

Day 10 (Monday, 9/29/08) Hakodate, Japan

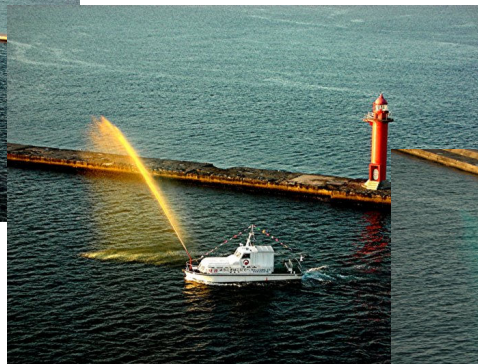
As dawn approached we entered the harbor of Hakodate, Japan. The weather looked like it would be perfect for us tourist types to do our thing today. Hakodate is located on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. Hakodate is the capital city of the Oshima Subprefecture. This map provides an overview of where Hakodate is located in the Japanese Island chain.



Hakodate has had some connection with the US since 1859 when the efforts of Commodore Matthew Perry resulted in opening up Japan to foreign trade. One curious factoid is that the first United States citizen to be buried in Japan was buried in Hakodate. He was a sailor in Perry's fleet and died (presumably of natural causes) while visiting the area. Continuing this rather downbeat note, Hakodate was the location of perhaps 10 or more prisoner of war camps during WW II. However, today we put those unpleasant facts behind us as Hakodate welcomed us with a fireboat spraying a sequence of colored waters into the air while we glided into the harbor. We had never seen such an enthusiastic reception by a foreign city.



In the photo above is an extinct volcano called Mount Hakodate. Later in the day we took a cable car ride up to the viewpoint at the top of the mountain.



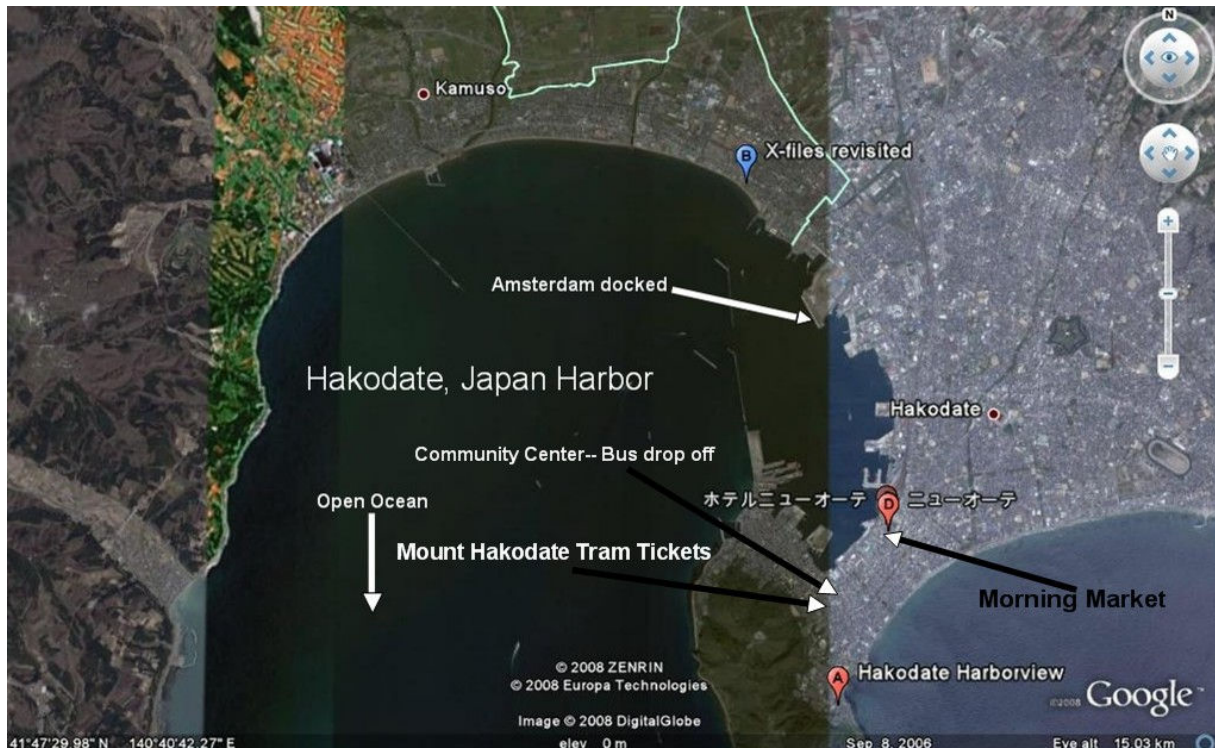
We could tell that Hakodate was a city that really wanted us to come and visit. We looked forward to going ashore and meeting the people and places they had to offer.

