

## Noumea, New Caledonia – Day 54 Nov. 20:

When we woke up the Amsterdam was already passing through the outer reef and entering into the harbor at Noumea, New Caledonia.

The location of Noumea in the New Caledonian Island chain is shown in the map on the right. Noumea is the capital city of New Caledonian archipelago which is a French protectorate. The dominant language is French although many people speak one of the Melanesian dialects and the currency is the French Pacific franc (XPF). Europeans discovered New Caledonia in 1774 when Captain Cook sighted the main island on one of his voyages. He named it New Caledonia because the topography reminded him of the Scottish Highlands. The French later claimed the islands in 1853 and the islands served as penal colonies from 1864 to 1904. Early in the French ownership of the islands there was the discovery of vast deposits of nickel which are still being mined. The processing and export of nickel is a major part of the local economy. On the



left smoke can be seen rising from the stacks of the nickel processing plant on the outskirts of Noumea. New Caledonia contains about 25 percent of the world's reserves of nickel which is a key ingredient of many critical alloys used in modern industry.

During World War II a significant part of the US Navy was stationed in New Caledonia and

working from these island bases the US played major role in stopping the Japanese advance on Australia.

The Amsterdam was tied up at the Noumea Cruise Terminal by 8am and we could see that the plaza around the terminal was set up for an outdoor market, as shown on the right.



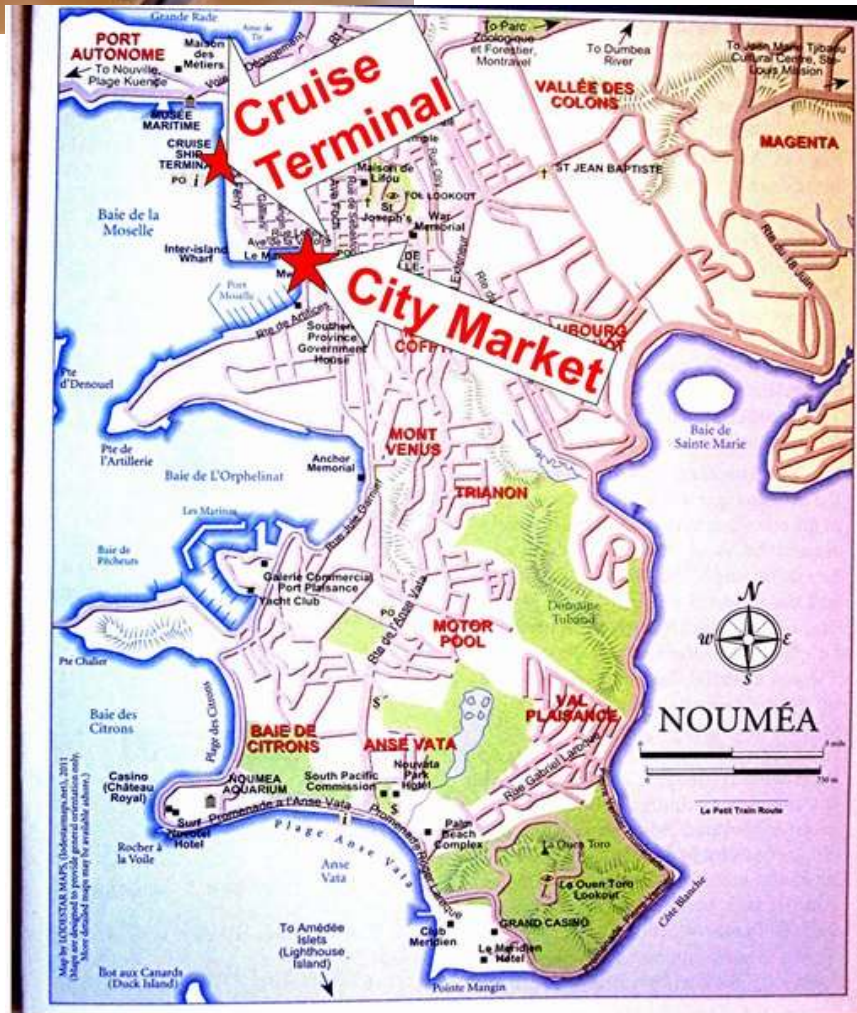
We left the ship about 8:30am for a day of just walking around. After checking out the open booths on the plaza we went upstairs in the terminal building. There was a



Melanesian band playing and singing among the vendors booths on the second floor of the terminal building, as shown on the left.

We have become pretty well “shopped out” so it didn’t take long to complete our tour of the vendor’s booths. We decided that our goal today was to walk to the City Market a few blocks away and then return to the

Amsterdam by way of the park near the city center. A map of Noumea showing the layout of the city is shown on the right.



Although the sun was shining brightly there was a light breeze blowing and it was comfortable for walking.



It was obvious from the start of our visit that the French language was the language of commerce as illustrated by this poster on the right. Without even high school French to help us we were limited to the most simple of communication with the local people. Luckily we really didn't intend to engage in any commercial activity today so our visit went well in spite of the language handicap.

