

To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #1- Singapore Arrival, 31 Mar 2019

Hi Everyone,

Thought I'd try to get a jump on this vacation & start telling you all about it while I relax on our first day at sea!!! I know you are probably tired of hearing from me – if so, just let me know & I'll take you off the list. Otherwise, let's get started with our new adventure!





We finished up our 2018-19 Mesa Season with a Ph 4/5/6 Farewell dance at Greenfield Village. George shared the cueing with Bill Goss. Great to get to work with Bill & Carol! The dance was great fun. Folks brought snacks to share both during the dance & afterwards, we had a party. Sure love working in Mesa!!



We flew out of Phoenix on Friday evening – 1st stop was LAX. Have to relate what happened there in LAX. We landed in the United Airline terminal - #7. First thing we discovered was that our flight on EVA air to Taipei was not from that Terminal. The only flights listed on any board, in any terminal are the ones for THAT terminal. The app for EVA air does not specify a terminal. George tried everything he could think of to look up what terminal, but finally we gave up &

found a United clerk that looked friendly. She was & she not only figured out which terminal, but gave us directions to walk to the Bradley terminal to catch our flight. It was only about a half hour jog (literally) and a bit more than 2 miles! She said we would have to walk past terminals 6,5,4 & then find the Bradley International Terminal. She mentioned that when we found it, we'd feel like we were at a "party." When we finally got there, we realized why – it is really high tech with lots of Wall Street type techno stuff on all the walls. What it didn't have was a board that went past midnight with the gates of outgoing flights! After waiting a half hour & no update to the board, we finally just started walking around until we found our gate. Really really crazy. Sure feel sorry for anyone that is not mobile! Anyway, once we got to the gate, it was not a problem – friendly staff & we were soon on board & settled for our 14.5 hour flight to Taipei! Then a 2 hour layover & on another 4.5 hour flight to Singapore. Other than long long long & boring, it was not a problem. The pilot told us a thunderstorm right over the Singapore airport delayed our landing for about 10 minutes, but not a problem for us – not even much in the way of bumps! When we taxied into our arrival gate, we realized our Crowne Plaza Hotel was essentially at our arrival point. Very very handy! Right through immigration & into the hotel rolling our baggage! We arrived about noon on Sunday, 31 Mar 2019.



Our room at the Crowne Plaza was really cool. From the bedroom, there were sliding doors into a huge bathroom. The back wall was solid glass looking over at the new Jewel Terminal with a glass passenger walkway to get there.



After getting a little situated & showered to wake up a little, we got in touch with John & Kay (they had arrived about a half hour after we did) & headed out to do some exploring. I was really intrigued with the glass walkway over to the glass domed building we could see from our room. Found out that we were missing it! The grand opening for the Jewel Terminal of Changi Airport will be April 17th!!!! Phooey. It is to be a 280 shop terminal with a fancy departure lounge

with sky walkways over an indoor garden. Should be spectacular! But not available to us. That night we watched a hundred folks or so cross the walkway to get a private sneak preview. So jealous! Anyway, we continued exploring this marvelous hotel & went outside to see the outdoor pool & the huge spa area with running corridors of water everywhere. Along with views of the water through the ceilings from the floor below. We realized somehow we had managed to get into another wing of the hotel & could see where we needed to be, but had a hard time getting there! Oh well – we needed to walk after all those hours sitting on the plane.



We also discovered that there were 2 floors of public areas in Terminal 3. Went exploring in the basement & found a shopping mall/food court with probably 35 – 40 individual food stores selling everything from Chinese to Indian to Malaysian to lots that we had absolutely no idea what it was. We found a nice sit down Thai place that served dishes we recognized & ordered Curry Chicken & Rice, but ours was baked with cheese on top. Yummy & only about \$8 US.

Compared to the Hotel's buffet for \$68 per person, we were quite happy! Ran into Jerry & Frances outside the restaurant. They arrived fine yesterday & had already been out exploring with their daughter Paula. We ran back up to our room with John & Kay and after having some wine & relating our individual flight stories, we decided to call it an early night!



The next morning we stepped into the hallway & looked down to find ourselves looking at another couple. Really funny, they had a mirror on the wall at the end of the hall – rather disconcerting, but we enjoyed making jokes about the other couple that was always leaving when we were! On downstairs to the breakfast buffet. It was lovely! One side was western – ready made eggs to order, bacon, beans, tomatoes, pancakes, French toast, hash browns, pan fried potatoes, etc and the other side was Asian – most totally unrecognizable, but did find some lovely sliced hot peppers that I had added to my omelet! Yummy! And in between were all kinds of breads, cheese, yogurts, cereal, sweet rolls, salad, & salmon! I don't think we're gonna starve here. Getting us all ready for our cruise!



Since our 1st excursion was not until 2pm, we headed out with John & Kay to do some more exploring in the public areas in the terminal. This time, we found the more expensive areas. Saw a sign that this was voted as the #1 airport in the World. Not sure who really gave it that award, but it surely is more amazing than any other airport that we've ever seen.

I'm going to cut this one off here so that I won't be worried about the size of the email for our first full day's excursion! It's coming soon!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pamspicts.shutterfly.com>

To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #2- Singapore 1st Day Excursion, 1 Apr 2019

Good Afternoon Friends & Family!

Let's continue our April post season vacation with our first beautiful Singapore City tour!





I had arranged through Tours by Locals for us to have a full day tour on Monday & a half day tour on Tuesday enroute to the Cruise ship. That would give us at least a basic overview of Singapore. By the time we made our way downstairs at 1:50pm, the rest of our group (John & Kay, Jerry & Frances & Paula) had already met up with Danny Lorenzo, our TBL guide. We wasted no time, so hopped in our big, clean, 10 pax van & headed towards downtown Singapore. Enroute, Danny introduced himself & Delhi, the driver & gave us some history of Singapore (initially and historically a port city!). First thing we would notice is that the government insists that Singapore is to be known as a city of gardens & the streets everywhere are lined with flowers & beautifully manicured greenery.

19 KOON SENG ROAD



15, 17 & 19
Koon Seng Road,
1986

Formerly known as Lorong E East Coast, this road was renamed in 1934 after Cheong Koon Seng (1880 - 1934), a prominent auctioneer, Municipal Commissioner and Justice of the Peace.

This pre-war terrace house and the other terrace houses along this stretch of the road showcase some of the best examples of Straits Eclectic architecture in the neighbourhood. Chinese influence on their architecture is evident in the 1st storey bat-shaped vents which symbolise good luck, Malay influence in the timber fretwork fascia boards and Western influence in the plasterwork featuring dentils and floral swags.



Scan the QR code or
visit www.ura.gov.sg
to find out more!





First stop was Koon Seng Road. This area is known as one of the “prettiest” areas in Singapore. It is a “peranakan” enclave in the Katong neighborhood. Peranakan is the name for the descendants of Chinese who immigrated to the Malay archipelago & married Malaysians. Many settled in this area & as they were mostly part of the elite & were traders, they & the area is quite wealthy. The homes are beautiful & very expensive – multi millions of dollars for somewhat small multi story row homes. Most are from the early 1900’s & were marked for conservation of history in the 1990’s. Danny remembers walking by one particular home & asking his father why they didn’t live in it. His Dad said it was too expensive – around \$60,000. Now it is up for sale at \$4,000,000!!!!

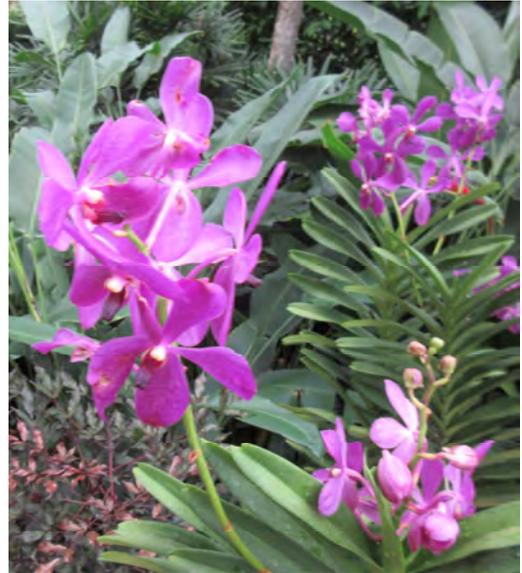


Danny took us into Rumah Kim Choo's Boutique to learn a little more about the Peranakan culture. Raymond maintains a treasure trove museum with examples of the Peranakan furniture & artwork. He designs fashion clothes for the rich. There is also a food boutique on the ground floor with fancy Chinese snacks & teas. Danny said his daughter was hoping to get a special college degree to learn dress design like Raymond.



We continued our drive into downtown Singapore – passing the famous bay area & into the new age downtown buildings. We would return here later.





Next stop was a lovely walk through the Singapore National Orchid Garden. It is on the World Heritage list. It was absolutely fabulous!! I wanted to load tons & tons of pictures from it. Everything was photogenic!



Danny had mentioned that if we wanted a really special souvenir from Singapore, this might be the place to find it! He pointed us to these one of a kind necklaces made form orchids dipped in 24K gold. The first one I picked up was called “the Dancer.” I was sold right then & there! Our saleslady was beautiful & she happily demonstrated the many ways to adjust the sliding chains. John is still smiling after their purchase!!



Just as we were heading back to the van from the Orchid Gift Shop, it started raining. Not just drizzling, but a hard deluge! We were supposed to have gone to walk around China town, but it was raining too hard. Danny & Delhi chatted & came up with a plan for us to walk indoors while we were waiting for the rain to stop! So on to walk around the Geyland Serai Wet Market. It is a Malay market selling spices & other food items. I had to look up what "wet"

market meant. It means they sell animals in the open – both dead & alive. Apparently considered an unhealthy environment – source of many diseases, etc, it has been cleaned up & it is in an indoor shopping center type area now. If it had any animals now, he didn't take us to that part, we were seeing spices, dried items (didn't ask what they were, but looked like fish!!!) & fabric stalls. So Daz – no hankerchiefs!!



Next stop was the Singapore City Gallery, housing the Urban Redevelopment Authority. It is a 3 story Visitor's Center with an enormous model replica of the entire Central City. It shows the current & also identifies many new buildings & the plans to expand. The plain brown blocks are planned new buildings. Since Singapore is basically a landlocked island, it has reclaimed land by building out into the ocean. But they have now reached their limits for that & are currently going up with taller & taller buildings and going down with some underground buildings also. According to Danny, they are very careful with checking the stability of the reclaimed land, letting it settle for years before building anything on it. There are no earthquakes here & they are in an area that is protected from severe storms or Tsunamis. Their temperature is fairly even throughout the year, but they do have a wetter season during the winter. The "to scale" model was incredible. It was really interesting to see how detailed the buildings are. He was pointing out to us that you can easily see the difference between apartment buildings built for private purchase and those built by the government for general housing. The private ones have balconies! The Government built do not! Another interesting thing is that you do not purchase land here. When you buy a house, even a single family home, you get a hundred year lease on it. Generally it will be torn down & a new building built when the lease is up. If you have enough money (multi millions), you can purchase a 1000 year lease so that you can protect the home for generations to come. All of the famous bay area is reclaimed land & most of the bay is surrounded by the "Singapore River" which is fresh water. A dam protects it from the open Ocean. They built in a management system to protect from flooding, so they can release water into the ocean if there is too much rain.

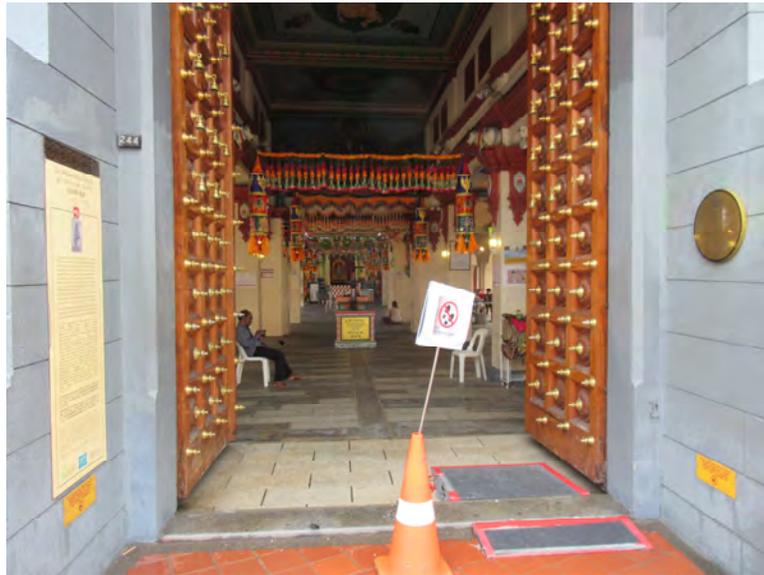




Since it stopped raining while we were admiring the city model, we walked across the street to China Town, to see the Hawkers food stands. We were hoping to have some of the famous Hainanese chicken rice at Tian Tian where Anthony Bordain ate while in Singapore, but it was closed. Danny said once they had sold their day's supply, they just closed up. If they had been open, we might not have been able to have any, because the line is usually an hour or more wait!



We continued our walk around Chinatown & stopped for a photo shoot in front of the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple & Museum. The museum was built in 2007 & gets its name from what the Buddhists regard as the left canine tooth of Buddha, which has been recovered from his funeral pyre in Kushinagar, India and displayed on the temple's grounds. We didn't go inside, just continued on our walk.

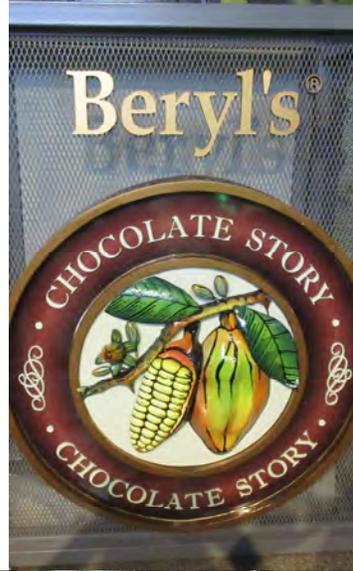


We passed by one of the only places we remember from our cruise excursion here 8 years ago – the Sri Mariamman Temple was founded in 1827, making it the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore. Again, we didn't try to go inside, just continued on our walk.



We passed under the Chinatown gate, looked like every other gate into China town that we've seen the world over! Walking through market after market, we snapped pictures of all sorts of unusual items. I thought this unusual version of Crock shoes was just too cute! No, I didn't buy any! We finally sat down for a few minutes for some nourishment – these Korean potstickers were yummy. Thought they would be quick, but ended up making us miss the first of the light

shows. Didn't phase Danny at all, he said, let's skip the scheduled boat ride – we'll do it tomorrow & we'll add in the biggest Night Market in Singapore & we still have to hit the Arab Quarter. Off we went for some more walking!



The night market was a hopping place. Didn't have time to stop at the Good Luck Beer House, but we probably got good luck just from walking past it! Danny took us by the Selfie Coffee store which was closed unfortunately. Apparently

when you order the coffee, they take a picture of you with a cell phone that is hooked to the coffee maker & the foam generates a picture of you on the top of the cup!!!! Too funny. So sorry we missed that! Took a picture of the Chocolate shop because it reminded all of us of our good friend Beryl.



Last stop for the walking tour was the Arab Quarter. Man – we are happy we got to see it at night. It was marvelous! The mini Taj Mahal was quite interesting. It was lovely to see it at night.



The drive back across town was beautiful. Lots more cars on the road than we had seen during the day. Danny was explaining to us that most of the daytime workers waited until about 7pm to leave because of the toll roads. Apparently the tolls vary by time of day & amount of traffic. Rush hour is the most expensive – sometimes up to \$50 for one trip! Amazing! Certainly wouldn't want to drive here.





The last stop of the evening was the Garden by the Bay light show. There are 18 towers here – they are basically water catchment towers, but the city has transformed them into an amazing artistic theatrical event. They played fabulous music (almost all music that we dance to! Like the Gumper!) & the lights danced & sparkled in synchronized choreographed beauty. We were thrilled. It was just beautiful. Like a fireworks show on steroids! It was a perfect way to end an unbelievable day!!! We were all totally worn out, but in the best possible way. Danny left us to take a bus back home & Delhi delivered us back to the hotel. John & Connie were waiting for us when we got there & we shared some wine & our travel stories while we anticipated tomorrow's adventures!

Stay tuned & we'll be back soon!

Pamela & George

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pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Sunday, April 28, 2019 10:30 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #3 Singapore 2nd Day Excursion & to the Constellation, 2 Apr 2019

Hi Everyone,

Can't wait to continue on with this adventure! Singapore was really really interesting. So let's get to it!





After another lovely breakfast for most of us at the hotel's Breakfast Buffet, (something went awry on John & Connie's reservation & they ended up with a lousy expensive breakfast in the airport Terminal!!!) we piled our luggage together for later pickup & delivery to the cruise ship and we hopped into our van. First stop was Mt Faber, at 344', it is one of the highest mountains in Singapore and has a Cable Car system that connects the Harbor front & the island of Sentosa. One of the oldest National Parks in Singapore, it was formerly known as Telok Blangah Hill (Malay for Cooking Pot Bay – referring to the shape of the Bay?). The name was changed to Faber in honor of the Chief of Engineers who designed the road to the top of it.





The city views were marvelous. The vegetation covering the lower hillside is considered a “secondary” rainforest. Meaning 1) secondary - it is recovering from having been harmed significantly (by logging or when they built the road & cable car system?) and 2) rainforest – it has a diversity of life besides trees from being in a hot, humid area with lots of rain. From our point of view floating above, it was very dense & dark dark green!! Didn’t see any wildlife & couldn’t distinguish any birds.



At the halfway point, you could get off & connect with another cable car system to go to Sentosa – an island resort (formerly a British military base & Japanese prisoner of war camp) that includes a Universal Studio, a casino, & multiple high end resort hotels. Flying above the amusement areas, we could see & hear happy people & even dolphins

(hopefully they were happy too!). Danny had been very specific that we “no get off” until we saw him waving at us. We were just doing a round trip!



We saw indication of continued expansion – they are reclaiming (if it is ocean & you are filling it in with dirt to make land – how is it “reclaiming?”) of the resort area. They say on a clear day you can see Indonesia – it was a bit hazy for us, but

we could see a dark area on the horizon. Before we returned to our van, we all made a pit stop at the “Toilets with a View!!”





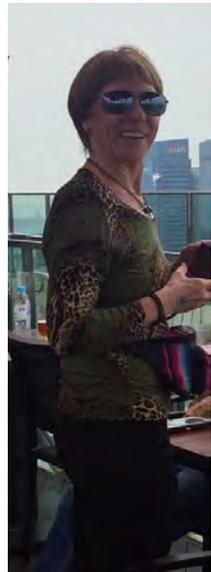
Next stop was a scenic Harbor cruise from Clarke Quay. Connie (always the adventurous one!) went out on the front for her pictures. The young man watched her like a hawk – afraid she’d fall overboard? The back of the shirt said “Cruising since 1987.” He was not BORN in 1987!!! The recorded narrative pointed out the statute of the boys jumping in the river for a swim. This time I missed getting a photo of the Merlion – symbol of Singapore. Singapore is known as the “lion city” as legend has it that a long ago Prince spotted a lion on the island. The legend continues that the lion was half lion & half dragon or sea creature. Thus the half lion/half mermaid of the symbol. The statute itself is quite significant & was been moved at great expense by the city back in the early 2000’s. I somehow missed it altogether this time, so downloaded this cool picture with the Marina Bay Sands Hotel in the back ground.



Normally a 40 minute round trip, Danny had arranged for us to only do 30 minutes. It was relaxing & beautiful.



We did this same boat ride back in Apr 2010 when we were cruising from Bangkok to Bejiing. At that time, the Marina Bay Sands Hotel was under construction, it officially opened a couple of months after our visit. Since then it has been on multiple TV shows & recently in the movie Crazy Rich Asians. I've anticipated seeing it for a long time now! The lotus shaped building is an Museum.



The complex is said to be the most costly stand alone casino in the world – it cost 8 billion, including the property. It is owned by The Sands in Las Vegas. The resort, designed by Moshe Safdie, includes a 2,561-room hotel, a 1,300,000 sq ft convention-exhibition centre, the 800,000 sq ft The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands mall, a museum, two large theatres,

"celebrity chef" restaurants, two floating Crystal Pavilions, art-science exhibits, and the world's largest atrium casino with 500 tables and 1,600 slot machines. The complex is topped by a 1,120 ft Sky Park with a capacity of 3,900 people and a 490 ft infinity swimming pool, set on top of the world's largest public cantilevered platform, which overhangs the north tower by 220 ft. The 20-hectare resort was designed by Moshe Safdie architects. We were whisked up the elevator to enjoy the view while drinking the most expensive cocktail we've ever purchased – a Singapore sling for \$20 ea (including tax!! Ha!!!). It was worth it. If you are gonna hang with the rich & famous, you have to pay the piper. Or something like that! Also snapped a shot of the 2 indoor green houses we are heading to see next!



After finishing up our gold encrusted cocktails (Ha!), Danny snuck us into the pool area which is supposed to be for guests only. This pool was one of the first infinity pools in the world and is probably the highest & longest. What an incredible pool view, huh?



Our last stop before heading to the cruise ship was the Gardens by the Bay. This is the same place we came last night for the light show. We were originally scheduled for a 30 minute Trishaw ride, but Danny & I decided to do a tour of the 2 indoor exhibitions here instead. Great decision. This place was amazing. It will be our number one suggestion for anyone visiting Singapore.

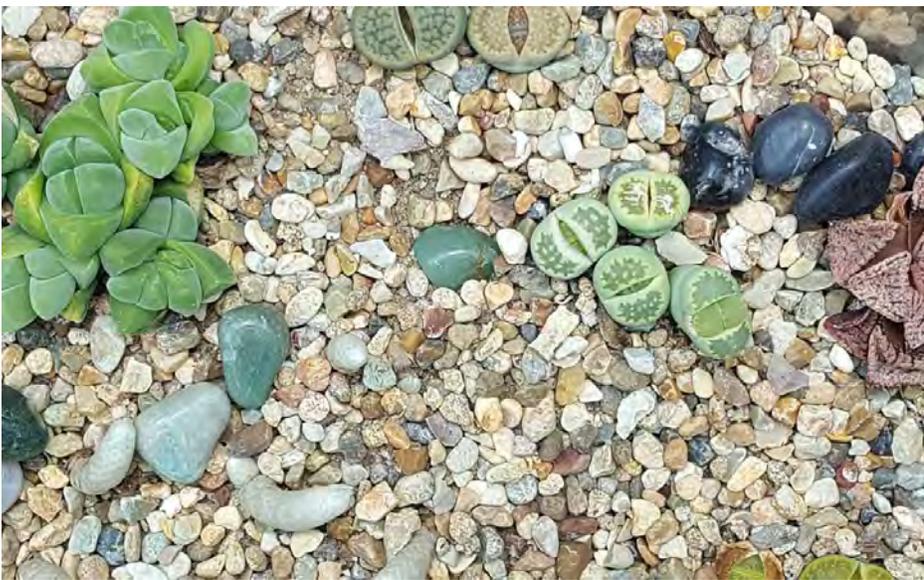


Just walking in the entrance is mind blowing. That's Danny, our Tours by Locals guide giving us suggestions on what to see.





Gardens by the Bay is a 250 acre park on reclaimed land. It is a part of the city's plan to become a "city in a Garden." There are 2 indoor exhibits. The first is Flower Dome, which is the world's largest glass greenhouse. The first picture is a huge mushroom with little gnomes under & around it. Too cute!



