

Updated December 31

December 26 – Mahe, Seychelles

No more cancellations since the last post. A lot of sailing across the Indian Ocean from Africa eastward. Our first stop was the Seychelles. The interesting fact about this country island is that it is the richest country in Africa. What is interesting to me is that I had not considered it was part of Africa. I guess it is and you can tell the people are better off, just by the fact that there are no people on the street asking you to buy their paintings.

The tour was interesting to us. Probably boring if I were to write about it. One fact is that the island is rich in many types of fruit not found too many places near our home, like breadfruit. And my specialty, the largest fruit in the world, jackfruit. They have a national garden growing many of these fruit trees. With lots of fruit, one gets lots of fruit bats. They were everywhere overhead in the gardens.

Here's the best picture I could get of one.



Other attractions at the gardens.



December 30 and 31 – Male, Maldives

Finally in Asia to the Maldives, an archipelago with over 1,000 islands. The one we stopped at is the capital, Male, an island of about 6 sq. miles with over 200,000 people. It is one of the densest cities in the world. If you ever get to these islands, pick another one. The Maldives is an Islamic country and also a major tourist stop. Being Islamic, the island of Male has many rules, such as modest dress at the beaches and no alcohol served on the island. The guide told us that rules differ from island to island. Those islands with resorts have different rules. Income has its priorities.

An interesting fact about a warm island with lots of people is that their homelessness level is 0%, no one is homeless. They must be doing something right.

A strange piece of information about this island with the “no alcohol” rule is that I was still able to buy a shot glass. Imagine traveling all this way to find out that fact. Kind of makes the entire trip worthwhile, wouldn't you say?

January 1 – Day at Sea

I normally do not plan to write about sea days, but I wanted to say more about the people on this ship who do nothing but cruise, so it seems. We met a woman whose husband was an excellent planner. They schedule a 2-month cruise on one cruise line that ends in some port. They stay there a couple of days and board another ship on another line going somewhere new. Then repeat. Maybe next time, they spend a week or two at home before going out again. Their idea is to spend at least 6 months a year on a ship. They were unable to join their current cruise when it started due to unforeseen circumstances. She met up with the first leg of their journey after a 3-week delay. What was this delay due to, you may ask? It's because her husband died and it took her 3 weeks to get things in order to join the ship.

January 2 – Columbo, Sri Lanka

One day at sea and we arrive on schedule in the next place. That's three in a row. Sri Lanka has about 20 million people and their capital, Columbo, has 2 million. Hindu and Moslem sects are the predominant religions.

The most interesting place was a Buddhist temple. A large area. We were required to remove our shoes and hats to enter.



Lotus blossoms, other types of flowers, and food were offered in prayer to Buddha.

Many places around town had large Banyan trees several hundred years old that are apparently considered sacred.



At one inside the Buddhist site, many people were in line (aka queue), each holding a vase full of water to pour on the tree and wish it well. The line had around 50 to 60 people waiting. This is all explained below.



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There were no English signs inside.

The Hindu temples were all very colorful.



Our tour took us to many other places, most trying to sell us tea, jewelry, spices, or other Sri Lankan products. One stop was at a park where people tried to trick us into taking pictures of them with their pets. There were four such people wandering the grounds, one with a pet monkey and three with cute pythons. We passed on the picture portion even though the monkey jumped on Vicki as she walked by.

Also, we were told that the name for one of the pythons was Barbara.

We were glad to return to the ship because of one product of the country I have yet to mention, pollution. You could tell it just by breathing the air. We did go to the top of a city tower, 29 stories tall, where it was hard to even see the ground about a mile away.

January 3 – Somewhere else in Sri Lanka

Today we are in about the middle of the south side of the island and have a tour to a Buddhist monastery. The monks were granted certain sites, mostly land with caves where they practiced their meditation. Caves mean elevation and we are at one with 4 levels and 585 steps to the topmost one.



On the way up, we enter the caves, which are just large areas under the rocks, enterable without having to go through narrow entrances. Each is full of paintings. Some of those on the ceilings are 300 years old, still very well maintained.



Here we are at step 585 with a banana plantation in the background.



That's about it. I could provide more pictures of the trip, but it's all more of the same. We now have two days travel to our final region around Thailand and Malaysia, and also Singapore.