We hiked along the sidewalks between the Cruise Terminal and the City Market trying to stay in the limited shade offered by the buildings. A few pictures of sights along the way are shown below.

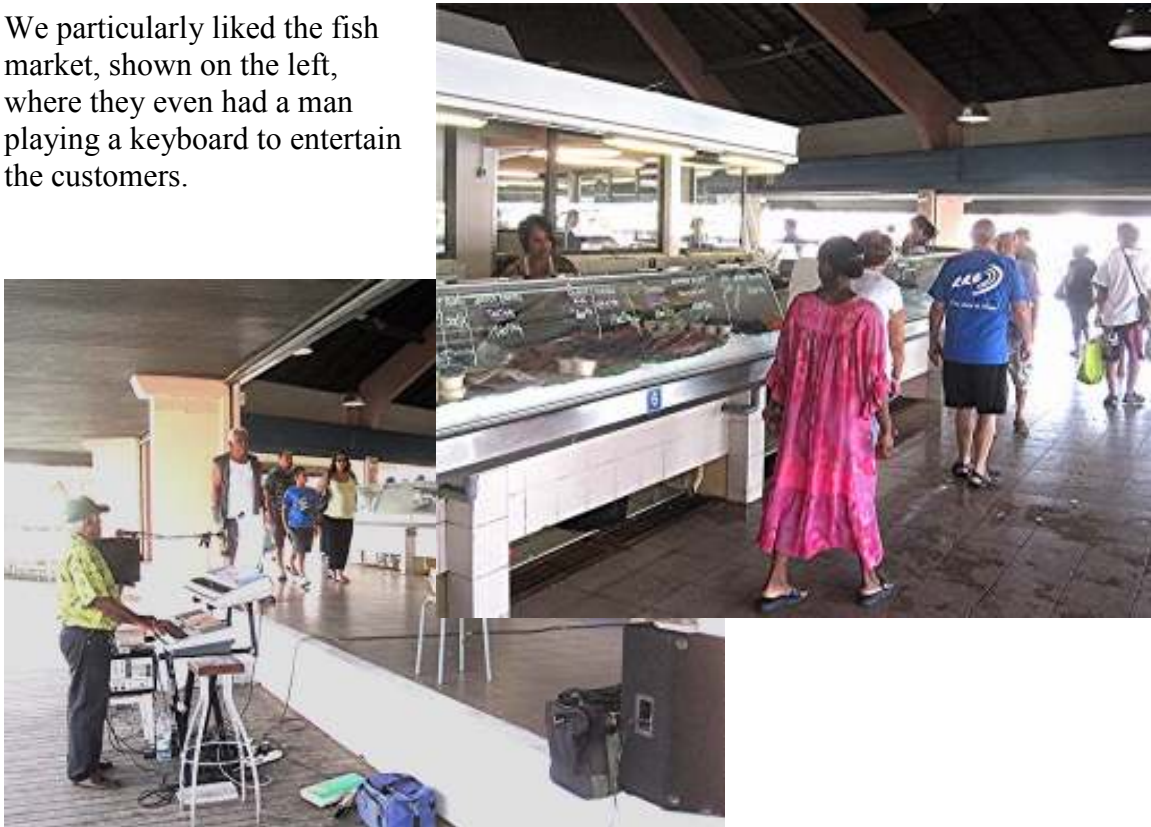


This was a Sunday so most shops were closed for the day. We were told that the ones that were open would probably close at noon. Indeed we found many shops closed. Here is the sign on one closed store that in addition to a steel curtain had a “Closed” sign in three different languages.



When we arrived at the City Market there was no hint of shops being closed. Everyone was open for business and there were lots of local customers as well as tourists.

We particularly liked the fish market, shown on the left, where they even had a man playing a keyboard to entertain the customers.





Lobsters are not especially cheap in Noumea. These fine specimens were selling for 4000 francs per kg. At the going exchange rate of 89 French Pacific franc (XPF) per US dollar that works out to about \$20 USD per pound.



This brightly lit booth with jewelry caught Barbara's eye.

A nearby booth had Tiger Balm ointment for sale that sent Orlin down memory lane. This “Vaseline-like” over the counter medicine was popular when Orlin visited Hong Kong on a US Navy ship back in the late 1950s. In fact, there were amusement



parks in Hong Kong and Singapore connected with the company and called Tiger Balm Gardens. The amusement parks are long gone but the Tiger Balm ointment apparently lives on. In the same booth was a new Tiger Balm product called “Medicated Plaster” for the relief of muscular pain, as shown on the left. People from this part of the world ascribe great

power to tigers, even as we are systematically eliminating them from the surface of the earth. Maybe the Tiger Balm product lines will have greater staying power than the tigers themselves. Let’s hope not.

Next door there was a thriving vegetable and fruit market. We found a colorful and delicious looking display of papaya that we photographed.





We wandered out of the main City Market into a collection of open air booths selling all kinds of crafts and commercial products. It was here that Barbara found a nice place to record the visit of her library card to Noumea. There was a nice display of colorful sarongs and one had “Nouvelle Calidonie” (New Caledonia) emblazoned on a lower corner where the well worn card could be held, as shown on the right.



