

3/24/13 - Day 77–Colombo, Sri Lanka: We arrived in the port of Colombo, Sri Lanka about 7am. The location of Colombo on the island nation of Sri Lanka is shown in the map on the right.

Colombo is the largest city in Sri Lanka. The deep water port can accommodate huge container ships and is one of the largest in this part of the world. A picture taken as we approached the harbor gives some notion of the size of the port.



The Amsterdam tied up at a pier that was outfitted to support container ship operations. The huge cranes can quickly lift containers and stack them on the pier or place them on ships waiting at the dock. The scene on the pier as we arrived is shown on the right. Immigration and customs officials along with



some tour buses and souvenir vendors were waiting for us. The souvenir vendor display area, shown on the left, was larger than we usually see.

We were soon tied up and the gangway was open for passengers to leave the ship. We were surprised by the appearance of a large elephant dressed in a red blanket with her mahout riding on his back. The elephant, whose name we later learned was Monyka was immediately the object of attention for photographers and excited elephant lovers.



Of course, we couldn't resist an opportunity to ham it up so we joined in and got a picture with Monyka for our memory files.

We had signed up for a Cruise Specialists tour of Colombo called "Contrasts of Colombo with Refreshments". We joined our group at about 8:15 and boarded the tour bus with about 35 other folks from the Amsterdam. Our tour guide's name was Prea (Priyalay) and he outlined the day's tour as the bus made the long trip from the ship to the entrance of this huge port.



The first part of Colombo that we saw was called the Pettah area and it was the bazaar and general shopping area. The following pictures give some idea of the range of sights we saw while driving through this part of Colombo. It was a Sunday so the traffic was less than usual and many of the shops were closed. However, there was still a fair amount of business going on.

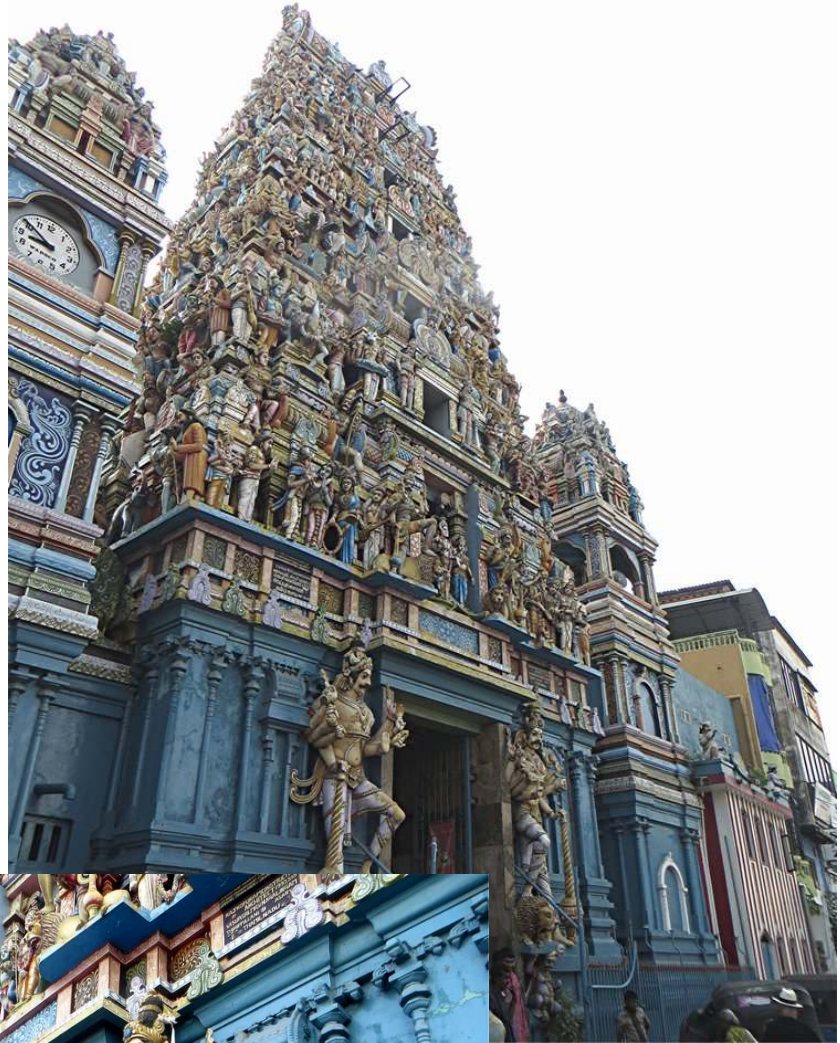


We took some pictures to show the range of housing that we saw in the Pettah district and in the other parts of the city where we visited. Some of those views are shown in the pictures below.

There was an obvious contrast in economic status between the homes that we saw. However, we didn't observe any abject poverty or slums in the areas where we went today in Colombo.



