

3/18/13 - Day 71–Singapore, City Highlights & Singapore Flyer: This was our second day in Singapore and we had signed up for a Holland America Lines (HAL) tour called “Highlights of Singapore”. We joined our group of 31 other passengers in the Queen’s Lounge and walked out to our bus at 8:15am. We met our tour guide, shown on the right, whose name was Juslet. She had grown up in Singapore and was able to fill us in on many aspects of Singapore history and culture.



The map of Singapore below shows the location of the places we visited today.



Our first destination was the Central Business District referred to as the “CBD”. As the name implies, this part of the city contains the financial and governmental buildings. We stopped briefly for a photo opportunity. The picture on the right captures the scene with many shiny tall buildings and prosperous looking people hurrying along the sidewalk.



Juslet led us on a walk under the freeway bridge separating the CBD from the Marina Bay Park area. We were then able to get a clear view of the three towers and top platform of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel/Casino building, as shown on the right. This is the building that we could see yesterday from the Amsterdam when we were still far out to sea. The building on the left that looks like an opened flower blossom is the Art and Science Museum. A huge Merlion fountain was also visible on the Marina Bay shoreline. The mythical Merlion has the head of a lion and body of a fish and it is the symbol of Singapore. Another Merlion statue of similar size but not a fountain stands on Sentosa Island near where the Amsterdam was docked.



We finished looking around in the Central Business District and then drove a short distance to China Town.

China Town had a collection of buildings with Chinese architecture like the one shown on the right.

We were in the middle of the fall break for schools so there were lots of school children on site seeing adventures, as shown below.



We were fascinated by this somewhat humorous photo on the right showing an apartment building decorated with laundry hung out to dry on poles. Singapore is a relatively affluent city but apparently electric or gas clothes dryers are not standard issue in apartment buildings. We don't hang around large American cities very much but we doubt that you could observe such a scene in the US.



While in China Town we visited the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple. In a very sacred place in the temple they keep a tooth that they believe came from the Buddha who founded the religion.

We finished our tour of China Town and proceeded to Arab Street and the part of Singapore that caters to followers of the Muslim religion. We walked by the Sultan Mosque which had an elaborate facility shown on the right. It had a water faucet in front of each tiled seat. Juslet said this was used for ritualistic bathing to cleanse oneself before entering the mosque.



A little further on we got a view of the Sultan Mosque dome which was magnificent, as shown on the left. Juslet drew our attention to a dark band of circular objects between the golden dome and white cylindrical base. She said that the Sultan who had the mosque built took offerings to help pay for the construction. Poor people who had no money to give donated the only thing they had which was empty bottles that had contained the soy sauce that they used every day. When the Sultan discovered this pitiful but heartfelt offering he ordered that the bottles be used in the construction of the mosque. The bottles were carefully cemented in place with the bottoms facing

outward to form the textured dark band that we could see supporting the golden dome today.

After browsing around some of the shops in the Arab District we left by way of the archway over one of the streets.

As luck would have it, we passed by one of the ubiquitous MacDonalD's Restaurants on the way back to the bus.



We drove to the park-like setting of the Singapore Botanical Garden where the National Orchid Garden is located.



Juslet got our tickets for the Orchid Garden and we were free to roam the place on our own for about 45 minutes. We started out along with all our other touring friends along the path festooned with marvelous blooms more beautiful than we had ever imagined. We stopped by a spot appropriately labeled as a photo opportunity. An obliging resident of Singapore offered to take our picture with our camera so we got this photo on the right.



As we walked our thoughts turned to Barbara's father who lovingly cared for orchids in his greenhouse for many years. His orchids live on to this day at the home of her sister, Joyce. We continued on taking pictures at every opportunity. The following are a sample of what we got.



We finished our tour of the National Orchid Garden much too soon for a full measure of the place.

From the Orchid Garden we drove to a high lookout spot called Mount Faber. We passed through an upscale part of Singapore City and photographed a couple of the nice homes we saw are shown below.



Mount Faber is a high spot overlooking the harbor where the Amsterdam was docked. It also is one of the turn-around stations for the cable car system that travels between, Harbour Front Centre, Sentosa Island and Mount Faber. We pulled into the parking lot and walked around to a viewing platform near the ticket counter. The view out over the city and nearby islands was a bit hazy but gave us some notion of the lay of the land around this part of Singapore.

This picture shows an island across the waterway outside the harbor. Juslet said the island was completely covered by a petroleum refinery owned by Shell Oil. The smoke stacks can be seen faintly in the distance.



We were able to see the Merlion on the nearby Sentosa Island. The picture on the left shows the Merlion poking its head up above some of the entertainment facilities on Sentosa Island.

We completed our visit to Mount Faber and returned to the Amsterdam. Because of the hot and humid weather we concluded that taking the HAL tour with an air conditioned bus was the best decision rather than taking an n open air hop-on hop-off (HOHO) bus tour today.

After lunch we hailed a cab outside of the cruise terminal and headed for the Singapore Flyer that we had been planning to ride. The Singapore Flyer is a huge “Ferris Wheel” type of ride that is as high as a 70 story building and located in the Marina Bay area of Singapore. However, one must be careful about wording because Singapore natives think the Flyer is in a class far above a simple “Ferris Wheel” which they refer to as the “F” word. The taxi ride took about 20 minutes through city streets at a reasonable cost of 12 Singapore dollars, about \$10 USD. The cab driver could speak good English and highly recommended the Singapore Flyer ride.

When we got to the Flyer we right away got a bonus in that Barbara found a place to document the Singapore visit of her library card, as shown on the right.