Besides all the amazing flowers – ranging from more types of cactus than I’ve ever even seen in Arizona, to every blooming flower imaginable, to huge trees of every species in the world (even African Baobabs!!!!), there were also HUGE sculptures of dragons & horses, & monkeys & everything else you could think of! It is 125’ high, 3 acres & multi

floors with stairs & sloping ramps. It has 7 different gardens, an olive grove, & an area with seasonal flowers. George even found an exhibit of living stones (Lithops) – a succulent from Southern Africa that looks like a stone to avoid being eaten!!!!

Whodathunkit?



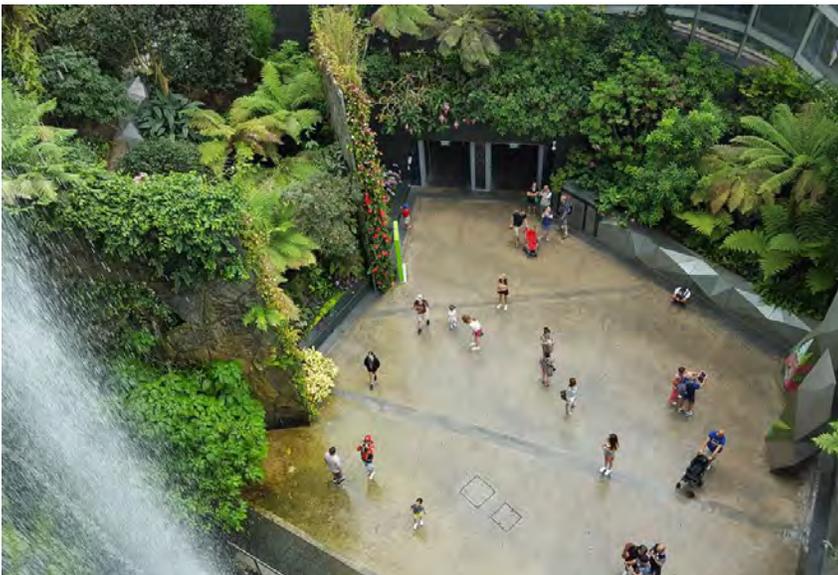


Just some more pictures! Wow Oh Wow! We realized we only had another half hour & hadn't gone to the other area! Started moving a bit quicker! We could easily have spent a half a day here.



Then on to the Cloud Forest. It is a smaller (only 2 acres!! What???), but taller greenhouse with plants from the higher elevations. It's main feature is a 138' "Cloud Mountain" to ascend via elevator (yep that's people way up there!!!) &

then slowly meander down with views through the 115' waterfall! The artistic arrangement is just incredible. The Inca scene was under construction, but couldn't resist a shot of the llamas!



We were having to put on more speed. Changed the estimation to needing a full day here! And we only had an hour!

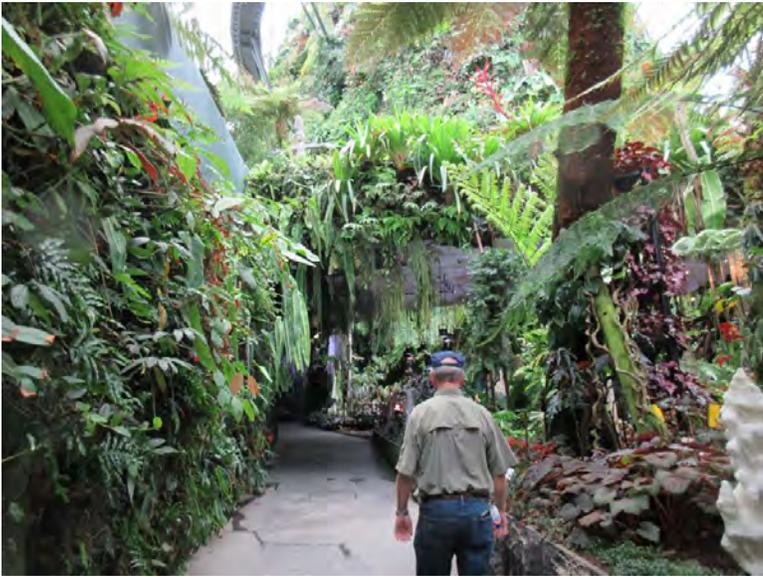


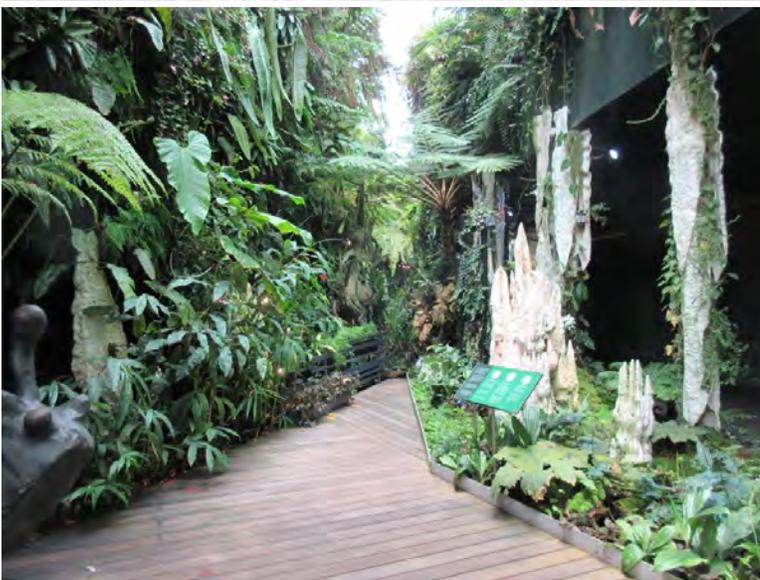
As we descended, we were sometimes going outside around the “mountain” and sometimes under a sheath of flowers on the inside. Spotted John & Connie along the outside edge. Just to give you an idea of size & height!



We could see lots of birds on the outside of the greenhouse – some trying to get in. These appear to be the Blue Tailed Bee Eaters. I'm sure it was confusing to see all that lovely green stuff & hear the water, but be stuck on the other side. Always easily amused, George pointed out that we could get a selfie from the ceiling!







Towards the end, we were practically running to get back to our meeting point on time. Ran through a dark theater & down halls & around corners. It deserved more! But we had already added an extra hour to our day's excursion, so it was time to head to the ship!



We were only 5 minutes away from the port terminal & Danny had coordinated for our luggage to arrive as we did. Even though our paperwork had suggested it could be a rather strenuous check in, it ended up being one of the shortest/easiest/most uneventful we've ever experienced. From drop off & goodbyes to Danny about 2:30pm, we were on board having our first toast about 3pm!! Amazing. And that was after seeing that most of our luggage was already in our cabins!!!



We made a swing by the dining room to confirm our table, 2nd floor early seating – set for 9 of us and then to our cabins to unpack. We all had Concierge class cabins on the back of the ship – so extra big balconies. Best we've ever had. They are even mostly covered. Awesome!



Lived through the life boat muster drill (too many of us packed into the Rendezvous Lounge downstairs) and then realized we were late for dinner!! Enjoyed our first meal & finished it off with my first yummy dessert – Crème Brûlée! Our first evening's entertainment was Phil Butler, a British comedian. He definitely kept us amused. We were pleased to hear that there will be a different entertainment every evening. Our last cruise doubled up on some & that was

boring! Finished up the day sitting on our balcony & watching Singapore fade into the distance! This is gonna be awesome!!!

Next stop is Phuket, Thailand!! Thanks for vacationing with us! Stay tuned!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

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From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Friday, May 3, 2019 9:18 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #4, Phuket, Thailand, 4 Apr 2019

Hello Everyone!

Hope this finds you all happy & healthy. Things are moving along well for us. Can't believe how fast time is going. But enough of the small talk – let's talk about Thailand!!!

15 NIGHTS
Best Of India & Sri Lanka
ONBOARD **CELEBRITY CONSTELLATION**

Day 1, Tue, Apr 2, 2019 SINGAPORE <i>Departs 8:00PM</i>	Day 2, Wed, Apr 3, 2019 AT SEA	Day 3, Thu, Apr 4, 2019 PHUKET, THAILAND <i>Tendered 7:00AM to 5:00PM</i>	Day 4, Fri, Apr 5, 2019 AT SEA	Day 5, Sat, Apr 6, 2019 AT SEA	Day 6, Sun, Apr 7, 2019 COLOMBO, SRI LANKA <i>Docked 7:00AM to 4:00PM</i>	Day 7, Mon, Apr 8, 2019 COCHIN, INDIA <i>Docked 12:00PM to 9:00PM</i>
Day 8, Tue, Apr 9, 2019 AT SEA	Day 9, Wed, Apr 10, 2019 GOA (MORMUGAO), INDIA <i>Docked 7:00AM to 5:00PM</i>	Day 10, Thu, Apr 11, 2019 MUMBAI (BOMBAY), INDIA <i>Arrival: 7:30AM</i>	Day 11, Fri, Apr 12, 2019 MUMBAI (BOMBAY), INDIA <i>Departs 6:00PM</i>	Day 12, Sat, Apr 13, 2019 AT SEA	Day 13, Sun, Apr 14, 2019 AT SEA	Day 14, Mon, Apr 15, 2019 MUSCAT, OMAN <i>Docked 7:00AM to 4:00PM</i>
Day 15, Tue, Apr 16, 2019 DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES <i>Docked 12:00PM to 10:00PM</i>	Day 16, Wed, Apr 17, 2019 ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIR. <i>Arrival: 5:00AM</i>					



First off, here's our itinerary & a map of our stops. On a previous cruise (3 years ago), we had gone from Dubai west to the Suez Canal & up into the Mediterranean to Venice. On another cruise (9 years ago), we had gone from Bangkok, Thailand east to Beijing (stopping in Singapore). This will be our first time for this part of the world.



We got to enjoy a sea day after leaving Singapore. We were delighted with that. Gave us a chance to sleep in & do basically nothing. George has a new Sci Fi series he is watching on his computer & I absolutely love piddling with the

travelogues on the computer. We paid for internet this trip, so answered some emails, did some reading, & just basically relaxed. Loved looking out the glass doors to watch our wake. It was a beautiful sunny day & smooth sailing.



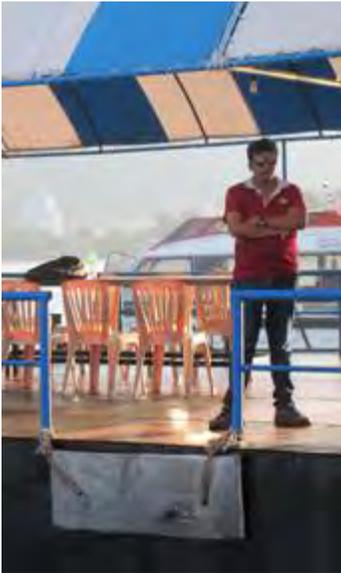
Enjoyed our meal (I was boring tonight with just a plain old chicken breast!), and found a little dancing in the Reflections Lounge. They called it Ballroom playlist & it was pretty poor actually, but we were able to do a couple of chas & a jive. There are a group of about 6 couples that seem to be sequence dancers. Haven't talked to them yet, but they seem to be together. The evening entertainment was the "Oz Boyz" from Melbourne, Australia. They sang Motown of all things. Who knew that Australia would be into Motown? And especially now? But they were young & cute & entertaining. Loved their sparkly suit coats! George needs one of them!



The next morning, we anchored in Phuket, Thailand at 7am. Phuket is a southern province of Thailand that is actually the largest island of the country and 32 smaller islands along it's coast. It is on the western coast of Thailand on the Andaman Sea. Our ship had to use tenders at Phuket, no dock big enough here. But they had it running seamlessly. We got to the theater for our meeting early & were called almost immediately. Down & straight onto the tenders. We sat up front so we could get some airflow & look out the side door.



It was only about a 15 minute cruise to the Phuket small dock.



We tied up alongside & made our way to the main street where the guides were all lined up waiting for us. There were tons of colorful little Fishing boats anchored along the beach. I had read 3 different guide books about Phuket City & all 3 had mentioned that the city has become too congested with tourists & covered with “drunken louts.”



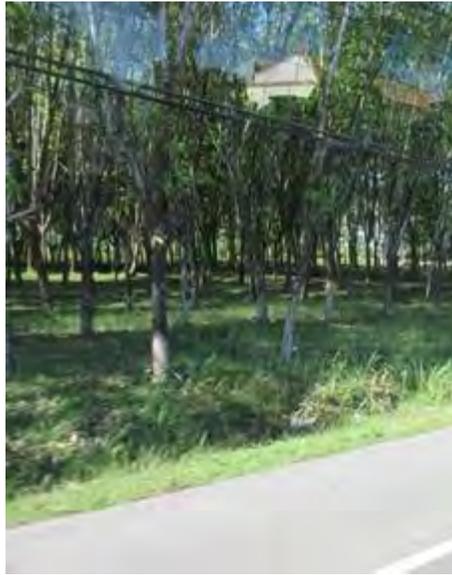
We followed our guide single file down the bustling sidewalk along the beach to get to our bus. Our heads were on swivels (looking for “drunken louts!!) as we tried to take in everything at one time! Although there were overflowing trash cans everywhere and some really putrid smells (rotting fish? Sewer?), the water was a bright glistening blue, the sky was another shade of vivid blue, the sand was glistening white & the trees were a gorgeous backdrop with rolling hills across the water in the distance. This is one of the many coastal areas in Thailand that was devastated from the huge Tsunami in Dec 2004. 250 people (including some Westerners) were killed along these beaches. Nothing remains to even tell the tale now.



After boarding our bus, we set off across the island to the western shore & then turned north. Looking at the map, we started in Phuket, crossed west, almost straight across to Patong Beach & then North. We crossed a bridge right at the tip of the island, then a little Northeast to the cave temple & on down to the coast for our boat ride (description coming!). We would have about a 2 ½ hour bus ride to our destination of Phang Nga Bay across a bridge to the mainland of Phang Nga Province. Phuket is said to have many of Thailand's most beautiful beaches, but there are claims that rampant tourism is destroying many of them. It still looked beautiful to us.



As we traveled in & out of the small towns, we noticed lots of differences to remind us that we were not in the US! Saw lots of motorcycles like this one loaded down with a Mom & her 3 kids. And the electrical wiring was unbelievable!!!



We passed lots of tree plantations. Many different kinds – some looked like nuts of some sort – Cashews?, and palm trees & tons of small trunked trees that our guide said were Rubber Trees. Rubber (actually latex) is still one of the number one money makers for Thailand. After a little over an hour of driving, we stopped at a HUGE service station for a rest stop. Big clean toilettes with a mix of western porcelain toilettes & Asian porcelain “bomb dumps.” The lady waiting in front of me gave up her place in line to me for the “bomb dump.” She said she was “scared” of it???? I used many of them in Korea years ago, so don’t quite understand being “scared” of them. Can understand not wanting to squat, but so far that’s okay for me! Maybe she was scared she’d loose her balance? I guess that could be a real issue!



Next stop was Wat Suwan Khuha – a Temple Cave. It is a limestone cave with a stunning 50' long golden reclining Buddha. When the Buddha is lying down in this posture, he is representing the end of life. He has reached the end of the cycle of reincarnation & is ready for Nirvana.





There were lots of other smaller statues. It is supposedly quite an important cave temple, but couldn't find any specific information about it, other than touristy stuff.



There were stairs going up into the darkness & we couldn't resist. The steps were a mix of rock indentions, real metal steps, & just crumbles of slippery limestone. I slipped once, dropped my sunglasses & then stepped on them. Way to go Pam! But no harm, glasses were just a little bent up. Now fixed – almost as good as new! Connie saw bats, but we didn't see them. Nothing much to see at the top, but now if anyone asks, we've been there done that! And without permanent damage!



Our guide had told us to beware of the monkey population going into the temple and we had seen a couple along with a sign that said “do not feed the monkeys.” But then as we left the grounds, we came upon an area that had a sign that said “Please Feed the Monkeys!!” And you could buy bananas & other fruit to give them. We didn’t participate, but lots of other folks were there. Now, I wonder, do the monkeys recognize that they are supposed to be fed here, but not at the entrance to the Temple??????? Hummm???



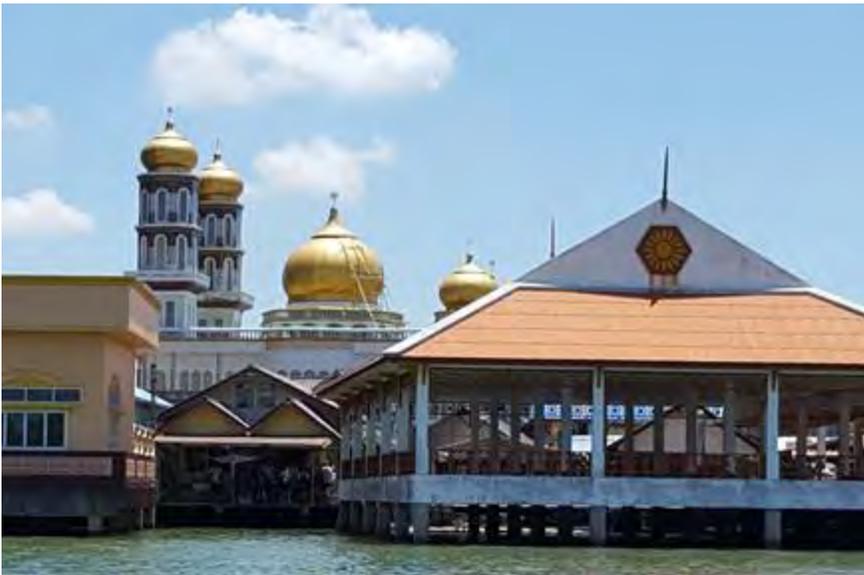
Just a short few minutes drive later, we were at a pretty sad looking dock & they were loading ALL of US on one small boat!! Somehow we had managed to be last in line & were crammed into the last row! Sure glad that John & Connie have small derrieres!



It was really really hot and humid & they also insisted we wear the life vests on our seats. At least they were clean & when he started moving, he stirred up a breeze that felt marvelous.



As we enjoyed the breeze & the scenery, we got over our discomfort on the boat! It was a beautiful boat ride. We were cruising in the Ao Phang Nga Marine National Park. This is a huge protected area between Phang Nga Province coastline & Phuket Island. It is dotted with these greenery covered Limestone islets with gorgeous water that varies in color from bluish to lime green. It is very clear when you look down into it.



Soon we passed by this little village on a small island. Not much explanation, we'll explain more later – first we just cruised by.





Soon we started circling one particular group of islands & noticed there was a lot of activity around. Apparently this is a famous cave area & they bring sea kayaks here to float through the caves. Paula had done this tour. They don't allow you to do your own paddling and there are some caves that are so low, that depending on the tide, you have to lay in the bottom of the boat to get through! Paula said she had a ball! Included the last picture not only because of the cool backdrop, but to show you the very common **long-tail boat**. They generally use a common automotive engine. This engine is invariably mounted on an inboard pole which can rotate through 180 degrees, allowing easy steering. The propeller is mounted directly on the driveshaft with no additional gearing or transmission. Usually the engine also swivels up and down to provide a "neutral gear" where the propeller does not contact the water. The driveshaft must be extended by several feet of metal rod to properly position the propeller, giving the boat its name and distinct appearance. If you are impressed with my superb "mechanical" knowledge, I won't mention that I copied & pasted Wikipedia!! As far as I'm concerned – it looks cool!

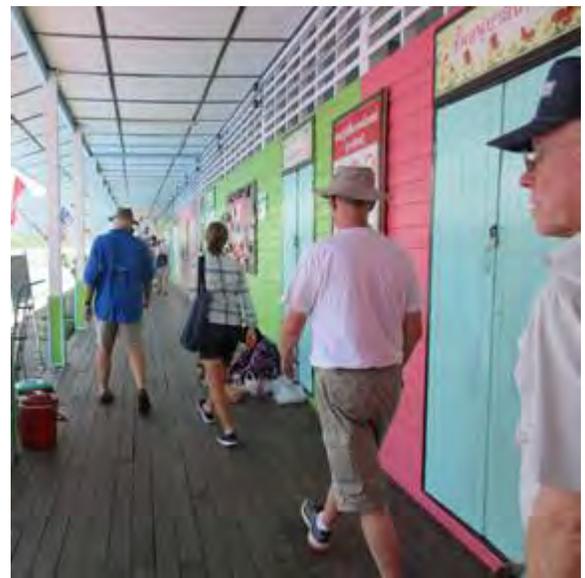


But our main goal for the boat ride was to get pictures of the “James Bond” island. The island’s real name is Koh Tapu which means nail island. The bottom of this 66’ tall limestone tower is half the size of the top, making it very recognizable. But it’s real claim to fame was a snippet in the James Bond film, Man with the Golden Gun in 1974. James

Bond (played by Roger Moore) has a shoot out with villain Scaramanga (played by Christopher Lee) on the beach with this tower in the back ground. We'll have to watch the film, because James Bond apparently flew here by sea plane showing the incredible scenery from the air!



We circled the island to allow shots from all sides. It was definitely beautiful. We didn't land & all our shots are from the boat.



Now our guide started talking about making a stop at the Muslim Fishing Village. By this time, we were all getting a little antsy. It was close to 1pm, we were supposed to have lunch served, we knew we had 2 ½ hours bus drive back to the boat & the last tender was supposed to be at 4:15pm. And we were 45 minutes away by boat! And very hot & hungry! But.....we stopped at the island we had all noticed on our way out. Took a few minutes to off load (actually had a man that could not get on/off the boat with out being physically lifted & was using a walker!) and then our guide led us on a frenzied fast walk through the little village.



He did some talking, but unless you were lucky enough to be up in front next to him, you heard nothing! I have since Googled to find out that Koh Panyi village was established in the 18th century by 2 Muslim fishermen from Malay. Now, it has a population of 360 with it's own school, a handmade floating football field & a mosque. It's mostly notable

because it is built on stilts. Some areas were well maintained & others were piled high with stinky trash. We did see some evidence that some folks still fish.



There are tons of little market stalls varying from tourist trinkets to fairly spendy jewelry. But we were not on a shopping tour apparently, we were never given any time to stop – it was a half hour walk/jog along the tiny aisles & back onto the boat. Very very strange.



Back on the boat, dripping sweat, most of us refused to put on our life jackets. The ride back was very pretty & uneventful. Turns out our buffet lunch was at a nice hotel/restaurant on the dock & we ate a quick meal of rice, tempura prawns & veges with fruit for desert (even managed to find cold beer!!).



We were warned that the ride back would be faster & NO STOPS! We were a little concerned about the beer we had guzzled for lunch, but apparently we had sweated enough that we were all dehydrated anyway. Between a snooze or

two, I would snap a few pictures of the scenery & the street life. We made it back at 5:30 pm – an hour & 15 minutes late for the “last tender.” But we were on a Celebrity tour & they had held the boat for us & the one bus that was behind us! We ran on board & straight to the dining room to let them know we wouldn’t be able to make our 6pm dinner seating, but they had pity on us & gave us until 7pm! Yea! A quick shower (never felt sooooooo good) and life was great again.



The evening entertainment was spectacular – Jocka & Maria did acrobatics both on stage & aerial. They were awesome! So completed a lovely day in Thailand! See – that Muslim Fishing village experience is basically gone from memory!

Now 2 days at sea & next stop is Colombo, Sri Lanka! Another totally new experience! Don't go away!

Sending love & good wishes!

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pampicts.shutterfly.com>

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Saturday, May 11, 2019 11:27 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #5 - Colombo, Sri Lanka, 7 Apr 2019

Hi Friends & Family,

This vacation has been amazing. So many new & different places. Here we go!

First comment is that I started working on this travelogue on Saturday, 20 Apr, just after we got back. On Sunday morning, we started hearing the horrid news about the terrorist attacks in Colombo & the other places in Sri Lanka. Awful! So sad & also scary that we were just there 2 weeks ago. Our hearts go out to them. Haven't heard from our guide, but sent him a note of sympathy & encouragement. On with the report of our visit.





