

## **Xiamen, China – Day 25 Oct. 22:**

When we got up the Amsterdam was already entering the harbor at Xiamen (pronounced Shamou) China. Xiamen is a city located on a relatively small island along the coast of China, directly west of Taiwan, as shown in the map on the right. The population of Xiamen is 3.5 million and it is a major city on the southeast coast of China but it is not considered large by Chinese standards. As the Amsterdam cruised through the harbor we got some photos of passing ships and the skyline of the city which wrapped around the harbor. The pictures below give some idea of the shipping traffic and high rise construction that was visible from the Amsterdam.



The length of this ship is not distorted. It was really that long.

The white dots seen along the water horizon on this picture below are the superstructures of empty container ships, waiting to be loaded with Chinese goods being exported to other countries. The air pollution and haze was much thicker here in Xiamen than it was in Beijing. We wondered if the effort to reduce air pollution in Beijing for the 2008 Olympics has had a lingering beneficial effect for those folks.





The nearly continuous line of high rise buildings that hugged the shore gave some indication of the high volume of commerce in Xiamen.



This was the first visit of the Amsterdam to Xiamen. The city had built a huge new cruise terminal and was probably happy that they were getting some use of the property.

Soon after we were docked the Chinese immigration officials gave the ship clearance and we were free to go ashore. We had signed up for a private tour of Xiamen that had been organized by Ira, a Cruise Critic friend. The tour was a bargain at \$50 USD each and it included an English speaking guide, bus transportation, round trip ferry boat tickets to Gulang Island, lunch, and a driving tour of the eastern part of Xiamen including a silk factory demonstration and shopping opportunity. We met the other members of the tour group in the Amsterdam Ocean Bar at 8am. About 8:30 Ira, shown on the right, gave us the instructions about which of the two busses we were in and we were headed off the ship. We were assigned bus number 2 with Bruce as our shepherd to make sure no one got lost. Each of us had a mandatory copy of the photo page from our passport with a bright red stamp on it from the Chinese Immigration Department.



We walked through the massive terminal building on our way to the bus. One of the passenger hallways is shown on the right.