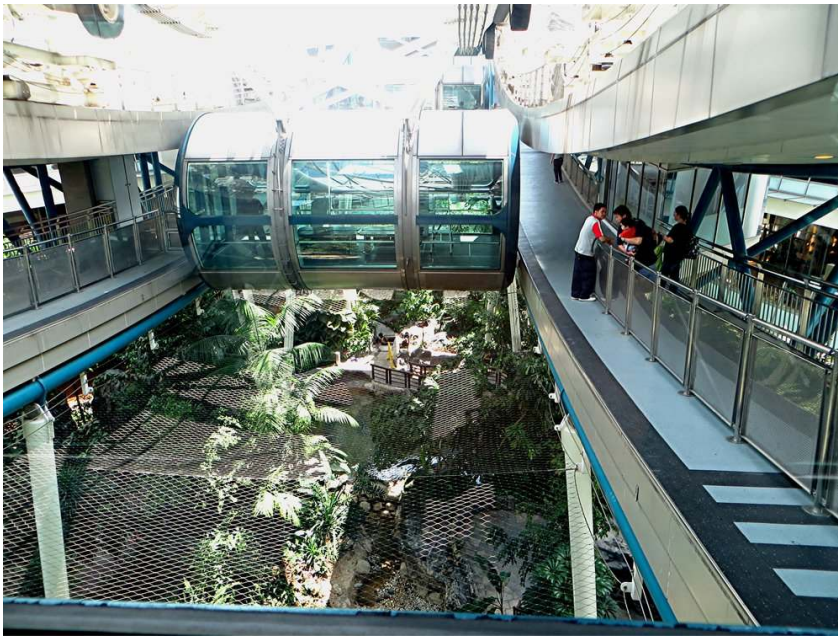
Another pleasant sight was the lack of crowds at this time in the afternoon. There were no lines at the ticket booth where we bought tickets for 24 Singapore dollars each (\$19.20 USD).



Here on the left is a picture of the Singapore Flyer that we took on a previous visit.

The base of the Singapore Flyer is a 3 story building that contains a large courtyard under the wheel with an outer ring of rooms devoted to elaborate displays apparently used to entertain large crowds waiting for their turn to

take a ride on the Flyer. Today the spaces were empty and we simply walked through and onto the deck where we could enter the car on the rotating wheel.



The picture on the left shows the “launch” pad. The cars never stop moving but as you face the door at the end of the car they slowly glide to the left and you can easily step over the one half inch gap into the moving car. It was as easy as entering an escalator.

We “launched” and were on our way, smoothly moving along. The car ahead of us on the wheel had an attendant on board setting up tables for the dinner ride that is offered in the evening. The complete turn on the Flyer takes only 30 minutes so we assume they let the diners go around several times to complete a meal. That sounds like a great way to spend an evening.

We took this photo on the left before we cleared the base of the Flyer so that the rubber tires that support the wheel could be shown. The Flyer isn’t driven by a central axel but is supported and driven by large



rubber tires in the base building that contact the massive outer steel ring of the wheel, as shown in this picture. A similar set of tires contact the upper surface of the outer ring to keep it from tipping over in a high wind.



As we cleared the base building we got a good view of the modernistic green houses and decorative steel flower-like statues across the Kallang River.

Our car rose higher and we got this view of Singapore below, looking eastward across the Kallang River. At the center of the picture the new



soccer stadium can be seen. It is currently under construction but some local people told us that when completed it will be the largest soccer stadium in the world.



Looking to the south we could see that the new cruise ship terminal was in operation and had a large cruise ship docked.

The view to the north, as shown below, included Suntec City and in the distance the Orchard Road business district. A major condominium development with red roofs occupies the land on the east side of the Kallang River at the right hand side of the photo.



Looking towards the west we could see the tall buildings of the Central Business District in the distance and the soccer stadium with playing field having the unique feature of floating on Marina Bay.

Part of the Singapore Flyer main wheel is showing on the left side of the picture. The black strip is the track for the rubber tires on the inner side of the wheel. The tires are located in the base building below and keep the Flyer wheel



from tipping over in a high wind.

There was a young family of Singapore residents in the Singapore Flyer car with us. They were taking pictures and chatting amongst themselves when Barbara asked if they would like her to take a picture of their family on the Singapore Flyer. They enthusiastically agreed and she obliged them as shown on the left.

There were also a couple of folks from the Amsterdam in the car with us. They were Rod and Barbara from Alabama. We introduced ourselves and chatted about our cruise experiences and the marvelous Singapore Flyer. They offered to take our picture so we hammed it up a bit as Barbara took this photo with the Marina Bay Sands Hotel in the background.

As we went over the top of the Singapore Flyer wheel we took



another picture looking to the south. The greenhouse gardens are in the foreground along with a dam across the Kallang River. The dam across the river minimizes the tidal action in Marina Bay and with the supply of fresh water from the river Marina Bay is slowly being converted into a fresh water lake. In the distance a flotilla of merchant ships was covering the ocean clear out to the horizon. As mentioned previously, most of this marine shipping through Singapore waters is thanks to the Malacca Strait that funnels the traffic past this thriving port. As food for thought one of the speakers on the Amsterdam recently suggested that with melting of the northern ice the long sought after Northwest Passage over the top of Canada may become a reality. The availability of the Northwest Passage might reduce traffic through the Malacca Strait and pose an economic penalty for Singapore.

All too soon the 30 minute ride in the air conditioned comfort of the Singapore Flyer was over. It was a great experience and we would recommend it to all. We returned to the Amsterdam by taxi and called it a day.

The Amsterdam got underway about 11pm bound for Porto Malai on the Island of Langkawi on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. We will have a day at sea and arrive in Porto Malai on March 20.