

Hong Kong to Southampton Voyage – Part 2

Great Adventure Travelogue

Part 2: Penang, Malaysia to The Seychelles

April 4, 2016

Dateline: Penang, Malaysia

Latitude at Penang 5.25 Degrees North, Longitude 100.21
Degrees East



Docked in
Penang

Today we were up early to watch as we docked in Penang at the port of Georgetown, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, located on an island off the coast of mainland Malaysia. In the old town you can see the fusion of Chinese, Indian and Malaysian cultures which have brought both their architecture and cuisines to the region. The island itself is quite scenic with mountains and sandy beaches. We had visited here in 2006, and did an around the island tour which involved a life-threatening ride on a trishaw (a bicycle rickshaw where the passenger is in the front and the guy pedaling is in the back). We were assured that trishaws have the right of way and indeed oncoming traffic did part for us as we hurtled down the bustling streets of Penang, inches away from approaching car

bumpers (right at eye level) and certain doom. I may be exaggerating a bit here, but it certainly kept me on the edge of my seat. Georgetown is still full of scooters and cars, but the tri-shaw traffic seems much lighter. We couldn't help but wonder if that is because so many have been wiped out with tourists aboard since we last visited. Another feature that has diminished since our last visit is the presence of jetty houses that were built out over the water. Most were destroyed, giving way to condos and other high rise buildings. Only 4 of the old jetty houses have survived "progress".

The island takes its name from the phrase "pulau penang" which means "island of the betel nut", which sounds nowhere near as exotic once translated, and perhaps that's why they started referring to it as "the Pearl of the Orient". Penang was once ruled by Sultan Abdullah of Kedah, but a British sea captain named Francis Light decided it would make a perfect trading port since it was on the valuable sea routes between Asia and India, and Britain set about colonizing with a vengeance – part of the "Sun Never Sets on the British Empire" lore. (And the Scottish say that is so because even God doesn't trust the British in the dark – but that's another story.) It was ceded to the British in 1786.

Trade here primarily was in tea and opium, the former sent to England, and the latter sent all over Asia to keep the natives subdued. In fact, Captain Light gave Sultan Abdullah, in exchange for the island of Penang, an offer of protection against Siam (modern day Thailand), however the promised weapons for his war somehow never arrived. Instead, Light sent the sultan twenty chests full of opium and a sum of money annually, and soon the sultan even forgot he was waging a war.



Modern Penang

The captain was also quite ingenious in his plan for clearing the land of jungle around the newly constructed Fort Cornwallis. He had a cannon filled with silver coins and fired it into the jungle. The local people cleared a wide swath surrounding the fort looking for the coins. That cannon, named Seri Rambai is still on the grounds of the fort. In a strange turn of events, today, childless women who wish to become pregnant place flowers inside the barrel of Seri Rambai in order to be blessed with children. It is unclear how they got that idea and started the trend, but I guess they figured if it had sufficient magic to clear the forest, it might have enough magic leftover for other happy events.

The British Colony of Penang thrived as a tax and duty free port and it created an ethnically diverse culture of races, religions and nationalities. In World War II the Japanese invaded the island and stayed for four years. After the war it became independent and in 1963 it became an independent state of Malaysia. Today it is joined to mainland Malaysia by bridges. The capital of Penang is Georgetown, named in honor of the King George on the throne at the time. He was one of a series of King Georges over the years.

The Chinese are a major ethnic group of Penang and have made some of the most interesting buildings. There are the Shop Houses, common in Asia, where there is a shop on one floor, with multi generations of the family owning it in residence, usually above or behind. Even more interesting are the clan houses (that is clan with a "c" not a "k"), called kongsis. These houses are meeting places for members of a family (clan)

sharing a last name, such as Lim or Chew. Members of other families are not welcome and there have been feuds and hostilities between the clans to varying degrees over the years.

One tourist site we are going to miss on this trip is the Snake Temple, formally known as the Temple of the Azure Cloud. It was built in 1873 in honor of a Buddhist priest who reportedly had healing powers. The temple is inhabited by a species of snake called Wagler's pit viper. The snakes feast on a diet of eggs brought by worshipers of the Tao god, Choor Soo Kong. Local wisdom says the incense burned in the temple makes the snakes harmless, and they say, so far so good. Apparently if anyone has been bitten, they didn't survive to report it.

Our guide, Lo, told us that there are three categories of condos that you can distinguish by appearance and location. Low income housing has no balconies, whereas middle income housing has balconies. All have giant satellite dishes pointing skyward. These are intermingled, but out toward the Penang Bridge, one you reach the TESCO store (a supermarket chain) , the expensive homes can be found and they typically are compounds or low rise condos. The big spenders here are reportedly Chinese and Japanese. The local currency is the ringgit, but we chose not to convert any US dollars, since they are widely accepted in Malaysia.



Pulau
Orangutan
Sanctuary

Today we opted for a tour of the orangutan sanctuary which is intended for the conservation of and research on orangutans. Leaving the ship, we felt a blast of steam, likely due to the 70 to 80 per cent humidity here. They say they don't have excessively high temperatures here, but you certainly can get that impression from the rivers of perspiration flowing from head to toe as soon as you leave any decent air conditioning.

Penang today has annexed part of the mainland of the Malaysian Peninsula, which is a booming industrial area. We would be traveling to the province of Perak to the Orangutan Island Sanctuary, about an hour from Georgetown. We crossed the 8 mile long Penang Bridge to get to the mainland. On either side of the bridge there were acres and acres of fish farms, both for eating and for aquariums. Lo explained that Penang is on a major migratory flyway for birds so fish farmers have to defend their fish accordingly. Lo said they have a number of birds that fly non-stop from Penang to New Zealand – a 9 day trip, knowledge gained apparently through tagging them.



The Island
Orangutan
Refuge
Headquarters

The Penang Bridge links the island to an Industrial Zone called Butterworth which is home to many multinational manufacturers. The bridge was built by the Koreans in 1985. They have another bridge called the Second Penang Bridge (but its real name is the Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah Bridge), built by the Chinese that is 15 miles long. The *quid pro quo*

here is that they have unfettered access to Malaysian markets and can set up plants here. The Chinese bridge was built with a crook in it to keep drivers alert, according to Lo. In our hour long drive, Lo came up with any number of tidbits such as this. Once on the mainland we were about 4.5 hours from Kuala Lumpur (the capital of Malaysia) and 2 hours from the Thai border. The countryside was lush and green with palms (used for palm oil), rice paddies and pineapple fields. The primary agricultural exports are sugarcane and tropical fruit. Their major import is actually garbage – they have huge recycling centers and take trash from Europe.



