

## GRAND ASIA PACIFIC

“How long are you going to be gone?”

“103 days.”

“103 days! You must be going around the World.”

“No. Just from Vancouver to San Francisco.”

“???”

Actually we covered a distance of 24,857 nautical miles, basically traveling around the Ring of Fire on the Regent *Seven Seas Navigator*. We went as far south as 45°.

9/7/2010.

This was another journey starting in an airplane that uses a Pringle’s potato chip can for a body. We arrived at LAX at 4 am, 3 hours as required before our 7 am international flight. Air Canada doesn’t open up until 5 am so we found one of the rare benches and sat for an hour. By 5:20 we had completed checking in and passing through the empty TSA gauntlet and were in the Maple Leaf lounge. It is small but pleasant and provided decent items for breakfast and sported a truly awesome coffee machine.

Around 6:30 we wandered down to the gate and boarded immediately. That’s when we learned the idiosyncracies of the Embraer 190 aircraft. We were flying first class, courtesy of Regent. Since the body tube is so small, the seats are 3 across in first class; one on one side of the aisle and two on the other. The overhead compartments on the single seat side are so small as to be almost unusable. We were eventually able to stow our larger carry-ons and placed the smaller ones under the seat in front of us.

There were several benefits from booking the full Grand Asia Pacific cruise. As mentioned above, we flew first class both ways. (Flying back from San Francisco, a one-hour flight, there were no benefits flying first class since we were flying on American Airlines.) Another nice benefit was we were able to ship our luggage using Luggage Free at no cost. Regent also paid for all visas. There were several other benefits that cropped up as the trip progressed.

The flight was uneventful. It left on time, arrived early, and featured an attentive stew.

We quickly passed through Immigration in Vancouver and, having no luggage, emerged into the terminal and found our driver. We sped off to the hotel in what the driver described as the longest stretch in Vancouver. It was built on a Ford chassis.

The Pan Pacific Vancouver is located adjacent to the cruise terminal, the tent-like building you may have seen in pictures of the Vancouver harbor. We took two escalators up to Reception and quickly checked in. We were pleasantly surprised to have immediate access to our room on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor overlooking the sea.

Another pleasant surprise was that the hotel is adjacent to Gas Town, a very touristy area. It is also within two blocks of the famous steam-powered clock.

We strolled along Water Street, doing a bit of shopping on the way, photographed the clock, and then had a very pleasant lunch at the Water Street Grill.

One of the special things that Regent had laid on was a special dinner for the 39 people who are doing the whole 103-day "Complete Grand Asia Pacific." We all gathered at the best restaurant in the hotel and had a cocktail party hosted by the cruise director, Ray Solarli, and the general manager, Engelbert Lainer-Wartenberg, who will be embarking the ship with us. It was an elegant meal well served with a never-empty wine glass.

9/8

At the very reasonable hour of 10:45 am we all gathered at the Regent courtesy desk in the lobby to be escorted onto the ship. What followed was a maze. I expected to receive a piece of cheese at the end, but I didn't. Down two escalators, one elevator then various passage ways until we entered the cruise ship terminal. We lined up at a small, inconspicuous door and eventually found that we were to go through a security screening; x-ray for the hand carry and magnetometer for us. The next step was a health screening where we had to fill out a form stating that we didn't have a cold or anything. Finally we were free to board the ship via a ramp from the cruise ship terminal to the ship itself. Since we were the "elite" boarding much before the ordinary folk, we were greeted along the way by various officials, including the head chef.

The *Navigator* has developed a big butt. This addition is intended to reduce the noise in the aft lounges. This noise was reputed to be the result of propeller cavitation.

With a glass of champagne in hand we entered the lounge to check in, be photographed, surrender our passports, and

receive our cruise cards. Then we received the surprising news that our cabin, 629, was ready for us. We met our room steward, I Made Nuaba from Bali, who will be with us the entire voyage. (The "I" indicates that he is a male; "Made" indicates that he is the second male born in his family.) The cabin was ready however our Luggage Free shipped luggage was not present. We unpacked our hand-carry luggage then headed to La Veranda for a light lunch. When we returned we found our five shipped suitcases. The remainder of the afternoon was spent unpacking and putting stuff away.

Regent ship suites (what they call staterooms) have a walk-in closet with adequate hanging space and drawers for clothing for a cruise this long. Our three suitcases and a rolling duffle bag fit under the king-sized bed. The hanging bag was stored in the closet.

The ship sailed at 6, which we enjoyed from our balcony. At 6:15 we went to the lounge for another special event, a private welcome cocktail party at which we met Captain Igor Bencina and various other dignitaries.

9/9. At Sea

Our scenic cruise up the Inland Passage was somewhat hampered by fog. We had our first of what I hope is many room-service breakfasts, served by Armando with whom we traveled on the RSSC *Voyager* along Norway.

There wasn't much planned today since we were to enjoy the scenic cruise however fog and low clouds hampered that. We passed by a native community called Bella Bella.

There was a pretty good blind wine tasting in the afternoon, featuring two whites and two reds.

Had our first trivia competition which we didn't win. We're invited to dine with Executive Concierge Alistair Sellers tonight. Afterwards went to the show which featured an 8-piece ship's band, and the Jean Ann Ryan singers and dancers. Throughout the voyage they performed several elaborate production numbers. The group consisted of a male and a female singer, 4 female and 2 male dancers and an acrobatic couple. The music was ok, the choreography was strange. We had the "opportunity" to see the same set of shows on each segment of the trip.

Clocks went back an hour tonight.

9/10. Ketchikan, AK

The ship tied up across from downtown. When I opened the curtains I saw that our cabin was almost at the same level as the wharf. I could look straight up the center of the tourist shopping area. To the left was a store proclaiming "Caribbean Jewelry." Since our tour was at noon we had a leisurely breakfast in the Compass Rose then strolled about the area.

Our tour was the Chef's Table at a local restaurant. It consisted of five small courses with a brief lecture by the chef about how he prepared each. The first course was local salmon prepared in three different ways, as hors d'oeuvres'. The second was shrimp and crab legs; third was bouillabaisse; the fourth was the "main course" which was a small hunk of king salmon and a small hunk of halibut. For dessert we had bread

pudding with blue berries and rhubarb.

Came within one point of winning at trivia, but several other teams were at the same level.

Depending on to whom you talk, Ketchikan has a permanent population of around 6,000 which swells to 12,000 for the Summer. The temporaries run the tourist shops, drive the buses, etc. At the end of the season they flee south to warmer climes along with the cruise ships. When we arrived, there were already two other ships docked here, both much larger than ours. Both departed during our lunch but were replaced by two other big ships.

Imagine the impact on the comparatively small tourist shopping area when it is mobbed by 6,000 to 8,000 additional people. Imagine the quiet when they all leave.

Tourism is not the only business supporting the community. Fishing provides a year-round occupation for many residents. Salmon seem to be the primary fish however there are also shrimp, king crabs, and halibut. (This was the first of three towns that claimed to be the home port for the ships in the TV program "Deadliest Catch.") The permanent residents claim to have a very active social life in the winter.

9/11. Tracey Arm and Juneau, AK

The ship briefly dipped her toe into Tracey Arm this morning and dropped off a large contingent onto a tour catamaran which took them on up to the Sawyer Glacier. The rest of us proceeded on to Juneau. We spent our time strolling the almost empty downtown. No other ships were in port. Many of the

shops have already closed for the season. Some of the ones that are open are having end of season sales.

9/12. Skagway, AK

Our ship was like the last rose of Summer. Skagway has 23 jewelry shops however most are closed and the operators have fled south. Many go to the Carribean to work there. The last ship is due to call here on the 20<sup>th</sup>. I have not yet figured out why one comes to Alaska to buy jewelry. It is not cheaper or more unique than the lower 48.

Our morning tour was Ghosts and Goodtime Girls Historic Walking Tour. It was led by a "madam" dressed in a period costume. After the season she is headed to New York to try her hand at show business. As we strolled about town she described how the ladies of purchased affection operated and where they worked. She also talked about some of the ghosts in town. The tour ended at the Red Onion Saloon and Brothel Museum where we had some champagne and toured the old brothel area.

In the afternoon we visited a gold dredge and tried our hands at gold panning. The dredge never operated here; it was moved from the Dawson City area. The dredge used steam to generate electricity. All actions were driven by giagantic electric motors.

Between the two of us we panned 2.7 grains of gold, which they said was worth about \$20.

9/13. Sitka, AK

Today was a pretty good day. We left the

ship early via catamaran to look for wildlife. And we saw wildlife. First we saw large rafts of sea otters. (Sea otters are the smallest sea mammal but the largest of the weasel family.) This area is full of islands, some small and some large. All, even the small ones, are covered with trees. We spotted several bald eagles including a nest with two young who are getting ready to fly. (Over 40% of fledgling eagles die on their first attempt at flight!)

We also spotted two yearling brown bears fishing for salmon near a very small stream. The stream seemed too small for the salmon to spawn however they were flocking near enough to it for the bears to catch enough to eat.

Then we went whale watching and saw grey and humpback whales feeding.

The cat took us back to town for a bit of shopping then we returned to the ship via tender.

Although tomorrow is a day at sea we will spend several hours viewing the Hubbard Glacier. Those of us who have accumulated many days on Regent are invited to some mystery special viewing area.

9/14. Hubbard Glacier.

The ship entered Disappointment Bay at dawn and moved slowly toward the glacier. (The bay was named by Capt. James Cook when he discovered that it was a bay, not the start of the Northwest Passage.) The best views of the approach were, of course, from deck 12 outside of the spa. The spa has been given the only location where forward views from inside the ship were previously

available. It was very cold and windy out on the deck however the glacier views were spectacular

At eight we joined a special group on the stern where we were offered coffee and sweet rolls.

We were eventually rewarded by several spectacular calvings.

The rest of the day was spent voyaging westward along the snow-covered mountains toward Seward.

9/15. Seward, AK

Seward was a turn-around day. Around 200 passengers left and a new set joined us.

We visited the Alaska Sea Life Center which is a very good, small aquarium. The center was funded in part by Exxon *Valdez* settlement money. It serves both research and educational needs. Our special visit included a presentation about Alcides and included a very good lecture and a personal encounter with a horned puffin, a rhino auklet, and a crested puffin.

The center contains many fish tanks holding native fish and a large aviary for sea birds. There is a large, deep pool where they may swim and dive for food. The pool may be viewed from the top or from below. There is also a very big Steller's sea lion, 14'. One interesting area features salmon in separate tanks in the various stages of development.

We accomplished one other important task in Seward, or a very helpful tour bus driver did. We needed to mail birthday presents for some relatives. The driver offered to

mail the three packages for us while we were in the center.

9/16. Kodiak, AK.

We did a long hike at Ft. Abacrombe State Park. This was a defensive fortification built in the early days of WWII. It was dismantled in 1947, however the massive cement works are still present. There also is a museum in one of the buildings plus the remains of two long rifles. The hike was through a very pretty temperate rain forest. Although touted as 1½ miles over easy terrain it seemed more like 2 to 3 and had many steep up and down sections plus a very long stairway. Jodie found it to be an interesting challenge to her knees.

9/17. At Sea.

Uneventful.

9/18. Dutch Harbor AK.

Our brief visit to Dutch Harbor was cloudy however there was no rain. We awoke in darkness and after breakfast rode a shuttle into town and stopped at the small but interesting natural history museum. After that we walked back to the Marine Supply Store. This was a giant general store. There was a huge hardware section to support the fishing fleet. Clothing went all the way from tourist T-shirts to heavy-duty rubber garments suitable for wear in the fish processing factories. A large, bulk grocery store rounded out the place. We took the shuttle bus back to the ship via the picturesque Russian Orthodox Church. This was the last port that claimed to be the home port for the "Deadliest Catch" ships from the TV show.

We think the purpose of the stop was to allow the ship to check out of the US.

In the afternoon Jean-Michel Cousteau presented a video that he is preparing about his famous father. We saw a half hour however the finished production is to be a full hour and, I assume, it will be shown on PBS. Part of his presentation was on ecology and the preservation of the seas and his Ocean Futures Society. It seemed ironic to be discussing ecological concerns while traveling on an ocean liner. Although Regent demonstrates many ecological concerns the very presence of 700 passengers and crew traversing the seas in the lap of luxury is not very sympathetic to the environment.

