

3/17/13 - Day 70–Singapore (city nation): Singapore is an independent nation that occupies a relatively small island near the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula as shown in the map on the right. A narrow strait separates Singapore from the Malaysian peninsula. Singapore city and its suburbs occupy nearly the entire island. It is sometimes difficult to keep in mind that this small island with one major city is an independent republic with tremendous economic power.

We were scheduled to arrive at the Singapore Cruise Centre in Keppel Harbour about 2pm. Before arrival this morning we were sailing close to the east coast of Singapore Island. We were amazed at the number of ships that were around us. The picture below shows a glimpse of our neighboring ships with the east coast of Singapore in the background. Unlike typical daily sailing where few passing ships are seen, in these waters we have seen a steady stream of ships going both north and south.



The reason for our sighting of so many ships was that we were approaching the Strait of Malacca. The Strait of Malacca is a narrow stretch of water between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Ships carrying cargo to or from Asia and the Western hemisphere use the Strait of Malacca because it saves the time and fuel that would be needed to take the longer route to major Asian ports around the southern tip of Sumatra. It is this fortunate geographic positioning of Singapore on a major trade route that has contributed to its great economic success.

As we neared the port of Singapore some of the city skyline came into view as shown on the right through a cluster of cargo ships. The distinctive profile of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel/Casino could be seen. It has a magnificent viewing platform that spans all three of the huge towers of the hotel.



Throughout the afternoon there were periodic rain showers that pelted the Amsterdam. In between storms there was a glorious display of thunderhead clouds for us to admire, as shown below.



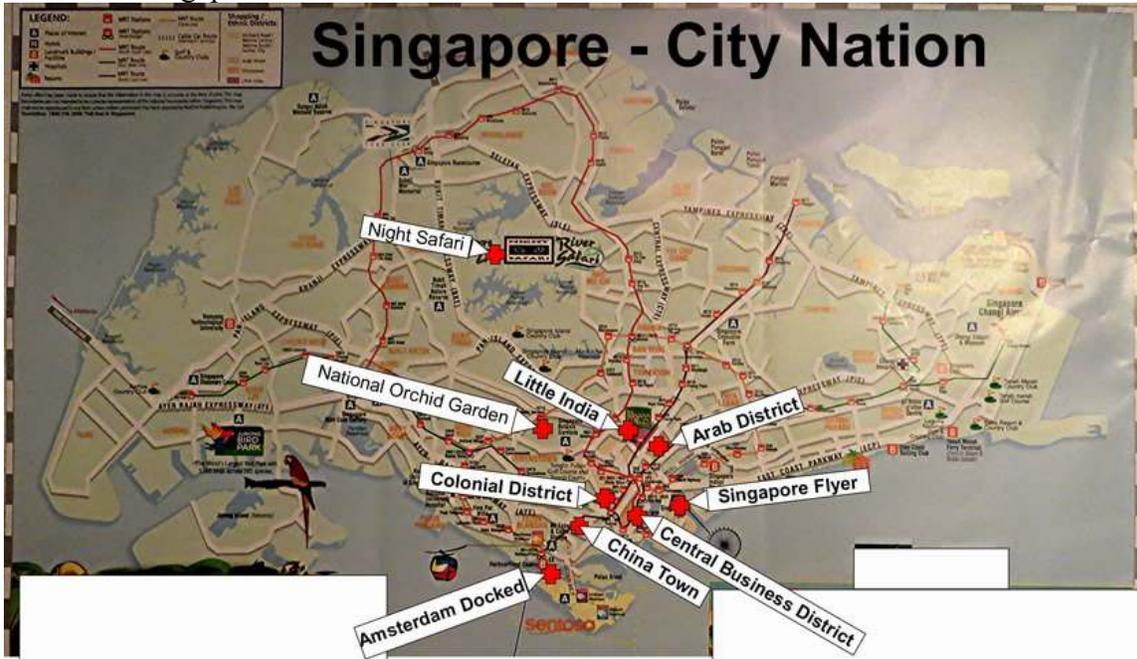
We sailed into Keppel Harbour and docked at the Singapore Cruise Centre. The Singapore Cruise Centre is part of the Harbour Front Centre with readily available shopping and other support for the cruise passengers. The Singapore Cruise Centre is noted for the long gangway and walk through the terminal (~1/4 mile) before being processed through the immigration and customs routine. A second, new terminal is being constructed near Marina Bay but it is not in service yet. We like this terminal because we are familiar with the facilities and the walk is good for us.

