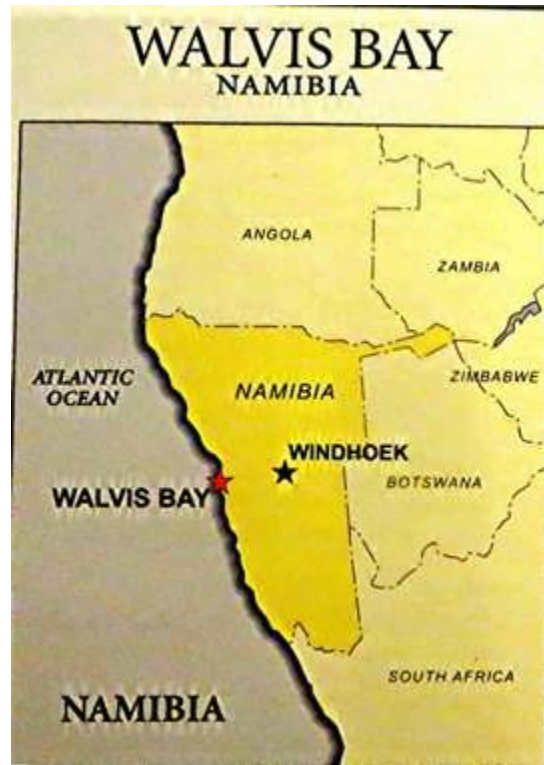


4/11/13 -Day 95-Walvis Bay, Namibia-Dune 7-Swakopmund-Flamingos: The

Amsterdam arrived at Walvis Bay, Namibia and was tied up at the dock by 7am. The location of Walvis Bay on the West Coast of Namibia is shown in the map on the right. The history of the land now called Namibia on the African Continent and capital city of Windhoek is littered with shifting dominance by various European powers. However, the last foreign country to rule Namibia was the neighboring state of South Africa. It was fairly recent, in 1990, that Namibia won independence from South Africa.



Walvis Bay provides a deep water port for the young nation and most of the imports and exports pass through this single port. Although there was some poverty in evidence as we toured in Namibia the economy appeared to be on a positive track.

Since this was our first visit in Walvis Bay we



had arranged for a tour with Cruise Specialists. Tom Mullen along with Henk and Lucia Barnhoorn are the Cruise Specialists ambassadors on board the Amsterdam and they arrange the tours we take with Cruise Specialists. About 9am we met our tour group and boarded a bus with our tour guide, Clause. Clause also served as driver as well as a guide with excellent English and deep knowledge of Namibian history and local sights.

As our bus drove to the port entrance we passed a long row of huge blocks of granite and white marble, shown on the right. They were lying on the dock and ready for export on some ship. The granite appeared to be harvested by a drill and crack technique while the white marble must have been cut with a saw or wire at the quarry.



We first drove through the town of Walvis Bay which was clean and neat with modest but well kept homes as shown in the photos below.



After driving around Walvis Bay for a while, Clause, headed our bus out towards the surrounding desert on a main highway. Before we had really picked up speed, Clause pulled our bus into a weighing station, called a Weighbridge. He complained a little about the time it took to wait in line and get weighed but, as he explained, it was an



intelligent measure to protect their expensive highways from abuse by trucks with excessive weight headed for the port.

The highlights of our tour today are indicated in the map shown on the left. We would explore the desert scene and then have lunch in the town of Swakopmund which is a showpiece of old German Bavarian architecture and tradition. We would then return to Walvis Bay on the road that goes straight along the coast from Swakopmund to Walvis Bay.

Clause explained that the Antarctic current that sweeps northward past the Namibian coast keeps the temperatures relatively low in Walvis Bay and along the coast. However, not much rain falls along the coast and moisture is mainly

delivered to plants and animals in the form of fog and mist that deposits water on exposed surfaces. This condition results in one of the driest deserts in the world right along the coast of Namibia. Clause called it a “cold desert”.



We soon were cruising through stretches of sand dunes, like the one shown on the left.

Before long we came upon a road sign indicating that Dune 7 was straight ahead.

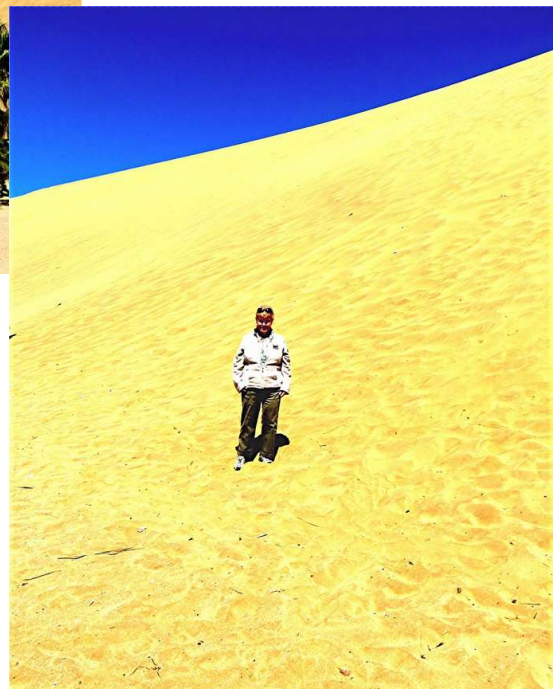


Clause said the Dune 7 was not the biggest sand dune in Namibia but it was the largest one in the vicinity of Walvis Bay and it was used by the tourist industry



and locals to show what a really big sand dune looks like. We pulled in to the parking lot of Dune 7 and got out of the bus to take some pictures.

