

# FROM BEIJING TO COPENHAGEN ON THE *RSSC VOYAGER*

OR

## 100 DAYS WITH NO COOKING AND NO CHORES

This trip, March thru June 2013, was one of the Grand Voyages offered by Regent Seven Seas. It actually was five cruise segments glued together under the guise of a grand voyage, making a total of 78 days. Unlike the previous grand voyage we had taken, there were almost no special perks to differentiate it from five segments glued together. We added two segments to accommodate a family trip, bringing our total to an even 100 days.

We flew business class to Beijing and spent one night in a hotel before boarding the ship. All of this was included in our fare. Under new Prestige Cruise Holdings rules this will no longer be included unless you book Concierge Class. Although there were several hints that Prestige is degrading the quality of Regent, the on-board crew and staff were just as outstanding as they always have been.

Bradley International Terminal at LAX was undergoing massive expansion brought on by age and the advent of the Airbus Whale. Most of the construction was at night. Since our flight left at 1 am we needed to start the process at 10 pm. There were parking barriers all across in front of the terminal. Daughter-in-law Donna incurred the wrath of a construction weenie by having the nerve to stop to let us off. In spite of him we were able to grab our stuff and then try to find a way

into the terminal through the orange-clad horde of construction workers who were about to start work.

We finally found an open entrance to the terminal, directly in front of the Cathay-Pacific check-in counter. There was no line and we were quickly processed. By 10:45 we were in the One World lounge. Since it primarily serves American Airlines it was pretty spartan with minimal amenities.

The 777 was configured in a way I'd never seen before. Both first class and business had individual cubicles that reminded me of monk's cells. The center section held two side by side cells with single cells at the windows. The center cells were arranged in a chevron formation so that when the seat was fully reclined your feet were pointed toward the center and your head near the aisle. When seated, Jodie and I were unable to see each other and could barely hear each other. The enclosure also pretty well blocked the view to the side which didn't matter since it was night. The effect was as if traveling in a sealed metal tube, but we slept well.

The flight to Hong Kong was uneventful as was the very long stroll to our next gate. Parts of the terminal didn't have any useful directional signs so we had to ask how to get

to our departure gate. Eventually we passed through Security and boarded a shuttle train. We spent an hour in Cathay-Pacific's spacious hub lounge before boarding the A330 for Beijing.

The newish Hong Kong terminal sprawls over the land like a three-legged octopus (tripus?) On the other hand, the Beijing terminal sprawls like an aggressive amoeba. We were welcomed to Beijing by dense, choking, brown smog. It felt that you could cut great hunks of it if you had a sufficiently large knife.

We quickly passed through Immigration, having our photo taken and compared with the photo on our visa. Since we had sent 5 bags by Luggage Free we had only one supplemental bag to collect which arrived quickly and we exited through the "Nothing to Declare" line. It was about noon.

Now a bit of background: Luggage Free picked up our 5 bags 10 days before we flew. Just prior to our departure we received panic calls from them. The first was for copies of our Chinese visas. The second call told us that Chinese Customs was not releasing our luggage. The day we left we were told that we had to appear in person at customs.

When we exited the customs line at the terminal we found two Regent "Meet & Greet" women who were fully aware of our problem and one of them took us by taxi to the FedEx terminal on the other side of the airport, at least a half hour away. The taxi was not allowed into the freight area so we walked the last block to the FedEx facility.

During the ensuing hassle there were times when we felt we might never see our luggage again. Yo Yo, the Regent rep, two FedEx managers, and various workers conversed in Mandarin and then people would rush off to the customs office on the other side of the parking lot. Eventually we accompanied them to customs and low-and-behold our bags appeared, being wheeled across the parking lot. The customs inspector came out and went through each bag and released them. One FedEx manager arranged for an employee with a van to haul us, Yo Yo, and our baggage back to the airport where we all got on a bus for the hotel. The manager accompanied us to the terminal.

By this time it was evening rush hour and the traffic was dense and slow. Eventually we arrived at the Peninsula hotel and checked into our room - with all of our bags.

The apparent advantage of using Luggage Free is that the bags are supposed to go directly to the ship and be in your cabin when you arrive. This didn't work out that way. We concluded that the problem was caused by Luggage Free not providing a realistic inventory of the bags' contents. We had provided this information to them however they didn't use it. They rather provided a completely unrealistic list of five line items, identical for each of the 5 bags. No wonder the inspector questioned the shipment. It was only the outstanding assistance of Yo Yo, the two FedEx managers, and several employees that enabled us to get our luggage. We later got another explanation from Connie, the ship concierge; the ease of luggage and freight handling reflects the state of relations between countries.

There was a welcome dinner at the hotel that evening at which we met several old friends with whom we had traveled before. There were, however, no Regent representatives from the ship. The hotel or the land tour operator provided gifts of fake porcelain ball-point pens and 2 Gb thumb drives.

The next morning we left the hotel at 11 for the ship, after personally slugging all our luggage to the lobby. Regent did not provide this service. As we were leaving the lobby Jodie spotted all of our luggage sitting in a pile. All the other luggage had been loaded on one of the three busses. Apparently the luggage tanks were full so I guess they were just going to leave it. We convinced them to load it on the back seats of the bus.

Traffic leaving the city was awful as was the continuing smog. The trip took 3 hours.

The port city of Tinchin has been dredged up out of the sea and is still under construction. It seems obvious from its size that this is intended to be a major world port. One interesting aspect was the huge stacks of new shipping containers and the factory that made them. There were acres and acres of containers, named for various shipping companies. Perhaps the World economic slow-down from the Bush depression tempered the demand for new containers. It also suggests that it is cheaper to make new containers than to ship empty ones back to China.

Eventually we boarded the ship, had lunch on the pool deck, and then were allowed to enter our cabin, #647. We began unpacking the two

bags that were present. Eventually all arrived. What a relief to finally be in our home for the next 100 days. Several crew and staff members remembered us and welcomed us aboard. We were delighted to see that Ray Solari was the Cruise Director. We have voyaged with him and his puppets before and enjoyed the experience.

We found another grand voyage plaque to place on our door.

3/18. Shanghai.

The Yellow Sea, during those moments when the Sun peeks through the overcast, is revealed to be more of a typical ocean green. We learned late this morning that our late morning arrival into Shanghai has been delayed by vague propulsion difficulties during the night. The ship needs to enter the Huangpu River at high tide. Since we missed the morning one we will enter on the afternoon tide. The port captain has directed us to arrive at the pilot station around 1 pm.

(The Yangtze River also seems to be involved with Shanghai however with the limited maps we have I can't determine if the Huangpu is also the Yangtze or if they are separate. There is also the Grand Canal that runs from around Suzhou to Shanghai. I'm sure that those of you with good maps will rush to clear up any confusion I have created.)

This late arrival has scrambled the times for city tours. The evening tour scheduled for tonight will go, but at a later time. Our stay in port will be extended tomorrow to allow other scheduled tours to go. Our late departure

meant we will skip Xiamen and proceed directly to Hong Kong.

Also, apparently our stay in Shanghai will allow some work to correct the propulsion difficulty. (Captain Gianmario Sangaineti said the problem was caused by the ocean being too cold?)

There was a gathering of long term travelers at 11 am in the Horizon lounge at which Chinese goodies were served along with Bloody Marys and Mimosas.

The evening tour started about 8 pm and wasn't much worthwhile. The high spot, literally was a high-speed ride to the top of the "Bottle Opener," one of the many high rises on the water front. It is currently the tallest but soon to be surpassed by a nearby neighbor under construction. The rest of the tour was just riding around and then a walk in a park. Most of the famous building illumination was turned off at 10 pm, before our tour.

The day dawned foggy but eventually the Sun put in an appearance. We had an early breakfast in the room then left on an all-day tour of Suzhou. Although the bus ride was long, it was interesting to see the uniquely styled high-rise office buildings throughout the city. There are elevated expressways and not as many cars as in Beijing although we did get into some stop-and-go congestion.

There is no country side between Shanghai and Suzhou. Our first stop was at an embroidery "factory." They feature unique silk threaded masterpieces on silk fabric. Some are identical on either side; some have

differences between the sides. For example, one had a tigers head on one side and a lions on the other. The embroidery done by masters take months to complete and sell for amounts like 100,000 Yuan. We were of course offered the opportunity to buy. If we bought one of the really expensive ones packing, insurance and shipping was included. We bought a one-sided piece that would fit in a suitcase.

After the factory visit we toured on the Grand Canal in a small boat. Dwellings are built right up to the canal. There was a bamboo-supported scaffolding sidewalk alongside the canal. It may have been for building maintenance. We saw women doing their laundry in the canal water. Toward the end of the ride we were allowed to buy some Tiger Balm products from the boat men.

Lunch was a very good Chinese meal at the Bamboo Grove Hotel.

The Sun which had been with us all day abandoned us as we toured the Gardens. These 900 year old gardens were created in or around a typical home of that era. In one room we saw family chairs. The grandfather's chair faced the most desirable Fung Suea direction and the father's chair was adjacent. The corresponding women's chairs were opposite.

As we toured a light rain began but we made it back to the bus without getting too wet.

We saw several ranks of green bicycles around town. These are for public use. You must buy an access card for 300 Yuan. When

inserted into the holder it releases the bicycle. You may use the bike for up to an hour for free. Any use beyond that costs 1 Yuan per hour. If you keep it overnight you have bought it and your card is no longer any good.

The drive back to town wasn't too bad.

3/23. Hong Kong

The enveloping smog/fog we first encountered in Beijing has followed us for the voyage so far. As previously reported, propulsion difficulties slowed the ship causing late arrival into Shanghai. Since our departure was delayed to allow the tours to go, we skipped the picturesque port of Xiamen and scurried on down to Hong Kong. We were chased by a 40 kt. tail wind which didn't disturb the fog.

After hurrying along we were suddenly directed by the Hong Kong port captain to slow down since he didn't want us to arrive until around 1 pm, yesterday. We loitered around the pilot station until the pilot and the immigration inspector arrived and then we moved a little bit into the harbor. The ship is moored some distance from anything near Kennedy Town and certainly no where near the usual location on Kowloon.

There is a frequent shuttle that goes to the Star Ferry Terminal however there is nothing much near there except for a lot of construction. We went in yesterday and almost immediately came back out.

Had dinner at Prime 7 last night. It was good however Jodie woke up in the middle of the night with a badly upset stomach resulting in

a bout of diarrhea. Now all is well.

Our pick-up trivia team has won the last two games. We all will be on tour this afternoon so we cannot repeat.

I signed up to receive the FAX edition of the LA Times. Given the time difference it arrives as a late afternoon paper from the previous day. The comics are so small that I have difficulty in reading some of them.

"NPR At Sea" is on the ship. This means that a number of their reporters are on board and have been giving some lectures based on their reporting. Most have been interesting. There is also a dynamic lecturer, Sandra Bower, who talks in general about the countries we are visiting. She was on the Grand Asia Pacific voyage we did two years ago. Surprisingly she recognized us when we were sitting in the library the other day. I don't remember having any interaction with her on that trip.

Unfortunately, the Jean Ann Ryan theatrical presentations are exactly the same that were presented two years ago. Apparently Jean Ann's creative "chops" have atrophied.

Capt. Gianmario Sanguineti, the never-seen, ethereal voice from the bridge, left the ship here. His replacement was the very personable Capt. John McNeill.

3/24.

We had an interesting walking tour of a local shopping area on the island. In one area there were many small shops selling dried edible

stuff, such as ginseng, birds nests, dried starfish, dried sea horses, and shark fins. The sidewalks were densely crowded with shoppers hurrying back and forth but almost no one in the shops.

We also wandered through a small fish market where vendors were chopping larger fish into smaller hunks.

Our treat was a stop at a café where we had our choice of hot or iced tea or coffee, with or without milk, and an egg tart. The tart consisted of a very flaky crust filled with a tasty custard. The place was quite busy, mostly with locals.

We also rode on what the guide called the World's longest escalator which was actually a set of moving sidewalks going up a steep hill. In the morning it runs down and up in the afternoon. This means that in the afternoon after reaching the top we had to descend a long flight of stairs to return to the bottom. Jodie's knees weren't happy.

Thoughts about China.

The Chinese government appears to us as a giant monolith bent of controlling the entire World. It seems, however, that it is unable to exercise domination over its own country. Over the eons, various rulers attempted to bring the conflicting war lords and fiefdoms under control. Mao seemed to have succeeded however unity seems to have been lost again. The war lords have traded their uniforms for business suits.

We were told that graft is endemic. Petty

local governments expropriate land from rightful owners with little or no compensation and sell it to developers at great personal profit. If you want your child to be well educated you must bribe the teacher. If you desire good medical care you must bribe the doctor. Doctors receive kick-backs from the drug companies in exchange for prescribing their drugs. Children aspire to become "corrupt officials" because they "have things."

We heard several residents express concern that there will be another revolution because of the inequalities in society. There seems to be abundant prosperity in the major cities which draws people in from the country, leading to overcrowding. One of our guides frequently expressed a desire to emigrate to Australia.

3/25. Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.

Ha Long Bay is a great scenic spot, one of the Seven Wonders of the World on somebodies list. The bay contains 1,969 islands, 989 of which have names. Islands are either composed of limestone or schist and are eroded into fantastic shapes. Although some of the shapes are named (e.g., Chickens Kissing) a strong imagination is needed.