9/19. At sea.

Last night we set our clocks back 2 hours. Through the benefits of Tylenol PM I awakened at around 8 am, current time. Had to skip my morning shower so as to not miss breakfast. Since it was Sunday there was the regular offering of caviar and champagne. We were able to avoid the caviar. (Passengers who love caviar were in Heaven on this trip. Regent serves quality caviar at almost any occasion.

As befitting a trip of this duration and cost, the ship has a large number of old, feeble, obese, discourteous people. Jodie was "fired" from our trivia team by the non-playing wife of an incompetent player on the team. We both moved to another team.

9/20 - 21

We were at sea for the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21 never happened. We crossed the date line.

9/22. Petropavlovsk, Russia

We spent more time waiting for the Russian border police to clear the ship than we were able to spend off of the ship. A total of 30 people took over 5 hours to clear the ship for entry and then took another 2 to clear it for exit. When we finally were able to leave the ship we were issued a precious little piece of paper along with our passports which we had to keep with us. (Do the Russian authorities realize or care that tourists can't spend their money in the country when you can't get off the ship?)

Our tour was a boat trip back to the entrance of the bay. Because of our very late departure we were going to miss lunch so we snacked before we left. When we got on the boat we found tables laid out with bottles of beer, plates of salmon, plates of cheese and sausage, and baskets of bread. Our hostess was a very enthusiastic Russian-speaking woman who used a sedate translator.

The small windows quickly fogged over so we moved outside to enjoy the view. The bay is surrounded by rugged hills and overlooked by a symmetrical volcano, described as beautiful however we couldn't verify this because of the low clouds and light rain. Supposedly 12% of the World's volcanos are on the Kamchatka Peninsula.

The turn-around point was the three pillars known as the Three Brothers. They are the home of a lot of kittiwakes and a few puffin. While the ship idled there the guests indulged in a bit of fishing. Two caught small halibut.

All in all it was an interesting but very cold trip.

There were a few souvenirs for sale dock-side however the large crowd prevented access. They didn't get any of our dollars.

9/23. At Sea

We are now 7 hours behind LA time but a day ahead. The ship Internet has died and won't be repaired until a technician arrives. The on-board MTN-support person is unable to correct the problem. MTN is the common Internet provider for many ships and seems to be universally unreliable. It turns out that Internet is available in the area of the Library but not in the cabins. Now almost every available chair in the Library and the Navigator Lounge is occupied by someone working on their computer.

9-24. At Sea

We are now 8 hours behind LA but one day ahead, or, 16 hours ahead. Take your pick.

Last night those of us who are on the Grand Asia Pacific voyage were treated to an elegant dinner in La Veranda. Since this is usually a buffet we were dubious as to how special the dinner would be. It was special! All of the ship's major officers acted as hosts and rotated from table to table. The executive chef prepared a unique menu, and the wine flowed freely. Each officer personally signed the menu where his menu selection was listed.

We were informed last night that the Japanese government prohibits all forms of satellite communication while the ship is in their waters. This means no Internet, telephone, and TV. I guess they don't want any communication that they can't control or listen to.

We have also learned that several passengers were not told by the Regent Miami office that they needed visas for China. Many of them were planning to fly home from China. Regent is supposed to be "working" on this?

9/25. Hakodate, Japan.

We slipped behind the Chrysanthemum Curtain. The Japanese Shogun has decreed that there shall be no communication other than what is available through government controlled media. Therefore there was no Internet, no telephone, and no satellite TV while we are in Japan. The loss of TV is slight. There are only five channels; CNN for news, ESPN and ESPN2 for sports, and two fictional entertainment channels - TNT and Fox News. We received our copy of the *Los Angeles Times* this morning, one of the benefits of being a frequent Regent traveler. I don't know if it falls under the ban on non-government controlled communication. (We didn't receive the Times while anchored at Yokohama.)

Today was our first day in Japan so we had to clear immigration, a much different and expeditious process than we experienced in Russia. Early in the day we were told to report to the lounge. We filed in and were quickly fingerprinted and photographed, then given our passports which we must keep on our person while we are in the country. We were then free to go off on tour.

Our tour went first to a museum that featured some An-people artifacts. It was a small museum and quite crowded by the number of people from the ship. In addition, the information was all in Japanese and not explained by the tour guides, limiting our

understanding of the displays. Then we took a cable car to the 332 m point on Mt. Hakodate. The views were good. The bus picked us up there and took us to a shopping center in a collection of brick buildings that used to be warehouses. There were many small shops which featured a lot of tacky stuff geared to the typical Japanese tourist who must bring back small gifts to his family and/or work group.

The best part of our visit occurred just before the ship sailed. The Hakodate drum corps performed and then about 75 students from the Iai Girls' High school danced *The Squid* to some recorded performance of the drum corps. The dance seemed kind of like the Hokey-Pokey without putting your body parts in and out and also seemed to be a lot more fun for the dancers. The dance is so named because squid are harvested in great numbers here and are a favored food.

9/26. Sendai, Japan.

We were welcomed into Sendai by another drumming and dancing performance. There were several groups first performing in unison then individually. Most of the dancers were women of varying ages although there were a few men. Most of the drummers were men. I assume that they were available since this was Sunday.

Our tour took us first to a large, tree-covered park on a hill. This was once the site of a powerful shogun's castle. Date Masamune was called the One-eyed Dragon because of his power and the fact he lost his right eye to small pox as a child. All of his statues but one show him with two eyes, according to his wishes. His very large statue riding a

horse is one of two large monuments on the hill. An eagle surmounts the other which is dedicated to war dead.

Masamune's statue was originally made of copper however it was melted down in WWII. It was recast after the war in green cement.

We encountered more drum and dance groups in the park. They seemed to be getting ready for a competition. When one of the groups noticed our interest they spontaneously decided to perform for us. They seem to derive great joy or pleasure from these performances if the smiles on their faces are a reliable indication.

Our next stop was Zuihoden Mausoleum where Masamune is interred. This was another beautiful tree-covered locale but the visit required climbing many stone stairs. Bamboo poles were available for use as hiking sticks on the stairs. Like so many historic structures, this one was reconstructed after WWII. Most of the city was destroyed by fire-bombing.

Date Masamune's bones were disinterred and a cast was made of his skull. A forensic sculptor then reconstructed what his head must have looked like. This bust shows a handsome, powerful-looking man.

Jodie didn't climb but had a very interesting visit with some people who were visiting a loved-one's grave at the cemetery below the mausoleum. It is Japanese custom to visit at this time of year. Family and friends leave flowers in bamboo vases with their names on them. There is also a special place to burn incense in the tomb stone. They also

have two containers of liquid on the tomb stone. This ranges from tea in traditional cups, cans of beer or just plastic cups of water. On the anniversaries of death the Buddhist Priest leaves a large wooden stick with prayers behind monument.

9/27. Yokohama/Tokyo, Japan.

Rain, rain, go away.  
Come again another day.

After a more mild night of rock-'n-roll we entered Yokohama harbor passing under the Rainbow Bridge early in the morning. We were greeted by fog and rain which persisted throughout the day.

Our tour was late departing because the authorities were late clearing the ship. Since we have never left the country it is difficult to understand why we need extensive clearance.

We boarded a bus and drove for over an hour, mostly on an expressway, into Tokyo. Our first stop was the Meiji Shrine located in a large park. The shrine is dedicated to the Emperor Meiji who transformed the country from a feudal state to a modern one. As yesterday's parks, this one is populated with beautiful, large evergreen trees. Entry is through a 40-foot high Torii gate. Also like yesterday, once you reach the shrine, you can't enter, just view. There are grated-covered boxes into which you may throw a donation.

This was a critical stop since it was the first potty stop since leaving the ship.

After visiting the shrine there was a brief opportunity to shop for souvenirs.

Next was a 40-minute drive to Tokyo's oldest temple, Sensoji. This is located deeply in the center of the city, surrounded by streets and buildings. This temple is dedicated to Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, a different manifestation of Buddha. It is a huge complex and connected to a covered, open-air shopping street.

As we shopped our way down the street Jodie entered one of the small stalls. She was quickly invited to leave since she was dripping rain water. We were on all sides of the Emperor's Palace, but never saw it due to trees. We did see the outer and inner moats.

Then it was time for another long drive back to the harbor. We had lunch at the pool grill around 2 pm.

There was a remarkable bit of local entertainment before dinner. Since this was the first visit by the ship to Yokohama there was an exchange of plaques between the city and the ship. The remarkable part was a brief samisen concert. The samisen is a 3-stringed instrument and was played by a young lady clad in a kimono. After her first piece she was joined by a second kimono-clad young lady who played the violin. Their first duet was an enjoyable Japanese traditional piece. The second was an Irish folk song that was fantastic! Both young ladies "rocked out." At times they almost seemed about to break into dance.

The more traditional after dinner entertainment was the Regent version of Cirque de Sole. It featured the gymnastic couple and was surprisingly good.

9/28. Yokohama, Japan.

Still raining. We stayed on the ship all morning while Jodie did laundry. In the afternoon we had a brief stroll into town then came back for the activities in the terminal building. Jodie was draped in a kimono and photographed. Then we got copies of the Ferguson boys names in Japanese characters.

There was a change of captains here. The new captain was John McNeil. We now sail to the strains of a bag-pipe recording of "Amazing Grace". The sailing was made more spectacular by the light show on the Big Wheel, a giant Ferris wheel that seems common in most ports in the orient.

We dined with Ray Solarli (or Raymond Hook), the Cruise Director. I assume he adopted a different name when he became an entertainer.

9/29. Nagoya, Japan.

This is the home of Toyota Motors. I could see three of the humongous auto transport ships from our cabin window. There were two more present when we came in this morning however they have departed.

As we moored we had another drum serenade. This time there were no dancers, just four musicians, one who played the bamboo flute and cymbals. One did dance and cavort around while playing a rather large drum hanging from around his neck. We missed most of their performance since there was no notification that it was going on.

Our tour was a curious mix of old and new. The first stop was the Shinto Atsuta Shrine. This is an oasis of calm and beauty in the heart of the city. Since the Shinto religion is

based on nature the shrine is set in a large, mature forest. The entrance was marked by the traditional Torii gate.

The new part was the Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology and celebrates a curious relationship between industrial strength weaving and Toyota Motors. It turns out that Sakichi Toyoda and his eldest son Kiichiro designed and built automatic looms. After an earthquake they decided that the people needed automobiles so they started building them. The weaving part of the museum has many functional looms ranging from simple manual ones to very high speed Jacquard looms. It was a fascinating display and at times quite noisy.

The automotive part featured static displays plus some operating ones, including a large metal press. I don't know when Toyoda became Toyota.

There was a remarkable send-off from Nagoya. We were treated to a traditional fireworks display as the ship left the wharf. A group of men had four tubes made of bamboo that were 4 to 5 feet long. At a given signal all were ignited at the end and started producing a fountain of orange-yellow sparks that must have been at least 20 feet high. Suddenly each fountain ended with a very loud BANG! The men immediately repeated the display with a second set of tubes. After the second set of bangs we thought it was all over but then they ignited some Roman candles. It was quite spectacular and enjoyed by a large crowd of locals as much as the ship passengers.

9/30. Kobe, Japan.

No drums and dancers here. We were greeted by a brass band playing stirring marches as we tied up at Kobe. We were about an hour late since we were about an hour late leaving Nagoya last night.

We now have Internet in the cabins while we are at sea. I heard an interesting explanation which may or may not be true. The reason cabin access became unavailable was that it was consuming too much bandwidth so the general manager ordered that it be turned off. One of the passengers e-mailed Mark Conroy, Regent CEO, stating that this was unacceptable. Now it has been turned on.

Our tour was a shorter one which started with a funicular ride to the top of 932 m high Mt. Rokko and then went to a sake museum. We had a late start as did all the tours because of our late arrival and lengthy clearance into Kobe. (I don't understand lengthy clearances when the ship never left the country.)

