got lost and traveled in circles and recognized a fish here and there from a previous circuit. We estimated we logged 8 to 10 miles just meandering through stalls and stalls of everything imaginable. We took the MTR (Mass transit train) from Nathan Road back to the Admiralty stop in Hong Kong. If we had been more transportation savvy, we could have taken a transfer to Wan Chai near our hotel, but we would have missed many memorable moments experienced as we walked instead. We were continuously entertained by exotic sights such as:

People were picnicking on the pavement like under an overpass or in the shelter of a building where homeless people might be if this were a different country. We wondered if it is illegal to spread your table cloth on the grass in some of these places since people were on the pavement instead.

People practicing tai chi in groups – no music and no audible instruction that we could hear. We wondered how they know when it's time to go to the next move?

People hanging their birdcages in a park to give the birds some fresh air, or so we assume. It must be kind of like people walking their dogs in a Doggy Park in the US.

Seven-Eleven stores here seem to be social gathering places. People will buy a can of beer and hang out on the sidewalk and

drink it. We ourselves bought a little treat there in the form of a \$5 (US money) ice cream bar. Clearly we are going to need to go local on the desserts too.



The Star Ferry
Coming from
Kowloon

We had thought to look out of place (or be identified as tourists) in our jeans and sneakers, but all of the local young people are wearing them now. I think we are busted as tourists though because we are the ones eating the \$5.00 ice cream bars.

We had a short restorative nap and walked to the Chili Club on Lockhart Road where we enjoyed excellent prawn tempura. The pork neck was recommended to us, but unfortunately, as appetizing as it sounds, we somehow missed it on the menu. Besides we had already had all the exotic dishes we could face that morning at the Super Super.

March 28, 2016



Cheung Chau
Harbor

Today it was cool and overcast as we walked to the Starbucks on Gloucester Road to plan our day. We decided to explore Cheung Chau Island and take the Rickshaw Bus tour of Hong Kong. We walked from our hotel to the Ferry terminal (a good hike of a few miles) and found the ferry leaving immediately for Cheung Chau and the tour bus nowhere in sight, nor could we find where to even buy tickets or see a schedule for a tour bus, and so we hopped on the ferry for Cheung Chau after some minor confusion over how to purchase tickets. (We wished we had that Octopus Pass). We had a thirty minute ride and found ourselves on a delightful tiny island with a tiny fishing village. The waterfront was lined with restaurants, many of which offered you the opportunity to pick out your fish (swimming happily in their pens until their death sentence came from a passing tourist stopping for lunch) but since it was too early for lunch, we decided to explore first and lunch later.



Spiral Fries
on Cheung Chau

We noticed that there were hordes of tourists, but only a few

Caucasians, as we strolled the main streets – two streets to be exact – the waterfront street that circled the island and a street through town parallel to the shore which seemed to be the equivalent of Main Street. We did find a delicious treat which was thinly spiral sliced potatoes on a skewer. We met a gentleman whom we assumed was local, but he told us he had grown up in Hong Kong, and moved to America and worked in Las Vegas for a number of years. He was now retired and has come back for a visit.



Incense
Burning at the
Temple at
Cheung Chau

The walk across the island was very short with many side streets with laundry hanging out to dry from the windows – sort of like the back streets of Naples (Italy – not Florida of course). There were a number of shops selling dried fish and produce all along our route. Cheung Chau on the back side of the island (also waterfront) seemed to be a Chinese Coney Island. We encountered an interesting construction project which we learned was an attempt to build a traditional house from bamboo. The temple itself could use a little maintenance work, e.g. the Fu Dog statuary (those chunky little pug looking creatures) guarding the entrance to the temple were missing some teeth. At one point all 4 of them had a free rolling ball in their mouths, but with the teeth gone in 3, there was only one ball left.



Lunch at the Chew Fat

We had lunch at restaurant called Chui Fat (as in chew the fat). Since we were getting low on cash, Gary asked if they take credit cards. They said yes, but the answer was really no when we got to the end of the meal and presented the card. We found that they said yes to everything – no matter what the question and since they really didn't understand the question in the first place – yes must have seemed to be the best answer. Lunch was a modest 37 Hong Kong Dollars per person – roughly 6 dollars. We had to ask for napkins by miming wiping our faces, which no one seemed to be using, and we absolutely cracked up when they brought a roll of toilet paper. We wondered if they were insulting us by suggesting that one end looked like the other, but we didn't take offense. We took the ferry back to Hong Kong and located the Rickshaw Bus.

We found the same payment issue with the Rickshaw bus, and not only would they not accept credit cards, but you had to have exact change. We had to go to a money changer to get Hong Kong dollars and get them in the correct denominations. The fare was \$66 Hong Kong dollars per person, or about \$10 per person on US dollars. After this minor stumble, we got in the bus and all went smoothly after that.



The Bauhinia –
Hong Kong
Convention
Center

The bus ride provided an excellent tour – it was a double-decker and we sat outside. We left from the Star Ferry Terminal and went inland to see Old Hong Kong east of Central Station – a stark contrast to the skyscrapers and condo towers that could have been featured in the Jetsons. It was very reminiscent of San Francisco with steep streets, and damp cool jacket weather. There were seed markets, side by side with art galleries, bars, restaurants, open produce markets. We made a note to come back and explore here. This is our third visit to Hong Kong and we can't believe we are just now discovering it. We were really tempted to hop off and mingle, but we only had a few hours left in our afternoon and wanted to see what else the Rickshaw Tour might turn up. We had a great time seeing the sights from the vantage point of the top of the bus. Our tour even took us through the Cross Harbor Tunnel to Kowloon, revisiting a lot of the places we walked yesterday, and back through that same tunnel to return us to our starting point. We decided to walk back to the hotel on a slightly different route this time since we had seen so many interesting things yesterday.