Small Life
Jacket on a
Large Man

The orangutan sanctuary is located in the Bukit Merah Resort (using the term “resort” loosely – it had definitely seen better days). It was billed as a water theme park, but everything appeared to be closed. However, we took a boat out to the sanctuary and it was an amazing experience. The Center is funded by several foreign governments and universities studying primates, as well as tourist dollars. And a funny thing happened on the way to the sanctuary. They issued life jackets for all of us. I had an okay fit with mine, but Gary’s (probably a Malaysian XL) barely covered his back, and would be about as helpful in maintaining flotation for him as a styrofoam cup.



Keeping the Tourists in Captivity

Once we landed on the island our hilarity was replaced with awe. The orangutans roam free on the island (well they do have an electric fence to keep them out of trouble with the tourists). We, however, were caged, on a 328 foot walkway through the habitat. These are Borneo orangutans, versus the other species, Sumatran orangutans. The primary difference between the two is that the Borneo alpha males grow enormous cheeks and are a brownish color. Other males that are in the group, but do not breed, do not grow these cheeks. Sumatran alpha males, on the other hand, instead of the big cheeks have long sideburns and “Taliban length beards” to quote our guide, Lo. In fact, the Sumatra females have little beards going as well, but far more modest. The Sumatran species is more of an orange color than the Borneo, as seen in the 1978 Clint Eastwood classic, Every Which Way But Loose. Both species are endangered with only 15 thousand Borneo orangutans left in the wild and only 8 thousand Sumatran orangutans. They do not interbreed since they live on separate islands.



Borneo Alpha
Male

As an interesting geographical note, we learned that the southern 2/3 of the island of Borneo belongs to Indonesia and the northern 1/3 belongs to Malaysia, with the Kingdom of Brunei carved out of the North Shore in the Malaysia part. Lo told us that the Sultan of Brunei is extremely wealthy, as sultans tend to be, and also a little eccentric, building a billion dollar theme park in this tiny kingdom. They say when you are wealthy you can be described as “eccentric”, when you are poor, you will be described as “crazy”. Most eccentric activity reported out of Brunei was that the prince, son of the sultan booked Whitney Houston to sing at his sister’s wedding. He is said to have given her a blank check and told her to fill in whatever amount she felt she was worth. But enough of these human antics – back to the orangutans.



Using a Stick
as a Tool

We learned that orangutans share 98% of human DNA so it is no wonder that so many of their gestures look so familiar. They are the only primates other than humans which have opposable thumbs that actually work like ours. (E.G. on some other primates, the thumb is there, but they don’t use it for much). They also use tools, such as sticks, to retrieve things out of their reach. The handlers encourage them to do this by placing food items just beyond their reach. Because the fence is electrified they will use a stick to either move the fence or bring whatever they want inside it. They are one of those creatures that when they look into your eyes, it looks like someone is home (like dolphins, and elephants). The



Making Eye Contact

name comes from the Malay words “orang”, (meaning “man” and “utan”, meaning jungle). Orangutans at the sanctuary are hand fed as babies, and they can be given human formula or even human breast milk since our DNA is so close. Lo, quite the comedian, told of a translation issue with a German tourist, who had only a smattering of English, and upon hearing this comment about breast milk, exclaimed to his fellow countrymen that how extraordinary it is, and not to mention creepy, that human women breast feed orangutan babies. A fellow German with a much better grasp of English set the record straight, cracking up the whole bus in the process.



Big Hands with Opposable Thumbs

Orangutans are much larger animals than we expected. The adult females are smaller, usually under 4 feet tall when standing and weighing about 100 pounds. The alpha male is about 5 feet tall can weighs an average of 180 pounds, but the largest on record was a whopping 265 pounds. We were told they have the strength of 10 human men and can rip open things for which we

have to use a knife. They can also open a coconut with their teeth. We had hoped to be able to pet and hold an orangutan baby or two, as we did with a koala in Australia, however this is a far different beast. It is not that they are malicious, they are just oblivious to how strong they are and how frail humans are and they can easily snap a bone (or neck) or two. A second reason for allowing no contact is that we could give them germs that they cannot cope with. The reason the fence around all human areas is electrified on the orangutan side is that they are so strong, that they could easily rip any fencing material apart. The electric fence is one of the first things they learn about and they learn very quickly. The island is almost 10 acre, so they have plenty of room to roam.



Young Female

They have many human ailments such as heart problems, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. In the wild the average lifespan is 30 years, but in captivity it is 60 since their health is better monitored and they are separated to keep from fighting. Mothers and babies are in one area, toddlers and little kids in another area, and adolescents in a third area. The alpha male lives with 4 females and there are other males present, but they know better than to mess with one of the alpha male's "wives". We were told that the non-dominant males do occasionally borrow one of the females for some fun, but never in the presence of the alpha male, and always on the sly. In the wild, they are not restricted to 4 mates, but the Center finds this number to be manageable. In the wild an alpha male will not kill the baby of another male (unlike lions for example). Part of the reason the species is

endangered is that a female only has a newborn about every 5 years. They are trying to speed this up at the sanctuary, but at the same time have to manage the threat of in-breeding by keeping the gene pool diversified.



Alpha Male in
Waiting

Alpha males are not born as such, but develop in that absence of another strong male. Orangutans are not vegetarian, although much of their diet is fruit and greenery. Even though they have huge fingers, they are quite dexterous with them and can peel fruit and pick out seeds. Their arms are also quite long in proportion to their torsos. A grown male can have an arm span of about 7 feet, and given their stature, it makes their distinctive “knuckle walk” quite practical. Because they make a new nest every night or else bring more branches and leaves to spruce up an old nest, these long arms are useful in swinging through the trees and gathering up suitable material.



Gary and Mike

There is a sculpted likeness of Mike, an alpha male who died

in 2014, that we perched next to on a bench to get an idea of how massive alpha males can be. They also have a young orangutan named Harry Potter, but we didn't get to meet him. We did get to meet Hiroshi, named after the Japanese Ambassador to Malaysia, an honor bestowed in recognition of the funding his government provides to the sanctuary. B.G. (short for Big Guy is my guess) is the new alpha male and we did encounter him sitting under a tree looking regal, if somewhat in a stupor, although we were told he is a bit on the bi-polar side, and capable of suddenly launching attacks on offending trees and limbs. No word on whether he is abusive to the "wives".



