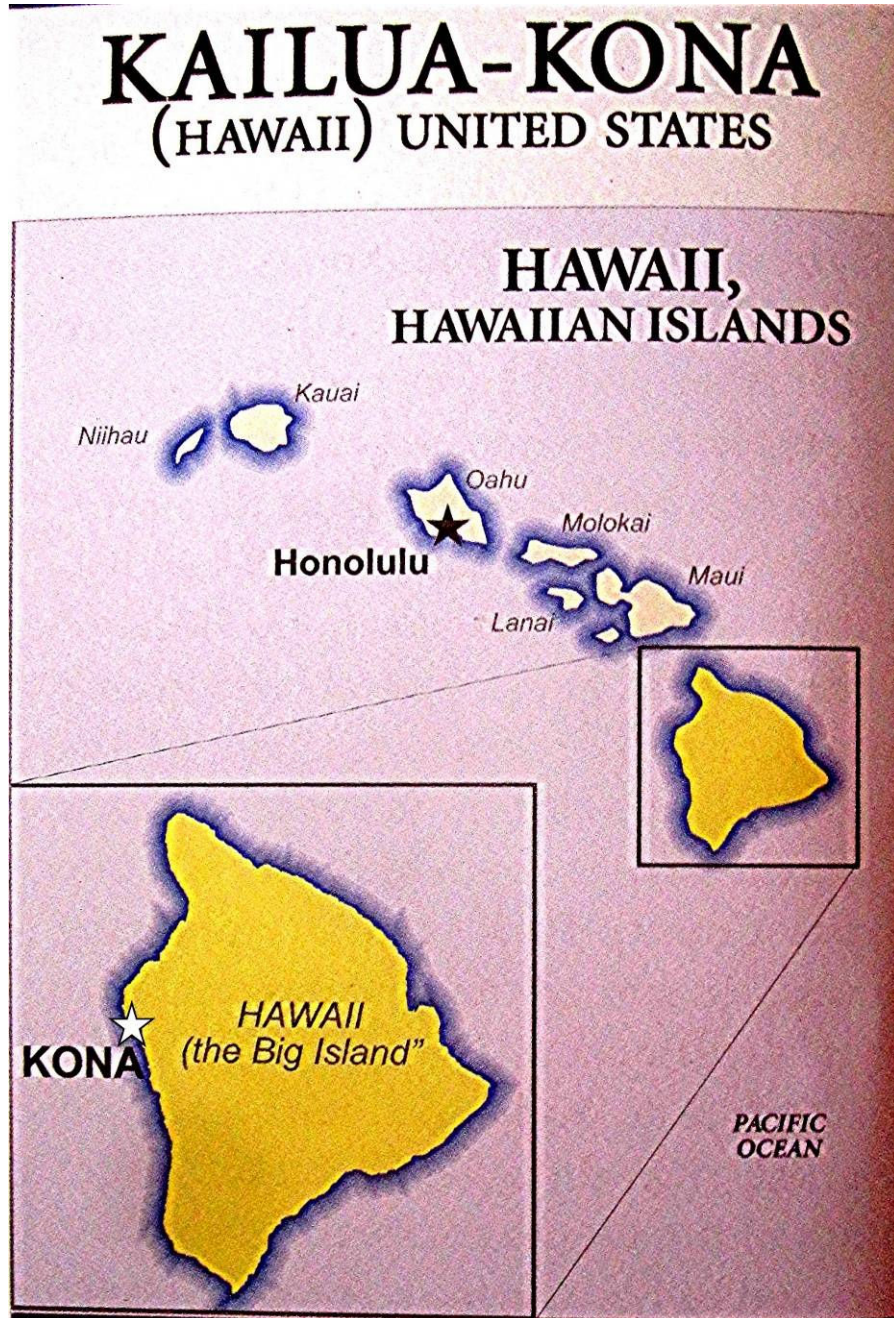
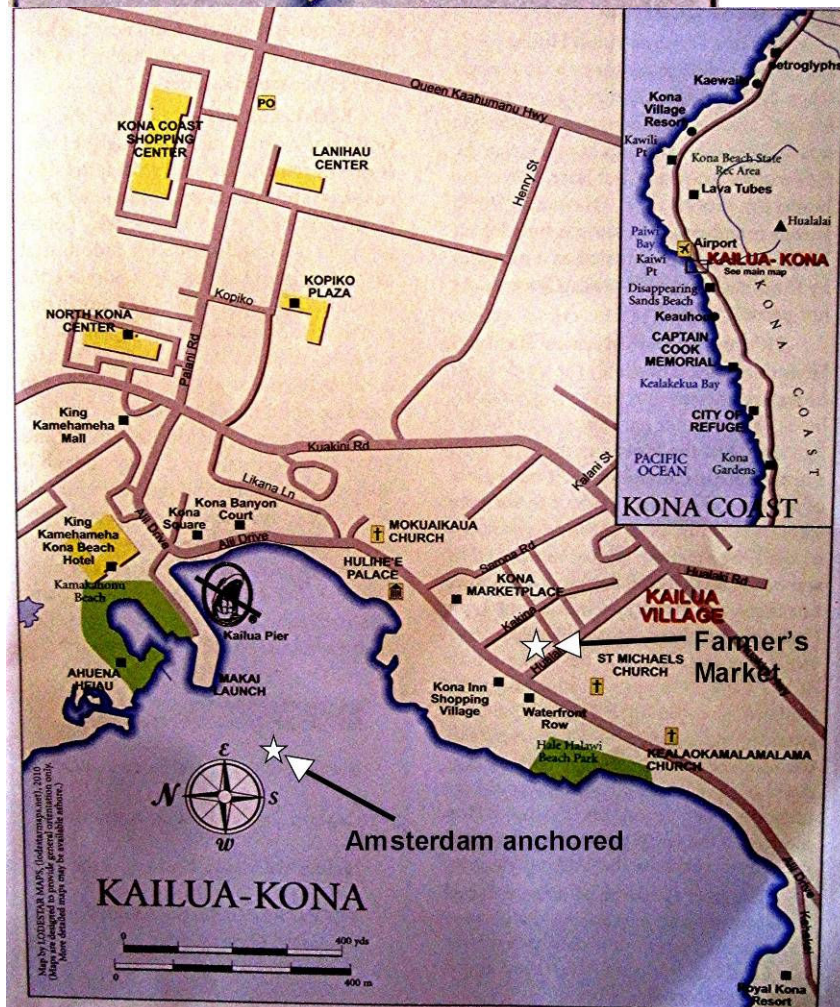
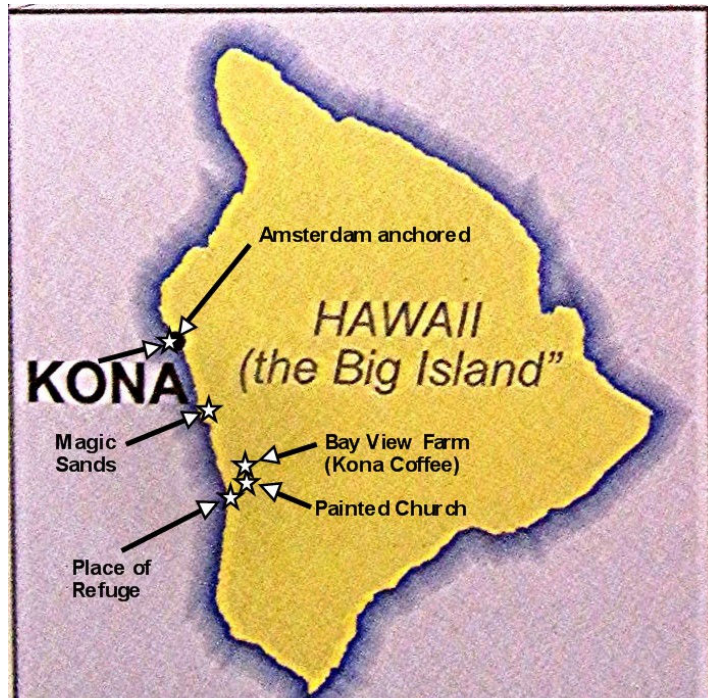


