

Day 13 (Thursday, 10/02/08) At Sea

Several people have sent us notes with nice compliments about the blog. We haven't acknowledged all the comments but the thoughts are appreciated. We are glad to share our record of experiences on this voyage.

We are at sea today sailing south off the east coast of Japan on our way to Kobe, Japan. The day started with bright sun and temperatures in the mid 70s as we walked around the Promenade Deck. We could tell that the time was coming for storing away the heavy clothes we had brought for the Northern Pacific part of the voyage.

The Promenade on Deck 3 has the classical design with teakwood deck and folding chairs set out for passengers each day. The deck chairs weren't used very much while we sailed through the chilly waters of the Northern Pacific. Today looked like one of the first times that this part of the ship would get some real use. In preparation the deck steward was unfolding the chairs and laying out the chair pads that had been stored away until now.



We walked around the Promenade Deck for about an hour to be sure we could qualify for dessert at dinner tonight. Then it was time to enjoy our first really warm day and a little relaxation on the verandah.



Later in the morning we went to a lecture by Anna Smith in the Queen's Lounge about exotic fabrics. Anna is one of the speakers that Holland America has brought on board the Amsterdam as part of the Explorations Series of informative lectures.

Today she was presenting a slide show and other information about batik fabric. We found out that batik fabric has origins in China thousands of years ago when artisans discovered they could apply melted wax to cloth in intricate patterns and then apply dye to the cloth. The wax was then removed with hot water leaving the artistic image boldly outlined by the dye. Manufacture of batik cloth is very labor intensive and preservation of the process relied on the manufacturing steps being passed on from parents to children over the centuries. With industrialization and

mass production the original techniques for producing batik by hand are being lost. The original dyes for batik were all from plants and insects and the color of choice for Anna was indigo blue. We are going to be visiting ports where batik cloth will be for sale. Bali in Indonesia is one of the favored places to obtain clothes and cloth made with the batik process. After Anna's lecture a table covered with samples of batik fabric was laid out for the audience to examine, touch and feel. Here we see Anna and her husband, David, both in beautiful batik clothes, conversing with people after the lecture. Meanwhile, our new Cruise Critic friend, Therese (ccTAC), is giving close examination to a sample of cloth. There was a question about how an amateur could tell the difference between good batik and a cheap imitation. The quick answer was that a person should just feel and look at the cloth and buy stuff that you like. Of course, the more you know about fabric the better armed you are to strike a good deal. The shopping scene in places like Bali is usually so frantic that it is not practical to get very technical in making selection of material.



The lecture on fabric was followed by another Explorations Speaker Series lecture by Dr. Jay Wolff. Today's subject was the history of Japan from early discovery by Western explorers in the 1500s through tumultuous feudal periods of openness and isolation ending with the opening for commerce triggered by the American, Commodore Perry, in the 1859. Dr Wolff's incredible memory and ability to weave historical events together in a logical fashion makes for a very informative and enjoyable lecture.

At 4 pm we tramped down to the stateroom of Bob and Esther to sample some of the Japanese munchies and a couple different types of sake they had picked up in Hakodate. We are supposed to tour a Sake Brewery Museum in Kobe tomorrow so we should be experts on Sake by the time we leave Japan.

It quickly became time for dinner and we went down to the dining room. The theme today was celebrating our visit to Japan and the staff was decked out in traditional Japanese clothes. We decided to take advantage of this special event and capture some photos of these folks who have been taking such good care of us at meal time.

On the right is Bernadette the wine steward. In addition to serving drinks she showed her warm heart early in the cruise she discovered a lady dining alone who could only speak Spanish. In a ship filled mainly with Americans, this left her very isolated. Bernadette canvassed other passengers until she was able to introduce the lady to other Spanish speaking people.



Our waiter is from Bali and his name is Gde, pronounced as the Australians say "good day". Here he is with Barbara.



Our assistant waiter is Dibya and here he is serving some lemon slices for our water.



Our Head Waiter is Janar. We have found that the head waiters, who supervise 5 or six tables, are often hard to find during the cruise.



Janar is the exception, knowing each of our names and joking around with us during the meal. When Gde and Dibya get really busy, Janar pitches in with some help with serving the meal. Here is this colorful gentleman.

On the way out of the dining room Bob took this picture of us in front of the Japanese theme decorations.