Our guide today is named Midori which means "green" in Japanese. She was born in April when everything is turning green after the winter.

The rain that has dogged us recently was with us again today. A lengthy bus ride brought us to the lower station of the funicular. Kobe is built upon the shore and extends up the mountain side. It is quite attractive with winding streets. There were no signs of the massive destruction from the 1995 earth quake that killed 6,000 people.

The bus picked us up at the top of the funicular and took us higher up the mountain. Trees have been planted along the road to block drivers' views of the

panorama so that they won't be distracted. We reached the top which is studded with all manner of antennae. There are also restaurants and souvenir shops. I asked our guide, Midori, why all of the Japanese souvenir shops had large selections of packaged food. I told her with all of this food available I expected the Japanese to be fat however they weren't. She explained that Japanese are expected to return with gifts for their group when they travel. Packages of multiple food items are the perfect gift since they may be shared. The gift shop also had a large selection of rocks and minerals many of which were made into expensive jewelry. We were told it had to do with astrological signs and good luck.

Our next visit was to the Sawanotsuru Sake Museum. The old building was reconstructed after the earth quake. During the excavation for the new construction they discovered many artifacts. We viewed a film that explained how sake used to be made then we toured the museum which had all Japanese plaques. Finally there was a tasting of a tiny sample of sake in the souvenir shop. Sake seems to be related to the Shinto religion which is the indigenous religion of Japan. It is strongly rooted in animism.

Good sake should be served cold! Heating it destroys the desirable aromas.

With all of our exposure to rain the past few days we have observed some interesting things. We have seen people, even business men in suits, riding bicycles while holding umbrellas. Umbrellas are quite common. The buses and many stores have plastic sheaths ready to slip over your umbrella to prevent it from dripping. Many places have

locking umbrella racks. Rain must be common here.

10/1. At sea

About the only noteworthy thing today is that the ship passed through the Kanmon Straits under the Kanmon Bridge. The bridge connects the islands of Honshū and Kyūshū. It was a rather narrow passage with strong currents. The ship made many abrupt turns.

10/2. At sea.

We lost another hour last night so now we are 9 hours behind LA. We packed for our overnight to Beijing.

10/3&4. Beijing, China.

The overnight trip was pretty much a disaster. China was celebrating its National Day starting October 1<sup>st</sup>. This commemorates the Communist victory and take-over of the country in 1949. It is a 5 or 7 day celebration, depending on to whom you talk. Anyway, many people have days off and want to visit their national landmarks, such as the Great Wall. Traffic was horrendous. We had opted to skip the wall visit and just go to the hotel after lunch. We did the trip just to see how Beijing had changed in the 15 years since we were first here. We didn't reach the hotel until 5 pm because of the traffic. Those who went on to the wall didn't get there until dark and had to walk the final 3 miles both way and didn't get to the hotel until 1 am.

Lunch was a mediocre Chinese meal at a very big jade store. Once we emerged from the meal a sales person latched on to us and

attempted to sell us anything that was available in the store. Jodie bought a jade bracelet for our soon-to-be granddaughter-in-law, Casey, because she learned it is a Chinese tradition for the mother- or grandmother-in-law to give one to the fiancée to welcome her into the family.

Our hotel, the Regent Beijing was elegant. From our 16<sup>th</sup> floor airy with floor to ceiling windows comprising the exterior wall we had excellent views down the canyons of Beijing. The room was large with a correspondingly large bathroom, containing both a large tub and a semicircular shower. The shower had both a "rain" shower head and a hand-held. There was a large window between the bathroom and the remainder of the room with an electrically operated Venetian blind.

Meal vouchers were included which could be used at any of the three hotel restaurants. These entitled you to a fixed menu meal, including wine. We chose the Bar and Grill and had a table overlooking the street. The meal was good and the scene on the street below provided fascinating entertainment.

The adventure with massed crowds continued the next day with a visit to the Forbidden City. It was wall-to-wall people pushing and crowding to get around. We finally made a joyous return to our refuge, the *Navigator*, late in the afternoon.

As stated above, our reason for the Beijing overnight was to see how it had changed since our previous visit 15 years ago. It was as if we were visiting a new city. Now it is a very big, modern city of high-rise buildings, pervasive construction, and traffic. The bicycles have been replaced by cars. There

are still construction scaffolds around new buildings however they are made of metal pipes rather than bamboo. The little neighborhoods of grey, single-story stone houses and shops are almost all gone. Also gone are the tiny restaurants along the streets where cooking was done in a giant wok over a barrel filled with coal.

Most of the cars are manufactured in China. If one is so bold to buy a non-Chinese-manufactured car you are charged a penalty of 200% of the purchase price! It would be interesting if the United States attempted to apply such a grievous penalty when China starts importing cars to the US.

Tianjin is the port city for Beijing. The ship docked at a vast, brand new terminal building. This is part of a massive industrial development. Thousands of acres of new land are being created by land-fill, both by dredging and 100-truck convoys hauling in dirt. The surrounding sea is populated with perhaps as many as 100 dredges. When finished it will be an industrial area with complete infrastructure, including blocks of apartment buildings for the workers.

As a poignant symbol of the World's trade balance problem with China, one of the new factories manufactures shipping containers. This allows the continued shipping of full containers from China without the inconvenient bother of shipping empty containers back.

There are many new toll roads which attempt to handle the traffic. We encountered hours of stop-and-go traffic, wild, erratic drivers, and many traffic accidents. The lane markings seem to be suggestions rather than something

mandatory. At times there were five lanes of traffic on a three lane road.

There seems to be no concern with global warming or energy consumption. I saw no hybrid cars and extremely few small, efficient cars.

#### 10-5. Dalian, China

Dalian has been Russian, Japanese, Russian again, and finally Chinese. Now it is just another modern big city with more high-rises under construction.

Our tour wandered about the city for awhile. Our 23-year old guide spoke English that was difficult to understand. A problem for her since she is planning a career as an English teacher.

Our first stop was at a large park that is used for kite flying. There were, of course, many kite vendors there. As we arrived, a group of six horses arrived. The beautiful young ladies astride the horses were clad in uniforms that could have been police. They posed as a group in a line which allowed a crowd to gather closely in front of them. The horses must have been carefully trained or exceptionally docile since the people massed closely in front of them didn't seem to bother them. Eventually they broke into two groups of three and rode around the park a bit then departed.

We also departed and went to a residential area for a home visit. We split into three groups of 10 or 11 so as to not overwhelm the small apartments. Our visit was to a second floor apartment in a dingy cement building that might have been built 30 years ago. The family has occupied the apartment

for 20 years. Entry was via a dingy, dirty stair well with exposed pipes and a rusty banister. With this negative first impression I was surprised when we approached a massive, beautifully finished wooden door. The apartment was quite nice.

Our hostess was the mother of the husband in the family. His wife is expecting their first child. The apartment consisted of a main living or sitting room, two regular bedrooms, a bathroom with very modern toilet and sink and what appeared to be a small washing machine but no shower or tub, a room that may have been the kitchen but is now sort of a bedroom and office with computer, and a balcony that is the kitchen. There was a large refrigerator/freezer, a small sink, and a two burner stove in the kitchen. There was also a chest-type freezer. A screened-in area held fresh vegetables and fish being dried. Our hostess was very proud of the stove and anxious to demonstrate its auto-lighting feature to Jodie.

She had laid out a spread of refreshments for us on the beautiful carved table in the living room. I was afraid to try any of the fresh fruits; apples, bananas, large grapes, and Chinese figs, which seemed to be crab apples. I ate one of the cookies; Jodie had some of the green tea. We could ask questions which the guide translated however we felt that there was a lot of confusion with the guide's poor English comprehension.

After this very enjoyable home visit we had a brief visit to a local food market and then a long visit to an eight-story Friendship Store.

10-6. At sea

A delightful respite from cramped buses. Those of us on the 103-day trip were "honored" with an early entry into the captain's welcome reception.

We have completed our first month of the trip. Beijing was also the end of the second segment of the trip and we now must deal with many new faces. The large number of short-time oriental passengers also left the ship there. Regent filled the ship by offering a special deal for the segment from Tokyo to Beijing.

10/7. Entering Shanghai.

The Yangtze foretold its presence long before we neared shore when the clear sea water turned a chocolate brown. The seas were almost covered with ships, some anchored but most under way, traveling in all directions. Finally this chaos resolved itself into two lines, one leaving and one entering the river. We joined a parade of inbound ships that stretched as far as I could see.

The industrious Chinese are creating new land here as they were in Tianjin. A long peninsula of fill extended from the land. Dredges were active all along this land adding to it.

When we finally reached the river mouth we still had around 60 miles to reach Shanghai. The river banks were lined with shipping terminals and shipyards that were building new container ships. We watched the entry from the upper deck in front of the former observation lounge. The air pollution became increasingly worse as we continued.

The ship moored quite near the famous

Bund, the old foreign concession area. (“Bund” is an Anglo-Indian word meaning “river side.”) When the Communists took over the country they confiscated these buildings. When capitalism took hold in China, the buildings were refurbished and the city fathers tried to sell them back to the people from whom they were confiscated.

The ship offered an early 5 pm dinner since almost all passengers were going to an acrobatic show. These acrobats were young, average age 13, and were quite good.

Since we weren't very hungry at 5 we went to the pool deck when we returned in search of food. There were small sandwiches and a wide variety of desserts available.

10/8. Shanghai, China

We had selected a 7-hour tour for our first day. The bus rode around the area then crossed to the Podong or East side of the Sung Pu river. We strolled along the river, fending off knock-off watch salesmen. Part of the object of this stop was to view one of the tall buildings, called by the locals The Bottle Opener since it somewhat resembles one. It is 492 m high.

We then walked to the Pearl TV tower. Once again we had to pass through massed crowds to reach the elevators which took us to the observation deck. After attempting to view the sights through the smog we ascended the stairs to the circular, rotating restaurant. I was surprised at the quality of the meal which featured both oriental and occidental items. After lunch we went to a maze of a cultural museum which featured walk thru scenes from the past century.

The Signature Travel Group reception was this evening.

10/9. Shanghai

Our short tour this day included an exciting ride on a maglev train that goes from town center to the airport. It reached a maximum speed of 431 km/h (268 mph)! We also went up another tall building, the Jin Mao Tower, to the observation level at 340.1 m (1,115.5 ft.).

All the major buildings are elaborately illuminated at night in a profligate use of energy. (China is putting 30 new coal-fired electricity generating plants on line each year.) We viewed the display from our balcony as the ship departed after dark.

10/10. At Sea.

10/11. Naha, Okinawa

We're back in Japan again. There was a new immigration feature added to finger printing and photographing. As we filed into the room we passed in front of an I-R scanner that checked our temperature. The operator was wearing a surgical mask.

The tour was short but part of it was interesting. We visited a factory that produces bingata fabrics. This is a process where multi-colored dyes are applied to fabric to produce complex designs. In the first step a pattern of resist glue is applied to the fabric. After it is dry the dyes are applied with short, stiff brushes. The dye is allowed to dry for several days and then the resist is removed with water. As part of the tour we tried our hands at this ancient technique.

The remainder of the tour was to Shurijyo Castle. It was almost completely destroyed in WWII but has been completely rebuilt. I don't know if originally it had almost no contents or if they haven't been able to replace them. This castle reflects the relationship between *China* and Okinawa. It changed hands over the ages. They now feel like a poor relative of Japan rather than a valued prefecture.

10/12. Taiwan

We were alongside around 12:30. In anticipation of the tours starting promptly we had a quick lunch in the Compass Rose dining room. They called our tour first so we went to the show room and picked up our bus tickets then headed ashore. We were handed our passports just prior to passing by an I-R scanner and then immigration. We again surrendered our passports immediately after immigration.

Our tour first went to Yeliou, a coastal national park that features strangely eroded limestone structures. After that we walked to a Taoist temple which was quite ornate and of recent construction. Across the street from the temple was a small pagoda which served as an incinerator for burnt offerings.