After our long hectic day in Thailand, we were happy to have 2 days at sea. The first one was totally relaxing – with beautiful blue skies & seas. After a great slow moving day, we all met to watch a movie out on the big screen on deck – “Green Book”. It is an excellent movie based on the true story of Don Shirley, a black musician that hired an Italian Mafia styled bouncer to be his body guard on a tour of the Deep South. Unfortunately, a squall blew over & we were rained out. George had the movie on his computer, so we went to our cabin & finished it up on a “little” screen.



Enjoyed another day at sea! Had already established a routine for Sea Days – ordered breakfast in the room about 8:30am, coffee & cereal or toast; lunch with John & Connie and John & Kay at our favorite table in the buffet at noon;

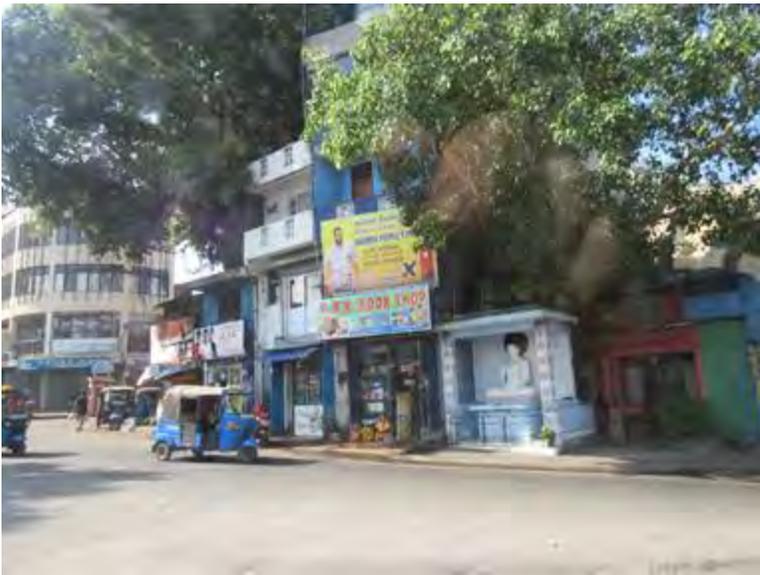
pidled away the afternoon in the cabin on the computer (George watching movies/sci phi on his); dinner at 6pm. The chef stopped by to chat & talk up this special excursion in Goa (we're already signed up!).



We always enjoy the ships entertainment at 7:30pm. This evening was Anna Fegi, an International Vocalist from the Philippines. She was excellent & the best song of the evening was when our Cruise Director Paul Vaya joined her. He's really good! We look forward to hearing more from him. We usually head back to our cabin about 10ish. The others have found their own daytime activities. That is what is great about a cruise – you can find your own routine & get together as you like!



We docked in Colombo, both the largest city & the capital of Sri Lanka about 6:30am. View wasn't much from our balcony – could be just about any port in the world! But gonna be a beautiful day – clear & hot, temps expected to be in the 90's with high humidity!



Only 7 of us were signed up for a Tours by Locals excursion (John & Kay were on a Celebrity tour). We had heard from him via What's App as soon as we got up. His name was Ruwan & he met us just outside the ship in a 14 pax van. We had scheduled a 6 hour tour. The ship was scheduled to leave at 4pm with a 3:30pm all aboard. We told him we

wanted to be back NLT 3pm. He sat in the back with us so we could all hear him easily. He gave us some initial facts & history about Sri Lanka – Colombo has a population of just less than 1 million. And that Sri Lanka used to be known as Ceylon. As we drove the streets of Colombo, we noticed lots of motorcycles, motorized tuk tuks & bicycle carriages too, not to mention a oxen cart or two.



First stop was the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara or Kelaniya Temple, a Buddhist temple in Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, seven miles from Colombo. Ruwan bought all of us flowers (lotus blossoms of course!) to place on shrine inside the temple. This particular temple is believed to have been hallowed by the Lord Buddha himself 8 years after his enlightenment – that would be 500 BC. Pretty darn old, huh?



Well okay. No shoes allowed inside a Buddhist temple. Socks are fine, as are bare feet. Now strangely enough, the area around this temple is sand!! Yep in socks & bare feet!

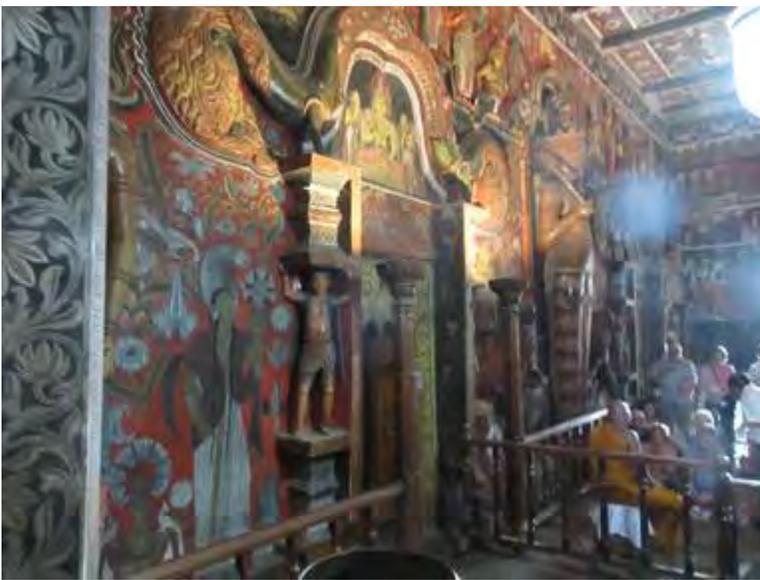


Ruwan tried explaining some of the Buddhist temple requirements. I got them a bit mixed up, but I think that there are 4 major requirements for a temple – first to have a temple structure (place of worship), then to have a Bodhi tree (type of fig tree under which Buddha achieved enlightenment), a stupa (bell shaped structure that contains a holy relic or a

written scripture) and a statue or sculpture of Buddha. This particular temple had all 4 of them, so it was a temple of the highest order. Apparently there are some that only have a couple of the requirements & they are not as holy. Don't quote me on this – I tried googling it, but it gets way too confusing! Regardless, it was very interesting & we enjoyed walking around the compound. As to the tree, there is one particular tree in India that is considered to be the actual tree where he gained enlightenment. Pieces of this tree have been delivered all over the world & planted inside temple compounds. This tree is supposed to be from the original one.



Inside the temple, the walls were covered in beautiful gold decorations & murals.



It was really really hot inside the temple, but that was soon forgotten as we were impressed with how ornate it was. Many of the murals were painted by someone famous in the Buddhist world & adds to the appeal of this particular

temple. The murals mostly depict scenes from the life of Buddha – much like the murals of scenes from the life of Christ in a Christian church. There was a Buddhist monk giving a talk (sermon?) in one room as we passed through.



Back outside, we walked around the Stupa to see the alter to the relic that is inside (it is forbidden for anyone other than the monks to actually go inside the Stupa) & we went to look at some of the other important statues. These 18' statues represent "buddha's" to come? I think it means that sometime in the future another Buddha is expected? Or something like that.



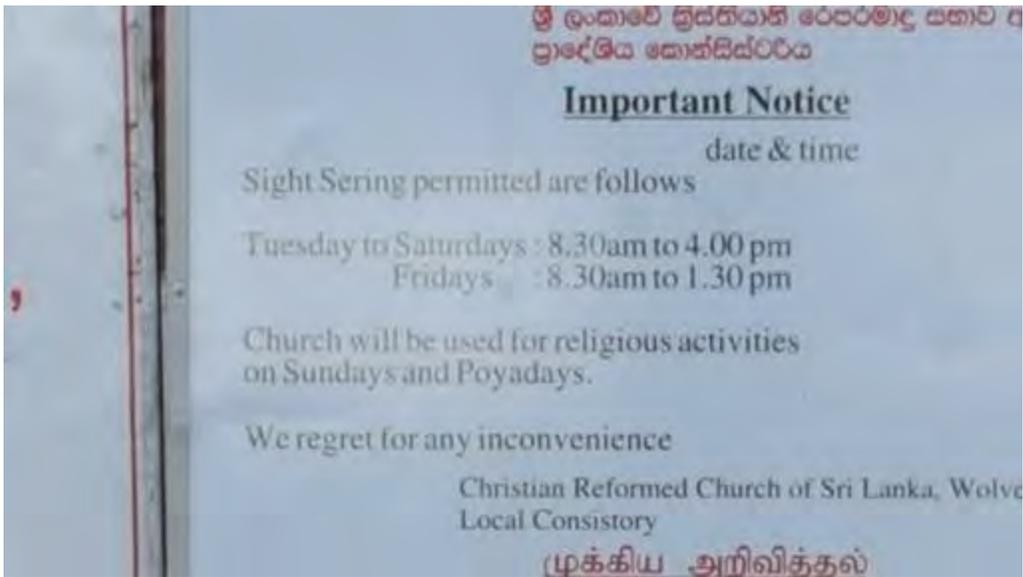
Back in the van, we circled around the grounds, passing several “free range” cows in the park, to the official entrance to the Temple. Although much more impressive (we must have used the back door!!), he said we hadn’t used it because it was much hotter - & yes it was. Sun was beating down from that direction!! And the fountain was not running either.



Short drive through town to our next stop. It was surprisingly clean. I was under the obviously mistaken presumption that much of the Orient was trashy. Either things have changed, or I was just talking to the wrong people!! As we traveled from place to place, Ruwan kept on with his speil about the history & traditions of Sri Lanka. Like much of this part of Asia & the Orient, besides the native population, the Portuguese, British, & Dutch fought for control over the abundant spices here.



We stopped for a few minutes to see the Wolvendaal Church, a Christian Reformed Church built by the Dutch in 1757. Since it was Sunday, there was a service going on, so we couldn't go inside. I downloaded a picture of the huge pulpit inside from Wikipedia, as well as a picture of the building without the car in front of it! According to the description on the picture, it was just posted in March of this year. I believe that since even the peeling paint looks the same. The area was called Wolvendaal because the Dutch Navy mistook the local jackals for wolves.



George got a picture of the notice posted at the front door of the church & we thought there was a misspelling of holidays to “poyadays.” But turns out that Poya is a monthly Buddhist holiday – happens on Lunar full moons. There was a sign on the fence outside the wall warning against desecration of an antique structure. I got tickled because the sign itself looks antique!! ***I checked & this was not one of the churches that was attacked.***

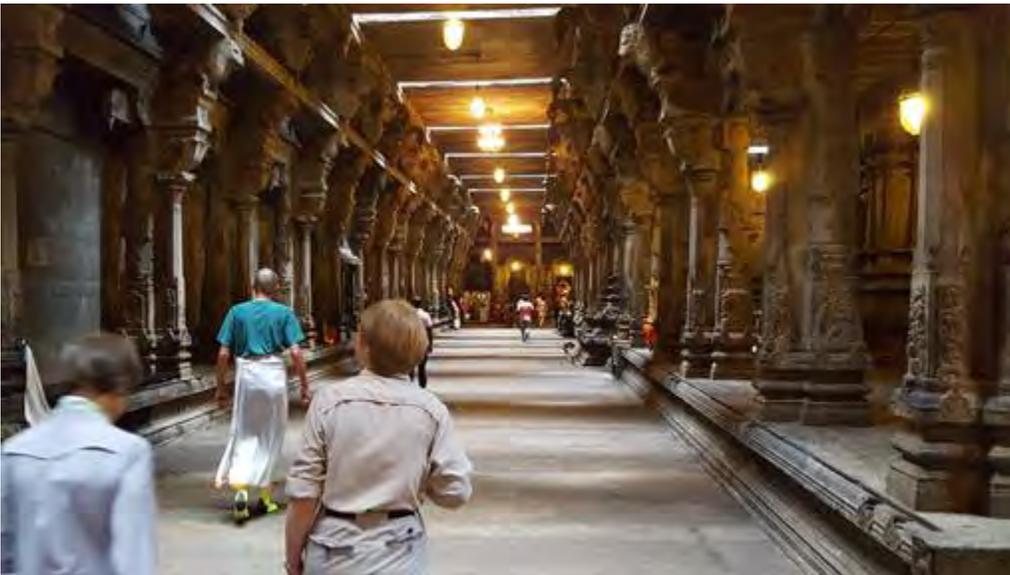


Then a quick stop to see the Jami Ul Alfar Mosque. It was built in 1908 & was recently enlarged to increase capacity to 10,000!!!! Before things were built up around it, the sailors used it as a landmark when approaching the port of Colombo. It's best known for it's crazy bright color.



While waiting for our van to get back to us, we took a short walk along the street & did a little window shopping while trying to avoid being knocked into the street by the busy masses of people! Seemed to be quite an affluent neighborhood, fancy clothes & really gorgeous necklaces adorned the shops. Kept seeing strange things hanging over

the doorways – like what appeared to be a kabab of green beans & stuffed olives over the shop name, “Richi Rich!!” Best I can understand, they are in some way a good luck charm. Really?



Onward to our next stop – Shri Ponnambalawaneswaram Kovil, a Hindu temple built around the mid 1800’s. Once again John became the best dressed of our bunch! He’s just a dandy isn’t he?



This place was enormous. I couldn't really find out much about it on line – just another historic temple!!



There were gorgeous murals painted on the walls & gold (brass?) candlabras & oil lamps everywhere. Several monks (workmen???) were busily polishing everything.



On the grounds of the temple, there was the quintessential “Bo” tree & various altars. There were also several bulls – Ruwan said they are taken care of by the monks.



There was a wedding going on outside the entrance. The colors were beautiful! Shame that John was not asked to participate, he was wearing the correct colors!!! I personally think that Indians are just beautiful people – love that black hair & beautiful skin – and they just have gorgeous features!

And all of this was before lunch!!! We still had another stop to make before lunch, so I’m going to break this epistle up into 2 parts. I’ve included so many pictures, it is too big to work on! Stay tuned & I’ll be back shortly with the rest of our day in Colombo!!

Love ya,

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)
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From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Sunday, May 12, 2019 7:53 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #6 - Colombo Continued, 7 Apr 2019

Hi Guys,

Wasting no time, let's continue with our day in Colombo!



With our heads on swivels, we continued the drive into the newer downtown area. The architecture is so diverse – a incredible blend of old & new, colonial & new age. The clock tower was originally a lighthouse, but this is another city that has reclaimed land next to the ocean & it's no longer in position to be a lighthouse! Then views of the two new 39 story World Trade Center Towers claimed the view in front of us. A Stupa sits proudly in the midst of the sky scrapers.



Soon our focus centered on this 1150' tower – affectionately known as the Colombo Lotus Tower. It was built by EXIM Bank of the People's Republic of China. Like in the US, China is sort of purchasing it's way throughout Asia. Anyway, this

tower will be for antennas & tourism. The base of the building will consist of a museum & shopping facilities. It's silhouette is expected to be an immediately recognizable symbol of Colombo (skyline photo was downloaded from the internet!) The lotus flower top is representative of purity & flourishing development. It is scheduled to open later this summer.



We drove past the beautiful glistening white Town Hall of Colombo. It not only houses all the municipal offices of the Town Council, but also the Public Library. The building was started 1924, officially opening in 1928.



Ruwan decided we could stop & jump out of the van to get some pictures, & when he did, we noticed a commotion in front of us & he walked us down there to see SNAKE CHARMERS!!!! Holy crap!!! They were for real! One of the men started blowing his flute, lifting the lid off a basket & one King Cobra lifted up it's head & started dancing & swaying to the music. When he realized we were watching, he started opening up the other baskets & soon there was a whole chorus of them! Scary scary scary! Glad you weren't there to see this Sue!!! When he put down the flute & went to pick up the enormous boa constrictor, the other guy was scrambling to keep the snakes from slithering down in the cracks in the curb. We tossed him a couple of dollars (he was definitely wanting more money, but Ruwan said NO!) and high tailed it back in the van!!! I totally forgot to take another picture of the building! Thank goodness George had gotten a couple from inside the van!

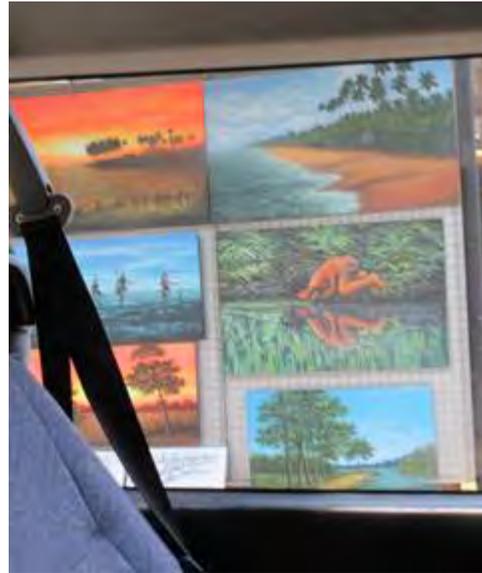
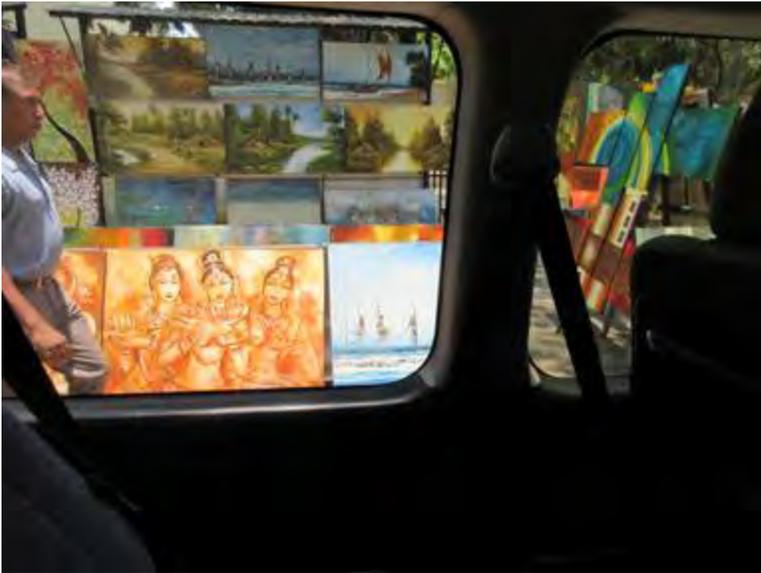


Around the block, we parked to get out & walk around inside the Independence Memorial Hall. It was completed in 1953 to commemorate Sri Lanka's independence from British Rule in 1948. The statue in front is the country's first Prime Minister, Rt. Honorable Don Stephen Senanayake, "The Father of the Nation" – Sri Lanka's George Washington! |

tried to get the Sri Lanka flag stretched out behind him, but it wouldn't cooperate. Not only was it an impressive structure, it was very cool & nice under the stone roof.



We made a quick stop to get a picture of the huge performing arts theatre – Nelum Pokuna Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre, named after a former president. The theater opened in 2011 & has 2 main theatres – one is an open air venue. It has a total of 14,000 square meters of floor area & has 1288 seats! Interestingly enough, the People's Republic of China paid for most of it! It was built in the shape of an 8 petaled lotus flower (well of course it was!!). A park surrounds it. The sign at the bottom of the buddhist statute says “ Please do not sit on the flower offering table, Please be calmly & quietly, No smoking Please. Thank you” And another Stupa!



We did a drive by of a display of street art. There was almost an entire block of it. One thing in particular he wanted to show us were the paintings of the Fishermen on Stilts. George had seen it on National Geographic, but the rest of us hadn't ever seen it. I Googled it & got this picture. Apparently most of them just do it now for the tourist, but several families used to fish this way when it was too dangerous to go out in their boats. Apparently the tsunami in 2004 decimated most of the beach fishing, so they make money on tips from the tourists when they display their abilities!



Finally it was time to sit down & relax a little while over lunch. The restaurant was gorgeous with this life size animated elephant (his ears waved!). It was a buffet & even though we didn't recognize most of the dishes, we tried many of

them & enjoyed a lot of it – lots of fish dishes that I didn't try! The back counter had several types of flat breads – some flavored & some plain. They were freshly made & really good. They had a really thin crepe that they pan fried to make it curl into a bowl & then put a fried egg in it. Didn't try it, but it looked good. I didn't get a picture of the dessert table, but it had probably 20 different desserts – most totally foreign to us, but tried a couple any way – not too sweet, with lots of cinnamon & other spices. Here's a link to the restaurant & a bunch of pictures if you are interested. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g293962-d793129-Reviews-Raja_Bojun-Colombo_Western_Province.html#photos;aggregationId=101&albumId=101&filter=7&ff=361551638





Our last stop of the day was the Ganagarama Buddhist temple. This one is probably the most well known & most visited temple in Colombo. Ganga, the young elephant is maintained by the temple staff (there is controversy about this, as he is chained & has no area to walk or be social!). There is a fee to enter this temple – we paid \$4 US to enter. It is HUGE! It is also an eclectic mix of Sri Lankan, Thai, Indian, and Chinese. Not only does it have all the usual trappings of a Buddha idol (this one of pure Jade), a temple, Stupa, & a Bodhi tree, it also contains a museum, an orphanage, several educational halls, a 3 story college for Monks, & an “alms” hall.



The alms hall probably got the most attention from us. It is actually a collection of millions & millions of items that have been donated to the temple – everything from shelves & shelves of watches, to statues & knik knaks, to several Rolls Royces (not to mention hundreds of regular cars!!!) Mind blowing. We barely scratched the surface of things that were there – it just goes on & on.



There was gold everywhere. Assume it was real? There is a massive structure that Ruwan explained was a reproduction of a temple in Thailand. There was a separate temple outside, built on Beira lake, but we didn't see it – got this picture off the internet.



Our last stop before the cruise ship was to be the Gaile Face Green – now brown due to the dry season & heat. This is the beach front play ground. They were setting up tents for the upcoming Easter celebrations. We didn't get out of the van – it was just too hot! It was close to 100 degrees & very humid!!



The drive back to the ship just emphasized the dichotomy of this city – amazing state of the art sky scrapers, the famous Shangrila Hotel, the beautiful old Parliament Building, high rise apartment buildings and bridges



....and then low cost housing next to the train tracks, some with laundry drying on the balcony. I think this last might have been the Sri Lankan Navy quarters!



Cruising away from Colombo was lovely. As the pilot boat left us, it was still a bit hazy – humidity? pollution?, then as we got further out, it was clear & beautiful with the Lotus Tower easy to recognize. And then it was gone. Goodbye Colombo.



Dinner was lovely as usual & we finally got one of of specialty after dinner liquors that we love – a Brain hemorrhage.



Then on to the theater for a fantastic Elton John mimic. He was excellent. Funny, if you had asked me, I would never have said he was one of my favorite performers, but I (and most everyone else in the audience) could sing along with the majority of his songs – Your Song & Candle in the Wind being a couple of favorites! The Celebrity band backed him up & they were excellent. Several of the performers pointed out that they generally only had one 45 minute practice session with the band a couple of hours before the evening shows! Wow!

Okay – so that’s the end of Colombo, Sri Lanka! Next stop is India!!! Hold on tight & don’t give up on me! I’ll get there soon!

Love ya,

Pamela & George

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Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pamspicts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Friday, May 17, 2019 11:25 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #7 - Kochi, Mon, 8 Apr 2019

Good Evening Everyone!

Hope things are going well for you all. We are doing well & enjoying reviewing our great time on this cruise! So let's move along! Time to get to India – the real focus of the cruise!



When I first stuck my head out, I noticed the humidity was soooo high that it was foggy out! This place is worse than Texas!!! It even looked like the ship's flag was hidden in a cloud! Our cruise buddies were out getting their first glimpse of India too!!



