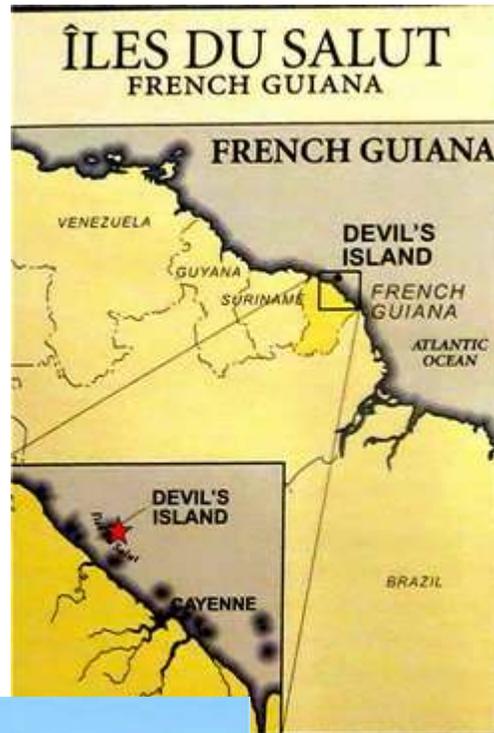
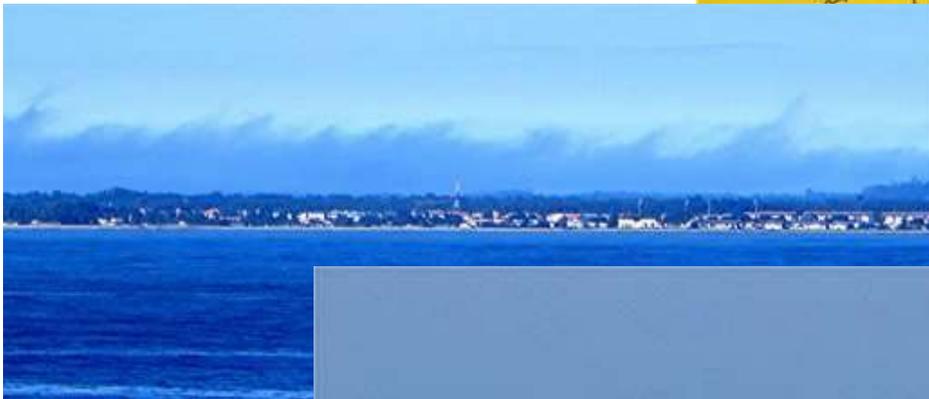


4/25/13 - Day 109- Devil's Island, French Guiana–Prison Cells–Monkeys: The

Amsterdam arrived off the shores of Royal Island and anchored about 8am. Royal Island is the largest of the cluster of three islands officially named Iles Du Salut. The name Devil's Island or "Ile Du Diable" is the official name of only one of the three islands but because they were all part of the terrible French Penal Colony system of the 1800s all three islands are commonly referred to as Devil's Island. The name Devil's Island has a catchy ring to it in the tourist industry marketing departments so that is another reason for calling the three islands by that name. The location of Devil's Island, off the north coast of French Guiana is shown in the map on the right.



The sun was shining brightly and, as shown in the photos below, it was possible to see the mainland shore of French Guiana which was