After praying, devotees may seek answers to their questions. This is done in at least two ways. One is the use of "chips" which are two crescents of wood that are thrown into the air. Depending how they fall the answer is favorable, unfavorable or uncertain due to lack of information in the question. The other is a container of sticks with numbers on them. After shaking a stick from the container, you then go to a small chest that has many numbered drawers and take a sheet

of printed paper from it. This will give you an answer after some more calculation.

Next we went to a mountain top to view a couple of Buddhist statues and enjoy an overlook of the city. We were given the opportunity to go to the night market after returning to the ship. The night market is mainly food items and we opted out mainly because we were tired and it would have meant dinner on the pool deck rather than the dining room.

Taiwan is a unique state. Because of its contentious relationship with China, and because of China's demands, no other country recognizes Taiwan as a country. The country's apparent prosperity from their manufacturing does not seem to have reached the port city of Keelung where we are docked for Taipei. All the buildings seem dirty and dated. The streets are narrow and crowded with thousands of motor scooters.

We scheduled a visit to the Gold Ecological Park rather than going into Taipei. I still do not know why it is called ecological. Dale wasn't feeling well so I went by myself with the rather small group. We left the seaport and drove high into the mountains, first on rather good roads that progressively became more and more narrow and windy with many, many hair pin turns. It was especially interesting the few times we encountered another bus, but I never felt we were in any danger. We drove through a couple restored mining towns which are tourist destinations for the locals. They like to drive into the mountains to have tea and watch sunset and the guide said party into the night. I guess they stayed overnight because he said because of the roads it was heavily patrolled

for drunken driving. Another interesting thing about the area was the number of shrines for the dead. These look like miniature versions of the regular shrines. They are about 10 sq. feet. The hill sides were covered with them. The guide called them night clubs. Perhaps that is where they watch the sunset.

We arrived at the Gold museum after a little over an hour bus ride. After a climb of over 100 steps we were at the museum which had some equipment and the largest gold bar in Taiwan. It was 498 pounds. Gold was found there in the 1890's. It was mined during WWII by the 1500 POW's who were at Jinguashiern , the northern most of the 18 camps on Taiwan. There were about 15000 allied POW's on Taiwan. They worked in the sugar cane fields in the south.

The next stop was another shrine where I picked up some new info. You enter through the dragon gate and exit through the tiger gate. We were also able to see the memorial to the POW's briefly before the clouds rolled in. Next we glimpsed the golden waterfall—colored by mine pollution—on our way to Bisha Fishing port and market which we toured and were offered samples of everything which is Taiwanese custom. The rusting hulk of the first Taiwanese fishing boat to reach Antarctica in 1976 was also there.

The elaborate decorative illumination of buildings has not reached Kelung, the port for Taipei, perhaps because there are few high-rise buildings there and perhaps they don't have the energy to waste.

10/15,16. Hong Kong

The ship was alongside at the cruise ship terminal early in the morning. When I opened the curtains, the panorama of skyscrapers on Hong Kong Island was spread out before me. We were moored very close to the Star Ferry terminal so the waters of the bay were filled with busy ferries in addition to the usual coming and going of all sizes of ships, boats, tugs, barges, and sampans.

We did two tours during our two-day visit. The first was at dusk and was a ride up Victoria Peak on the cable-driven tram. It was delightfully cool at the upper end of the tram at 400 m. After attempting to photograph the electrical spectacle below we repaired to one of the several restaurants for some wine and snacks. The bus took us back down and back to the ship in time for the 8 pm light show in the harbor.

The next morning we re-did the tram in the daylight, had a short sampan ride in the Aberdeen harbor, visited a jewelry factory, and had a final shopping extravaganza in the famous Stanley Market. Hundreds of permanent shops line its crowded walkways, many delightfully air conditioned.

As a result of its origin as a British Crown Colony and currently a World banking and shopping center, Hong Kong presents a delightful mix of people and races. All of them seemed to be at Stanley Market that morning.

10/17. At Sea

The ship's clocks were retarded another hour last night so we are now 10 hours behind LA.

10/18. Ha Long Bay/Hanoi, Viet Nam.

I was disappointed that we didn't ever see Hanoi Jane's statue in downtown Hanoi during our visit to the city. We did learn from our guide, however, that the imprisoned US airmen in the "Hanoi Hilton" had a very pleasant time during their incarceration. He had a very distorted view of the war, which I guess is understandable.

We took a tour into Hanoi from Ha Long Bay. It was three hours each way. The views of the country side were quite interesting. We made a rest stop about half way. The facility was a souvenir factory that employed people alleged to be handicapped. Their wheelchairs were liberally sprinkled about the room. When we stopped on our way back, the workers were no longer there however their wheelchairs still were.

Hanoi itself was an amazing display of wild traffic. The primary conveyance is the moped. They zip about with no concern for traffic laws or personal safety. For that matter, our bus seemed to follow the same lack of rules.

The "highlight" of our visit was a view of Ho Chi Min's tomb. We couldn't visit since he was out for his annual maintenance.

Random items;

Drivers, even moped drivers are licensed at 18 and must take a driving test. Helmets are required however this law doesn't appear to be rigidly enforced.

When Viet Nam became Communist there was insufficient food production and people starved. Now that people possess their own

production, they export food to the rest of the far east, including rice, corn, and many vegetables.

There is a 200% tax on imported cars.

Electricity is generated by hydro and coal-fired plants. They have copious coal supplies.

There are very narrow houses of multiple stories with elaborate fronts and plain, flat sides. Land on major streets is more valued than other since the first story can be used as a store.

Power and telephone poles are cement so the bugs can't eat them.

There are three TV channels, government news, agricultural education, and entertainment.

No free education!

Mostly Buddhist, some Catholic.  
(Interesting after Communism.)

Because of the dust and pollution filling the air, many people wear cloth face masks. Women often wear brightly colored masks that match their clothing.

10/19. Ha Long Bay

This was a more relaxing day. We did a short tour of the bay by junk. Its 1,553 km<sup>2</sup> is filled with over 3,000 limestone islands or islets. (The Vietnamese claim there are 1,969 islets because this is the year of Ho Chi Minh's death.) These are karst formations raised up from a prehistoric sea floor by tectonic plate collisions (orogeny.)

There are some floating villages scattered among the islands. The scenic vistas were impacted by the dense haze or smog.

It was a short drive from the ship to the junks. There were hundreds tied up and floating at anchor. We quickly boarded ours and departed. Its interior was nicely finished wood. Its exterior was also wood however in extremely poor condition. I went to the upper open deck via a rotten stairway and decided to go back down to the interior since I was afraid I might break through the deck.

The armada of junks set off for the rock formations. Along the way we were intercepted by sampans whose inhabitants attempted to sell things. They would come alongside and one occupant would climb into the junk, then beg.

There were occasional bumpings between the junks as they maneuvered around various features, such a "Chicken Kissing Rock." After a couple of hours, most of the junks headed as a group back across the bay to the beach. It looked like a vast invasion armada preparing to storm the beaches.

The ship departed at 2 pm. Rather than going to Da Nang we are spending a day and a half at sea to reach Saigon Friday afternoon. Typhoon Magi prompted this move so that we could avoid rough seas.

Ray Solarli put on his third show at 6 pm. It was another mix of his singing and puppets. He used four crewmen as his aides, all dressed from head to toe in black. Most of the show was illuminated by UV light. It was very good!

We were finally able to eat in the up-scale

Prime 7 restaurant, courtesy of Virginia Martin. She was able to get reservations when we couldn't. This small facility was carved out of La Veranda and specializes in beef, lobster and crab.

10/21. Saigon, Viet Nam.

We spent yesterday rolling around quite a bit on our hurried way south to avoid Typhoon Magi. In early afternoon today we entered the mouth of the Saigon River. Some 60 miles later we tied up close to downtown Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City as the communists prefer to call it. Apparently most of the residents here still call it Saigon.

The jungle on the banks of the river was frequently broken by settlements or small industrial complexes. There was also quite a lot of floating vegetation in the river.

The authorities cleared the ship in record time so we caught the shuttle into town. It stopped at a large department store. We shopped the three stories and bought a little, then strolled around the block it occupied. The incredible rush of traffic discouraged any attempt to cross any street. Mopeds and light motorcycles jam the streets. Bluffing and/or seemingly ignoring oncoming traffic determines who gets the right-of-way. Pedestrians have no rights. As in Hanoi we saw many people wearing masks because of the pollution. Most of the women wore masks of brightly figured fabric.

10/22. Saigon

We took a half-day city tour that took in the Notre Dame Cathedral, the central post office, the former South Vietnam presidential palace, now called the

Reunification Palace, the history museum, and China Town. There are still many classic buildings from the French era.

At the museum we were treated to a water puppet show before touring the museum.

We were driven from the museum to a lacquer-ware factory in pedicabs through, and sometimes against the dense traffic. We entered through the token group of workers making lacquer ware and then went into the large showroom where we had the opportunity to buy to our heart's content.

We also paid a brief visit to a Buddhist temple located in the heart of the business district. There was so much incense burning that the smoke obscured the place and made it difficult to breathe. There was also a stroll through the streets of a market. We had to walk in the street, competing with motor scooters and motorcycles, since the sidewalks were covered with vendors.

10/25. Bangkok, Thailand

We left the ship in Saigon last Friday and flew to Siem Rep, Cambodia. Our departure from Vietnam left us with a lasting impression of sullen people. Both the ticket agent and the immigration agent were about as noncommunicative and unfriendly as could be. The beautiful young women on Air Vietnam were quite different, thankfully.

The airport in Siem Rep is quite small, no taxi strips on the field. When we descended from the plane it was our introduction to the Hellacious heat and humidity that would be our companion for the next two days. (I've always assumed that the Hell fires would make the place quite hot however the same

flames would eliminate humidity. So I guess the analogy is not correct.)

We passed through a token immigration by handing our passports along with a completed immigration form to some man as instructed by our escort, Katjka. (We wouldn't see them again until the day we left.) After that we collected our checked-through luggage and paraded out of the terminal and boarded our bus for a 45 minute ride to town and lunch. Although we packed for the brief trip in a carry-on the size of the storage bins on the aircraft required that it be checked.

Lunch was a buffet at Tonle Chaktomuk Hotel. There was a wide range of items available, both American and Cambodian. This was our first introduction to Cambodia and the full employment policy. It is a very poor country so the up-scale hotels employ many people. We were greeted at the entrance by two lovely young ladies dressed in traditional garb. There were many servers in the dining room so that you never had to wait for anything.

After lunch we drove a very short distance to our hotel, the Raffles Grand Hotel Angkor Wat. This was the first hotel in the area, there even before there was a town. It went out of business during the Pol Pot atrocities but was restored by the more moderate government and leased to the Raffles organization for 99 years. It was quite pleasant, with halls smelling of citronella. And, as at the lunch hotel, there was an excess of employees. Everywhere we went in Cambodia we received effusive welcomes. Our room was quite nice with enthusiastic air conditioning.

Our next adventure was a ride on a “long-tailed” boat on Tonle Sap Lake. Now, at the end of the rainy season it covers an area of 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is the home of 400 families. They live on the lake, not around it! The lake is quite shallow and will shrink now that the rains are over.

The ride to and from the lake was almost as interesting as the ride on the lake.

The long-tailed boats are so called since the propeller is on a shaft that extends several feet from the stern and is connected to the motor by a flexible coupling so that it may bounce over obstructions rather than fouling or stopping. Many boats use motors taken from trucks or cars and even use a steering wheel and dash board from the same. There are no mufflers so they are quite noisy.

We roared off across the lake, accompanied by three police in another boat. Someone decided that since we were rich people from a fancy cruise ship we needed an escort. In the course of the tour we saw several floating communities. Most of the residents are fishermen who work at night. The houses seem quite simple with little more than one room. Sleeping accommodations seemed to be hammocks. Many had TV antennas and satellite dishes so they must have had generators since there is no public power. As the lake level drops during the dry season and rises during the wet these villages relocate. These “towns” are complete with food shops, schools, basketball courts, banks, and churches/temples, all floating.

We returned to the hotel for a bit of cooling but set off again at 6 for a dinner show at the Apsara Theater. The Apsaras are legendary

characters from the Khmer Ramanaya. The meal consisted of several bowls presented on a tray and were traditional Cambodian items, not especially tasty. Most guests were seated on pillows at very low tables. We were able to sit at a regular table. The entertainment was traditional dancing.

