

3/11/13 - Day 64 – Hong Kong–Arrival, Lantau Island & Buddha Statue: At about 8am we arrived for a three day visit in Hong Kong. There was a heavy overcast with many of the tallest buildings having their top floors hidden in the fog. We saw a low profile building, as shown below, occupying the land where the old Hong Kong airport (Kai Tak) used to be. This building will be the new cruise passenger terminal when it is completed in summer 2013.



Going further into the harbor the skyscraper buildings that make up the Hong Kong skyline came into view as shown on the right. Finally the long low Ocean Terminal building came into view, as shown below, and we could see where the Amsterdam would be docked.



The Ocean Terminal building is connected to the huge Harbour City Mall and is in a very convenient location for other Hong Kong attractions. The

thriving business district of Kowloon is next door and the Star Ferry landing is right there to take a person across the harbor to the sights of Hong Kong Island.

After the Amsterdam was tied up to the pier we didn't have any time to spare because we had signed up for a morning tour arranged by Holland America. We had been to Hong Kong several times before but never had visited the offshore island of Lantau to see the giant Buddha statue there. The map below shows the location of Lantau Island and the sights of interest in Hong Kong during our visit. Lantau Island is just a short bus ride



from the Kowloon suburb of Hong Kong. A smaller adjacent island (Chek Lap Kok) was greatly expanded with landfill and now is home to the Hong Kong International Airport. A new freeway provides easy access by way of bridges across the narrow waterways that separate the islands from the mainland.

By about 9:45 we had boarded our bus, along with 40 other people, and were on our way to the “Sky-Land-Sea Lantau adventure that starts at Ngong Ping 360!” as promised by this poster shown on the right. The “Ngong Ping 360!” is a four mile cable car system, called a Skyrail. It stretches from the terminal on Lantau Island, across water to the Hong Kong Airport island and then across more water back to Lantau Island and the Po Lin (Precious Lotus) Monastery where the giant Buddha statue is located.



Our Chinese guide's name was James. He spoke perfect English and filled us in on local facts and Chinese language going to and from Lantau Island. When we arrived at the

Ngong Ping 360 terminal building a large throng of people, shown on the right, were waiting to get tickets and board the cable car ride. Sometimes we grouch about the high cost of



Holland America tours (in this case \$80 each) but today we got extremely good value as James picked up our tickets and led us along a special route that got us nearly instantly to the loading platform for the cable car ride out to the Buddha Statue. At the loading station we got to board every other car

while the hundreds of folks waiting in line were also limited to every second car. Probably not fair – but that was the system and we didn't complain. On the right our guide, James, is approaching a car loaded with eight of our tour group, ready for launch.



The cable car system was a marvel of cable car engineering that, according to signs on the towers, was designed and installed by Leitner Ropeways. The cars were stable and no



one seemed to have any anxiety about safety during the ride. The photo on the left shows the car ahead of us launching out of the terminal building.

As shown on the map above, the Skyrail route of the cable cars included a turn of about 90 degrees when the cable crosses the island where the airport is located. The picture on the right shows cars approaching the turning station. We were amazed that our car was somehow carried on a huge wheel around the corner without stopping so that we didn't have to get out and



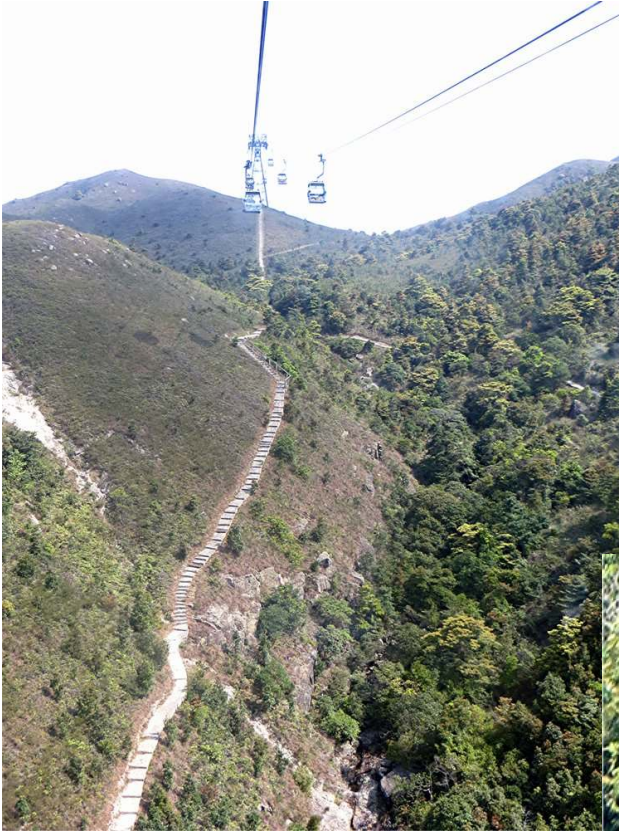
reboard another cable car. We made the turn and were smoothly off, as shown on the left, flying across the waterway separating Lantau Island from the airport island.