The temperature was warm but comfortable and we were happy to see

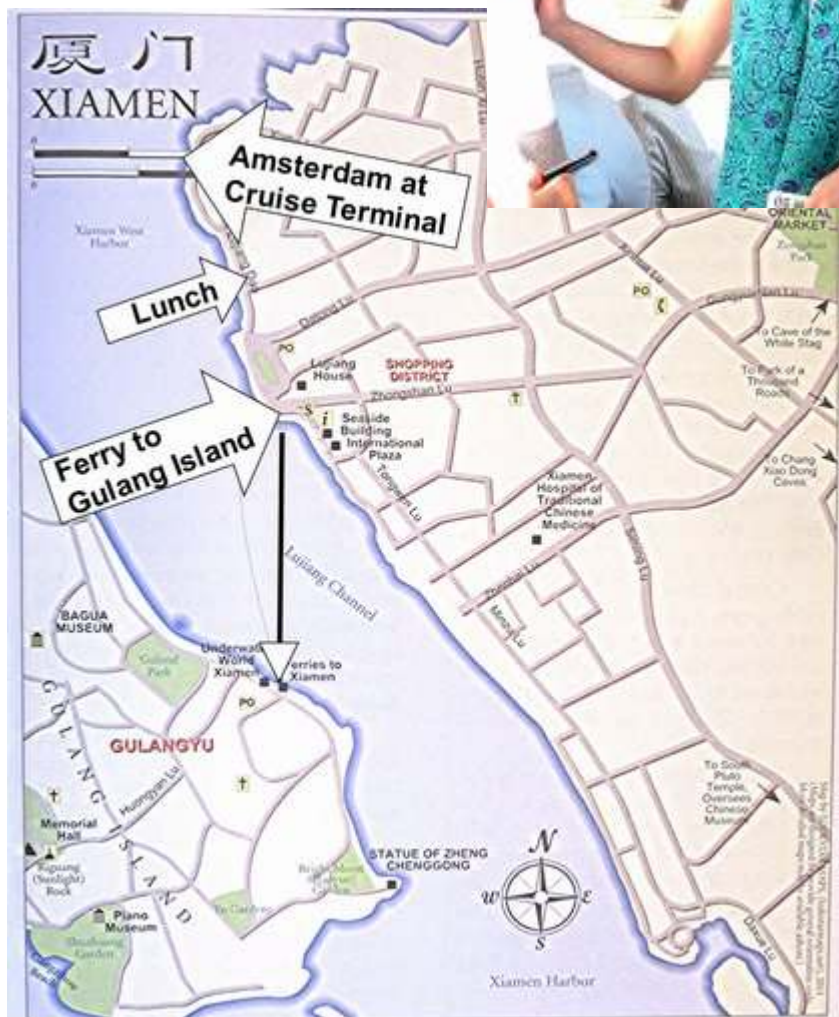


palm trees that signaled we had reached the outer fringes of tropical lands.

We found the bus labeled with the sign "Ira's Xiamen Tour Vehicle 2"



Once comfortably seated on the bus our Chinese guide, Karen, introduced herself and explained what we would be doing on the tour. She spoke with a definite Chinese accent but had a good command of American English and was clearly understandable. She mentioned that this was her 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday so we all wished her a happy one and appreciated that she would work with this group of Amsterdam seniors on her special day.



A map of Xiamen and the nearby Gulangyu Island is shown on the left. The key sites for our tour, except for the silk factory, are indicated on the map. The silk factory was located on the coast road of Xiamen about 15 miles south of the cruise terminal where the Amsterdam was docked.

The bus took us a short distance to the Ferry Landing where Karen got tickets for us.

Shown below is the type of ferry boat that plies the waters between Xiamen and the tourist spot known as Gulang Island.



The boat is divided into two classes of accommodations. There is the steerage class where we resided on the lower deck and then the first class section on the less crowded upper deck. The fee for upgrading to first class was 1 Yuan (\$0.15 USD) but for such a short trip we went for the economy route.

At Karen's signal we all walked on to the waiting ferry. Shown below is a view of how we were packed on to the ferry boat along with several hundred Chinese tourists.

This was not a time for insistence on a lot of personal space. We were pressed on all sides.



The boat rocked slightly so Carol and Barbara quickly grabbed straps hanging from the ceiling to steady them and minimize any damage to their neighbors. There was plenty of open air ventilation and temperatures were not oppressive so the short boat ride of about 10 minutes was tolerable and part of a memorable experience.



When we arrived at Gulang Island we marched up the gangway, as shown below, along with hundreds of other exuberant passengers.



One of the repeating lessons of the day for us was that, indeed, the population of China is massive and sometimes we got overwhelmed by the sheer numbers. However, with only a few exceptions we found that with patience and human kindness the system seems to work here in China as well as in similar crowded situations back home in the US.

Karen got us started on our tour of Gulang Island. The main attractions of the island consist of (1) the Guanfu Classic Art Museum, (2) the Shuzhuang Garden, (3) the Twelve Rock Caves and (4) the Gulangyu Piano Museum. Karen took our group up some narrow streets and alleys until we were standing in front of the Xiamen Music School. She said that many families in Xiamen send their children to this school which involves the tortuous round



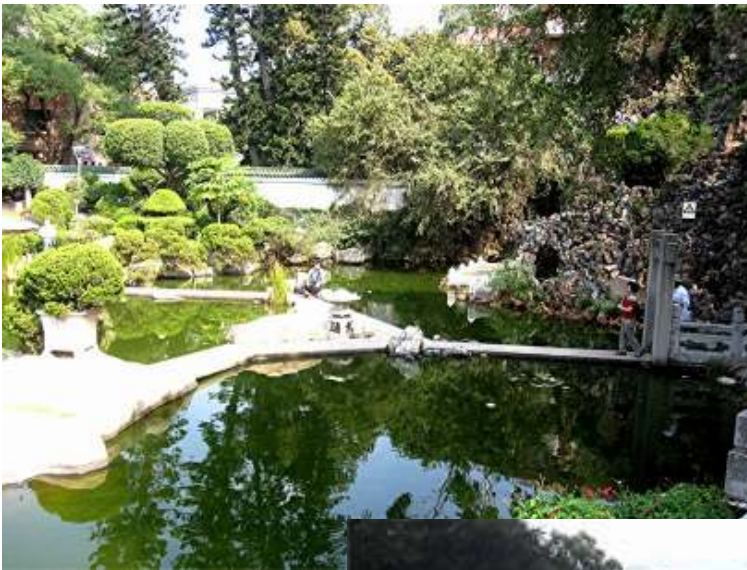
trip on the ferry each day. It is considered one of the finest music schools in China. This was about as close as we got to anything related to the Guanfu Classic Art Museum that was one of the main attractions for the island. The music school is located near an area that used to house several foreign consulates and embassies including the US. We walked by one sign indicating that the German consulate once occupied the grounds.