Early the next morning we set off for a day of temples. We visited several in the morning. The most interesting was Ta Phrom Temple. Its walls were overgrown with huge trees which were both supporting and tearing apart the walls. This temple was filmed as part of the “Lara Croft, Tomb Raider” movie.

After another buffet lunch at a local hotel we went to Angkor Wat, the highlight of the trip. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is considered the pinnacle of Khmer architecture. Its outer walls enclose approximately 200 hectares. The entire complex represents the universe and consists of a pyramid of three levels, each enclosed by a gallery with corner towers. Although quite spectacular, it is slowly falling apart, since no mortar was used to assemble the structure and comparatively soft stone was used.. There are restoration activities at this temple as well as at all the temples we saw. These are mostly being conducted by foreign organizations.

By the time we reached Angkor Wat both Jodie and I were so fatigued from both the oppressive heat and the stairs from the other temples that we limited our exploration of this, reputed to be the best of the lot. We also opted out of the option to climb a hill and the temple stairs on top of the hill to view the sunset and instead went back to the hotel for a cool shower. Those who went

said we made the right choice. The hike was hard and the sunset poor.

Dinner that night was a buffet at the Raffles Grand d'Angkor.

We flew back to the ship the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>. While we were gone it had moved to Bangkok, Thailand. At Bangkok we made our furthest excursion west. We now had to start unwinding all of the clock changes we made to this point

There was a special Grand Asia Pacific event this evening, a visit to Jim Thompson's house. He was sent to Thailand as a U.S. Army officer shortly after WWII and fell in love with the country. After discharge he returned to live there permanently. He became interested in hand-woven silk and helped develop the industry by marketing the product internationally. He constructed a traditional teak house for his residence on the banks of one of the canals. He mysteriously disappeared while on a visit to the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia. No trace has ever been found. Eventually the government turned the house over to the James H. W. Thompson foundation to preserve it.

We were greeted by a unique bamboo band upon arrival and then toured the house. It is tastefully decorated with Thai antiques and has many pleasant airy rooms with solid wood shutters to close the glass-less and screen-less windows. Although it is equipped with modern plumbing each bedroom had a unique chamber pot.

After the tour we enjoyed wine and snacks in the modern restaurant. The final event was a unique puppet show. There were two

puppets, each manipulated by three people. The monkey-god puppet was operated by three men; the goddess was operated by three women. Their performance was remarkable and fascinating. It was like watching two separate shows. The puppet movements and interactions were one show. The closely coordinated movements of the puppeteers was like watching a fine ballet. After the first "dance," the puppets interacted with us, with the goddess working her way around from one side and the monkey-god from the other. It was easy to interact with the puppets and forget that there were human operators. After this delightful interlude there was a final "dance."

10/26. Bangkok

There have been heavy rains in Thailand recently resulting in heavy flow in the Chao Phraya river. This coupled with an astronomical high tide resulted in a predicted flooding of the waterfront where the ship was moored. In anticipation of this flooding a walkway was constructed from the ship to the terminal building. Bangkok was a turn-around port which additionally complicated matters. When we emerged from the ship for our morning tour we found the wharf flooded by waters almost knee-high. We were able to keep dry by walking on the pallets. However when we exited the terminal building we still had to contend with minor flooding. There was remarkable controlled chaos as departing passengers and luggage were loaded onto buses and vans, positioned as close to the terminal as possible. Departure of our small tour group was delayed as we waited for tardy members. While we were waiting we watched the flood waters bubble up through

the asphalt.

Our tour went to perhaps the most elaborate, gaudy Buddhist temple that we have seen. This was Wat Phra Keo. Everything was covered with gold or mirrored tiles or statues. The featured Buddha was the Emerald Buddha which seemed to be a couple of feet high but it was difficult to tell since it was at the peak of an altar that was 30 or 40 feet high and covered with gold.

10/27. Ko Samui, Thailand.

There was a long, hot tender ride from the ship to the wharf. We started the day wearing shorts in anticipation of heat and humidity then read on the tour tickets that long pants were required at the temples. The day wasn't excessively hot since there was a heavy rain for most of the time.

Our tour was Ancient Temples and Monkeys. We made a complete circumnavigation of the island and saw a shrine, a couple of temples, and watched macaque monkeys harvest coconuts. The "highlight" of the tour was a visit where a dead Buddhist head monk is enshrined. He died 20 years ago while meditating. He was left in the position in which he died. Since he wasn't deteriorating it was decided to put him in a glass case and revere him.

The tour route took us through the beach and resort area which is famous (or infamous) for Full Moon parties. I had never heard of these however several passengers had and questioned the guide about them. She said if you wanted to stay in one of the numerous hotels in the area you had to reserve for at least five days. Many of the streets in this coastal area were flooded with many

buildings protected by sandbags. The bus made quite a wake as it passed through.

10/28. At Sea.

10/29. Singapore.

Singapore is one of the four economic tigers in the Far East. The ship docked in one of the container terminals since the limited space in the downtown terminal was already taken. This port is reputed to be the busiest port in the World. I don't think I have ever seen more shipping containers and the supporting handling equipment.

The island country is one of the tightest controlled and regulated places in the World that still seems to allow personal freedom. It has no natural resources but seems to exist as a financial center and trans-shipping point. It is also the second largest petroleum refiner in the World. Over 80% of the population live in subsidized government apartments.

Our tour was the Round Island Tour and really got around the island in the course of 8 hours. The first stop was the Tiong Bahru "Wet" market, a place where residents shop for fresh food and also some clothing and cooking items. There were also some tourist items. Reflecting Singapore's careful control, the market wasn't wet and everything was quite neat and clean. Meat and fish were kept refrigerated or displayed on ice. It was quite a contrast from the local markets we have visited so far.

At this point the character of the tour changed to a continued depiction of how the island was lost to the Japanese at the start of WWII and how prisoners and residents were

treated by the Japanese. The loss of the island was just another example of the foggy military thinking that pervaded the allied side prior to the war. With heads buried in the sand the military ignored the build-up both in Japan and Europe. Planners who dared to point out the superiority of the aircraft over the battleship were either ignored or punished. The two British battleships in the area were almost immediately lost to the Japanese bombers. The antiquated British air force planes were no match for the Japanese planes so the city was bombed at liberty.

The tour continued with a stop at the north end of the island at the point where, as predicted by one planner who was ignored, the Japanese landed. The south end of the island was heavily defended with many large guns that were useless. This northern point is closest to Johore Bahru, Malaysia which could be seen easily across the Straits of Molucca.

We next visited the Kranji War Memorial. This is the last resting place for many of the 20,000 men and women who died in the war. In addition to masses of graves, there is a large monument at the top of the hill on which are inscribed the names of those who were lost but their bodies never recovered.

Lunch at the Orchid Country Club was a very tasty Chinese meal. One unusual item turned out to be boiled peanuts. They looked and tasted like beans.

Next was the token Buddhist Temple, Bright Hill Temple. It was a massive place and included a crematorium

Our final stop was at the Changi Chapel and

Museum which focuses on the lives of the POWs and civilian internees who survived the 3½ years of the brutal Japanese occupation. The chapel is a replica of the chapel created and decorated by the POWs at the infamous Changi Prison. This was the prison that was the subject of James Clavell's book *King Rat*.

There was another special dinner this evening for the 35 Grand Asia Pacific guests. This was another elegant meal at La Veranda which was closed to all other guests. One purpose was to honor Ray Solaire on his birthday.

10/30. At Sea.

We crossed the Equator around 3 am however King Neptune didn't appear until around noon to "welcome" the pollywogs. I guess he likes to sleep-in.

10/31. Semarang, Indonesia

Here it was, Halloween, however no acknowledgment of this significant religious holiday on the ship. The ship spent a long day here for two reasons; first was to allow time for the 8-hour tour to Borobudur, the second was to allow more time for Indonesian crew and families to visit. We took a rather simple, short tour of the town which first visited Sam Po Kong Buddhist Temple, built to honor the famous Chinese-Muslim admiral who visited here in 1405. There was one unusual aspect to this otherwise typical temple complex. There were two arrays of giant burning candles that apparently are a form of prayer. The smaller ones will burn for only 6 months; the larger ones for a year. We found them on sale in the shop. The small ones cost 6,000,000

rupees; the large ones 14,000,000 rupees. (One US dollar was worth 8,900 rupees.)

Our next stop was at a hotel where we were offered genuine Java coffee or tea and little snacks. Jodie greatly enjoyed her Java.

The shoppers were appeased by the next stop. It was a government operated handcraft store where all of the goods were made by Indonesian artisans.

The final stop of the tour was a brief visit to Gereja Blenduk. A domed Protestant church built in 1753. It is the second oldest Christian church in Java and is still in use. Unfortunately the old pipe organ no longer works and no one seems able to repair it. The church features an unusual octagonal configuration.

11/1. At Sea.

11/2. Bali, Indonesia.

This is the resort island, or the party island. We chose an arts and crafts tour and that's what it was. We drove into town on a small, cramped bus. The buses here have to be small because the streets are narrow and the turns tight. We went to a batik store, a demonstration in a silver jewelry "factory," an open-air demonstration of wood carving and then a visit to the store, and finally a general handicraft store. We didn't visit any of the famous resorts nor did we party.

Several of the crew, including our cabin steward, live here. His wife drove 4 hours to meet him here. He is due back on the ship at 6 tomorrow morning.

There are thousands of statues for sale here.

Most are based on Hindu or Buddhist mythology figures. There seemed to be enough statues to supply at least one for every man, woman, and child in Indonesia. Statues and small shrines are everywhere. Many of the statues are draped with colored cloth. Some also have offerings of fruit or flowers in front of them. Some are sheltered under brightly colored umbrellas.

The various craft stores tend to be located together. The batik, silver jewelry, and wood carving stores were all located with other similar stores. The statue stores, however, were everywhere.

The island has many nice beaches and is covered with greenery.

Our evening tour went to a small but nice bird park where we had a poor buffet dinner followed by an interesting show. The "music" was provided by a very large group of chanting men. The dance portrayed the battle between the evil god and a king for the king's wife. The king prevailed with the help of the king of the monkeys.

The primary fault with the meal was that it was supposed to be Indonesian however we had beef stroganoff, baked potatoes, and steamed veggies, not Indonesian food. It was served in an open-air dining room which was extremely hot.

11/4. Komodo Island, Indonesia.

The dragons at last! We were on the first tender ashore, since boarding was by deck and ours was called first. Therefore we were the first group into the forest. Although it was raining heavily it wasn't unpleasant because the temperature was mild. The rain

did impact photography, however. Jodie used her waterproof Pentax camera which is just ok. I kept my SLR in my day pack but it still got a little damp.

Our group set off from the landing accompanied by three locals and a tour guide. The guide was in the front and the three locals were scattered among the group, each carrying a long, flimsy forked stick. These sticks are apparently capable of fending off a hungry, 300 pound, 11 foot long Komodo dragon.

The guide raced off down the trail leaving us and several others stuck behind a very slow hiker. The trail was quite well maintained and level. The only problems were the flooding and some muddy patches. Eventually we rejoined the group which was viewing three dragons. About the time we arrived the guide was pressuring the group to move on. Jodie had a few words with him and we stayed a bit longer but then had to move on since the second group was approaching.

It was basically a pleasant, short hike through the forest. Apparently if it isn't raining it is quite hot. I would like to have seen it without the rain since I suspect there would be a lot of birds flitting about. We heard some interesting calls along the way but I didn't see any birds. There are also supposed to be several varieties of poisonous snakes. There are also wild pigs and a large deer herd upon whom the dragons prey. There is also a small village on the island. Their chickens and goats also are prey, as is the occasional villager.

The hike concluded back on shore at the visitor center, a building elevated on stilts

and under which rested another dragon. We then ran the peddler gauntlet to get back to the landing and a ship tender.

This evening was another dress-up occasion and the cocktail party for returning RSSC passengers. We have been blowing-off these occasions however decided to attend. It was good that we did since we were acknowledged along with four other couples as having achieved Platinum status.