A City Park in Kowloon

We saw a lot of families out together in parks and on sidewalks. In one sunny waterfront spot, we saw a father reading to a group of kids about 4 years old and using a hand puppet . They were spellbound and so cute. There was also an enclosed doggy park where adults and kids can come to play with their pets.

We have found obesity to be practically non-existent here among the Chinese, and even being overweight is rare. The city is not particularly handicap friendly, but is very clean and well cared for. The economy seems to be booming here. In addition to the huge land reclamation projects, there is also massive construction with very *avant garde* design. My favorite was the Kowloon building with numbers cascading helter-skelter from the top, interspersed with hearts and clouds and other graphics.

We had planned the same routine a nap and then dinner, but we went down for a nap a 5:00 p.m., awoke at 8:00 p.m. briefly, and went back to sleep until the next morning. Some tourists we are!

March 29, 2016



Queen Victoria
at her Berth
in Kowloon

Today we boarded Cunard's Queen Victoria for a 42 day cruise across the Indian Ocean, around Cape Horn and up the coast of Africa to dock at Southampton, home port to the Cunard Line. The Queen Victoria was built and launched 2007 and is registered in Bermuda. She can accommodate 1,997 passengers, with a crew of 981. She has 12 decks and is 965 feet long (she can fit through the Panama Canal with 35 feet to spare) and 106 feet wide. From the waterline to the top of the mast is 181 feet. From the bottom of the hull to the top of the mast is 207 feet. Her maximum speed is 24.3 knots (28 miles per hour). She has six diesel generators for both on board power and propulsion for the twin electrical engines called azipods. These are like giant (really giant at 185 tons apiece) trolling motors than can spin in any direction. This capability, along with the bow thrusters, essentially eliminates the need for tug boats, but a lot of ports require them anyway. To deal with side-to side- roll, the Queen Victoria has two vertical stabilizer fins that can be deployed in rough seas (each about 22 feet long and 10 feet wide). When not in use they slide inside the hull. She has the capacity for almost 900,000 gallons of water, replenished daily with on board desalinization plants and over 900,000 gallons of fuel, replenished in various ports as needed.

After a mere 12 hours of sleep, we woke up at the hotel early, eager to get on board. In need of some protein, but leery of the offerings at the Super Super, and looking for something

substantial (we hadn't eaten since noon yesterday after all) , we opted for (guilty confession time) McDonalds Egg McMuffins which we wolfed down with great gusto. We followed this up with coffee and hot chocolate at Starbucks. We returned to the hotel to check out and get a taxi to the cruise terminal in Kowloon. There was so much construction around the hotel and around the pier, it was two hours before we were checked in and on board the ship.



The Atrium of
the Queen
Victoria

We checked out our table assignment – having requested a table for two in a quiet corner and we got just that – it was perfect. We were eating at the first sitting which was a little early at 6:00 p.m., but the second sitting was not until 8:30. We usually eat around 6:30 or 7:00 so the earlier time looked to be best for us, especially since we were not yet cured of jet lag. Our room was on Deck 4, starboard side so we were perfectly positioned to see the nightly light show on the buildings of Hong Kong from our balcony. There are a few lasers, but it is mostly neon, as glitzy and showy as imaginable. The buildings are typically headquarters for banks and major corporations, each responsible for their own lighting.



Celebratory
Champagne on
board the
Queen Victoria

We left at midnight and we watched the departure from our balcony. There were 3 blasts from the ship's whistle (which is the nautical term used – it is actually a very deep sounding horn). We were actually watching in pajamas (well I was – Gary was in his “pajama” underwear, and realized too late that our balcony is one of several on our deck that sticks out further than those on the decks above us, so we were in full view of many of our fellow passengers who were also watching the departure. My pajamas can pass for Capri pants, but Gary's undies are very clearly just that , so we were definitely flaunting the dress code. We haven't seen anything in writing about balcony dress rules, but are pretty sure underwear would be considered unacceptable.

March 30, 2016

Dateline: South China Sea

Latitude at Noon UTC +8, 19.6 Degrees North, Longitude 112.8 East



The Commodore Club Lounge

Today is our first full day at sea, cruising southward in the South China Sea. We awoke early and had a leisurely breakfast, did a little reading and played cribbage. We decided to start with a best of 10 series and you have to win by two. We attended a lecture on the history of China in the late 19th and early 20th Century, which I must admit I dozed off in, but fortunately I was familiar enough with the material that I don't think I missed a whole lot of enlightenment. However I did finally learn what the deal was with the Opium Wars. That is the British wanted tea from China, but had nothing to trade that the Chinese wanted since they were such an insular society. So the British introduced them to Turkish Opium and as it turned out, they wanted that a lot. War broke out because the opium trade was so profitable that the British wanted access to all Chinese ports. The Chinese for their part, resisted at first, but then got to liking the opium so much that they didn't much care one way or the other after a while, and the British dominated their country for the next several decades, or in the case of Hong Kong, the next century and a half.

