

Day 52, (Monday, 11/10/08) Suva, Fiji

The day started with rain and lightening before daylight but we had a calm sea as we approached Suva in the Fiji Islands. About 7am we were entering the harbor at Suva. Like many South Sea Islands this one is surrounded by coral reefs that were visible as breaking surf many miles from shore. We got a couple pictures of the reef surf and one of the volcanic ridges in the distance.



The warehouse across the dock from the Amsterdam had a welcoming sign painted on the roof. There was also a uniformed band waiting to greet the Amsterdam at a simulated native hut as the ship reached the dock.



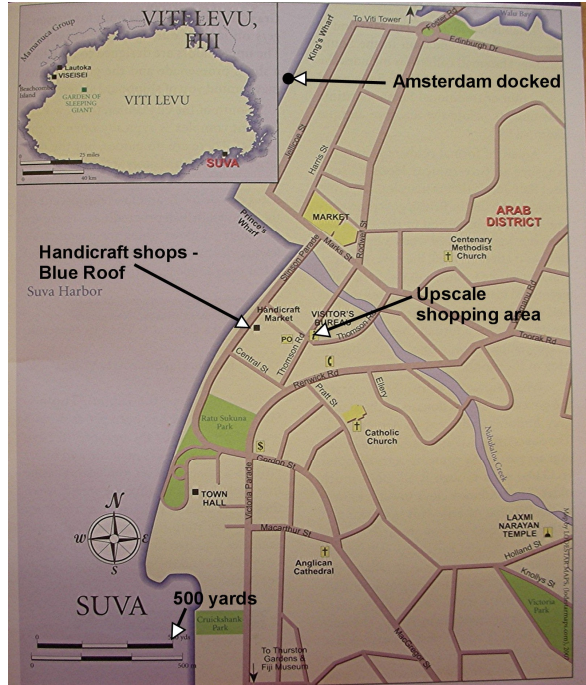
The Amsterdam was soon tied up at the dock and the gangway was open to leave the ship by about 8am.

We got our act together about 8:30 and left the ship. We appeared to be in about the same location as we were in when we arrived at Suva with the Amsterdam in February of 2007. On the right is a map of the area to help locate Suva on the island of Viti Levu. The people of Fiji know their nation as "Viti". Through one of those quirks of history the map makers mispronounced "Viti" and recorded the island's name as "Fiji". That is how the rest of the world knows the place.

Also, shown on the map is the location of the Amsterdam and some shopping areas in Suva. We found everything we wanted within easy walking distance. The ship was visible from the handicraft shops in the blue roofed building.

The traffic in Fiji is left hand drive like in Britain. We didn't think to check the price of gasoline but there was plenty of traffic so we figure it was consistent with other ports we have visited. We thought the people we saw on the streets looked a little more friendly and happy than they did when we visited in February of 2007. This opinion is pretty subjective - - maybe we have changed.

We took a free shuttle bus from the ship to an upscale department store called Prouds. It had very nice shops and probably was sponsoring the free shuttle buses for the day. It was only a few blocks from the ship. We browsed around Prouds a bit and got a picture taken with the costumed native warrior outside one of the shops. The main advantage for us in these kinds of shops is that they have nice rest rooms and they take credit cards. Other than the liquor store, which carried Australian wine in boxes, we couldn't find anything of interest.



Stepping outside we checked out the neighborhood which was mainly 2 and 3 story buildings and shops. We were soon approached by a local man who somehow must have suspected we were tourists. He warned us to watch out for pick pockets and to protect our billfolds. He then said he could take us to a place with lower prices and money we spent would go directly to local natives who make the craft items for sale. We followed him about a block back towards the ship and he brought us to a shop filled with native crafts in a mall-like building. We found a nice decorated teak wood kava bowl shown in this picture on the right. The kava bowl lore we got from the vendor goes like this. The kava bowl is used in native religious ceremonies where a concoction known as kava is put in the bowl and drunk by those assembled around it. The kava bowl is always round with four legs representing four sons of an ancient warrior. The triangular piece coming down from the rim represents the warrior's only daughter. The normally light brown teak wood is soaked in swamp water to turn it black. The artistic pattern shown here is then created by hand with a carving tool that cuts off the thin layer of black wood to expose the brown wood underneath.



Later we went to another handicraft store that was housed in a large building with a bright blue roof visible from the Amsterdam. That craft store is indicated on the map above. There we bought more craft items shown in the following pictures. We liked this teak wood bowl shown on the right. The bowl was about 12 inches across the long dimension. It was oblong and had palm fiber binding around the rim. The vendor threw in a cannibal fork as a deal sweetener.



We got a couple large cannibal forks, as shown below, to hang on the wall at home. The oblong brown wooden ball in the cage of the handle of one fork was supposedly carved in place and it couldn't be removed without breaking the handle. The vendor said that the ball in the handle represented the brain of the victim being eaten with the fork.



While we had earlier been at the Prouds department store, Barbara had been envious of the boar's tusk necklace worn by the man dressed as a native warrior. By luck one of the vendors had such an item so with our remaining cash she acquired this charming piece of jewelry shown below.



Having done sufficient damage in Suva we decided it was time to walk back to the ship. Along the way we passed the beautiful tree growing along the shoreline, as shown below.



There was intermittent rain during the day. The good news was that the temperatures were not high enough to trigger a lot of sweating so periodic dampening by rain was not a problem.

As we approached the Amsterdam on the dock we saw that a side hatch had been opened as shown on the right. Later we saw produce trucks unloading provisions into the ship through the hatch. The crew never rests in their effort to satisfy the voracious appetite of the passengers.



At dinner we got some sad news. On Saturday, just two days ago, we had seen one of the passengers fall and injure himself in the terminal in Noumea. Joan's stateroom is near that of the injured man and she has been aware of unfolding events. Tonight we learned from Joan that the man had died and his body had been removed from the ship today in Suva. His wife had to pack their things and return with the body to the US. It was sad to contemplate the trauma that the man, his wife and the rest of his family have suffered.

During dinner the Amsterdam got underway bound for Apia, Western Samoa.