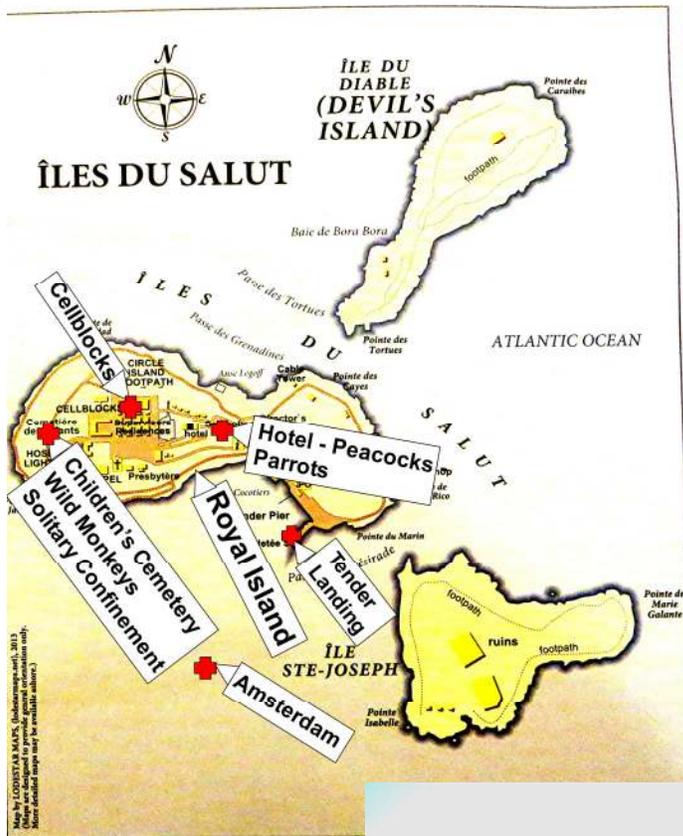


about 14 miles south of our anchorage.

Of particular interest to Orlin were the two large white buildings shown in the picture on the right. These

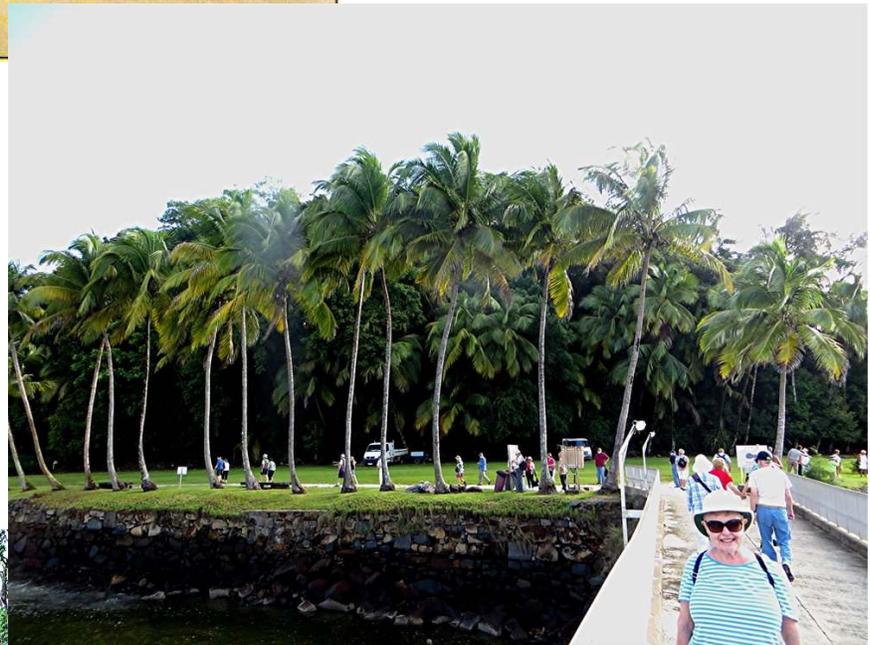


turned out to be part of the French Space Launch Facility. It is located near the equator to give the space vehicle a little extra speed when launched toward the east for an orbit in space. It is an interesting fact that everything on the surface of the earth at the equator is already moving eastward at a speed of about 1000 miles an hour even though it appears stationary compared with the surroundings. That speed is necessary to make the approximately 24,000 mile journey around the center of the earth once every 24 hour day.



Now--- back to our island adventure. The location of the three Iles Du Salut islands relative to each other and some of the places we saw on Royal Island today are shown in the map on the left.

There were no formal tours offered for today so everyone was on their own. It was fun to try and find our way around the small jungle covered island by ourselves. We were on one of the early tenders to go ashore and we were greeted by an attractive tropical scene on the beach, as shown below.