11-5. At Sea.

11-6. Darwin, Australia.

We made a brief visit to Darwin, arriving in late morning and departing at 6 pm. The immigration people boarded with the pilot and inspected each passenger with his passport. This process went quite rapidly and the ship was cleared in time for the tours to start. Our tour was scheduled to start at 12:25 so we had an early lunch of ice cream on the pool deck. Our tour finally started about 1 pm.

It seems that Darwin has finally recognized that it must remember the events of WWII. I suspect that these were overlooked in the development that followed the war and also during the recovery from the devastating cyclone Tracy. Our tour touched on several local sites which were significant in the war but currently are in other uses. Most of the large fuel tanks in town are still encased in a concrete sheath which protected them from bomb fragments. Darwin was bombed over 50 times by the Japanese at the start of the war.

As part of the tour we visited two museums. The first was in a bunker that was the fire

control center for a coastal battery and contains many weapons, including some very large guns. The second was in a purpose-built building and was devoted to aircraft and included a B52 along with a lot of junk and scrap.

We were drenched by an intense tropical downpour while at the first museum. This is the beginning of the Wet in the Top. Strangely enough, this is the beginning of the Dry at Komodo Island which is not very far away.

There is a large tide in the Darwin harbor. We exited the ship from deck 4 onto a gangway that was almost flat to the wharf. When we returned in late afternoon we reboarded to deck 7 and had to go up the gangway.

11-8. Thursday Island, Australia.

After a day at sea we arrived at Thursday Island around 11 am. Actually we arrived near Thursday Island. The harbor is too shallow for the ship to approach too closely. As it was, the approach was quite slow because of the shallow depth. There is the added problem of a 9 kt current running through the Torres Strait.

We left the ship around 12:30 and were on the local school/tour bus by 1:30 and had completed our tour by 2:15. There isn't much to see. The most (only) noteworthy thing is Green Hill Fort. It was constructed in response to a Russian threat after the Crimean War. Three old breach-loading guns of that era are present along with the bunkers. The bunkers have been turned into a museum that commemorates military things along with some items from the

island's pearling industry. This industry harvested oysters for the mother-of-pearl shells. Very few pearls were found. There is a rather large cemetery which holds the graves of many who died while diving for the shells. So many are Japanese that the Japanese government has constructed a memorial for them.

We visited a native museum and strolled the town main street after the tour and then returned to the ship. The ride back was much faster since it was with the current.

11-10. Cairns, Australia.

Several nights ago, as is our custom, we asked to be seated at random and wound up at a table with two other couples. One was from England, the other from Australia. During the course of the evening we discovered that all of us were married in 1956. So we decided that we should have a small celebration. Last night we dined together again after meeting for cocktails in one of the lounges. Jodie asked the head waiter if he could arrange a little cake to add to the occasion, which he did. It was a very nice evening.

We did a very low impact tour of Cairns. There was a too brief stop at the Cairns Botanical Garden and a visit to the very modern Catholic cathedral, St. Monica's, plus a drive around town and out of town. The cathedral has very elaborate painted windows depicting The Creation and also the battle of the Coral Sea.

The Creation Windows have been described as the world's largest themed stained glass windows. They were installed in St Monica's Cathedral in Queensland's Catholic Diocese

of Cairns late in 2000.

There are 24 windows, depicting the cycle of creation. The designs range from an exploded supernova to the formation of the earth, from the development of Queensland landmarks and the arrival of humans to a crystal pattern symbolizing perfection. One of the windows includes a reproduction of an image of the Eagle Nebula - the so-called Pillars of Creation - taken by the Hubble space telescope.

The windows are six meters high and 1.7 meters wide and include 320 square meters of stained glass. Stained-glass artists, Gerry Cummins and Jill Stehn spent two years designing the windows and four years building them.

We asked to be dropped off in downtown so we could mail Ryan's birthday gift there. We were concerned about customs and dealing with the Australian post office but thanks to a very helpful postal employee it was simple. (The package arrived in about 10 days in contrast to his birthday card which was mailed from Singapore and arrived a month later.) It was a short stroll back to the ship from town.

11-11. Whitsunday Islands, Australia.

This stop was to allow a visit to the Great Barrier Reef. This was a paid trip via catamaran to an anchored platform. Those who went said the ride was quite rough and the defined snorkeling area too small for the number of participants.

We opted to visit Whitehaven Beach instead. This was an unbelievably white silicon sand beach that stretched as far as the

eye could see. The sand was quite fine and crunched or squeaked when you walked on it. The ship was at anchor so we first had to tender into town where we immediately boarded a big, air conditioned catamaran and had a buffet lunch. Then we rode for about 30 minutes, bouncing all the way, until we reached the beach. The boat nosed up onto the beach and lowered a boarding stair onto the sand. We all debarked and the ship pulled away and anchored.

We walked on the beach but didn't go into the water. There were stinger suits available however they weren't needed since it was very early in the season and the water was too cool to attract the jelly fish.

Not everyone arrived by boat. While we were there a float plane landed and discharged its passengers to play on the beach. After an hour or so they reboarded and the plane took off.

After about 2 hours we embarked and returned.

Had dinner with Bo and Peep, the Signature Travel Group reps.

11/12. At Sea.

It has occurred to me that we have been just ahead of disasters on this trip. We had to rush our passage south from Viet Nam to escape the clutches of Typhoon Megi. We passed by Java before the volcano eruption became so vigorous. Then there was the almost Biblical flood in Bangkok. Probably what will happen next is a plague of locust in Australia. (After we returned to California we heard that Queensland was experiencing historically high floods.)

11/13. Brisbane, Australia.

The ship tied up in the heart of the container terminal because a Princess ship had the only berth in the downtown passenger terminal. This was to have been our berth. The excuse that the harbor master gave was that the bigger boat was “turning around” today. This put us 1 hour away from downtown Brisbane.

Since we were taking a tour to the Australia Zoo (Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin’s) the distance from the CBD (central business district) didn’t affect us. It was a one hour drive each way to Beerwah which left us with two and a half hours for the zoo. We watched the show at the Crocoseum almost as soon as we arrived and then wandered about. The show featured snakes, birds, and one croc. As we wandered we interacted with bunches of kangaroos and saw several crocs in individual pens.

11-15. Sydney, Australia.

We arrived in early morning, passing through the harbor heads well before Sunrise. The ship was alongside by 6 am. Big ships wishing to dock at the Circular Quay must do so early to avoid the frantic ferry traffic.

We did a trip to Fetherdale Wildlife Park, an hour’s drive away in Doonside. It is a nicely laid out park that features only Australian wildlife. We had a good visit under threatening rain clouds that occasionally released warning drops. We took lots of photos. Jodie even posed with an awake Koala.

Around 10:45 we all went to the Drovers’

Hut for some Bush Tucker. We had damper bread, tea, and some really good cake. We also sampled bush tea which is made in a billy can and has some eucalyptus leaves in it for added flavor. It wasn’t bad. While we were eating the skies opened so that ended our wildlife visit. We spent the rest of the time in the gift shop.

In the afternoon we shopped the Rocks in the rain.

This was the last night of this cruise segment so we said good-bye to some Australian friends.

11/16. Sydney.

We filled our day with tours. The day started with rain so we left for our first tour garbed for rain with Gortex and umbrellas. We boarded a bus and drove the short distance to the famous Opera House. Although we had toured it before there have been changes both to the structure and the tour. One big change are the seats in all venues. They are all new and had been designed by an orthopaedist. Jodie found them uncomfortable because of the spacing between rows.

After the opera house tour we drove around the city for the rest of the morning and made a brief stop at Bondi Beach. It is a beautiful, wide white sand beach.

The tour returned to the ship around 1:30. We had to pass through rigid Australian port security to board the ship. This included removing our hats because we might have something hidden under them, even though we had passed through a metal detector.

Since our next tour was to leave at 2:05 we had a lunch of ice cream from the pool deck and headed out again. Since the threatening clouds had cleared up shortly after we left the ship in the morning we left the Gortex and umbrellas in the cabin but did take coats and sun hats since we were going on a harbor cruise.

It was an enjoyable tour on a large sail catamaran.

11/17. At Sea.

Another dress-up night that wasn't identified as such on the preliminary information.

11/18. Melbourne, Australia.

We arrived early in the morning and were alongside by 8 am. Our tour was to ride on an old narrow gauge steam train called Puffing Billy. There was about an hour's scenic ride on a bus through the town and up into the mountains. We hiked down to the station where a train of open cars was loading. The passengers were allowed to sit on the side of the car with their legs dangling out. At the front was one old steam engine. Soon a second engine backed up and coupled to the first. Then the train left. This wasn't our train.

Eventually, a half hour later than scheduled, our train backed into the station, drawn by a Diesel engine. We boarded one of our reserved cars and eventually, after much hand-bell ringing by the station master we departed. Then the rain began. It was also quite cold. The rain and the minimal amount of scenery limited our photography.

By the time we returned to the ship it was

too late for lunch in the Compass Rose so we had hamburgers on the damp and cool pool deck.

In the afternoon we took the Leisurely Melbourne tour and it was leisurely. It was just a bus ride around town with a stop at the striking Shrine of Remembrance, a war memorial.

We won in Trivia for the second day in a row!

This evening there was a special event for all passengers at the Melbourne Aquarium. Both the Compass Rose and La Veranda opened at 5 for an early, light dinner. Since we had our hamburgers at 2 we didn't feel the need to eat.

A one-hour bus ride through traffic brought us to the aquarium. It was a very nicely done small facility which featured reef fish and native Australian creatures. We were welcomed with wine, beer, and soft drinks, and an extensive variety of hors d' oeuvres. These were sufficient to satisfy the need for dinner.

11/21. Hobart, Australia.

The often rough Tasman Sea was pretty gentle for our crossing from Melbourne and along the west coast of Tasmania. Hobart is a beautiful city built across hills and valleys surrounding the harbor. We were moored close to city center. Although there was a shuttle it took less than 15 minutes to walk in.

Our ship tour took us out into the country to a winery for a late morning wine taste. The wine wasn't noteworthy however the winery

and surrounding land was quite attractive. We also visited a historic bridge and church in the old town of Richmond.

The final stop on the tour was Runnymede Estate. It was built in 1840 for Tasmania's first lawyer, Robert Pitcairns. It was a beautifully preserved and furnished house from that era.

The tour guides in Melbourne kept referring to things there as "the best (insert thing) in Australia." The guide in Tasmania kept referring to things as "the oldest (insert thing) in Australia." It must be nice to be superior at something.

We walked into town for a brief shopping trip after our tour. On the way we walked by the *Sea Shepherd*. This is the anti-whaling ship operated by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. It is painted all black with skull-and-crossbones decoration. They were selling t-shirts that brag of the number of whaling ships they have sunk, by what means I don't know. It will soon head south to do battle with the Japanese "scientific" whaling fleet. DNA tests performed on whale meat sold in Japan proves that they are harvesting all whales indiscriminately.

Capt. John visited the ship sometime during our stay in Hobart. The captain of the *Sea Shepherd* told him that the ship rolls  $\pm 35$  in heavy seas. The worst I have seen on this ship has been less than  $5^\circ$ .

Shortly before the ship was to sail the Tasmanian Police Pipe Band came on board and presented a short performance in the show lounge. It was quite enjoyable. Capt. John, who is Scottish and who plays a bagpipe recording of "Amazing Grace" at

each departure, requested that the pipe band play us away from the dock. The harbor security authorities deemed the police to be a security risk and wouldn't allow it.

This brings me to port security at all of our stops in Oz. It has been obsessive, excessive, and illogical. For example, we were not allowed to wear our hats when passing through the metal detectors. When I asked why I was told that I might be hiding something under my hat. I guess they have no faith in their metal detectors. Perhaps they thought I was smuggling a koala out under my hat.

We always had to show our ship ID card and a government-issued photo ID while on the bus returning to the ship.

Their obsessive behavior reached a peak in Hobart. There was a team of 6 that aggressively inspected each of the tour busses each time they entered the port. This included using mirrors under the busses and requiring the driver to open every locked luggage compartment. I finally decided that the army of security inspectors was just part of a government full employment program.

