

Incheon and Seoul, South Korea – Day 16 Oct. 13:

About 6am the Amsterdam entered the harbor at Incheon, South Korea. The location of Incheon is on the west coast of South Korea about 30 miles from the inland capital city of Seoul, as indicated on the map on the right.

The tides at Incheon are so large that locks have been built at the entrance to the harbor to reduce the rise and fall of ships tied up inside the harbor. The Amsterdam worked its way through a set of locks and tied up at one of the piers.

We had signed up for the tour of Seoul called “Soul of Seoul” organized by Cruise Critic friend Larry. He had volunteered for that job when other tours got to be fully booked and there were still some stragglers, like us, who wanted a tour of Seoul.

We gathered in the Amsterdam Atrium at 7:30am with 23 other Cruise Critic people going on the tour. Here are a few selected photos of our group eagerly awaiting departure.



L-R Barbara - Brigitte - Louise



L-R Dan - Steve - Bobbie



L-R Pauline - Barbara - Carol

After a bit of a hold-up at the gangway to check pass ports we streamed out onto the pier and boarded our bus bound for Seoul.



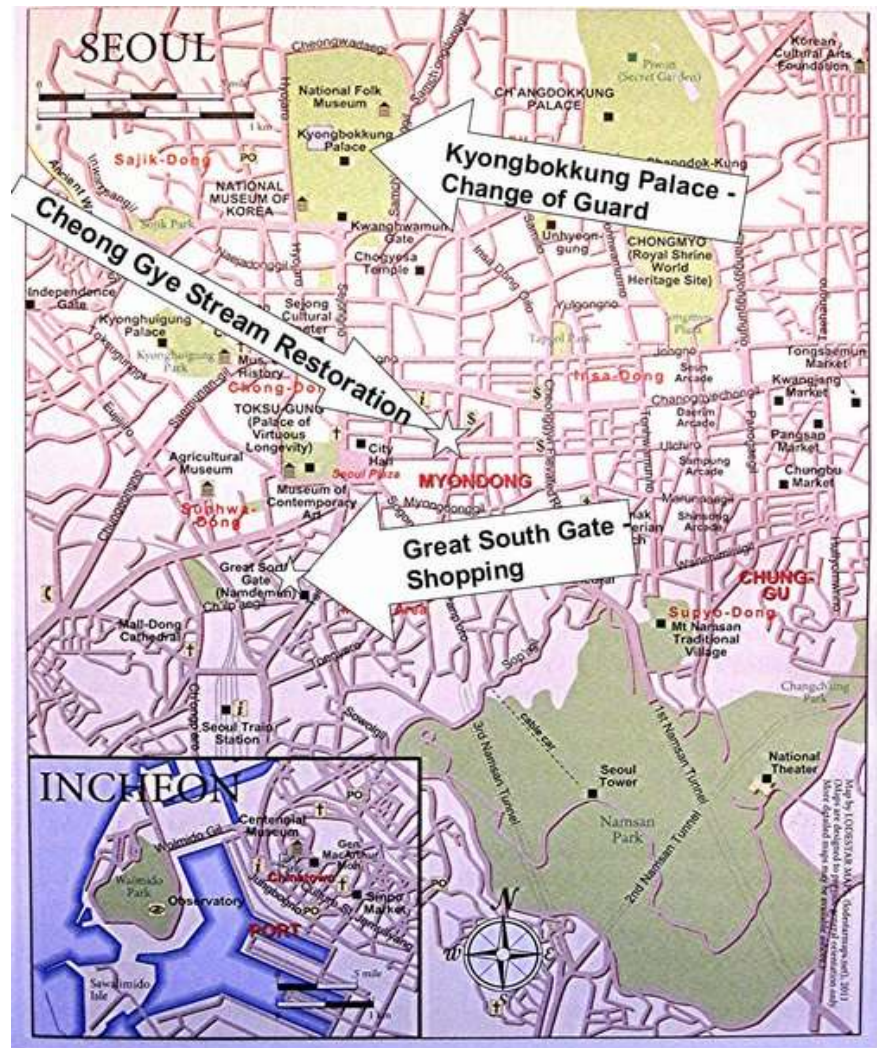
During our 1.5 hour ride to Seoul our guide, with a last name of Kim but a nickname of Pansy gave us a running monologue about Korean customs

and some of the sites we would visit. She had a great command of conversational English so we had no trouble with the language. On the right is a picture of Pansy later in the tour. She had a portable loudspeaker that was a great aid in communicating facts, figures and plans of action throughout the tour.



The map of Seoul on the right identifies the primary sites we visited during the day.

As we drove into the city our first impressions were that the city was very clean a well maintained with many signs of a vibrant economy, with crowded traffic, large and small businesses and ongoing construction projects.



