

Pago Pago, American Samoa – Day 58 Nov. 23:

By the time we woke up the Amsterdam had already started the approach to the harbor of Pago Pago, American Samoa. We had visited Pago Pago in 2009 just a short time after a tsunami wave had caused significant damage at several places along the coast and harbors of American Samoa (check out <http://2009aunzcruise.thestansfields.com>). Life had been disrupted for many of the families on the island. We were looking forward to our visit and hoping the good folk of American Samoa had been able to make repairs and get their lives back on track.

This morning we were entering the harbor by 7am and we passed the old Rainmaker Hotel as shown on the right. It appeared not much better than it was in 2009. Temporary patches had been put over some of the holes in the roof of the old building and some new construction was underway on the property.



The Amsterdam eased past the Rainmaker Hotel and docked a short distance away at the Container Pier in the port of Pago Pago, as shown in the map on the left. The port is formed by a deep indentation in the volcanic island of Tutuila. There are several villages along the harbor but the main commercial center is in the village of Pago Pago at the tip of the harbor and the whole harbor complex is called Pago Pago.

The pronunciation of Pago Pago is one of the enduring mysteries for us folks who only do fragmentary research on the places we go. Apparently the natives and other people familiar with the area have always

pronounced the name as if it were spelled “Pahngo Pahngo”. Some documents even spelled it Pango Pango like it sounds to an English speaking person. At some point in the past the official name on charts and other documents was changed to Pago Pago even though the pronunciation by local people remained “Pahngo Pahngo”. We have stuck with the Pahngo Pahngo pronunciation but Captain Everson of the Amsterdam doesn’t buy in to the Pahngo Pahngo pronunciation and says Pago Pago just like most English speaking people would.

We had signed up for a private tour organized by Pauline, one of our Cruise Critic and cruising friends. The tour was to start as soon as we got clearance from the local officials which was estimated at about 9am. The tour was provided by a lady named Tisa who runs a company called “Tisa’s Barefoot Tours of Pago” www.tisasbarefootbar.com . It consisted of a drive along the coastline to the eastern tip of the island where we were hosted by the PTA of Matatula Elementary School in a Thanksgiving Day celebration performance by the students. After the Thanksgiving Day celebration we were to return along the coast to Tisa’s Barefoot Bar for refreshments and a dinner cooked in a traditional Samoan oven powered by hot rocks.



This morning, per instructions given by Pauline, we gathered in the Deck 3 Atrium and waited for the announcement that we were cleared to go ashore. While we were waiting, Pauline (on the left in the picture) gave us some details of how we were to find our “Tisa Tours” buses here at the harbor. We wanted to go together as a group to the Matatula Elementary School.

The ship’s crew had been busy putting the gangway in place so we could exit the ship, as shown on the right.



At about 9am we were given the okay to leave the ship and we all filed off as a group. The booths for all the tourist type stuff had been set up on the dock, as shown on the left.

Trying to avoid any distractions we marched by the booths in the direction of our bus.



We did stop for a moment when we found a convenient banner for the Pago Pago Visitor's Bureau. A picture was quickly taken so that the arrival of Barbara's library card could be documented as shown on the left.

The hoards of taxi drivers and tour guides that usually abound at ports like this were out in force. They waited at the gate of the dock and we had to press through them to our bus.



It was a pleasant sunny day with temperature in the 70s so we were comfortable as we hustled along the road looking for our bus. Finally we came to brightly colored buses that Pauline indicated were to be ours. We piled in and shortly were ready to go. Our group filled three buses and we left in a caravan.

We took a route down the south side of the harbor towards the village of Pago Pago which we passed through. Then, as indicated in the map above, we took the road on the north side of the harbor and headed out to the Matatula Elementary School.