Since we have previously toured the bay we elected to stay on board for the morning and tour in the afternoon. By being on board we were able to see the entire crew participating in a life raft drill. After a simulated fire and evacuation the entire crew formed up on the wharf below our cabin while one of the life rafts was inflated and then every member filed through it. Capt. McNeill stood near the exit

greeting crew members as they came through. As part of their instruction, they were told to take two sea sick pills immediately upon entering the raft in a real evacuation. The reason - "You can't assist if you are sea sick."

The tour we had selected was cancelled for lack of participants. Instead we toured the Halong countryside. It was about 1½ hours on the bus each way. Most of the flat area contained rice paddies. Since the rice season is over some of the fields are now devoted to vegetables. Vietnam is now a net exporter of rice.

This heavily traveled road is the main road to Hanoi. Because of heavy traffic it is being widened. Houses on either side were being partially or totally destroyed. Some of the sights were like what is seen after an earthquake; a still furnished house with the front wall gone, stairs intact going to the upper floors.

Our first stop was the Yen Tu Buddhist Monastery which is the home of 40 monks and has the usual collection of large Buddha statues. The approach to the temple was up a long, wide flight of stairs that were without handrails. Jodie decided to wait at the bottom of the stairs while the rest of the group toured. This led to a unique and fascinating experience she described below.

While sitting on a low wall at the base of the stairs a number of interesting things occurred. There was a group of middle aged ladies who came along and put their arms under my arm pits and gestured they would help me up the stairs. I had a difficult time convincing them

not to. There were groups of mainly young adult men who would stop and handle my knee brace. There was a group of three women who sat beside me on the wall one on each side who put their heads on my shoulder the other gestured by putting her fingers around her eyes like glasses. I thought perhaps they wanted to take a picture, but that wasn't it. After a short time they continued on their way up to the pagoda. A little later another group of women approached me saying in Vietnamese (I later asked the guide) "How are you" and began gently massaging my arms and legs.

After getting over my initial concerns about my safety it was a touching experience to have so many strangers wanting to help. I found that the traditional finger sign for OK would send them off with smiles on all of our faces. Beside the incidents I have described there were many more who gestured to me they would help me. That doesn't happen often in today's society. The only English words uttered were "Hello" and "USA." Many were family groups bringing food offerings to the monastery.

After the monastery we paid a brief visit to a local farm family. We were served welcoming treats of cold, cooked, whole sweet potatoes and green tea. Their home consists of two small buildings. One contains three rooms, one a living room/bedroom, another bedroom, and a toilet. The other contains a sort of kitchen and a shower room. Most of the farming is done on the fields adjacent to the house although he has a rice paddy some distance away.

3/28. Saigon.

Ho Chi Min and his red horde from the north may have driven the foreign devils out of Viet Nam however capitalism has certainly won out over Communism with the exception of governmental elections. The streets are lined with any business imaginable, ranging from hole-in-the-wall shops selling 20 foot lengths of rebar to impromptu restaurants consisting of plastic tables and small chairs with some sort of cooking device along side the road.

We asked our tour guide what the unemployment rate is and he said there is no unemployment. If you don't work you don't eat. There is no welfare program. If you want health insurance you must buy it. Education is not free.

The streets are jammed with motor scooters, motor bikes, and motor cycles. There are very few cars. There are also some public transportation buses and freight trucks. Much of the hauling, however, is by incredibly laden two-wheeled vehicles including even some bicycles.

The most impressive sight were streams of two-wheelers making left turns through equally dense streams of ongoing traffic. Everyone proceeded and the streams just seemed to flow through each other. It seemed like some higher dimensional relativistic flow. Even pedestrians seemed to flow through traffic, moving slowly but steadily and observing the flow and sliding through it.

We took a full day tour which included a 2-hour bus ride each way through the

convoluted traffic flow out into the country. Once we eventually reached the open country side we saw some rice fields. Viet Nam claims to be the number two exporter of rice in the World.

Our first stop was a family fruit farm. The typical house was surrounded with fruit trees which were their cash crop. There were durian, Asian pears, rambutan, and some that I couldn't identify. They also raised chickens and pigs. We were treated to some fresh fruit and green tea.

The next stop was the Cu Chi Tunnels. This is a preserved complex of tunnels used by the Viet Cong during the war. We were first "treated" to a terribly biased propaganda film from the time of the war and then strolled about the area seeing some of the tunnel features. Some of the more adventurous even did a brief stroll in a section of tunnel.

After the tunnels we had a delightful lunch of typical Viet Nameese food (almost the same as Chinese) at a pleasant open air restaurant next to a river. Then it was the long drive back to the ship which was moored in the "beautiful" Lotus container port. The two-wheel traffic was even more dense than in the morning.

I must mention the women. They prize white skin or complexion and therefore avoid all contact with the Sun. They wear hoods that cover the head and neck, hats and face masks, long sleeves and pant legs, and gloves, many times all color coordinated. This is all in spite of the heat and humidity.

3/30. At Sea .



We left Saigon around 4 pm last night which allowed us to finally sit on our balcony and share a bottle of wine as the ship wended its way down the Mekong River to the ocean. Immediately after leaving the mooring the river made almost a 180° bend which required some mighty thrusting from both the azipods and the bow thrusters to get the ship around.

There was continual heavy ship traffic going both up and down stream. Eventually we got into the delta which was heavily wooded with either fish ponds or rice paddy here and there. Whenever we reached a town we found masses of kites in the air. We don't know if there was some sort of festival or if this is just an evening activity. We gave up when it became dark and returned inside. Although it has been quite hot, the breeze from the ship movement made it quite pleasant on our little balcony.

When we entered the dining room for dinner we made our usual request to join other guests so we were taken to a table occupied by a couple from Texas with whom we had previously dined. The other person was Jim Coston, one of the temporary entertainers who board the ship for a couple of performances and then leave. He is a banjo player.

It was a very interesting dinner and discussion. He started as a paramedic and bought a banjo at a pawn shop with no previous experience with a banjo. He basically taught himself. He now lives in Thailand although still a US resident.

Early in the trip I sent a message to Julie Northington, our travel agent, stating that

there were rumors that the line is for sale. This rumor was supported by what many perceived as poor service in the dining room. She passed this on up the line and received an informal denial. Recently, a new Manager of Food and Beverage, Goran Radojicic, came on board and approached us in the dining room one lunch. He introduced himself and said that if I had any problems of any kind to please tell him. Tonight is a formal night and we have been invited to dine with him.

3/31. Laem Chabang, Thailand.

Happy Easter!

Jodie put plastic Easter eggs along the hallway. We suspect security removed them as they were not there very early next morning.

Dinner last night was interesting. In spite of the recent war around Kosova, there are Serbs and Croats working in harmony side by side on the ship. We will be in port all day and tonight. Tomorrow is turn-around day. We have a tour this afternoon and another tomorrow to keep us from being under foot.

After a leisurely morning on the ship we went off to see the elephants. We traveled for about 45 minutes into the relatively less densely populated country, finally reaching the compound. Shaded seats offered a view of the working area. No sooner than we were seated, however, those who wanted to get wet could ride the elephants to the pond and help them bathe. So everyone tramped over to the pond to watch the process. On the way into the show we were offered the opportunity to buy

small, local bananas to feed the elephants, \$4 for a large bunch. The animals loved the bananas!

Next we were offered the opportunity to ride the elephants. Boarding was facilitated by a tall platform nearby. Jodie and many others took the short ride around the stand.

Jodie's report: After checking out the boarding procedure I decided to give it a try. The platform had hand rails on the steps and there was a sturdy pole to hang on to where you boarded the elephant. An over weight man boarded the elephant in front of me and then panicked as it started off. That did not do great things for my confidence. We were not in the seats that you usually see when riding elephants, but were riding on the neck area with our legs tucked behind the ears and the mahout seated atop the back behind us. And then when my elephant appeared it was much smaller thus a long step down which I knew I could not handle. I started to leave, but they said a taller one was coming so I waited and sure enough a big fellow plodded up and I was able to board easily if not gracefully. Then we started out. It was a shock to have my secure seat start oscillating with each step of the elephant. They said you could hang on to the hair on the head, but my friend had a buzz cut. Thankfully I got into the rhythm and enjoyed the rest of ride and was able to get off with style at the end.

Then we got to the show. They demonstrated how the elephants were used for logging and then dressed up one as a war elephant. We took advantage of this photo op and posed with the dressed-up elephant. While standing

next to the elephant with my hand resting on her tusk I remembered the massive protective structures that separate people and elephants at the San Diego Zoo.

The end of this segment was marked by the always enjoyable Crew Capers show. Total distance 3613.5 nm.

4/1/13. Laem Chabang, Thailand.

We've found that the *Voyager* can't go many places that the *Navigator* does or did. For example, her draft of 23 feet meant that we docked before passing under the bridge in Saigon at a container terminal. We tied up at another lovely container terminal an hour's drive away from Bangkok in Laem Chabang.

The in-transit passengers were given the option of riding a bus into Bangkok and spending the night at a hotel, and touring things we had seen on a previous visit. The long bus ride didn't appeal to us so we elected to stay on board. A second reason for staying was that we had signed up for the tour that went to the elephant preserve.

April Fools' Day was a turn-around day. Those in-transit passengers who didn't go to Bangkok were offered a tour to the Wood Pavilion/Sanctuary of Truth in Pattaya. What an astounding place! This is a giant, wooden depiction of Buddhist and Hindu motifs. It was created in 1981 by Lek Viriyaphant who had the Mercedes-Benz bus manufacturing license for Thailand. He felt that the traditional wooden temples and carvings should be preserved, so he did. His family continued the support this effort.

Its highest point is 345 feet and it covers 2,115 m<sup>2</sup>. The architecture is Khmer and presents an ancient vision of life and the seven creators; heaven, Earth, father, mother, Moon, Sun, and stars. All surfaces are covered with carvings or carved figures. All is assembled with wooden pegs rather than nails. We were required to wear construction helmets to enter since there are ongoing repair and upgrade projects throughout.

#### 4/2. Sihanoukville, Cambodia.

The Cambodians are resilient people. After the deprivations and slaughter of the Pol Pot atrocities they seem to be bouncing back. Although far from prosperous the streets are busy with the typical Southeast Asia shops and restaurants. There are not, however, the masses of two-wheelers we've seen elsewhere.

As usual on this trip, the ship tied-up at a container terminal. Our docking was delayed a bit since we were going between two ships which were too close. We had to wait for one to move. Imagine parallel parking a ship.

We left the ship in the oppressive heat and quickly boarded a somewhat air conditioned bus for the trip to "Amazing" Ream National Park. This 210 km<sup>2</sup> park was established in 1993 by a government that was concerned with the loss of natural habitat. It is on the shore and combines rain forest and beach.

We drove about an hour into the countryside, passing many elemental dwellings and small markets. We also passed the very large Angor brewery and a large shoe factory. We

frequently saw hammocks slung beneath trees in small shelters, some occupied.

Eventually we reached a river and left the bus to board some long-tailed boats tied up there. Boarding was via a rickety wooden walkway over smelly mud flats. Our boat was powered by a 4 cylinder engine taken from some small car. Its cooling liquid was drawn directly from the brackish river water and returned there.

The hour-long ride was uneventful with a few sightings of osprey and egrets. The fleet of boats all ran aground when trying to land at a small settlement at the ocean. The boatman got out and wrestled the boat over the mud flat while his young son operated the engine. Eventually we reached a wharf and debarked with some difficulty. We landed at a small settlement which had a school. The residents were friendly and smiled as they went about their chores as we trekked through.

What followed was a one-hour trek through the rain forest with no apparent wildlife. The trail lead up over a ridge and down toward another beach. It was a long and difficult hike with rickety stairs with no particular reward other than reaching the end.

#### 4/4. Singapore.

For a place with no natural resources, Singapore has become an economic powerhouse. Its famous founder Sir Stanford Raffles is honored by many statues throughout the city/state. I was surprised to learn that he spent only a few weeks here on several occasions.

The place is thriving with high rise buildings fingering the skies. The most outrageous is a complex of three separate towers with a park/swimming pool across the top of all three.

Our tour started with a very long walk from the ship to the buses, including passing through customs and immigration and then gathering in a shopping mall.

The bus immediately drove up the narrow, twisting road to the top of Mt. Faber where we enjoyed the views of the city from the Singapore Cable Car Station. The guide stressed that we all must visit the Iconic Restroom which had the conventional amenities however with a spectacular view, thanks to floor to ceiling clear glass walls.

We next had a short visit to the spectacular Singapore Botanic Gardens National Orchid Garden where we photographed blossoms and shopped with glee.

The rest of the trip was basically riding around town with a stop by the harbor to view the pool-topped towers and the Singapore symbol, a lion-fish statue, in the harbor. We ended with a half-hour shopping opportunity in Chinatown. The forecasted thunderstorm broke out as we were driving back to the ship.

Many people on the tour had iPad-like devices with which they attempted to take photos. This required them to move in front of everyone else, forming a wall. Tours should be separated into iPad and non-iPad photographers.

Singapore marked our farthest excursion south on the voyage, 1° 15.71" N.

#### 4/6. Malaysia

Malaysia seems to be thriving. Although there have been violent riots in the past all seems peaceful now. There seems to be a lot of government provided housing and the streets are filled with cars and trucks.

On our first day the ship docked at Port Klang, 30 or 40 km from Kuala Lumpur. We had what is our worst tour so far on this trip and perhaps any trip. The bus ride to Putra Jaya was interesting however when we reached the Botanical Gardens the guide ushered us off of the bus and pointed to the gardens and said we should wander around for an hour. We asked what there was there and he said he had never been there and come back in an hour since the bus couldn't stay.

