

Final Blog Entry-Back to Reality-Luggage Arrives-Gifts-Farewell-9 Dec. 09: The days since returning home from our 63 day cruise have been a blur. There was the need to react to long overdue administrative issues, appointments made before the cruise, decorating for Christmas and just getting used to being at home without all the luxuries of life being at your finger tips. We did find time to weigh ourselves and to our amazement Orlin had lost 3 pounds and Barbara gained only 1 pound.

Barbara found the kitchen and in a rather tentative fashion began to recall how to put a meal together. She discovered the old faithful crock pot and remembered how to turn it on, as shown on the right. However, it will take a while for the fond memories of shipboard life to fade a bit so that everyday life at home seems more interesting.

We both tackled the job of putting up Christmas decorations, as shown below. At least we will have a few days to enjoy the fruits of our labor.



The Christmas tree we stood up in the corner of the living room before leaving for the cruise in September finally got some cheery ornaments and tinsel.

Our spirits improved a lot when we got a dusting of snow a couple days after returning home. It had been a year or two since that happened so we got a photo of the big 2009 snowfall for the record, as shown below. We're sure we can make it back to reality now.



While waiting for the luggage to be delivered by FedEx we noticed on the Cruise Critic Message Board some questions about the "Pillow Gifts" that people got on the Grand Voyage to Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific. It appeared that the reduced price we paid for the cruise may have decreased the number and value of the little pillow gifts that we found on our bed when returning to our cabin after each formal dinner. Shown below is an arrangement of the gifts we got during the cruise.



The two dishes at the back are more clearly shown here. The description of the items we got is as follows:

Front row – Left to right, four nice luggage straps with 2009 Grand Voyage colors and images. One bronze colored cruise pin with the white cruise logo of the Sydney Opera House.



Second row – Left to right, silver colored cuff links with Holland America Logo; Silver colored pendant with Holland America Logo; Digital Clock with battery; Two porcelain shot glasses floral design in the Art Nouveau style from the Amata collection - Royal Goedewaagen – Holland; Leather card holder; Decorative jewelry tray with Grand Voyage colors and images.

Third row – Two beautiful journal/diary books with leather covers in Grand Voyage colors and Grand Voyage images; Two ball ornaments with floral design in the Art Nouveau style from the Amata collection - Royal Goedewaagen – Holland; Four porcelain coasters with floral design in the Art Nouveau style from the Amata collection - Royal Goedewaagen – Holland

Back row – Two large porcelain plates with the Grand Voyage Logo and map showing the route of the 2009 Australia, New Zealand & South Pacific Grand Voyage. We also got two 4 inch x 4 inch porcelain tiles with the Holland America Logo which we left in the stateroom. The quality of the gifts was fine. We would have preferred less porcelain because of the fragile nature and weight. We had hoped to get a duffel type luggage with rollers similar to what we got on 2007 Grand World Voyage and 2008 Asia Australia Grand Voyage; that was not to be. Also a souvenir shirt with the 2009 Grand Voyage logo or other artwork would have been a nice substitute for the porcelain. People who collect the porcelain were probably very happy with the selection.

On Tuesday, 8 December, 6 days after leaving the Amsterdam the FedEx truck rumbled down the driveway and we got our 4 fully packed pieces of luggage, as shown on the right. We were happy with the FedEx service. They delivered when they said they would and the luggage was in fine shape. We didn't have any breakage.

Note that we used the four luggage straps that we got as pillow gifts. They were very useful and addressed a need that we all have at the end of the cruise.



The cruise was everything we hoped for and more. The Cruise Critic folks made up an even bigger part of our social circle than in past cruises. Thanks go to Karen who took on the job of coordinating the "Meet and Greet" sessions and the luncheons. This Cruise Critic group seemed to be a lot more active in arranging private tours than we had experienced previously. For the first time we bought in to half day and all day private tours set up by Cruise Critic contributors and we were very happy with the experience and the price. In that regard we would particularly like to thank Pauline (hallpau), Karen (Kween Karen), and Bill (sk8teacher) for spending the time to organize the tours that we took. The private tours were equivalent to the excellent Holland America tours we also took but the private tours were less expensive.

Readers may be interested in blogs by other people covering the 2009 Grand Voyage. There were several people blogging the cruise but because of the high cost of Internet time we didn't read them daily. Now in the chaos of our paperwork after getting home we can only locate two addresses as follows:

1. Karen's 2009 Grand Voyage - <http://dreamcruise.kweenkaren.com/>
2. Jeff's World Adventures - <http://www.amazingvoyages.blogspot.com/>

We also have previous blogs for the cruises we took in 2007 and 2008 as shown below:

1. 2007 Grand World Voyage - <http://2007gww.thestansfields.com/>
2. 2008 Asia, Australia Grand Voyage – <http://www.2008asiaaucruise.thestansfields.com/>
3. 2009 Voyage of the Vikings - <http://2009voyageofthevikings.thestansfields.com/>

Our email for comments is `orlinbarbara"at"bellsouth.net` , where "at" signifies @.

This brings us to the end of our final blog entry for the 2009 Grand Australia, New Zealand & South Pacific Voyage on the ms Amsterdam. We are sold on the cruising life style because of the great people that we get to know while experiencing shipboard life and touring foreign ports. This was a great bunch and hopefully we will meet again someday. Meanwhile we will console ourselves over morning coffee with our wintry view shown on the right. We can see water, and that helps, but it's not quite up to the ocean view from the Lido on the Amsterdam.



Goodbye and farewell until we meet again.

Orlin and Barbara