I also learned about the Boxer Rebellion. I had heard of it and wondered if the Boxers involved were dogs, or pugilists. Apparently it was neither. There was a rebellion of a segment of the population against Western influence from 1899 to 1901, which took on the rather cumbersome name of "The Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fist". In Chinese this is still a lengthy name, and thus the Brits shortened it to "Boxer". We

also learned that China, despite popular myth, is a long way from dominating the world in most ways that really matter.

One striking figure was that average income per person in US dollars in US is 42k, in Australia it is 56k, in China it is 7K. Now why do we want those offshore jobs back?



From the Stern
of Queen
Victoria in
the South
China Sea

We then sat in on an interview with the Commodore, Christopher Rynd, who has had a very interesting career and is a charismatic speaker (not in the preacher sense of the word) and held our full attention the whole time. He said the most challenging port in the world is Cunard's home port of Southampton, England due to tides, current, wind, narrow channels and tight spaces. He reported his scariest moments at sea were on a small freighter going from Australia to Asia in extremely rough seas. It was a stiff vessel with no flex to it, pounding in 20 foot seas for several days. He said that weather is the biggest threat to any seagoing vessel and thus there is a need to be vigilant 24 x 7. His 3 favorite ports in terms of scenery and overall ambiance are Istanbul, Venice and Sydney. Gary and I have been blessed enough to have been to all 3 and we have to agree with; his assessment. He says the one place he has not been that he wants to go to is Antarctica. We have been there, but only small ships can go there now so he will either have to go as a passenger or take a downgrade to a smaller ship. He was asked if they ever

leave passengers behind and he said absolutely. He told us that once they left 200 passengers behind in Cannes because a mistral, a strong cold wind coming out of the northwest across southern France and into the Mediterranean, came up. The ship had to get out to sea in a hurry to ride it out since winds can be in excess of 40 miles per hour and can climb up to hurricane force. In this instance, Cunard paid for hotel rooms and put the people on buses to take them to the next port, Pisa, Italy where they could pick them up.

He also talked about the improvement of ships and the use of bow thrusters and azipods which allow the ships propellers to turn 360 degrees. This provided much more maneuverability than in the old days of propellers and shafts. We did have a tug assist leaving Hong Kong, but the Commodore said it is required by the Hong Kong Authorities, plus the Queen Victoria needs to do this regularly to keep the skills sharp in case of any system failure, even though she could easily have maneuvered herself out of the harbor.

We had actually met Commodore Rynd in 2006 when he was a Captain on the Queen Elizabeth 2 for her World Voyage. We chatted with him after the talk to see if he remembered our most exciting moment on board which was a cyclone hitting American Samoa the same day we docked there. The QE2 had 4 tugs pushing to keep us at the dock with our lines secure. The visit was cut short by several hours and we left at noon. The Commodore said he remembered it well.

At noon we were 120 miles east of the Chinese island of Hainan Dao, which looks like a large tear drop when viewed on a map. We were traveling at a speed of 18.3 knots in water about 650 feet deep. Both the air and water were a balmy 73 degrees F. We have traveled 205 miles from Hong Kong with 1,241 left to go to Singapore. We are only 12 miles from the Paracel Islands, which are currently being claimed by the Chinese, the Vietnamese and the Filipinos with Malaysian and Brunei also claiming some of the territory. There are ongoing

“International Incidents” here – fortunately we were not a participant in one this trip.



Queen
Victoria's
Grand
Staircase

We had lunch in the Golden Lion, the ship's pub. Fish and chips and mushy peas are served daily along with other English specialties such as the ploughman's Lunch and Yorkshire pudding. The so called “mushy peas” are English peas mashed into a yukky slime. I don't really like English peas when they look their best so I had to leave this on the plate. And for dessert Gary ordered another English specialty called (no kidding) “Spotted Dick” which tastes as bad as it sounds. It is a pudding-like cake with raisins in it with a vanilla sauce. Just a personal observation in line with my own tastes, I have found that British desserts often need more sugar, butter, flour, baking soda or baking powder(not necessarily all in the same dessert – but there is a deficiency detected in sampling an array of British desserts on a variety of Cunard Ships. For example, the ice cream needs both more cream and sugar. I did have a good crème brulee and the cream puffs and éclairs are good, and so I expect they were following a French recipe.

In the afternoon there was more leisure time for naps, reading, cribbage, but we did decide that for sea days, we would walk two miles on the Promenade deck which requires 6 laps and we began that regimen today. We had a wonderful

dinner – excellent food, (no mush peas here) which we learned would be true of every meal, served with excellent service. The evening performance was one of the best we have ever seen anywhere. It was a one man show – an Australian named Danny Elliot who could sing, dance and play 12 instruments. He actually can play more; he just played 12 for us. We found ourselves looking forward to another sea day tomorrow to rest from the grueling schedule so far.