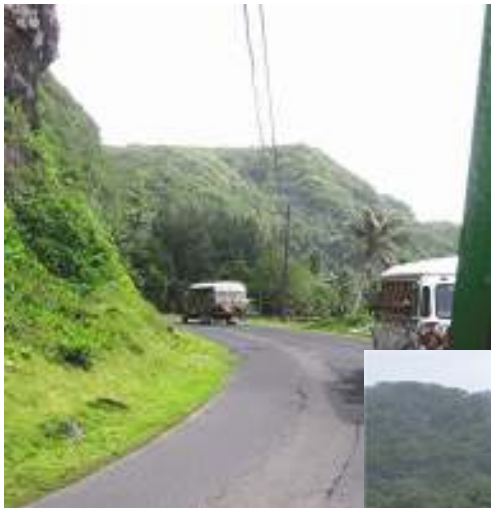
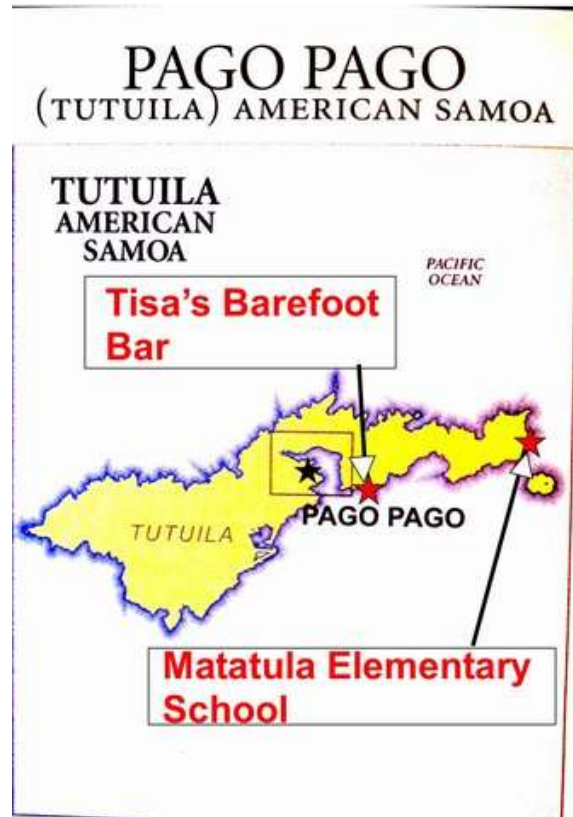
Tuna fishing is a big industry in Pago Pago and when we were here in 2009 the Starkist Company tuna processing plant was pretty much in shambles because of damage from the tsunami. As we passed through town this morning we were pleased to see the plant repaired and the surrounding community looking like a busy productive place. The “Charlie the Tuna” statue beside the road had been spruced up. He even had on a US National Football League Steelers jersey with number 43 on it. This was, no doubt, a tribute to their home island boy of Troy Polamalu who is a defensive player for the Pittsburgh Steelers.



While passing through the town of Pago Pago we were lucky enough to get the photo on the left showing the price of gasoline. Here in American Samoa the currency is the US dollar and the volume measurement is in gallons so we don't even have to go through the rain dance of converting to US standards. Gasoline can be purchased for \$4.25 USD a gallon which is in the ballpark of what it costs in the continental US.

Leaving the town of Pago Pago our buses took the road that hugged the southern shoreline of Tutuila Island. The road led us to the east toward Matatula village and the elementary school as shown in the map on the right. We passed Tisa's Barefoot Bar where we would go later.

We were never out of sight of the surf line or the other buses in our caravan.



After about an hour we arrived at the Matatula Elementary School. The organizations and kids associated with the school are apparently known as the “Blue Pirates”. There were three two story buildings that enclosed a graveled courtyard. A bright blue trim adorned the buildings and the uniforms on the kids were a bright blue. The school was right on the water’s edge and suffered some damage from the 2009 tsunami. There were two temporary Quonset type buildings in the courtyard which we assumed were part of the tsunami recovery program.



We climbed out of the buses and walked into the open courtyard of the school. Apparently we were a little late and the program had already started. There were many



parents and other local people sitting and standing around the edge of the courtyard watching the children perform their dances. They may have made some special accommodations for the fact that visitors from the Amsterdam would be there but it was a school

Thanksgiving Celebration event that would have been carried out whether or not we were there.

As shown in the picture on the right, we stood or sat on the concrete walkway or on chairs that were provided. Tisa, (lady with the hat in the picture) obviously had some connection with the school and helped to make sure we were all taken care of and could see the show.



The photo on the right gives some indication of how close the school is to the ocean. The surf can be seen breaking near the school yard.

There was a series of dances performed by the uniformed children. The youngest ones were first and then the upper grades took part. A few pictures of the children dancing are shown below.



There is a desire to keep the old Samoan culture alive and it looks like this young fellow is doing his part.