The crowds on the narrow streets were unrelenting. However, they calmly gave way when struggling workers pulling carts loaded with sand came through going against the main flow of traffic.



The next objective on our tour was the Shuzhuang Garden and we found that to be a beautiful experience.

Here are a few photos we got from the Shuzhuang Garden.







There was a huge monolith with a walkway leading to the top as shown on the left. It looked like a very popular part of the park. However, none of us volunteered to make the climb so Karen kept to her original agenda.

The Shuzhuang Garden was the best part of the tour for us. We got this picture below as a memento.



The Twelve Rock Caves are supposed to be a major attraction of the park but Karen didn't discuss them with us. Gulang Island appears to be made up primarily of solid rock so it is not surprising that there could be twelve rock caves on the island. We'll have to catch that one next time.

Karen got us headed up narrow stone steps to the top of a hill where we found the Gulangyu Piano Museum. The Gulangyu Piano Museum is China's esteemed house of pianos. Nearly 100 historic pianos from the four corners of the world have been collected there. The town of Gulangyu on Gulang Island has a deeply imbedded musical culture and the Piano Museum is the epitome of that musical tradition. The pianos which ranged from the modern to the very old were beautiful. However, we were not allowed to take photos of the piano collection so they will have to remain as just a mental picture.

About this time the energy of our tour group was starting to ebb. We caught a photo of a few of our characters hamming it up and expressing the condition most of us were in.



Karen then started the trek back to the ferry boat landing. The downhill path through the town of Gulangyu was enjoyable and we were able to observe many Chinese tourists enjoying the day. One subject that has come up frequently as we visited in China is the “One Child Policy” where the government does not allow a family to have more than one child except under special circumstances. We asked Karen her opinion about the one child policy. She gave a very matter of fact description of how her parents had a son and then decided to have another child. They simply paid a fee which was on the order of 8000 Yuan (~\$1230 USD) and then proceeded to get pregnant and give birth to Karen. She said her family joked that she was a very expensive addition to the family. She explained other extenuating circumstances for having a second child that took into account the gender of the first child and where the family lived and many other details. It is so complicated that we couldn’t claim to come away with an accurate picture of how the system works. However, the picture we got was that Karen didn’t have any fundamental objection to the system.

In the US we have been told of terrible social injustice that results from this policy because boy babies are favored over girl babies. We had heard that there was a large imbalance in the population with more boys than girls. Orlin had noticed that there seemed to be just as many young girls as young boys in the throngs of Chinese tourists that we mingled with. He asked Karen if this observation was correct and did it represent Chinese society in general. She responded rather nonchalantly that actually many Chinese families preferred girl children and were quite happy with a single girl child. She explained that girls were usually much better behaved than the spoiled brat boys, worked hard around the home and they brought in a dowry when they got married.

It is probably hazardous to put much credence in the opinion of a 23 year old tour guide regarding such a wrenching social question as the Single Child Policy of China. However, her response does seem to correlate with what appeared to be a pretty equal balance of male and female young Chinese people we saw today.

Karen got us back to the ferry boat and we tramped on board with hundreds of Chinese tourists just as with the earlier trip. During the ferry boat ride back to Xiamen we noticed several people carrying colorful shopping bags filled with boxes, as shown in the photo on the right. Karen explained that the city of Gulangyu on Gulang Island is famous for producing a particular kind of pastry that is very popular with the local population. Apparently it cannot be obtained in Xiamen so people make the journey to Gulangyu just to stock up on this wonderful treat.



The ferry boat dropped us off on dry land and we took a short bus ride to the Xiamen Honor Seafood Restaurant for lunch.