We joined Lyle and Marjorie at the rail of the Amsterdam to watch the show as we docked at Minatocho Pier in Hakodate.



Before we could leave the ship we had to be fingerprinted and our passports inspected by the Japanese Immigration Authorities. They were very efficient and with about 15 agents working they processed the 1500 or so passengers and crew on the Amsterdam in a couple hours. Once we were cleared to leave the ship we walked down the gangway and boarded a shuttle bus that the city provided to get us in to town.

This map of Hakodate (provided courtesy of Google Earth) gives an overview of where the Amsterdam was located and places we visited during the day.



The bus dropped us off at the Community Center which on a paper map that we had was called the "Town Planning Centre". There were 15 or 20 young schoolgirls in their blue uniforms there

to greet us. They gave us maps and were helpful with tourist information. We were very appreciative of the care and courtesy they showed for us.

We were trying to get to a market of local food and crafts that we had heard about called "The Morning Market". This fine lady who was in the Community Center gave us and our friends, Dick and Anne, some guidance. She told us about how to get to the Morning Market and also some churches and temples in the nearby area. The young ladies in blue uniforms can be seen in the background.



Dick and Anne decided to check out the churches while we headed for the Morning Market which was a 15 or 20 minute walk through the town.

Along the way we noted the price of gasoline was even more costly here than at home in Oak Ridge. At this station regular gas is selling for 149 Yen per liter. This works out to about \$6 US per gallon in Hakodate while regular gas in Oak Ridge sells for about \$3.50 per gallon. Scenes like this help put our current US energy plight in a more global perspective.



Squid is the official fish of the city and last evening we had seen the bright lights of the squid boats in the distance as we approached Hakodate. In August the Hakodate Port Festival draws thousands of Japanese visitors who gather to participate in a wiggly dance known as the Ika-odori or the "squid dance". We arrived too late for those festivities but there were plenty of reminders that squid plays a big role in the local economy. For example, some manhole covers, like this one, were cast with stylized images of the city's official fish.





Other manhole covers featured brightly painted local historic sites.

We finally arrived at the "Morning Market" which is near the modern looking Japan Railway Station. We were not disappointed by what we saw. There were not many hand crafted items but there was the most amazing display of all kinds of marine food. The following pictures attempt to show what we saw.

On the right is a display for a restaurant showing food that sells for \$13 to \$20 US per dish.



On the left are active live squid for sale.

On the right are some dried squid.



This crab was hauled out of a tank for the customers to see.

Below Barbara screws up her courage to stand near a shark that is offered for sale.



Below is a general view of the Morning Market scene. The vendor stalls were neat and clean and there was a general feeling of hard working people prospering from their labor.



We can't read Japanese but this logo was posted all around the area and suggests that the citizens of Hakodate are "rolling up their sleeves" and working hard to succeed. Barbara took this moment to show her Oak Ridge Library card in this foreign port. This is part of the "Where in the World is your library card?" program of the Oak Ridge Library where she does volunteer work.



Barbara and her Oak Ridge Library Card

After thoroughly checking out the Morning Market we walked back to The Community Center.

Along the way we found another opportunity for Barbara to display her library card. This time the sign clearly showed in English that we were in Hakodate.