Near the City Market was a yacht harbor filled with fine looking boats, as shown on the left. Apparently there is a fair bit of money in Noumea looking for outlets and the boat business seems to be filling the bill.



We started our trek back to the Amsterdam by way of city center. By luck we happened to pass a Shell service station and were able to get a fix on the price of gasoline in Noumea today. They had a large sign advertising the fact that this was a Shell service station but they didn't comply with the protocol of posting the gas prices in large numbers next to the street.

There was an attendant but the language gap was too large to handle the question of why a crazy old American without a car would want to know the price of regular gasoline. We settled for just taking pictures of the gas pumps showing the price of recently pumped gas. We found four pumps two of which had pumped gas at 130.6 francs per liter and two had pumped at 158.3 francs per liter as illustrated by the photos on the right.



We made a guess that the 130.6 francs per liter was for regular gasoline. At the exchange rate of 89 francs per USD and approximation of 4 liters per gallon that

works out to \$5.87 USD per gallon of regular gas. That price in the \$5-\$6 per gallon range seems amazingly consistent across these countries with the US drivers getting a break at around \$4 USD or less per gallon for regular gas.

We came across a bus station as shown on the right. That station apparently served as the focal point for buses that ply the streets of Noumea and circle the island. There were a few people waiting there but it looked like a slow day for buses in Noumea.





We proceeded on to the park in the middle of Noumea. It is a lush and beautiful place. Today being Sunday there were only a few people sitting or walking around in the park during the noon hour. As we entered the park we immediately saw a sturdy toilet booth made of solid stainless steel and anchored to the sidewalk, as shown on the right. We didn't need one at the moment but it was reassuring that the citizens of Noumea were looking out for the people with an immediate need. At first we thought it would be a coin operated pay toilet like those we have seen on the streets in Paris. However, this one was completely free with a commode of Western design. It could have used some tidying up but was completely useable.



Going on to a more pleasant subject the trees, shrubbery and landscaping of the park were magnificent. We took a few pictures to illustrate what we mean.





We walked on until we were across the street from the open plaza where the Cruise Terminal was located. There we saw a large highway type sign advertising Coca Cola. That would not be too unusual except that Orlin's mind is tuned to what he thinks are US norms. The man pictured in the sign holding a Coca Cola bottle had a most unusual smirk on his face, as shown on the left. Maybe these signs are all over the US but we hadn't seen one. The man's body/face language transcended the written language and seemed to say in a condescending way, "Drinking this is so obvious; why haven't you tried it?" Maybe this is good advertising, it sure got our attention.





A short time later our friends, Bob and Esther, came by this same location and saw something else that was unusual. They saw a pickup truck with the bed of the truck filled with unwrapped French bread, as shown in the following two photos that Bob took.



Bob couldn't tell if the bread was coming or going to an eating establishment or grocery store. However, an hour later we were watching from an upper deck of the Amsterdam when the truck load of bread drove away. This was just

another observation in a foreign land that you might not see in the US.

The Coca Cola sign and pickup load of bread were somewhat of a diversion from what was going on across the street on the plaza beside the Cruise Terminal. Even across the street we could hear the rhythm of the drums and chanting music from the performers on the plaza. We crossed the street but had to pick our way around the Petit Yellow Train that had pulled up beside the plaza to unload a group of tourists and take on a new load.



Although the Amsterdam's huge size dominated the plaza it was clear that the organizers had planned the program to entertain local people as well as passengers from the Amsterdam. For example there was a children's bouncy tunnel called Le Cheval set up and being used by kids of local people or passing tourists with children, as shown on the right.



The master of ceremonies for the activities taking place spoke primarily in French with occasional explanation in English about what was going to happen or what had just taken place. We were most interested in watching young girls do their native dances and then men, whose weekday jobs were in the nickel processing plant also performed dances that would have been used to prepare for battle.

The pictures below show some of the dances that were performed on the wooden stage that is part of the plaza next to the Cruise Terminal.



The dances were similar to the Polynesian hula dances performed in Hawaii and the other Polynesian islands.





We enjoyed the dances and the effort that the performers and city of Noumea had put into the show we saw. The fact that young people like this are preserving their heritage of native dances was particularly pleasing.

The Amsterdam got underway from Noumea

about 4pm. There were people on the dock and on the Amsterdam waving to each other as we pulled away from the pier and the sail-away party got rolling. This being a Sunday and we were underway at 5pm, Stryker, the piano bar artist on board gave his usual Sunday Gospel Hour piano and singing performance. Stryker's father was an evangelical Christian minister so he has a long history of singing and playing gospel music. We look forward to these sessions on all the Sundays when we are at sea. Tonight we enjoyed Stryker's music until 5:30pm when we had to leave for the evening dinner. As many of us got up to leave, Stryker, shown at his piano in the picture on the right, chided us about our priorities needing adjustment.



The sea was a bit choppy tonight with a stiff wind blowing across the deck. The rocking and rolling was not severe so we had a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will be a day at sea as we make our way to Fiji and the capital city of Suva.