Day 62–Kona, Hawaii–Tor Tours–Painted Church–Kona Coffee–Thanksgiving Day-

26 Nov 09: The day started with partly cloudy sky and moderate sea. We were sailing into the open harbor of Kona, Hawaii. The Amsterdam was anchored by 8am and the tender boats were in the water. The maps below show where Kona is located in the Hawaiian Island chain and on the big island of Hawaii. The highlights of a tour around the Kona area by TorTours are shown on the map of Hawaii and there is a street map of Kona that we used after returning from the tour. This was Thanksgiving Day but since we were far from our family and having just arrived in Kona it didn't feel like Thanksgiving. However, we were ready for a visit in Kona on the big island of Hawaii.





Soon after we had anchored some curious paddle boarders came by the ship to take a look, as shown on the right.

They were using an oar rather than their hands to propel them through the water. This is a sport that has become popular here in the last year or two.



A short while later a boat came by towing the submersible reef viewing vessel, as shown below. The operators of this vessel will take tourists under the sea near the reef and navigate around to see the fish and coral formations. It wasn't clear if this vessel was on



the way out to the reef or if this was just an advertisement for the fact that such rides exist in Kona.

Since all the passengers had gone through the immigration process yesterday in Honolulu, there was no need for that today. We soon got clearance from the local authorities to go ashore. About 9:30am we got our stuff together and took a tender boat to the passenger landing in Kona. We had planned to just wander around Kona and revisit some of the places we had seen in town 6 years ago on another cruise. There were several private tour guides offering their services on the pier and we stopped to check them out. We were favorably impressed with a tall fellow named Tor who offered a 3 hour tour in his van for \$30 each. He had 4 people already lined up and only needed two more so that they could start immediately. The 4 other tourists were people from the Amsterdam and Tor made a good impression so we decided to take his tour.