Snack Time

The favorite food of the orangutans is the durian fruit, which the locals say smells like hell, tastes like heaven. Another fruit called rambutan is a favorite as well. Durian was not in season at this time, but we are told when it is, it drops from the tree and needs to be consumed within 24 hours or it will go bad – or literally from bad to worse. It already starts out bad, so we were told.

The goal of the sanctuary is to re-introduce the oldest generation back into the wild once a new generation becomes adults and produce offspring. The center started with 9 orangutans and today has 21. The occasional



Neo Natal Unit
in the
Orangutan
Nursery

negligent mothers require that babies be taught (if not by their mothers, then the staff) the essentials to survival such as nest building, and finding water and food. And the center often takes in orphans and so this is essential for them as well. They even have a nursery with aneo-natal unit and cribs.

The problem is that the orangutans get so attached to human handlers and often get spoiled. One in particular named Adam (the first born in captivity) got so spoiled that he is lazy and wants his handlers to put food in his mouth. We also saw handlers pouring milk into the waiting mouths of a couple of youngsters, and are not sure how this will work once they are released into the wilds of Borneo.

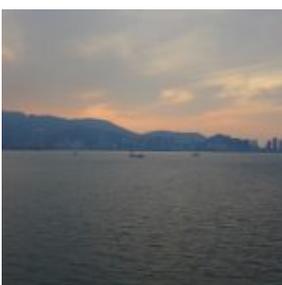


Lucky, Looking
to Impress the
Onlookers

We also met Lucky, who was something of a show-off,

entertaining us with his trapeze act, and we got to see baby Shasha with her mother Nicky. Shasha is an adorable little bald thing. I just wanted to scoop her up and snuggle her close (just before her mom ripped my face off I think . We saw Hiroshi, a 9 year old, play wrestling with a 7 year old having all kinds of fun. Then we saw another one that they explained had bonded with a handler and whenever he saw her he would run to the fence and follow her (just like Mary and her little lamb.)

We were supposed to sail at 5:30 p.m. but were delayed by a mechanical problem with a steam fitting. Since we don't have steam engines or generators, we decided it must be the espresso machine in the Café Carinthia. The delay was fortuitous in two respects (1) a passenger had a medical emergency at 6:00 p.m. and (2) of much less importance in the grand scheme of things, I had left my Kindle on the tour bus and the staff had time to retrieve it before we sailed. This retrieval involved my reporting it to the Purser's Office, who called the ship's tour manager, who called the local tour operator, who called the bus company who called the bus driver, who went back to the bus garage and searched the bus. I was amazed that it was recovered, and in fact I had already resigned myself to its loss and stopped by the ship's library and checked out a few books before I was notified it had been returned. Kudos to Cunard's and Penang Tourism's Customer Service!



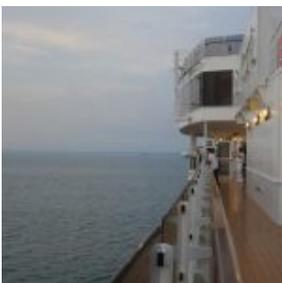
Leaving Penang

We had dinner and watched the ships departure around 7:30 with a fine sunset where the mountains of the Malaysian Peninsula met the sea. The evening's entertainment was a Classical Flautist (I never understood why it is 'flautist" instead of" flutist" – after all she was not playing the "flaut"), but we decided to skip it in favor of reading and catching up on email. As it turns out, we are one floor above the theater where the performance was held and the notes were so piercing we could hear them in our stateroom, so we had a bit of culture injected into our Facebook time.

April 5, 2016

Dateline: Eastern Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean

Latitude at Noon, UTC + 7 6.3 Degrees North, 94.4 Degrees East



At Sea in Bay
of Bengal

Today is a sea day as we cruise from Penang, Malaysia to Colombo, Sri Lanka, a journey of two days across the Bay of Bengal, the largest bay in the world. We are 68 miles from the northern tip of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. The ship is currently moving at 21 knots as we cross the Great Channel which is around 6,000 feet deep. Early this morning we passed within 30 miles of the Nicobar Islands to the north, some of the most isolated in the world. We left them isolated and kept going. As of noon today, we have traveled 360 miles from Penang and have 919 to go to Colombo. The weather is fair and the captain says we are transitioning from the Northeast

Monsoon (where the weather is the best) to the Southeast, where they have torrential rain. Monsoon often has the connotation of being descriptive of a torrential downpour, but here it is used to refer to seasons (wet and not so wet, hot and hotter). The air temperature here is 81 degrees F and the sea temperature is 90 degrees F.

With a full day of leisure ahead of us, we had our breakfast, followed by coffee and cribbage in the Carinthia Café and spent some time lounging on the Promenade Deck chatting with Mick and Anne, a couple from London. Then the next thing we knew it was lunch time and then a little more reading until the afternoon movie – an excellent one called Everest, based on the book by Jon Krakauer. We barely had time for our two mile walk around the deck before it was time to shower for dinner. We watched the evening performance of a comedienne, and then Gary concluded our first cribbage match with a victory bringing the score to 10 games to 8. I was surging there in the end, but could not catch up. We plan to start another round tomorrow.

We were told that there will be an emergency drill tomorrow since we will be sailing into waters with reported pirate activity once we leave Sri Lanka, so we decided we better get rested up for that in case we are called on for some rappelling or confronting swashbucklers who may be boarding.

April 6, 2016

Dateline: Western Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean

Latitude at Noon, UTC + 6 6.9 Degrees North, 85.4 Degrees East



Container Ship
off the
Malacca
Straits

Today was our second sea day between Penang and Colombo. During the night we passed over the Ninety East Ridge, dividing the Indian Ocean into East and West, so named because it is an actual ocean ridge than runs right along the line of 90 degrees Longitude. There is also an 85 Degree ridge with the same characteristic at Longitude 85 East. At noon we are 260 miles east of Sri Lanka. We have traveled 538 miles from Penang and have 382 to go to reach Colombo. Skies were overcast with gentle winds from the west. The sea was as flat as glass this morning, but has “freshened” as they say in “nautical speak” in the afternoon to create swells. For the uninitiated in nautical terms, a swell is a wave that does not break, but just rises and falls.) The sea was so calm that we were able to see dolphins on our two mile power walk this afternoon.

