

3/28/13 - Day 81–Victoria, Republic of Seychelles: The Amsterdam arrived at the harbor of Victoria, Seychelles at 8am. There was a little delay in docking because, as Captain Mercer explained, a NATO warship had to get underway and vacate our spot at the pier. Pretty soon the navy ship shown on the right could be seen steaming out of the harbor and we went in to



VICTORIA (MAHÉ) REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES



our berth. No one minded the slight delay because we all appreciated the protection these NATO ships afford us while we sail in pirate waters. The city of Victoria is on Mahe which is the largest of the 115 islands making up the Republic of Seychelles. The location of Mahe in the Indian Ocean is shown on the map on the left.

Our first view of the harbor of Victoria is shown below. The recently installed wind turbines dominate the scene. We learned later that they go into operation next month. We also learned that the large structure on the mountain ridge near the center of the picture is the home of a Sheik from the Arab Emirates.



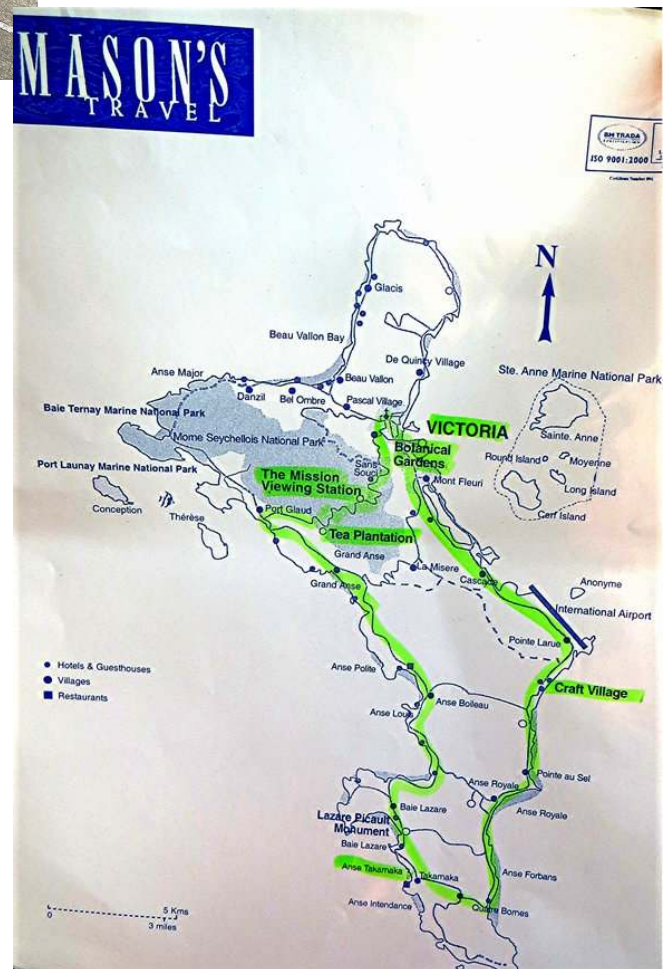
The tour buses were all lined up on the pier when the Amsterdam arrived, as shown on the right. In addition, a three person band in the little grass shack on the pier was playing some lively tunes. We had signed up with Cruise Specialists International (CSI) for a tour of the island and it didn't take long for us to join the group and load onto our bus.