There was a pretty small channel that we had to negotiate to get us into the Kochi harbor. We could see the new Downtown part of the city in the distance. So for a little background – India is divided into 29 states & 7 territories. Our first stop is in the state of Kerala. It is the 22nd largest state by area & the 13th largest by population - 33,387,677 inhabitants as per the 2011 Census. Kochi is known as the commercial, financial & industrial capital of Kerala and the district of Ernakulam. It is also almost in the center of the coastline of the Laccadive Sea and has 2 main rivers that flow through it to the sea.



Today our group is all just taking a Cruise line sponsored bus tour. Streets looked really busy – regular cars, buses, motorcycles, tuk tuks, bicycles, pedestrians, you name it, they were all there. So the last Census published in 2011 showed a population of 600,000. Our guide, who had the recognizable sing song Indian accent said the population was probably closer to a million. This city is also known as Cochin, Spice Town & Queen of the Arabian Sea. Christopher Columbus was originally headed here when he overshot by a few miles due to the wind & landed at Calicut where there's a marker of his landing in 1498. It was known for trading Pepper!!! Supposed still smells of pepper, but we didn't ever notice that.



Bus dropped us off in the Fort Cochin area to walk a small crowded side street to Greenix Cultural Art Centre. Just walking along this street was an adventure – huge amounts of traffic in all shapes & sizes. And of course there are

always the cruise passengers that wander in the middle of the street, in the way & oblivious! How do you like the name? Pretty funny, huh? There were lots of rooms on both sides of the long hall we were ushered quickly along, didn't see inside them – saw a few signs saying museum, displays, etc. Read on line that this place even has yoga & dance classes.



So now we're basically shoved into a small room with a stage at the front. Tons of folding chairs crammed together with practically no space inbetween the rows. It was dark too. We were lucky enough to see a couple of seats on the 3rd row, so we grabbed them. It was very hot & stuffy in the room & I believe they mushed 3 bus loads of cruise passengers into the overcrowded room!! Then the show started. It was a form of dance called Kathakali. The older gentleman in the back of the 3rd picture was alone on stage at first. He played a variety of percussion type instruments. Then the first "dancer" came out. For the first 5 minutes it was very interesting & entertaining. Simplistic explanation is that hand signs & facial muscle expressions are used to tell a story. Even the colors of the makeup are important. According to what I read on line, there are 24 main hand signs & 9 standard facial expressions. It was really cool watching how the first guy (at first we all thought it was a woman!) showed emotions like anger, confusion, love, excitement, etc. Very easy to recognize what they meant. Like I said, for the first five minutes! Then he went on to show all the letters of the alphabet (really???). Then the other guy & the drummer came out & they started telling a story. It went on & on & on. There was a voice narrating, but sometimes you couldn't understand. Felt like we were in this hot cramped dark space with a thousand people for hours! Actually I have read on line that sometimes these plays went on for DAYS! DAYS! We only had to deal with it for a bit over an hour. The final scene was a fight where the man (green

painted face) killed the “woman” and cut off her breasts! Yep! Lovely story, huh? Anyway, we were all (Paula said she liked it – the whole thing) mentally begging for him to get a move on & finish her off! Enough of that – let us out of here!



Mix of walking & bus through the city to our next stop. Tickled at the goats along the streets & the tangle of wires to window air conditioners. Churches everywhere – Christian, Muslim, Buddhist!



Next stop was historic St Francis CSI Church. Inside was not impressive AT ALL! Main significance is that it was built in 1503 & as such is the oldest European church in India – imagine the struggles it has seen! Vasco de Gama died here in Kochi on his 3rd visit in 1524. He was originally buried here, but his remains were removed to Lisbon 14 years after his death. One of the interesting aspects was looking at all the different languages listed on the signs.



From the church, we walked over to the shore for what I considered the most interesting part of the excursion! We had heard of the “Chinese Fishing Nets” and we got a personal demonstration. As luck would have it, our group ended up being directly under the main contraption. You’d have to see a video to get the full experience, but the bottom line is that the net is lowered into the water by a system balanced by the strings of rocks hanging from top. This system was introduced by the Chinese in the 14th Century. There is actually a possibility that the name Kochi came from the Chinese word, Co Chin which means “like Chinese.”



The net didn't lower very deep into the water & then it immediately started back up. The birds are obviously used to this operation & were fully prepared to grab up any small offerings that came up with the net. Unfortunately for the ones we were watching, they were mightily disappointed. When the net came up, it only had one medium size fish in

it. From what I read on line, this is really common. They expect to sell this one fish to an individual along shore. Since we had come as a big group from the cruise ship, they weren't trying to sell it to us. These nets were set up in a string along the shore – mostly for viewing by the tourists. There are only 2 places in India that have this type of fishing – Kochi & Kollam.



Walking off the stationary apparatus was a little stressful too. Most of it was put together pretty haphazard & the boards were rotten. We could see another one in operation a little ways down the beach. They asked for volunteers to

operate it, but none of our group had any interest in it. We walked off while someone else from the ship was holding the ropes saying, "hey wait!!"



We continued our walk along the beach & took a look at their days' catches. Looked like they were doing pretty good! On the catching anyway – maybe not the selling.



Now we boarded a small covered sightseeing boat to cruise the harbor. It was cool & comfortable. We were loving this!



We soon started seeing lots of these birds along our route. They appear to be a type of Fish Eagle, but I can't totally confirm it. It was lovely watching them anyway.



We motored past this “abandoned” island. Apparently there is some legal issue that has caused it to become overgrown. Our guide said he remembered taking day trips there as a child to picnic & play, but now there is some controversy on ownership & use & it just sits, becoming more overgrown & wild. On the plus side, it has become a great haven for bird life!

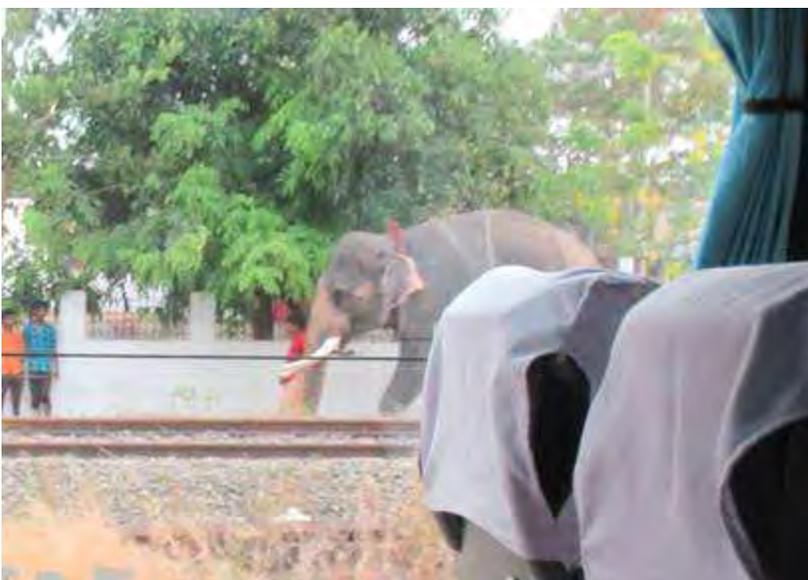


Nearest I can figure, we took off from about where the yellow star is, went up & around the tip of the peninsula, which is Fort Cochin and cut across east to about where the red star is. We passed by a man made island that they use for oil

tanker docks & then on to the coast. The Cruise ship dock was much further north where the blue star is. We could see the ship far up the channel. We saw some dolphins playing near us. Couldn't get a picture.



After a little over an hour cruise, we docked to head back to our bus. We were told that due to a Catholic service going on, the parking lot was too full for our bus to turn in & pick us up, so we had to cross a really busy street to get to our bus!! First off, we passed the open, covered building where the “catholic” service was going on & we’ve certainly never seen Catholic like that before! They were really really noisy, hollering & stamping & clapping. Very interesting religious service! Anyway, we all survived the street crossing. Figured if we crossed in mass, most of us would make it, out guide stood in the middle of the street & waved us on. Cars were honking & revving their engines – not pleased at all! Interesting!



The drive back to our ship took almost an hour. We enjoyed seeing the street life. The Indian attire varies from standard Western jeans & shirts for both men & women, to the white toga like long or short outfit for the men to the bright colored sparkling robes on the women. It was really interesting. Then just before we turned into the port, we

saw a guy leading an elephant down the street! Okay – common everyday occurrence?? He was actually a sad looking elephant, unsure what causes the pink skin?



We were supposed to have gotten back to the ship at 4:30pm, but we didn't get off the bus at the ship until 6pm! We have early dining & were very hot & sweaty, so we figured we would have to miss dinner in the main dining room & just eat in the buffet. We stopped by to have the manager let our head waiter know & he said he would let us in if we got there by 7pm. We rushed upstairs to clean up & then were excited to have our regular lovely dinner! John dressed for success with a tie & sparkly reading glasses (compliments of Kay!). Even had time for a pretty pre dinner drink and later had another special after dinner drink! Yummy!



The ship's evening entertainment was a full cast musical called Land of Make Believe. It was quite good & we were really impressed with all the special effects they were able to manufacture for the ship's theater! Made for a nice relaxing evening!



Left the port of Kochi about 9pm. Watched the coastline fade away into the darkness from our balcony. A full fun day in India! And more to come! Now looking forward to another day at sea before our final 3 days in India.

Hope you enjoyed the 1st day! Stay tuned & we'll continue with the adventures!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

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pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Sunday, May 19, 2019 6:50 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #8 - Goa, Wed, 10 Apr 2019

Hello All My Friends & Family,

Hope you are all healthy & happy & busily planning your own next adventure! In the meantime, let's go to Goa, India!!!





As I mentioned before, we had a sea day between Kochi & Goa. It was a beautiful day! Slept late & when we headed down to meet everyone for on noon lunch at the buffet, found that it had been transformed into an Italian banquet! I was most impressed with the Italian desserts! They were BEAUTIFUL!! And tasty I might add. Not that I tried all of them, but I did do some severe damage to my low sugar diet!!



The cruise ship no longer advertises “formal” nights. It was called a “Cruise Chic” night (as opposed to the regular “Cruise Casual” nights). I don’t think I have shown anything about the dining room. They had us toward the rear on the second floor by the rail. Even though my camera doesn’t show it, we usually got a beautiful view of our wake! It was quite a nice table location – we weren’t in the main path of the kitchen and enjoyed seeing over the railing! We had asked for an “Italian Flag” as our after dinner drink. Since the buffet was Italian this afternoon, we really didn’t think it would be a problem.....but the poor bartender sent us several trials. He finally gave up – he couldn’t get 3 layers. The red & green kept blending together & making a icky looking blackish color. The taste was still pretty good!



The evening entertainment was Pop Singer Andrew Derbyshire. He reached the Semi finals in Britain's got talent. Joked that he was beaten by a 90 year old lady ballroom dancer!! Too funny. But he had a lovely voice & was quite entertaining – that's all you can ask for, right? So I will now relate an funny on going story. In the theatre, there is a light that shines up from inside the small cocktail table between the seats. It is too bright & has annoyed us from day one, so we've tried several things to cover it up during the show. Well, a couple of nights ago, John & Connie got to the door of their cabin (all 4 of our cabins are on the aft of the ship, right in a row) & they didn't have their door cards to open the door. Turns out that John had put his over the light in the theater & left it there after the show!!!! We all laughed about it & gave him a hard time! Well....tonight I used my camera to cover the light & guess what? Yep, I left it there! I realized just after I got back to the cabin & ran back to the theatre, but it wasn't there. The waiter suggested I try Guest Services, so I ran down there & sure enough it had been turned in!!!! Yippee!! They made me describe it & even sign for it! But I got it back. From that night on, we used napkins to cover the light! Much safer! The last picture is of our favorite bartender in the Sunset bar, just one floor above our cabin. He was a really friendly young man, Sunny, from Bali Hi in Indonesia, entertaining & happy. He always remembered our names & knew that we lived right below the bar.



The next morning we looked out our balcony window to another beautiful hot & sunny day in India!!! We docked a little before 7am. Looked out to see John & Kay checking out the morning too. Our cruise included excursion had us off the

boat before 9am to find some dancers that looked more like Greek or Portuguese than Indian! We didn't hang around too long to watch.



The bus was set up rather strange. Driver was in a separate sealed box - safety? Our guide was very easy to understand. Our chef was with us too. This was quite an interesting excursion. The guide was there to give us info about the state of Goa & it's capital city Panjim, where we were headed. The chef was there to lead us through the marketplace & show us what he was purchasing to make us a special dinner tonight! There were only 12 of us on the tour today. There were huge crowds of people in the street as we left the port – mostly lots of men gathered together. Possibly local transportation drivers (taxis, tuk tuks, private vehicles)? Almost immediately left the city area around the port – it was about an hour's drive to Panjim.



Our sea day had taken us up the western coast of India & into the Arabian Sea. The port was on a peninsula of Northern Goa & we drove northeast about an hour to get to Panjim (also called Panaji). Goa is where not only Europeans & other world travelers come for vacation, but also the Indians themselves. It has the highest GDP of all the Indian states (one way of saying it's the richest!!) and also the lowest population density of all of India. The beaches are famous from being beautiful white sand & clean. The Portuguese influence is still very apparent. Hindu is the most common religion, but Christianity is second. The people of Goa are considered to be very easy going & open minded. Lots of priority given to food & happiness.



The road was well maintained & we easily traveled past train tracks, churches, roadside markets, & through other small towns.



I blew this picture up some to show the school kids gathered outside waving at us & being quite friendly. More churches & some really beautiful murals painted on modern buildings. Our chef chatted for a bit about the most common dishes (seafood & curry) in this part of India.



Our drive was frequently along the side of the Mondovi River. It is a large river (about 48 miles long) running into the Arabian Sea from Karnataka (the Indian state bordering Goa on the East side).



The city itself seemed pretty clean from the bus. The driver let us out on the side of the road & continued on to find parking. We followed our guide & the chef into the Panjim Market.



The market was huge – covered several blocks – and very very busy.



The first area was every kind of seafood you could imagine. Both whole fish & fish steaks. Everything seemed very fresh & there weren't many flies. That was a surprise. It was not even very smelly!



On to both meat & chicken – alive & dead!



Into an area that had spices. Everything you could possibly imagine. Some we recognized (like tumeric), some we didn't. He said there were probably 5 different peppers that were very common, ranged from sweet to fiery hot.



On to shoes & apparel. As we continued, our guide pointed out some strange produce. Said he didn't know an English name, but his Mother grew it & gave it to friends who were undergoing Chemotherapy for cancer! Said it helped with the side effects? Looked like Jack Fruit to me.



On into the produce area. It was by far the largest area. All the vegetables looked really good. Notice the sign on the far wall!





The group leader turned us loose to wander on our own for an hour. We left the market to walk along the outside street. First thing we noticed were all the motorcycles! Obviously the vehicle of choice! Wandered on down the street – saw a really nice looking liquor store & a store selling lots of different kinds of rice.

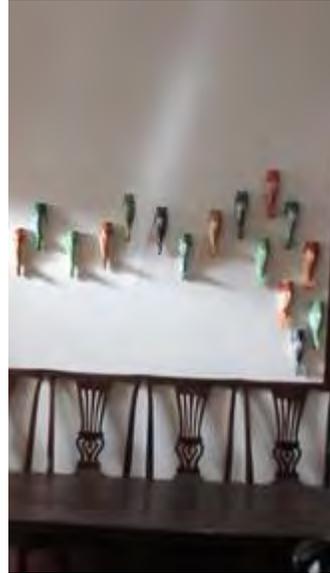


Our group meeting place was across the street. We made our way across to the waterfront. We got a better look at all the fancy floating casinos out in the river. The funny thing is that locals are not allowed to gamble there! Only tourists

are welcome! One of them is a Mississippi paddle wheel! Our guide said that he had no idea how anyone ever managed to get it all the way over here!!!



We tried to stay under the shade, but there were 2 problems – one was the birds perched on the trees were big poopers!! We actually stopped once to chat with a young tourist couple from England that fly here on vacation & the birds actually got her while we were standing under the trees! The other was that folks kept showing up trying to sell us things. We would move from spot to spot while we waited. We watched a guy fishing with nets. We couldn't see him in the water, he would apparently cast his nets under the overhang & we would just see him come out with the net onto the beach & empty his catches into a bag. He was doing pretty well! Have no idea what kind of fish it was. The other guy must have been the manager – he never helped, just stood watching with his arms crossed.





Next stop was a lovely restaurant. We had a relaxing lunch with multiple courses. I totally forgot to take any food pictures! The only pictures I got were of the colorful lobster they had on display (none of us ordered that!) & then the one little dessert square – have no idea what they were – it was sweet...maybe honey? & it was layered with a nutty flavor. According to the day's description, we were supposed to have come here for appetizers before going to the market & then have lunch in another restaurant by the water, but never made it to the other restaurant – no explanation given, but this one was good.



The drive back to the port showed us a really interesting mix of beautiful technologically amazing bridges and a herd of water buffalos in a farmers field!



Back on the ship, we watched Goa fade away into the distance. Good memories!





Part of the excursion was a tour through the kitchen while they were actively preparing dinner. Not sure how sanitary that would be considered, but we enjoyed it. It started through a door in the dining room & down escalators for 3 decks. Into another world!! Definitely a well oiled machine. Turns out that our chef from this morning's tour had returned to the ship to find that he had been given an early leave & got to head home! We had another chef to lead the way. He assured us that this morning's chef had prepared our meal before he was allowed to leave. Yea, sure!!! He showed us that the different hats & colors of neck scarves showed the levels of authority. The tall round hats were in charge. He said he thought the tall hats were originally just so that they could be seen over the other workers.



Everyone was very friendly & were saying hi & singing & seemed pleased we were there. Strange. I would have thought they would just think we were in the way!! Everything was sparkling clean & well organized. They showed us that all

the orders for each table were processed together & orders were picked up at one time. Last section was the dish washing area. It was just as clean and sparkling as the rest of the kitchen. Very interesting tour! We had never been to the ships kitchen before.



Our dinner (still a part of today's excursion) was served in one of the Specialty restaurants – Qsine. It was mostly Indian, but things were served in these interesting little towers. It was a multicourse meal & was quite tasty. Several of the dishes were the same as we had for lunch at Fisherman's Wharf. Several folks from the Restaurant/Kitchen staff came & chatted during the meal.



We had had totally different entertainment every night up to this point. Tonight was our Cruise Manager, Paul Vaya in combination with the Singer/Comedian from a few days back. I heard that the "real" entertainment had had some problem & didn't make it to the ship in time. Regardless, the entertainment was enjoyable. Especially the Cruise Manager. He is very very talented. This is the second ship we've been on that the Cruise Manager was also an entertainer. The other one had actually been raised on a cruise ship because both of his parents had been employed on board. Kinda like Carnival families, huh?



We ended our special day with drinks at our favorite bar – the Sunset bar. This time John & Connie joined us! End of a perfect day! Tomorrow will be Mumbai and we'll overnight in port there, so 2 more full days in India!! Hope you are enjoying our visit! We'll be back soon!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

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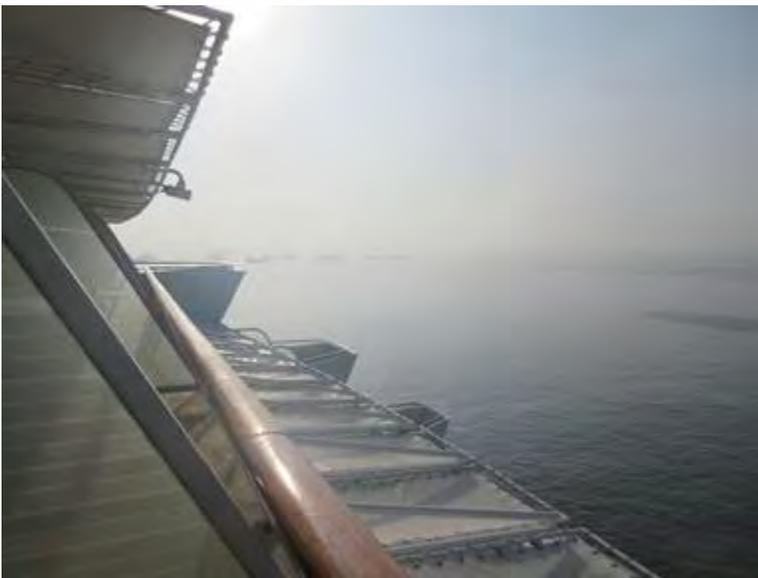
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pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2019 6:36 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #9 - Mumbai, Elephanta Island, Thur, 11 Apr 2019

Hi Guys,

Welcome to Mumbai, India. Used to be called Bombay! Let's get on with it!





Here we are! The harbor of Mumbai, India!! Docked at 7:30am. Gonna be another hot/humid day!! But clear!

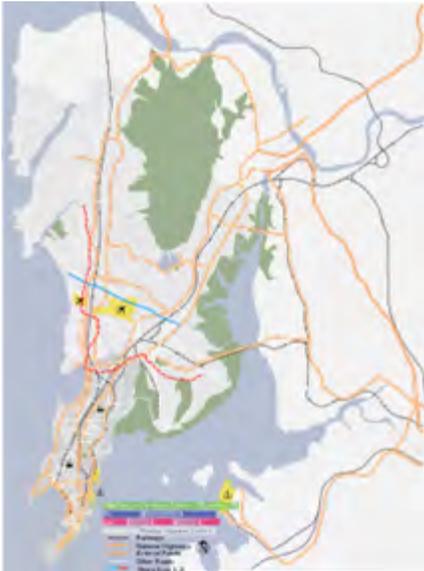
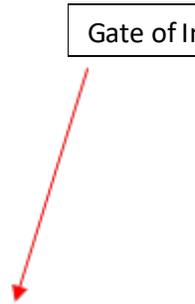


We were all going on a ToursbyLocals tour. Shailendra Pandey (great Indian name, huh?) contacted us on What's App & told us he'd meet us at the Greengate at 8:30am. This is another one of the ports where there is a little local shuttle to

get take us from the ship to the main terminal building. And it's appropriately called "Greengate." He was there waiting for us, so we hopped into our small air conditioned van & away we went.



So before he started his spiel about Mumbai, he let us know that he was not feeling well & was handing us off to another guide. Okay, we're flexible. So we listened to him as we took a short drive to our first stop. In the meantime, we looked out on a bustling big city. Mumbai was known as Bombay until 1995, when the reigning party at that time decided that Bombay was a reminder of British control & Mumbai would be tribute to their own heritage by naming the city after their goddess Mumbadevi. Here Here! Or is it Hear Hear? So, it's also the largest city by population in India! Yep – 12.4 million as of 2011. Who knows how many call it home now? I was expecting mobs everywhere & trash along the streets. Actually Mesa could learn something here as far as trash pickup & check out the sign – even advising the public to not use Plastic Bags! Very Green!



Mumbai is the capital of the state of Maharashtra. This is the wealthiest & the most industrialized state of India & is the single largest contributor to the National Economy. And Mumbai is the wealthiest city in all of India! It has the most millionaires & billionaires of any city in India! Another interesting item is that it was originally 7 individual islands, but in the mid 18th century, it was totally reconstructed & the area between the islands was reclaimed!!! Unbelievable! It's natural deep water port became one of the largest on the Arabian Sea with the opening of the Suez Canal. Now it's known world wide as the home of the most prolific film industry (Bollywood!!).