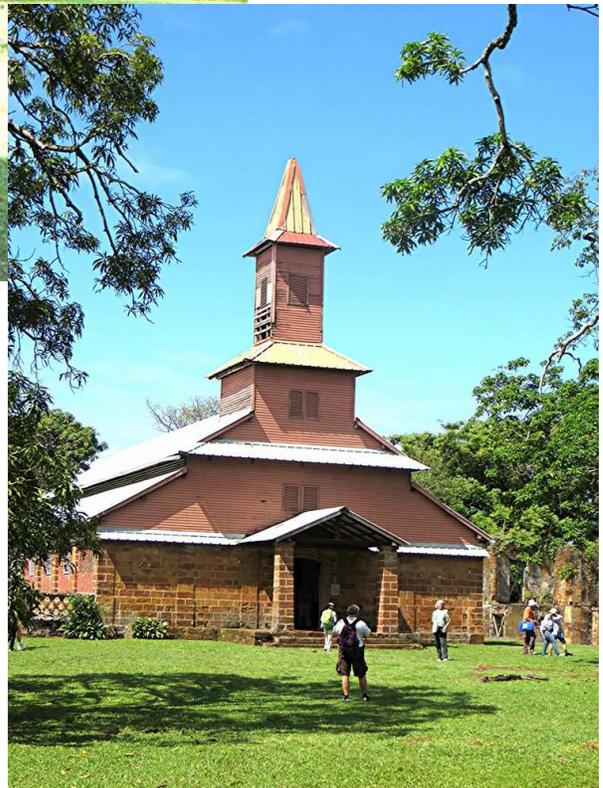
The photo on the left shows the cobblestone road we took that led to the open area at the top of the island where all the cellblocks and hotel were located.

At the top of the island was a spacious open area ringed with large trees and some of the administrative buildings. The buildings remained from the days of the French Prison Colony, which ended in 1952. One of the features that caught our eye immediately was the population of rodents known as “agouti”. One is shown eating a palm nut in the photo on the right. They were about the size of a housecat and didn’t seem to be bothered by our presence. Legend has it that the prisoners ate these critters



to supplement their meager diet. Two of the little beasts are shown prowling the grounds in the photo on the left.

One of the first buildings we encountered was the large church, as shown on the right.



We headed for the hotel that was on the east end of the open area on top of the island. The hotel used to be the mess hall for the guards when the prison was in operation. It is a two story building with about 12 rooms to rent. Approaching the hotel we passed by an open lake that was nearly filled with plant growth as shown on the right. Although not attractive today, this facility collected rain water for use by the prisoners and guard staff of the island.



We browsed around the hotel lobby, shown in the photo on the left. All the signs and language of the staff was French so we didn't get a lot of information about the hotel.

However, we did get another entry for our "dogs" collection. Here is our candidate for "Dogs of Devil's Island" as shown on the right.



Outside the hotel was a farmyard like scene with pens containing chickens, peacocks, and parrots. The following are a couple photos from that area.



They also had some nice flowering plants that added some color to the scene.



Now we turned our attention to the cellblocks where up to 2000 prisoners were kept at one time. The prison was opened by the French government in 1852 and became one of the most infamous prisons in history. The harsh conditions and diseases on the island resulted in the death of over 80,000 prisoners who were among the 70% who died. The bodies of dead prisoners were dumped in the ocean but most of the prison staff members and family that died were buried on nearby Ile Ste-Joseph. A small number of adults and children were buried in the cemetery we would visit later today on Royal Island. The French government stopped sending prisoners to Devil's Island in 1938 and in 1952 it was closed down. The dark reputation of Devil's Island was propagated far and wide by the best selling book "Papillion" by ex-Devil's Island convict, Henri Charriere, and the movie by that name starring Steve McQueen and Dustin Hoffman.

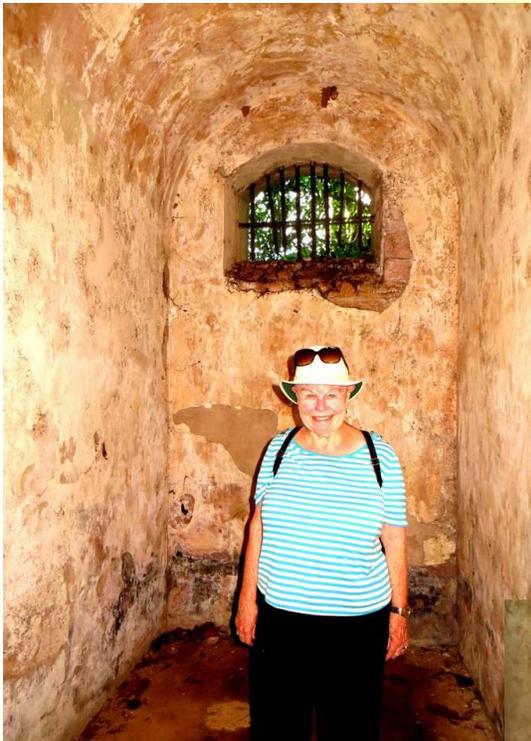
As we approached the cellblock we first passed by a row of nice looking homes where the supervisors and guards lived with their families. Some of those homes are shown in the photos on the right and below.