At the Community Center we found the blue uniformed school girls were still hard at work practicing their English and helping the struggling cruise tourists with their questions. We got the attention of two lovely young ladies and asked them where we might find an ATM machine so we could replenish our supply of Japanese Yen. They said they could take us to a machine that was at a bank just a block away. On the way to the ATM Barbara found out that they as well as the other volunteers were high school students. They led us to the ATM machine where we found several other anxious tourists waiting to extract some money. After a short wait we were successful in withdrawing some cash. In conversation, while waiting, we told them we were from Tennessee in the United States. We were then absolutely astonished when they immediately asked about the University of Tennessee "VOLS" football team and indicated knowledge of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) system. This contrasted starkly with our ignorance about current or past events or important subjects of Japanese interest. Our helpful and obviously talented guides then posed for this picture and said they needed to return to the Community Center. We thanked them as best we could in English while wishing profoundly that we could express our gratitude more completely in their language. These wonderful ladies are truly a credit to Japan and we wish them all the best in whatever their life careers may be.



Freshly supplied with Yen we decided to take the nearby tramway to the top of Hakodate Mountain where we had heard there was a magnificent view of the city to be had. The maps and signage for the place refer to it as a "Ropeway" and a round trip ticket costs about \$11.50 US. We hiked up a rather steep street for a couple blocks and found the lower station of the tram. The structure is quite impressive and appeared to be very capable of hauling us and about 15 other waiting tourists up the mountain.



While waiting for the tram car in the station we spotted some items that help make a point about an attractive cultural behavior of the Japanese. The streets of their city were completely free of trash. I had several items that I wanted to discard while we had earlier walked to the Morning Market but we were dismayed that there were no trash cans along the streets or in the market place. We walk along a lake near our home in Oak Ridge and part of our routine is to daily pick up plastic bottles, fast food wrappers and other trash thrown from passing cars. Such disregard for common courtesy and our surroundings is an unattractive feature of some of our fellow citizens. Clearly the Japanese excel in respecting others and keeping their trash out of public view. And yet we had not seen trash cans until we were standing in the line at the Hakodate Ropeway. We took the opportunity to dispose of our trash and snapped this picture of the rare trash cans.



The weather was absolutely gorgeous and the views spectacular. We were thankful about our good fortune to have this lovely day on our first visit to Japan. Here are some photos we took during the smooth cable car ride and visit in the viewing center at the top of the mountain.



Right: Hakodate city and the harbor



Left: Hakodate city and the Pacific Ocean to the east. A matching tram car descends past us and helps pull our gondola up the mountain.

Left: Hakodate Harbor. The Amsterdam can be barely seen to the right and at the same level as Barbara's head.



Left: Here is a better picture of the Amsterdam docked at Minatocho Pier in Hakodate.

Right: This was a curious plaque at the viewing center on Hakodate Mountain. It refers to several northern islands (apparently called The Northern Territories) that both Russia and Japan claim as their own.





Right: Viewed from the tram gondola at the foot of Hakodate Mountain are several Churches and a Temple. Slightly left of center is a Russian Orthodox Church, slightly right of center is an Episcopal Church with the roof line showing the shape of a cross, and to the far right is the dark brown glazed tile roof of the Higashi Hongan-ji Temple.

We managed to get a closer view of the Episcopal Church which displayed such an architectural flare.



Right: Although we didn't climb the mountain at night to view the famous lighted glory of Hakodate, we obtained this picture which shows some measure of how wonderful the sight must be.

We made our way back to the Community Center and caught a shuttle bus back to the Amsterdam. Later in the evening (10pm), just before the ship got underway for Aomori, local performers from Hakodate put on a show in the Queen's Lounge. Our energy was gone and we retired early, missing the performance. However, their efforts to welcome us to Hakodate and entertain us to the last minute left us feeling like we should return.

Finally, outside the Hakodate Mountain Ropeway base station is this street sign with a little ceramic bird perched on top. It caught our eye and we thought it would be a fitting picture for closing out this marvelous day in Hakodate, Japan.

