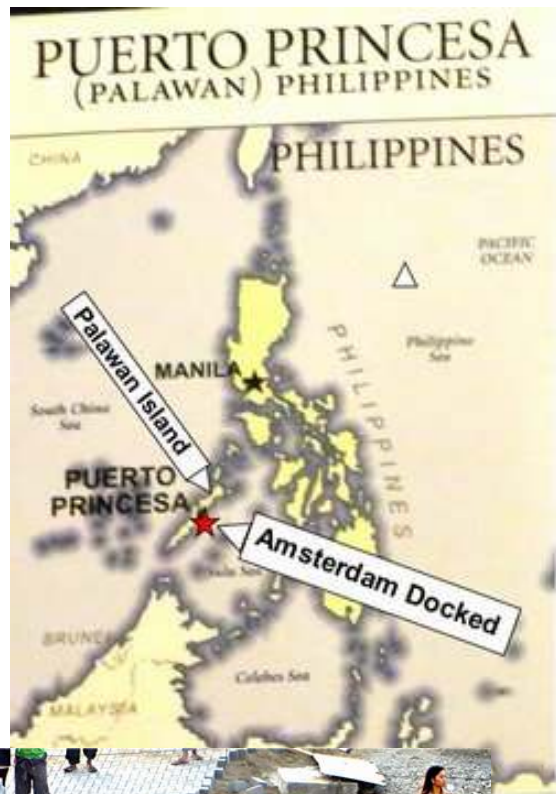


3/7/13 - Day 60 – Puerto Princesa, Palawan Island, Philippines: We arrived at Puerto Princesa about 7am. Puerto Princesa is the capital city of the island of Palawan in the Philippine nation. A map showing the location of Puerto Princesa on the West Coast of Palawan is on the right.

The city of Puerto Princesa had a large contingent of people and equipment on the dock and proceeded to put on a welcoming show that was the best we have seen in our years of cruising. In fact, the show did not stop all day as students from schools around the area came to the pier and put on a non-stop display of pride in their community and open-armed welcome of the Amsterdam people. We found it hard to adequately describe all that the local boosters of Puerto Princesa did today.

First there was an hour long series of energetic dance teams that performed on the pier to lively music that was professionally produced by a portable sound booth in a tent. Just a little of the action is illustrated by these photos below.



This men's team on the right was doing a "Gangsta Style" dance number.



Native tribes and dancing ceremonies were represented by these fierce fellows below. They were followed by less threatening dances performed by their female companions





This set of dancers, on the left, had an elaborate stage prop on wheels to screen off waiting dancers.



A truck mounted “Jumbo Tron” type of display was set up next to the gangway. A continuous presentation of the highlights of Puerto Princesa went on all day.



Meanwhile souvenir vendors set up their booths and a parade of buses and vans arrived to start the land excursions that had been planned for this one-day stop in Puerto Princesa.



A bevy of fresh faced young students formed two lines at the gangway and as we passed between them we were presented with a classy necklace made with sea shells and a medallion from the city of Puerto Princesa.

The humidity was high with temperature in the high 80s but that tremendous reception had us energized and ready to explore Puerto Princesa.



Our plan was to walk up the main street leading from the dock to the market place near the center of the city. We would look around and then decide if we wanted a more extensive tour around town. The map below shows a section of the narrow Palawan Island and where the Amsterdam was docked. The route we took today through Puerto Princesa is traced in black on the map.



We walked up Rizal Avenue and were successful in fending off the hordes of “tricycle” drivers who wanted to take us on a tour of the city. The “tricycles” consisted of a light weight motorcycle with a detachable cab that held two small passengers comfortably. On the right is a typical scene of the tricycles lined up while their drivers looked for customers. We concluded later that with the scheduled arrival of the Amsterdam the local boosters must have recruited tricycle drivers from far and wide to come to Puerto Princesa today and take us around town. There seemed to be many more of these little taxis than they needed for the local population.





We were amused by the scene below. We saw what was obviously an Amsterdam passenger competing with the tricycles for road space while riding one of the many battery powered scooters that ply the ship's decks. Usually the battery

scooters are carrying physically challenged cruisers, however this hearty soul today confirmed that -- "When the going gets tough the tough get going."



We turned off of Rizal Avenue into the market place on Burgos Street. There we found a well laid out fruit and vegetable store.

We also found that getting a haircut in Puerto Princesa was very economical. In this barber shop a haircut cost only 40 pesos. At the current exchange rate of 40 pesos per US dollar that would be just \$1 USD.



This store on the left had a huge pile of coconut husks piled up in the front. Apparently you could get some coconut copra from them.