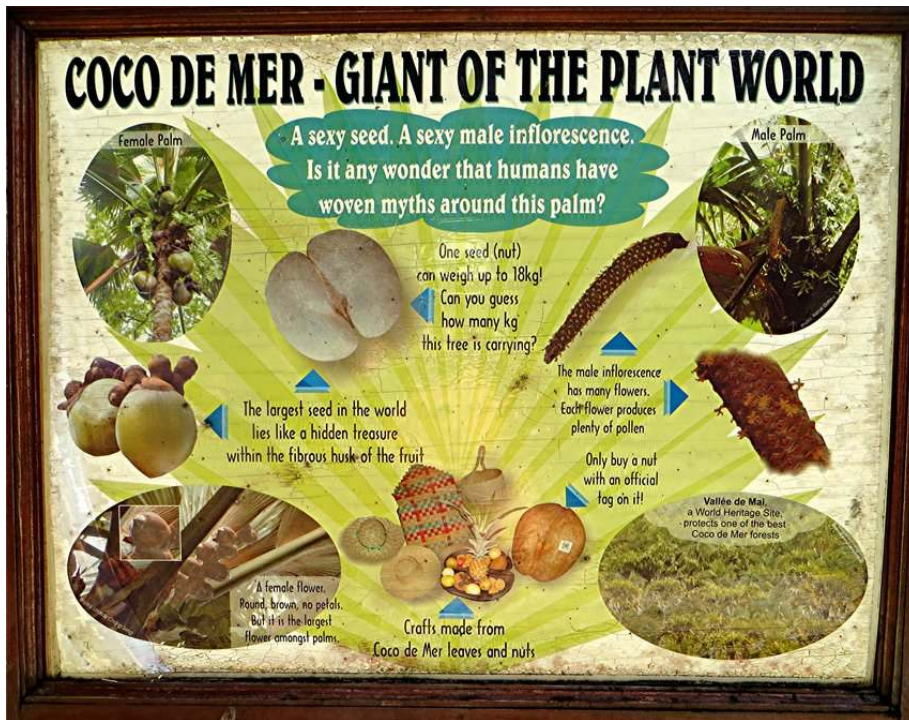


We had a comfortable bus, as shown on the left, and our tour guide's name was Jaenine. Jaenine handed out a map that showed the route and highlights of Mahe that we would see today. The map was much appreciated and is shown below.

Jaenine's first language was apparently Creole French, like most islanders, but she spoke excellent English. Jaenine said that the official language of Seychelles was English and all the signs we saw were in English but we were puzzled by the fact that people about town and workers we met were all speaking French. Apparently this situation is an artifact of the British and French influence over the centuries of colonization and recent political/economic developments.

Our tour path for today is shown in green on the map. It started in Victoria with a visit to the Botanical Gardens. Jaenine was familiar with the plants that we saw on a brief walk through the lush gardens. She went into great detail to describe the seed that is grown on the Coco de Mer palm tree.





The sign on the left covers most of the points that she made. The harvesting of the Coco de Mer seed is controlled by the state because it is in such high demand and seems to be somewhat of a symbol for The Seychelles.

Some of the nuts are hanging from the palm tree shown below.

In the picture below, Barbara is holding a Coco de Mer display nut that shows what it looks like after the husk is removed.

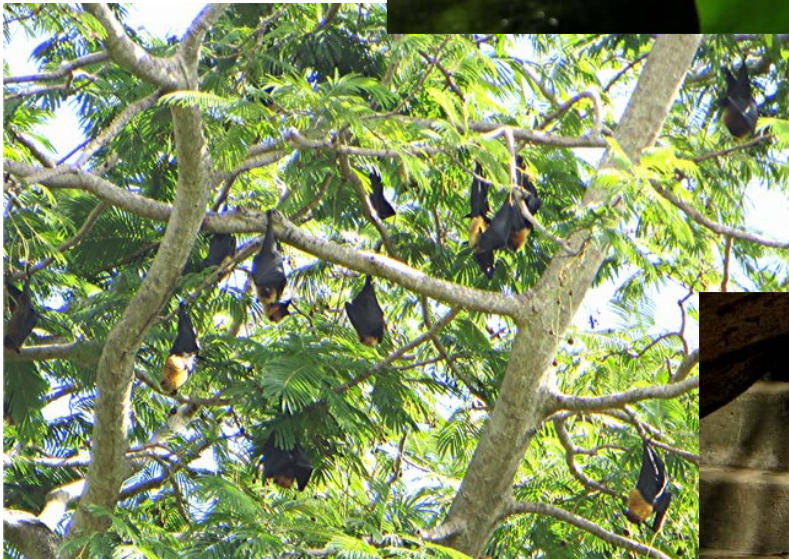




The water lilies were beautiful.



