

Singapore – Day 32 Oct. 29:

The day started with the Amsterdam sailing in the open sea on the way to Singapore. At 10am a show was put on in the Culinary Center that we attended. There Chef Mark was demonstrating the making of a dessert called “Chocolate Lasagna”. It definitely sounded different and we wanted to see what they had in mind. Normally as we approach a port we are on deck watching or in our cabin getting ready but Barbara had become a devotee of this show as well as the cast and didn’t want to miss it. Chef Mark, who is also the

assistant cruise director, created the recipe and was the main presenter. He was assisted by Adele and Gene who mainly provided comedy slapstick as they attempted to assemble the lasagna under the direction of Chef Mark. A photo of one of the team in action is shown on the right. The lasagna essentially consisted of chocolate brownie between layers of lasagna pasta sheets. Their demonstration pan of



chocolate lasagna was pretty much a disaster but they had brought samples of the dessert to the presentation so we all lined up and nibbled on Chocolate Lasagna. It was definitely chocolate but the lasagna connection was weak and it was like eating fudge. After the show it was time to get ready for Singapore because the ship was rapidly approaching the port.

There were hundreds of cargo ships anchored or tied up in the water leading to the harbor at Singapore. The reason for the high shipping volume here is the proximity of the Malacca Straits which is a narrow stretch of the sea separating the mainland of Malaysia from the island of Sumatra. The Malacca Straits is like a gateway offering the shortest route for shipping between the European/Middle Eastern part of the world and Asian ports in the Pacific Basin. A view of some of the ships we saw outside of Singapore Harbor is shown on the right.



Singapore is an independent nation that occupies a relatively small island just off the southern tip of the Malaysian Peninsula. The location of Singapore on the world map is shown in the picture on the left where an expanded view of Singapore Island is brought out as an inset. Most of the island is covered with farmland, tropical growth and small communities with the major city of Singapore located in the south-east corner of the island nation.



We arrived in Singapore about 11am at the modern and huge cruise terminal in the port of Singapore. About 1pm the announcement was made that Singapore immigration officials had given the okay for us to leave the Amsterdam and go into Singapore.

A newly constructed cluster of tall buildings in the harbor area immediately grabbed our attention. The buildings appeared to be made from a huge Erector Set and they were intentionally constructed with the towers leaning in various directions. They were not really attractive to us but their unusual shape may result in them becoming an identifying marker for Singapore in the future. A picture of the shiny new but bent buildings is shown below along with some other new construction in the harbor near the cruise terminal.



We had talked with Steve and Bobbie about Singapore over the last few days and today we planned to team up for our touring of this interesting country. Steve and Bobbie had done some research using Frommer's Travel guides and we had been to Singapore on two other occasions in the last 5 years so we had a fair idea of what we wanted to do. Our list of tour sites started with the Marina Bay Sands Hotel which was recently constructed with a large observation deck on the 57th floor about 600 feet above ground level. We then planned to visit the old Raffles Hotel and sample their Singapore Sling drink at the famous Long Bar. Finally we wanted to spend some time browsing around the part of town known as "Little India" and famous for good shopping for almost anything. We met Steve and Bobbie in the Amsterdam Atrium on Deck 3 and headed out into the cruise terminal with our passports, Singapore money, and high hopes of having a good time.

A map of the city of Singapore is shown below with an indication of where our primary sites of interest were located.



Part of our plan was to go downtown and then buy tickets on a Hop-On Hop-Off bus. We would then make a complete circuit of the city to see what was available before hopping off. There were no Hop-On Hop-Off stops in the cruise terminal area so we had decided to take a taxi to our first destination which was the Marina Bay Sands Hotel where there was the observation deck that had received tons of publicity in the tourist and travel literature.

It is difficult to describe the scale of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel which consists of three separate towers connected at the top by the 57th floor which contains an expansive open air observation deck. The hotel is big and distinctive enough that it could be seen from the Amsterdam in the ocean off of Singapore. We got this photo on the right from the deck of the ship. At the center of the



photo are the three towers connected by the observation deck.



