

## At Sea – Day 10 Oct. 7:

The sea was flat and smooth this morning with a bit of fog cover as the Amsterdam continued on a southwest course towards Vladivostok, Russia. We haven't set the clocks back for several days of westward travel so the sun didn't come up until about 8 am... The video display of the Amsterdam location showed that we were about halfway to Vladivostok, Russia from our last port of Petropavlovsk. We have about 500 nautical miles remaining.



Our first activity of the day was to attend the “Good Morning Amsterdam” TV show in the Wajang Theater. Cruise Director, Gene and host Adele had a cast of 3 staff members lined up for interviews today, as shown below: from left to right: hostess - Adele, dining room manager - Tom Grindlay, culinary operations manager - Bart Groenveld, executive chef - Benigno “Bernie” Ruis, and cruise director - Gene Young.



Gene circulated through the audience with a microphone so that people could ask these key staff members questions about the challenges of their jobs and a cruise line career. One question concerned the dinner menu where a dessert called “Spoon Cake” is shown. We have wondered if this might really be called “Spoon Cake” and somehow it was changed to Spoom Cake in translation. Chef Bernie explained that “Spoom” is a well known cooking style that is used in making the cake which is correctly described in the dessert menu as Spoom Cake.

The major event for us today was a scheduled “Meet and Greet” of people who regularly monitor and contribute to the Cruise Critic message board ([www.cruisecritic.com](http://www.cruisecritic.com)). Ray (JORAY) had sent out invitations for the 10:30am gathering in the Crow’s Nest and, like the first meeting, it appeared that over 100 people showed up. Several of the Cruise Critic participants have volunteered to set up tours in various ports that are independent of the tours organized by Holland America (HAL) or travel agencies like Cruise Specialists (CSI). The independent land tours are similar to company sponsored excursions but they usually cost less. The independent tours carry a bit more risk than company sponsored tours but in ports where travel veterans have had prior experience, the probability of a bad turn of events is low enough to justify going for the cost savings. The Cruise Critic people organizing the tours communicate by way of the Cruise Critic message board in the months leading up to the cruise and the roster for each tour was pretty well set by the time the cruise started. The main purpose of the meeting today was to provide tour organizers an opportunity to double-check their rosters with passengers face-to-face and discuss any payment and schedule issues.

The Crow’s Nest Lounge was noisy with chatting Cruise Critic people, who now are getting well acquainted. The Amsterdam had generously provided mimosa drinks, cookies and coffee for our get-together.



Ray called the meeting to order and introduced Henk Mensink, the Hotel Manager for the Amsterdam.



Henk expressed appreciation for our loyalty to Holland America. He also said that the ship would do whatever necessary to provide meeting space and any other assistance needed by Cruise Critic people participating in the independent tours. In view of the fact that the independent tours compete with the Holland American tours, this was a gracious offer that we appreciated.

A few of our fellow Cruise Critic passengers, along with their message board "handle" in parens are shown in the following photos.

Steve and Shirley  
(HUGSHIRLEY)





Carol and Larry  
(WeBeCrusinNow)

Lenny (L.I. LASS) foreground

Ira (BESTZ5403)  
discussing the tours he  
organized.



Steve and Bobbie  
(BUDDYBOB)

In the afternoon there was a “For the Love of Chocolate” event in the culinary Arts Center. We attended the demonstration along with a large audience of other chocolate lovers.

Danube, on the left, told us all about the benefits of chocolate, such as antioxidants. Adele was busy making spicy Haute Chocolate according to the recipe shown below.



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### **HAUTE CHOCOLATE**

Ingredients:

- 1 cup milk
- ½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 1 red chili or jalapeno pepper, split with seeds removed
- 1 cinnamon stick, cut into 3 to 4 pieces
- 2 2/3 oz chocolate (semisweet), grated

### **Preparation**

Simmer milk in a saucepan with vanilla bean, cinnamon and chili. Heat thoroughly for about a minute.

Whisk in grated chocolate, and continue to simmer until melted and thick.

Remove from heat and let set for another 5 minutes. Strain out the spices and serve.

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Adele gave each of us a small cup of Haute Chocolate to taste. It was warm and rather thick so we ate it with a spoon. It had a robust chocolate taste and the spices left a pleasant tingle in your mouth. It would definitely be a candidate drink for a cold winter day.

The ship was decorated in a casino theme today. Throughout the hallways there huge playing cards on the walls and sprays of colored plastic playing card hearts, diamonds, spades and clubs hanging from the overhead. For these theme events there is a team of stewards who work from about 2am until 6am putting up the decorations for us to enjoy during the following day. We appreciate their efforts and show some of their handiwork in the pictures below.

This pillar of cards was built around a steel support column in the dining room.



Our friends, Bill and Dolores join Barbara for a picture with the casino touch.

This is how the Amsterdam's actual casino looked with the added casino playing card motif.



Finally, we got together outside the dining room to have our photo recorded with these gala decorations.



We set the clocks back one hour tonight as we continue on a southwestern course. Tomorrow will be a day at sea and then on Sunday, October 9, we arrive in Vladivostok, Russia.