Conditions were harsh on Devil's Island, even for the staff, but these homes must have provided some comfort compared with what the prisoners lived with.

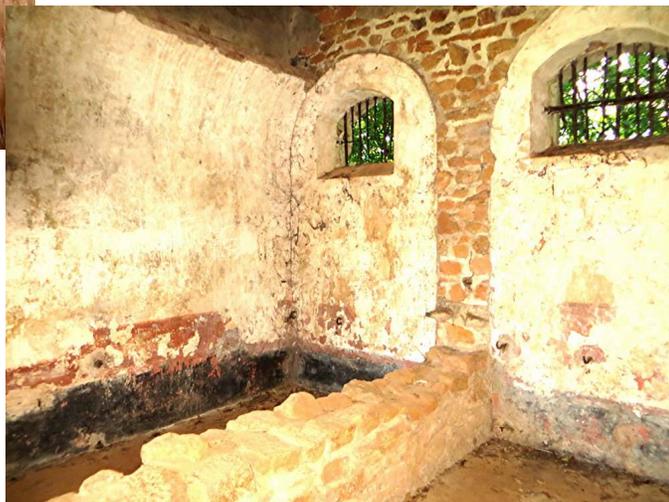
The prison cells were constructed of rough hewn volcanic stone held together with mortar. Since the prison was shut down there had been significant decay and damage from the elements. However, there had been a real effort to remove debris and present what remained in a well dressed clean condition. The following are some photographs we got of the prison cells.

What remains of the outer wall of one cellblock is shown in the photo on the right. The narrow cells inside were backed up against this wall.



In this view on the left, Barbara is trying on one of the cells for size. For a really big person this would have been a tight fit.

Some of the cells had been partially dismantled, as shown below. This view shows how the cells fit together in the building. It was clear that a lot of clean-up work was done to prepare the prison for tourist traffic.



The hospital for the prison was part of the cellblock and consisted of a single room where many patients were treated at one time. Iron bars ran the length of the room and prisoners were chained to the bars. However, there was an extra degree of freedom in that they were able to slip along the length of bar if that was needed for treatment. The photo on the right shows the prison hospital.

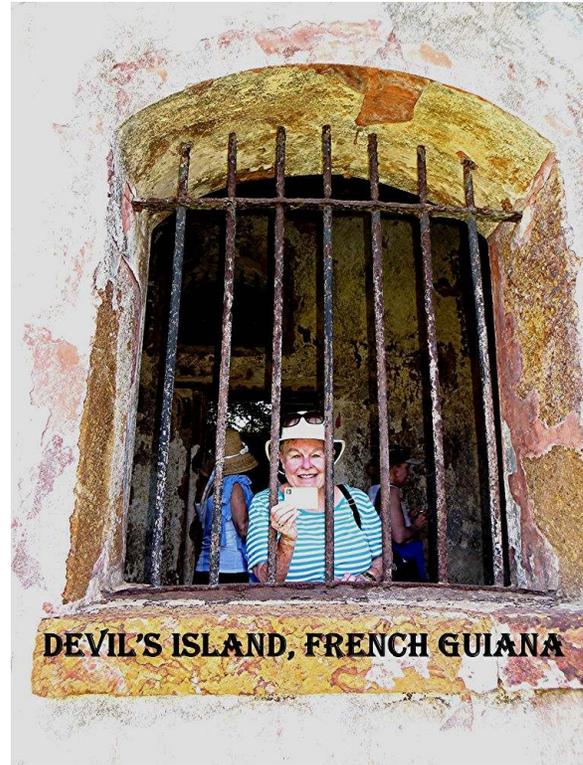


The photo below shows what was left of crude cells that backed up against the outer wall of the cellblock.

