1/8/13 Day 3 Cartagena, Columbia: Before starting the description of our Cartagena adventure we need to announce that our son, Steve, has set up a website and is posting these emails from the 2013 World Cruise in our usual Blog format. It's a great idea and we really thank him for doing it since otherwise it would be a royal pain to try and look back at prior emails as the cruise progresses through the weeks and months ahead. These emails from the cruise will be posted at   http://2013worldvoyage.thestansfield.com/ .

Cartagena (pronounced Carta-Hena) is one of the major cities of Columbia and it provides an important port on the Caribbean Sea. Cartagena was founded in 1533 by the Spanish because it offered a convenient and safe harbor for the ships that hauled gold and other products of the region to Spain. In 1811 the province declared its independence from Spain and decades of fighting with Spain took place. Finally in 1821 the Columbian patriots established a permanent nation with Cartagena as one of the most important cities. Cartagena is now the fifth largest city in Columbia. A major contributor to its growth in the 20th century has been the opening of petroleum fields in the Rio Magdalena Valley after 1917.

A major attractions for tourists like us are the twisting streets of the old city with 18th century architecture and endless variations in balcony styles. Surrounding much of the city is a massive defensive wall. Just outside the city walls lies the fortress of Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas on a hill rising 135 above sea level. The location of Cartagena on the northern coast of South America is shown on the right. This photograph of a video display in the Amsterdam library shows the location of the Amsterdam last evening as we approached Cartagena.

We woke this morning as the Amsterdam was sailing into the harbor of Cartagena at 7am. This was going to be a short visit since we would be getting underway for the Panama Canal at 1pm this afternoon. The atmosphere was heavy with humidity and the temperature was already approaching 80˚F out on deck as we ate breakfast in the Lido. We had been to Cartagena years ago and had visited the fortress on the hill outside the city. Today we joined up with Roy and Gayle and in view of the oppressive heat and short visit time decided to just take a little self guided walking tour of part of the Old Cartagena Town.

At 8am the ship was cleared by local officials and we caught the free shuttle that took us a short distance to the cruise terminal. At the cruise terminal was the usual horde of locals offering taxi and tour services. We caught a taxi into the Old Town for a

negotiated total fare of $20 USD. This turned out to be about twice what it should have been but we were in the learning phase.

Our taxi driver said gasoline was priced in gallons and the cost was about $6 per gallon. On the way we were able to get a picture showing the price of gasoline at a Texaco station, as shown on the right. Regular gasoline was selling for 8,490 Colombian Pesos per gallon and premium was 10,650 pesos per gallon. At the current exchange rate this works out to about $4.72 USD for a gallon of regular gas and $5.91 USD for a gallon of premium. Not too much higher than in most US cities at the current time.

Our diver dropped us off near the Naval Museum and Hotel Charleston in Old Town. The Hotel Charleston appeared to be of five star quality. Fortunately the management was sympathetic to us tourists and after a little conversation with the guard at the door we were able to make use of their very fine "banos" facilities.

Part of the massive stone wall around the Old Town was readily accessible so we climbed up and walked along the 50 foot wide avenue that tops the wall. We took some pictures and then escaped the scorching heat by leaving the wall and walking in the shade of the buildings bordering the narrow streets of Old Town.

The winding streets were charming with well maintained 2 and 3 story buildings. Nearly every building had a balcony, many of them painted in bright colors. The following is a collection of photos we took as we wandered the streets.

The local people seemed to be healthy, happy and well dressed. This may not be a representative sample but what we saw appeared to be an example of middle class prosperity.

After walking several blocks Barbara was able to find a good spot to show that her library card had now visited Cartagena, Columbia.

There was a major musical concert event in the preparation stage. Several of the plazas were set up to handle large crowds. However, at the time we were there it was not crowded.
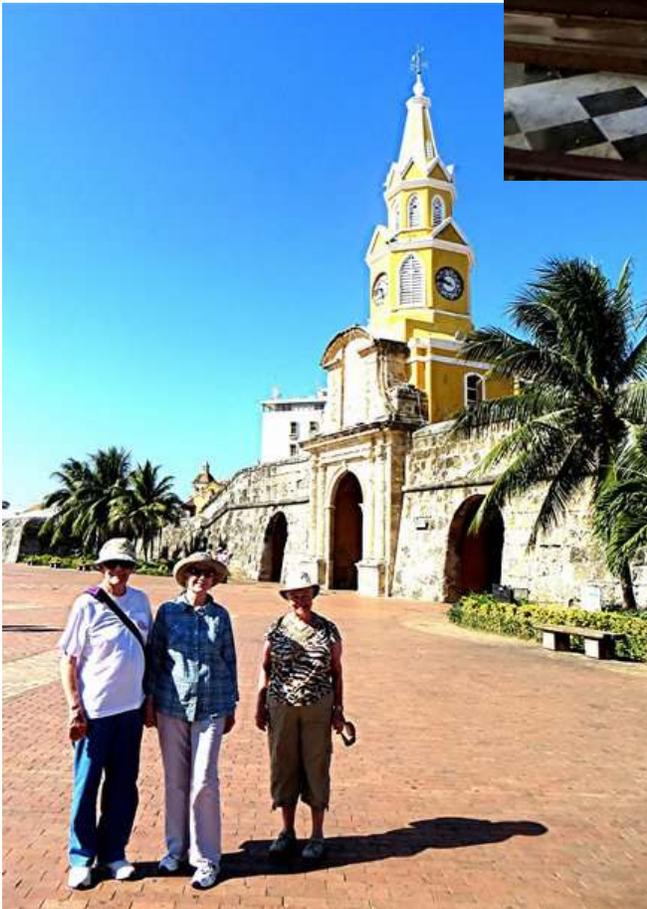

People were congregating and casually passing time under the shade of huge trees in several small plazas.

We came upon the Cathedral of Santa Catalina de Alexandria. The doors were open so we walked in quietly. While the outside of the building was impressively large and stately, it understated the marvelous appearance of the main sanctuary shown in the picture on the right.

We exited the Cathedral and spent a little more time exploring the wall around the Old Town.

About 10:30am the heat and humidity had taken its toll on us and we decided to head back to the cool comfort of the Amsterdam. We caught a taxi back about 2 miles to the cruise terminal for a reasonable charge of $10USD for the four of us.   At the cruise terminal there was abundant shade under large trees and they had colorful uncaged birds on display.

Finally our home away from home on the Amsterdam was within sight. We eagerly boarded and enjoyed the luxury of a cool shower before lunch.

About 1pm the Amsterdam got underway for Colon, Panama and our transit of the Panama Canal tomorrow. The scheduling for entering the locks is tightly controlled and Captain Mercer explained that it is very important that we arrive by 5:30am tomorrow to take the Panama Canal pilot and marine inspectors on board. The ship must pass an inspection to ensure that it is sea worthy enough to rule out breakdown and associated disruption of operations in the Panama Canal.