None of our group tried to climb to the top of the dune but Barbara went up a little way for this picture on the right.





This fellow, shown on the left appeared to be making a more serious attempt at reaching the top of the dune.

We left Dune 7 and drove along more desert roads. While most of the sand dunes look pretty much like all the others there were some that stood out as prettier than the rest. The ones shown here are



examples of dunes that were decorated with streaks of dark sand that left an attractive pattern.



Our next stop was at the site of a prehistoric plant that has adapted perfectly to the desert conditions of the Namibian coast.

Clause explained that the plant is called a *welwitschia mirabilis* and, as shown on the right, it is ugly but makes up for it in pure determination to survive in the desert.

Most of the plant is below ground in the form of an extensive root system that takes up water where ever it



finds it. It starts life with two leaves like the little one shown on the left that Clause found for us. He put his pocket knife down by the sprout to provide some sense of scale. The large specimen shown above may be more than a thousand years old and over the centuries the two main leaves got shredded but they still continue to produce nutrients for the plant.

The welwitschia plant is somewhat of a local celebrity because of its rarity so it is on the agenda of all the tourist guides. It is usually mentioned prominently in literature about plant life in the region.

From the welwitschia plant we went to the banks of the Swakop River and a place called Moon Valley. Clause joked that this region which looks like the surface of the moon was

the site where the American landing on the moon was actually filmed. Some pictures we took illustrate what he was talking about, as shown below.



We had heard stories of wild ostriches walking around out here but none were showing today.

We took a moment to get a picture with Lucia, our



Cruise Specialists ambassador. She was on our bus to make sure everything went well. One of the reasons we like the Cruise Specialists International travel agency is that representatives, Lucia and Henk, accompany us on these adventures and are there in case of unexpected travel problems.

From Moon Valley we traveled to the town of Swakopmund and stopped for lunch at the beautifully restored Swakopmund Hotel, shown on the right. The hotel building was originally the town railroad station but now it makes a wonderful hotel setting.



A lunch had been set up in a central courtyard for our tour group, as shown on the left. The hotel staff served us a delicious meal in this beautiful setting.

After lunch we boarded our bus again and took a brief driving tour of Swakopmund. Many of the buildings showed the old German architecture we had been told about.



Another prominent feature of Swakopmund was an extensive sidewalk craft market that was set up near the hotel where we had lunch. We browsed around the displays that were mostly colorful textiles and carvings of African animals, as shown below.



Fortunately we were able to avoid buying one of the 4 or 5 foot high giraffe carvings shown below. They have their own special shipping problems.



After giving the craft market a thorough review we got back on our bus and continued our day's tour. Now it was time to head back to Walvis Bay. We took the road that led straight along the coast from Swakopmund to Walvis Bay. Just as we were on the outskirts of Swakopmund Barbara spotted a "Camel Friendly Safari" opportunity. They were using camels for transportation rather than 4x4 Toyota pickups like we had used at the Naledi BushCamp a few days ago.



At first Barbara was tempted to have the bus stop so she could test ride one of the camels. Then she remembered the "thrill" of her camel ride in Dubai in 2007 as shown on the right. She decided to take a pass on this opportunity.



It was getting late in the day but there was one more important sight to see. That was the flamingo colony that lives in the lagoon on the southern edge of Walvis Bay. We arrived there as the sun was low in the Western sky. The flamingos were beautiful but we were concerned that the lighting situation was far from optimum for good pictures. We gave it a try anyway and were pretty well satisfied with the results. Some of the flamingo photos are shown below.



We even got a shot at a flock of flamingos flying in formation overhead, as shown on the right. We were glad to see that these beautiful birds are doing well here in Namibia.



After we calmed ourselves down from seeing all the flamingos we noticed that the homes across the street from the lagoon were very elegant. We were definitely in the “high rent” district of Walvis Bay. Some photos of the homes are shown below.



We particularly appreciated the whimsy shown by the builders of the house, shown below, with the thatched roof.



We asked Clause what the selling price might be for these houses. He said that located on the coast, as they were, they would have a price in the 1 to 2 million US dollar range. While there is certainly poverty in Namibia there are also people who are obviously very well off.

We got back on the bus and headed back to the Amsterdam which was only a short distance away. At the entrance to the port there was another display of African crafts spread out on the curb, as shown on the right. These hard working folks were trying to make a living from every opportunity they had. Observing this scene so soon after viewing the million dollar homes down at the lagoon helped us appreciate the people of Namibia who have forged a nation that appears to be encouraging people raise their standard of living.



We returned to the Amsterdam and got ready for dinner with our friends. Tomorrow we will still be in Walvis Bay and we plan to just take the shuttle bus in to the town and look around on our own.