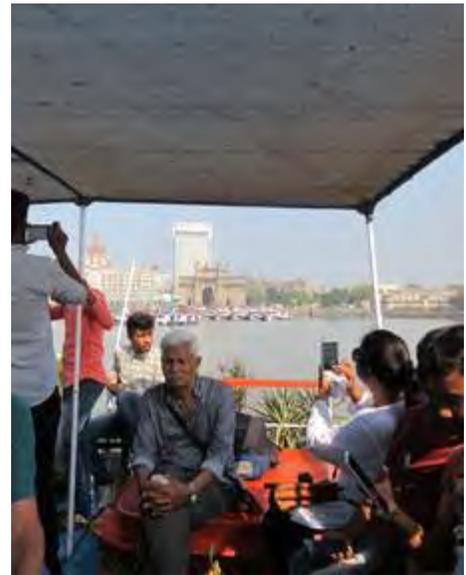


Since we were going to overnight here in Mumbai, I had us scheduled to see something a bit off the beaten path today. We were off to see Elephanta Caves – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But one of the best things about going to the Caves is that they are on an island, *Gharapuri* (literally "the city of caves") in the Mumbai Harbor – about 6.2 miles from the city and that the boat to take us there would leave from the Gateway to India – the monument that represents Mumbai, much like the Eiffel Tower represents Paris!! It was built to welcome King George V & Queen Mary when they visited Mumbai (then Bombay of course) in 1911, although they never really saw it, as it wasn't completed until 1915!! This is the most visited tourist site in Mumbai. Shailendra waved bye to us from the top of the jetty.





In olden years, The Gate of India would have been the first thing that any visitor by boat would see. We got to see it from that perspective! Very impressive! Also visible here in this square is the famous Taj Mahal Palace & Towers Hotel (more on that later). Some of the many ferries that leave from these jetties are ones that you hear of being overfilled. We didn't experience that, thank goodness! We did actually wait for a second boat because the first one was packed. I found this one overhead view of the Gate of India, the jetties & the Harbor. Lovely, isn't it?



Shailendra had handed us off to his friend Anzi to guide us around Elephanta Island. He is a full time tour guide & actually lives on the Island, was born there as a matter of fact. There was a ladder to get to the top of the boat & all of us except Jerry & Frances climbed up there. They stayed downstairs & Anzi ran up & down giving us all a little narration as we traveled across to the island. It was about an hour cruise. So besides the Shrine portion of the island, Anzi let us know that about 1200 people currently live on the island which is about 6.2 square miles in area. No one is allowed to move there now, but his ancestors had lived there for years, so they were allowed to stay. There are actually 3 villages on the island & a school for the children. Most of the inhabitants are farmers or fishermen. Tourist are not allowed to remain overnight. The cruise over was pretty slow. It was too hazy to see much in the distance (you can just glimpse our Celebrity Cruise Ship in the haze). Occasionally a fishing boat passed by close enough to see clearly. Assume the small island was just a mooring station for bigger boats.



We arrived at the island & immediately saw the little train that was to take us from the landing jetty to the main part of the island. When we saw all the boats in the mud, we realized why the train was there. Apparently the tide makes a

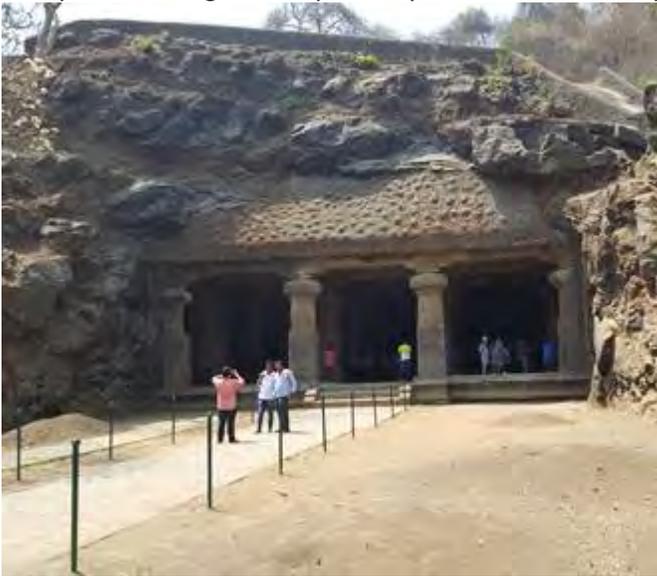
huge difference in the water level here! The small white boats are what a lot of the cruise ships use for life boats. Not sure why they are here in the mud?



There is quite a gauntlet to walk before you get to the shrine portion of the island. When we first arrived, there was not a lot of activity. As you get closer in, there are more shops. And lots & lots of monkeys!



Anzi warned us that there were 120 very steep steps to get to the shrine. He strongly suggested that the women take the 4 man chair option. Frances looked like a queen riding her chariot, but Kay was obviously terrified – not so very trusting of those 4 guys running up the stairs in flip flops!! I was very happy to stay on my own 2 feet! All of us made it safely, even though it was probably close to 100° & very very humid. No breeze at all.





So as to the shrine. I will not even begin to try to explain the significance of all the statues (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephanta_Caves you can read about it if you'd like!). I will tell you that there is architectural evidence that the island has been used as a Buddhist or Hindu shrine since the 2nd Century BC. Wow! It is dedicated to the Hindu God of Shiva. The carvings have been damaged by many over the years, but probably the most damage was inflicted by the Portuguese soldiers who reported that they used them as target practice! You can still see bullet holes in the stone. They also named the island because of an Elephant carving that they found when they first discovered the island in the 16th Century. They broke it trying to remove it from the island & it's now in a museum, not on the island. There are 2 main entrances & the main columned central area.



This carving is the most famous & is called the Trimurti. The three heads represent three essential aspects of Shiva: creation, protection, and destruction.



When we went out the other entrance, Anzi told us we could walk to another cave area that is a little smaller, but we were ready to head back to Mumbai. It was just too hot to stay. He spent a little time taking some “magic” pictures with some of the folks phone cameras. We didn’t get any. I got this off of Jerry & Paula’s blog site! Pretty cool, huh? Have no idea how he did that!



Frances & Kay loaded back up for their return trip & we all headed back to the boat. The shop keepers were all out in full force, so I didn't pause long enough to take any pictures – they were as pesky as flies! Seems odd to me that their persistence runs off an awful lot of perspective shoppers. I assume others feel like me? Anyway, I practically ran down the stairs & back to board the little train to the boat. Glad that most of the way was covered. At least a little shade to help with the heat. There were several cows along the pathway, Anzi said folks fed them – sometimes purposely & sometimes because they had something in their hands & the cows would help themselves – just like the monkeys! There was a HUGE swarm of bees on a tree along the train tracks, but I didn't get a picture of it. Glad the train didn't stop there!



Anzi loaded us onto the boat & he stayed on the island. Once again the boat was very full & we were balking about getting on, but he insisted this time. Our guys ended up spending most of the hour outside in the sun (John Hibner was happy as a clam – he loves the heat!, the others not so much). George & I sat inside the pilot's cabin, but it was

uncomfortable too, not much air flow and the wooden bench was too tall to let my feet hit the floor! Kay tried it & gave up – bad for her knee! A funny thing, there was a young man that joined us in the cabin. Turned out that he was a tour guide (his clients were down below). He got excited when he found out we were dancers/teachers & said he was going to send us some Indian music! But never heard from him. We saw dolphins on the way back & our young pilot (wish I had gotten a picture of his feet – he was barefoot & looked like he was about 15 years old!) pointed them out several times, but I couldn't get any pictures of them. He & the young tour guide sang some Indian songs to us. That was really fun!

I'm going to stop here for this episode. It is already hanging up & taking a long time to edit, Outlook must have some sort of size limit before it has difficulty, so I'll continue the afternoon portion of the tour in a separate travelogue. Don't go away!

Love ya,

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pampicts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Saturday, May 25, 2019 9:15 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #10 - Mumbai, afternoon tour, Thur, 11 Apr 2019

Hi Everyone,

Let's continue with the afternoon tour of Mumbai!





The standard tour was just to the island, but since we were staying overnight, I asked them to continue on with some of the main highlights. Since Anzi stayed at Elephanta, Shailendra had arranged for another of his coworkers to meet us as we stepped off the boat, Dharma, a sweet young man with a bubbly personality. The same van & driver were waiting for us too. We told him that even though our ship was overnighing, we wanted to be back to the port by 3:30 to 4pm. He was quick to say that Shailendra had tasked him to take us to 3 temples & that would take until 4:30pm. So, I said, skip a temple or do a drive by & take us to the railway station. Okay, he said we'll be there at 4:30pm. We tried again to make it 4pm. Okay, he agreed. First we drove around to see some of the beautiful colonial buildings. They even have their own Big Ben! (called the Rajabai Clock Tower & at Mumbai University).



The van stopped to let us hop out on a fenced, raised concrete island in the middle of the conflagration of streets in front of the Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus or Main Train Station!!). This building is also on UNESCO's World Heritage list. The outside is amazing! It took 10 years to build it as British Architects worked with Indian craftsmen starting in 1878. They created a unique Gothic style to showcase Indian traditional designs!



I downloaded this picture so you could see the entire 2.85 hectare station!



As Dharma & I posed at one end of the road divider, we got to experience Indian traffic!!! Mostly what we'll remember is the noise! I'll always think of India when I hear multiple horns blowing!! Believe it or not, we crossed the street to the main stairs up into the terminal. And made it without losing anyone!



And inside – we could feel the energy released from more than 3,000,000 commuters per day! Per DAY!! Unbelievable. This was not even the rush hours (my guide book said “don’t travel by local trains from 7-11am or 4:30-8:30pm). There are 18 separate platforms serving both local & long distance trains.





When Dharma led us to the ticket counters, we were all doing the mouth hanging open stare. Wow oh Wow! A train station!! As we walked around with that tourist stare, we looked at the locals going about their business on their cell phones & tablets. They had long ago lost their wonder about the place. Back outside, we got a close up of some of the ornamental decorations. Humm? Are those really rats? Yep, I believe it is! And of course a King Cobra!!!



We took a short walk to a subway entrance to get kitty corner across the street to our van. Along the way, we gawked at the locals (note the guy carrying at least 8 suitcases on his head!!!), having lunch together, fancy clogs under the burqas, & stuffed into the back of a truck.





Our van took us along the 2+ miles long 6 lane curved Marine Drive to see the public beaches along the harbor. We were told they clean & rake them 3 times a day. Somewhat reminded us all of the Malecon in Havana. It is also known as the Queen's Necklace because the lights along the curved beachfront looks like a string of pearls. Didn't get to see that! So downloaded a picture!





We made a short stop at Radhagopinath Temple – the Hari Krishna temple (you remember all those guys in white at the airports in the 60's????). Several of the group decided they didn't want to take their shoes off, so only Jerry, Francis, Paula, & I went upstairs to see the inside. It was beautiful & I enjoyed a lovely conversation with one of the monks. He said he was a doctor of Veterinary Medicine, but had given up working for his service at the temple. He pointed to the

monk that was cleaning up at the front alter & said he was a Medical Doctor. He brought out some wonderful honey balls to give us. He even gave us a bag of them to take downstairs to the guys that didn't come upstairs. They were a really yummy sweet treat!



With no other stops planned, we continued the drive around the city. Dharma gave us the low down on this 27 Story Apartment building, built in 2010. Yep, it's an "apartment" building....for a family of 5. Yessereebob....a single family of 5 people!!! Actually I think a couple more folks live there now since Mukash Ambani's 2 sons' families moved in. The 400,000+ square foot home took 4 years to build & is now thought to be worth more that 2 Billion US Dollars. Here's the link if you care to read any more about it. <https://allthatsinteresting.com/antilia-the-worlds-most-extravagant-house> Mukash is India's richest man. He supposedly came from a slum & is a self made billionaire, owning Reliance, a textile company that provides 15% of India's total GDP!! It supposedly has 3 heliports & 6 floors of parking (168 total spaces). Possibly a bit of an excess?





We continued the drive to see some of the Embassy buildings and views of high rises across the harbor. We drove slowly along the harbor front to get pictures of the Haji Ali Mosque. This mosque is only accessible during low tide by walking along the narrow unfenced causeway from the shore. You can't see them in the picture, but there were hundreds of folks walking both to & from the mosque on the causeway. Dharma was more than willing to let us out & take us over, but we decided to pass. He gave us a long complicated legend about the man (now considered a saint) that built this mosque in 1431.



The rest of the drive returning us to the port was more of the same. The traffic was starting to build up a bit & we felt sorry for the brave traffic cop standing in the middle of the road directing traffic. I wonder how many of them are hit by

pre occupied drivers. Oh yes, guess what time Dharma & our driver dropped us off at the ship? 4:30pm!! Too funny! He had agreed with us just to get us to shut up! Felt like a long day!!



Once again we had a lovely dinner. Had a surprise after dinner drink, designed & developed by the bar tender! Yummy yummy! Then the evening entertainment was a local Indian Folklore Dance troupe. Awesome costumes & very interesting. So athletic. Perfect ending for a day sightseeing in India.



The evening ended with our regular wines served by our favorite guys at the Sunset bar. One more day left in India!!

Hope you are still enjoying the tales of our adventures! Stay tuned for more!

Love ya,

Pamela & George

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Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pampicsts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

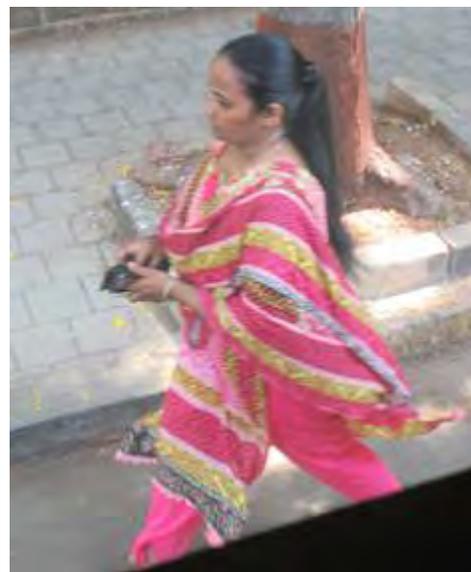
From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2019 12:33 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #11 - Mumbai, 2nd day excursion, Fri, 12 Apr 2019

Hello Everyone!

It's time to cover our last visit to India! We had one more excursion to see Mumbai. Let's not waste any time!



George started sneezing & coughing during the night, so he decided not to join the group on our morning bus excursion sponsored by Celebrity. They were even nice enough to give us a refund!! The rest of us (minus Paula who was taking a neat tour that would try all of Mumbai's forms of transportation), headed out to hop on a bus. Waved goodbye to our ship as we drove off! We had a female tour guide & she had lots & lots of info to give us.



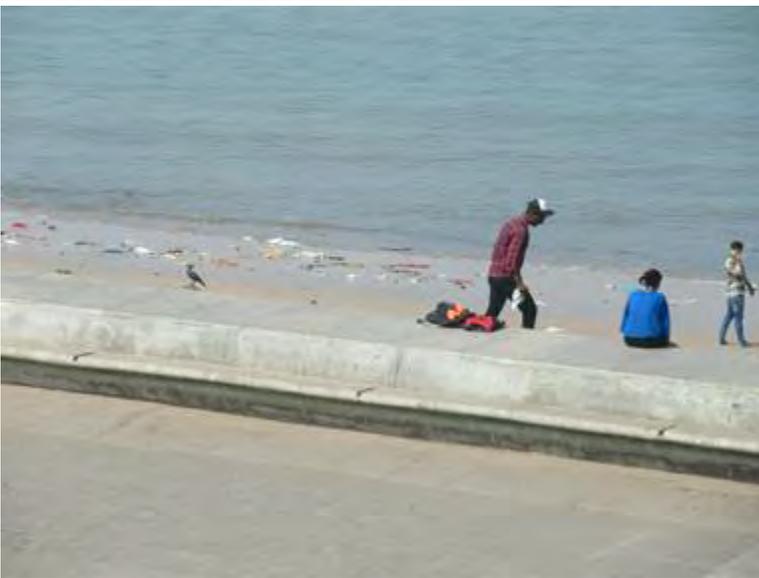
I found the tour a bit of a yawner, since we'd driven most of it yesterday. However, the view out of the bus windows was a lot bigger. And the route was a bit different. Again views of all the Colonial buildings. They are really

impressive. But this time, we could also see some of the dilapidated apartment buildings. From the height of the bus, we could see over the fences & see lots of folks in the parks, playing soccer & just enjoying themselves. Can't beat the walking fashion show either.



As we drove past the fabulous train terminal that we visited yesterday, we saw Shailendra with 2 tourists!! Hilarious that in a huge city of multimillions we would see the one resident that we know while on a bus trip!! Small small

world!! Too funny! Continued on & saw huge fig trees growing everywhere. Past one of the largest intersections with the Metro Inox theater on the corner. It is a still popular & operational movie theater originally built & run by MGM in 1938! This is also one of the neighborhoods that was reclaimed to join up all the islands of Bombay. By the way, don't think I ever mentioned that Bombay is a derivative of the Portuguese term that means "good bay." We cruised by a small "lumber mill" that was cutting bamboo stakes to use for a frame work to make repairs on the outside of this old building. Amazing!





Another cruise down Marine drive. Not sure if our higher elevation to look over the walls let us see so much more trash, or if we were just in between clean-up crews??? But definitely more trash visible today. But beautiful sandy beaches none the less! And odd to me that in a city of 25 Million people, the beaches were almost empty!!!



These beautifully decorated fences dressed up some of the neighborhoods. And at one exceptionally long traffic stop, a couple of enterprising young men vied to sell us some really pretty peacock fans. I came close to buying one, but the

couple in front of me said that their friend had purchased one the day before & it was a bait & catch scheme where they showed you a really well made one, then handed you a trashy one. Phooey!



So do you remember my comment on yesterday's travelogue about "more later?" for the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel that we saw from the ferry to Elephanta Island? So here's the more!! Our bus was supposed to be able to go to the parking area of the Gate of India, but construction was blocking the turn, so they let us out to walk down the block to see it. I had apparently had too much coffee before leaving the ship, so I really really needed a toilet. The guide was not happy with me, but she said that while she took the rest of the group to see the Gate of India, I could sneak into the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel across the street & use their toilet next to the lobby! I had to navigate around all kinds of construction barriers & even go through security to run inside the hotel, but I managed it without any problems. She had advised me to take my bus sticker off my blouse! She was serious about me "sneaking" in! The other funny thing was that about 5 folks followed me – they didn't need the toilet, but they wanted to see the inside of the hotel! They wanted me as the leader & waited in the lobby while I ran to the restroom! Now to tell you an interesting historical tidbit. The Taj was built in 1903 by Jamsetji Tata, an Indian pioneer industrialist. Legend has it that he decided to build the hotel after he was refused entrance into the Watson Hotel as it was for "whites" only!!! Some dispute this story, but it's told by all the guides. To continue that, the Watson Hotel, then the most influential hotel in Mumbai, is now a ruin...the building remains, but it is falling down & soon to be destroyed. Great revenge story, huh? The Taj was the first hotel in India to have electricity, American fans, German elevators, Turkish baths and English butlers. A little later, it was also the first to have a fully licensed bar, a 24 hour restaurant, & a disco!! It was one of the locations attacked by terrorist in Nov 2008 in Mumbai & killed over 167 people, 31 of which were there at the hotel. In November 2010, President Obama was the first head of state to stay there after the attack & said that "the Taj has been the symbol of the strength and the resilience of the Indian people." So I am happy to say that I have used their toilet!!! It was beautiful by the way, I would have taken a picture, but there were 2 attendants inside handing out real cloth towels for drying your hands & to also open the door to leave!!!! (No tips required – Ha!!).



I lead my little entourage down the sidewalk to where the bus was supposed to be. Oops! It was gone! We heard some yelling & our group was across the street waiting on the corner. Apparently the bus had had to leave & our guide was trying to organize a return to pick everyone up. We had to cross the street twice & she stood squarely in the middle of the intersection to block traffic for us – waving her little lollipop!!



Next stop was for coffee & snacks at the 5 star hotel chain, The Oberoi. It was a nice comfortable place to relax for a bit with okay cookies & little sandwiches. They didn't have enough places for everyone to sit at tables, but we all managed. Strangely enough, this was another of the locations that the 2008 terrorist took over. Assume it was because

both of these places had a lot of foreigners? Looks like they had a great wine selection, but we didn't get to check that out.



On the short drive back to the port, our guide pointed out a dabbawallah. Dharma had told us about them when we were inside the Railroad Terminal, but we were excited to actually get to see one. They all wear the little short order cook hat, making them easily recognizable. They rarely use motorized transportation, just bicycles (other than the trains of course). But I'm getting ahead of myself! You don't even know what they are!! So bottom line is that they are the original "pizza delivery boys!!" Back in 1890, an Indian entrepreneur, Mahadeo Havaji Bachche recognized the need for lunch to be provided to the office workers in Mumbai. Obviously this was before the birth of McDonalds!!! The name actually means "one who carries a box." He hired 100 men to pick up lunches from the homes of some office worker & deliver it to them. Since then, this service has morphed into a huge operation called the Mumbai Tiffin Box Supplier's Association and between 175,000 and 200,000 lunch boxes are moved each day by 4,500 to 5,000 dabbawalas. It is a very very complicated system where the guys pick up a home made lunch in a special container made to keep it warm and it is delivered to the recipient and the container is taken back to its origination. There is a Bollywood movie about this service called "The Lunchbox." We watched it & it's very cute. It's supposed to be really awesome to see large groups of them working at the train stations during the lunch hour rush. We only got to see the one guy on his bicycle. I downloaded all the other pictures. There is a funny story you can read about online. Both Dharma & our lady guide today related it as truth. It basically says that Forbes identified the Tiffin Association as a six sigma operation – meaning that they make less than 1.9 errors per billion operations. Forbes denies it, but it makes a great story! It is extremely

complex – the boxes are picked up from individual homes, marked with collection point, starting station, destination station, & final destination. There is a really small monthly charge & each worker, regardless of their place in the chain is guaranteed a fixed wage. Quite a system & a great way to remember how completely different life is in India!!!



Back on board ship in time for lunch & a relaxing afternoon. Then downstairs for our delicious & always enjoyable dinner (George was still feeling sick, but not bad enough to keep him from eating!!!) – see how good I was – a Waldorf Salad! - for a start anyway!!!! Unfortunately, we left the port of Mumbai during our meal, so we didn't get a single picture of the sail away!! Enjoyed dinner so much that we never even thought about it!! Then on to the evening entertainment - 2 celloist from Poland. They were amazing – played everything from Michael Jackson to Elvis Presley!!! Too funny.





So for the entire cruise, they had advertised this show. It was adults only & wasn't until 11pm! Only John & Connie, George & I stayed up for it. It was really really strange. There were amazing costumes & lots of aerial work. The main star was one of the 4 main cruise singers & he was a big young man. For this, he was dressed as a female prostitute???. Since he had a beard, it was kinda like the old time bearded lady in the circus? Only wearing a garter belt? We could never find a story line & couldn't understand a word of the sung narrative. But the costumes were beautiful & the only saving grace. Crazy that they had spent so much time & money to produce this show & give it so much advertisement. The theatre was full too. Lots of folks just walked out. We still finished up the day with our wine nightcap! And it couldn't detract from 2 beautiful days in Mumbai! Sorry to be moving on! When will we ever come back to India????

Don't go away! We still have a few days left on our cruise & some amazing things to tell about! Hope this gave you a nice picture of India. We were very impressed. Much better than we had anticipated!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

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Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

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pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Friday, May 31, 2019 10:59 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #12 - Oman, Mon, 15 Apr 2019

Hi Friends & Family,

Only a few more days on the Constellation. But they are goodies! Let's move along – time's awastin'.





We had 2 days at sea heading towards the Arabian Gulf & our stop in Oman. Amazingly enough, it was another sunny day at sea with really smooth water. Even the Captain mentioned in his daily briefing that we had been awfully lucky on this cruise. I can't remember which day it was (we didn't go), but one of the sea days, the Captain (our Captain was Italian & loved to talk!!!) held a briefing in the theater & showed some a picture comparing today's huge cruise ships & the Titanic and then a picture that he personally had taken of a huge wave coming at the ship. This is the comparison picture, but I downloaded this picture of the wave – since we didn't see it, I don't know if this is better or worse – either way – SCARY!!! Luckily our weather was picture perfect for the entire cruise.





