

## Oak Ridge, Tennessee (Dec. 1) – Luggage Arrives – Final Comments

**Luggage Arrives:** We had tracked our luggage via the Internet and the FedEx website as it made its way from San Diego to Oak Ridge.

It was scheduled to arrive on Monday, December 1 and we waited patiently all day. Finally, about 6:30pm the welcome FedEx truck rolled down the dark driveway. The two ladies on-board quickly brought our luggage into the house and thankfully all eight pieces were present and accounted for. This must have been their last delivery of the night as they seemed very happy to finish the transaction and be on their way. We got one of the ladies to pause long enough for the picture on the right.



We anxiously opened the bags and pulled out the treasures we had packed five days ago on the Amsterdam. The long package on top of the luggage in the picture above contained our didgeridoo and a quick inspection showed that it had survived the trip with no damage. All of the stuff we had packed arrived on time and in good condition so we are happy with the FedEx and Holland American arrangements for shipping of our luggage.

**Final Comments:** Which port or event was our favorite? Each port had unique experiences to offer and we were intrigued by what we saw. However, the highlight of the cruise for us was in Sydney when we did the Harbour Bridge Climb. We had planned the adventure for many months with Jack and Evelyn (itravel2much) through Cruise Critic messages and chats while on the Amsterdam. Another Cruise Critic fan, Larry (webecruisinnow), happened to be in the same team of 12 climbers with us. On the day of the climb everything worked perfectly. For details, check out Day 46 on this blog.

Another comment would be about MaryAnn (wowzo). She took the lead in coordinating Cruise Critic meetings and lunches. The network of friends that we formed through Cruise Critic connections contributed greatly to our enjoyment of the cruise.

Some people have commented or asked questions about the physical condition of the Amsterdam. With the usual caveats about our subjectivity and not seeing everything here are six observations about the Amsterdam:

1. We were on the Amsterdam for the 2007 Grand World Voyage. On this 2008 Asia & Australia Grand Voyage we thought the ship showed more signs of wear than was evident during the 2007 cruise. There was nothing really terrible but some examples are: one threadbare spot on the forward stairwell carpet, cracked glass in a Lido wall treatment, deep scratches on some wood flooring of the deck 5 Atrium public area. The condition of furniture upholstery in the Queen's Lounge, Explorer Lounge and Library and other areas throughout the ship was excellent.
2. On deck 7 there were some plumbing leaks in 3 cabins that inconvenienced the occupants temporarily but didn't bother the rest of us.

3. Our cabin on deck 6 was super on the interior but the verandah showed some rusty spots and the paint on the furniture was flaking off in a few places.
4. We found the ship spotlessly clean and the service staff excellent. Treatment of passengers in the lounges, restaurants and front office was generally at the usual high standard. However, our table stewards in the main dining room seemed a bit inexperienced. With some prompting we got what we wanted. Our head waiter, Janar, was the most attentive that we have had. In total we got our money's worth.
5. The entertainment was not top notch so we skipped about half of the evening shows. The fact that working on the blog in the evening was more interesting for us may have had something to do with that statistic.
6. The whole Internet Café system is wireless and with our Dell Inspiron E1705 laptop we could get online while in our deck 6 stateroom. However, in order to improve the signal strength and reliability we had to prop the steel cabin door open during the brief periods when we were on-line. A sliding curtain in the doorway maintained privacy. The Internet Café service was good but too expensive.

An unfortunate event was the crash of the stock market during the time period of the 65 day cruise. It was too late to take any defensive action so we just ignored the bad news and enjoyed each day of the cruise. When we returned home there was plenty of time to mull over the financial damage.

There was some real good news visible in the price of gasoline posted in gas stations along the highway as we drove home from the airport. When we left Oak Ridge on September 18 the local price of regular-unleaded gas was \$3.57 per gallon. Gas prices we saw in most ports we visited on the cruise hovered around a price of \$4/gallon. Upon return home November 27 we saw regular-unleaded gasoline selling for \$1.64/gallon in a local Oak Ridge gas station. On a related political/technical note we would like to see the whole transportation sector of our economy go to electric energy use with minimum dependence on oil. This will involve a major investment in new battery and vehicle technology as well as non-oil dependent electricity generation facilities such as nuclear, clean-coal, wind and solar. The supply of oil is temporary and we should make the transition to electricity as soon as possible.

This will be the final blog entry. Our plan is to leave the blog in place for about a year so other cruisers can make reference to it. Anyone with questions or comments can email us at **orlinbarbara(at)thestansfields.com (at)=@)**. Steve's suggestion was to use this obtuse format for our email address here in the blog. This practice will prevent a blizzard of emails from automatic electronic scanners that suck up email addresses from the Internet for use in mailing spam. The pictures on the blog are typically in files about 100 to 200KB in size. If you try to make large prints from these photos the quality may be low. We can email out the original pictures that are 1 to 2 MB in size if anyone wants to make a few large high quality prints.

Finally, we give thanks for our family and many friends who make our life so enjoyable whether on a cruise or here at home. We are looking forward to sharing experiences together in the future.

Cheers,

Orlin and Barbara  
December 3, 2008