March 31, 2016

Dateline: South China Sea

Latitude at Noon UTC+ 8, 12.5 Degrees North, Longitude 110.8 Degrees East

Today was a super lazy day, both physically and intellectually, with the one redeeming factor of walking the two miles on the Promenade Deck. We awoke early, checked email and Facebook (on board wi-fi is quite acceptable, if a little on the expensive side), had breakfast, did our usual cribbage and reading, but today we decided to lounge in the traditional wooden deck chairs on the Promenade Deck. This was truly delightful and we would come to try to work this into our daily lounging routine. There is nothing like doing this to make you feel like you are on a ship – the sights – endless expanse of sapphire blue sea and pale blue sky laden with fluffy clouds- and the sound – the steady drone of the engines and the slap of water against the hull, and the continuous swells, rolling and breaking. We had an occasional sighting of a fishing boat or freighter and the occasional sea bird of some sort. We have not seen much land since Hong Kong, although we trust that it is out there relatively close, since the commodore has said so. Out on the Promenade Deck, it is every bit as relaxing as two martinis – it is in a word, delightful.

We get a daily bulletin with scheduled activities and it often

has little nautical tidbits to entertain us. We learned today about the Plimsoll Mark, (also known as the "Load Line" which is a special marking on ships to show the legal limit to which a ship may be loaded). If your Plimsoll mark is underwater, you could have big trouble, especially in rough water. There are 6 separate loading levels: tropical fresh water, fresh water, tropical sea water, summer sea water and winter sea water and winter North Atlantic sea water. This mark was invented by Samuel Plimsoll in 1870. All commercial vessels today are permanently marked mid-ships with their appropriate mark.

Today at noon we were traveling at 19 knots in the South China Sea, north east of Nha Trang, Vietnam. We have traveled 629 miles from Hong Kong with 850 miles to go to Singapore. Our route will take us south, down the east coast of Vietnam to the Singapore Straits. There was a 7 knot wind and the seas were slight. The air temperature was 70 degrees F and the water was 82F.

At lunch today they served a potpourri of exotic Asian fruit, which we only discovered after we had eaten, and which perhaps may have been a good thing, but the Asians on board were really enjoying it. There was mangosteen, rambutan (a spiky thing that looked like sweet gum balls, only much larger), rose apples, dragon fruit, lychee, jackfruit, and finally one we recognized, the mandarin orange. The omitted, no doubt on purpose the durian, which is said to have an awful smell – somewhere between skunk and rotting corpse.

And speaking of awful things, the bane of most passenger ships is the norovirus, which can be spread from passenger to passenger and is highly contagious, causing nausea, vomiting and frequent trips to the bathroom. To combat this there is Purell, dispensed at every entrance to everyplace food is served and most where it is not. Purell flows more freely than wine here. So far, we are aware of no outbreaks, although the rumor mill has it that both the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen

Mary were having trouble as they visited Hong Kong the same day we left it.



Library
Staircase on
Board the
Queen Victoria

We tried the Winter Garden after lunch, but since it is essentially a green house, we found it much too steamy for this climate and decided to return outdoors to the promenade deck for our afternoon lounge session. We had to work hard to rouse ourselves from our lethargy to put in our two miles of walking, followed by showers and dinner. We are convinced that without the walking, we will both outgrow our clothes by the end of the cruise. However, we may still do that even with the walking – there is just too much temptation on board. One particular vice that we have adopted at dinner is eating two to three rolls, (crusty on the outside and soft on the inside) with probably the best butter I have ever eaten. It is Irish and has to have an astronomical cream content. We will have to go through rehab when we get off the ship to get weaned off this stuff.

This evening we passed a series of offshore oil rigs off the coast of Vietnam. Apparently oil was recently discovered here. Adjacent to the oil fields, we will be crossing the Julia Shoal which runs for 20 miles and is only 30 meters deep, before a drop-off of several thousand meters.

April 1, 2016

Dateline: South China Sea

Latitude at Noon UTC+ 8, 6.3 Degrees North, Longitude 107.0 Degrees East

We are supposedly in Time Zone UTC Plus 8, but there is something hinky about that, unless our computers and phones are playing an April Fool's trick. They wanted to spring forward an hour to UTC plus 7, but the ship's clocks were having none of it and then when we arrived in Singapore our electronics agreed with ship's time. We found we have to be vigilant when covering so much ground so you are not late for anything, especially a meal. However since we are going west it is often earlier than we think. We later learned that the ship often is off by an hour or so in the interest of smooth running.

This is our last sea day before Singapore, where a number of passengers are disembarking, and we will take on some new ones. The ship is sailing full, so we assume that means the same number will get on that get off. The sun at this latitude is almost directly overhead so we are casting only the tiniest of shadows today. The sun is also very strong and sunburns can happen in no time so we are strongly advised to apply our sunscreen liberally when outdoors.



A Favorite
Hangout for
Lounging

We did our leisure thing until mid-morning on the Promenade Deck, when there was an interview of a British journalist,

Jenny Bond, who was the Royal Correspondent for the BBC for over 14 years, and as such, she was very well acquainted with Princess Diana. Ms. Bond told us about how she got started in the business and ended up with the royal assignment, as well as lots of interesting tidbits, but nothing not already rehashed in the press. Apparently she was something of a confidante of the princess, and many of those confidential talks were not and would not be shared.

Today at noon we were 120 miles off the coast of Saigon, Vietnam in just over 200 feet of water, pretty shallow as sea beds go. The air temperature at noon was 83 degrees F and the sea was the same. We have traveled 1,080 miles from Hong Kong and have 366 miles to go to reach Singapore. We will be traveling through the Gulf of Thailand and will reach the Singapore Straits at 5:00 a.m. The Singapore Straits feed into the Malacca Straits which we will also traverse. We are traveling at a sedate 16 knots since there is heavy traffic and at one point the Straits narrow to 1.5 miles across. The straits were busy with ships – freighters, tankers, tugs, containers, auto carriers, fishing boats in every direction as far as the eye could see. We were told that 25% of all goods moved anywhere in the world by ship come through these straits aboard an estimated 90,000 vessels per year. The captain had to repeatedly sound a blast on the ship's horn (called a whistle harkening back to the old days when it actually was a whistle) to warn smaller ships that kept darting across our path.

