

Semarang - Java, Indonesia – Day 36 Nov. 02:

When we got up today the ocean was flat calm and the ship had already started the approach to Semarang harbor. The map on the right shows the location of Semarang, a few hundred miles south of the equator and in the central part of Java Island.

Heading into the harbor there was an interesting straight line concrete barrier that barely cleared the surface of the water, as shown below. It looked like a navigation hazard because it wasn't very well lighted but apparently it works.



When we arrived at the dock an Indonesian band was playing traditional music and there was a tent set up to shade and accommodate the visiting friends and relatives of crew members from Indonesia.



As shown on the left, there were tons of buses lined up on the pier ready for the tours to the ancient Borobudur Buddhist Temple and other sights around Semarang.

Our friends Bob and Esther, were among the first people to leave the ship, as shown on the right. They set out on their own to explore Semarang.

We had signed up for a Holland America tour of Semarang Highlights. We went down to the Queen's Lounge and were fairly quickly called away to go to our busses parked on the pier.

The bus took us through the port area

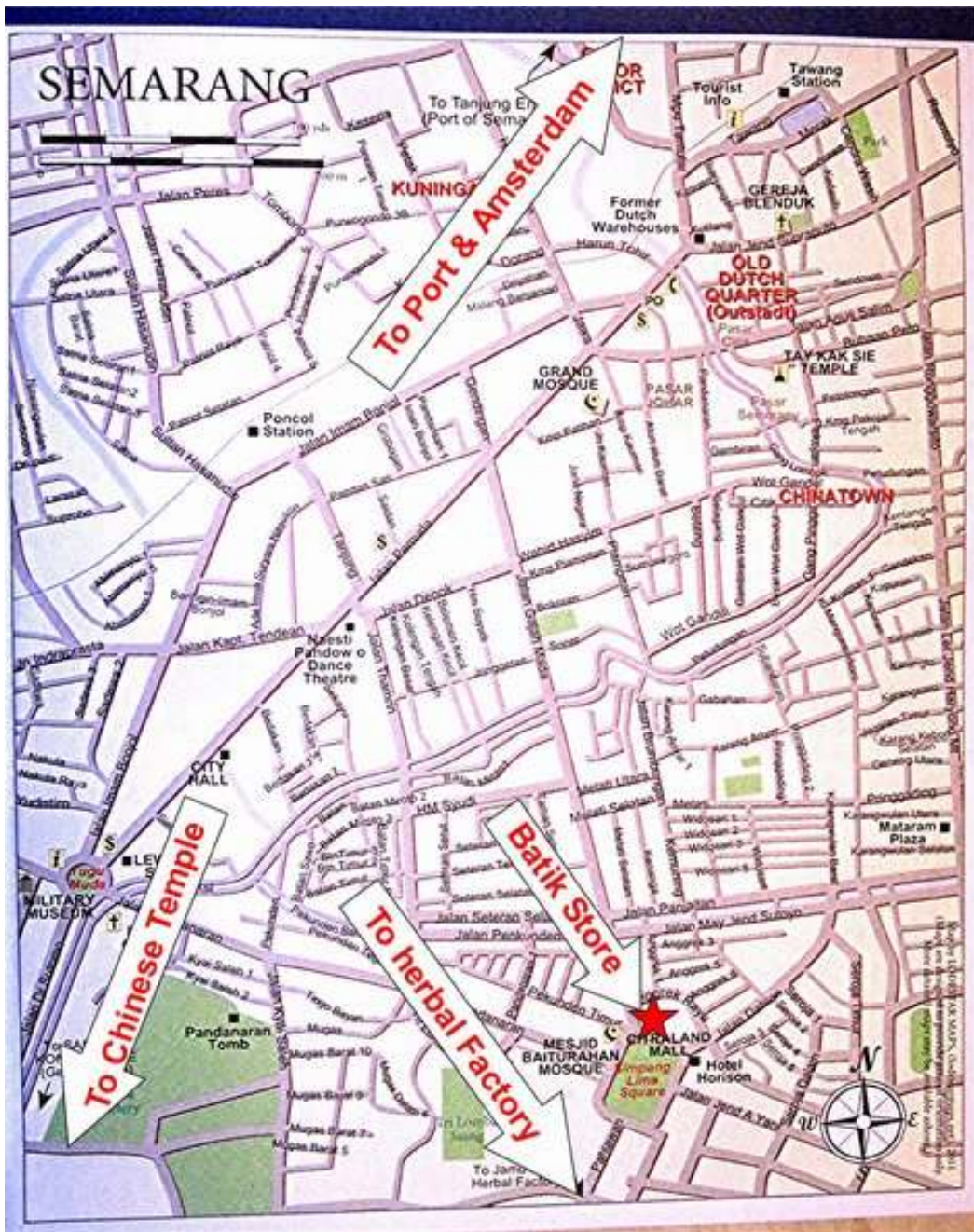


past the local power plant, shown below. There were signs of flooding in the port area from recent rains, as shown below.



Our guide, Hery, explained that part of problem with flooding was due to the fact that the whole port area is sinking at a rate of about 10cm (~4 inches) per year. Therefore the ocean is starting to encroach on the land and drainage of rain water is slower than it used to be. If prediction of rising ocean levels because of the melting ice cap are true that could make the flooding problem for Semarang even worse.

The tour of the Highlights of Semarang took us to a series of interesting places shown below on the map of Semarang.