Just to stretch our legs a bit after leaving the ship we set out to find a gasoline service station so we could check out the price of gas in Singapore. We found a station about one half of a mile away but they didn't have the prices posted. We had to take a picture of the price shown on the gasoline pump, as shown in the picture on the right. The price for the 95 octane, regular gas was 2.18 Singapore dollars per liter. That was equivalent to \$1.74 USD per liter. At 4 liters per gallon that turns out to be about \$7 per gallon of gas.



For our first day in Singapore we had joined our friends, Roy and Gayle, and scheduled a tour with the exotic title of "A Night Safari". This was a Holland America organized tour of a production staged after dark at the Singapore Zoo.

At 8pm we met with our tour leader and group of 30 or so other Amsterdam passengers. We boarded our bus and took the 30 minute ride to the Singapore Zoo. The Singapore Zoo occupies space in a rain forest and is one of the attractions in the central part of the island. A map showing the location of our Night Safari adventure and other sites of interest in Singapore is shown below.



When we arrived at the Night Safari location it was already getting dusk and taking pictures was a challenge. The sign shown below was pointed out by our guide who said



the Singapore Zoo was the parent organization which has created the Night Safari and River Safari as side attractions that build on the infrastructure of the Zoo.

The organization of the Night Safari is much like that of Disney World and is set up to efficiently handle large crowds quickly. We got our tickets and were hustled through turnstiles into a folded fence area that got the mob into a single line. People were loaded onto trams pulling four or five open cars as shown on the right.





We, along with Roy and Gayle, got into a seat together and hastily took the picture shown on the left.

The tram moved very quietly out of the station into the dark rain forest. There were subdued lights along the way but often we were in complete darkness. A lady guide in the front car provided us with a monologue in very precise English explaining what we were about to see and some of the animal behaviors.

We set our digital camera (Canon PowerShot SX260 HS) to the night photo setting and hoped for the best.

The animals were contained in well defined spaces by natural barriers that were not obvious. There were separate areas where each type of animal congregated and a low level of lighting provided a barely discernable view of the animals. When we approached one of these areas the guide gave us a heads-up warning and the tram would slow or stop briefly as we focused on the dimly lit scene. Usually it took a few moments to identify the animal forms in the darkness. We tried to take pictures but all of them were too dark or blurred to be of use. After a 40 minute ride and about 15 chances to view animals the tram ride was over. We had passed elephants, hippopotamus, Cape buffalo, tigers, hyenas, several kinds of deer and other animals.

We then had about a 40 minute opportunity to walk along dimly lit paths that led through the rain forest. This turned out to be a little more rewarding than the tram ride because we could take more time at each viewing station to focus on whatever animal was supposed to be there. Our only “useable” photo of the night was obtained on the walk when we spotted a reclining tiger as shown on the right. This photo shows more detail than we could see with our eyes during the tram ride we took earlier.



When we completed our “Night Safari” walk through the rain forest it was time to go to the “Creatures of the Night” show. There was a huge line of people waiting but it was handled efficiently and we were ushered into a large open amphitheater which had a stage that appeared to be part of the rain forest. A master of ceremony came out and warmed us up with hints about the mysterious animals we would be seeing. The show then proceeded with a series of animals like wolves, raccoons, and hyena making brief and shadowy appearances on the stage. The part of the act getting the most reaction was when a large live boa constrictor was brought out. It was staged by having someone run on stage shouting that the boa constrictor had escaped and was loose in the stadium. There was a lot of shuffling and screaming as people looked under their seats and at their feet. Then several stage hands came into the audience with a large snake that they pretended to find under someone’s seat. They then paraded the snake through the audience as people shied away from them. That part of the act was brought to closure by having a volunteer come out of the audience and having the snake coiled around him, as shown on the right.



The show ended soon after the boa constrictor demonstration and we boarded our bus for the return ride to the Amsterdam. We were disappointed in the Night Safari. It was not surprising that the photo opportunities were limited but we felt that the visual experience was not anything special. It was what you would expect when viewing any scene with inadequate light to discern details. In the promotional literature the Night Safari was billed as an experience where you might see the animals showing behavior not observed in broad daylight. However, the animals we were able to see were behaving the same as they would in daylight.

We got back to the Amsterdam about 11pm and turned in for the night. Tomorrow we have a tour of the “Highlights of Singapore” and we are looking forward to that.