

Day 33 (Wednesday 10/22/08) Singapore

By about 7:30am the Amsterdam was docked at the Cruise Ship Terminal in Central Singapore. Singapore is an independent nation that consists of the large main island and 63 smaller islands located on the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. The map on the right shows where Singapore is located on the globe.

During this visit we learned that the name "Singapore" is derived from some Sanskrit words meaning "Lion City". Building on the "Lion City" theme, the icon of Singapore is a mythical animal with the top part of its body in the shape of a lion and the bottom half as a fish, much like a Mermaid in western culture. Playing on this Mermaid like feature Westerners called the fanciful beast a Merlion. In an amusement park on Sentosa Island near where the Amsterdam was



docked is a large statue of the Merlion. The Merlion is visible near the construction cranes on the left side of this photo we took from the deck of the Amsterdam.

About 9am, we retrieved our passports from the ship's office and then checked in with the tour

people to get our bus assignment for the "Around the Island" tour we had selected. Only 14 people had signed up for the tour so rather than a full sized bus we ended up with a large van as shown on the right. We soon met our guide, Andrew, and a driver who took us to several sites around the island that had current and historical interest.



Below is a map of the main island of Singapore showing in red font the sites we visited.



The traffic conforms to the left hand tradition in Singapore, probably a holdover from the British colonial days. The city streets were in good shape and traffic moved smoothly as we made our way to the first stop at the Fish and Vegetable Market. Andrew, our guide, pointed out that this was a wholesale market for selling large quantities of any one item. It consisted primarily of open dock areas, like that shown on the right, where the food was displayed on pallets heaped with the different items for sale. Andrew said that all the goods in the market came from Malaysia.



Our guide first took us through the fish market where most of the product was dried and/or salted. Here are some items that we ran across. The colorful star shaped discs in the photo below were made from fish meal. They are deep fried and eaten like a potato chip.



We next went to the produce market across the alley where we saw all kinds of gourds, melons, and roots for sale.

This green vegetable known as a "bitter gourd" was a favorite of Andrew's.

We were fascinated by the fact that the root of the lotus lily, which looks like an Irish potato, could be eaten and apparently is popular among people in this part of the world.



Leaving the Fish and Produce market we cut north across the island headed to a place called Kranji Beach. Along the way Andrew filled us in on some economic information.

An average salary in Singapore is about \$3500 Singapore/month (~\$2400 US). A 90 square meter (1000 square foot) flat costs about \$200,000 Singapore (~\$140,000 US) when purchased in public

housing and \$750,000 Singapore (~\$515,000) when purchased in the more upscale private developments. Andrew said the private developments had more amenities like balconies, swimming pools and tennis courts but also monthly maintenance fees. He had looked at homes in a private development about 10 years ago when he was ready to purchase but decided to buy a home in the less expensive public housing. When you buy a home you get just the shell and have to install all improvements at your expense. He was aware of the bad reputation of public housing in the US and said that it is very different in Singapore where strictly enforced laws keep bad behavior to a minimum. We passed by both public and private housing and while it was obvious the private housing was more upscale, the more economical public housing looked very good. Here is an example of public housing on the right. An example of private housing is shown below.



While we were traveling north we were passing through the rain forest that Singapore has left mostly undeveloped in the middle of their island. The purpose of the rain forest and associated reservoirs is to store water for the ever growing city. It turns out that even with their best planning they still can't store enough water for their people. Singapore has to buy additional fresh water from Malaysia a few miles away.

When we signed up for this tour we were thinking it would provide us with some sightseeing beyond the Raffles Hotel and Colonial District shopping that we had seen in 2007. It turned out we got the new sights but, in addition, we got a whole lot of World War II history delivered at the scene of the crime. Our history lesson started at Kanji Beach facing the Malay city of Jahor Bahru across the narrow strait. This photo on the right shows the current symbolic barbed wire barricade on the beach and Jahor Bahru in the distance.