There were crew and passenger drills today for potential pirate attacks and for fire and/or sinking. The area west of the Maldives to the Seychelles is considered an area of concern. There is no land close by on this route and Somalia is a long ways away, but pirates could operate out of a “mother ship”, just like in the movie, Captain Phillips, and could be anywhere. We were to take the precautions from sundown April 9 to sunrise April 11. The ship has advised the UK Maritime Trade Organization (for this part of the world it is based in Dubai) of our route so they will know our exact

co-ordinates at any given time. The Queen Victoria has a security team, supplemented by private security team (I am envisioning Blackwater, the over-eager security guys from Iraq Ops, but perhaps my imagination is over-active). Nevertheless, I keep looking for them to see if I can spot them skulking about the ship. I guess it would be quite alarming if I could. We also have had on board since Singapore a Royal Navy liaison to the Coalition Maritime Force in case we have to call in the Big Guys. The ship will go dark with the order "Darken Ship" and sundown each day. We aren't truly going dark – it's just that the curtains will be pulled and most exterior lights will be off to make it harder for any pirate-types to see us.



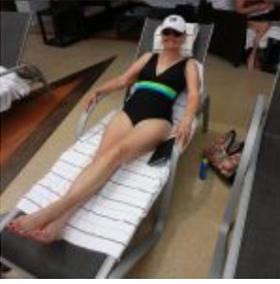
Speaking of
Pirates – You
can have the
look with
Knock off
Oakleys

This morning at 10:00 a.m. we had back to back drills to deal with two types of emergency: Pirate attacks and fire and/or sinking. There were two separate sets of instructions, so if one were followed by the other, there could be pure pandemonium. It sounds like it would make a good movie, but I don't want it to be based on any personal experiences of mine. We got up early so we had time for breakfast, cribbage and deck time before we had to proceed with the drills.

In case of piracy, we would hear a loud speaker announcement

broadcast throughout the ship that says "Security Threat" three consecutive times in a most serious voice. Today we heard it just for practice and proceeded as if it were real. The ship increased to its maximum speed of 24 knots. The response team appeared on deck dressed in bullet proof vests and helmets. All passengers were to go to their staterooms – if you had an inside room, you were to go in it and stay in it until further notice. If you had a balcony cabin, as we did, we had to go sit in the corridor, away from stateroom doors to avoid potential machine gun fire.

In case of fire or sinking (or a collision where we aren't sinking for that matter), we will hear 7 sharp long blasts followed by one short one. If we hear that, we are to go to our rooms and get our life jackets and report to our muster stations. Ours happens to be in the Royal Court Theater with around 900 other passengers who are moving at about the speed of cold molasses. From there we would be directed to life boats if necessary. I don't think it worked this way on the Costa Concordia, but perhaps so. They did say that in the event there is no time to "muster" , we would be directed to proceed directly to the lifeboats, but that still does not address the issue of the sry and the not-so-sry. Ever since the Titanic disaster, all passenger ships are required to have enough lifeboats on either side of the ship for all passengers and ship's company. The issue is that many of the passengers are not capable of "moving out right smartly" and can create bottlenecks. It would be interesting to see what happened in the event of a true emergency, but I would rather imagine it, or see a movie where someone else imagined it, than have the experience myself.



Pool Time at Sea

We had a leisurely afternoon lunch, and then it was a darts tournament for Gary. He reported it got quite hazardous as some of the dart participants were new to the sport and were bouncing darts off the windows and floor. I spent the time on journal work and then there was some pool time for us both. It was breezy out, and dangerous sunburn weather since we were so close to the equator. There was a movie on which I wanted to see, but pool time won out over a darkened theater for 2 hours. We followed this lazy activity with our ritual two mile walk and got ready for another Formal Night. We did manage to stay awake though dinner, but decided to skip the theater production in favor of reading and going to sleep at a ridiculously early hour. We do, however, get up early so we are not entirely slugs.

Days at sea always provide the opportunity to observe and document some of the strange characters on Board. Here are a few more from the gallery of characters.

There is a man whom we came to call Streak, who wears a visor with a shock of fake salt and pepper gel-drenched hair sprouting from the opening on top.. He otherwise dresses normally, and in fact looks downright stodgy. He has Prince Charles ears, but don't believe he is any relation since his headgear is far from regal. We have not seen him at night (that we know of) and so we don't know whether he wears the visor to dinner, but of course we would not recognize him if he did not.

Today we saw a woman who we came to call Caitlyn since she bears a striking resemblance to Caitlyn (formerly known as Bruce) Jenner, and is a chum of Tom-Geraldo. She stands out in his crowd because he usually is in the company of dowagers, conservatively dressed, conservatively bejeweled with upper class accents and Caitlyn is far from looking the role of dowager. She swept into the Carinthia Café to join Tom-Geraldo and his lady friends this morning with huge Texas size auburn hair fanning out from her head like the headdress on a Vegas show girl, but this was hair not feathers. She wore a flowing white lace outfit with sparkly rhinestones all over it and silver spike heeled sandals that make your average stilettos look sawed off. And this was at 9:00 a.m. this morning. When she entered, wearing white sunglasses (indoors) the conversation was about the royal family and succession of Charles to the throne (or not), but once Caitlyn arrived, they switched to hair and nails, and then to food when Caitlyn was overheard to say "the cod would "simply melt in one's mouth". Grammatically correct but sooo awkward, and she made lavish gestures with each proclamation. We couldn't help ourselves – we were riveted to eavesdropping, but had to cease since we risked missing lunch of all things.

We saw Caitlyn with a man we assumed to be her husband in the elevator later, dressed for dinner, hair even bigger and more triangular and wing-like, (similar to the female co-worker in the Dilbert cartoons) but her hair was brown this time. The shocking thing was her her eye make-up when viewed up close. I was thinking it was kohl, like the Egyptians used to use, but the foundation make-up seemed to be more like modern day spackle for drywall. With the triangular hair and kohl, I felt she was channeling King Tut.

There was to be stargazing tonight at 10:00 p.m. with Commodore Rynd, who would have shown us a thing or two about celestial navigation, but it had to be postponed due to cloudy skies. Gary and I are both having trouble staying up that late

– we think our body clocks are synched up with a time zone somewhere east of Hong Kong.