There was a break in the dancing and a young girl took the microphone and delivered a 5 minute speech. She was speaking all in Samoan so we didn't know what she was saying. However, we observed that some of the parents standing near her tucked dollar bills into her collar or placed them behind her ear. We concluded she was an outstanding student who had been given this opportunity to give a speech and people were acknowledging what she had to say.



The giving of dollar bills to the performers was not limited to the girl giving the speech. People, presumably parents, from the audience got up and moved into the dancing students to give dollar bills to specific kids. Sometimes they would tuck the bills into the



clothing but other times they would throw the money at the child or just lay it on their heads where it soon fell to the ground as they danced. The photo on the left shows some adults in the act of giving money to the dancers during a performance. We

were fascinated by this custom and wanted to encourage the kids but hesitated to join in for fear that our ignorance of the custom would create an embarrassing situation. Later there was an opportunity for us visitors to make a donation in a central collection plate.

Older boys and girls also took part in the ceremony with active dances.



Refreshments in the form of coconuts with straws were passed out to the visitors.

As the program was drawing to a close, Larry, from our group of Amsterdam passengers took the microphone, as shown on the right. He briefly thanked the school and students for their presentation. The local people applauded and showed their appreciation for his comments.

The formal part of the dance celebration was then over but the music continued and people in the audience, including Amsterdam people joined in, as shown below.



Finally it was time for us visitors to leave. For our collection of photos we took pictures of a couple “Dogs of Samoa” unconcerned with human activity and resting in the parking lot.



Sitting behind us on the bus was a little girl who had been in the school Thanksgiving festivities. She was the daughter of our bus driver and since school had been dismissed for the day he was giving her a ride home.

We drove back along the coastline about 30 minutes until we came to Tisa’s Bar and Grill, as shown by this roadside sign. Actually we know it better as “Tisa’s Barefoot Bar” which sounds a little more like the laid back South Seas place that it is.



Before lunch was served we had about an hour of relaxation time for drinks. For the more athletic types the bar included a beach for wading or swimming in the ocean, as shown on the right.



We picked out a table in the shade and prepared to enjoy the afternoon watching the beach and talking to our neighbors in the bar. We were soon joined by a friendly group of fellow Amsterdam passengers. Shown below are Francois, Denise, Kathy, Dana, Barbara and Orlin.



Other friends enjoying life around the bar are shown below.

L to R: Carol, Larry, Bruce,
Sandy



On the right: Tisa
Of Tisa's Barefoot Tours of Pago





Below: Helene and Tom,

Marsha and Bob



L to R: Maart and Alex



Below: Dale and Marilyn



L to R: Scott, Karen, Barbara, Tisa



Tisa showing us how they make banana leaf plates for serving the food.



L to R: Kathy and Dana



L to R: Bev, Gary, Francois

L to R: Orlin and (ocean swimmer) Pauline
--- Hey- thanks Pauline for arranging a
great tour and party!



Finally it was time to uncover the traditional Samoan oven and remove the food. Barbara (white shirt) was ready with her camera to record the action.



Coconut shells held cooked fish and spinach.

The papaya halves are exposed in the scene on the right.



After the food was retrieved hot and toasty from the oven it was served up buffet style on our banana leaf plates.

The cooked menu included papaya, New Zealand lamb, turkey, pork, bread fruit, and taro. The coconut shells at the end of the table held the cooked fish and spinach.



The feast was served up on the banana leaf dinnerware as shown below.



Tisa's Barefoot Bar even has its own Dog of Samoa. This pooch seemed more interested in the contents of the banana leaf plates than the beautiful beach behind him.



Unfortunately we had to return to the ship so the party at Tisa's Barefoot Bar had to come to an end. About 2:30pm we reluctantly boarded our buses and headed back to the Amsterdam.



We found the Amsterdam waiting serenely for us at the end of a gauntlet of vendor's stalls, shown on the left. We negotiated that hurdle and climbed on board.

It was a sensational day of visiting a local Thanksgiving celebration and then participating in a Samoan feast laid out next to an idyllic South Sea island beach. It

was hard to imagine anything nicer than this as we closed out the day in Pago Pago.

The Amsterdam got underway about 5pm and headed for Honolulu, Hawaii over calm seas and under a sunny sky.