As our taxi approached the Marina Bay Sands Hotel we got this closer view through the windshield, as shown on the left. The observation deck we hoped to visit can be seen on top. The nearby Singapore Flyer (Ferris wheel) can be seen in the distance on the left in the photo. This view of the hotel shown below (copied from a postcard) gives a clear view of the 57th floor viewing platform configuration.



The concierge and other hotel staff were very helpful and courteous to us gawking tourists and directed us to the basement where we purchased tickets at 20 Singapore dollars each (\$17 USD) for the ride to the top. The ride up in a glass walled elevator was smooth and fun as the whole city was laid out in front of us. From the elevator we walked out onto broad and uncrowded open air platform with a wooden deck and glass

wall around the edge that extended about 4 feet above the deck. Above the glass wall was a strong wire safety barrier with openings so that the surroundings could be clearly viewed and pictures easily taken.

Here are a few photos of the happy tourists and the scene on the viewing platform.



Steve and Bobbie pause for a picture with the skyline of Singapore in the background.



The view of the surrounding city of Singapore was marvelous.

This photo on the right shows a soccer stadium at the center with the floating soccer field resting on the surface of the marina bay. The unusual roof of the nearby Art-Science Museum is on the extreme left.



In this view on the left the Singapore Flyer is shown near the Marina Bay Sands Hotel. The Flyer used to be one of the only places you could get a good high level view of Singapore. Clearly it has now been surpassed by the Marina Bay Sands Hotel viewing platform.

Needless to say, the city skyline and surrounding harbor were all clearly visible and wonderful to see.



We would have liked to stay longer on the viewing platform but the rest of Singapore was calling so we descended in the elevator to the ground floor. We had planned to take a Hop-On Hop-Off bus from the hotel but after talking to the concierge we decided that catching the bus might take too long in view of the relatively short time we had for touring.. We walked through the hotel lobby on the way to the taxi stand and took this picture on the right. The hallways for the rooms on each floor are open to the lobby and lean over the lobby like a balcony.



We caught a cab that took us through the orderly streets and freeways of Singapore to the Raffles Hotel. Singapore must be one of the most orderly cities on the globe and a real pleasure to visit.

Some freedom has been sacrificed for this escape from the chaos of other Asian streets. For example, the tendency of most city centers to choke with cars and trucks has been minimized in Singapore by a device shown to us by our cab driver. The radio receiver/transmitter device sits on the dash board and each driver has a unique electronic card that slides in while he is driving. There is a system of radio monitors that circle the city center and interact with the dashboard devices. When ever the vehicle heads toward city center and passes a radio monitor that fact is electronically recorded and the driver is assessed 2 Singapore dollars (\$1.70 USD) by the city. We heard later that there is a similar system that monitors and charges all drivers for downtown parking. There is an economic incentive to avoid unnecessary trips into the center of town.

Our taxi dropped us off at the entrance to the Raffles Hotel. We asked the doorman how to find the Long Bar and he directed us through a garden area and up an elevator to our goal.



Many doors and gates are labeled “For Residents Only”

but we eventually found our way. When leaving we found there was an entrance directly from the street but we arrived by the “scenic route”.



The Raffles Hotel was first made famous by the writings of Kipling and the conventional wisdom that the Singapore Sling was invented at the Long Bar of the Hotel.

The Long Bar is located in a large high ceiling room oozing charm and ambiance of a bygone era. No air conditioning or rotating fans here where slowly oscillating reed fans, like those shown on the right gently moved the air.



Most of the tables were occupied but we



had no trouble finding a table and settling down for a memorable drink. The table came supplied with a container of unshelled peanuts. The tradition was to simply open the peanut shell, eat the contents and toss the shell onto the floor. We had no trouble joining in with that process as revealed by the shells accumulating at our feet.

We soon had our Singapore Slings as shown by the picture on the right. The Singapore Slings are pricey at \$30 Singapore dollars (\$25 USD) each but well worth it to celebrate our visit to a historic site with good friends.