Whenever we have sea days it provides the opportunity to check out our fellow passengers, and I must say there were some odd ducks on this voyage.

One character we saw almost daily was the Tom Selleck in his Magnum PI role look-alike, but with hair gel. But some days, he seems to be more Geraldo Rivera, especially when he dons his reading glasses. He always appears in the Carinthia Lounge, the best place according to Gary to get a decent cup of American coffee. We would hit it every morning after

breakfast so Gary could get his fix, and apparently so did Tom-Geraldo. Today he appeared in an off-white linen sports coat with a pocket square, matching his tasteful shirt, linen trousers. I imagined his clothes to be all bespoke from Savile Row (or it could be a Hong Kong customized 24 hour job too – they are that good) Anyway, he appeared with his Mac laptop and had his cappuccino, chatting merrily with two ladies of his acquaintance about such trivia as where to go in Singapore. He reports that tomorrow he is going to Little India (but being British he calls it “Inja”), an India Quarter of the most exotic kind, we assume, for the truly discerning.

On our daily brisk walk around the Promenade Deck, we would see a lady moving out right smartly on her own deck walk, but without the benefit of an appropriate foundation garment for her ample bosom. It looked like she has little animals under her T-shirt trying to get out. While a more supportive foundation garment would be in order, I did not suggest it. She was brawny enough to snap me in half like a tooth pick. Gary, on the other hand, she might have to snap in half like a piece of kindling.



The Promenade
Deck Just
Below the Life
Boats

Also on the Promenade Deck, we often saw the man whom we thought had on a brown wrinkled shirt until he got closer and saw he had on no shirt at all, but sported a deep tan as if he often walked about outdoors so scantily clad. I must report

that if he did have a T-shirt on, he too would have looked like he had little animals under his shirt. In the words of Kramer from Seinfeld when speaking of foundation garments– he could have used a Man-zier.

Taking a break from contemplating fellow passengers, I had to go to retrieve our passports from the Purser's Office since we had to have them to go ashore in Singapore. Gary played a round of Bingo and went to a Chinese Wine Tasting from the Changyu Vineyards. I thought it sounded like you'd have some really bad wine to taste there. (It just seems like some things are never going to be good ideas (like having Mexican food in Bangkok, or ordering a margarita in Nairobi, or having Chinese food in Ecuador – all of which, to our dismay, we have tried). Gary reported that it was pretty good and even ordered a bottle for dinner. Once we finished up a nice South African Wine, the Chinese was served next and he concluded that perhaps he had overrated the Chinese wine and decided to strike it from future consideration.

April 2, 2016

Dateline: Singapore

Latitude at Singapore 1.3 Degrees North, Longitude 103.8 Degrees East



Approaching
Singapore –
the View from
the Commodore
Club

Overnight we passed the Anambas Islands, belonging to Indonesia, which is the site of a number of shipwrecks in shallow water – a haven for scuba divers. We entered the Straits of Singapore in the wee hours, passing just over 7 miles from the island of Bintan. At one time Bintan was known as Pirate Island, because it was a base for the Malay Pirates who looted sailing vessels passing through the area. The Straits are 40 miles long and quite narrow, with land close on both sides. We stopped at 8:00 a.m. to pick up a harbor pilot and continued north to our berth. Taking on a Harbor Pilot is standard procedure at every port to utilize local knowledge regarding individual ports when docking to avoid such inconveniences as running aground or the embarrassment of docking at the wrong pier. Taking on board a harbor pilot involves a small vessel coming along side and boarding through an access door in the hull of the ship.

Singapore gets its name from the Sanskrit words “singa” which means lion and “pura” which means city or village, but the British changed it, as they were wont to do back in colonial days, to Singapore. Folklore attributes the name to a 14th Century Sumatran prince who landed here and saw what came to be interpreted as a lion, but in all likelihood was a tiger, since they don't have any lions in these parts. Malay is the national language of Singapore, but after the British colonization, a Creole version of a Malay and English developed which is referred to as



Marina Bay
Singapore

“Singlish”. British colonization began here when Thomas Stamford Raffles, employed by the East India Trading Company, established a settlement on the Singapore River to conduct trade, primarily for the exporting of tea, silk and spices. He signed a trade agreement with the local sultan on behalf of the British East India Company in 1819. The sultan, of course, didn’t think he was agreeing to a takeover, but that evolved quickly in the ensuing years. Back in colonial days, the old town had “go-downs” (warehouses), all along the river, while most of the people lived in large extended families in “shop houses” where there was a shop on the first floor and living quarters in the floor or floors above it.

Singapore was the property of the East India Company until 1856. In 1857 it became a Crown Colony of Great Britain, and the floodgates opened for immigrants from China, Indonesian, Malaya and India. As a result there are now 54 languages spoken here. Today’s residents are primarily of Chinese descent (76 %) and Malay (15%). Singapore finally declared independence from Britain in 1963. There are still very distinct ethnic neighborhoods here such as Chinatown, Little India and Arab Street.



