

**18 September 2008, The Journey Begins:** Today we buttoned up the house and at 5am our son, Steve, took us to the Knoxville Airport. We checked in at the Delta counter, went through the usual security hassle and then caught our flight to Seattle via Atlanta.

By the time we landed in Atlanta the morning newspapers were on display with disturbing news about the financial institutions failing and Wall Street in a free fall mode. There were front page captions such as the one in The Wall Street Journal which reported, "Fear coursed through the US financial system on Wednesday, as hope for a resolution to the year-old credit crisis faded." Another Wall Street Journal story was titled "Worst Crisis Since '30s, With No End Yet In Sight." This news was disturbing but there was little we could do at this time. We felt some consolation in the fact that before our investments lost more value we had put the money to work on building good memories of travel like the voyage we are on.

It was a nice early schedule so we arrived in Seattle about noon. We caught a taxi to our Comfort Suites Hotel which was about a 17 mile ride (\$35). The route we took probably did not show us the best face of Seattle. We saw primarily a tangle of freeways and the industrial harbor area. Fortunately when the driver turned towards our hotel the scene improved. The Comfort Suites hotel was centrally located about 5 blocks from the Seattle Space Needle and 10 to 15 blocks from downtown Seattle, including the tourist sites of the harbor area. It was also only two blocks from a wonderful Quality Food Center (QFC) grocery store where we were able to buy some wine to take aboard the Amsterdam with us tomorrow.

After getting settled in our room we walked over to the Seattle Space Needle site. We decided to skip the (\$18 each) elevator ride to the observation deck of the Space Needle because of the misty low hanging clouds and overcast sky that obscured a really good view of the city. However, we had to get a couple pictures of the Space Needle just for the record.

The Space Needle is part of a larger complex called the Seattle Center which includes a collection of other facilities such as an open air stadium and a very unusual building housing The Science Fiction and Hall of Fame Museum. The museum building exterior has a free form with curious lumps and portals covered with a copper colored metal sheeting. These pictures don't give it justice but gives some idea of what an imaginative architect created.



We left the Space Needle area and hiked about 25 minutes down to the harbor area and a tourist Mecca at the Pike Place Public Market area. This well kept open market area looks out over the Seattle harbor. It is populated with tourists and street people browsing through the vendor displays of craft and art items for sale. There was also a farmer's market and a wonderful selection of flowers.



There was a lively fish market area where free samples of smoked salmon drew an enthusiastic crowd. The whole happy scene of the Pike Place Market was the perfect setting to celebrate the start of our cruise.



It was late afternoon and a little early for dinner but being surrounded by all this delicious food gave us an overwhelming appetite. We decided to drop in to the Maximilien restaurant in the Pike Place Market area where we had delicious salads loaded with salmon and crab.



After our meal we said goodbye to the Pike Place Public Market and walked back to the hotel through downtown Seattle. It was wonderful weather for walking and the streets were friendly to pedestrians but we were happy to get back to the hotel. We cooled our aching feet and turned in for the night. We were looking forward to tomorrow and checking in to the Amsterdam down at Terminal 30.