From the shopping area of the Pettah, next to the port, we drove south in the direction of the National Museum. About half way to our destination we stopped briefly for a photo opportunity at the Sri Shiva Subramania Swami Temple used by those of the Hindu faith. The temple main building has a tower at the front that has every square inch covered with figures representing the Gods and other important characters for the Hindus. Here are two photographs that we got.



Prea told us that 70% of the Sri Lanka population was Buddhist, 15% Hindu, 9% Muslim and 6% Christian. Traveling on we passed the Onnaman Gardens Baptist Church, shown on the right. Looking closely on the right side of the picture, the top of towers and dome of a neighboring Muslim mosque can barely be seen. Our day of contrasts continued.



Next we drove by the Sri Lanka President's House that was being renovated and expanded in an ongoing construction project. The splendid looking building is shown on the left.

This sign shown on the right indicated that the Montessori School might be available to young students in Colombo.



We hadn't seen any gasoline prices posted at service stations so we asked Prea about the price of gas. He said that gasoline costs 160 Rupees per liter. The current conversion rate is 125 Sri Lankan Rupee per \$1 USD so a liter of gas costs the equivalent of \$1.28 USD. At 4 liters to the gallon the cost of a gallon of gasoline would be \$5.12 USD, just a little higher than is typical in the US.

One of the most amazing sights on the way to the National Museum was this structure shown below that Prea called “The Lotus Blossom”. He said this was a gift from the Chinese government to Sri Lanka. The “Lotus Blossom” structure was a façade that contained a building designed for large public events, like concerts and conventions.



We came to the Sri Lanka National Museum which was in a building designed and built by the British in the 1800s. It had been maintained very well and reflected the architecture of the British Colonial Period in a beautiful way, as shown on the right.



Prea led us through the museum. Photography was restricted so we mainly just looked and listened. With regard to listening, we were glad that the Cruise Specialists International (CSI) tours provided a battery operated receiver and ear phone for each person and the guide had a microphone. With this system everyone could hear Prea clearly on the bus and even in museums where the guide can continue to speak in a normal voice volume and everyone can hear what is being said. The museum was arranged to display artifacts from Sri Lanka history from distinct time periods starting with prehistoric and leading up to modern times. We found it very well done and educational. Prea spent considerable time on the display that

described how reservoirs were built on the island to capture the annual rainfall and distribute it to the farmland during the dry season.

Before leaving the National Museum area we had to take care of the most important item of the day which was to record the visit of Barbara's library card to Colombo. We happily accomplished that task by using the handy sign for the National Museum, as shown on the right.



Near the museum was a large Muslim mosque with the traditional green and white colored architecture.

Prea told us we would be driving through a very upscale part of Colombo on our way to the refreshments and snack at the Galle Face Hotel. We saw several auspicious homes and soon we passed the United States embassy as shown on the right.





We pulled into the parking lot of the Galle Face Hotel which was constructed in 1864 and is another wonderful example of British Colonial Period architecture, as shown on the left.

We made our way into the expansive dining room, shown on the right. We took our seats at tables that had been set up for us and several other bus loads of touring Amsterdam passengers. We got a nice cup of coffee or



tea and some delicious sandwiches, cookies and cake.

While everyone was seated Barbara circulated around and got some photos of Lee and Lorraine as shown on the left.



She also got a picture of Roy, Gayle and Orlin at our table.

After our refreshments we walked around the grounds of the hotel and were impressed with the ocean beach area that was part of the hotel property. Some of the cabanas set up on the beach are shown below.

Near the parking lot of the hotel there was a traditional Indian snake charmer performing for the tourists, as shown below. We had forgotten about the iconic



Indian snake charmer and we were glad that we had an opportunity to see one. The snake looked completely docile and, at least superficially, the performance looked fairly safe.

The next destination on our tour was the large Gangarama Buddhist Temple. After a 20 minute ride from the Galle Face Hotel our bus was parked and we walked into the courtyard that was crowded with local people and tourists, as shown on the right.



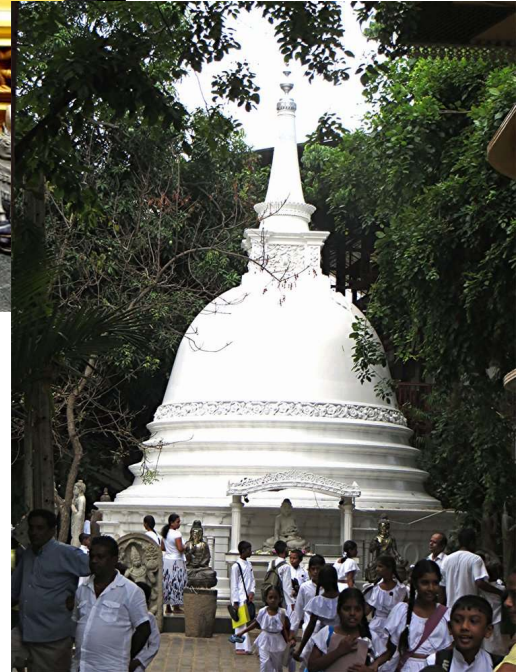
Signs were posted requesting that shoes be removed before entering the temple. There was a nice collection of shoes on the ground around the entrance to the temple, as shown on the left.