It was a pleasant area with a large lake but there were almost no flowers but many identified trees. Not worth the time spent there nor the hour drive to get there.

Although the capital of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur the Prime Minister has a massive office building in Putra Jaya. There are numerous other governmental offices plus housing for governmental employees located there. There were also a couple spectacular mosques, the pink and the iron, which warranted a photo stop.

On our final day, in Penang, things were much better although it started our rather wet. When I wake up in the morning I usually open

the curtains to see what kind of day it is. I had a hint this morning since I saw a flash of lightening and heard the crack of thunder before I got out of bed. Sure enough, when I parted the curtains I saw rain.

We took two separate tours. Jodie went to a batik “factory” where she created her own large cotton scarf which turned out quite well.

I took a tour which seemed to circle the island. We paid a token visit to another batik “factory,” where there was a brief, hurried demonstration then an extended shopping opportunity. The bus then drove up into the hills and stopped at an elaborate road-side fruit stand, then visited the snake temple.

On the way to the snake temple we passed through a tax-free enterprise zone. Factories built in this area are free of taxes for five years. By far the largest factory we saw was a Fairchild Semiconductor facility. There also was a Bosch factory that made electrical tools.

The snake temple is Taoist and features live snakes hanging on various structures throughout the altar area. For \$10 you could be photographed with a python around your neck.

This area was hard hit by a tsunami in 2004, the day after Christmas. Since then most of the destroyed dwelling have been replaced by the UN at no cost to the residents. Other structures have been rebuilt on pilings so that the waters may flow under with no affect.

4/7. Back to Thailand.

As we worked our way up the coast of the peninsula we once again entered Thailand and made our final stop, in Phuket. Although the coast of the island is littered with hotels and resorts, the rest of the area seems to be a busy, industrious town.

Our all-day tour was very popular with 9 buses. It departed at 8 am, more or less. After a fairly long ride we stopped at a road-side entertainment complex, called Elephant Camp. Our reason for stopping was a potty stop and to view a demonstration of rubber tree tapping. In addition you could rent a very noisy ATV, ride an elephant, ride a water buffalo, have your feet cleaned by some tiny fish, view and feed a baby elephant, or mess with a macaque.

Elephants were critical components of the logging industry. Now that all logging has been banned in Thailand they have retired to the tourist industry.

There are rubber tree plantations all along the roads. The trees start producing after around 7 years and may produce for 50 years. The chevron like tapping cuts are made each night. The collected milky sap is coagulated with formic acid and then turned into sheets by passing it through rollers that compress it and squeeze out the water. The resulting sheets are dried and then packed for shipment.

The trip continued on to Phang Nga National Park where we boarded a long boat. What followed was a long and noisy ride around the karst formations similar to Ha Long bay in Viet Nam. There were swarms of various sized long-tailed boats rushing back and forth.

Our Diesel-powered boat was much slower. Eventually we reached the “highlight” of the trip, the viewing of Kao Ping-Gan Island where part of the James Bond flick, *The Man With the Golden Gun*, was filmed. It was impossible to hear any of the guide’s commentary over the noise of the engine.

On the way back the boat stopped at a Muslim fishing village of Koh Panyee for a 30 minute shopping opportunity. We followed the guide through the twisting, narrow passage ways to the point where we could view their floating football (soccer) field. It also serves as a helicopter pad.

Lunch was a good Chinese style meal at the Phang Nga Bay Resort.

The ship departed almost on time and headed due West, 270° at a sprightly 19 kts.

4/9. At Sea.

This was our second day of rest at sea and will be our last on this segment of the cruise. Since there was nothing to do, the ship held the fourth *Costa Concordia* lifeboat drill of our voyage. It is claimed that the mysterious powers of international maritime law have decreed that there must be a drill every 14 days, or less.

Promptly at 10 am we trooped to our designated stations and lined up like convicts at roll call. All of the staff had obviously been directed to assume a stern demeanor and to discourage any joking. Jokes about Italian captains were especially discouraged since Regent has some. As part of this drill we

actually went out on deck to the point at which the tenders would be boarded. We exited the interior in lock-step each person holding onto the shoulder of the person in front of them. When outside we again were lined up in rows. After some period of time we were dismissed.

It is easy to imagine how different this would be in an actual emergency, considering the number of passengers who ignore directions and rush to be the first on the tour busses.

We have had to fill-out and sign a whole packet of documents for access to the various Indian ports. Their bureaucracy is outstanding. I think they are afraid some English-speaking people might sneak into India and take away some of the telephone customer support jobs from Indian citizens.

Tonight will be the first special event for the long cruisers. There will be an Indian dinner in La Veranda Restaurant served by the Indian staff.

4/10. Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

This part of Sri Lanka had been the stronghold of the Tamil Tigers. Now that they have been apparently suppressed life is getting back to normal. During the 30 years of war, nothing was maintained. We drove from the ship in a small tourist van to an abandoned Buddhist monastery, perhaps called Velgamwehera Temple. Once we left town the roads were miserable with construction obviously aiming toward widening and paving.

We were seated in front so we could see the many near misses as the van dodged around

the construction sites. Traffic was mostly trucks, tuck-tucks, and an occasional car. All of the vans were brought from Colombo the previous day. Ours was quite nicely air conditioned.

The monastery was obviously a large structure which housed around 65 monks. Now little is left but some low walls, a Buddha, and a Stupa.

A long drive back into town brought us to a hotel where we had a cool soda and watched the monkeys in the trees.

The final stop was a drive to the old Dutch fort which now seems to house some current military. It was quite large and also held a Hindu temple. To visit the temple you had to remove your shoes some distance from the temple and then walk on hot asphalt and up the stairs to the temple. Trucks seemed able to drive right up to the temple without removing their shoes.

The MTN Internet and the telephone system has not been working. Among various excuses are that there was local interference. Difficult to imagine interference existing in a town that seems to have no technical infrastructure.

4/11. ~~Galle~~.

This has been a swell day. But because of the swell, landing at Galle was canceled. The ship must anchor to visit this port. After anchoring, a tender was lowered and approached the pontoon. There was about a 2 m movement between the pontoon and the

tender, making it too difficult or dangerous for passengers to use. So we up-anchored and headed off to Colombo.

Yesterday afternoon we had the second impromptu lecture on Asian religions from Dr. Ned O'Malia, professor of Asian Religions at the University of New Mexico. He is on board as the traveling companion of the Signature rep on this segment. The lectures have been casually unorganized but quite informative.

The MTN services continued to be unavailable while at sea, presumably when no longer near the town interference. Each time I have called Reception about this lack of service I have been told that the Interned guru is "looking into it." I wish he would look into fixing it. Perhaps MTN is using a spot-beam on one of the Inmarsat satellites and we have moved out of the spot.

We arrived in Colombo around 4 pm.

Internet became somewhat available late at night.

4/12. Colombo.

This was our final day in Sri Lanka. On the 7-hour tour we sampled a Buddhist temple and a Hindu temple. Of course, it is required that you must remove your shoes before entering the temple. To me, a temple means a building however a Buddhist temple is an entire complex including several structures, statues, and usually a banyan tree. Therefore you must walk shoeless in the dirt.

Kelaniya Temple is a large complex with many worshipers. Many were carrying small pots of water around the banyan tree and then offering the water to the tree. In addition to the usual incense there were several with tiny fires contained in small bowls, representing purity. Flower offerings ringed the stupa.

We then drove around town eventually reaching the National Museum which we briefly toured.

After more touring we enjoyed a buffet, Indian lunch at the Cinnamon Hotel.

The Hindu temple was a typical gaudy array of boldly colored statues. Since the whole area was paved we weren't walking in dirt. The place seemed to be under extensive repair with some new construction.

When we returned to the ship we found an interesting letter from the captain on the door. I'll quote it in part:

*"As we depart Colombo...we will be entering an area known as High Risk Area (HRA) for piracy."*

When we went to the lounge for Trivia I noticed that fire hoses have been mounted on the stern railings. During Trivia sound projectors were mounted on the railings. I believe these areas will be manned 24 hours by ship security personnel.

4/13. Cochin, India

We bid a fond adieu to Sri Lanka, a country that seems to be on the road to recovery from

their 30 years of rebellion.

The ship arrived around noon in India. Our introduction to India began when it was time to leave for our first tour. We were called, deck by deck, tour by tour, to the Constellation Theater where we picked up our passport, our Indian arrival card, and a copy of our passport. We were viewed by an immigration inspector who stamped our passport copy and we were then allowed to pick up our bus ticket and go to the bus. We again had to show the passport copy at the top of the gangway and then again before we left the secure area on the wharf.

We drove from the ship to the shore line where we watched fishing with the traditional Chinese fishing nets. These are more of a tourist attraction than used for productive fishing. The system consists of a very large rectangular net that is suspended from four poles at the corners. The whole affair is suspended from a frame. Rocks suspended from various lengths of rope counterbalance the weight of the net and frame. When the net is under water all of the rocks are in the air. As the net is pulled out of the water and pivoting, which reduces its weight, some of the rocks progressively rest on the ground reducing the counterbalancing affect. Although several nets were in operation I didn't see any fish caught.

In spite of the lack of catch, there were vendors selling fish all along the walk. Most of the buses from the ship started their tours here so it was quite crowded. We strolled from there to a store for a shopping opportunity but also a potty break.



The stroll continued to St. Francis church. It was built as a Catholic church however when the British kicked Portugal out it became Anglican. Since it was Christian we were not expecting to have to remove our shoes. The guide explained that local tradition requires shoe removal when entering any church or temple. The most interesting things were the suspended, manually operated fabric fans.

From the church we went to the Dutch Palace which is now a museum. It was quite crowded with ship people and also with locals. The most remarkable part was the murals on the walls depicting Buddhist lore.

An hour was allotted for shopping on Jew Street. (Yes, this is the correct name.) This used to be the center of the Jewish population however most have emigrated to Israel. There were some good buys, if you weren't too tired or hot to haggle. At this point we were more interested in a place to sit - something difficult to find.

The day's final adventure was a harbor cruise on a crowded boat. We were all packed onto the upper deck. The breeze from the boat's movement was welcome in the 90° heat. At the end of the cruise the several boats carrying the tours from the *Voyager* battled to reach the mooring. We unfortunately didn't have a very assertive captain.

4/14. Still Cochin.

We booked a 7½ hour tour. It started at Mahadeva Temple. The Hindus are celebrating their New Year so the temple was packed. Our guide was Hindu so he attempted

to explain the Hindu faith to us during the tour and also at the temple. There was a group of priests in an open-air structure chanting. Their chants were broadcast throughout the whole temple area. There were few areas that we, as non Hindu, also not traditionally dressed, could visit. Periodically there were loud explosions made by the detonation of brass cylinders being continuously refilled at the site. By the time I returned to the bus my clothing was completely saturated with perspiration.

The next stop was a small coconut oil extraction facility. It was pretty crude and not sanitary enough to produce oil for human consumption. Its output went to a local manufacturing facility.

The most thrilling part of the day was a "Tuck-Tuck" ride to a small canal. (A Tuck-Tuck is a 3-wheeled passenger conveyance built on a light-weight motor bike frame.) Although it was quite a short ride it was on a narrow road and required the driver to swerve several times to avoid on-coming vehicles.

At the canal we boarded an 8-passenger canoe fabricated by stitching rough-cut boards together with coconut fiber rope and calking the inside with coconut fibre soaked in oil. (This latter part is speculation on my part since no one explained how the boats were fabricated.)

The natural canal was less than 8 feet wide and quite shallow. In fact, so shallow that we frequently grounded which required the boatman to push the boat while wading in the canal. Widely separated houses lined the

canal and we encountered women washing clothes in the canal and children swimming. We also saw two dead and one live snake.

Eventually we reached a settlement where we had a box lunch and then viewed several demonstrations of native crafts. A man climbed a coconut palm and gathered liquid from a blossom cluster. A mildly alcoholic drink called toddy naturally ferments from this liquid in a few days. We also saw demonstrations of making rope from coconut husk fibre; weaving roof mats from coconut palm leaves; pottery making; and making rice flour by pounding rice with a large, wooden mortar and pestle.

On the way back to the ship we made a brief stop at the Khadi Weaving Center. There were several women working at hand looms in a dark, hot room. They were making bed sheets for institutions. We could have purchased one of these rough fabric sheets for \$10. It looked like a real sweat-shop however the weavers seemed happy and were eager to interact with us. We made it back to the ship at 5 pm as the crew was packing up the stuff on shore.

4/15. Mangalore, India.

After yesterday's long and very hot tour we opted for a short tour, touted as a shopping tour. First we visited Belmont House, built in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by a British magistrate. It was bought by the Peres family in the 1940s and is currently occupied by Joan Peres. It is a very pleasant, high-ceilinged home.

Next we visited the fish market which is located next to the bus terminal. Local

custom seems to be that buses must enter with great flourish and speed, horn blaring all the way, beware pedestrians!

The final stop was a 50 minute shopping opportunity at a modern mall.

Our guide on this trip was a 23 year old Catholic who was celebrating his birthday. We now have had, in succession, a Buddhist, a Hindu, and a Catholic tour guide. Although India is considered a Hindu state we saw many, many Christian facilities during all of our tours.

4/17. Mumbai.

We arrived at the end of the second segment of our grand voyage, traveling a total of 3,924.6 nm from Thailand. Because of heat and fatigue we blew off tours yesterday in Goa and a daytime tour here. This evening we went on a tour of the night lights of Mumbai.