We continued down Burgos Street until we came to Malvarst Street where we spotted a modern looking supermarket/mall, called Unitop, as shown on the right. Of course, there were some of the ubiquitous tricycles parked in front.



We went in to Unitop to see what a Philippine supermarket would look like. We found that this one looked very much like the ones we are used to seeing in the US. We took a few pictures to show how the merchandise was displayed, as shown below.



We were fascinated by this huge display of small stainless steel electric cookers. An enlarged view of the cookers is shown below.



Apparently there is a big market for small, inexpensive cookers.

We were looking for some coffee that Steve might like when we get home. There was a friendly

looking lady shopping near us. We asked her which of the coffees she liked. She recommended Kopiko, a “Kopiccino” coffee with extra “Choco”, as shown on the right. It came in 25gram packets and we got 250 grams, about 0.5 pounds, for 68 pesos. At today’s exchange rate that’s about \$2 USD.



While we were at the check-out counter Alex and Judy, friends from the Amsterdam, came by on their tour of the city. We chatted for a while and then snapped this picture of



Alex and Orlin to celebrate our chance meeting in this foreign city. We then made our purchase and left the store. By the way, the same check-out rules applied just like at home. Namely, although we picked the shortest line, any of the other lines would have gotten us out of the store faster.

About this time we decided that we would

like a more extensive tour of Puerto Princesa. We paused at the curbside and like magic a series of tricycles approached us with offers of a ride. We inquired of each driver about his English speaking capability. After testing and rejecting about 4 we finally found a fellow who understood the questions we were asking and appeared to be a good bet for showing us around town. His name was Jun and he outlined a tour that would take about 1 hour for a charge of 400 pesos, which was \$10 USD. That seemed reasonable to us so we began our tricycle tour. We got this inauguration picture on the right to document our condition at the start of the ride.



It turned out that Jun rented the tricycle from John Marco whose name was emblazoned on the front. He paid John Marco 300 pesos (\$7.50 USD) per day as rent.

Jun recommended that we start our tour by driving to a park at the top of hill outside of town where there was a nice view of surrounding countryside. Next, among a few other items, we would stop at a souvenir shop and then a gasoline station so we could get a sample of Philippine gas prices here in Puerto Princesa. Along the way we could stop whenever we saw something of interest. This sounded like a reasonable plan to us so we boarded our motorcycle powered taxi and were on our way. It was a great comfort to us that in the Philippines cars drive on the right hand side of the road, just like in the US. That reduced our fright factor significantly.

We took a picture of Jun while he was driving to show a little bit about the configuration of the vehicle. Barbara was pretty well crunched into the back of the steel bench seat while Orlin perched on the front 1 or 2 inches.

We took the busy Puerto Princesa National Highway north through the suburbs of town. After about 4 miles we turned west onto Puerto Princesa South National Highway.

We passed by colorful open air markets selling fruit and vegetables.



We saw a large hardware store that looked like any that might be found in the US.

We also came across a gasoline station where we were able to get a picture of the posted prices, as shown below.



The regular gas was selling for 58.37 pesos per liter. At the current exchange rate that was equivalent to \$1.45 USD per liter. Assuming 4 liters per gallon that works out to \$5.80 USD per gallon of gas.

It was about a 10 mile ride out to the hill where Jun said we could get a good view of the countryside. The passing scenery became more rural.

We passed a store called Jun's Grocery. We asked Jun if that was his store and he laughed, saying only the name was the same.



We started to take pictures of homes that we passed on the highway. There was a variety of homes but most were considerably better looking than the rather run down houses that we saw in the city of Makassar, Indonesia that we visited a few days ago. Some examples of homes along the way are shown below.



This home on the left probably had an on/off water pumping system. It had a water storage tank mounted on a tower to provide constant pressure.



This house on the left was the most luxurious looking home that we saw today.

We suspected that we were in the high rent district.

Our taxi arrived at the location of the hilltop viewing spot and turned into the driveway. For some reason, perhaps economy, the driveway consisted of four strips of concrete rather than a continuous pad.

Jun used the right hand two concrete strips to get us up to the top of the hill and then we parked.

About this time Jun said the house was the home of Baham Mitra, the governor of Palawan Island. However, the place was set up more as an amusement park than a governor's home so we suspected that the governor didn't actually live there. It probably belonged to the government and may have been the governor's residence at one time but was later converted into a park.





We were eager to take a look at the place and check out the view from the top of the hill. Of course, Orlin had to get out of the cab first with the camera and this meant that there would be a photographic record of Barbara making her grand exit, as shown on the left. Note the shell necklace that she received from the Puerto Princesa welcoming people when we left the ship this morning.