Singapore
Skylilne

Today Singapore, officially called The Republic of Singapore, consists of 63 islands, including the main island of Singapore (or Pulau Ujong in Malay). Singapore now has an elected Prime Minister (head of government) and a President (head of state) and Parliament, but this is a fairly recent

development. Singapore was taken over by the Japanese in WWII in 1942 and occupied until 1945, and suffered thousands of civilian casualties. There is a bit of a discrepancy between the figure at which the Japanese assess the number (5k) and the figure that the locals believe it to be (30 to 50k). After the war, the British came back and went about running the colony as before, but granted them self rule in 1959 with Lee Kwan Yew as the Prime Minister. Singapore joined a loose federation that was Malaysia for a time, but they were expelled in 1965 because the Malaysians felt Singapore's large Chinese population threatened their own country's culture. It was considered a very sad event, by Yew, but he turned things around in a major way. Singapore was for a long time, quite the din of iniquity (drugs, prostitution and general mayhem) until Yew's prime minister role became more that of a dictator and his "dictates" really cleaned the place up. All the iniquity migrated to places such Pataya, Thailand, and such minor infractions such as littering and gum chewing became major offenses. There was a bit of a flap several years back when a young American offender was sentenced to "caning" (that is a spanking (or a beating – all a matter of perspective) with a cane for vandalism. Apparently he survived it with no permanent scars and we've all moved on.

Singapore lies 85 miles north of the Equator, in the most southerly part of Asia. The nation is comprised of 227 square miles on several islands, with a population of around 3.8 million. We were here 10 years ago, but only got to spend one day, so we were glad to have the opportunity for a city tour this time. We had some spare time as the ship eased up to the dock so we had a game of deck quoits before disembarking. We still had some time so we took stroll around the deck and saw that a fuel boat had pulled alongside to fill us up, which given the size of our ship's tanks, would take a good part of the day. We did puzzle over a sign that said "No naked light", until we finally figured out that this translated into American English as "No open flame". The pier where we

docked, Marina Bay Cruise Terminal was fairly new. Ten years ago we docked across the harbor among the container ships. The skyline rising from the morning mist was also radically different from the one we last saw in 2006. I say mist – it was really just pure humidity. Singapore is billed as the “cleanest and greenest” city in the world. We can certainly agree on the clean part, but there is a lot of concrete here where trees used to be.



Ship Traffic
in Singapore's
Harbor

Today Singapore is home to 130 banks, an oil refining and distribution center, a ship building center and several makers of electronic components. Singapore last year also received twice as many tourists (6 million) as it has residents. We learned that the currency here is 1.13 Singapore Dollars to the U.S. Dollar. The primary language is English and the second is Chinese. The English language rose to prominence first because there are so many different nationalities and cultures here, that they need a common language and the British were here long enough to ensure that language is English. The official size at one point was 277 square miles, although they have added many more with reclaimed land. There are 5.7 million residents and millions of guest workers. Of the residents 75% are Chinese, 10% are Malay, 9% Indian, the rest European or Eurasian.



On the
Singapore
River

There are strict laws, rules and procedures here. Singapore considered a prime target of terrorists since it represents capitalism with a capital "C". We had to take our passports, and go through a screening process which included having our bags checked. One of the "checkers" asked Gary if he has a pacemaker. Gary usually loads his backpack up to about 40 pounds and it was quite warm (88F) at 10:00 a.m., and so he was sweating buckets by the time we got to security so perhaps he did look a bit like a cardiac arrest about to happen. We learned there are still strict rules (with serious fines) for such offenses as littering, smoking in prohibited places and failure to flush a public toilet. (We were wondering how that last one is enforced).

We took a bus to Clarke's Quay and via Orchard Road – the Fifth Avenue of Singapore, where every designer who has any sort of reputation in the world has a storefront. It gets its name from the fact that it used to lead to a nutmeg orchard, now no doubt covered by high rise buildings.



Marina Bay

Sands

One of the most striking features of the Singapore Skyline is the MBS (Marina Bay Sands) Complex which is a casino and a hotel, with 3 towers, each with 55 floors connected only at the top by a 332,000 square foot roof terrace. The structure is visible for miles. It looks like a ship at a distance, but once up close you can see that it is curved and looks more like a streamlined whale or other massive sea creature. There is a Sky Garden on Top where trees and shrubs have been planted. The property gained some notoriety when Katy Perry came to town and stayed there. She was in one of the pools surrounded by reporters and said she would only be interviewed by those who joined her in the pool – and so everyone did *en masse*, business suits, designer dresses and all.



The Fullerton
Hotel

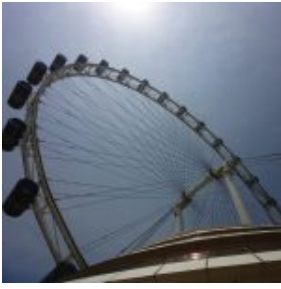
We stopped at Clarke's Quay, named after a British governor of Singapore back in colonial days, for a boat tour on a vessel called a "twakow" or "bum boat" on the Singapore River in the heart of what was Old Singapore, with "was" being the operative word. Today the go-downs are gone and the waterways are lined with skyscrapers, each more architecturally *avant garde* than the next. Back in colonial times the India emigrants occupied the north side of the Singapore River and the Chinese occupied the south side. We embarked from Clarke Quay and proceeded downriver to the newly built Marina Bay – newly built with the massive landfill mentioned earlier. A couple of familiar sights from our previous visit were the