It was enjoyable and included a rapid stroll through a teeming night market. We were beset by insistent begging children and street vendors. We also had cocktails at the luxurious Trident hotel and saw part of a Bollywood movie. Since none of it was in English we really had no idea of what was going on. Just when the usual elaborate dancing started many of the guests decided, on their own that it was time to go so we all had to leave.

Most of the younger people were in western dress.

The city streets were still filled with people

walking around or going to restaurants even late at night. We saw a few instances of families bedding down on the streets for the night. We saw none on the beach like we saw 15 years ago.

Security has been quite impressive here. We even had to go through a metal detector and a pat-down to enter the movie theater.

The next day was turn-around day. The in-transit passengers were offered a city tour while the other passengers departed and the new ones came aboard. The tour wandered around the city making various stops. The women seen on the streets were mostly dressed in the traditional Indian style for this area; very few saris but many leggings and tunics. I suspect that standard work dress tends towards traditional rather than western.

One old tradition survives; the lunch being delivered from suburban homes to offices by bicycle, train, and bicycle. We saw many bicycles laden with the four-part lunch tins being moved along the streets as noon approached.

It seems that any tour must include a stop at a temple. We visited a Hari Krishna temple devoted to Shiva. In a delightful departure from the Buddhist temples we have visited, the surfaces upon which we walked without shoes was smooth, clean tile. Although it was only 10 am they were serving a vegetarian meal that seemed to be mostly rice to anyone wanting it. Participants ranged from indigent to well-to-do. This is considered a form of sharing and/or a shared blessing for both the temple and those consuming.

One stop was at a house that Gandhi used whenever he was in town. It is now a museum and library devoted to him.

We also had a brief stop at the Bombay Ghat. This is the famous manual laundry center. Just as with the lunch tins, we saw many freight bicycles laden with either sacks of dirty laundry or packages of ironed and folded clean laundry.

#### 4/19. On the Arabian Sea

After two days in Mumbai we are at sea on our way to fabled Arabia.

It seems appropriate to attempt to summarize India, or at least the small part of India we have seen. As we progressed up the west coast we encountered increasing sophistication. Stores changed from little open-fronted stalls to more conventional establishments. There are still families that live on the street. Their bedding is folded up and stored close by during the day. There are water trucks that supply water for drinking and bathing. There is also day care for the young children so both parents could work. There is still a lot of begging.

Automobiles became more prevalent, replacing two and three wheeled vehicles.

One thing was unchanging - immigration security. Whenever we left the ship we had to show our landing card plus an authenticated copy of our passport twice. In Mumbai immigration inspectors also entered the tour bus and inspected our landing cards both when exiting and reentering the port area. Are

there really individuals who want to illegally stay in India?

Security was quite evident in Mumbai. There were armed police/military everywhere. We went through metal detectors and pat-downs whenever we entered a public place. I guess this is reasonable given the terrorists attacks that have occurred here. Here, and many places so far, security TV cameras are in profusion.

4/19. Dubai, UAE.

“If you build it, they will come.”

After two days of blissful sailing across the Indian Ocean we arrived in Dubai, one of the seven emirates that comprise the United Arab Emirates. We arrived in late morning and had an afternoon highlight tour. It is difficult to fathom the economy of the place. Its skyline is populated with extravagant, grandiose, soaring high-rise buildings. It seems that this part of the World is engaged in some sort of juvenile “mine is bigger than yours” game. But who will occupy these towers?

These buildings may have been built in the hope that business will occupy them, thus perpetuating the economy that is currently based on petrodollars.

Dubai had the World’s tallest flag pole however someone has built a taller one. They have what is or was the World’s tallest building, the Burj Khalifa. It is a bunch of towers, each a bit taller than its neighbor, culminating in one soaring above all the others. It reminded me of some of the

medieval paintings of the Tower of Babel.

The rest of the high rises are striving to look nothing at all like their neighbors. Each architect created a unique, unconventional look and most seem to have succeeded. But then the question arose, who or what occupies these multi-story edifices?

The Emirates were small fishing villages and relatively minor stops on world trade routes. At one time they were under British influence. All this changed in 1962 when Abu Dhabi started exporting oil. This led to eventual independence and the creation of the UAE. The emirs seem to have realized that the oil wealth was finite and have attempted to use it to create a sustainable economy by building.

This is a two-class society. Citizens comprise 20% of the population while imported workers comprise the rest. There is no path to citizenship for those not born here, although foreign women can marry a citizen and gain citizenship.

In Dubai there is no unemployment. If a non-citizen doesn’t have a job he must leave. Citizens have free health care and free education; foreigners don’t. At the age of 65, non-citizens must retire and leave. Hopefully they have been able to save enough upon which to retire.

In addition to the high-rise buildings, Dubai has dredged up grand islands from the ocean upon which there are, or will be luxury housing. One, called The Palm, is, strangely enough, shaped like a palm. Another, called The World, is sort of shaped like a map of the

World. The faltering World economy has stopped development on the World and the ocean is slowly reclaiming it..

On the first day's tour we drove from the ship on a serpentine course through the developing port complex and then along the coast line. The road was lined with homes, medical clinics, and dental clinics. Eventually we reached one of the most improbable hotels in existence, the Burj al Arab. This soaring structure is supposed to look like a sail. In fact, one wall is fabric. Our tour did not include entry so we tramped from the bus to the parking lot entry and took our photos. An extremely light rain fell while we were doing this.

As part of the tour we visited the Dubai Museum, built on the site of an old fort. For some unknown reason it was underground and so dark that you couldn't see much of anything. We also visited the spice and gold souk (market.)

4/22/13

Now that we are well inside the Arabian Sea the security measures have been relaxed. The fire hoses have been removed from the railings however the LRAD is still in place for when we go back "outside." There are still three men whom have been identified as Israeli commandoes on board.

For our second day in Dubai we did a Sharjah heritage tour. Sharjah is one of the other emirates in the UAE. There was no noticeable transition from Dubai to Sharjah. We just drove on limited access highway and

eventually passed through an automated toll gate that marked the dividing point. Our first stop was at the Quran roundabout to take pictures. Yes, we went to a traffic circle to take pictures. This one had a large mosque on one side and 3 unique government buildings on the other sides. The center was beautifully landscaped with a statue of the Koran in the middle.

Many of the traffic circles here have been retrofitted with controlling traffic lights. This illustrates once again how traffic circles collapse in high traffic conditions and must be fitted with traffic lights to allow traffic to flow. We were also told that many are being replaced with more conventional intersections to reduce the accident rate.

We also visited a fish market and spent an hour at a huge souk that was filled with small shops selling gold jewelry. Many were being patronized by Moslem women in black burkas. There was a large electronic sign hanging from the ceiling displaying the current price of gold.

Random items: The metro in Dubai is fully automated - no drivers. Desalination provides 93% of the water. The rest comes from springs. Given the usual temperatures, it's nice that the bus stops are air conditioned.

The fabled and retired ship, QE2, is in a dry dock here being prepared to move to China under its own power. Once there it will become a hotel. There was also a very large natural gas tanker in the same yard. Contrary to our expectations of clear desert air, the skyline was obscured by a thick haze or fog.

4/23. Doha, Qatar.

During the night the ship moved to Qatar. This is not one of the emirates but has its own skyline of garish, grotesque buildings. None of these buildings are, or were contenders as the tallest. Qatar's source of wealth is natural gas. Like the emirates, 80% of its residents are non-citizens.

Our Highlights of Doha tour was on a jam packed bus. Most of the time we just drove around however we spent an interesting hour in Souq Waqif. This seemed to be a place where residents would shop. There were many shops selling brightly colored yardage, others selling the white cotton used for the male garment. There were also stalls with several sewing machines and operators making various garments. Shops also had massive stacks of men's white dress shirts. We found a cooking utensil store that was fascinating. There were pots and griddles of unimaginable size.

We also visited the Doha Museum which depicted life in the area before petro-wealth.

4/24. Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Abu Dhabi is the capital of the United Arab Emirates and once again validates the Golden Rule; he who has the gold makes the rules. As the largest and richest of the Emirates it stimulated the formation of the UAE and became its capital. It has 8% of the World's proven oil reserves and 5% of the natural gas. And like the other emirates, 85% of its 2 million population are foreign workers who cannot become citizens.

Yet Abu Dhabi seems to have an inferiority complex with respect to Dubai. Perhaps Dubai's skyline is more spectacular. There are also the dredged-up island complexes; the Palm and the World in Dubai. The all enveloping fog or haze that has been with us seemingly forever cloaked Abu Dhabi's skyline as we approached in the morning. There seems to be an active building program but certainly nothing approaching the tallest building in the World. It has gone one better than Dubai. It has the World's largest flag pole with a flag that is the size of a football field.

The emirate has embarked on an active expansion plan, developing some outlying islands for various cultural purposes. Over 200 natural islands comprise the emirate. We visited one island that will be the home of several museums. The whole emirate has been "greened" up by the planting of 9 million trees. Each tree is watered several times a day by a drip irrigation system.

By far the most spectacular part of our city tour was a visit to the Grand or Sheikh Zayed Mosque, the World's third largest and capable of holding 41,000 worshippers. It was gleaming white with typical gold and floral accents. It has 82 domes and is surrounded by and contains within over 1,000 beautifully decorated columns. Among other superlatives, it has the World's largest hand knotted carpet that is filled with beautiful floral patterns. Surprisingly we were allowed to walk on it.

Although she was wearing full length pants, Jodie had to borrow a black burqa to enter since she was wearing a short sleeved shirt.

Also her hat wasn't adequate since it allowed hair to show. Moslem men must be terribly short on self control if they cannot view any part of a woman other than her eyes. In some instance even the eyes can't show.

The burqa was extremely hot. I don't know why the women have to wear black and the men wear white. We also got into trouble with the mosque "police on a couple occasions. We were having our photo taken and we put our arm around each other. That is a big no-no in a mosque - NO TOUCHING OF THE OPPOSITE SEX. And Jodie was scolded frequently for having hair showing.

4/25/13.

We made our final stop in U.A.E. at Fujairah April 25<sup>th</sup>. It is now appropriate to summarize the emirates. We had no real contact with any residents. All of the guides are nonresidents. An undocumented 80% of the people are not residents and never can be. There is a 10% sales tax, a 17% tax on rental dwellings, and there is a \$1,000 a year fee for a work permit. The only unemployment figures we heard were for residents, 17%. This high number is due to the fact that they are supported by the state and will only work if it is a prestige job. No one keeps track of the nonresidents but they can't remain if unemployed.

(There is a table of info about the emirates on the last page of this document.)

Fujairah is beyond the Straits of Hormuz and therefore beyond a potential Iranian blockade of the straits. A pipeline has been built from Abu Dhabi to Fujairah so that oil shipments

could not be interrupted by Iran. There is also an extremely large grain import facility in Fujairah which I assume has the same intent as the pipeline, but in reverse, to insure ready access to rice and wheat in the event of hostile Iranian action.

Our little tour took us first to an old fort for a photo stop - not much worth while. Then we visited the local archeological museum which, although small, was interesting. The most interesting part of the tour was a long drive up into the mountains which included a stop at the Friday market, open although it was Thursday. It sold mostly fruits and vegetables and lots of carpets. All of the workers at the market were from Afghanistan.

4/26. Muscat, Oman.

Muscat is built into the foothills of the mountain range that travels down the peninsula. Although it has oil wealth, Oman doesn't seem to have entered into the building competition with the U.A.E. The tallest building is 10 stories. The predominate impression is white. Almost all the buildings and houses are white.

For a change, our guide wasn't from India; he was a local Omani in his final year of college working on a degree in tourism. The approaching degree apparently didn't include map reading. The bus kept getting lost, reversing direction, driving around and around the same places.

We first visited a curio collection of a local man. Then the usual photo stop and a mosque, a long shopping opportunity at the

Mutt Rah Souq, and then a photo stop at the sultan's palace.

4/27. At sea.

While we were at breakfast this morning the captain announced from the bridge, "Code yellow papa." This is the first stage of a terrorism alert. This was not a practice. There were some small boats chasing after the ship. The fire hoses were turned on and the security personal manned the decks. After about a half an hour the alert was called off.

The following are Jodie's notes from the captain's description of the three stages of pirate alerts. He described these as we were having a practice pirate drill:

#### **Code Yellow Papa**

Suspicious unknown vessel within 3 miles  
Attempt to identify and communicate  
Step aside maneuver

#### **Code Orange Papa**

Unable to identify high speed approaching vessel  
All exterior doors on deck 5 & 6 locked  
LRAD activated  
Deck lights out  
Close water tight doors  
Get ready to evacuate suites, close drapes and move away from windows  
Move passengers away from windows in public areas and close drapes  
VHS  
Report to Naval vessels

#### **Code Red Papa**

Viable piracy intent

UK Maritime notified in Dubai

May Day call

Elevators stopped

Evacuate suites to hall way

All non-essential crew and passengers lie down to avoid injury from next step

Evasive maneuvers by ship

4/29. At Sea.

We are sprinting through a "patrolled corridor" at 19.5 kts. The waters off of the southern end of the Arabian peninsula have been prime territory for the pirates. There has been a armed naval vessel in every port we have stopped in recently; US, French, and South Korean.

Recently I was asking Capt. John about the propulsion system on the ship, azipods, so he invited me to visit on the bridge to see some photos of them. There are two that look to be almost 5' in diameter. They are d-c motors but I didn't think to ask what their horsepower is. There are no rudders. Power is supplied to the pods through slip rings so there in no limit to their rotation. The ship has a total of four diesel a-c generators that provide all of the electrical power for the ship, including the azipods. When the ship is in port only one generator is required.