Relations between citizens of Singapore and Jahor Bahru are apparently very good. Andrew said that Jahor Bahru had lower prices than Singapore and was a favorite place for Singapore people to visit on their shopping trips.

We, like most Americans, tend to focus on Pearl Harbor and December 7, 1941 as the start of our involvement in WWII. It was eye opening for us to learn that on that same solar day (recorded as December 8 because of the International Date Line effect) the Japanese also attacked the Malay Peninsula a couple hundred miles north of Singapore. The Japanese wanted the natural resources of the area and with a relatively small number of troops and equipment they actually bicycled down the Malay Peninsula toward Singapore with little resistance as they went. Singapore was a British colony at the time and the British military had prepared for an attack by sea from the south leaving their northern boarder relatively unprotected. The Japanese arrived at the narrow strip of sea water separating the Malay Peninsula from Singapore's northern shore. They easily crossed the water and landed at Kanji Beach. The Japanese army proceeded to take control of Singapore with a lot of cruelty and loss of life among the civilian population, particularly the Chinese. The poor defense of Singapore by the British left a bad memory with the people of Singapore and contributed to the movement leading to the 1959 declaration of independence from Britain. Most of the rest of our tour today was to sites related to the conquest of Singapore by the Japanese.

We went to the nearby "Kranji War Cemetery 1939 – 1945". This is a War Memorial cemetery, much like Arlington Cemetery in the US, where fallen military are buried and honored. Although Singapore didn't shed any blood until 1941, the 1939 date was derived from the date the Germans invaded Poland and WWII was started. While we were at the Kranji War Cemetery there were 100 or more uniformed school children also visiting the site. Andrew explained that this was part of a government program to instill patriotism and sense of nationality in the children. Andrew was of Chinese extraction but he made it clear that he was a patriotic Singapore citizen and he was honored to show us the War Memorial. Here are a couple views of the cemetery.



As we were about to leave the War Memorial Cemetery our guide grew a little bit emotional and started talking about a Malay sultan in the city of Jahor Bahru who had collaborated with the Japanese in 1941 and assisted them in attacking Singapore. He said this sultan let the Japanese use the top floor of his palace in Jahor Bahru as a control station for the movement of troops across the narrow strait and up onto Kanji Beach. He took some time and using several landmark buildings identified the sultan's palace building that was still standing. He didn't elaborate on how fate dealt with the sultan in the rest of the twists and turns of the war period. Here is a picture of the sultan's palace that he identified to us.



It was about noon so the bus took us to the Orchid Country Club for lunch. This is a luxurious building and golf course built by the government for the trade unions. Andrew thought the fee for a round of golf was between \$100 and \$150 US.

We were served Chinese style food displayed on a large glass lazy Susan (chop sticks optional). The food was good and the staff cheery and efficient. The view out the window by our table was terrific. Here is a photo of our well fed table group.




Clockwise from Barbara is Howard, Alice, Wayne, Anne and John.

We took a couple photos of the beautiful orchids on display around the aptly named "Orchid Country Club".




Continuing on a military theme we went next to the Johore Battery where replicas of large guns are on display. The British had five large guns that could hurl 15 inch diameter shells about 15

miles. Unfortunately, the guns were not mobile and they had been put in place on the southern and western coast of Singapore, to fend off the anticipated invasion from the open sea. They were of no use when the Japanese made their attack from the north. Before the surrender to the Japanese in December 1941 the British destroyed the original guns but replicas have now been made and displayed as part of a historical museum.


 NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

JOHORE BATTERY




*A close-up view of one of the "monster guns".
14 November 1941*


The Johore Battery comprised three guns. They were part of a group of twenty nine large coastal guns installed in Singapore in the 1930s.

The Johore Battery's three weapons were among Singapore's largest coastal guns. They were known as 15-inch guns, because 15 inches (38 cm) was the diameter of the shell they fired. Their gun barrels were 16.5 metres long and the shells stood 1.5 metres high. The guns were capable of hurling these shells at battleships over twenty miles away.