11/22, 23. At Sea.

11/24. Cruising the Fjords of New Zealand..

We started the day entering Milford Sound at 6:30 and traveled to near the end, viewing several waterfalls along the way. When we neared the end the ship stopped and a smaller ship picked up 10 passengers who were going on an overnight land tour of New Zealand. The ship then slowly pirouetted and nosed into Sterling Falls while the passengers, the captain, and the staff captain

took many, many pictures. As other boats and ships approached we moved off back down the fjord.

In the course of moving on around the southern end of New Zealand we passed through two more sounds, Dusky and Doubtful.

Jodie convinced the Signature rep on this segment to get a galley tour for the group. It was today at 4:30 and conducted by the head chef. (We were once told that these tours were not available but we have since learned that they are offered to some people who haven't even requested them.)

The tour was conducted by Executive Chef Klaus Reinmueller. The galley is all stainless and fairly spacious. There is a galley staff of 69 to cover all four galleys, Compass Rose, La Veranda, crew on deck 4, and Signature 7. We got the impression that they are unionized and are "limited" to working only 10 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are 80 on the wait staff and 20 on the bar staff. All this is to feed the full capacity of 492 passengers and 400 crew. Almost all food is shipped from the US in response to menus that are planned a year in advance in Miami. Meat cuts are aged as required, shrink-wrapped, and frozen. Meat cuts for Signature 7 are individually sized before freezing. Some fish, fruits, and veggies are procured locally from some areas, but not others. There are inspections from governmental authorities in almost every country, not just the US. The nurse inspects all food workers weekly for cuts or injuries on their hands. Only hamburger buns, hot dog buns, bagels, and English muffins are bought; all else is baked on board. Food waste is ground and dumped; paper waste is

burned; all else is compacted and off-loaded. (Is it recycled wherever it is off-loaded?)

11/25. Dunedin, New Zealand.

We turned the corner last night and are headed north. Our furthest south was just a bit below 45°. Dunedin is a beautiful little town arrayed around Otago Harbor. As we were coming in I was impressed with the beauty of the scene, then the container terminal filled the view. The harbor seems to exist only to export logs and wood chips to China.

Our tour first went to the Royal Albatross Center on Taiaroa Head. This involved a long drive around the harbor. When we finally arrived at the center we had to pass through four locked gates and doors and hike up a steep path to reach the highly enclosed observation chamber. Everything was so controlled, confined, and restricted that it was almost impossible to see anything of the albatross. Three or four could be seen sitting on their nests. After 10 minutes it was time to leave so the next group could attempt to see something. We, however, had a generous amount of time to spend in the gift shop. It was not worth the trip.

The driver was in such a hurry to leave that he miscounted and left two passengers at the center. The ship escort recounted as we were driving away and convinced him that he had erred so he finally turned around and went back. Then we rushed along the curvy roads and up the hills to Larnach Castle, stopping briefly to view a Maori whareniui (meeting house).

This stone mansion was built between 1871 and 1885 by a very rich business man. After

he killed himself his family sold off all the furnishing and sold the property. It fell into disrepair until another family bought it in the '60s and restored it. We were told that the gardens were quite lovely however we didn't have enough time to find out. Shortly after we arrived we had lunch in the ball room and then had a tour of the building. Then it was time to leave, in the rain.

Our best views of the albatross nesting area were as we were leaving the harbor which required sailing close to the head. Although it was getting dark we had excellent views of many nests and many soaring albatross. The severe restrictions at the center prevented any decent views.

Since this was US Thanksgiving turkey and dressing was one of the dinner options.

11/26. Lyttelton/Christchurch, New Zealand.

This was another small harbor with a large and active container terminal. It is separated from Christchurch by a high ridge which is pierced by a 1 mile long tunnel.

We had a 45 minute drive to reach the International Antarctic Center. Christchurch is the provisioning port for the US Antarctic program so the Kiwis have created a museum to illustrate several aspects of Antarctic exploration. It was a very modern museum with many showy exhibits that gave some flavor of the Antarctic.

The bus dropped us off in downtown on our way back so Jodie could access an ATM. There was a craft sale in the square where we were dropped so we shopped a bit and visited the cathedral.

Christchurch suffered a 7+ earthquake in September. Damage is still evident. Several historic buildings are now being held up by massive metal bracing until they can be repaired. Many homes have holes where chimneys used to be.

11/27. Wellington, New Zealand.

There was a special event for the "long cruisers," those of us who were on from Vancouver to San Francisco. None of the "ordinary" passengers were even aware of this event. Our first stop was the National Museum of New Zealand where we had a rushed one-hour guided tour before the museum opened. It was an excellent museum and would have been worth at least a full day.

Then we rode for at least an hour to Springfield where we visited the facilities of one of Wellington's top caterers, Ruth Pretty. In addition to her cooking school and store, she has her home here. We were welcomed with tea and then observed one of the chefs preparing pizza in an outdoor, wood-burning oven. The pizza had cracker like crust and was covered with caramelized onions, two kinds of french cheese, and spinach. It was quite good and served with wine.

Then we toured the grounds and cooking shop until it was time for lunch, served in Ruth's dining room. We had salmon, lamb chops, and spiced ginger log with cinnamon cream accompanied with vanilla bean ice cream.

It seemed that most of our special events involved food and wine.

11/28. Napier, New Zealand.

This is a very pleasant town. We saw a lot of the area as we toured. The tour first took us to the 1,300' top of Te Mata Peak where we viewed the surrounding country and the Tuki Tuki River. The final part of the road to the top was quite narrow; so narrow, in fact, that they allowed nervous passengers to leave the bus and wait at the side of the road. Before we reached the road, the bus paused and the driver called a motorcyclist who preceded us up the hill to see if all was clear. In addition, the road was closed while we were going up and again when we were descending.

There are many topological features that were radically changed by a large earthquake in the 1930s. The courses of rivers changed; areas of swamp were uplifted and became dry land. In the towns most stone buildings collapsed while wooden structures survived. Many of the wooden buildings that survived were destroyed in the post-quake fire. When the town was rebuilt the power and phone line were placed underground - in the 1930s! The town is now a treasure of art deco buildings since it was rebuilt in that era.

Our next stop was Mission Winery, New Zealand's oldest. At one time this was a Marist school educating priests and monks. Apparently they started making wine at some time. Now it is operated by a foundation. Our group sat at tables that once were in the dining room. The benches were pews from the chapel. We tasted four wines, a Saviagon Blanc, Chardonnay, a Pinot Noir, and a desert wine - Noble Gewürztraminer. The Noble Gewürztraminer was produced from grapes that had been infected with boturitus. The

winemaker explained each pouring as we tasted it.

The next winery was Moana Park. This is a small winery that prides itself on being vegetarian and organic. For example, they don't filter their wine through carbon since they feel it is made from cattle bones! We tasted a Saviagon Blanc, a Chardonnay, a lovely, dry Rose', a Syrah, a blend of Merlot and Malbec, and a delicious Tawny Port. It's a shame that their wines are not available in the US. We could have shipped some however the cost was prohibitive.

About an hour before the ship was to leave a small dixieland band showed up on the pier along with a bunch of antique cars. They serenaded us until we left.

11/30. Torrance, New Zealand.

We passed by a small volcano on our way to Torrance. Whakaari/White Island is an active andosite stratovolcano, situated 30 mi from the east coast of the North Island of New Zealand, in the Bay of Plenty. The island is roughly circular, about 1.2 mi in diameter, and rises to a height of 1,053 ft above sea level. However this is only the peak of a much larger submarine mountain, which rises up to 5,249 ft above the sea floor.

The full Maori name for the island is 'Te Pia o Whakaari', meaning 'The Dramatic Volcano.' It was named 'White Island' by Captain Cook on October 1, 1769 because it always appeared to be in a cloud of white steam. Although Cook went close to the island he failed to notice that it was a volcano. Its official name is Whakaari/White Island although it is most well-known as

White Island.

We did a highlights tour of Torrance which included a visit to The Elms. The city was founded by a group of missionaries. The house was built in 1847 by Archdeacon Brown and is furnished as it would have been when his family occupied it.

We also visited Mills Reef Winery. The wine was not remarkable.

12/1. Auckland, New Zealand.

This was the last turn-around where we're not leaving the ship. We have developed a real feeling of superiority as people pack up and go off to the airport while we have a leisurely day of touring. In 20 days we too will be toting our carry-on luggage off and exposing ourselves to the evils of air travel, or travail.

But that wasn't today. The in-transit passengers could avail themselves of a paid tour, Waitomo Glowworm Grotto and Pioneer Show. Since the pioneer show included a dancing pig I wasn't too enthused about this trip. It turned out to be pretty good.

It started with a long bus ride through the beautiful NZ countryside finally arriving at the Glowworm Grotto. The grotto is actually a typical limestone cave with stalactites and stalagmites. There were very well paved paths with regular steps with handrails. The feature of the cave, of course, was the glowworms. These are larva which live in the dark on the cave ceiling. They live on bugs that they can lure with their bioluminescence. They emit a continuous glow and at the same time exude

sticky tendrils which hang down. When a bug flies into the tendril they consume the tendril, and the bug. Eventually they pupate and become flies which mate and die, since they have no mouths with which to feed. They might also fly into the sticky tendril in which case they become food for their former neighbors.

Part of the visit includes a boat trip along the underground river in the dark. This reveals the worms in all their glory. They look like the stars on a dark, clear night in the desert. The view was spectacular.

After the cave we drove to the Woodlyn park where we had a finger-food lunch and enjoyed a pioneer show. Although it seemed corny it was really enjoyable and did describe a bit of what the early European settlers did when they arrived. Woodlyn park is operated by Billy Black who is also the performer, along with his animals, in the pioneer show. They perform on a rustic stage which is open to the outside in back. The animals are all kept in pens which are controlled by Billy's "computer." This is actually a set of ropes hanging on one side of the stage which, when pulled, open gates which releases the selected animal. Billy refers to this as "downloading." When the sheep were coming down the hill they were rather slow which he explained as being because there was only one ram.

Many of the fields in NZ are lined with very high, solid wind-breaks composed of trees. These are trimmed square at the top and vertical along the sides so that they resemble a stone wall. Driving between them is like driving down a long hall with no sightseeing. We did see many Kiwi fruit farms. The vines are grown on trellises that

are several feet high, allowing the harvesters to walk underneath to collect the fruit.

Most of the urban roads in NZ use traffic circles rather than intersections. Since the flow of traffic through a circle quickly collapses in high traffic conditions, many of the circles have now been equipped with stop lights.

12/2. Bay of Islands.

Our last stop in NZ was at Russell. There are no port facilities so we were at anchor. When we awoke the day seemed sunny but became overcast and cool. We toured a Kauri forest and visited the oldest wooden house and stone store in NZ. When we returned to the landing, through a screw-up in tender operation we spent 1 3/4 hours standing on the pier in the cold.

Dale's birthday celebration began when I Made delivered a chilled bottle of Dom Perignon Champagne accompanied by a dozen chocolate-dipped strawberries. These were sent by Chris and Beth.

That evening we had a reserved table for 8 in the Compass Rose. Attending were Virginia and Frank Martin, Abby and John Lummis, Melody and Dave Herman. The whole dining room staff sang when they presented the chocolate mouse cake.

12/5. Fiji.

I've gotten a bit lax on keeping this up to date. We had two glorious sea days before reaching Fiji. This allowed catching up on some photo work and also to get the Christmas cards under control.

Our first stop in Fiji was Nandi or Lautoka. We had signed up for a snorkeling trip however it was changed so that we would have been spending 5 1/2 hours sitting on a beach and snorkeling from the beach so we dropped out. Instead we had a leisurely breakfast and then took the shuttle into town. Since this was Sunday most stores were closed. The shuttle was provided by Jack's store, which was open, so we shopped there.

When the ship arrived at the wharf it was greeted by the police marching band. Before we left a group of local dancers performed on the pool deck. They finished shortly before we sailed. The police band put on another impressive performance as the ship departed. (I hate to use the term "sailed" since the ship uses diesel engines, not sails.)