We will be at sea for a total of four days, until we reach Jordan.

Our last middle eastern stop was Salalah, Oman. The place is quite similar to Muscat, but not quite as clean. We had what I hope is our last visit to a mosque. It was pretty but nothing spectacular. The guide said it could



hold 2,000 worshipers but it looked larger to me. He seemed to be numerically challenged. He told us that there was a 2,000 km high mountain behind the town. (Hint, convert kilometers to miles to see how high the mountain was.)

We also visited a small but very nice museum which had two areas. One was devoted to the seafaring era of Oman; the other to archeology.

The final visit was to a shopping area. Many of the shops were “Gents Tailors.” There were also some fabric shops. Almost every shop sold frankincense.

There is a beautiful white sand beach here. The government has bought all of the old, small houses along the beach and is removing them. The plan is to replace them with luxury hotels. This is another area that is aligning its future with tourism when the oil runs out.

5/1 Still at sea.

Our respite from touring continues. This morning there was a special breakfast for the passengers on the Grand Voyage. It was served in the observation lounge and featured cooked to order eggs and pancakes. The “entertainment” was a special Trivia with questions based on the trip so far.

Jodie is now walking with crutches, rented from the ship at \$3/day. Her so-called good knee has decided to act up and does not want to support any weight. Hopefully the long break from cramped tour buses and the rest provided by the crutches will help it.

The sixth lifeboat drill since we boarded the ship was held today. Jodie was able to get an exemption from Frank Glazy, the General Manager because of the crutches and that she had attended all of the others. The cruise industry association has mandated that drills be held every 14 days and all must attend.

5/4. Safaga, Egypt.

This is a turn-around port and also access point for tours to Luxor. The port and the town are quite unimpressive. Yesterday and tomorrow were and will be at Aqaba, Jordan. This provides access for one-day tours to the classic ruins of Petra. There are also Jeep rides into Wadi Rum. Since we have already had extended visits to both Petra and Luxor we remained on board.

Our room stewardess has told us that we are exempt from the lifeboat drill to be held this afternoon since all we have to attend are the 14-day drills. I certainly won't argue with her.

According to the daily *Passages* the last segment from Mumbai covered 4,637 nm.

5/5. Aqaba, Jordan - again.

We were in Jordan two days ago and then went to Safaga, Egypt to change passengers. Then we came back to Jordan so the new passengers could go to Petra. We've already seen Petra a few years ago so we took a simple city tour. It turned out to be pretty good. It included a visit to a very small museum housed in an old fort. The exhibits were mostly archeological finds from the area.

There was also a small but remarkably good aquarium. It featured fish from the Red Sea. The fish were easy to see and even easy to photograph. The final stop was a shopping opportunity in downtown Aqaba. It is a modern city with busy streets. Women's dress ranged from full coverage in black to blue jeans.

#### 5/6. Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

We snorkeled in the Red Sea! The water was crystal clear, no current, and the fish were abundant. Unfortunately the experience could have been better. The areas where we swam were packed with snorkelers. It was difficult to see the fish with flippers in your face.

One interesting thing the bus guide told us; this place gets 70% of the tourists in Egypt. The antiquities get the rest. There are at least 1,000 hotels here. Everywhere you look there are dive shops and tour operators. It is easy and relatively cheap to get here from Europe, and it is warm in the Winter.

#### 5/7. Suez Canal.

This was our third trip northward through the canal. Although it doesn't have the complexity of the Panama canal it is an interesting way to spend the day. There is the cross-section of Egyptian life as seen on the African side contrasted with the military presence and barrenness of the Sinai side. We watched the entire passage, first from the deck and then from the Observation Lounge.

The *Voyager* paid almost \$300,000 to transit the canal as opposed the usual fee of \$200,000

for most ships. Part of this fee, \$50,000 is for two tugs to accompany the ship since it has azipod propulsion. Somehow this is deemed by the canal authority to be less reliable than most of the very large tanker and container ships that have only one engine. Capt. John McNeill feels this is just another extortion.

#### 5/8. Haifa, Israel.

The tours departed around 7 am because most were quite long. We had to cancel our tour because of a bug. I didn't want to be separated from the rest room for any extended period of time. So we went into the theater at the appointed time to be viewed with our passports by Israel immigration and then retired to our cabin. Things are much better now.

#### 5/9. Still in Haifa.

We've made our pilgrimage to Jerusalem! Interesting how three major religions claim Jerusalem as their nexus. It is a city of hills, called mountains. The old city was built on top of one of these hills. King David is said to have built his temple on top. All that is left is one wall, the famous Wailing Wall. Although I have seen countless pictures of men praying at the wall these never portray the scope. (Note that I said "men" because women have a separate very small, fenced off section.)

This was an especially festive day. Thursday is one of the traditional days for Bar Mitzvahs. The families arrive in large groups, often by chartered bus. Many hire musicians who flock around the entrance. The 13-year-old boy being honored is covered with a canopy

and the joyous procession enter the temple grounds to great music, shofar sounding, drums, and singing. All of this has to proceed through a serious security check and X-Ray. All of the family men enter their area of the wall and the ceremony becomes much more solemn. The females of the family must watch from behind a fence. At the conclusion pieces of candy are thrown into the air.

Perhaps the most interesting group we saw was not the one with the gilt-decorated clothing and the 8-foot long brass trumpet but rather a group of Downs Syndrome children and adults. Their procession was no less joyous than the others we saw.

Our tour left the ship at 7 am for the 3-hour drive to the city. We passed through agricultural areas. All housing is built on the hill sides to preserve the fields for crops. This area is quite hilly with many fertile valleys. The climate is similar to SoCal in that rain occurs in the Winter and the Summers dry. The highest point on the trip was close to 3,000 feet. The route often passed near the wall that imprisons Palestine.

Jerusalem is a very white city. During the British Mandate the British decreed that all buildings must be made of limestone. The city contains 1,150 synagogues, 130 churches, and 80 mosques. Given the historic nature of the city, there is extensive archeology going on; given the density of building, the archeology is conducted by tunneling under the present buildings.

Traffic in the city was horrendous. We first went to the Old City and Temple Mount,

entering through the Dung Gate. We viewed the religious fervor at the wall then bus toured other places with some photo stops. There was a very good Kosher lunch at a hotel complete with Israeli wine.. After lunch we went to the top of the Mount of Olives to view the area, visited the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Church of All Nations.

We didn't visit the Dome of the Rock. I don't know if it is open to visitors since all three religions claim it and are fighting over it.

The drive back to the ship was through mostly heavy traffic. Friday is the start of the 2-day weekend so there was a lot of weekend traffic. We reached the ship at 6:30 and quickly opted out of the tour in Ashdod the next day.

We had an excellent guide who gave a fairly impartial view. After his 2 years of mandatory army service plus 1 additional as a volunteer, he traveled and wound up spending 5 years living in Japan and brought home a Japanese wife. He related that there is a large, permanent Arab population in the country (Arab, as contrasted to Palestinian.) Both Hebrew and Arabic are official languages of the country. He, his wife, and two young girls are living in rental quarters but intend to build in the near future. All dwellings must have a bomb or rocket shelter.

It was interesting to visit Jerusalem, a city over which so many lives have been lost in the name of God.

5/10. Ashdod, Israel.

This is a planned city. There was no real

settlement here before it was built. It is also Israel's number 1 port although the port at Haifa seemed much more active than Ashdod. The most remarkable thing about this port is that there are new cars and light pick-up trucks parked everywhere. There are almost no flat areas not so occupied. Some have been here so long that they are covered with a heavy coating of brown dust. There is a 107% tax imposed on the purchase of a new car. Perhaps that is why there are so many sitting at the port.

Jodie took the shuttle into town. There are beautiful white sand beaches and very modern buildings. There didn't seem to be much going on, however.

5/11. Limassol, Cyprus.

Jodie toured the town of Pafos. She took off without me today because I didn't want to be too far from the porcelain throne.

After about an hour's bus ride we reached the seaside town of Pafos. It was the capital of Cyprus in Hellenistic and Roman times. We visited a partially restored village which served as a seaside retreat of the wealthy. The house of Dionysos was a 1000 sq. meter villa in which most of the exquisite mosaics had been restored to their original state. There were also samples of earlier works, about 200 BC, which were made from small sea pebbles in various shades of gray and tan. The rest of the village was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The floors show Roman legends, but mostly represent scenes from Greek mythology.

There were other ruins that had been

uncovered and catalogued then recovered because there were no funds available at the time. A 3000 sq. meter palace is in the process of being restored. Some of the mosaics have been moved to museums around the world.

On the bus ride back we stopped at Aphrodite's Rock which is part of a 3 rock formation close to the coast. This is where she supposedly emerged from the sea after Zeus deposited his sperm into the sea. Legend is if you swim around the rock at midnight under a full moon you will add 10 years to your life.

5/12. Rhodes, Greece.

This is where one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World once stood, the Colossus of Rhodes. This bronze statue of Helios was reputed to stand astride the harbor entrance. Experts feel that the construction techniques of the time would not have supported such a structure and that the statue was probably on a nearby hill. At any rate, it fell down during an earthquake and the Turks melted the bronze for other uses.

We also viewed the city from a high hill and then visited the Grand Master's Palace. This was once the home to the chief of the crusaders but collapsed after their departure. The Italians restored it however none of its elaborate furnishings were recovered. Jodie was challenged by the long, handrail-less stairways but even more by the very long descending cobble stone street after we exited.

The final stop was described as a tour of a

winery. It was actually a very limited tasting of mediocre wine with no tour since there was no winery present.

Gwen Ifeill, of *Washing Week in Review*, and other people from PBS were on tour with us and having a good time.

5/13. Kusadasi, Turkey.

This stop was to allow visiting Ephesus. We've been there so we chose a different tour to some other ruins. This was a good choice since the port was crowded but most tourists went to Ephesus.

Our good weather failed us. There were heavy, continuous thunder showers for most of the day. We visited the site of the ancient harbor city of Priene. The silt from the Meander river destroyed the harbor and now the ocean is several miles away. The temple and all structures have been destroyed by earthquakes. The segments of the temple pillars are scattered about like giant Lego pieces thrown by an angry child.

After this visit I was thoroughly soaked. My Gore-Tex had failed. By the time we reached our second stop, Miletus, the rain was so heavy that we just rushed to the shelter of a souvenir shop and took our pictures of the ruins then returned to the bus.

The final stop was the temple at Didyma. This was not a city but rather the location of an oracle. The rain had pretty well ceased by this time so we toured.

We had a rather good Turkish lunch at a

nearby restaurant then returned to Kusadasi. There we had to run a serpentine gauntlet of shops and security to reach the ship. There were a total of six cruise ships in port, including two humongous ones. The crowds of shoppers filled the streets.

5/14. Piraeus, Greece.

This stop was to allow visits to Athens. Since we have made several visits there we opted for a tour to historic Corinth and the Corinth Canal.

The canal is a straight 63 m deep cut through solid rock across the isthmus. It is 25 m wide and the water is 8 m deep. Several bridges cross its 6,343 m length. The most interesting are at either end and are just above water level. When a ship is passing these bridges submerge.

The ruins of Corinth were revealed by the tops of some of the temple columns that were still above ground. It was a Roman city built on top of a Greek one. Excavations are now limited by the current city which covers much of the older ones. There is a rather nice, small museum containing some of the artifacts uncovered. St. Paul lived and preached here for 18 months. Since he was a Roman citizen he escaped prosecution for preaching Christianity.

The guide was quite candid about the country's current fiscal problems. The austerity measures have had a huge impact on the common people. Her opinion was that the high income individuals and the government were not absorbing their share of discomfort.

5/15. At Sea.

After several days of touring we enjoyed a restful day at sea. We were on our way from Greece to Sicily. Last night there was a special event for the Grand Voyagers, a private dinner in the Signatures Restaurant followed by a concert by classical guitarist, Vincenzo. After listening to his classic Spanish-style playing it was a shock when he spoke with an Aussie accent.

5/16. Taormina, Sicily.

The ship was anchored. Our tour took us on a winding road up the slopes of Mt. Etna, a still active volcano. In spite of it still being quite active, rumbling and belching smoke frequently its slopes are extensively populated and intensively cultivated. The slopes have been elaborately terraced so that almost all surfaces are productive. There are many citrus groves and vineyards. Whenever an eruption produces lava flows the populace in the affected area entreats God to halt or alter the flow.

The only stop on the way to the winery was at a church in Randazzo-Linguaglossa dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The actual purpose of the stop was for the mandatory "rest" stop which must be included on all tours with tourists of our age. This stop was at a patisserie across the plaza from the church and included a complementary coffee or gellato. We opted for the gellato which was magnificent

We visited the Gabino Winery. This was a very modern winery which produces 80,000 bottles a year of 7 different varieties. It

utilizes modern, temperature controlled stainless steel tanks for fermentation and French oak barrels for some aging. The barrels cost €800 to €1,000.

Instead of the usual standing around and sipping thimble-sized samples of wine, we were seated at long tables covered with bread, cheeses, pickled mushrooms, olives, and a lentil dish. They poured generous samples of four different wines, one white and three red. Seconds were available. The wine was good and we became a very happy group. We purchased a bottle of each to share with the family when they arrive. (We thought they were still good at that time.)