This prominent sign, on the right, called the place “Palawan Rancho – Zip Line Adventure” and advertised the zip line ride, horse back ride and other amusements that were available at the site. The fact that the sign was in English and we didn’t see a similar sign in Spanish suggested that this place was set up primarily for foreign tourists.



However, there was a large group of people there who looked like they could be locals enjoying the day, as shown below. One family had a child who was getting ready to ride a pony, barely visible on the right hand side of the photo.



Jun thought we would be interested in the zip line ride so he hustled us to that site. The operators were anxious to sell us tickets for a zip line but after a few seconds thought we declined. Instead we took a picture of their set-up that included a view of the valley and Honda Bay below.



About this time a couple bus loads of people from the Amsterdam arrived. They were on one of the tours offered for sale by the ship. This confirmed our suspicion that the site was on the regular route for foreign tourists.

We wandered around the hilltop setting and took some pictures. The “Governors House” had magnificent bold architecture as shown in the picture below.



We had expected to be able to see the airport near town but it was obscured by some hills. We were told that the airport was built on the remains of an airport built by the Japanese during WW-II occupation. What we could see was pretty forested hills with a few farms in the valley.

Walking towards the back of property we were surprised to find an enclosure housing what looked like game cocks and some cows, as shown in the picture on the right.



After spending about 20 minutes at the hilltop site we got ready to leave, as shown on the right.



We enjoyed the ride back to town as we saw some elementary schools apparently letting the students out for the day. It was interesting in that there appeared to be some mothers picking up their kids with tricycles similar to what we have practiced with cars in our community. Jun told us that he had one daughter and three sons. The daughter was going to a local university and the sons were still in high school. He said that he had learned his English in high school and college courses.

After a brief stop at a souvenir shop Jun took us back to the port area and let us out at the gate. Saying our goodbyes, we told him of our appreciation for his English being so good. That was important to us since we suffer from the common US problem of having no language other than English. He gave us his cell phone number in case we return and need a tricycle taxi ride. The number is 09396263853 and we would recommend him to any person visiting the area.

Before returning to the Amsterdam we made use of the port sign to document the visit of Barbara's library card to this fine city, as shown on the right.



We returned to the Amsterdam and had a quick lunch. After that we took a short walk to the Puerto Princesa City Baywalk Park that was recommended this morning by one of the Visitor Guides. Leaving through the port gate we turned left into the first street and after walking about a block we entered the park. It was nicely landscaped with tropical plants and had a broad paved area with booths set up for refreshments and vendors to use. There were a few people in some of the booths, apparently getting ready for activity starting in the evening. The view across the bay from the sea wall was beautiful as shown in the pictures below.



We particularly liked this fanciful series of fish decorating the walk along the seawall.



On the way back to the Amsterdam from the park we stopped by the Immaculate Conception Cathedral. The picture of the Cathedral on the left shows the two massive towers that are visible from the harbor.

The interior of the cathedral is even more beautiful than the exterior as shown by the photo on the right.



Back at the Amsterdam preparation was being made to get underway at 5pm. We were really in for a sail-away treat delivered by our Puerto Princesa hosts. Shortly before we got underway a large group of students from local schools joined those who had remained on the pier all day. The music started and we were first entertained by children from the Holy Trinity Church School playing classical music in a violin orchestra. It was a beautiful and amazing performance.



The violin performance was followed by a choral group from the Puerto Princesa Holy Trinity Church singing gospel music. The music was in English and included a soloist who sang it in an enthusiastic and beautiful way that rivaled any that we have heard before. It was uncanny to hear gospel music so perfectly delivered and moving in this far flung foreign port.



After a series of songs it was time to go. The Amsterdam let loose its lines and we moved away from the dock. There was a nice sign they had made to wish us a Bon Voyage as shown below. The railings of the Amsterdam were lined with cheering and waving passengers while those on the dock were waving back with just as much vigor.



Even as we moved into the channel the people remained and continued waving from the dock. It was a emotional moment for many seasoned travelers on the Amsterdam to see this much warmth and friendliness from such a large group.



From our vantage point further out in the bay the towers of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral crowned the hill above the harbor and we got this last picture of Puerto Princesa as shown below.



Later there was a most beautiful sunset as shown below.



It seemed to be just the right closing scene for a day that had started and ended so well.

We sailed on north through the chain of Philippine Islands. After a day at sea we expect to arrive in Manila, the Philippines on 3/9/13.