April 7, 2016

Dateline: Colombo, Sri Lanka

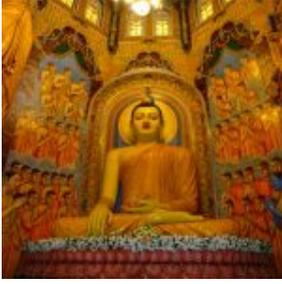
Latitude at Colombo 6.5 Degrees North, Longitude 79.5 Degrees East



Docked in
Columbo, Sri
Lanka

We arrived dockside in Colombo at 7:00 a.m. local time which is an interesting UTC plus 5.5 hours. We were not told why they are on the half hour, but we're flexible and will just go with it. We were told that it was going to be a high of 91 degrees today so we stocked up on our water accordingly. I would describe it as a scorcher, but that implies dry air. With the humidity in this city, a steamer might be more appropriate.

We had visited Sri Lanka ten years ago on another cruise and had a wonderful experience at the Pinnawela Elephant Refuge where they take wounded, orphaned and retired working elephants to live out their days. Sri Lanka had a very brutal civil war and many land mines were laid at the time and it took a large toll on the native elephant population. We considered going back to the same refuge, but decided to see the city of Colombo itself since we missed it last time.



Buddha at the
Ashokaraymaya
Temple

We read about a nearby town called Kandy which has the Festival of the Tooth (Esala Perahera) every year, which involves all kinds of dancing and the elaborate painting and bejeweling of elephants and parading them through town. That also would have been a good tour, but our timing was off.

Kandy has the intriguingly named Temple of the Sacred Tooth, which like the one we saw in Singapore, claims to have a relic that is one of the Buddha's actual teeth. It was believed that the tooth would bring rain. The king who brought it here was King Sri Megha Varna (translation is "resplendent one whose complexion is that of the rain cloud "). Then the tooth more or less evolved to become a symbol of power and whoever had the tooth, had the right to rule the country. Consequently the tooth was moved around a lot to ensure it didn't fall into the wrong hands. We had to wonder what caused Buddha to leave teeth scattered all over Asia and beyond. We chose to skip this tour too in favor of a shorter one closer to the ship.



Traces of
Colonial
Trading Days

in Downtown Colombo

The island nation of Sri Lanka, about the size of Ireland, was formerly known as Ceylon when it was a British Colony. It lies only 18 miles from the southern tip of India. Today it is home to 2 million people, a quarter of which live in the capital city of Colombo. It is a mostly flat island with a few mountains at the southern tip. On a map it looks like a giant tear drop that just fell from India to the north – kind of round on the bottom and pointed on the top. The natural harbor, used for centuries by Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Chinese and Persians, was enhanced with the building of breakwaters at Colombo, Sri Lanka largest city, and reclaiming land from the sea. The nation's capital is actually Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte, adjacent to Colombo, but it doesn't seem to be much of a tourist spot. The name alone would scare people off. The port of Colombo is a busy scene of "straddle" cranes, so named for straddling containers to pick them up and move them from ship to shore, and vice versa. Colombo itself is filled with colorful bazaars, temples and colonial buildings and many interesting, if not totally aesthetically pleasing features.

The majority of the earliest inhabitants were Sinhalese, coming from Northern India around the 4th Century BC. There were invasions from other people, including the Tamil of Southern India. There were conflicts between the two groups, which erupted in violence in the 1980's when the Tamils tried to establish a separate state. This long running war finally ended in 2009, but only after 70,000 people had died, and in the 2004 tsunami, they lost more than 30,000 people.

In 1505 the Portuguese landed and soon controlled the west coast and expanded their territory, followed by the Dutch and then the English who made it a colony in 1802, as the English were wont to do in those days. They established coffee plantations, which were destroyed by disease, so they planted

tea which has thrived there ever since and it is often called the finest tea in the world. Independence was granted in 1948 and in 1972 the name was changed back to the traditional name, Sri Lanka.



Sinhalese Script

We had a guide for our tour, but I had trouble understanding him due to a very pronounced accent that gave his English a musical lilt that was nice to listen to, but hard to glean information from. There were a number of public building such as the lotus shaped building that was a theater, the usual government edifices, banks and business towers, but the really interesting things were what was going on in the streets, which were bustling. The shops sold such an odd assortment of goods – toilet brushes, onions, cigarettes, concrete, brooms, paint, and Pepsi – all in the same shop. The local people are slim and small, typically very dark skinned like those of Southern India. The Moors were here years ago and there are still many signs of their influence in architecture and skin tones. They also derive much of their culture from nearby India, including the use of the Sinhalese alphabet, which looks very much like the Thai alphabet – beautiful script, but not easy for westerners to comprehend.



A Tuk tuk
Competing Head
to Head with a
Bus

There was a combination lighthouse and clock tower built in 1951, which replaced an old one from 1857. It used to be ocean front, but is now in the middle of town due to land reclamation. The city has a very Indian flavor – full of litter, crowds, tuk tuks, saris, accents, colonial-era buildings, unwieldy and seemingly impossible loads on bikes, cars, scooters, trucks and humans. The Pettah is the bazaar area , and it is quite a bizarre bazaar There is much crumbling concrete going bad, lots of rusted rebar sticking up from delayed or abandoned construction projects, and corrugated tin used with reckless abandon atop grimy buildings. Walls read “stick no bills” meaning do not paste anything to these walls, but it is rarely heeded. There is a new International Conference Hall built to resemble a lotus petals, which stands in stark contrast to the crumbling neighborhoods surrounding it. In nearby Victoria Park workers were using crudely fashioned brooms to rake leaves.



Near the
Ashokaraymaya

Temple

The British established a tennis association and brought cricket to the island, and continuing in the colonial tradition, police still direct cars with white gloved hands despite the heat. It is good they are there since there were many street lights that were not working, The YMCA and the Salvation Army are both present here and seemed to be bustling. We drove by the army and air force barracks, and didn't see much to indicate a high degree of readiness in case trouble breaks out, but perhaps there is more going on behind the grimy walls than we would observe. In stark contrast to the grimy aspect, we saw just a few blocks away, a park-like area with street artists, hanging paintings on fences and easels on the streets.



New Addition
to Colombo's
Skyline

Columbo is not without modern buildings and structures, often funded and built by foreign countries. For example, they have a conference hall built by the Chinese. We have visited a number of countries where foreign countries have invested. It is typically to ensure themselves friendly export markets for their goods, or in some cases to influence their votes at the UN. It seems to be working well for them. They have a World Trade Center here, also with twin towers, but quite a bit shorter than the ones in New York. The Old Dutch Hospital is now a shopping and dining complex. If it's not third world – it is definitely second, but the city still has some charm

with a host of mosques, Buddhist and Hindu temples and Christian churches. We saw a single street with a Jewish temple, a Christian church, an Islamic mosque, a Hindu temple, and a Buddhist Temple, all within a few blocks of each other and all peacefully co-existing for centuries, so there is the proof that it can be done.