Special dinner tonight. Our last Cruise Chic night & it started with a special champagne cocktail toast. Finished with the cruise standard parade of the kitchen and dining room staff & Baked Alaska for dessert. Had surf & turf option for our meal – lobster & filet. Yum Yum Yum!!!!



Not a very good picture, but a reminder that several times when we passed through the Martini Bar enroute to the theater, the bartenders were putting on a show – tossing bottles, glasses, mixers, you name it, they were playing with it!! The evening show was my favorite for the cruise. A Stevie Wonder wannabe. He not only sang all Stevie Wonder songs, but he told his history. One interesting fact that caught my interest was that Stevie Wonder was fine at birth, but born premature. At that time, they were putting preemies in an incubator with pure oxygen & that's what caused his blindness! His mother went to a Billy Graham rally & made her way to the front to have Rev Graham pray for him. Even though he was not healed of his blindness, his family believes that was what gave him his musical genius. Pretty cool!



The day ended with a fun Pool party. We didn't do much dancing, but had a great time listening to our Cruise Manager (Paul Vaya) singing & the Latin band playing for him. Weather was nice & it was a different activity! Paul had decided that we would do a pretend New Year's event since we had a time change. The really funny thing was that the time change was to set the clocks back from 11:00pm to 9:30pm. Totally crazy. He kept announcing the countdown as 10 minutes to 9:30pm!!! Hilarious. Fun way to end the day.



Our last sea day was just as relaxing as all the previous ones. Another special dessert day (this is killing me!!) & the kitchen staff made a happy parade through the buffet dining room. We had a little Happy Hour party before dinner & wouldn't you know it, there was a short squall during that time! So instead of getting to sit with the balcony door open, we were listening to some grumbling thunder & watching some lightning. Oh well. Just a little different kind of excitement. Didn't even get rough. According to the Captain, the seas went from 1 to 2 meter swells to 2 to 3 meter swells. Certainly not much!



The evening entertainment was a variety show of sorts, some singing & some dancing. The coolest thing was a guy doing hula hoops that were laser lit!



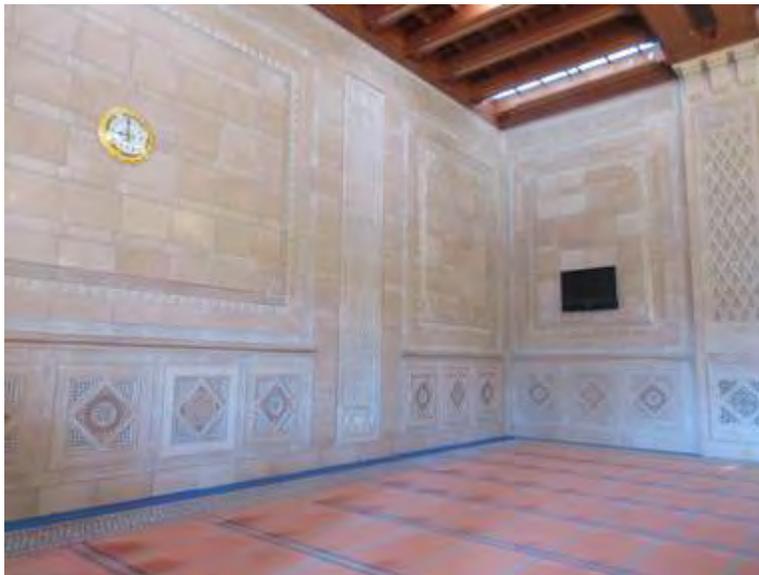
Yee Haw! We woke up at Muskat, Oman! Everyone went different ways this morning. John & Connie came with us on a Tours By Locals tour of old & new Muskat & a drive out of town to see a Wadi (permanent river). Once again, we contacted our guide on What's App & found out that he had to meet us after we took a short shuttle to the

Terminal. But he was easy to find – holding up a large printed sign with my name on it. We all introduced ourselves & it turned out all 3 men – George, John & our guide, Yasser Marhoon Salim Al Maamari had a cold!! We hopped in his big brand new Nissan 4 Wheel Drive SUV & away we went. Most of the others had gotten notices that their tours had been canceled or changed due to yesterday's rain, but he explained that both with his big SUV and the Wadi he had picked for us to visit, we were right on track. First thing we noticed was that everything within sight looked NEW! Roads, buildings, light posts, just everything! And clean & white!



Our first stop was the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. This mosque was inaugurated by Sultan Qaboos in 2001 after 6+ years of construction. It has 5 minarets & can accommodate 20,000 worshipers throughout it's huge complex. Like all mosques, the ladies are supposed to have their skin covered from feet to crown of their heads (although it's okay to

show your face – thank goodness!!). Connie managed to make do with her scarves, but Yasser covered my head & neck with his scarf. There are actually guards (a man & a woman) at the gated entrance that check to make sure the women are covered (men aren't supposed to wear shorts, but otherwise it's not a big deal)! Connie was actually showing a little neck skin because her shirt didn't button, but she held it shut to get through the guarded area!! The entire complex covers 430,000 square feet. It was constructed using 300,000 tons of Indian sandstone!!!



The marble & sandstone walls are all highly decorated, as are the teak ceilings & doors. It is truly beautiful.

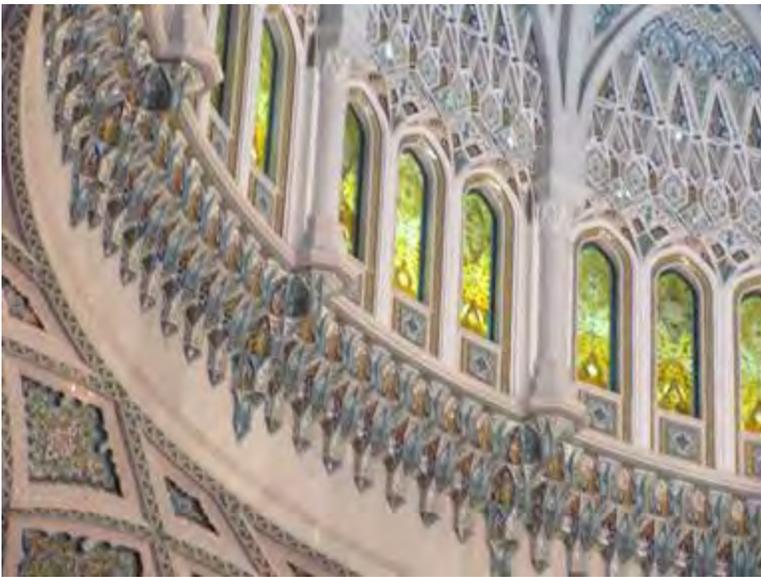
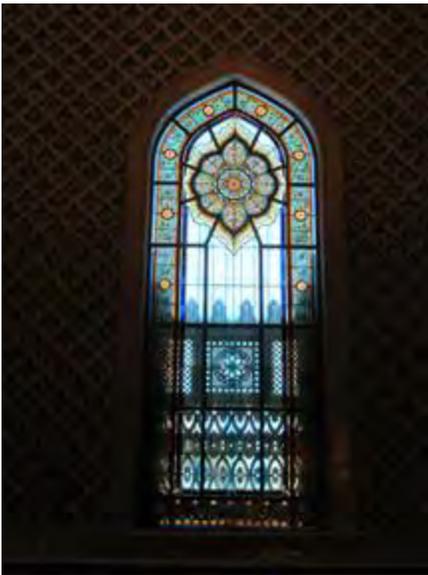


The huge vaulted rooms are cool and also beautifully lit with enormous chandeliers that are made by an Italian company, Faustig . The largest one weighs 8.5 tons and has more than 600,000 crystals. It used to be the largest in the

world, but is now the 2nd largest after the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi (more on that later as we are going there!!!).



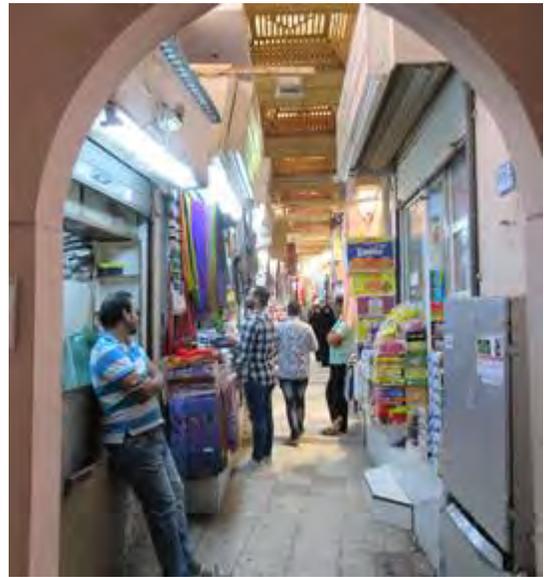
Another feature unique to the mosque is its HUGE Persian carpet in the main prayer room. At 46,750 Sq feet, it was also the the largest single piece carpet in the world until it was replaced by the carpet at Sheikh Zayed Mosque!! It took 4 years to weave. This amazing room can allow 6500 worshippers to pray together.



Everywhere we looked, there were lovely stained glass windows or tile mosaics. Complicated designs decorated the vaulted ceilings.



Back outside, the white glistening sandstone was extraordinarily beautiful against the clear blue sky. I'm always looking for birds. I believe this is a Red-vented Bulbul.



Next stop was the Muttrah Souq. This is known as one of the oldest shopping districts in all of the Arab world. Our guide gave us a half hour to explore the area. We almost immediately ran into John & Kay. Their Celebrity tour had given them some free time here too. This lovely mural graced the entrance wall.



This souq was originally sheltered by huts made from mud & palm leaves....but like everything else in Oman, the government has covered it all with modern amenities, including some air conditioning & electricity – wanting to keep

the huge tourist industry more comfortably shopping! It is still a jumble of everything from clothes & souvenirs to spices & fruits. The locals come to buy their stuff as well as cruise ship tourist & even shoppers from other nations in the Arab world. Folks from UAE travel here to shop due to the lower prices. We were leery of venturing too far – alleyways went in all directions & it all looked the same to us.



We climbed the stairs for a nice overlook of both sides of the street & into the harbor. Another really new & fresh looking area.



George took a picture of me with the harbor in the background. We noticed a huge yacht directly in front of us. We could see our guide sitting under an awning at one of the juice cafes, so we headed down there to sit & have a cold fruity drink. I wish I had taken a photo of the menu – there were about 50 different flavors of fruit juices. I had a spicy lemon that was quite tasty & tart. We asked our guide about the yacht in the harbor & he explained that it was one of the Sultan's personal yachts. He has 2 of them. One for himself that has a helipad & one for his security forces to keep him safe while traveling!



We paused for a view of "old" Muscat.



The main draw in Old Muscat is Al Alam (the Flag) Palace. It is one of 6 royal residences for Sultan Qaboos. More about him later. The palace has a history of over 200 years & was actually built by a direct grandfather 7 generations back!! It was rebuilt as a current residence in 1972 after Sultan Qaboos took over.



We drove around the area getting pictures of some of the other buildings & the harbor.



The Gulf of Oman is protected by 2 huge fortresses. Both forts, Al Marani (left) & Al Jalali (right) were built by the Portuguese in the late 1500's to protect Muscat from the Ottoman forces (didn't work!). Al Jalali has been used as both a refuge and a jail, but currently it's a private museum of Omani Cultural History.

I tried to continue from here & it was too big! I've had to divide the day into 2 parts!

The second one will follow immediately!!

Sorry for the interruption!

Love ya,

Pamela & George

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Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pampicts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Saturday, June 1, 2019 5:52 AM
To: 'pam@gphurd.com'
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #13, Oman - drive to Dam, Mon, 15 Apr 2019

Hi Guys,

Sorry for the interruption. Let's continue!



Then we started our drive out of town to see some of the country side & the largest dam in Oman. The highway was amazing. During the hour drive, Yasser gave us some history about why everything looked so new & pristine – because it is!! In 1970, Qaboos bin Said Al Said overthrew his father, taking over in a palace coup. He is a 14th generation descendant of the founder of the Al Bu Sa'id dynasty. His father was mostly concerned with petty wars between rivaling sects. Sultan Qaboos was sent to England for continuing education when he was 16 & then continued his education at

the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Then he joined the British Army & served for several years. During that time, he started formulating a plan to bring Oman out of isolation & using it's oil revenue for modernization & development. His father tried to keep him out of Oman's political decision making, so with the support of the British, he staged the coup. Ever since then, he has followed his dream for Oman. He is the sole decision maker and almost single handedly, he has taken Oman from being a poorly developed country with practically no infrastructure, healthcare, education & only 6 kilometers of paved roads dependent on subsistence farming & fishing to the modern society it is today. He built schools, hospital, hundreds of miles of new roads, a telecommunications network, modern ports & several airports, both in the north & south of the country. He also abolished slavery in Oman during his first year of reign. Unfortunately, he is 79 years old & currently has some form of cancer. He has no children & has yet to name a successor. The people are all hopeful that things will continue with the constant improvements regardless of his health. We are too! There are practically no poor in the country & the educational level is very high, the adult literacy level is over 93%! There is practically no criminal element either. Oman is officially neutral & occasionally acts as a go between for the US & Iran. As I was reading about Sultan Qaboos, I found that he is an amateur radio operator. Isn't that interesting? He is the longest serving leader in the Middle East & Arab countries.



Here's a couple of maps to give you an idea of where we were. On the cruise we took a few years ago, we docked at the bottom of Oman at Salalah. This time with the ship docked at Muscat, we followed the yellow line of the highway to the Dam. We were much more impressed with the city of Muscat & the entire surrounding area than we were in Salalah. Felt like a different country!



When I was setting up the excursions at each port, I had asked Yasser if we could visit a Wadi. To be honest, I didn't even know what "wadi" meant, I just saw that several tours had a visit to one!! Ha! I was happy that he had included this visit. Not only did it give us a drive out of the city, but we got to see some beautiful scenery in Oman! Anyway, this particular wadi was dammed, not only to prevent the annual flooding of the surrounding farms, but also to produce the largest reservoir in the country to help provide drinking water for the region & the city of Muscat's metropolitan area. By the way, another of Sultan Qaboos's achievements was the building of a desalinization plant in Muscat! Anyway, the dam was completed in 2009, but not officially inaugurated until 2012. Currently the water level is very low due to a drought that's been ongoing for several years. Due to the extreme heat here, most of the construction was done at night! While we were there, the temperature hovered about 100. They were expecting the heat to increase as summer neared.



I found one more little bird. I think this is the White Eared Bulbul, also known as the Iraqi Bulbul.





We were the only ones around today, Yasser said there were lots of folks around on weekends, they come out for picnicking & just relaxing. We asked about water sports, but he said that was not done here. I assume because it is used for drinking water?



Lunch was included in our tour & Yasser asked if it was okay if we ate at the small restaurant at the dam. It is mostly for the workers. We said that was fine. As we were walking over, we noticed the really interesting sidewalk pavement. It looked 3 dimensional!! It was really amazing. So as to the small café, I didn't take any pictures, but when we walked in, they showed us some pre-cooked items – chicken kabobs & a couple of different kinds of wraps. While we were looking at them (they didn't look all that appetizing), Yasser was talking to the guys behind the counter. They apparently didn't speak any English, or if they did, they certainly didn't offer to speak any to us! So after a prolonged conversation, Yasser said that he suggested that we all have a chicken & rice dish that is common for the locals. He said they would make it fresh for us. We all gratefully said yes & it ended up be a very pleasant meal with a piece of chicken (some breast & some legs) with a yellow rice (I think it was saffron!!!) & a yummy yogurt/cabbage salsa type salad.



The return to the port was uneventful, back the same way we'd come. On the way there, I hadn't noticed us driving through a vehicle check point as you near the city. Apparently it is due to folks driving over from the UAE. I noticed the flag hanging in the car. He explained white, the color of the topmost horizontal band on the flag symbolizes peace and prosperity. The red color in the middle band and the vertical band of the flag represents the battles fought by the people of Oman against the foreign invaders (blood). The green color represents the fertility of the land. The national emblem of the country depicts crossed swords over a dagger or khanjar. The national emblem is also on all their coins. We really enjoyed the tour with him.



Back at the port, we had to ride the bus back to the ship – the port had all sorts of big cranes & other equipment scattered around.

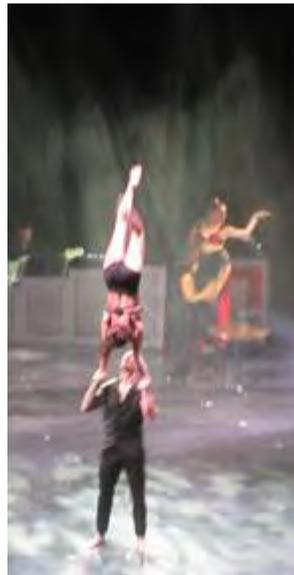




Back on the ship, there was a special invitation to the folks in the Concierge class cabins to enjoy departure from Muscat from the Ship's Helipad. We'd never been up there before, so we were happy to join the party.



Finally remembered to get a picture of our standard view in the dining room!! Awesome, huh? And our Dining room team, Mario & Anushka! They were really great.



The evening entertainment was great fun. A full musical presentation called Soundtrack - with singing, dancing, aerial performances & more. A real highlight of the cruise.



Perfect ending up in the Sunset bar.

And that's it for our day in Oman! Only 1 more day on board the Constellation! Hope you are enjoying it. I've sure loved reviewing it. Amazing how much I had already forgotten until I started writing things down. Join me in Dubai next!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pamspicts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Sunday, June 9, 2019 9:54 PM
To: 'pam@gphurd.com'
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #14 - Dubai, Tues, 16 Apr 2019

Hi Guys,

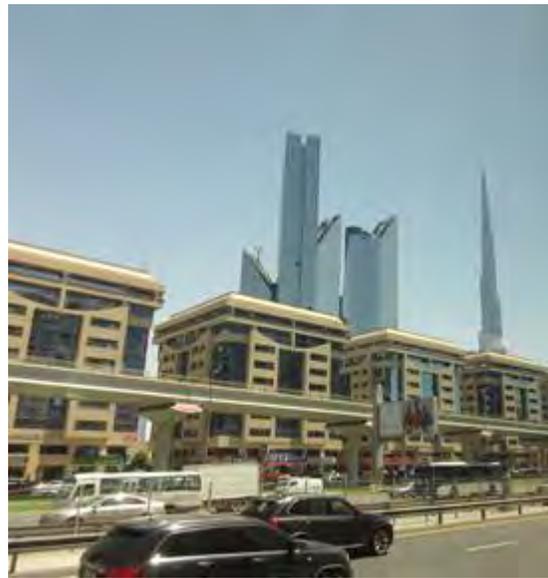
We only have a short afternoon in Dubai. Let me tell you how it went!



Since this was the last day on board the Constellation, I got all packed up after we woke up. Figure the afternoon & evening will be pretty busy! Didn't cruise into the port of Dubai until almost noon. Watch us pull in & dock from the buffet. Last time we were here, we got to go up in the Khalifa Tower – that huge towering needle on the skyline. Amazing how tall it looks, huh?



Off the boat & walked to the terminal to find our tour bus. Hot & clear today. Nice shot of the ship across the parking lot! Only the 6 of us today – Paula, Jerry & Frances were getting to visit with a friend of hers.



Loved the drive to the park! Passed by Jurassic Park. All the dinosaurs were out to say hi! And the architecture of Dubai is absolutely stunning. Khalifa doesn't look very high from this perspective!



Our guide (who started every single sentence with “excuse me”) chattered non-stop. The thing I remember most was about the camel races! Up until 2002 when Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan banned it, young children were used as jockeys. Some as young as 2 years old! And they had been abducted from their homes & kept in camps! Anyway, it is

no longer allowed with severe punishments if caught. Now they use mechanical robots! Wow!! We had hoped to see a race while we were here, but just didn't work out.



Our excursion today was to the Dubai Miracle Garden. I had read about this before our first trip in 2014, but our guide didn't recommend it. It had only been open for a short time then, so anyway, had been looking forward to seeing this a long time. The gardens cover 780,000 sq feet, making it the largest natural flower garden in the world. It holds 2 Guinness World records – one for the largest floral sculpture (the Airbus) & one for the Mickey Mouse sculpture (largest vertical garden). It's only open from Nov – May, the heat makes it too impossible for the rest of the year. As our guide let us out of the bus, he said, "Excuse me, this visit will add 2 more years to your life from beauty & peace!"



The park is pretty much set up in a circular fashion, so we started out just walking the outside ring. The loop, moving slowly took about 45 minutes. That's even with the stop to brush Connie's teeth!



We enjoyed the Disney section.



And huge cakes? Pyramids? The ants were really busy here too.



As we circled the outside ring, they forced you through their gift shop. We didn't really mind, it was air conditioned!!! Yea! Besides the usual tourist crap, there were spices for sale in bulk! And some nice looking pillows. But besides enjoying the cool, we didn't indulge in anything.





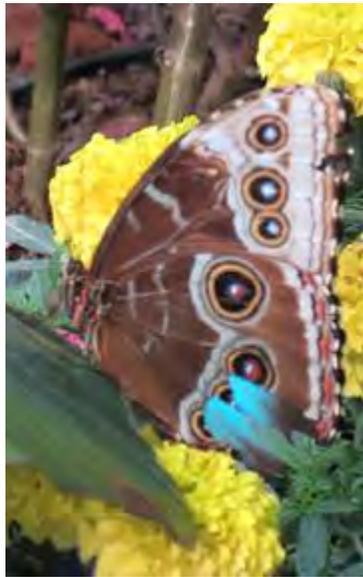
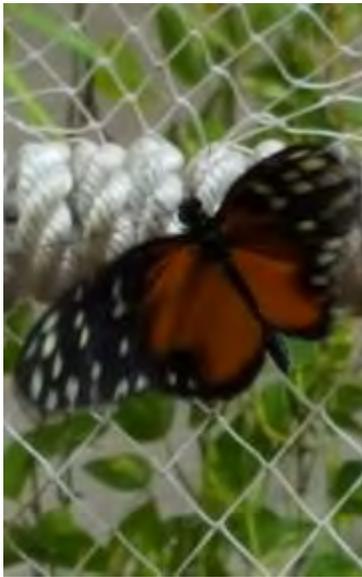
The back side of the circle was where the largest exhibits were placed. Most famous is the full size Emirates Airbus, castle, huge clock, & the home of Snow White & the Seven Dwarves. At least there was a bit more color back here.



We made the full loop & crisscrossed through the center portion and still had another hour & a half before heading back to the ship! Hummm? Found another little bird – I think it's another white eared Bulbul?



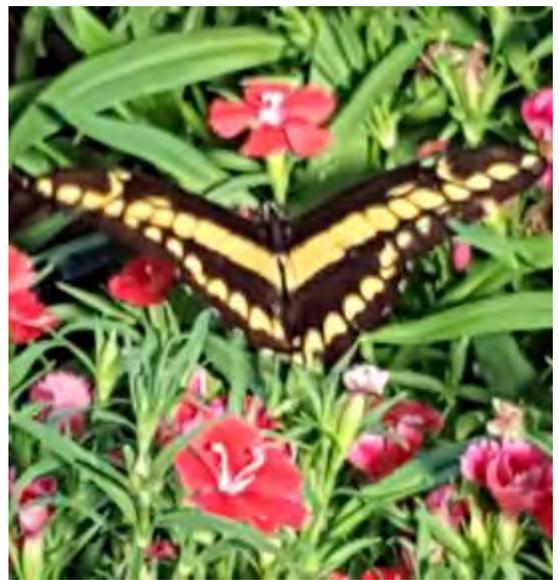
I downloaded a few pictures of what the gardens were SUPPOSED to look like. Either we were too late in the season or they hadn't done as much this year! It was still beautiful, but nothing like this!!!