At this point we got a nice view of the large new Hong Kong Airport as shown on the right.



An obliging fellow passenger took our picture as we made this over-water portion of the trip. The Skyrail terminal building is the white structure over Barbara's left shoulder.

On Lantau Island there was a continuous pathway located directly under the Skyrail as it crossed the mountains. An example is shown in the pictures below. There was an unverified claim that the monks use the footpath when coming and going from the monastery.



Some people do use the path and today we saw some folks, taking a rest and perhaps a picnic on the steps below.



After about 20 minutes we were approaching the end of the Skyrail and got our first glimpse of the Buddha statue through the morning mist, as shown on the right.

Our cable car journey came to an end at the terminal building shown below.



We exited the car and made our way into the village at the foot of the mountain where the Buddha statue was located. By this time the fog we had experienced down on Hong Kong harbor had dissipated and the sun was shining brightly.

As we approached the mountain our guide, James, told us there were 246 steps leading up to the Buddha statue from the courtyard below. After a short walk we were standing in front of the staircase leading up to the Buddha, as shown on the right. There was a nice crowd of Chinese and other tourists milling around at the base of the stairs. In this picture Barbara shows a guilty smile after announcing that her vision of today's tour was satisfied by this magnificent view of the Buddha and didn't include climbing 246 steps to get up close and personal with the statue.





Regarding the stairs, we couldn't help but notice that the "dogs of Po Lin Monastery" had found the stairs useful for something other than climbing, as shown on the left.

Orlin was unable to get Barbara to make the climbing effort so he tackled the job on his

own. Notice was taken of the fact that medical facilities were available if needed.



One nice thing about the stairs was that they were only 4 or 5 inches high so that made the climb easier than if they were much higher. About half way up the staircase the photo on the left shows the view of the Buddha.

We got a picture of the Buddha statue at the top of the stairs but it is not impressive because of the steep viewing angle. Orlin went ahead and took the picture just to nail down the stair climbing bragging rights.

Climbing the stairs to the Buddha does have deep religious significance for people of the Buddhist faith. Inside the structure



at the base of the statue are areas where offerings can be made by the faithful. In addition, while we were there a large group of Buddhist monks in yellow robes emerged from the base of the statue and slowly walked down the stairs, as shown on the left. They were on their way to the monastery building. Some were very young, carrying cell phones and ipads.



James later told us that if we see what appears to be a monk begging in Hong Kong we should ignore him as a fraud. He said a common scam is for people to dress as monks and beg but actually the monks never leave the monastery.

We walked around the monastery grounds and took some pictures as shown below.



After about an hour in the monastery village James gathered our tour group and we boarded the cable car for the Skyrail return trip.

The views from the cable car going back to the main terminal were just as jaw dropping as the first time we had the experience. This picture below, taken as we approached the airport island and the sharp right hand turn was worth showing. We were riding the cables on the right and people going to the monastery were riding the left hand cables.



After the return Skyrail ride we boarded our bus and returned to the ship at Ocean Terminal in Kowloon. We had a quick lunch and then we were ready for a jaunt out into the business district of Kowloon. We had heard through the Cruise Critic message board (ALSAS) of a reliable Hong Kong company for purchase of economical but high quality glasses. ALSAS said they had been making satisfied customers of long distance cruisers since the early 1990's. They cater to cruise ship passengers who have only a short time to visit in Hong Kong. They have an email address of admandoptical@yahoo.com.hk . If we could get Orlin's prescription put in today we expected that the glasses could be ready before the Amsterdam departed on March 13.