There were other plants of interest in the



Botanical Gardens but animals, namely the Fox Bats on the left and Adelbra Giant Tortoise, shown below, attracted the most attention.



After the Botanical Gardens we drove through town on the way to the farmers' and fishermens' market. Along the way we saw the town clock, shown on the right, that was installed in the 1800s to chime the hour and tell the workers and slaves when to return to work. The slaves were brought in from East Africa and worked on the plantations.

There was a fantastic Hindu Temple on one of the main streets as shown below.



Jaenine said that about 85% of the population was Catholic, 7% other Christian, 5% Muslim and 3% Hindu. We got off the bus at the market place and walked through an immense display of vegetables and fruit, as shown below. .



There were some kindergarten kids in the market place and we tourists couldn't resist taking some pictures of them. Then Lucia (our CSI escort) showed some of the kids their pictures on her I-pad and they instantly wanted to pose for more pictures. Barbara was right there posing with them.



We proceeded through the market to where fish were for sale. There was a wide selection of fish types and sizes and it all looked very fresh.

Jaenine said that tourism was the biggest employer in Seychelles but fishing was the second biggest economic driver.

We left the market place in Victoria and took a modern two lane road south along the coastline.



Along the route we took pictures of typical homes that we saw. The following is a selection of photographs we took throughout today's tour.





From what we could see the houses represented a relatively prosperous people who took good care of their homes. Jaenine said that in almost all household both the husband and wife work to cover the expenses of the modern lifestyle most people crave.



We drove past the International Airport and a short while later we pulled into the driveway of the Craft Village. The Craft Village is a human development and economic project that has taken over an old plantation. The organization restored the old tropical architecture of the main house, shown on the left, and the smaller homes of hired workers and slaves. They charge a small fee to visit the main house and



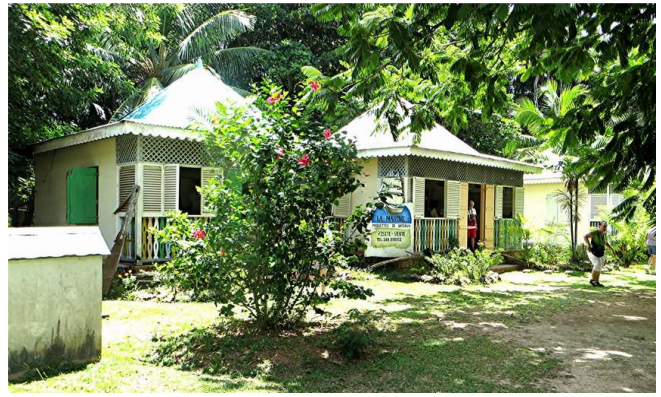
sell crafts made by local people in the smaller houses. There was a plaque in the main house acknowledging some financial support they had received from the United States government.

We toured the main house and noticed the provisions made for abundant ventilation of the rooms in a tropical climate before air conditioning. This picture on the right of one of the bedrooms illustrates the point.



In the smaller houses shown on the right, crafts were displayed.

For example, these hats and purses were all made from coconut husk fiber. They were displayed in a house called the Fibre House.



In another house the models of ships were displayed. There



was a young man working on one of the models, as shown below.





From the Craft Village we traveled on, stopping occasionally to take pictures of the beautiful beaches for which Seychelles is famous (Beaches are called “Anse” on the map of our tour route).

It was time for lunch when we arrived at the Chez Batista’s Restaurant at Takamaka Beach (Anse Takamaka on the map).



The restaurant architecture and dining room set-up was a classical tropical motif. It has thatched roof, open air dining and sandy floor.