Since we had at least an hour & a half to wait, we decided to walk over to the Butterfly House. It was still a part of the same complex, but not included in our tour. It was only about \$20 ea, and about a 5 minute walk, so we headed over. It was lovely. It was divided into 5 different world regions, but we didn't pay any attention to specifics, just ran from butterfly to flowers to more butterflies. I'll just post the best of what we got. My camera did not like to focus close up, so most of mine were crappy. George's was not doing well in the up close environment either, but we did our best!



Each area was divided up by doors with hanging net separators. Most of them had small netted enclosures & big open areas. Some with koi ponds & other decorations.



The last brown one was HUGE. I wish I had put something up for a size comparison. I read later that it was the Atlas Moth – the largest moth in the world & found in the forest of Asia. Apparently they can get to almost a foot across –

this one was about 6". It was amazing! There were young people stationed in each area to answer questions, but we didn't bother to ask anything.



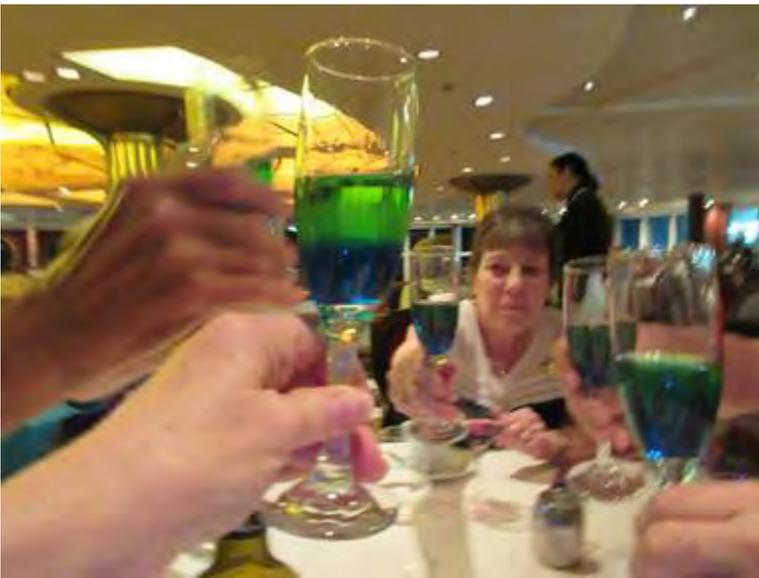
The last exhibition room was huge & had some lovely areas to sit & rest a bit. It was not real cool, but it was pleasant for sitting.



In the far corner of that last room, there were a bunch of big cages with different birds. We were running out of time, so I just sped past & said hello to them. In the lobby were framed pictures made from butterfly wings. I especially liked this one of an Emirates.



After meeting back up with “excuse me,” we loaded back into the bus & started the drive back through lots of traffic. We drove slowly past a beautiful Shiite Mosque, but the sun was in the wrong position for us to get much of a photo. Instead of the usual white, it was covered in colorful mosaic tiles.



We started our last meal on the cruise ship with before dinner cocktails. Then we ended the meal with another of the bartenders’ tries at layered liquors! He hasn’t quite got the hang of it, but he’s learning! This one was minty. I had brought blinkies & had a great time handing them out. Amazing how folks show up from all over asking for one! Even just guests from another table!



As we walked along the Promenade deck to our last theatre show, I snapped a picture of the young string duo. They were pretty good & we'd enjoyed listening to them. Tonight they were fully dressed – on several evenings, they were

wearing cut off bluejeans!! Claire Maidin was our last cruise ship entertainer. She was absolutely gorgeous & quite talented also. Another Britain's Got Talent contestant. She's a young mother that thought her career was over, but friends talked her into getting back on stage. We are glad she did. She finished off our cruise quite well. Nothing but good memories!





We visited the Sunset bar one last time & watched Dubai fade off into the distance. Two more days to the vacation, but they are ashore in Abu Dhabi. But they were full to the brim & not to be missed! Hang in there! I'll be back soon!

Love ya,

Pamela & George

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Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pampicts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Tuesday, June 11, 2019 10:04 AM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #15 - Abu Dhabi arrival, Wed, 17 Apr 2019

Hello Again Dear Friends & Family,

Unfortunately we are down to the last 2 days of this vacation. But what an ending! Abu Dhabi is even better than Dubai & was actually more impressive than Singapore. Let's not waste any time!





Ship docked in Abu Dhabi by 5am. Can see the huge city in the distance. It's really a busy port & terminal. We got off the ship a little earlier than planned, so we had to wait a bit for Barti Rajan, our Tours By Locals guide to pick us up at 9am. He & the 24 pax bus driver came over from Dubai (about an hour's drive). Waiting was not a real serious issue, just not a lot of seating, but tons of activity as we watched folks getting off & figuring out where to go. Another cruise ship had arrived at virtually the same time, so there were literally thousands of people milling around. Also loads of guides holding up signs, transportation drivers, & even some folks dressed as Emirates (not sure they were really the true folks!) were dancing & singing off & on. I didn't have my camera in hand, so no pictures of all that activity.



Anyway, Barti arrived & got us easily loaded onto his bus & on our way to Abu Dhabi. He immediately started filling us in on facts & history. This 2.6 mile tunnel, named Sheikh Zayed Tunnel, was originally completed in 2002 and at that time was considered the longest tunnel in the Middle East. Since then there have been many construction updates to it. It is actually quite beautiful inside & very light. I downloaded this overhead picture of it.

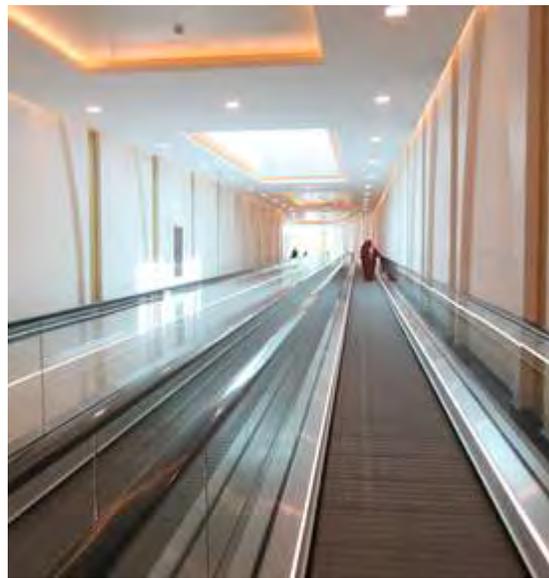


Our first stop was the magnificent Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. Wow! It is the largest mosque in the UAE, covering 30 acres and allowing 41,000 worshipers to pray at the same time!!!! It has very strict rules for

females, so Barti got a picture of us all suited up & ready to go inside! It is obvious that we are not used to wearing head scarves! Connie can you really see? We headed towards the enormous glass dome.



The dome housed a newly constructed entrance to the mosque. This was the first time Barti had used it. It is a combination Visitor's Center & Retail shopping mall. It was constructed over the past 3 years to control the millions of visitors to the mosque & provide some commercial sales to raise money for upkeep. The stores were all very upscale & sold everything from souvenirs to traditional burkas. There are plans for several restaurants also, but those had not opened.



Even though there is no charge to visit the mosque, there are electronic kiosks where each individual has to apply to enter. It is all new, so there were bugs in the system, not to mention translation issues with the many questions & it took us quite a while to get inside! Luckily it is air conditioned here! This whole complex is underground to keep from detracting from the mosque itself. This huge new complex is not even included in the 30 acres of the mosque. After walking through the mall area & signing in, there was still a long way to walk past other sales areas & some under construction museums. Then there was a tunnel with one way moving sidewalks! Everything, by the way is gleaming white marble with teak & gold trim! It reeks of MONEY!



We came out of the underground tunnel to a spectacle designed to make you ooh & ahh!! The gleaming white marble against that bright blue sky was unbelievable!!!



As we walked further inside the complex, Barti gave us the facts & figures. The idea for the mosque came from the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founding father and the first president of UAE in 1996, who wanted to establish a structure that would unite the cultural diversity of the Islamic world with the historical and modern values of architecture and art (quite a mouthful, huh?). It was not completed until 2006 and one of the first official ceremonies was the funeral of its' founder. Sheikh Zayed is now buried next to the mosque. 3000 workers took part in the 10 years of construction.

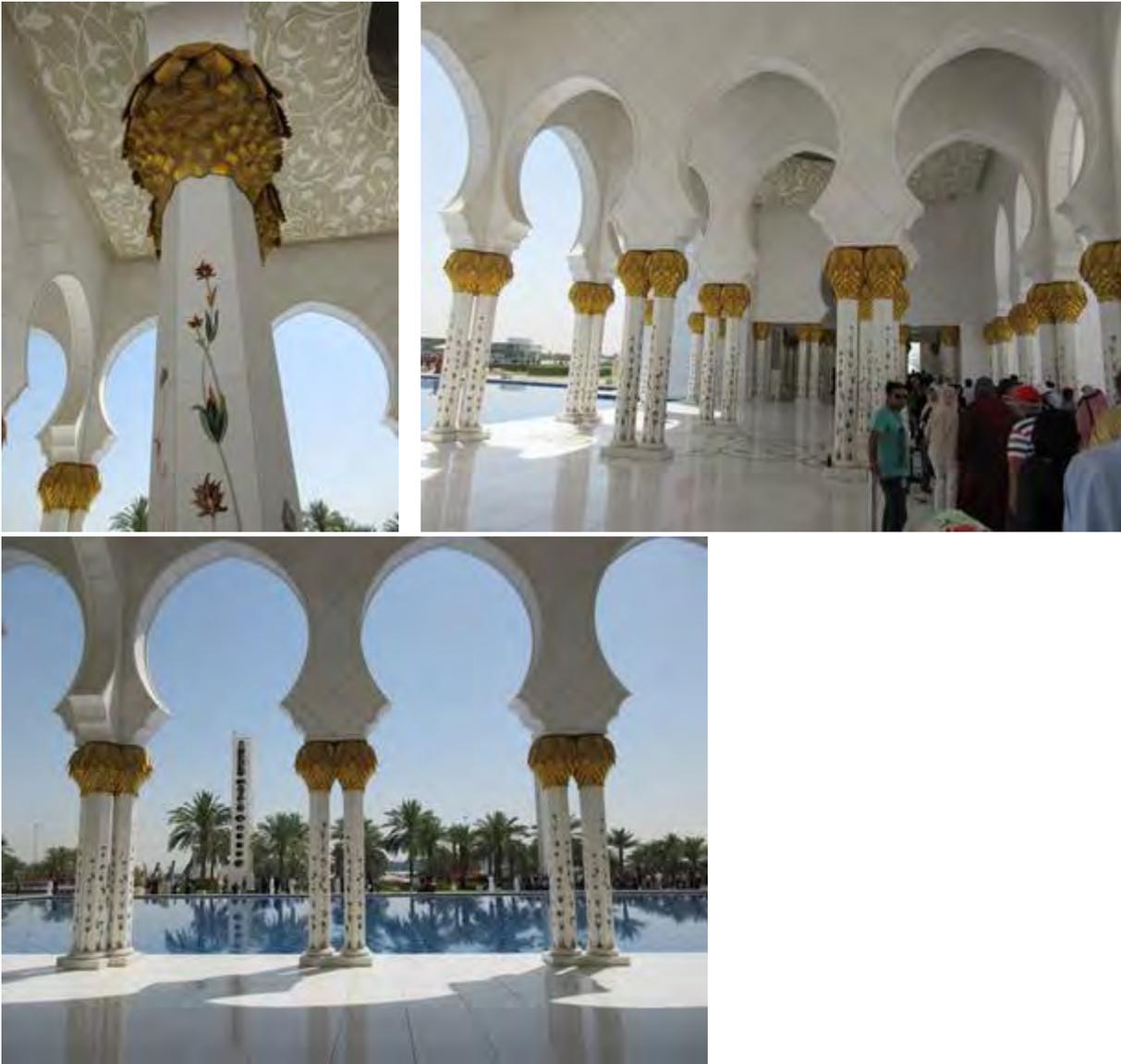


We followed the crowd around the pristine courtyard with its' floral designs. It measures about 180,000 sq ft, and is considered to be the largest example of marble mosaic in the world. According to Barti, there is a bit of

controversy about the mosque because of its unique use of floral designs & mosaics. Islamic mosques generally don't use any floral decorations.



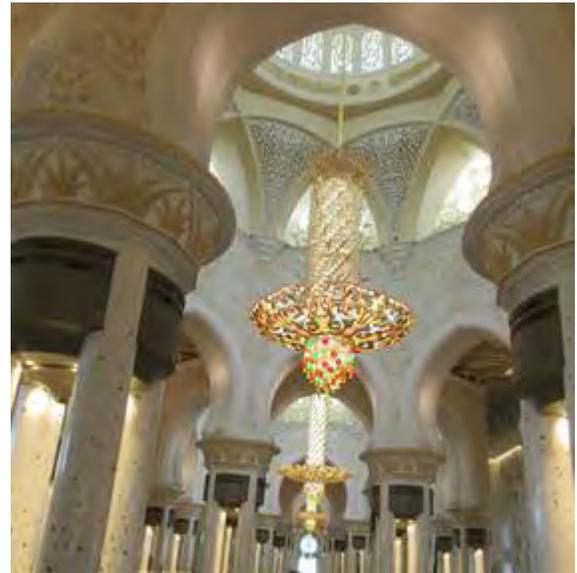
Our colorful friends blended into some of the intricate mosaics. There is also an elaborate Qiblah, the wall made facing Mecca to aid the worshipers in the alignment for prayer, which has 99 names for Allah inscribed on it.



The pillars were all decorated with floral patterns along the length of them & all had golden pineapple designs at the top. When we mentioned how beautiful the reflecting pools were, Barti told us about a unique lighting system designed to reflect the phases of the moon. There are 22 light towers which project soft clouds of a 'bluish gray' color on the exterior of the mosque. This light changes according to the moon phase every night. Wish we could have seen that!! He said sometimes at night you can see the different colors as you drive past.



Inside the prayer chambers, the Mosque contains seven chandeliers, each are made up of millions of Swarovski crystals. The largest of these is the largest in the world, measuring 33ft in diameter and 49ft high. All made by Faustig, the German producer I mentioned from touring the Mosque in Oman. LED Synergy designed the 9 prayer clocks with precise instructions from 2 Senior Mullah from the UK. The clocks switch between English & Arabic to show precise prayer times.



The carpet in the main prayer hall is said to be the largest single piece of handmade carpet in the world (remember my comment in the mosque in Oman? That used to be the largest, but this one is bigger!), measuring around 67,570 square feet and weighing around 35 tons. With around 1,200 carpet knotters contributing, it took approximately 2 years to create, using wool from New Zealand and Iran. There are 96 marble pillars in the main prayer hall, each delicately inlaid with mother of pearl. It's made up of mostly natural materials such as marble, stone, gold, crystals and semi-precious stones. They are very proud that different building materials were sourced from many countries like Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Germany, Austria, New Zealand, China, India, and Pakistan, it goes along with the original purpose of blending the culture!



After loading back into our van, we toured around the city a bit. Although not quite as impressive in architecture as Dubai, Abu Dhabi has no debt & the leaders are being very careful with it's expansion, whereas Dubai is now close to bankruptcy! They just tried to do too much too soon. Dubai is also fairly dependent on tourism, whereas Abu Dhabi is almost totally funded by oil. Oil is a lot more dependable!! Barti pointed out this one building that looks like it's leaning. He said it felt weird inside also. Most interesting were all the window cleaners. We saw them on almost every building! Barti said it was a never ending job & lots of them worked for just one building complex. By the time they reached the bottom floor, it was time to start again at the top!! Teaser photo of this enormous white Palace complex!!!!



We lost a little time looking for a place to eat. Barti had a reservation for us at a hotel's buffet, but a bus group arrived before we could get there & they decided it would delay us too much, so they took us to a popular local buffet. A little more expensive, but It was very good with tons of choices. Had no idea what most were, but tried a lot & it was yummy. All the others there were locals. That is usually a good sign!



On to what was to be my favorite stop of the entire vacation – the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital!!!! While I was researching this stop last September, I happened to see a National Geographic magazine article about it. I asked Barti about including it in the tour & he was very enthusiastic about it. Here's a link for it <https://www.falconhospital.com/> We had to have an appointment scheduled in advance & we arrived to find our Emirates guide already started. The was a full crowd of all Nationalities. The Emirates spoke snippets of all the languages: German, French, Chinese, Thai, Arabic of course, & was fully conversant in English. He was also a stand up comic & loved practical jokes. So in between true information about the history of the hospital & info about the UAE love & use of the Falcons, he told jokes! Barti told us that most Emirates do not work. The UAE provides all of them a monthly salary, free education, free housing, free transportation, & free medical care. So why work? But some of them decide they wish to do something & this was his chosen job. Barti said he would be paid a huge monthly salary for doing this. As to the hospital – it was originally established in 1999 and is the largest falcon hospital in the world. Originally just a veterinary facility for falcons, it is now a tourist stop, an education center, & cares for everything from pets to everything avian. It is also a kennel for birds & other pets. They have an established breeding program for individuals & to release into the wild.



After the general briefing, they moved us into a different room where lots of the falcons were being held. They all had on hoods. They explained that Falcons are very territorial & without the hoods, they would be constantly attacking one another. But with their eyes covered, even though they could hear & smell the others

in the room, they were calm & basically still. Even with us moving beside them, they would swivel their heads, obviously aware of us moving past them, but they didn't act startled or uneasy. It was amazing seeing all the various sizes & colors. The white one was magnificent. Basically, besides being the national bird of the UAE, the falcon has been a part of the culture throughout known history. Originally used for hunting, the hunting dog of the sky!, they are now used for sport & just kept as pets. The type of falcon we are most familiar with is the Peregrine, one of the smaller, but fastest falcons. Here in the UAE, the Saker falcon is the most common & the largest is the Gyr falcon.



Next they divided us into 2 groups to watch them perform some procedures on an anesthetized falcon. First they just inspected it for any injuries or problems. Then he trimmed the toe nails.



This falcon did not need it, but he showed us how they can replace & repair feathers. There are kits with pins to attach a broken feather. They keep all feathers that they find in the cages or when they molt so that they have multiple sizes & can fix most anything! It was awesome! They also know exactly how much gas to give them, because we watched the falcon start to wake up almost immediately after they removed the tiny little gas mask. It was really brilliant to watch this whole operation.



They brought in a falcon that is a full time resident & very used to being held. He was passed from person to person & was very calm & seemed pleased with all the attention. We could even pet him. He was just beautiful.



There were also 2 different owls. They were even tame enough for us to pet them.



They asked for a young volunteer & this boy stepped up, not really realizing that he was volunteering to hold the falcon while it consumed a small guinea fowl!!! It was quite interesting watching it feed. We could hear it breaking & eating the bones! So could all the other falcons in the room, they were tilting their heads towards the noise. They knew they were next to get their dinner! The boy was a good sport, it was obvious he hadn't quite expected that!



Our Emirates led us outside to view some of the grounds. There were multiple outdoor cages where various birds were kept. Lots of owls, I believe they were rescued & would be released. They had some peacocks wandering around loose. There were quite a few different kinds of trees being managed.



The last stop was the Molting room (is it molt or moult? I found it spelled both ways in several articles!). It was round and the walls were mostly greenish blue. They didn't mention if that was helpful in some way? Anyway, they said that during molting (which can take 3 to 8 weeks!!), as long as they were fed on a daily basis (about 1 guinea hen per falcon per day), they could leave them without hoods or leashes & they would not attack each other. Not sure why, but they were obviously very calm & didn't mind us wandering inside. One was in the sand having a dirt bath! Our guide said they were free to fly around, but didn't do so much during molting. The hospital acted as a boarding school for falcons during molting. Many owners just leave them there for care during this period. Our adorable guide posed for pictures as we said goodbye & wished them good luck with this wonderful project.



The drive back into town showed us more of the clean vibrant city. Beautiful buildings. We got tickled about this sign all along the streets. Apparently some sort of cell phone advertisements, but they were really

pretty. Shaped like a cell phone & all with a pole in the background, matching the pole it is placed on. Some with woodpeckers, some with other birds, some bamboo stalks. Barti didn't have any idea what it was about.



We made a quick stop at a Date Market before arriving at the Novotel Hotel. We all tasted some delicious dates – some stuffed with almonds & some covered in chocolate. Several bought some gift packs to take home. Abu Dhabi is known for their yummy date exports. Barti wanted to continue on to a Heritage Museum, but we were all tired & voted to just get to the hotel & relax for the evening.

Had the evening free for some time to relax. George & I found a little grocery just across the courtyard from the hotel that had a deli. We bought some interesting wraps & some chips & enjoyed a picnic dinner in our room. Then had our wine before bed with John & Kay in their room. They had made a stop at a nearby pharmacy for some drugs. George was nearly over his cold, but John, John, & Jerry were still suffering from the effects! Strangely, none of the women got it!!

One more day left. It was a totally full one, from first thing in the morning until late at night. Hopefully I can cover it in one report. Don't give up on me! I'm almost done!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

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Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pampicts.shutterfly.com>

pam@gphurd.com

From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Thursday, June 13, 2019 2:12 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #16 - Abu Dhabi - 2nd Day, Thur, 18 Apr 2019

Good Morning Everyone,

We had a really full day planned for our last day in Abu Dhabi. Let's get going!



Still a lot of eating to do, even off the ship! Had an awesome included breakfast at the hotel! Love these 4 Star hotels!



Before we left, Jerry came downstairs to say that he, Frances, & Paula were not going to tour with us this morning. They were leaving tonight, immediately after our desert safari, so needed to spend the day getting things organized & rest a

little. Disappointing, but certainly understandable. After we left the hotel to head to our Dhow cruise, Barti stopped along the river to let us get up close to some old fishing boats that are still in use. There were no people around, but it was obvious that they had recently been out fishing. Some of the local catches were cleaned & hanging to dry beside the boats. It was interesting how they were all docked side by side & you could actually walk from one to the other.



The metal nets were shared & Barti said they sometimes sold their catch directly from the small boats, but there was a line of tents set up & check out the line of trailers along the street!! Assume that's where many of them live when they aren't on the boats? What a contrast to see the technical marvels of the Abu Dhabi skyline from the decks of these well used fishing boats!



Our bus pulled into a small parking lot to let us walk to our tour boat. We noticed these mobile food trucks. The last one looked like it had been parked there for years! It was all banged up & the paint was all cracked. Even Barti was laughing about it. Certainly wouldn't buy anything off of it, even if we were starving!!!