Remnants of Colonialism

Sri Lanka has been termed the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, (Penang claims the Pearl of the Orient title) per our guide, and maybe that was the case back in the British Colonial tea plantation days but the luster seems to have worn off. There is much evidence of this – a former horse race track, now just the grounds where it used to be and former polo fields and tennis courts, cricket pitches, and other remnants of a bygone, and grander era when British brought their lifestyle to the colonies they occupied. While many of the sporting venues are still there, they have largely gone to seed with patchy grass and untamed shrubbery. Cricket is still big here, but the facilities seem to need a facelift, at least the public ones we saw. Our guide told us that there were several private clubs where the serious cricketers played, but that volleyball was really the national sport.



Asokaraymaya
Temple

In any event, you would never confuse Colombo with any place in the Western World or Europe. It has a very unique flavor. It is similar to India, but not as crowded or poverty stricken and there don't seem to be any wandering cows. There are thousands of bicycles, laden with some really bizarre payloads – like chickens, or building supplies. We stopped at a temple named Asokaraymaya and we had to take our shoes off to go inside, a common thing in visiting temples. It is a hundred years old (new by temple standards) with murals of 20th Century Buddhist art cast in concrete and beautifully painted.



The Stupa at
Asokaraymaya
Temple

Just before we entered, we saw a toothless beggar, who we assumed was collecting “protection money” so you can make sure you leave with the same number and same pair of shoes you arrived in. The pavement is very hot so barefoot walking is not feasible, so his business model seems to work. Across the street was a huge standing Buddha in concrete patterned after one in Thailand. On the grounds there is a large stupa (a

structure containing the remains of priests and nuns) also built of concrete.



Independence
Square

We stopped at Independence Square to see the National War Memorial, a national monument with pillars built in what is called “Kandy style”. We weren’t sure what Kandy style was, but it looked a whole lot like Russian Cold War architecture (gray and grim). It did have a bright red tiled roof, so maybe that was the Kandy part, or maybe it was those concrete lions on guard out front. Across the street is the Parliament Building, built in the distinctive British Colonial style which could look natural on any London street. It seems every place we visit that was ever a British colony, has at least one of these trademark structures.



A Resident
Snake Charmer
Greets a Tour
Bus

Our bus was met by an assortment of snake charmers, complete with cobra and basket, and guys with little monkeys, both of whom would pose with you for a small donation. The wardrobes were an interesting mix of stripes, plaids and prints, sometimes all worn together with reckless abandon. One snake charmer had added a vividly striped sarong, (a length of fabric wrapped around the lower body) to accent his plaid shirt. The women also wear a wrap around skirt-like garment that is called a "redda".

Colombo National Museum (and Sauna – a name I might add to the title) was housed in an old colonial building. It was built in 1877 and was occupied by the Dutch, but later it was the residence of the British Governor of the colony. It would have been interesting to see if it were not so hot. Plus they kept it dark trying to keep it cooler. It is hard to concentrate on historical



Former British
Governor's
Palace Now
Combination
Museum and
Sauna

treasures when you feel as if you are being poached like an egg in a darkened kitchen. We looked around as best we could considering that heat stroke was imminent. We did see a little water feature that farmers used to scare mice. A gourd would fill up with water and a clapper would crash into a rock every few minutes in sort of a scarecrow effect, but we were

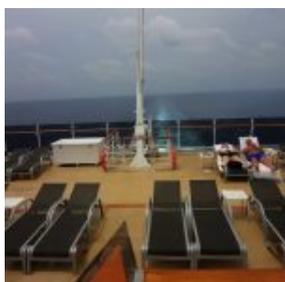
really fantasizing about having that water land on us instead.

Outside it was somewhat cooler, and there were more (or were they the same?) snake charmers and monkey handlers. The only air conditioner was in the gift shop and it was packed with panting tourists. On our way back to the ship we noticed a number of apartment buildings that are using the occasional window unit for air conditioning. We think a big opportunity awaits here for Trane or Carrier or any other manufacturer of central air conditioning – they need to get those salesmen over here.

April 8, 2016

Dateline: Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean

**Latitude at Noon UTC + 5.5 hours, 5.5 Degrees North,
Longitude 75.3 Degrees East**



The Ship's
Wake from the
Stern

We were at sea today on a southwesterly course for the Seychelles, having proceeded overnight through the Lakshadweep Sea, a body of water bordering India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The water is as smooth as glass, so much so that we can see clouds reflected on the water's surface – an uncommon sight at sea. It makes you want to jump in for a swim. We changed our exercise routine today and took our 2 mile walk right after breakfast since Gary has the Behind the Scenes Tour this afternoon. We had a double reward for our early morning effort: it was much cooler and we saw several pods of

dolphins, as well as what some termed “flying fish” but they may have only been flying since the dolphins were after them – we weren’t close enough to tell if they actually had the little fish-wings. We were advised to be on the lookout for Blue Whales that are fairly common in these waters, but had no luck in that regard. We spent the morning on the Promenade Deck, as we love to do with a wonderful sense of relaxation – reading, napping, watching for sea life, reflecting and counting our blessings.

As of noon today we have covered 289 miles since Sri Lanka and have 1,335 miles to go to reach Port Victoria in the Seychelles. We passed through the Maldives today at around 5:00 p.m. through the Kardiva Channel. The locals call the channel Kaashidhoo Kanduu, but Kardiva seems to work for us who are English speakers. This passage was used as part of the “Spice Route” for hundreds of years and there was also a big pearl business that flourished for 2,000 years, but has since been replaced with pearl farming. . We could see a few of the islands in the distance, but since the highest point in the Maldives (the world’s lowest county) is only about 1.5 meters above sea level, we couldn’t see much. We have visited the Maldives on a previous trip and they are lovely with coral atolls, turquoise waters and sandy beaches – all things the Queen Victoria needs to avoid. And tonight we are able to advance our clocks by another half hour so we will be in synch with the rest of the world. The air temperature is 91 degrees F and the sea is 90F.

I listened to a historical lecture called Britain’s Greatest Defeat: Malay and Singapore, February 1942. I knew the bare bones of the story from a previous visit to Singapore, but didn’t realize how devastating a loss it was. The speaker said this was the first time Great Britain had been trounced so badly since the Battle of Yorktown and the American Revolution. That time, they lost a colony to the people living there; this time they lost to the Japanese and the people

living there suffered horribly. When the British evacuated, they took British citizens first, leaving the locals behind to be slaughtered by the thousands, which made for not so warm a welcome when they came back. They did get Singapore and Malaya back after the Japanese surrender, but things were never the same. It was only a matter of years before they surrendered the colony a second time under much more peaceable circumstances to become independent.