As I said above, we were anchored. The tender ride from the ship to shore in the morning was a little rocky. The trip back in the afternoon was quite rocky and boarding the ship was a bit of an adventure. The tenders following us had even more difficulty. Eventually the captain called off tender operation and the ship set off for Messina, leaving approximately 200 passengers and crew on shore. They were bussed to Messina where the ship docked around 6:30. Since that is the same time that Crew Capers was scheduled it was post phoned till the following night.

5/17. Sorrento, Italy.

This was the final stop on this segment. We were again anchored however the seas were quite calm. Unfortunately in Sorrento the landing area is at the bottom of a narrow, winding road that only small vehicles can use. We had to ride crowded little shuttle buses to

a remote parking lot where we boarded conventional tour busses.

Our tour went along the spectacular coast to Amalfi with a potty stop along the way at a pottery "factory." In Amalfi we shopped the narrow streets for an hour and then had lunch. Shopping was a bit harrowing since cars, small trucks, motor cycles, and motor scooters drove through the very narrow streets, some with little caution for the pedestrians flocking the streets. Since the area is almost totally dependent on tourist dollars you would think that they would value the pedestrian tourists more.

There was a very enjoyable lunch at the Best Western Hotel Marmorati, another old but modernized facility tenuously clinging to the steep slopes. As a result there were spectacular views. The meal started with a large serving of canolli which was followed with some very good fish in a cream sauce and concluded with cake covered with lemon-flavored whipped cream.

As on Sicily, the steep slopes are heavily terraced and extensively cultivated. Lemons are the predominating crop and many are used to produce a local lemon flavored liquor. Areas not under cultivation are filled with houses clinging to the steep slopes. Many belong to the rich and famous. Parking is at a premium. As we drove through some of the small towns the highway was lined bumper to bumper with cars, some barely off the highway. The very narrow, winding, steep and traffic filled road was a real challenge for the bus driver. We took an inland, conventional highway back to Sorrento.

When we returned to Sorrento we were in for another unpleasant shuttle bus experience. For some unstated reason the bus dropped us at a different lot from where we were picked up. The tour guide then led us on a meandering hike for at least a half a mile and then stopped at a random spot, losing several of the slower passengers in the process. Eventually a city-provided shuttle bus arrived and we crowded on board, standing since there were few seats. The driver closed the doors and began vigorously revving the motor with no affect. Finally he asked some passengers to get off so he could raise the bus. Then they could get back on board. Then, after more revving of the engine we finally began to move and made it down the narrow road to the port.

There are 18 people on the long cruise who were on the Grand Asia-Pacific trip. We had a little cocktail party outside the Horizon Lounge as the ship sailed. Jodie had set this up with the hotel manager so we had a nice selection of both hot and cold snacks and very attentive waiters plying us with liquid refreshment. We were hoping that some of the ship's officers would drop in however Crew Capers were going on at the same time so they weren't available. Crew Capers were to have been the previous night however they were postponed as mentioned above.

5/18. Rome, Italy.

A turn-around day in picturesque Civitavecchia, Italy and the perfect time to catch up. This segment was 2,592 nm and made quite a cultural transition by passing through the Suez Canal.

5/19. Villefranch-sur-Mar, France

Our scheduled visit to Monaco on turned into a visit to France. After our previous experiences with rough seas while at anchor the captain decided to opt for the more sheltered bay of Villefranch rather than anchoring off Monte Carlo. Both are quite close so it made little difference. Since higher winds were expected later in the day the captain shortened the time on shore. When we were here on the *Navigator* we docked.

Jodie toured while I continued my affection for the cabin porcelain. The tour ventured around Monaco. Since the famous road rally was scheduled for next week the preparations were quite evident. Prince Albert II Gramaldi is very active in building high rise state of the art buildings. One has a car elevator to carry the car to the individual apartment garage.

After viewing Monte Carlo from near and far the tour took us up the Cornish to the top of the mountain. It was on one of the hairpin curves that Grace Kelly had her fatal accident. It was all downhill from that point. We had a walking visit to the village of Eze and then bus tour of Nice before returning to the tenders.

The anticipated wind made for another rough tender ride. All tours succeeded in returning their passengers to the ship however the ship had to manoeuver to find quieter seas before the tenders could be recovered.

5/20. Marseille, France.

Marseille was once known as one of the most

dangerous seaports in the World. Now the port area, at least, seems to have undergone a metamorphose into a vibrant, modern area that offers many recreational opportunities to a young population. Our tour drove about the area and then on to the picturesque town of Cassis. The Cassis liquor is not made there, but in another region because the black currents needed for it's production can't grow there. There are many other vineyards in the area. A small street train took us from the bus parking lot down to the harbor area where we had an hour and a half to look around. Although this was a national holiday all shops were open. There was also an open-air craft market.

521. Barcelona, Spain.

The ship docked very close to downtown. Our tour wandered about the city for a bit and then up to the top of a small overlook, then set off to the country to visit the Jean Leon Winery. Jean Leon left Spain as a young man and traveled to the US as a stowaway. He worked in New York as a waiter, joined the military, became a citizen, and moved to Hollywood. Eventually he started La Scala Restaurant which attracted the Hollywood elite. His daughter now runs the restaurant.

He returned to Spain and started the winery. After his death the family sold it to the Torres Wine group. There is an area described as a museum in the tasting room complex. It contains photos of Jean with various older Hollywood stars but very little about the winery. One interesting item emerged; Ronald Regan, that great American and Californian, served Jean Leon's French wine



at his presidential inaugural dinner.

Our tour was extensive and informative. It included an explanation of the selection and care of the vines. The tastings of four wines, one white and three red, were generous. The wines were unimpressive. I feel that they overly process the grapes thereby destroying any residual flavor of the grape and replacing it with something else. For example, the white wine spends all of its fermentation time and most of its aging time in oak barrels. The temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks are only used for the reds.

5/22. At Sea.

Another trip past Gibraltar without stopping.

5/23. Seville, Spain.

We did nothing.

5/24. Lisbon, Portugal

The journey up the river to the pier in Lisbon was scenic as usual.

Our tour spent an inordinate amount of time at Queluz Palace. This was the Summer palace of the king, set in the mountains (380 feet high) so as to escape the heat in Lisbon. Our guide seemed to be quite enthusiastic about the place and presented excruciating detail about each and every room. We finally escaped to the statue-filled garden. We then had 20 minutes in Sintra and 30 minutes in Cascais.

Our 6 pm departure from Lisbon was delayed

by a mooring line tangled somewhere on the bottom of the stern. Since we were moored in a river there was a strong current. A diver was called to free the line however he couldn't dive until slack tide, around 10 pm. Fortunately the line was not tangled or wrapped around the propellers or anything important so we departed immediately after the dive.

5/25. Oporto, Portugal

We arrived around noon, because of our late departure from Lisbon. All tours went off as planned but at a later time. Some of the longer ones were truncated. Oporto is a very picaresque, colorful, hilly town, bisected by a river. The favored snack or meal seems to be grilled sardines, although they also like a dish that combines tripe and beans (yum.)

Our first stop was at a port wine aging facility. It was filled with giant wooden casks and also many, many oak barrels. We wandered through the facility, stopping for process descriptions and then finally had a sample of white port and tawny port in the modern tasting room. Although the wine was quite nice all we bought were two glasses.

The rest of the tour was walking an hour in downtown.

5/26. La Coruña, Spain

Our tour was a meandering drive about town, frequently passing the same points several times. We stopped at the Hercules Tower and strolled up to its base. This place was significant because at one time it was

considered to be the End of the World. There also seems to be some connection to Celts here however I couldn't quite follow the guide's dramatic dialog. We also spent some time at Maria Pita Square and walked uphill to view some old churches. Since it was Sunday there was nothing much open on the square other than restaurants. The churches were also not open for visitors since there were ongoing services.

Had dinner with Capt. John McNeill and social hostess Vivienne Grouse, plus two other couples. Both the captain and Vivienne are leaving the ship at Southampton as are most of the people we have traveled with since Beijing.

5/27-28. Bilbao, Spain

We were here two days. The visit to St. Jean-de-Luz, France was cancelled. It was to have been a tender operation. The visit was cancelled because of rough seas and the non-sheltered anchorage

I think that travel fatigue has set in, or perhaps bus fatigue. Anyway, we cancelled our scheduled tour for the first day in Bilbao and worked on photos.

On the second day Jodie took the shuttle into town and found the shopping nonproductive and the shuttle bus unreliable. It failed to pick up at the same location that it dropped off. A group of us waited 1½ hours for a bus. Part of the problem was that one of the humgus Princess ships used the same pick-up point and their busses took all the parking area. Our shuttle went elsewhere, forgetting that not

everyone was aware of the change.

Most of the ports at which we are stopping in Spain and France are located on rivers. I guess this is logical since the river mouth or estuary form a natural harbor. Bilbao is located on the Bilbao River.

5/29 and 5/30. Bordeaux, France

Bordeaux is located some distance up river from the Bay of Biscay. Entry into the river offered a welcome break from the violent motion of the sea. The trip up the Gironde river, which splits into the Dordogne and Garonne rivers, is quite scenic. The ship remained on the Garonne and eventually moored alongside a pleasant grassy area in downtown. Our arrival attracted quite a group of spectators. There was a constant parade of joggers, bicyclists, and strollers passing by. Meals in the Compass Rose were enlivened by the constantly changing scene outside. We were moored next to a Mexican tall ship which was open for visitors. There was also a boat race scheduled so there was lots of activity and many vendor tents.

On our first day we drove through the rolling countryside and visited a winery, Château Carbonnieux. This was a typical winery with a typical tour. There was a light rain so we didn't visit the vineyard. Their white wine grapes are allowed to start their fermentation uncrushed in small stainless steel tanks then immediately moved to oak. Somehow they prevent any malolactic fermentation. The reds are fermented in stainless with daily pumping from the bottom onto the cap.

We had typically small samples of a white and a red. Neither retained much of the grape and were quite unremarkable. The best part of the winery tour was the very pretty, young guide.

Since we were moored in downtown we decided to walk about the shopping area. I suppose you could call what we did shopping however we bought nothing. We didn't find the major pedestrian shopping street but found many interesting ones. Perhaps the most interesting encounter was with the proprietor of a small shop. The displays in the windows looked quite interesting so we entered. She said something in French to which Jodie replied that we didn't speak French. So she then said, in a rather harsh manner, "What do you want?" We don't believe that she was being rude, that was just the way she spoke.

Bordeaux is a lovely town!

5/31. At Sea.

The "highlight" of our day at sea was a question and answer session with Frank Del Rio, Chairman and CEO of Prestige Cruise Holdings, the holding company for Regent and Oceania cruise lines. The Grand Voyagers were invited. It was in the form of a cocktail party at 11 am in the Observation Lounge. We had noticed a group of strangers poking about the ship. They are evaluating it for changes to be made when the ship goes into dry dock in October of this year. He said all the public areas will be massively changed. He didn't mention the cabins. The cost will be \$20,000,000. (I later found an article from the *Miami Herald* that said the public areas, lounges and theater, and the cabins on 10 and

11 would be refurbished. Nothing will be done about the worn carpets and broken furniture in the lower deck suites.)

There were quite a number of very pointed questions about things that concern these veteran Regent travelers. He really didn't make any firm commitments or positive responses. There were several comments about the usability of the Regent web site. The only problems he admitted was speed. He wouldn't recognize the general uselessness of the site.

Several asked why the detailed tour description booklet was no longer available. He said the information was on the web site. He was then told that the tour descriptions weren't available once the cruise had started. His response was "OK."

There were many comments/questions about the very poor service from their travel department. He tried to lay these all off on the airlines. I asked him why we had to pay \$125/person to guarantee that our two minor grandsons could fly with their parents to Reykjavik. He absolutely refused to believe that this had happened.

It was an interesting meeting, but did nothing to calm my fears that Regent will not remain an excellent cruise line under the current blended Oceania/Regent management. They don't want to continue the "Grand Voyages." Instead there will be short segments that individuals can cobble together to make their own version of a grand voyage, however there will be no special amenities. For example, our current grand voyage had no special perks as

opposed to what we received on the Grand Asia Pacific grand voyage in 2011.

#### 7/1. Honfleur, France.

After a day at sea we arrived in Honfleur. The industrial shipping container port city Le Harve lays on one side of the estuary of the Seine River. Small, green, and quiet Honfleur lies on the other. The purpose of this stop was to allow long bus tours to the D-day beaches or into Paris. We opted for a short tour to the old beach town of Deauville and then a visit to a Calvados distillery, Château du Breuil. This required driving through the beautiful Normandy countryside. The country side is filled with old half-timbered houses and barns. Calvados is made from apples and there were orchards all over, most in bloom.

Château du Breuil uses natural fermentation in very large metal tanks and then pumps the resulting apple cider to stills. They do a double distillation and then age the result in oak barrels.

The beaches of Deauville are beautiful. To service them there is a vast stretch of commercial establishments for renting cabanas, umbrellas, chairs, etc. It is also a very wealthy town with an unbelievable number of expensive sports cars. The area is also known for its horse breeding and auctions.

#### 6/2. Southampton, England

A short dash across the channel brought us to the end of this segment. We have traveled 3,000 nm from Rome. This is also the end of

the so-called Grand Voyage which wasn't grand. All of the other "long" travelers left the ship here. In addition, Ray Solari, the cruise director, Captain John McNeill, the really good band, and one of our room stewards left the ship here. I think that around 20 of the crew changed also. It will seem like a new ship.

Capt. Sanguineti has returned from vacation.

There were over 200 travel agents touring the ship and lunching aboard. The Compass Rose was quite crowded. Those of us who are "in-transit" were seated on a quiet side of the room while the guests were in the middle.