We proceeded through the city of Semarang observing a mixture of neighborhoods and relative wealth, as shown here.

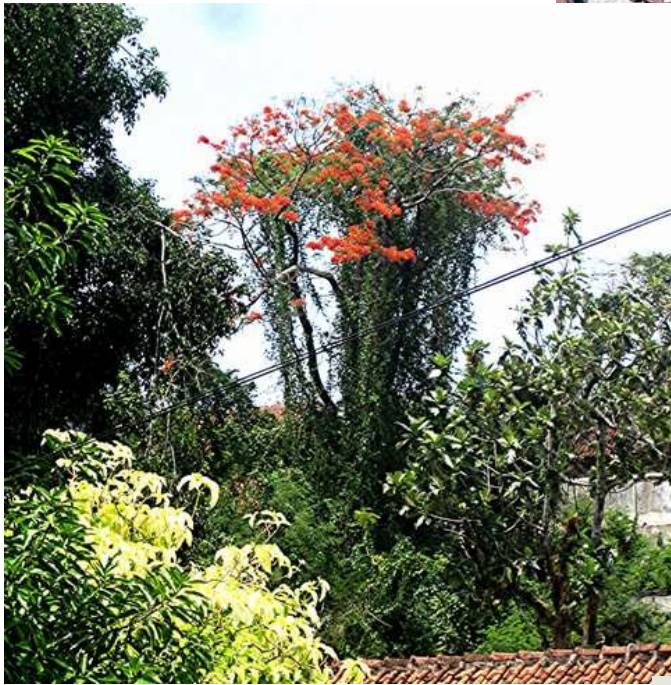


The building on the left was a government building flying the red and white flag of Indonesia in front.



After about a 30 minute ride the bus was parked and we entered the Sam Poo Kong Chinese Temple.

The Sam Poo Kong Temple is an unusual composite shrine for both Chinese Buddhists and Muslims from other nations. It is an active place of worship and people were praying and meditating at various locations around the temple as tourists tried not to interfere. The temple has been especially important in easing long-standing ill feelings between Chinese citizens and Indonesians of other bloodlines.



This tree with beautiful red flowers was near the entrance.

Red is a color showing strength and power in Chinese religion and there was a perfusion of red in the Temple structure as shown in the photos below.



Hery pointed out a Teak tree growing in the courtyard. He said the Teak tree not only provided a very useful wood but represented strength and long life and was revered by users of the temple. We had not seen a Teak tree before so we took a picture for our records, as shown on the right. The picture below shows some of the leaves of a Teak tree up close.



This huge statue of Zheng He (1371-1435) resides in the central courtyard of the temple. Zheng He was a famous Ming Dynasty Chinese admiral who commanded 317 large Chinese ships and 28,000 crew on an epic voyage starting in 1405. The fleet visited Arabia, Brunei, East Africa,

India, Malay Archipelago and Siam. Zheng He suppressed pirates in south eastern Asian waters and then trade flourished between countries. He landed on Java with a party of 30,000 sailors and is credited with introducing Java to the faith of Islam. He was beatified as Sam Poo Kong and memorialized by this statue in the Sam Poo Kong Temple.