Gary took the ship's Behind the Scenes tour today and got to wear the Commodore's hat and sit in the Commodore's chair on the bridge. He was not allowed to take any pictures (we think not so much out of fear of terrorist take-over of the kitchen as the desire that he purchase pictures taken by the ship's photographer.)

The first stop behind the scenes was hosted by entertainment director. In the theater, they went back stage to see how the sound and light worked, saw costumes and props, visited dressing rooms, and talked to performers. The next stop was the bow, where they went into the anchor closet where lines, anchors, chain, and capstans are stowed. The Deputy Captain hosted this segment and explained how all worked. There are three anchors – 2 hanging in place on the hull and one spare.

We docked in all the ports we have visited, but they will anchor occasionally if dock facilities are not available and use the tenders to take people ashore. The next stop was the Engine Control room where there were dozens of monitors for on board systems – water, fuel consumption, RPM's, etc. They did not go into the actual compartments where the engines were operating – far too hot and noisy.

The ship's doctor hosted them in the medical facility which is called the Surgery. Despite the name, they perform no surgeries in the surgery. They mostly medicate and evacuate if necessary, and they only do that if it is a matter of life and death and they must be within 100 miles of shore in order to evacuate. They have an "ambulance" equipped just like a 911

vehicle, which is essentially a cart and they say they can be anywhere on the vessel within 6 minutes.

The next stop was the Print Shop – where the gazillion photos taken by the ship’s photographers are printed to put up in photo galleries and offered for sale. Gary asked about all the wasted paper and chemicals and they said will eventually phase out the current process and go to terminals and print to order. The next exotic stop was the Recycle Center. The ship recycles all plastic, paper, aluminum, etc. Extra food is incinerated. Ships have come a long way from an environmental perspective. On our first cruise in 1972 they used to throw garbage overboard and flush sewage called black water directly into the ocean. Now it is treated and released based on maritime guidelines

In the galley the Assistant Chef showed them around. On board there are 140 chefs who work under the Executive Chef, the Sous Chef and four Chefs de Cuisine. There are 70 “utility hands” that do the cleanup work in the kitchen (such as washing all the dishes and mopping the floors). The ship employs two full time fruit and ice carvers, whom I assume must just cut up fruit or have other duties in their spare time since otherwise I would hardly think they would be fully employed. In the bakery, running 24 hours a day, all bread and pastry is made fresh on board daily, including 2500 dinner rolls a day.



Doing our Part
to Consume our
Share of

Ship's Stores

The Queen Victoria has a staff of 11 for provisions management which loads fresh food in every port of call in 17 refrigerated or freezer rooms, plus they keep track of all that and all non-perishables as they are used. In a tour of the vast storage units, Gary noticed potatoes from Pasco Washington, which is not too far from where he grew up. Curious about how they got on this ship, (he assumed maybe in San Francisco), he was told they were loaded in Singapore. It's good to know we as a nation are exporting.

Here is the typical consumption on a fourteen day voyage: 70 tons of fresh fruit and vegetables, 18 tons of meat, 12 tons of fish and seafood, 30 tons of dairy products, (does not include 67,850 pints of milk), 3 tons of sugar, 4,666 eggs, 8 tons of flour, 3 tons of rice. Almost 6,500 meals each day are prepared and consumed as well as 120 pizzas. Eight thousand linen napkins are laundered daily, 70,000 pieces of china and glassware are used daily, 5,000 cups of tea are served each day. And in the course of a year, the galley uses 610 miles of cling wrap.



Gary on the
Bridge with
Commodore Rynd

The last stop was the bridge where Gary was hoping for the opportunity to drive a bit, or at least blow the whistle, but that didn't happen. He did get photo op, and the chance to sit in the Commodore's chair. Unfortunately as he posed for the

captain, he was photo bombed by a woman with frizzy hair and a clueless man bumbling about in the background. It does make the photo a more interesting keepsake though.

April 9, 2016

Dateline: Northwestern Indian Ocean

Latitude at Noon UTC + 5 hours, 2.2 Degrees North, Longitude 67.9 Degrees East

We were traveling across the Arabian Sea and having a rainy and an unusually lazy (a.k.a. slothful) morning. After breakfast we went out by the Pavilion Pool which has little cabanas and enjoyed the rain and a game of cribbage. We were joined by a matronly lady (hope she doesn't



The Pavilion Pool

describe me in the same way) from England who fancied a bit of a chat. She was already stereotypical – stout, iron grey hair, lined face, lively eyes – but when she took out her knitting and told us she was knitting a “tea cozy” that just added icing to the stereotype cake. I had to explain to Gary the function of a tea cozy (i.e. a sweater for your teapot to keep the tea warm). Unfortunately we had to cut our chat short since torrential rains arrived and we were getting wet. We first went to the Winter Garden (an indoor atrium) but it was

way too muggy in there and so we went to the Commodore's Lounge just below the bridge with its windows with panoramic views on a clear day, but today they were getting pelted with rain, but it was so cozy (nothing to do with tea in this case) sitting there listening to the rain and watching it sheet down the windows, while we read our respective books. We were snug and dry and it was soothing, so of course we both nodded off until lunch-time.

Today at noon we were 660 miles from the southernmost tip of India, crossing one of the world's major tectonic plates and a massive underwater mountain range known as the Carlsberg Ridge, named after the sponsoring company of the Dana Expedition, which discovered and charted the ridge between 1928 and 1930. The water depth difference created by the ridge is between 5900 feet and 11,800 feet. Our speed was 19 knots and there was 9,500 feet of water under the keel. We have traveled 770 miles from Colombo and have 867 left to reach Port Victoria in the Seychelles. We have been and continue traveling on a "rhumb line" (nautical term for straight line) with no change in our heading, ever since we cleared the Maldives. The air temperature is 81 degrees F and the sea is 89 degrees F.



Cornwall Style
Scones and Jam
at Tea Time

We had burgers at the Lido pool for lunch and had the opportunity to meet our RNLO – that is our Royal Navy Liaison Officer. He is assigned to our ship to call up the Royal Navy

in case of piracy threats. He would later give talks on security measures. He really had a delightful and self-deprecating sense of humor that we really enjoyed. He explained the difference in tea time scones in Devon (where he lives when not at sea) and Cornwall. In Devon they put the cream on the scone first and then the jam. In Cornwall it is just the opposite. He favors the Cornish method, as do we since putting cream on a warm scone tends to make it run all over.



