

Day 1- (9/19/08) Boarding the Amsterdam and Underway: The newspaper headlines that greeted us this morning were still focused on the current financial problems facing the country. The federal government was moving in to take over risky loans made

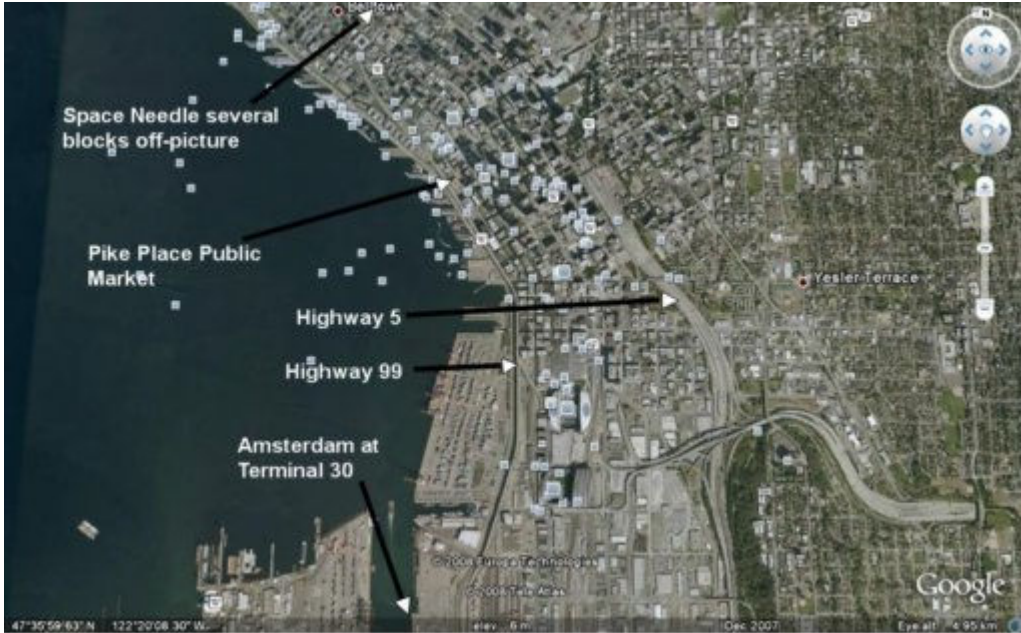
worthless by the recent bursting of the real estate bubble. This action would avoid failure of some major US financial institutions and consequent long term economic hard times for the country. This was not particularly good news but it appeared the power brokers of the nation were awake and trying to fix the problem. The best advice was to just hang-on. We tried to clear our minds and concentrate on getting the most out of our vacation.



After breakfast at the hotel we walked up to the Seattle Space Needle again and took the elevator to the observation deck (\$14 each). The lower level and elevator attendants were very professional and offered information about what we were seeing in Seattle as the elevator was raised on tracks along the outside of the tower. The experience was vaguely reminiscent of when we visited the top floor of the World Trade Center many years ago. The cloud ceiling was low and it was misty but we still enjoyed the visit. At least there weren't large crowds to deal with. We could see the Amsterdam docked at Terminal 30 but we couldn't get a clear picture of it. Here is Barbara at the observation rail with a Celebrity Cruise Line ship showing at her left elbow. The elevator took us down and deposited us in the largest gift shop we had seen for some time. After the obligatory browsing and minor purchase we walked back to the hotel and prepared to catch the shuttle bus.



This map adapted from Google Earth shows an overview of the Seattle downtown area and the sites of main interest for us.



At 11:30 the shuttle bus driver loaded our bags and we, along with several other passengers, headed to the Amsterdam (\$6 each). At Terminal 30 we were met by efficient porters who took our bags and got them into the system that eventually delivered them to our stateroom. We are used to huge crowds and slow moving lines during cruise check-in but there were lots of helpful staff around and we were shepherded through the passport/visa routine and photo ID process with little delay. The crowd of people checking in was less than we had expected.



In fact, it went so fast that we had trouble keeping up as we fumbled through our documents looking for what they were after. Finally we passed all the hurdles and had our room key so we could board the Amsterdam.



One of the observations we have made is that Holland America makes a good effort to assist handicapped people and particularly seniors who may need just a little help over



the rough spots. As an example, we noticed a wheelchair area that had been set aside in the terminal. In this place people could wait for stewards to come with wheelchairs to take them to their cabins. We soon learned why such a service was a good idea. The ramp from the terminal building up to the greeters on the Amsterdam was at least a quarter mile long and a real test of our stamina. Here is

a view of the long ramp taken from the top deck of the Amsterdam.

Once on board the ship we enjoyed wandering through our favorite areas of the ship from prior cruises. Even better we met several friends, like Darrel and Karen, Bob and Esther



from a cruise we had taken in 2007. We were looking forward to meeting more friends whom we knew were taking this cruise. We finally got to our room (6142) and checked it out. It was snug and comfortable looking but we wondered how it would look when all of our luggage came piling in. Soon our room steward knocked on the door and we met Acep (pronounced A-chep) who welcomed us on board and offered any help he could give us in getting settled in. Acep is from the city of Bandung on the Indonesian island of Java. He has been working for Holland America for eight years.

Before the Amsterdam could get underway it was necessary for the crew and passengers to conduct a lifeboat drill so that everyone would know where to go in case of an emergency where it might be necessary to abandon ship. Each stateroom has at least two life vests and also instructions on the door telling the passengers which lifeboat they should go to in case of emergency. For the lifeboat drill the crew was posted in the

passageways and stairwells to tell the passengers which way to go. As the alarm sounded we all tramped down to deck 3 and assembled at our assigned lifeboat station. While at our station a crew member took a roll call to ensure that the occupants of all the cabins assigned to his boat were present. This was also a time that we were instructed in how to put on our life vest and enter the lifeboats. In this picture one of the passengers is receiving instructions about the life vest. Barbara smiles bravely while the man behind her looks less than amused.



Shortly after the life boat drill it was time for dinner. We joined our table mates in the La Fontaine Dining Room at the 5:30 early dinner seating. Here we are ready to enjoy our first meal of the cruise. From left to right there is Joan, Esther, Barbara, Orlin and Bob. Bob and Esther were our table mates during the 2007 Grand World Voyage on the Amsterdam. We are looking forward to many more evenings with these friends.



While we were eating, the ship got underway at about 6pm. We are headed for Hakodate, Japan. Originally the first foreign port was Petropavlovsk, Russia on the Kamchatka peninsula. However, on 10 September the Petropavlovsk visit was canceled by Holland America and the northern Japanese port of Aomori was selected as a substitute for the Russian port. The reason for the cancellation of the Russian port has not been published but US–Russia tension over the conflict in the nation of Georgia and subsequent hassles over immigration papers for cruise ship passengers in Petropavlovsk has been suggested in the rumor mill.