Since this was a turn-around day and the end of the latest "grand" voyage, the ship was pretty much devoid of passengers. We were, however, joined at our 57<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebratory lunch by those 200 travel agent who were touring the ship.

There were no tours or shuttle bus offered to the few in-transit passengers. Jodie's attempt to explore the port area was also thwarted and she had a lot of trouble getting back on board. She wasn't a travel agent, new crew member, or new passenger.

On this segment, there is a crew of 455 from 32 different countries.

#### 6/3. Falmouth, England

Falmouth is in Cornwall which is the southern-most part of the British Isles. Beautiful green fields cover the rolling hills. Our tour took us on a crowded little motor

coach to an Iron Age village called Chysauster. The ruins are on a hill top and once consisted of 9 large oval houses constructed of local stones. Our guide was born and raised on a farm in this area so she was quite familiar with this site and Cornwall.

As we left the urban area we learned why we had such a small coach. The roads became increasingly twisting and narrow. Most of the fields were outlined in hedges, many higher than the coach. These are being maintained rather than being eliminated to make larger fields. This is to preserve a place for wild life.

The country side was peppered with the remains of the once thriving tin and copper mining industry. There are remains of the smelters and the pumping buildings. There were even two still functional, but not functioning, mines.

One side product from tin smelting was arsenic. The vapors from the smelters were routed through earthen tunnels where they would condense. At the end of the day men would scrape the arsenic from the roof. Much of the arsenic was shipped to the southern US and used against the cotton boll weevil.

We next visited a reconstructed burial chamber called Lanyon Quoit. Three 6 foot pillars support a huge stone slab. Cremated remains were once under the stone and the whole thing was covered with a mound of dirt. Grave robbers exposed the stones which fell down but have been re-erected.

On the way back to the ship we paused briefly to photograph St. Michael's Mount. This is

very similar to Mount St. Michel off the Normandy coastline.

Notes on the absorption of Regent into Oceania:

Apollo bought Oceania Cruise lines in 2007 and then bought Radisson Seven Seas Cruise lines later that year, changing the name to Regent. Both lines were placed under Prestige Cruise Holdings whose chairman and CEO is Frank Del Rio. Mark Conroy was fired from the Regent presidency Jan. 31<sup>st</sup> of 2013 and Kunl S. Kamlani was made president of both lines in addition to being president of Prestige. Regent's offices were moved from Broward, FL to Oceania's offices in Doral last year. Although Del Rio denies that the lines are being merged it seems obvious that they are. Perhaps one example of merging into the lower quality Oceania operation is the recent degradation of the Regent travel department. There is also a mixing of on-board staff between the two lines.

Regent is slowly chipping away at benefits. For example, previously a hotel stay at the start of a voyage was included. Now this is only available to those staying in the concierge suites. All others must pay.

6/4. Cobh, Republic of Ireland.

This tour consisted of little more than a drive to Kinsale where we had a delicious scone with jam and clotted cream and a drive back to Cobh. Although that doesn't sound like much, the lush green fields and rolling country side were quite pretty under the blue skies and bright Sun. Occasionally the green was

broken up by a brilliant yellow field of rape seed. This seed is processed to become canola oil.

We stopped briefly on the way to Kinsale to photograph Charles Fort.

Kinsale's harbor was once the home of the British fleet in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It, along with several other harbors, claims to be the second largest natural harbor in the World.

Cobh, which is the harbor for Cork, was the last port visited by the *Titanic* prior to its encounter with an ice berg. It has a very nice historic display in a reconditioned dock side building along with a very nice gift shop. It is only because our tour got back after it closed that we don't have some lovely Irish crystal that Jodie spotted earlier and wanted Dale to see before buying. We did purchase some unique glass in Kinsale. When speaking to the proprietor he said he wanted to give people the opportunity to purchase something other than junk from China.

Ireland is promoting something called The Gathering in 2013. This is attempting to get all emigres to return to Ireland and their home villages for a reunion.

6/5. Dublin, Ireland.

We toured around and about town, stopping for bit at Phoenix park which is one of the largest parks in the World. We spent our time strolling around a unique kitchen garden. It was planted with large plots of almost any edible plant imaginable.

Dublin is known for its Georgian architecture so we drove by many square parks surrounded by houses with their famous Georgian doors. Originally these parks were for the exclusive use of the surrounding residences. Now most are open to the public.

Trinity College, home of the Book of Kells, is located in Dublin. It is surrounded by a huge, black wrought iron fence. The guide said that if you get lost you just go until you run into the fence.

The tour concluded with 45 minute ride on the *Liffey Voyager* on the Liffey River.

Dublin is another town that has a rental bicycle program. There are around 20 bicycle stations scattered about town. The cost to use a bicycle is €2/day but the first 20 minutes are free.

6/6. Isle of Man.

Poor little Isle of Man, it must be sinking under the weight of 30,000 motorcycles. This week was the famous (in the motorcycle world) Isle of Man Time Trials or "TT." Almost every available parking space is occupied by motorcycles. There are no rooms or hotel rooms to be had. The competition is a timed circuit of 37 miles around the island and almost up to its highest point. The best time is around 17 minutes. Only four racers and two pedestrians have been killed so far this year. The racing is every other day. Fortunately we were there on an off day.

Our transportation was much more dated, electric trolley cars. The first was an open air

affair that took us several miles from the center of town to the village of Laxey. There we changed to a different Victorian era electric trolley that took us to the top of Mt. Snaefell, all of around 2,500 feet high. Both trolleys were quite old and cramped however it was enjoyable to ride in a manner that was common 100 years ago.

The mountain was quite barren and populated with a few sheep. We spent around a half hour on top. There is a restaurant offering snacks, beer, and meals. It also offered rest rooms. Our trolley riding ended back in Laxey where we boarded a city bus which took us back to the ship. We passed by the start/finish line for the TT. Even though there were no time trials going on there was still a bustling, carnival like atmosphere. The pits were set up and large motorcycle manufacturer support trucks were prominent. When the time trials are underway, competitors are dispatched every 10 seconds.

The Isle of Man is an obvious tourist stop, even when the TT is not on. The streets are lined with hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, and bars.

We had dinner with the current cruise director, Willy Adams this evening. He apparently was a child TV star on such great programs as "8 Is Enough," "Charles In Charge," and others. He appeared on "Bonanza," "Little House on the Prairie."

6/7. Belfast, Northern Ireland

We visited the Titanic historic sights. The most spectacular was the immense dry dock

where the ship made its final stop on dry land for painting and to have the three propellers fitted before heading off for its encounter with ice. The pumphouse that filled and emptied the dock is still present along with the pumps. This building also houses a restaurant and gift shop. Part of our tour included scones and tea there after the tour.

Little else remains from the facility that made the three great ships. The design and management offices are still standing but empty. There is some talk of turning them into a hotel.

The vast factory that fabricated all of the sheet metal, engines, and generators is now just a giant vacant field. The ships hulls were assembled on slipways and then launched when complete. The empty hulls were then towed to an outfitting wharf where the engines, interiors, and superstructure were added. The location of the slipways are marked by lines of poles on a grassy yard. These poles are next to a Titanic museum which documents the history of the ship.

We had dinner with Sandra Bowden, the enrichment lecturer on board. She is every bit as animated in private conversation as she is in her lectures.

6/10. At Sea

A glorious day at sea, the only one on this segment. We are making our way toward Iceland after a foggy day on the Orkney Islands. We had lunch with Katja Bross, the Cruise Destinations Manager. We first encountered her on the Grand Asia Pacific

trip. On that trip she sort-of adopted us on the Ankor Watt excursion. This relationship continued on this voyage. She really looked after us and seemed to value our opinion on excursions. She has enhanced our trip.

On June 8<sup>th</sup> we were at Portree, Island of Skye, Scotland and did a scenic drive. It consisted of little more than a drive around the upper part of the island with a stop at a recreated crofting village. The newly built thatched roof houses were filled with stuff typical of the era that have been collected by a local resident. The tour also passed by the Old Man of Storr, a rock outcrop that looks like the face of a man to some people.

We passed by many now abandoned crofting (farming) villages. The chief cause was that the amount and quality of land could not support the immigrants who were lured there.

6/9. Kirkwall, Orkney Islands, Scotland.

A city bus picked us up at the dock and took us on a brief tour around town before dropping us at the ferry terminal. The ferry took us to the island of Shapinsay, the location of Balfour Castle. This facility was built in 1848 as a residence and guest house. The guide described it as a "calendar house." It has 7 turrets, 52 doors, 365 windows.

It is nicely furnished with furniture of the period including a portrait hall way filled with various Balfours. The current owner is not a Balfour however he made his money on the stock market. The original builder, David Balfour, died without an heir so a cousin acquired it, only to lose it. It fell into

disrepair until acquired by the current owner, named Zawadski.

As part of our tour we enjoyed a lovely tea in the dining room. The number of passengers on the tour was dictated by the number of seats available at the table, 40. We had home made cookies, cakes, and scones with rhubarb jam and clotted cream. All were yummiie.

6/11. Reykjavik.

This is the final turn-around day of our extended cruise. This is also the point where the rest of the family joined us on the ship. They arrived in Reykjavik before we did. Since Donna, Chris, and Natalie will be in a concierge suite with butler on the ship they were placed in a higher quality hotel for their shore-side stay than the rest of the party. (One of the previous benefits that has been eliminated under Del Rio is the free hotel overnight at the start of the trip, unless you are in a concierge suite on board, another example of the creeping two-class system on the ship.)

We took a rather simple city tour in the afternoon. It visited a rather nice collection of old houses that have been furnished as they would have been. The Árbær Open Air Museum contains 20 restored buildings. The church was dismantled sometime in the past so that the wood could be used in another building. (There is no native lumber available in Iceland.) The wood was recovered and the church rebuilt for the museum.

The open air aspect wasn't especially desirable. There were 33 knot winds and light rain showers all day.



After the museum we made a brief photo stop at Hofdi House where Reagan and Gorbachev met in 1986, signaling the end of the Cold War.

Thankfully, the next museum was the National Museum which was indoors. It contains a nicely presented history of the populating of Iceland. There was also a very nice film illustrating the fabrication of traditional Icelandic silver jewelry. Iceland has no natural silver or gold.

The last stop was The Pearl. This is an observation deck built on top of some large geothermal water storage tanks on top of a hill. The place was packed with tour buses and there was a line waiting to climb the four flights to the deck. I passed up this opportunity.

There was a final surprise to end our day. We were sitting in the Horizon Lounge, enjoying our nightly cocktails, when the manager of the Prime 7 restaurant approached us and asked if we would like to dine there. There was a table of 3 people who were sharing the table but needed 2 to complete the table. So we had an enjoyable but unplanned dinner. The three at the table were interesting so we had a very enjoyable conversation while dining.

6/12.

Jodie went off to bathe in the Blue Lagoon this morning. I didn't. Fortunately the winds of yesterday have turned into gentle breezes.

It was a little over an hour ride first thru Reykjavik and the surrounding urban area

complete with 3 modern indoor shopping malls into the country side with what the guide described as former small fishing villages surrounding a natural harbor. They are still fishing villages, but they have been joined by the 1000 workers from the world's second largest aluminum smelter. The closer we got to the blue lagoon the more volcanic the area became. When we were about 5 miles away you could see the steam billowing into the air.

The blue lagoon itself had several interesting things. First we were given plastic bracelets which were multipurpose. They would lock and unlock your locker as well the ability to act as a credit card and gain you access through various locked doors and gates. Then there was the communal shower. For unknown reasons everyone had to take a shower without their bathing suit. It was a somewhat comical sight seeing all these grand motherly women running around in the nude. It brought back memories of high school gym classes except the bodies were not quite as fit.

The lagoon is high density salt water and the bottom is uneven and rough with patches of the miraculous mud. I found it difficult to do much exploring and there was a lot to explore. The area was quite large—at least a couple blocks square. The water temperature varied from really hot to pleasantly warm. There was a walk-up bar that served drinks and snacks which you paid for with your bracelet. There were buckets of the mud in various locations. Many patrons were walking around with a white face which they rinsed off in the shower. It is rumored to take ten years off

your looks. There were paid water massage areas and areas where you could recline. I ended up sitting on a small rock with the water covering my shoulders. It was quite comfortable and there were interesting people to chat with near by. I soaked for a little over an hour.

After a cleansing shower I dressed, checked out the expensive gift shop and observed the lagoon from the inside for short while before it was time to go. When we arrived about 10:30 AM it was not at all crowded, but when we left it was packed.

For over a month I have been treating an angry red spot on my leg which I think resulted from a bug bite with a variety of stuff which didn't seem to do much good. It is now a couple days since the blue lagoon and it is much better and starting to dry up. The mud is supposed to be healing and many people come from around the world and stay for a few weeks to clear up skin conditions. I am a believer. Guess I should have put it on my face. Dale would not have recognized me.

Dale spent a large part of the later morning watching the buses as they brought boarding passengers to the ship, hoping to see the family arriving. Jodie returned from her Blue Lagoon adventure around 12:30 but none of the family had yet arrived. So we went to lunch in the Compass Rose and sat by a dockside window. The kids saw us and waved vigorously, then danced in front of the window after exiting the bus. The next bus carried the remainder of the group.

As promised, a 11-place table was set up in

the Compass Rose for dinner. We cocktailled in Donna and Chris's room, taking advantage of their butler and provided snacks. Our server for our special table was Mala. She told us that she would be leaving the ship the same day we all will to return to her home in the Philippines. She is 35 years old and will be married a week after she arrives home to one of the sommeliers on the ship.