Enjoying the
Hot Tub at the
Lido Pool

We spent some time in the hot tub at the Lido Pool and played a game of music trivia, but did not fare so well. Much of the music was British or too recent for us to identify. We decided we had better stick to our normal pursuits – cribbage, writing time, nap time, walking, showering and eating. We noticed as we walked today that the crew had set up LRAD (Long Range Acoustical Device) equipment on the Promenade Deck and there was one person with a portable on his chest, plus there were people with binoculars scanning the horizon. The LRAD are capable of broadcasting in frequencies very unpleasant to the human ear and is used for crowd control with much more frequency than pirate control. The crew had also laid fire hoses along the railing with the nozzles fixed and pointed at the sides of the ship, recalling scenes from the movie, Captain Phillips, which according to some ship's officers we chatted with, was supposedly a very accurate portrayal of the incident.



With Tim, the
Ship's
Engineer

This evening we were invited to dinner with The Chief Engineer, who told us that since the Maersk Alabama incident, they do have weapons on board, as do most ships – thus the rapid decrease in piracy. He also told us that casting call for extras for the movie went out in maritime trade press, but he took a pass. Tonight we will cross the Equator in the wee hours at a longitude of 63 degrees and we will also start our “Dark Ship” mode.

April 10, 2016

Dateline: Southern Indian Ocean

Latitude at Noon UTC + 5 hours, 1.1 Degrees South, Longitude 60.9 Degrees East

After an unusually late night for us last night (11:00 bedtime) we had an unusually long “lie –in” (the British term for sleeping “in” as we would call it. We decided to have breakfast in the Britannia Grill with table linens and waiters and all the finery this morning, since the Lido gets a little hectic for those who “lie in”. We went back to our regular routine with coffee and cribbage in the Café Carinthia, and had the added bonus of seeing a vegetable carving demonstration, where Bobby Cadic, a talented sous chef creates

little animals out of vegetables. It sounds a little wacky, but it was really entertaining, but then it is probably something we will not be trying at home.



The Indian Ocean from the Promenade Deck

We went out on the Promenade Deck where it was warm but breezy and mostly enjoyed just watching the ocean roll by with a bit or reading an napping interspersed with sessions of staring off into space (or staring off into water might be more accurate). We both agree that this is the place to be in order to really feel like you are where you are – that is in the middle of a vast ocean. Inside, you could believe you were in a really nice hotel with great service.

We were now in the Southern Hemisphere, having crossed the Equator at 3:00 a.m. this morning. Our position at noon is 1,140 miles off the coast of Kenya and the water is 14,760 feet deep. We have traveled 1,235 miles from Colombo, Sri Lanka and have 411 to go to reach Port Victoria in the Seychelles. We are making 18.2 knots, somewhat slowed by a 2 knot current called the Counter Equatorial Current. The weather is overcast, but bright with light seas and 20 knot winds. The air temperature is 84 Degrees F and the water temperature is 90F. There are a number of sea mounts and ridges in this area which cause depths to decrease to as shallow as 600 feet.

We roused ourselves to go to lunch at 1:00 p.m. in the Lido

and encountered the masses which heretofore we had avoided by lunching at noon. It was just another reminder that the early bird does indeed get the choice pieces of pizza. After lunch – I want to work on my journal , writing in our stateroom where I can look out our balcony window for inspiration. I brought a keyboard since my lightning fingers far outpace the keyboard speed of my laptop. (Thank you high school typing teacher). The downside of the lightning speed is copious error correcting. Gary has gone off to (I am not kidding) a lecture on the Evolution of the Harp) I am a little worried



Stress Free
Days at the
Lido Pool

that this Equatorial sun is getting to him. He is planning to follow that up with an activity called Float Your Boat, which is a competition among passengers to design and construct a small boat (suitable for a bathtub size). The vessel would be judged on seaworthiness (i.e. does it float?), appearance (visual appeal and decorative elements) and cargo capacity (it must be able to carry six 12 ounce cans of beer). Sea trials were to be held in one week in the Pavilion Swimming Pool. The size could not exceed 3 feet by 3 feet and be no taller than 2 feet from the keel to the tallest point. Guests had to scrounge around the ship for their materials, but could also use anything they find ashore. Gary seriously thought about entering, but decided it would be way too stressful and we are all about keeping our days stress free.

The alternative entertainment this afternoon that we are both

passing on, having seen it several times in previous cruises is the ritual "Crossing the Line" Ceremony where all persons who are crossing the Equator for the First time attend the Court of Neptune and his Queen and the Seaweed Court of Mermaids. By undergoing the ritual (which involves being christened with all sorts of foodstuff and sauces), "newbies" will graduate from the status of "Pollywog" to "Shellback". This is an age old seafaring tradition. I am not sure how they make the leap from frog to turtle here, but Cunard keeps the tradition going.

I did the deck walking alone today since Gary has pulled up lame and has taken on the role of lap counter (since there are only six this isn't too stressful for him). We are crossing an area known as the Somali Basin (and thus the piracy precautions.) I did see one fishing vessel looking like it was approaching us off the starboard bow, but it veered off. It certainly garnered a lot of attention prior to that since this is one of the favorite disguises of pirates, but sometimes a fishing boat is just as fishing boat, as was the case here.

Tonight we have a wine pairing dinner in the Verandah, the gourmet restaurant on board that we have no yet patronized on this voyage. The dinner was outstanding, and with only 16 couples, we had exceptional service. We had seven courses, each paired with a selected wine. We were first served a tiny appetizer called "amuse bouche", a French phrase roughly translating as an amusement for the mouth. This particular one was a latke (a.k.a. potato pancake with a scallop atop it). My mouth was indeed amused and wanted more. This was accompanied by a glass of fine champagne. Then came the soup with a Riesling, and the fish course with Pouilly Fume. The fish was delicious and the portion was huge and by this point we were getting full, but still had several courses to go. The next course was just to cleanse our palate and was an "espuma", which was a foamy drink in a tiny glass made with apples and Calvados. This paved the way for the main dish, Beef

Tenderloin, served with Cabernet Sauvignon. Then came the cheese course served with a St. Emilion Grand Cru, and then we finished up with desert and brandy. Needless to say, we had to waddle back to our room. It was too much of a fantastic thing.