They were originally called "monster guns" when tested in England in 1934, before being sent to Singapore. When World War II started, there were only seven of these defending the coasts of the British Empire. Two were near Dover in England, and five in Singapore. Besides the Johore Battery, Singapore also had two 15-inch guns at Buona Vista Battery. They were located at the junction of Ulu Pandan and Clementi Roads, in the West of the island.



Gunners "walking through" the barrel of a "monster gun" after firing, c. 1941



(From left to right) General Sir Archibald Wavell accompanying the C.F.D. Brigadier Curtis and the General Officer Commanding Singapore Fortresses, Major-General Keith Simons. Leaving Singapore's defences, c. 1941

Each of Johore Battery's guns had its own ammunition bunker. These were about 500 metres apart, arranged in a line that stretched from the present site onto what are now the runways of Changi Airport. Though these guns were originally intended to stop an attack from the sea, two of Johore Battery's guns could turn around and fire to the rear, towards Johor Bahru. The third, the one located at this site, could only fire out to sea.

From 5th to 12th February 1942, the two guns of the [unclear] could turn around fired landward

Here is what the replica looks like. The inside diameter of the fake gun barrel looked more like 12 inches than 15 inches.

The next event on our tour was a visit to "The Changi Museum". The Changi Museum is on the site of the Changi Prisoner of War Camps operated by the Japanese during WWII. The prison was originally built by the British as a civilian prison to house about 650 ordinary criminals in colonial times. After the fall of Singapore to the Japanese the site was turned into an infamous Prisoner of War Camp holding thousands of prisoners.



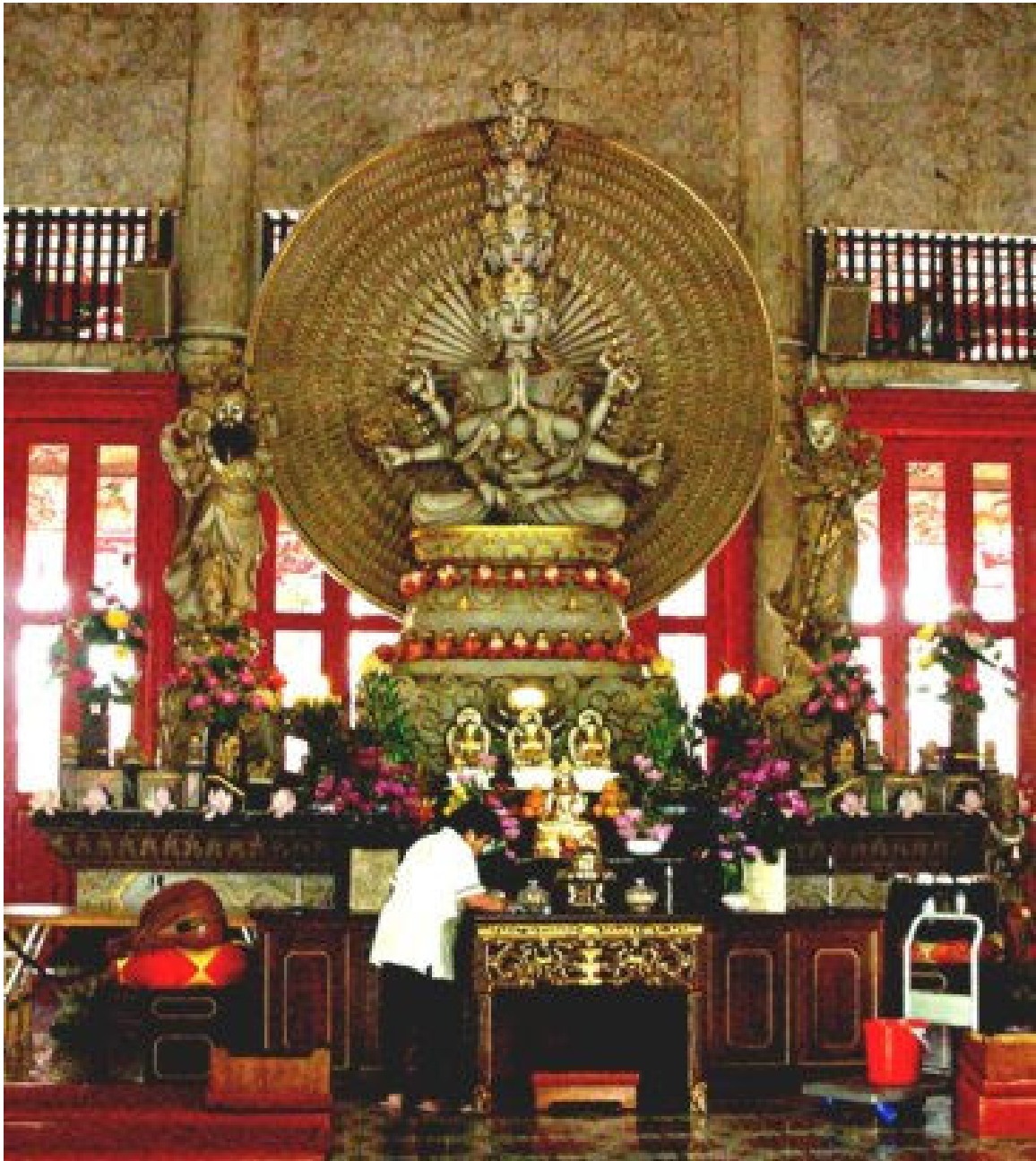
The museum had displays that documented the grim existence of prisoners in the camp. The most ominous symbol of the old prison was a high wall and barbed wire top that forms one side of the driveway. Inside the museum is a courtyard containing a simple chapel that symbolizes clandestine makeshift chapels that the prisoners managed to assemble within the prison walls.