As we were preparing to leave, Larry and Trish, our fellow Amsterdam passengers and Cruise Specialists “Chat Time” friends arrived. They were just settling back and preparing to enjoy the moment on their tour of Singapore when we took this picture on the right.



Our exit was much more direct than the meandering path we took in to the Long Bar. Barbara was delighted when we stumbled across the sign shown below where she could record the visit of her library card to the famous Raffles Hotel Long Bar.

We had an opportunity to get tickets for the Hop-On Hop-Off Bus that came to a bus stop near the hotel. A ride in the open air top section looked inviting on this warm day.





However, about this time our charmed life for good weather on port visits began to fade. The rain came down hard so we scurried to the main hotel entrance where we regrouped and decided that taking the Hop-On Hop-Off bus was just not in the cards for today's visit. The doorman in his impressive white costume helped us get a taxi to Little India which was the next item on our list of things to do.

When we got to the Little India section of Singapore we got out of the taxi at the southern entrance near the intersection of Serangoon and Sungei Road. The rain had slacked off and we were optimistic about having a good shopping time here. We were greeted by streets decorations and buildings that could have been in the heart of India so we were really getting the Indian ambiance.



Bobbie and Barbara lost no time in checking out the garments in the different shops along Serangoon Road.

The streets and shops were crowded with tourists and natives busy with their own agendas.



After about 30 minutes in this interesting shopping bazaar it suddenly started to rain with determination. People normally used the streets for

walking as well as the sidewalks but now everyone crowded onto the covered sidewalks. It became almost impossible to move along the sidewalks as everyone tried to avoid getting wet in the torrential downpour. We tried to wait out the rainstorm by using umbrellas and



continuing to move along the streets of Little India.

We were all pretty thoroughly soaked and the rain was still continuing to come down in torrents so the decision was made to hail a cab and return to the Amsterdam. That part of the solution was easy, the hard part was trying to get a taxi to stop and pick us up in the rain. Of course most of the cabs had passengers who, like us, were trying to avoid the rain. Finally we got a taxi to stop but it turned out the driver wanted us to stand in the rain and negotiate with him about the fare for taking us back to the Cruise Terminal. We finally settled on \$20 Singapore (\$17 USD) for what normally would have been about a \$12 Singapore (\$10 USD) ride.



We were just happy to hop in and get out of the rain. The driver got busy telling us about all the shopping opportunities along the way back to the Cruise Terminal. He was particularly insistent that we stop at a jewelry store he knew in China Town where we could get some really good deals. He even volunteered to wait for us while we shopped and then take us back to the ship for the original fare. We all said no-thanks and begged him to just get us back to the terminal which he did without a problem.

We slogged through the huge cruise terminal which doubles as a terminal for local ferries as well as cruise ships like the Amsterdam. There were lots of Singapore, Malaysian and Indonesian people milling around the terminal either getting off their ships or getting ready to board. In Singapore it seems like about a half mile walk from the entrance to the Cruise Terminal to actually boarding the ship but eventually we got back. It was good to be “home again”, where we could get some dry clothes and decide what to do with the rest of the day. We said goodbye to Steve and Bobbie and retreated to our cabin.

We had dinner in the Amsterdam dining room. A lot of people ate off the ship tonight so the dining room was not very busy. Some of the stewards had been given the night off so they could go ashore. After dinner, Esther and Elaine took advantage of the situation and attacked the little “treats” bar at the entrance to the dining room. The treats bar is loaded with little candies, dates, nuts and other goodies that a steward normally hands out as we leave the dining room. Tonight the steward was gone but Esther and Elaine helped themselves without any problems, as shown on the right.



After dinner we went back into the cruise terminal which has a pretty extensive array of shops with clothes, books, food, and souvenir items for sale. We browsed around looking for something interesting but without any luck. We returned to the ship and called it a wet but satisfying day since we had been able to do most of the things we wanted to do on our agenda. Tomorrow we have a few more hours to spend in Singapore before we have to be back on board at 10am. We will try to make the most of it.