Our first stop was at the Cheong Gye Stream Restoration site near City Hall. The story starts about 600 years ago in the late 1300s when there was a natural stream here that was used by the people. Unfortunately a shanty town grew up around the stream in the 1900s. After the Korean War ended in 1953 the city decided to upgrade so the entire area was paved over as the city of Seoul rebuilt. As attitudes of people changed they decided to restore a human friendly stream here in the center of town. Where the original stream existed a surging water cascade was constructed with an artificial stream bed in 2005, as shown in the picture on the right. The people of Seoul are proud of this bit of real estate that has been reclaimed. In the adjoining square preparation for some sort of celebration appeared to be underway.



Near where the bus parked was a small protest regarding sexual discrimination, reminiscent of what might be seen in some US cities. Apparently a person had to be camped out with the sign to keep it in this public place.



From the Cheong Gye Stream Restoration our bus took us on about a 20 ride through heavy traffic to the Kyongbokkung Palace. The timing for our tour was perfect as we arrived just as the changing of the guard ceremony was starting. Pansy hustled us into a giant open square with a few thousand other excited visitors and we watched as the Palace Guard in their colorful uniforms paraded through, as shown in these photos.



There were lots of school kids as well as foreign and Korean tourists watching from the sidelines.

Pansy then took us through the rest of the palace grounds and explained the architecture and purpose of the major buildings within the surrounding walls, as shown in these pictures.



The roof ridges held little statues that represented god-like creatures that protected the building and building inhabitants. Some examples are shown in these pictures.



The more important buildings had more little creatures on the ridge. This building shown on the left was very important.

The king's bathroom/bedroom was a popular spot for many

people to tour. It was necessary to remove shoes before entering that building, as these people shown on the right are doing.



This wedding couple on the left is having their photo taken in the palace grounds. Pansy said that weddings could not be performed in the palace area but Korean people like to have wedding pictures taken within the palace after the wedding ceremony.

These Korean school boys on the right were enjoying a day of exploring the palace grounds.



Our group stayed together quite well through the milling crowds thanks to Larry's watchful eye keeping up the rear and Pansy taking the lead.

Here are some of our Cruise Critic friends taking a little break. Pansy on the far left was keeping a constant electronic check with someone as she coordinated the trajectory of our tour.



As we were finishing the tour of the palace grounds we saw an opportunity to record the visit of Barbara's library card to this special spot in Seoul, as shown on the right.



Pauline, who is one of our Cruise Critic friends had



arranged for her friend, Stephany, to meet her at the palace and take part in the tour. Stephany's husband is in the Air Force and they were stationed at a base near Seoul about 3 months ago. Pauline and Stephany are shown on the left.

After the tour of the Kyongbokkung Palace / National Folk Museum complex we took a short 10 minute bus ride to a restaurant where we had a lunch of traditional Korean food.

Some brave souls elected to go completely native and sit on the floor during the meal as shown here by Carol, Brian and Larry.

The rest of us chose conventional chairs for a very enjoyable meal. Shown below is a picture of the selections on our table.



We had cabbage kimchi, seaweed, mushrooms, plum tea among several other hot and cold other traditional foods. We were really happy to finally have an opportunity to sample the spicy kimchi which is the national dish of Korea.

After lunch, which was especially well prepared and served, we had an opportunity to browse through the local market before continuing our tour of Seoul. We made a few souvenir purchases and then our group boarded the bus for a 20 minute ride to the Old South Gate. Seoul was surrounded by a wall in ancient times and access was controlled by strong gates. Over the years the gates have deteriorated by they are currently undergoing reconstruction. The restored gates aren't ready for public display yet but the traditional market place that developed at the gate is a marvelous place to visit and we were given some free time to shop around. Pansy was available to help us find things of interest and deal with the merchants. We bought some ginseng tea and plum tea for use when we get home. The plum tea served for lunch was delicious and may become a steady drink for us.

After the Old South Gate shopping we all got back on the bus and headed back to Incheon Harbor. After an hour's ride through heavy freeway traffic we arrived back at the Amsterdam about 3pm.

At 4pm in the Queen's Lounge of the Amsterdam a Korean percussion group put on a very energetic show. In addition to their percussion instruments a couple of the troupe were wearing hats with long "antennae" trailing a long white ribbon. A couple pictures that we got are shown below. They put on a very professional and enthusiastic performance that was a perfect way to end our visit in Korea.



The Amsterdam got underway about 5pm and after threading our



way through the locks of the harbor we headed to our next destination of Dalian, China. We are traveling further west and will be turning our clocks back one more hour tonight. For purposes of coordinating

phone calls to folks back home we need to keep in mind that we are 12 hours ahead of East Coast US time. We are half way around the world from East Coast USA.