On our first Monday, 12/6 we moved to Suva where we had booked a tour. About an hour's drive through the lush countryside brought us to Pacific Harbor where we shopped for a bit and then watched a performance which included fire (hot stone) walking and a more elaborate performance by the same group we saw on the ship last night.

Jodie had some Fijian money left so she asked to be dropped off at the shuttle stop in town. This led to an interesting adventure. Not finding anything at the large, expensive store at the shuttle stop, she ventured forth. First discovery, crossing the street is difficult, even with a green light. Midway into the excursion a native approached her and displayed an ID card identifying him as a City Council Tourist Policeman. He warned her about buying from street vendors because they weren't safe and large stores

because they were foreign owned. He encouraged buying from natives and volunteered to assist her. After checking his credentials with a uniformed policeman, she allowed him to escort her to two stores where she succeeded in spending her money. He volunteered to walk her back to the ship, which was close by, but she opted for the shuttle bus. The question is, who paid him, the city or the stores?

There was a second Monday, 12/6. We observed the crossing of the International Date Line. One of our fellow guests celebrated her birthday in the Prime 7 restaurant that night, although her birthday wasn't until the 12<sup>th</sup>. (I guess she felt two Dec. 6's equaled one Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>.)

12/7. Samoa.

We took a tour called Gardens and Shopping, and that's what it was. We first visited a local market and then visited the several acre yard of a woman. It was filled with tropical plants nicely scattered about the grassy area. Volcanic rock underlaid all of this and occasionally poked up through. Although most of the plants were purely decorative there were also some that bore fruit, such as breadfruit, avocado, cashew, papaya, and coconut.

For a bit of entertainment before touring the yard we watched a young man climb a coconut tree and throw down some nuts. Another husked the coconuts while a third scraped the meat out of the nut.

In typical Samoan fashion, the grave of the woman's husband was in one corner of the yard. It also contained their daughter who died at the age of 2.

We also snacked on some of the produce from the trees.

After this visit we did some more shopping before returning to the ship. Jodie continued shopping at the vendor tents set up on the wharf while I returned to the cabin. A violent squall broke out almost as soon as I got inside. Jodie stayed somewhat dry since she was under a tent.

One thing that I noticed while driving around that was quite different than every other location we have been on this voyage; there were almost no TV antennas and no satellite dishes. I guess Samoa is either too small or too poor for anyone to direct a satellite footprint here. Speaking of satellite footprints, we have been without ESPN for several days. This has been blamed on satellite coverage. Unfortunately this same lack of coverage did not affect Fox News.

12/8. At sea.

12/12. This was our last sea day on our way to Hawaii. During this time Jodie wrapped the Christmas presents that needed to be mailed in Honolulu and we stuffed them into flat rate USPS boxes she brought along. We also completed stuffing and stamping our Christmas cards that we wanted to mail in Honolulu. We also caught up on our photo processing and attended a few lectures.

Unfortunately, the sea between Samoa and Hawaii seemed devoid of satellite coverage. Phone calls were spotty. The only TV was Murdoch's Fascist news channel. No newspapers were available. For a few days we were cut off from any factual and honest accounting of what was going on in the world. That wasn't quite true. The Internet

worked so we could get Goggle News.

12-14. Hawaii

The ship arrived in Honolulu bright and early and moored in the shadow of the famed Aloha Tower. This once soaring landmark is now dwarfed by the high rise buildings that populate downtown Honolulu. Our goal here was not to tour or sightsee. We needed to mail. Through the search capabilities of the Internet we were able to first locate the post offices in downtown and second print directions from our mooring to the post office.

After a leisurely breakfast in the Compass Rose we packed 7 flat rate boxes and 50 Christmas cards in our large rolling duffel bag and small rolling carry-on and set off on our mission. We reached the post office in less than 15 minutes and found a long line of people mostly carrying flat rate boxes to mail. There were also vast piles of flat rate boxes available for customers. This was quite a contrast to the Hawthorne, CA post office where one must beg for flat rate boxes. It is as if they must pay for them out of their pay check.

Even though there were only four windows open the line moved quickly and we completed our mission, leaving us with the remainder of the day free. The downtown post office is across the street from Iolani Palace so we wandered over and sat under a banyan tree for a brief rest. After a few pictures we left and photographed a statue of King Kamama across the street. Then we returned to the ship for a celebratory Bloody Mary in the Navigator Lounge.

After lunch we shopped the area around

Aloha Tower without buying anything. One interesting thing; there is a place where tropical fish flock right next to the sidewalk. They are there because there are fish food dispensers there where for 25¢ you can buy a handful. There are also a flock of tiny doves thronging the area hoping for some food.

There was a special event this evening for all passengers, a visit to the *USS Missouri* Battleship which is now a floating museum. Although most of the ship was closed we could wander the decks freely and, more importantly, view the famous location of the Japanese surrender in WWII. This area appeared to be much smaller than it looked in the famous photographs. We were also plied with generous amounts of wine and some snacks.

We spent the next day in Hilo. Although reputed to be the wettest place in the World we had fairly nice weather. As we were approaching the island we had clear views of Mona Kea with its snow-capped peak and astronomical observatories. We also had a brief view of a partial rainbow.

Our tour first went to a Mauna Loa macadamia nut processing facility which also had a store. We spent 30 minutes shopping then set off for Kilauea volcano. The crater has been venting sulphurous gases for some time, producing what the locals call "vog." or volcanic fog. The winds were favorable for our visit and were blowing the fumes away from the Thomas A. Jaggar Museum which was located next to the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory. We took many photos and shopped the museum store.

Our next stop was at some steam vents.

These were located in what appeared to be a large, shallow bowl on the rim of the crater. I suspect the bowl collects rain which filters down through the porous rock to the hot rock lower down, only to re-emerge as hot water vapor.

The final adventure of the day was a stroll through the Thurston Lava Tube. There was a somewhat long hike and stairway through the rain forest to reach the entrance of the tube. The stroll through the tube was facilitated by electric lights.

The ship departed on time for the 4½ day voyage to Frisco.

12/16. At Sea.

Jodie set a goal of packing one suitcase a day during our crossing to San Fran.

The night after we left Hawaii the ship suddenly blossomed forth in Christmas decorations. We have had a red Christmas stocking on our door since December 1<sup>st</sup> however now there are several lit trees and artificial garlands on most stair railings.

We received a bit of a surprise yesterday. We have been competing in the Daily Quizzes most of the time since the start of the trip but have never been awarded the prize. It is supposed to be awarded at random among those who have the most correct answers. We have had all correct many times but never won. We won for the quiz submitted the 13<sup>th</sup>. The person who is doing the quizzes was using a web site that I found so I copied the answers to that quiz directly from the web site. All the questions were devoted to physics and some were obscure.

The small, 4-page newspaper we receive each day is called USA Times, published by Headland SatNews. The little snippets of news are usually quite out of date and frequently out of sequence. For example, someone's death may be reported before their sickness.

12/17. At Sea.

Some personnel difficulties lead to the break-up of our 8+ person Trivia team several days ago. Since that time we have reformed into a 4-person team. Two days ago we reached a new low, getting only 4 points. In contrast, however, we won yesterday!

12/18. At Sea.

We won again today with the help of one of the transient entertainer couples. This was the final day to win prizes and to turn in your award points for gee-gaws at the store.

The final GAP event was this evening. We all gathered in the Seven Seas Show Lounge at 6:30 for cocktails. As a bit of a surprise, a brief DVD of the trip had been produced and was shown. It was surprisingly emotional. We have made many nice friends with both fellow passengers and crew.

An even bigger surprise awaited us when we went to our exclusive dinner in La Veranda. This was a fixed menu and was quite special. During the course of the meal copies of the DVD were handed out. On the cover was a copy of the watercolor map of the voyage painted by Jodie. She made it originally as a birthday card for one of the passengers who asked Reception to make a copy of it. When Jodie found out she

provided reception with a larger original. In addition to the cover on the DVD they also made a much larger copy on heavy stock with a farewell message and crediting Jodie for the painting. It was a delightful surprise.

12/19. San Francisco.

Our final day on the ship was mostly spent at sea. We were scheduled to pass under the Golden Gate bridge around 1:30 PM or so. The final Trivia game, for no points, was at 11. We didn't win however a team who hadn't ever won did win so our loss was ok.

We ate lunch earlier than usual so we would be free for the bridge. While we were eating the Farallon Islands came into view out of the fog and mist. Finally the call came over the public address system that the bridge was within view. We suited up, grabbed our cameras and headed for the 12 deck, forward. The rail was about 10 deep with passengers photoging away. By picking out short people we were able to get clear shots.

James Blair, the National Geographic photographer on board was at the rail giving advice. Given the fog and flat light he advised underexposing the scene. The heavy rain held off until after we passed under the bridge. There was a mass exodus from the deck.

The ship tied up at what was closest to the most unattractive terminal of the entire 103-day trip. We left almost immediately for a 2-hour tour of the lights of SF. It wasn't much of a tour.

When we returned to the ship we finished packing, had dinner, packed our carry-ons, and put the checked luggage out. We came

to the ship with 5 pieces and are going home with 6. One is mostly filled with Christmas presents. If we hadn't shipped the packages from Honolulu we would have had at least one more. Regent allows 135 pounds per person for our free Luggage Free. Our total was somewhere around 270 to 275 pounds.

12/20. Going Home

We left the ship around 8:15, found our 6 bags and turned them over to Luggage Free, and were escorted to our private car. (By taking the full 103-day voyage we got many little perks. The private car to the airport was one.) Our driver was originally from Azerbaijan. He and his family fled in great haste several years ago when the Muslims started killing Armenians. His wife is Armenian. The four of them eventually were given refuge status and allowed into the US 16 years ago. Now his kids have graduated from college and one is married to an American girl.

Since I was able to print our boarding passes on the ship yesterday we went directly to Security. We are flying first class (another perk) so we had priority access. The screening wasn't too bad and we made our way to the American Airlines Admirals' Club. The magic of the American Express card got us in.

An hour late we took off in the rain for LAX. We arrived in the rain after a 58 minute flight. I called Chris as we were taxiing to the gate. Since we had no luggage we were at the curb when he arrived.

We found a gigantic stack of mail waiting for us.

12/22.

Our luggage arrived two days after we left San Francisco. Our duffel bag was damaged beyond repair. In addition, one zipper on the hanging bag was damaged but it may be repairable.

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#### Miscellaneous Conclusions or Comments on the trip.

Cell phones are everywhere, except in Samoa. I think that cell phones invaded before the wired infrastructure could be completed. Cell phones are even in extensive use by the crew on the ship.

Home satellite dishes are also everywhere, except in Samoa. Even neighborhoods described as “poor” seem to be liberally sprinkled with dishes.

We saw very little wildlife on the trip.

Shipboard entertainment could be compared to an advanced form of Karaoke. Although there was an excellent 8 piece band for accompaniment most visiting performers brought some sort of recorded soundtrack with which the band played. The on-board singers and dancers performed shows to recordings of both musical instruments and singing, usually augmented by the band.

China is going to eat our lunch, even our breakfast and dinner too. There is massive development going on. The port for Beijing has just been dredged up out of the ocean by a massive number of dredges. As we drove in Beijing we saw planned cities springing up from empty fields. This included high-

rise apartment buildings, shopping areas, and factories. Perhaps indicative of China’s export-only philosophy, one very active factory we saw was turning out large numbers of shipping containers.

Both Australia and New Zealand seem much better off than the United States. Their economies seem quite vigorous, perhaps because both export raw material to China. New Zealand has zero liability in auto accidents and does not allow personal injury law suits. It also has 6 month visas for needed agricultural workers.

We were not aware of any muggings or petty crime committed against any passengers on the trip.

#### Helpful (?) Hints.

Many countries required us to present a government-issued photo ID to return to the ship. Since the ship kept our passports to facilitate immigration clearance into countries we usually did not carry our passports. We carried an expired drivers’ license which worked quite well.

#### Advice for travel in the Orient:

- wear shoes that are easy to slip on and off for temple visits
- bring a cool, long sleeved shirt
- bring cool pants that at least cover the knees
- bring a cool, sun-shade hat with built-in sweat band
- bring a good, compact umbrella