

The Voyage Begins, Day Zero – Sept. 26:

The big day for the start of the cruise finally arrived. We met with Joe and Sally in the hotel restaurant for breakfast. At the end of the meal we said our farewells as they headed out for the rest of their west coast tour and we prepared to catch the shuttle bus that would take us to the Amsterdam and the 70 day cruise. Fortunately we have plans to meet with Joe and Sally again for a get-together in Las Vegas next January so it won't be so long between visits this time.

Cruise Specialists had arranged a complimentary bus ride to the Amsterdam so about 10am we were scooped up and headed out for Pier 91 in Seattle Harbor where our ship waited. Along the way we were able to snap a quick photo of a sign showing the local gas prices. Regular gas appears to be selling for about \$3.89 USD a gallon here in Seattle.



The bus ride to the Amsterdam through the steady rain took about 30 minutes. As we went along the bus driver filled us in on the passing Seattle landmarks and history of the area. We arrived at Pier 91 and could see the Amsterdam superstructure towering above the cruise terminal. The lines of people at the Holland America check-in were much shorter and faster than we have experienced in the past. Later we learned that there were only 780 passengers on board compared with the normal capacity of 1380 and that probably explains the rapid processing we got. In fact, the crew numbers 647 so there were nearly one crew member for every passenger.

As usual, the Amsterdam crew had prepared a warm welcome for us in spite of the dreary weather we were experiencing. They had draped a sign on the railing near the gangway that welcomed us to what would be our home during the cruise.



The officers and crew throughout the ship all greeted us with welcoming smiles. The Lido Pool Deck was festooned with hundreds of flags above the pool with the iconic Alaskan Bear statues that we have grown to love during the previous cruises. The Lido Pool Deck is covered so we were protected from the rain here. At the stern of the ship, there is no cover from the rain so in spite of the decorations the feeling was not so festive there, as shown below.



We stepped inside the Lido Restaurant where passengers were eating the buffet lunch. Soon our cruising friends, Bob and Esther, arrived and we enjoyed a reunion with them at the start of a Grand Voyage. An obliging steward snapped a picture of our reunion, as shown below.

At 5:30pm we made our way down to the dining room for dinner. We were seated at a table under the back windows of the ship with our friends, Bob and Esther. This was a similar location where we dined with them during the 2007 world cruise on the Amsterdam.



We enjoyed a sumptuous meal prepared under the guidance of Executive Chef, Bernie Rius. We met our two Indonesian dining room stewards, Danu and Suchipta who did a great job of serving us. Danu said that they had just finished a cruise to Alaska where there was a full complement of about 1400 guests on board. They had been very busy in the dining room during that cruise and he said this cruise with many fewer passengers was going to be like a vacation. At the end of dinner we got a picture of Suchipta (on the left) and Danu. Barbara is holding a single red rose that was presented graciously to each lady during the meal. It was a nice way to start the cruise.



The Amsterdam was supposed to have gotten underway at 5pm but the Captain had announced earlier that there was an administrative problem with immigration officials and there would be a delay. During dinner the Amsterdam got underway and we were officially on our Grand Voyage. The rain and wind had continued all day and apparently there were stormy seas out in the Pacific Ocean off the Washington and Canadian coast. Before we had cleared the harbor Captain Fred Eversen came on the loudspeaker and announced that in order to provide the guests with smooth sailing and sound sleeping during the night he was altering the cruising route to the Inland Passage north along the coast of Canada. The long and narrow Vancouver Island protects the Inland Passage so we would be spared the potentially unpleasant exposure to high ocean waves. The Captain said it might take a little longer to get to our first port but the compromise was worth it. We all silently agreed and indeed had a very pleasant night.