There were other bus loads of people at the restaurant taking tours from the Amsterdam so we saw a lot of familiar faces. The menu was Creole food set up buffet style for us to pick out what we wanted. People lined up and got their plates full. We tried cooked breadfruit for the first time and found it kind of bland with the texture of potatoes. Other items on the menu were more tasteful and delicious.

After eating our lunch we walked along the beach and around the grounds of the restaurant. Some of our fellow tourists went for a swim. We came across Henk, one of the CSI escorts on another bus, and got his picture.



Henk told us about some giant tortoise he had found in the back yard of the restaurant. We tracked the beasts down and got a picture.



After finishing our lunch break at Chez Batista's we hit the road again. We passed some plastic screened fields used to grow tomatoes. There were several examples of this kind of farming along our route. There were also miles of beautiful beaches on our left as we circled the island (note that left hand road traffic is the rule on Seychelles).



We never saw any gasoline prices posted so we asked Jaenine about the price of gas. She said that gasoline costs 23 Rupee per liter. At the current exchange rate of 11 Rupee per \$1 USD that is \$2.09 USD per liter. Assuming 4 liters per gallon that works out to \$8.36 USD per gallon of gas. That's getting a bit pricey. Traffic in Victoria was wall to wall but out on the highway traffic was very light, perhaps because of high gas prices. The open highways have almost no shoulders so when our bus stopped for a photo opportunity we simply blocked our lane of traffic. Usually for a 2 or 3 minute stop there would be no cars coming up behind us. When cars did come they simply drove around us as a normal practice for driving on narrow roads.

Jaenine gave us a little geology lesson as we went along. She said that the Seychelles were not a volcanic group of islands, like we might find in the Pacific Ocean but were solid granite. She referred to the geological theory that several hundred million years ago there was a giant land mass called Gondwanaland that contained what is now Africa and Seychelles. About 200 million years ago Gondwanaland broke up and the continent of Africa moved away but left the Seychelles where they are now located. Therefore, the granite of Seychelles is what remains of Gondwanaland in that location. There were several large granite outcroppings along the way and Jaenine pointed them out to us. One large granite rock shown on the right was called the pig because it looked like a pig crouching on the rock beside the road..



Near the end of our loop around the island we climbed up into the highlands and drove through tea plantations where the tea plants were simply planted on the steep hillsides where their water was supplied only by rain.

We stopped for afternoon tea at a “Tea Tavern”. Each of us could choose to have tea of lemon grass flavor or vanilla flavor. We tried both and liked the lemon grass flavor best.

We left the Tea Tavern and proceeded along the road that led back across the mountain ridge to the city of Victoria. We made one more



stop at a lookout point called the Mission Viewing Station. This was the site of a missionary school and a roofed area has been built at a spot where tourists could get a view of

the coast of Mahe south of Victoria. The view was great but the best thing about the site was that it contained a large information sign, as shown on the right. The sign outlined important historical and cultural events of Mahe and the Mission Viewing Station land that used to be called Venn’s Town.



From the Mission Viewing Station our bus went down the winding mountain road. We stopped at one point where we got a good view of the Amsterdam at her berth in Victoria Harbor, as shown on the right.



We soon were in the city of Victoria where we again



encountered heavy traffic. It was a short drive to the dock where we left the bus and prepared to board the Amsterdam. Before we left the dock there was one more important task we had to perform to make the day complete. That task was accomplished, as shown on the left, by posing Barbara with her library card in front of the conveniently located sign identifying our location as Port Victoria Seychelles.

The Amsterdam got underway about 6pm bound for the port of Nosy Be in Madagascar. We would spend tomorrow at sea and arrive in Nosy Be on Saturday, March 30th. In a happy coincidence the sun was setting behind some distant clouds as the Amsterdam sailed out of Victoria Harbor. It created a dramatic scene that was a good way to end the day.