We had been in several Buddhist temples lately and didn't want to go through the hassle of the shoe shuffle so we

occupied ourselves with just walking around the temple grounds.

In another courtyard of the temple was a large Buddhist stupa, as shown on the right. Our guide, Prea, explained that the Buddhist stupa represents a rice cup that has been turned over. Relics that are important to the Buddhist faith are kept protected within the stupa.



The excitement level was raised by another attraction of the courtyard, as shown on the left. A middle sized elephant was tethered in an area that was accessible to people. Occasionally a tourist would cuddle up to the friendly elephant's trunk for a photograph. Prea later explained that in the Buddhist faith the elephant brings luck. The elephant also has some mystical quality in that it symbolizes the East where the sun rises. The East is a preferred direction because, like the rising sun, it represents rising opportunity and expansion of life.

On the other hand the West, where the sun sets, represents the end of life. Prea said that Buddhists bury their loved ones with their heads pointed in the west direction.

The importance of the elephant in the Buddhist faith is emphasized by the numerous statues of elephants that are found around temples. This temple today was no exception. On the right is shown the live elephant and in the background a statue of an elephant at the temple entrance.



It was a Sunday but there appeared to be many young people out in organized groups wearing pure white clothing. They may have been part of a school class or perhaps some Buddhist organization. These happy looking kids on the left agreed to have their picture taken by Barbara, the friendly American lady.

After the visit to the Buddhist temple we boarded our bus and headed back to the port through the Pettah market area. On the way we passed the beautiful red and white brick building shown on the right. Prea said this was a department store and this building was the site of the first department store that opened in Sri Lanka.



Another view we got was of the Lighthouse Clock Tower, in the picture on the left. The nearby green and white Muslim mosque is shown close by.



On one street corner were a couple signs indicating that a health clinic was nearby. Prea then told us that Sri Lanka has a national health program that is completely paid for by taxes. It sounded similar to the health program of Canada. Emergency medical issues are dealt with

immediately and elective medical procedures go on a waiting list. In either case the person getting the medical procedure has no financial cost for the specific treatment.



We entered the gate of the port and then the bus drove on for what seemed like a couple miles before we finally arrived at the Amsterdam. Back on board the Amsterdam preparation had been made and the ship got underway at about 3pm. We headed out of the Colombo harbor on our way to Victoria, Seychelles. This view back at the cranes, grain elevators and expanse of Colombo harbor reinforces the idea that Colombo is a significant player in the marine commerce for this part of the world.



Soon after arriving back on board the Amsterdam we discovered that while we were docked in Colombo our dear ship had been equipped with some anti-pirate defensive gear. Apparently Holland America was putting an emphasis on proactive defense against pirate attack as we sailed the Indian Ocean and passed by Somalia on our way to Seychelles and points south.

A vicious looking concertina razor wire had been uncoiled and placed along the railing of Deck 3 which is the lowest open deck of the ship. The picture on the right gives some idea of what a potential pirate would face if he tried to scale the side of the Amsterdam to board at Deck 3. The photo below shows an up-close view of the razor wire.



In addition to the concertina razor wire there were high pressure fire hose fittings installed on the railings to ward off pirates who might try to climb up. One such arrangement is shown in the picture on the right. The black and orange nozzle is fed by a fire hose from the ship's high pressure water system. The nozzle would be difficult or impossible for a single man to control so it is attached firmly to the ship. The nozzle can be rotated to hit a target by turning the yellow and black tapped handles inside the railing at deck level.



This evening, a note from Captain Mercer was delivered to our cabin explaining the defensive measures that he had implemented. In case of a pirate attack we were instructed to stay away from windows, leave our staterooms and sit down in hallways or other protected spaces in the ship's interior. The purpose of these instructions was to ensure protection by putting several steel bulkheads between the passengers and any stray bullets the pirates might fire at the ship. The sitting down was requested because the ship may go through violent turning maneuvers to escape the pirates and standing people could fall over as the ship heeled over suddenly in a turn. The note also said that a pirate attack drill would be held tomorrow for both passengers and crew and a 24 hour/day security personnel watch was set on Deck 3.

On the following day, March 25, the promised pirate attack drill was held. Captain Mercer came on the ship's PA system and again explained the purpose of the drill. He repeated the explanation for why passengers were being asked to leave their cabins and sit down in hallways or other interior spaces. He specifically asked that those passengers who might be tempted to get sensational pictures of pirates for their Facebook or Blog should forego this urge as it could turn out to be fatal. The drill was carried out and we sat or stood quietly in our hallway as shown in the photo on the right.



The crew exercised the high pressure fire hose equipment and other defensive measures. The drill went well so after about 20 minutes it was all over and we could go back to our usual at-sea routine.

The Amsterdam continued on course to arrive at the city of Victoria in the Seychelles on March 28th.