Merlion Sculpture and Fountain and the Fullerton Hotel, which in colonial days was the Post Office. It is a huge edifice, but back in colonial days – mail was the only way to stay in touch and so it was key to the colonial lifestyle. The Esplanade, a park like area where people (British Colonial types) was also key to the Colonial lifestyle, providing a place to stroll in the afternoon and see and be seen, only today the ancient trees are dwarfed by the skyscrapers of the business district which



The Merlion

tower over the old town. Back in the days when promenading was all the rage, the Esplanade was lined with fine homes where the wealthy British merchants and civil servants lived. The Palladian Window became all the rage here to adapt to the tropical climate and has since been incorporated in structures all over the world. A portion of the Esplanade was preserved in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and has been named in her honor. The Merlion was added in 1972 and has been spewing water from its mouth ever since. It is half lion (the top half) and half fish with the lion symbolizing the city and the fish symbolizing the sea, which supports the city.



The Singapore
Flyer

Another prominent feature of the Singapore skyline is the Singapore Flyer, a 165 meter high Ferris wheel of sorts, but with compartments the size of city busses that makes one revolution every 32 minutes, very similar to the London Eye. It was built in 2012 and is one of the world's largest. This was the next stop on our tour. The wheel never stops moving and so the passengers load into the air-conditioned (blessed relief) and UV protected capsules as it creeps along. We were told that on a clear day, the visitors can see for 28 miles. Despite the visibility not being nearly that good, the view was indeed spectacular. We were able to take in all the quirky new buildings, including one that resembles two halves of the local durian fruit (tasty to some, stinky to all) which is an Arts Center. It is round with hexagonal divisions on its surface with little spiky things emerging. We also got a good view of the Formula 1 Race Course starting positions and pit area. The race takes place every September.



Gardens by the
Bay

They also have a park called Gardens by the Bay that we could

see from the Flyer, but it is a strange park. They have installed massive tree-like sculptures that were striking, but odd in that they are bare of leaves. Singapore is tropical, they don't really have any deciduous trees, no one living around here can identify with them, and they don't provide any shade from the equatorial sun. They are made of stainless steel which can only add heat to the already sweltering landscape, but perhaps they are "Art" and I am just a philistine. I do firmly believe, however, that God's trees are a much better design and are also more beautiful.



The Floating
Soccer Field

From the Flyer we saw a floating soccer field that is used for that and other sporting events, particularly cricket which is still big here. They also celebrate Chinese New Year with fireworks that are staged here. And locals traditionally give each other oranges as a gift. We were told that the Chinese palate typically favors sour things so this is a precious gift. We also saw the memorial to the civilians lost in WWII with its 4 spires of white granite, with each spire representing one segment of the population (Chinese, Indian, Malaysian and Eurasian) While the British suffered some losses, most of them were evacuated by their government ahead of time. The locals call the monument "the Chopsticks" because they are long and tapered.



Raffles Hotel

Our next stop was at the historic Raffles Hotel established in 1887. It is on Beach Road (which used to be adjacent to the beach,) but with land reclamation, it is now several miles inland. The hotel doormen are Sikhs from the Punjab region of India and they dress the part. Per our guide they are traditionally all named Singh (like Smith in America) to make calling to them simple. The hotel in the past has been ultra traditional. We visited 10 years ago and were not allowed inside in shorts and so we changed in order to have our Singapore Sling cocktail at the Long Bar. The drink was invented here, originally for ladies in the Victorian Era who were not allowed to drink. The bartender surreptitiously added liquor and the ladies loved it. Today the place seemed over run with tourists in shorts , so we fear that tradition is crumbling, but still it is a magnificent place and you can just imagine the way it was 100 years ago. In addition to the Long Bar, there is the Writer's Bar, just off the lobby where writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham used to hang out. We did some more driving in the Colonial Section to see the Old and the New Supreme court buildings. The old one is a stately, domed Victorian Building, and the new one is well, interesting . It is quite a block, angular sort of structure and has what is referred to as the Flying Saucer sitting atop it, although I thought it looked more like a hamburger) and it seems to have no charm what so ever.



Buddha Tooth
Relic Temple

Our last stop was in China town and en route we went down a street where we passed a Christian Church, a Muslim mosque, a Hindu Temple and stopped at a Buddhist Temple. This city and country is a great testament to multiple religions and ethnicities peacefully coexisting for centuries, proving it can be done. Our final stop was the temple named the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, whose claim to fame is that it is purported to have one of the teeth of Buddha. The temple is a 4 story elaborate pagoda-like affair painted red. The relic is on the 4th floor behind a glass wall, which keeps the tourists at a safe distance from the treasure. Inside the glass is a solid gold stupa (burial chamber) that is said to house the tooth. The floor is covered in gold tiles that are available for purchase/ sponsorship for \$5,000 US. You can have you name put on them, kind of like the bricks at Centennial Park in Atlanta only a lot more expensive and fancy. You can also purchase smaller



The Shrine
Containing the
Relic of the
Tooth

“mini-buddhas that sit in little niches along the wall that get blessed by the monks on a regular basis. They do display a photo of the tooth, but it looks far too large for a human – but then who are we to question the faith of others. The faithful burn incense sticks (also known as joss sticks) by lighting them and sticking them upright into an urn full of sand. They look like skinny sparklers, but don’t put off sparks. The temple provides the sticks and our guide says normally you burn 3 – one for God, one for the Earth and one for humanity. However in the interest of economy, the temple requests we keep it to one per person.