A line-up of smartly dressed ladies greeted us at the door as shown on the left. We were



ushered into a large dining room and seated at large tables with the traditional lazy Susan in the center. Bowls of vegetables, fish and meat dishes were brought in and we attacked it with the chop sticks that were provided. Soon the cry went out requesting that we be given forks to help us chopstick challenged Westerners eat. After some quick shuffling by the staff a collection of forks were provided and we happily continued eating. Karen said later that she had called

ahead and requested forks be made available but the restaurant staff had trouble finding enough for the several Amsterdam tour groups that arrived simultaneously.

We had a wonderful meal of Chinese cuisine similar to meals we have enjoyed at the previous Chinese cities on the cruise.

Unfortunately we don't have a picture of how it was so well presented at the beginning. All we have is this rather pitiful display of the wreckage after being attacked by our hungry tour group.



Some of the culprits are shown in the photo on the left.

Barbara had prided herself in getting ready for the tour by putting a generous supply of toilet tissue material in her back pack in case the facilities she encountered were not well stocked. Taking her backpack in tow she headed for the restrooms. She soon returned beaming from ear to ear with news that the restaurant toilet facilities exceeded her wildest expectations. She described how there were plenty of tissues and the western style toilet had an additional innovation that automatically covered the toilet seat with a fresh protective wrap after each use. We vaguely remembered something similar in a US airport but hadn't seen anything matching this luxury for a decade or two. This sounded

like something needing documentation so Orlin made a trip to the men's room armed with his trusty camera. These photos show one of the marvelous devices Barbara was talking about.



Below are the instructions appropriately printed on the underside of the uplifted toilet seat cover.



We appreciated the restaurant management going well beyond our pampered Western expectations in their rest room facilities.

With our flagging energy restored by the great lunch we boarded the bus and began the rest of the day's tour. Karen took us on a driving tour south through Xiamen and along the coast highway. Along the way we saw a collection of large office and apartment buildings that rivaled any we have seen in other cities around the world. Some were finished but many were still under construction. Shown below is a sample of what we saw.



We couldn't remember scenes like this in the US even before the collapse of the economic bubble in 2008.

The bus eventually stopped at a silk factory (Xiamen Jiaruihua Silk City) where we had a demonstration of silk production. The presentation was the same one we had heard in a silk factory in Beijing. However, the lady giving the demonstration was obviously trying to make it interesting for us and there was enough variety to hold our attention. Compared with prices in the US we were convinced that a silk quilt cover she showed us was a reasonable value so we bought it.



After the silk factory visit we got back in the bus and headed for the Cruise Terminal and the Amsterdam.

Karen had told us that one of the important civic events in Xiamen was a marathon that was held each year. It is important enough in the city's profile that they put a rather large monument in place to commemorate the annual event. The monument isn't large in the conventional sense but it covers a lot of territory because it is in the form of individual bronze runners spaced out along the parkway that bordered the road we were on. We were able to get pictures of some of the bronze runners that looked much like actual runners performing their event.



As we approached the terminal we sang Happy Birthday to Karen as a friendly token of appreciation for a job well done. At the port we passed through the Chinese immigration check point and on through the cavernous terminal. Barbara suddenly remembered that she hadn't properly documented the visit of her library card to Xiamen



and she was in a state of near panic. Then one of those minor miracles appeared in the form of a cruise terminal sign featuring the city name of Xiamen. We quickly snapped a picture of Barbara and her card just as an immigration official came over waving his arms and pointing to a sign saying "No Photography". Luckily, he was willing to cut us a little slack so all we got was a stern look. We counted our blessings and hustled on to the Amsterdam.

Our guide, Karen, had expressed a lot of home-town pride in Xiamen and we had a good time exploring a little bit of what the island region had to offer. Since this was the first visit of the Amsterdam to the city and the cruise ship terminal didn't seem to be heavily used, we may be at the vanguard of western tourism in the area. It appeared that there were plenty of native Chinese/Asian people and buses competing for space near the ferry landing and on the tourism gem of Gulang Island. We will be watching Xiamen in the future to see if it develops into a popular tourist destination for Westerners.

The Amsterdam got underway about 5:30pm and we said goodbye to Xiamen. We spend a day at sea tomorrow heading for Hong Kong where we expect to arrive on October 24<sup>th</sup>.