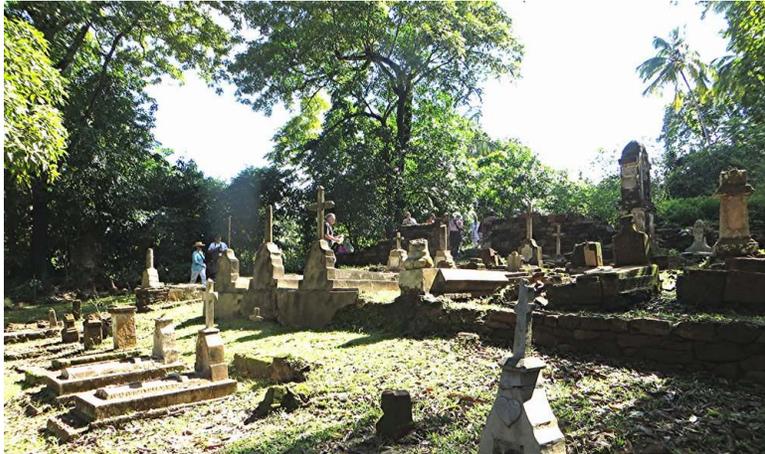


Before we left the cellblock Barbara needed to document the visit of her library card to this dismal part of human history. Straining for a little levity we took this photo showing the card making a break for it through the bars of its cell, as shown on the right.

We left the cellblock area and walked towards the area noted on the map as the children's cemetery. Along the way we passed over a helicopter landing pad next to the operating lighthouse on the island, as shown below. Next to the lighthouse was a large vacant structure noted on the map as the hospital. This hospital must have been a replacement for the bare room we saw in the cellblock.



On the other side of the helicopter landing pad the path led down the hill into a cemetery, as shown in the photo on the right. Some of the headstones were elaborate which was surprising in view of the austere nature of the island. We could read the engraving on some of the headstones, like those shown below.



The headstone above appeared to be for an adult named Elise Echard who died in 1938 at the age of 34. We learned later that the cemetery was not exclusively for children as this grave confirmed. The gravestone on the right was for a child named Emelie Cigrand who died in 1906 at the age of 27 months. An interesting cultural note was that each gravestone marking was ended with a single word, “REGRETS”.

Not far from the cemetery there was a group of Amsterdam tourists who had gathered around a family of wild monkeys. They had brought some snack food for the monkeys and this was providing lots of photo opportunities. We had heard stories about how some monkeys can be real pests and take loose items like glasses and cameras from people who approach them. These guys seemed to be very well behaved with no signs of aggressive action. Shown below are some of the photos we got of the monkeys as they snacked on the tourist food.



We eventually took all the monkey pictures we needed and continued our walk along the road that wound through the peaceful jungle, as shown on the right.



At one point we came to a structure on the side of the road



that looked like a very strong storehouse, as shown on the left. There was a plaque in French which probably explained the purpose but to us single language people it didn't convey its message. However, a friendly man standing nearby provided a plausible explanation of the purpose. He said that prisoners who didn't follow the rules were subjected to solitary confinement in this vault-

like building. Living in the cellblock was miserable enough but living in solitary confinement in this vault would likely break a person's spirit quickly. Tucking this last little bit of human misery away we decided that the heat and humidity was close to winning the battle with us so we turned our steps toward the tender boat landing.

However, before boarding the tender boat we proceeded just a little bit further until we saw the blacksmith shop at the eastern end of Royal Island. With all of the chains and manacles that were used on the prisoners this building must have been a busy place.

Another reason for going around



this way was that we had not taken a clear photograph of the real Devil's Island today. There were always trees in the way. Now, as we proceeded, the dreaded Devil's Island came into view. From this perspective, as shown on the left, it didn't look very big or foreboding.

With that goal accomplished we walked out onto the jetty and caught the next tender boat back to the Amsterdam. The Amsterdam was supposed to get underway about 3pm but some mechanical problems with the gangway hatch delayed us. About 6:30pm, while we were eating dinner, the Captain announced that everything was now "ship shape" and we were ready to go. After dinner we went out on deck and saw that the three islands, collectively known as "Devil's Island" were slipping away behind us. We grabbed our

trusty camera and took this low light photo shown on the right. In this photograph, St. Joseph Island is on the left, Royal Island with its working lighthouse is in the middle and Devil's Island is on the right. It had been a good visit.



We were underway and bound for the city of Castries on the island of Saint Lucia. We will spend a day at sea and expect to arrive in the port of Castries on Saturday.