Gary and I decided to make a stop at Raffles on the way back to the hotel so I could visit their gift shop. We contemplated walking since it was not that far, but by this time the temperature was 36C which is 97 F). I had bought a bag from Raffles 10 years ago – still in perfect shape and I had it with me and I wanted to get another one. We found an amiable cab driver named Richard Ong (or Dave Ong) we couldn’t tell by the business card, who drove a big black



Mr. Singh and
Mr. Singh on
Duty at
Raffles

Chrysler in perfect condition. We asked him to wait for us. He was concerned he would not be able to wait in front of the hotel so he gave us a cell phone with instructions to call him when we were through shopping. We both looked at each other like two deer in the headlights and he patiently demonstrated

how we might make this call and insisted Gary could leave his backpack in the taxi. Once his demo worked and once it didn't, so we hopped out with his card in hand knowing the concierge at Raffles (Mr. Singh of course) would help us out if need be. Fortunately he was allowed to park just outside and amazingly we were reunited with him and Gary's backpack.

Richard/Dave told us about the reclamation project on the way back to the ship. Gary wanted to know where they got all the dirt and he said it came from Vietnam. He said their nearest neighbors, Indonesia and Malaysia, have plenty of dirt, but they are their business competitors and do not want them to succeed. Richard had stated his price was \$50 per hour, but we only used 45 minutes and only had \$45 and some change in Singapore money and so we all agreed to call it even. Richard offered some sightseeing stops, but we were pretty hot and tired and so we passed on that.

We opted for a late lunch on the ship followed by reading, cribbage and naps and came out on deck to watch our departure, but finally had to give that up since there were delays and we had another grueling sea day tomorrow.

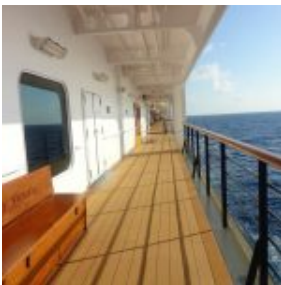
April 3, 2016

Dateline: Malacca Straits

Latitude at Noon, UTC + 8 ,2.2 Degrees North, Longitude 101.9 Degrees East

We left Singapore at 1:40 a.m. last night, with red tape taking longer than expected due to the high amount of ship traffic trying to get into and out of the port while we were sound asleep. We disembarked our pilot during the early hours of the morning before entering the Main Strait (we were not awake for this event either) and continued our course parallel to the Western Coast of Malaysia, working our way through the Malacca Straits, which at 500 miles long is one of the busiest sea lanes in the world. Thousands of vessels per year,

travel thorough these Straits, but not all ships can be accommodated. The term "Malacca Max" refers to limits of depth where the water is too shallow for the largest oil tankers and certain other ships. These ships have to detour to the Straits of Lombok in Indonesia, adding days to their voyage. In addition to shallow water, the tides flow alternately north and south here, creating another navigational shallow water factor to consider. The Straits are named after a town on the Malaysian coast. There was a long forgotten Malaccan sultanate here from 1400 to 1511. Once we cleared the straits, we turned northwest to reach Penang.



The Promenade
Deck on Our
Daily
Promenade

We had a most leisurely day with breakfast, followed by cribbage, reading on deck, journal writing (me) napping (Gary). We then had lunch and repeat the activities until it was time for our daily constitutional – a two mile walk around the Promenade Deck. We had dinner and attended a Welcome Aboard Cocktail Party hosted by our Commodore. We happened to meet the Chief Engineer, a young man (44) who is the Chief Engineer for the ship, and who invited us to be his guest for dinner the following week. He had over 20 years in the business, with P&O and Cunard and worked his way up from the bottom, now supervising several hundred people. His job is to make sure everything works correctly, from stage lighting to toilets, to galley equipment, to life boats (a.k.a. ship's tenders).

At noon today we were 8 miles off the coast of Malaysia and 37 miles off the northern tip of Sumatra, traveling at 15.2 knots in waters 90 feet deep and we were mostly clear of the heavy traffic. The air temperature was 85 degrees F and the sea was 88. We are following what is called the "Traffic Separation Scheme" which is an international "rules of the road" guideline. At noon, we were 144 miles from Singapore, with 250 miles to go to reach Penang, Malaysia, where we were to pick up another Harbor Pilot at 5:00 a.m. and planned to dock at 7:00 a.m. In the late afternoon we passed Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, not quite visible due to the distance and the haze.

Church Services were held today with the Commodore officiating and collections were made for Marine Charities. We continued our people watching and listening over dinner. We noticed the common use by British people throughout the ship of the word "whilst", where as we would only say "while" – it seems very Shakespearean of them I think. They also eat kippers (stinky fish) and pork and beans for breakfast – very unappetizing I think – well at least the stinky fish. I could do the beans at lunch or dinner. We Americans have a lot in common with the British, but language and eating habits are not always among those things.

Our evening entertainment was two brothers from Scotland, the MacDonald brothers who were very talented and entertaining, playing a wide variety of instruments. They were finalist in Britain's talent program called the X Factor, comparable to our American Idol or The Vocalist. It was good that they were so entertaining since these sea days just wear us out.