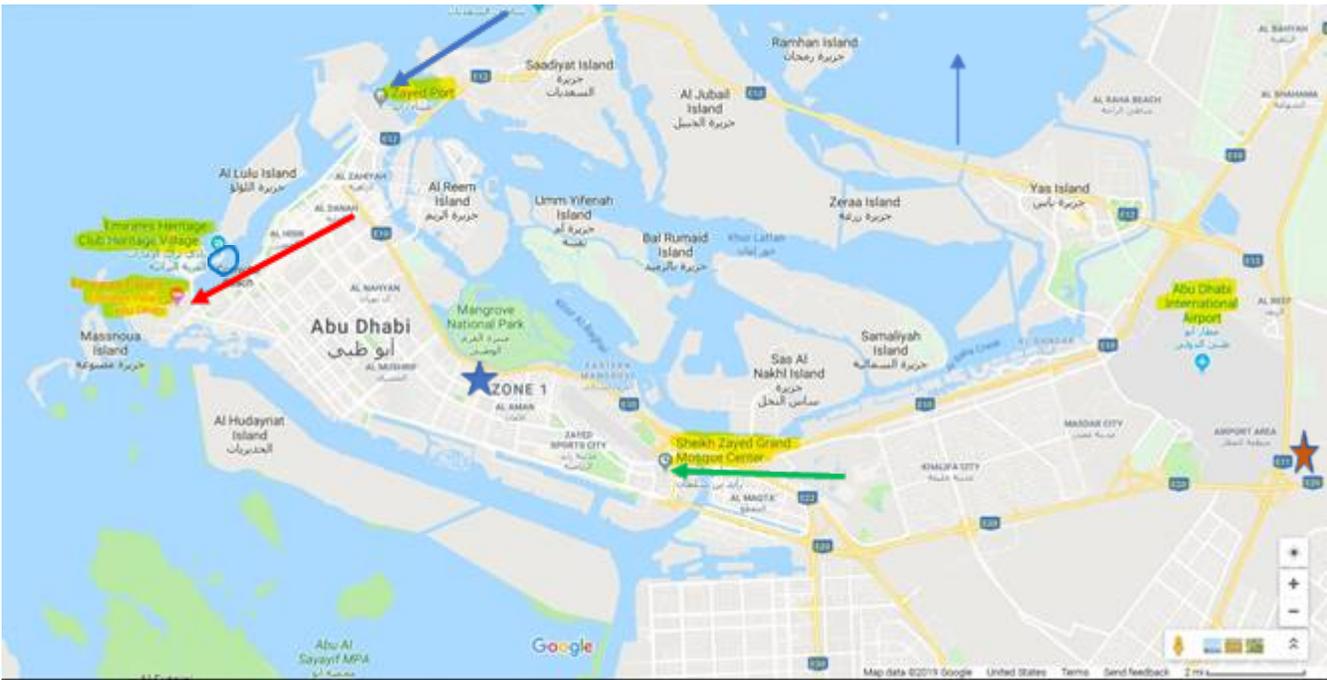
There weren't many of us on the boat, apparently most folks do the sunset tour that includes dinner (that was all set up downstairs). We had other plans for then! This was just a gentle, relaxing cruise along the water to see a beautiful

perspective of the city. Interested to see that there was a public beach with glittering white sand just in front of the downtown skyline. And at one end of the circuit, we could see some sand dunes compared to the pristine white beach.



The skyline was gorgeous from the water. The color of the water looked like the blue water at Disney Land. Assume it was fairly shallow. Didn't ask. By the way, this Dhow, as it was called, is a traditional Arabian teak boat. Although when I look up "dhow," it says it is a sail boat, generally with 2 masts. Okay, so the mast were there, just not being used for anything!

N



Here's a little map to give you an approximate idea of where we were going in Abu Dhabi. Blue arrow is the Cruise Port. Green Arrow is to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. Red Arrow is the Palace & just above is the Heritage Village (coming next). Orange star is the approximate location of the Falcon Hospital. It was about 30 miles from the Falcon Hospital to the Novotel Hotel, Blue Star. That blue circle is approximately our boat cruise area.



We made a short stop at the Heritage Village near the Marina Mall on Corniche (the main road that we drove multiple times). It was interesting, but it was sooooo hot, we didn't stay too long. There is no entrance fee, it's set up to show life on the Arabian peninsula BEFORE the oil money!! On the water front are a few of the old wooden boats. There were lots of stalls set up selling standard souvenirs (from China Ha), a few with artistes demonstrating their abilities.



The hungry camel was enjoying attention. You could step inside the different desert homes – made with stones & animal hide walls & thatched roofs. There were the expected oil lamps & surprisingly enough, the electric plugs for the desert nomads cell phone charging? Ha Ha!!! Inside were displays with both metal & pottery containers (couldn't touch them to rub for the genie!!).



Just have to mention that it felt like you could have eaten off the streets here. Everywhere!! No trash, no cigarette butts, no gum! Amazing! And almost every corner had intricate parks decorated with amazing statutes. In the corner of the 2nd picture, notice another one of those cell phones – this one has a boa constrictor for the pole!!!

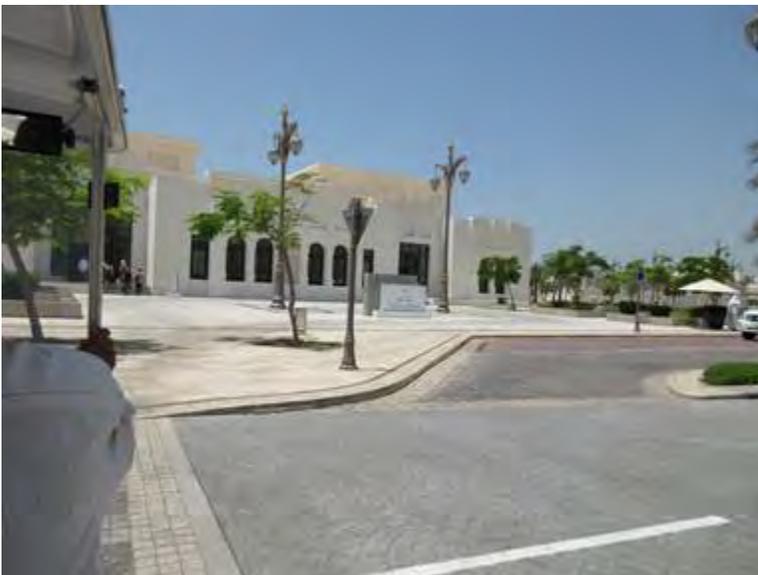


And one more picture of window cleaners! A whole squadron of them!! So, you can see that they are on individual cables & just using squeegees by hand! And holding their own bucket! Is that scary or what???



In the spirit of collaboration, acceptance and hospitality, the United Arab Emirates opens the doors of Qasr Al Watan to the public. These three values are an important part of Emirati culture and are reflected in the main function of the Palace, which is to host official visits and summits. They are also echoed in the architecture of the building, which draws on the best traditions of Arab and Arabian Gulf architecture from past centuries and interprets them for the 21st century. This has resulted in a modern Palace that is a unique landmark.

The main building of Qasr Al Watan is part of a 380,000-square-metre complex, which has rooms reserved to receive dignitaries during state visits and major international and regional summits. The wings allocated for the President, Vice President and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi are behind the main building. The Palace is home to Qasr Al Watan Library, which holds a vast collection of rare books and manuscripts. The construction of Qasr Al Watan began in 2010 and was completed in 2017.



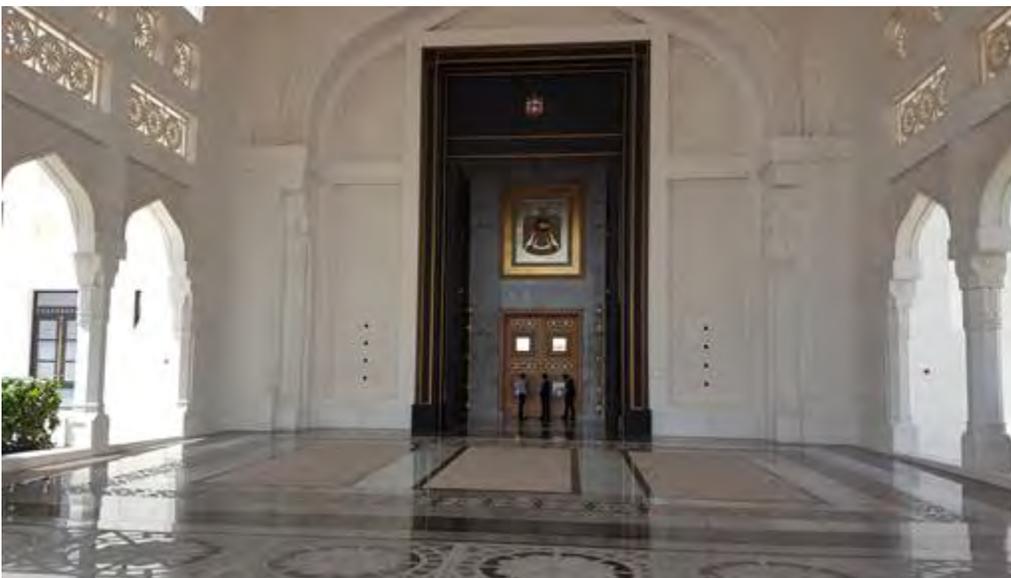
Okay, here's another HUGE highlight of this trip. Our original booking of tours for these 2 days only had us doing the 1 hour boat cruise in the morning, then back to the hotel & pick up in the evening for our dune safari & dinner in the desert. Yesterday, Barti suggested that for an additional small charge, he would take us to the Presidential Palace, Qasr

Al Watan. It was completed in 2017, but only opened up for public tours in March, tickets are about \$15 ea to visit. The 6 of us decided to do it & OMG! We are very very happy that we did! Other than the printed info in the picture above, I can't find any other details on the internet about it. Barti said that they had not officially published it, but according to his sources, the palace cost 42 Billion American Dollars to build!!! Yep, that is BILLION! If you look at the palace on their website, <https://www.qasralwatan.ae/en/explore-the-palace> you can see pictures with a little explanation. We were only allowed in the one building. There are several separate buildings in the complex. This is not only where the president of the UAE lives, it is also where he invites all the heads of state for any visits. We got out of our bus in the HUGE parking lot and were picked up by a golf cart & taken to the Visitor's Center where we went through a pretty serious security check. They even took away the finger nail file in my fanny pack & the few pieces of hard candy I had in there. They held them for me at security & I picked them up when we were leaving!!! They even took a picture with my camera to check it!!! As we were going thru security, several Emirates had things taken from them also – cigarettes & lighters for sure!





We exited out the back door of that building & got on bus that drove us to the main Palace building that we could tour. Check out the actual streets! Can you believe we were driving on these intricately laid patterns?



So you get out of the bus & have to walk through this huge mezzanine area. You come to this enormous entrance with guards to open the doors. You are allowed to enter one at a time.



And you are then looking at this – the *entrance* to the Great hall. So by the way – anything that is “golden” colored is not just colored – it is real honest to goodness GOLD. It actually takes your breath away. George was pretty good about getting views of the ceiling too. One of the first things they do is suggest you enter the official Media room. They have a

professional photographer set up to take a picture of you sitting in one of the seats at the desk!! We didn't do it, have no idea what they charged for it.





We moved on into the Great Hall. The description on line says that the dome is 60 meters high & 37 meters across. I can tell you it looked enormous. We've been to the Vatican – unless my memory deceives me, this place makes it look like a sad old apartment building! Well maybe not really, but this place is certainly like nothing we've ever seen before. Got a kick out of seeing all the Emirates there. Barti said the locals are just as excited as the tourist for the palace to be open.



We spent a little time taking pictures of each other. There were these huge multifaceted glass cubes in the corners, we tried taking a selfie with it.



I tried to zoom in on some of the specific designs. It was really difficult. The place is so mesmerizing, it was hard to separate individual aspects.

Okay, I have to stop here. The email is too big & Outlook freezes on me. I don't want to cut out too many pictures, so it is easier to just divide up the tour! I should be able to finish the Palace, the Dune Safari & get us home in a final email!

Please don't go away!

Hope you are enjoying this amazing place with us!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Check out our web site! [Hurd's Round Dance Home Page](#)

Check out our dance demo videos www.DanceRounds.info

Look at pictures, videos, & Photo books on Shutterfly <http://pamspics.shutterfly.com>

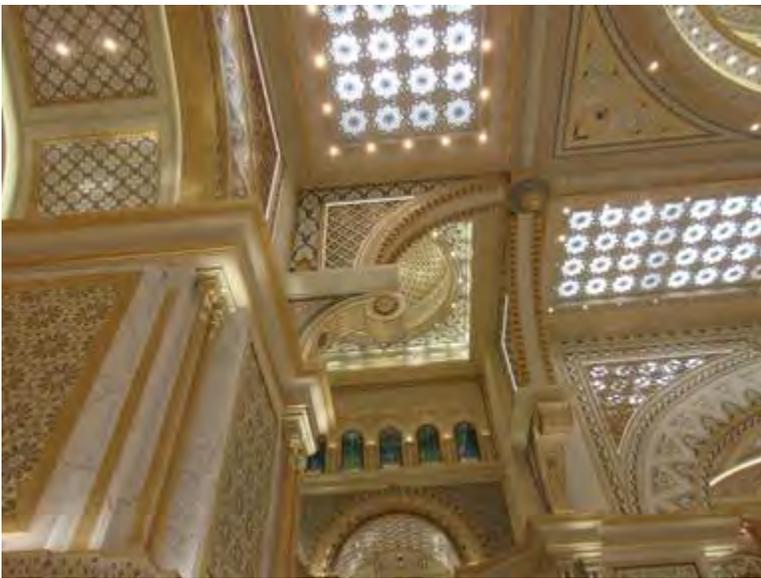
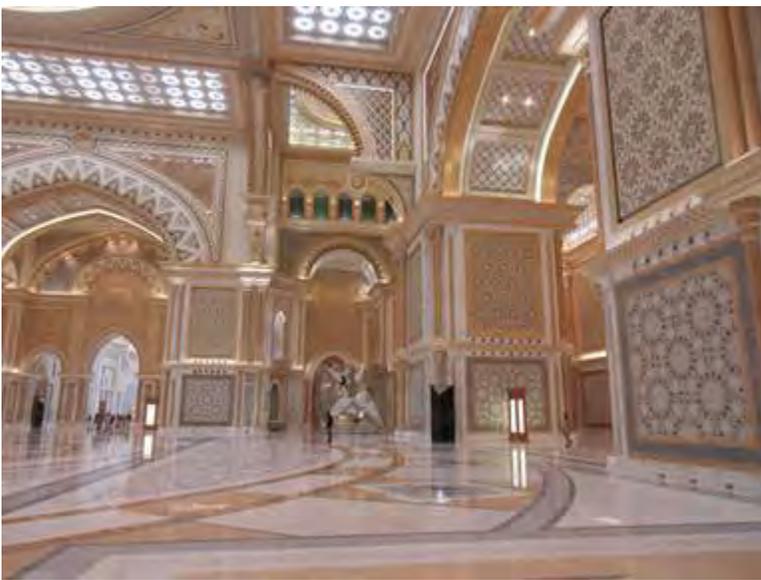
From: pam@gphurd.com
Sent: Thursday, June 13, 2019 7:14 PM
To: pam@gphurd.com
Subject: Singapore Sensation Vacation #17 - Abu Dhabi - the end, Thurs, 18 Apr 2019

Hi Guys,

That was a crazy place to stop, but it was already too big & even rushing, I have too many things to show you to deal with the oversize email! Let's get right to it – this should be the last email for this vacation!!!!



And yes, I took pictures in the toilet! All gold trim in there too. Individual stall doors were carved wood with . Even the waste basket, sprayer, & toilet roll holder were gold! The etched mirrors were amazing!



Just more pictures as we walked through the side wings & back into the Great Hall.



There was another photo opportunity. There was a professional photographer stationed to take a picture of you inside this Golden Globe. We all went inside, but didn't pose. She was clicking pictures anyway, but we never went to see what they looked like!

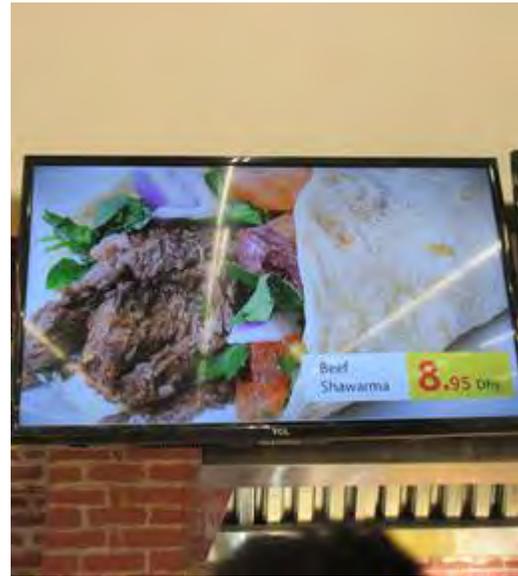


By this time, we were basically in sensory overload. There were several separate rooms to investigate – you can read more on line if you are interested. There was a huge library (we could only look in from a roped off doorway), a room

holding gifts to different UAE presidents from world leaders (never found anything from the US!), a room that holds historical artifacts commemorating the Arabian contributions to the world (medical, literary – 1001 Arabian Nights!, etc), and a room with photos of all the previous UAE leaders.



The last room on the list was the Presidential Banquet Hall. It speaks for itself! Of course all the place settings were specifically designed for use in this hall. I have loaded all the pictures George & I took in the palace on my Shutterfly account. If you want to look through them, here's that specific link! <https://pampicts.shutterfly.com/57527>

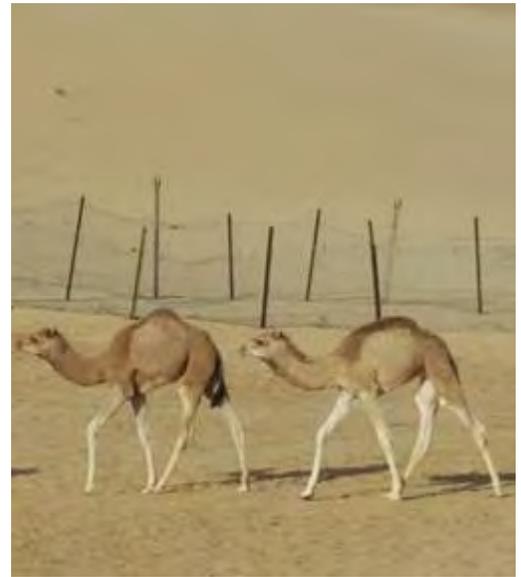


By this time, we were really really hungry! We discussed what options we had for a quick lunch & he suggested that we pop into the Marina Mall & have a local delicacy, Shawarma. It is a type of sandwich served in pita bread with your choice of shaved meat (chicken, lamb, or beef), assorted vegetables (including French fries stuffed inside the pocket), & a lovely spicy sauce. Cost about \$2 ea & it was AWESOME! Have to look for it in Mesa!



While eating our local fast food in the van, we drove back to the hotel. Original plan was to be there about an hour before pick up for our desert safari, but the palace had taken too long & there was traffic enroute back to the hotel, so

turned out that our transportation to dinner was already waiting in front of the hotel and Jerry, Frances, & Paula were ready to load up! We got a chance for a quick potty stop & we hopped in the vehicles. Okay, now here is where I have to admit that sometimes when I am planning, I jump on something that sounds good by the title, so I don't really read much more about it. Barti had suggested a "desert safari with dinner." Yep, sounds great for our last night in the UAE. My first clue that things were a little different than I had imagined was when Barti asked me if we wanted the full out wild ride or a more sedate one? Huh? So after verifying that 6 of us could fit in one vehicle, I suggested a wild one for the 6 of us & a bit safer one for the other 3. When we arrived at the hotel, I verified that with Paula, Jerry, & Frances. Now, I still didn't really know what "wild" meant, but we set out with our driver in the lead with the other SUV following. Got to see the Sheikh Zayed Bridge on the way out of town! Nearest I can figure, we were driving south, southeast out of town. Drove for about an hour as the scenery got more & more remote. Loved the brightly clad chicken salesman!!



Our first stop was just to see a camel farm. We were about the last to arrive, so the camels were already being fed & soon wandered off. We really didn't want to pet them anyway. It was fun to see the little ones. Babies are cute no

matter who's they are, right? While we were looking at the camels, all the drivers were letting air out of their tires! Apparently that gives us a little more traction? Back in our big Land Rovers & we were ready to go!!!





Okay, so here's where the "wild" came in. Now that I'm in the know, it's called "Dune Bashing!" George has a video – can't see much, but boy oh boy can you hear the girls scream! And of course, my shrill screech is the loudest of all. John H said that the more we screamed, the wilder & faster our driver got! The scariest was when we'd fly up the side & slide down. It was definitely a wild wild ride. And all of us would do it again in an instant!!!! So for a size/distance comparison – look at the first picture closely & see the little tiny white SUV on the left side of the dune. We were flying up, down, sideways. It was awesome. And did I mention stupid?? Our driver/guide told us later that he had 15 years of experience doing this! He was certainly good as far as we were concerned! At least we never rolled over, although my left hand gripped so tight I could barely unfurl it later!



We stopped for a short break for pictures. Everyone was jumping in the air & trying to get a picture of it. Connie at least got 1 foot off the ground! I bent my knees & pretended! John T & George won the prize! Kay just laughed at all of us!



We thought the wild part was all over, but as soon as we drove off, we were at it again! Yee Haw!! So that's the best I could do for an action shot! When we finally arrived at the Bedouin Camp, we were exhilarated & very happy to be alive!



The encampment was pretty large. We filed in & our guide showed us our table. First item on the agenda was a beer & a toast to never getting too old!!! Jerry, Frances, & Paula costumed up & got a photo with the Falcon. I wanted to ride a camel, but the line was too long & the camels looked too tired & put upon!



We wandered over to one of the shops & realized a guy was making sand pictures in the little glass bottles in person. That seemed like a pretty cool souvenir, and easy to carry, so I bought one. It was amazing watching him do the designs! Quite a talent. Later in the evening the girls visited the Henna tent & got "tattooed!" Kay & Connie were smart enough to get theirs on the inside of their arm so they could cover it up. In about 4 days started looking like I had a disease or hadn't washed my hand in a while! Kept shocking myself when I would point at something! Note to self – don't do that again!!!



After the barbeque buffet (my pictures didn't turn out – all fuzzy!), we were entertained. First was a guy that basically twirled. Fast & Furious. Sort of reminded me of the Egyptian/Turkish Whirling Dervishes. He invited girls up to try it –

most lasted about 5 spins & nearly fell down. Then he turned on costume lights! Wow! That was really cool. Then a girl came out to Belly Dance. Strangely enough, George had a lot of pictures of her? Not sure why? Ha! Anyway, she was really really good.



The grand finale of the evening was an invitation to join the dancers on stage to dance. Paula joined in & did a great job! We stayed seated & clapped a lot! Then the 3 of them said goodbye & took off – Jerry & Frances were heading straight to the airport!! Paula would leave shortly after that. We all had flights tomorrow, so we hung around until the end. They turned out the lights just before we all started to leave & gave us a chance to look at the stars. Not as impressive as in Africa, but it was still a lovely way to finish up our trip! We got in the Land Rover & were settling in for a long boring ride back to town when we realized that they do Dune Bashing in the dark too! Holy Moly! That was exciting!!!! Even after we made it back to the highway, we weren't totally safe! Our driver pulled off on an unpaved road – said it was a short cut! It was an interesting drive back to say the least. He was hoping to show us gazelle, but they were too elusive. By the way, Abu Dhabi means Father of Gazelles. Last bit of trivia before I end this travelogue!!!



John, Connie, George & I headed to the airport a little after 6am (John & Kay were to leave later that evening). Even that was exciting! Had scheduled our pick up & got a young girl from Nairobi! Not sure, but we might have been her first

passengers! She couldn't figure out how to back up in the hotel driveway. Interesting! Anyway, we made it fine & John & Connie took off for first class & we settled in for our cattle car trip back. The best thing was that there is an apparent agreement with the Abu Dhabi airport & the US Customs, because we did all our customs/immigration procedure there before we took off! When we landed in New York, it was as if we were on a domestic flight! Amazing! As we took off, I saw the crazy curved Airport Control Tower. Assume that's a one of a kind! Enjoyed seeing the Arabian Sea coastline from our take off path. And so it's gone! Another vacation experience totally completed! It was amazing from beginning to end. Hope you enjoyed the trip with us!

Until next time!! We'll be cruising to Antarctica in December!!

Love ya,



Pamela & George

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