While we were taking the tour of the temple we introduced ourselves to Andrea who is the Acupuncturist in the Green House Spa on the Amsterdam. She was on the tour as an assistant to Hery, our local guide. Holland America has a policy of sending one crew member with each tour to bring up the rear and make sure no passengers on the tour wander off and get left behind. She carried a flag for our tour at the rear of the procession so she could be seen. We took a picture of her so maybe we will recognize her when we see her back on the Amsterdam.



We are always looking for an opportunity to document the visit of Barbara's library card and we found a good spot in the Sam Poo Kong Temple. The background sign announces "Welcome – To Kleneng Agung Sam Poo Kong – Semarang" as shown with Barbara and her library card on the left.

Our guide, Hery, completed his description and tour of the temple and led us back to the bus. Hery turned out to be one of the best local guides we had on the various tours taken during the voyage.



From the Sam Poo Kong Chinese Temple we took an extended bus ride around Semarang, focusing on the higher elevations where we could get a view of the city. The following are pictures of some of the sites we passed.

As the sign indicated, this modern freeway leads to the capital of Jakarta. We were told the Jakarta is about a 2 hour drive from Semarang.



From time to time as we passed through Semarang we would hear the call to prayer for the faithful Muslims. The call would be broadcast from loudspeakers located in minarets usually associated with one of the numerous mosques around town. The minarets were not of uniform design so we took pictures of the various shapes and assemble them here for comparison.



It seems possible that as we criss-crossed the city on different streets we may have photographed the same minaret twice. However, the observation, for anyone who is interested, is that not all minarets look the same.

Our next stop on the “Highlights of Semarang” tour was a shop that specialized in the Batik form of decorative fabric. The guide took us in to the Batik Damar Hadi store (Jalan Gajah Mada No.186, Semarang, Indonesia) where we saw an extensive, high quality collection of Batik at reasonable prices.



Batik is a method developed originally in Java for producing colored designs on textiles by dyeing them, having first applied wax to the parts to be left undyed. A more complete description is beyond us but we know we like the stuff.

There was a demonstration of making the Batik design on cloth. The ladies doing the work are shown below.



Examples of the Batik design are shown below. We ended up buying tablecloths, shirts, shorts, and wall hangings. This store was the best source of Batik for quality and price



that we have found (\$20 USD for shirts, \$8 USD for shorts, \$35-\$55 USD for large table cloths). We had to leave with the tour group before we had finished shopping. Later we hopped the shuttle bus provided by the Amsterdam and it took us back to the same store which happened to be located next to a shopping center popular with cruise passengers.

From the Batik store we drove about 20 minutes to the site of a museum for herbal medicines. It turns out that medicines made from herbs and spices have always been important in Indonesian society. The people who provide herbal medicines are called jamu gendong merchants.

We entered the Museum Jamu Jawa and were treated to a presentation on herbal medicine by Hery. There was a table with an extensive array of different herbs and spices as shown on the right.



Some ladies were grinding the herbs into a fine powder using a stone mortar and pestle. Hery told us what each ingredient was supposed to do in restoring the body to good health. After the presentation we went by a table where some ladies were offering us hot ginger tea in small drinking glasses. We tried some and found it quite pleasing so we bought a jar of the powder to make some ginger tea when we get home.

We boarded the bus and headed back to the port area and the Amsterdam. As we approached the port Hery pointed out some large ponds as shown on the right. He said that the ponds were used for fish farming.



Not far from the fish farm was a line-up of the antique wooden pinisi (schooners), shown below, that are still used for



hauling freight around the Indonesian Islands. We had seen similar schooners in Jakarta yesterday.

Continuing along the road to the port we passed a yard where Teak logs were being prepared for loading on a ship. Teak is an important wood for use in fine furniture and decking but the worldwide supply is becoming limited. Java still has some Teak forests and they are being harvested as a profitable export.



After passing the Teak log processing yards we pulled into the pier where the Amsterdam was moored. We wanted to return to do a bit more shopping so we caught the Amsterdam shuttle bus, made our run on the Batik store, and returned to the port.

The last of the relatives and friends visiting with Indonesian crew members were gathering their things and slowly walking away from the ship. We boarded the Amsterdam and the ship got underway about 6pm. We were headed down the northern coast of Java toward the Indonesian island of Bali where we will be visiting the day after tomorrow.