We were looking for the Admand Optical Company at 50 Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Since none of the buildings on Nathan Road have numbers posted the way we found them was by knowing they were in the basement gallery of the Holiday Inn. The Holiday Inn was well marked and on the east side of Nathan Road about a block from the Peninsula Hotel. We quickly found the Admand Optical Company and met the gregarious Thomas Cheung who runs the place. Thomas explained that just this morning a lot of Amsterdam folks had come by and left their orders, which were piled at the end of the counter. He said that if we left our order now, the new glasses would be ready by 3pm tomorrow. Orlin looked through the large inventory of frames while Thomas demonstrated the strength of the ear pieces and engineering features of the hinges.

Orlin found the frames he wanted and ordered a pair of glasses with progressive bifocal lenses made of transition material that darkens when exposed to sunlight and becomes clear when out of the sun. The cost was \$335 which was about the same as the price paid back home for just clear progressive bifocal lenses placed in the old frames. As we discussed the purchase Thomas mentioned that Jeff, our fellow cruiser and blogger (<http://amazingvoyages2.blogspot.com>) on the Amsterdam had been in this morning and left an order for glasses. We

were making the purchase based primarily on the fact that people we know have had good experience with Admand Optical Company and return year after year. Before leaving the shop Thomas and Orlin had a little photo session with the results as shown on the right. Orlin is the one hiding his glasses behind his back for the photo,



(as trained by Barbara). As we were leaving the basement shopping gallery we spotted another couple from the Amsterdam looking for the Admand shop so we directed them down the corridor to Thomas. We then proceeded down Nathan Street in the direction of the Jade Market taking in the sights and dodging traffic all the way.



We passed by the Muslim mosque with the white tower and dome. There was a lot of construction going on all across Hong Kong, including Kowloon. We never seemed to be completely free of the sound of jack hammers or other loud construction noises.



This building on the left was completely encased by bamboo scaffolding and shrouded in plastic screening material. Nearby another building was covered with bamboo scaffolding, as shown below. Bamboo is a tough, plentiful and economical material for scaffolding that is used on even the tallest buildings in Hong Kong.



After walking several blocks we turned west and soon crossed Temple Street with the traditional Chinese gateway, as shown below. Temple Street is the



home of the famous Night Market and people were in the process of setting up their booths in the late afternoon.

We turned down Temple Street and threaded our way through the booths for several blocks. The streets were clean and free of most debris. However, the scene on the right is typical and should confirm that if you are a neatness freak you probably wouldn't enjoy walking through this area.



Eventually we came upon the Jade Market. The Jade Market has an enclosed building with vendor stalls packed closely together, as shown below.



Barbara was looking for small jade “doughnuts” to fit on some earrings she has. In spite of the hundreds of vendor stalls in the Jade Market we weren't able to find the right sized jade doughnuts this afternoon.

Leaving the Jade Market we started walking back towards the Ocean Terminal and the Amsterdam. We came across this meat market shown on the right. It is always a shock to see the open air meat markets in operation but they have worked in these unsanitary conditions for centuries and aren't about to change.



We walked back to the Amsterdam and confirmed that our long time friends, Bob and Esther, had arrived after their 17 hour flight from Southern California. They will be cruising on the Amsterdam from Hong Kong through to Fort Lauderdale. Arrangements had been made for them to be at good ole' table 36 with Roy, Gayle and us. All six of us had shared a dining room table during the 2007 World Voyage so this was to be a grand reunion of friends.

We all got together in the dining room at 5:30pm and it was a joyous occasion to have the gang together again. We got this photo on the right of our happy group.



Every night the buildings along the shoreline of Hong Kong,

across the harbor from the cruise terminal, put on a light show complete with coordinated musical accompaniment. Many people go out to the raised viewing platform next to the Star Ferry Terminal where the music and lights can be experienced. That venue gets very crowded during the show so we chose to view the show from the top deck of the Amsterdam with a few other passengers. The show started at 8pm with green lasers shooting up into the mist and lights on the buildings changing color. We were severely challenged in getting a good picture of the 30 minute light show. The photo below is the best one we got.



After the light show we turned in for the night. Tomorrow's plan was to get passes for the Hop-On Hop-Off (HOHO) bus and visit Stanley Market on Hong Kong Island as well as more of Kowloon. Of course, we also need to check in with Thomas at Admand Optical Company and pick up Orlin's new glasses.