### 6/13. Isafjodur, Iceland

We took two tours. In the morning we visited the bird island of Vigur. It was approximately a 30 minute boat ride to the island. It is owned by a sheep farmer whose family occupy the three buildings on the island. There are eider ducks nesting all over the island. The farmer collects, cleans, and sells their extraordinarily fine and light down from their nests. Each nest brings in an extraordinary amount of money. There are also many other sea birds around the island. Black guillemots fill the waters and beaches surrounding the island. There were also a few black oyster catchers. Arctic terns are nesting in one area and objected strongly to our presence when we approached. There were also Atlantic Puffins .

Our hosts also treated us to coffee, tea, and delicious desserts.

The dense, morning fog cleared while we were on the island so that the spectacular views of the fjord emerged on the return boat ride.

In the afternoon we did a basic bus tour. The tour guide was an English woman who has moved to Iceland and has just married an

Icelandic fisherman. She had many interesting views of Iceland viewed as a resident outsider. Part of the tour took us to Flateyri where we visited a cement church and were serenaded by a young woman dressed in traditional clothing. The church had outstanding stained glass windows created by an Icelander who also made one for Queen Elizabeth II 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We also visited some reconstructed fishermen's huts in Osvor. As part of this visit a woman dressed in traditional fisherman's garb described their life. The clothing consisted of sheepskin, without wool, made water repellent with fish oil. A typical crew consisted of seven men and one woman. The woman acted as a cook/housekeeper and also slept with the boat captain.

Spring has arrived very late. The farmers usually have sent the sheep into the mountains to graze by this time. Snow still covers many of the mountain meadows so the sheep are still in the lower fields. The late spring has also slowed the growth of grass which is usually mowed three times a summer and stored for the sheep in the winter.

We saw several avalanche breakers or diversion earth works above towns. Flateyri was struck by one a few years ago which destroyed several houses and killed a couple of residents. It stopped just short of the church we visited. These avalanches are either snow or rock or even mud.

The road to Flateyri passed through a very long, one lane tunnel. There are turn-outs to allow vehicles to meet and pass each-other.

Traffic from Flateyri has the right away. Other traffic must pause to let them through.

6/14. Akureyri, Iceland.

We drove from the pier to Husavik, approximately a 1½ hour ride, where we boarded a whale watch boat. The boat provided "bunny suits" for all of us. In addition to providing much needed warmth these were also flotation garments. Although there was bright Sun it was quite cool and breezy. Narration was provided by a Frenchman!

We were quite successful. We had very brief sightings of Minke whales and extensive sightings of Humpback whales. One even poked his head up right next to the boat and checked us out then rolled onto his side and raised his flipper. (I said "he" and "his" however I have no idea what its sex was.)

To signal the end of viewing, the crew served hot chocolate and cinnamon rolls.

Lunch at a local restaurant was included in the tour. It consisted of tomato soup, steamed cod, rice, and a salad. Coffee and water were provided. Beer, alcohol, and soft drinks could be purchased.

After lunch there was about a half hour available to shop and visit a small but worthwhile whale museum.

On the way back to Akureyri we paused at Iceland's most famous waterfall, Godafoss. It isn't spectacularly high however the volume

of water passing over it is impressive. Some in Iceland want to dam it to generate electricity. The famously cheap electricity here has allowed Alcoa to build aluminum smelters here and they would like to build more.

Icelanders don't have to pay for heat or hot water thanks to the geothermal supply. Their electricity and water are also very reasonable. In spite of these benefits, the overall cost of living is quite high.

#### 6/16. Tórshavn, Faeroe Islands

We took a 5-hour bus ride around a couple of islands. The islands are spectacularly green with many waterfalls. The climate is warmer here than in Iceland since the islands are in the Gulf Stream. They are essentially independent from Denmark.

Many of the roads are single lane. When vehicles meet they must squeeze to the side. There are frequent turn-out pocket to facilitate this. There are also some very long tunnels through the mountains to ease travel, especially in winter to avoid mountain passes.

Our bus ride was briefly interrupted in Gjógy village where we walked from one end to the other. Many houses here and in Iceland make use of sod roofs. Some homeowners mow their roofs; some put sheep on the roof to trim the grass; and some don't bother. They prefer the sod because it is quiet during wind and rain and provides insulation. It was Sunday and everything was closed except for the small church which was full.

#### 6/17. Lerwick, Shetland Islands

Lerwick is the capital of Shetland and even though it is now Scottish it has a very Norwegian feel due to its past history. The main income comes from fishing, sheep, and tourism. The population is about 30,000 and there are 10 times that number of sheep. They are also starting to explore for oil.

First stop on the bus tour which followed the tender ride ashore was to view the ponies. They were bred to be used in the mines, but are for personal enjoyment now. The price has gone down this year so not very many fous were born.

The other stop was Scalloway castle and museum. The castle has been partially restored and the museum had many interesting displays of ancient history, fishing, wartime history and the present day activities. They also had a nice selection of knitwear made by the locals

There were also many brief photo stops.

#### 6/18. Ålesund, Norway.

The town seems to consist of a number of islands interconnected by various means. Given the Norwegians penchant for burrowing, some of the access is by very long, curving tunnels that go underwater. Our bus tour made use of these tunnels.

Our first stop on the island of Godoy was a retired lighthouse. It was surrounded by masses of dandelion puff balls, just waiting for a good wind to set them free. There were

also small patches of wild flowers. It was an attractive but not spectacular setting.

We next drove to Giske to visit a very old chapel. It was built of massive marble blocks that have been covered with cement to protect them. Although originally built as a Catholic church by the landowner it became Lutheran during the reformation. An old Papal letter offered dispensation of 200 days of sins to anyone who kissed one of the crosses etched on the back wall.

The final stop was a drive to the Aksla view point for a view of the city/islands spread out below. The place was jammed with tour busses and tourists. It was hardly worth the time.

Part of the family who didn't take the bus tour climbed the 400 steps to enjoy the same view.

6/19. Geiranger, Norway

This may have been our third visit to Geiranger although we can't remember if we went ashore when we were here the first time on the Lindblad *Caledonian Star*. On this current visit the ship entered the fjord at 3 am and was at anchor by 7 am. The stern was tied to a bollard on shore so that it couldn't swing on the anchor. Two other ships arrived after we did and tied up to floating mooring points. There was heavy tender traffic all day. The town has provided special landings for tenders, each designated for the specific ship.

Our tour took us to the top of Mt. Dalsnibba for spectacular views. The bright Sun made the surrounding snow covered peaks glow.

Although the altitude was 5,000 feet it was comfortably warm. The road had approximately 140 curves, 70 of them hairpin. After the visit to the top we returned to the midway hotel for refreshments and coffee.

Our guide was a young woman who was raised in Geiranger and moved back three years ago. She has opened a coffee shop in an old house which is open all year. It, one hotel, and the grocery store are the only places open all year for the 214 permanent residents.

To make up for the very early arrival when most of the passengers were still asleep we departed at 4 pm. The upper decks were packed since everyone wanted a picture of the famous 7 Sisters Waterfall which we passed at 4:30. Shortly after that the cool wind drove most of the passengers below. Regent isn't really strong on scenery or wildlife.

We celebrated Casey's birthday with a cake presented after dinner. She was also serenaded by the trio that has been performing in the lounge.

6/20. Flåm.

We did a fairly short tour up out of the fjord and through the verdant countryside. The road tunneled through the mountains so it could remain fairly level. There were a lot of farms. Our first stop was at the Tvinde waterfall. This wasn't a fall of spectacular height however the volume of water and the rough face of rock made for an impressive sight. The water cascaded down in foaming mini-falls and then turned into a dancing rapids as it hit the field of fallen stones at the bottom.

After the falls we drove up a winding, narrow road to the Stalheim Hotel. It is a nice, traditional lodge overlooking the valley far below. The scenery keeps reminding me of Yosemite. We spent about an hour at the lodge, first enjoying coffee and treats then strolling the grounds and photographing the views.

When we left the lodge we went down an extremely narrow, twisting road. Before the tunnel was dug, this was the main road in this area. We made a final stop to see the closed Viking exhibit and to photograph a fjord.

We did a bit of shopping and visited the Flåm Railway museum after the tour.

6/21. Bergen.

A light rain greeted us in Bergen. Since this was our third visit to Bergen we chose a tour that left the city. The bus took us to Buene Pier where we boarded a small boat that took us to Lysøen Island. This is the location of Ole Bull's Exotic Fairytale home. It turns out that Ole Bull was a World famous violinist and quite the ladies' man. He had a 48" chest and a 28" waist.

So many women fainted in his presence that he carried smelling salts with which to revive them. His land lady kept his bath water, bottled it, and sold it to his admirers.

Local craftsmen built the house from trees harvested on the island. It is a mixture of styles, incorporating things he had seen in his travels. There is a large concert room where he and others performed. This is also the room where he died. The use of the local

wood was extensive and beautiful.

After the visit to the island we made a brief photo stop at the Lysekloster ruins. This once was a very successful monastery that owned most of the surrounding area, including Lysøen Island. After the Reformation the monks were thrown out and the buildings collapsed.

We celebrated Donna's birthday with a cake presented by the chef and the head waiter. A group of waiters sang to her.

6/22. Oslo.

We arrived about noon and passed on touring in favor of packing.

6/23. Oslo.

We enjoyed a fascinating visit to the Hadeland Glass Works. It was about an hours drive through the countryside and several long tunnels to reach the works. The road passed near the island with the Labor party youth camp where Anders Breivik massacred 69 people in 2011.

In the glass blowing demonstration the artists started with a blob of glass to which they added a second blob and then some colored ribbons. They kept working it until they had a very large, hollow round ball. They continued working it, making it bigger and widening the mouth. Finally they put it back in the kiln and rotated it. Suddenly it expanded into a flat plate! It was an amazing demonstration.

There were several shops as part of the complex. The shopping was good; no one came away empty handed.

6/24. Copenhagen, Denmark.

We were off the ship shortly after 7 am. It was sad leaving the crew, most of whom seemed especially nice and friendly. There was a bit of narration from the guide during the ride to the airport. We were in the SAS lounge fairly soon after arriving at the airport. Our business class tickets allowed us to bypass the long security lines. Casey and Nathan joined the 5 of us a little later. The Fergusons stayed on in Copenhagen for a few days.

Although our boarding pass quite clearly indicated business class, when we boarded the SAS plane around 11 am we learned that it had no business class. Since we were in row 1 we had no place for our hand-carried luggage. The cabin crew took care of it for us. Although there was no business class, the first five rows were of some better class which entitled us to a free sandwich and small bottle of wine.

The flight to Munich was a little more than an hour. After a long hike we found the Lufthansa lounge where we whiled away the time until boarding at 3 pm. There is so much commercial activity at the Munich terminal it almost seemed that the terminal had been shoe-horned into a typical shopping mall.

The flight home was on a 4-engine Airbus with uncomfortable not-quite lay-flat seats. We arrived after 7 pm and parked at the

extreme end of Bradley terminal. From there it was a long, circuitous hike up and down escalators until we finally reached the immigration hall. Although we have Global Entry there was no line at immigration so we went through the regular manual interview. The immigration inspector was impressed that we lived so close to the airport.

Although we had sent our luggage by Luggage Free we had to wait for Chris and family to get theirs since we were riding with them. Eventually we arrived home to mountains of mail. Dinner at Cocos was a bit of a comedown from the Compass Rose restaurant on the ship. But our own bed was delightful even though it did not have designer linens.

Our adventure was not yet over. I mentioned Luggage Free above. We put six pieces of luggage outside our cabin door the night of June 23. They were all marked with special Luggage Free tags provided by the ship. On June 27 four of them were delivered by FedEx. I contacted FedEx and they had no idea where the other two were. We received an e-mail from Luggage Free stating that two were held up by Danish Customs because they contained prohibited material. One eventually arrived on July 3. On July 5 Jodie received a call from FedEx lost-and-found in Memphis stating that our last bag had showed up there. The air way bill was missing but our luggage tag was still there. The woman said she would ship it to us for Saturday delivery, which she did. Finally the last bag arrived Saturday July 6. The only thing missing was a can of spray deodorant.

I feel some necessity to summarize the trip

which I'll try to do in bullet form.

\*It was an interesting view of the religions of the World ranging from Hindu to Judaism, and all in the middle.

\*The Suez Canal was like a dividing line between two radically different Worlds.

\*The service provided by the crew and staff of the *RSSC Voyager* was exemplary. They strove mightily to make up for what appeared to some voyagers as a reduction of staff.

\*The high quality of the on-board personnel may make-up, for a while, for the eroding service provided by the Miami office. I don't know if we can tolerate the Prestige (Regent) travel department given the attitude of the executive management. The credit if you don't use their travel is ridiculously low and you then must make your own arrangements to get to and from the ship. Perhaps this scheme is to make their travel so bad that you won't use it and they get to increase the profit by rebating such a small amount.

The following table is from Wikipedia and the figures not current.

Emirate	Population	Pop. Percent	Size mi <sup>2</sup>	Size Percent
Abu Dhabi	1,548,655	31.2	26,000	87.6
Ajman	379,923	7.5	100	3
Dubai	1,770,533	35.6	1,500	5



Fujairah	137,940	2.9	450	1.5
Ras	171,903	3.4	650	2.2
Sharjah	895,252	18	1,000	3.3
Umm	69,936	1.4	300	0.9