From the Changi War Prisoner Museum we went to a large Buddhist Temple for a tour. The Buddhist Temple was decorated in the most elaborate style with magnificent dragons poised symmetrically on the roof line and eaves.



In one of the temples was the Buddhist goddess of mercy. She prayed so hard for mankind that her head split into 5 heads. Here is how the goddess is portrayed in the temple.



Andrew showed us the crematory that is operated on the Buddhist Temple site. He said that Buddhists are encouraged to be cremated when they die. It is consistent with their religion and makes sense for minimal use of scarce land. Handling of the remains of a deceased person is relatively inexpensive if cremation is elected. However, if a Buddhist chooses to be buried it is very expensive. On the other hand, Muslims are forbidden to be cremated and their religion requires that they be buried in special ceremonies with their face pointed toward Mecca. For Muslims the government of Singapore provides for inexpensive burial in the earth. Andrew

didn't seem to have any complaints about the apparent inequity of this treatment on the basis of religion.

The tour was brought to an end and we headed back to the Amsterdam. One of the passengers asked Andrew if we could drive by the Raffles Hotel. It would take a few extra minutes but no one objected so we drove to the Old Colonial District of Singapore and cruised slowly by the Raffles Hotel in all its splendor. We could almost taste those good Singapore Slings!



The drive back to the ship also took us by the new Singapore Flyer. Andrew said that guides are told not to use the "F" word when referring to the Flyer.

Apparently the marketing people don't want it referred to as a "Ferris" wheel. However, it is a Ferris wheel and it is a few feet higher than any other Ferris wheel in the world, even the famous "Eye" in London, England and the Tempozan in Osaka, Japan.



Our guide dropped us off at the cruise ship terminal. Time was a little short before the ship was getting underway. We reluctantly walked by the shops that were there selling all kinds of interesting things.

Having a looming departure time helps us maintain some restrictions on our shopping urges.

About 6pm the Amsterdam got underway for Bali, Indonesia.