A picture of Tor and his van is shown below. He operates his van tours in German and English and apparently has a busy tour business with German speaking visitor groups. The name of his company is "Tor Tours". He made a joke out of the possibility that if you say "Tor Tours" rapidly in English it can sound like "Torture". He is originally from Belgium but has lived in Hawaii for 10 years and his English is impeccable.

Tor and we tourists, minus photographer Barbara, are shown below. We all climbed in Tor's van and the tour began.



It was a 2003 model van and we all had plenty of room as we rode along in air conditioned comfort. The six of us cruisers were all from the Amsterdam and didn't bother to introduce ourselves. It was a friendly atmosphere with Tor

providing the nearly all of the conversation. In the first few minutes of the tour we were getting positive signals. The van was clean and comfortable, the air conditioner worked and a real plus was that Tor had installed a first class audio system with a microphone headset for him so that when he spoke we could all hear very clearly. Before we had driven 2 blocks he impressed us by pointing out an inconspicuous building on the Kona waterfront that we would otherwise have overlooked. It was the Hulihee Palace shown on the right. It was built in 1838. At that time most of the islanders were living in simple wood shacks so this building of lava and coral blocks, which is modest by modern standards, was a true palace.



It was the residence of Chiefs and Princesses over the years but it is now a museum.

We drove south from Kona along the highway that follows the beach. After a few miles Tor pointed out a beach with a lot of people enjoying the Thanksgiving Holiday by frolicking in the surf, as shown on the right. This beach is known as “Magic Sand” or “Disappearing Sands”. Tor explained that the variations in ocean currents with different seasons of the year periodically remove the sand and leave only lava rock and then the sand is brought back like it was today. The ancient Hawaiians thought the Gods were taking and returning the sand so they considered the beach sacred.



A house along the beach had a gate on the driveway that was a real work of art and joy to see, as shown on the left.



The flowers were out in profusion. Some were providing a pretty border for this golf course shown below.

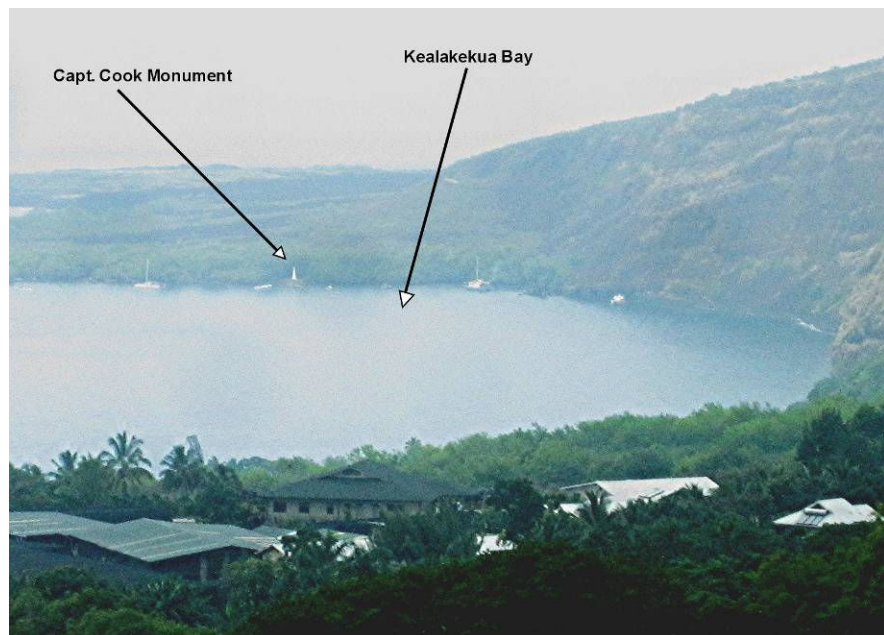


We stopped at the Lekeleke Burial Grounds, shown on the right. Flat topped piles of lava rock, called Cairns, are barely visible in the middle of the right hand side of this photograph (Black on black doesn't photograph well.). The Cairns consecrate the burial place of 300 people killed in a religious war that took place in about 1819. According to a plaque at the site, after the death



of Kamehameha I in 1819, and before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, the Hawaiian Chiefs forbid the practice of the ancient religion and worship of the many Gods. Traditionalists, rallied to Kekuaokalani, custodian of the old war god. Here, in the Battle of Kuamo'o, they were defeated by the Monarchy troops and the old religion died in the blaze of musket fire. Both sides had firearms, provided by the Europeans, and more than 300 were killed. The dead were then buried in this lava field where the battle took place. According to our guide, Tor, after the battle there was a cultural vacuum created by the victory of the anti-religion forces. Hawaiian civilization needed a supernatural explanation of what was happening in the world around them. That was the stage that was set when the first Christian missionaries arrived with their God. Many of the Hawaiian people thus willingly accepted Christianity as a welcome relief from their Godless culture.

We next drove to Kealakekua Bay where we could see the Captain Cook Monument from a high vantage point, as shown in the photograph on the right. Here is where a good guide can really fill in the detail for you. Tor explained that this was one of the



very few protected harbors on the big island of Hawaii. Some unique forces of earth collapse and lava flow created this pocket in the coastline. Captain Cook was drawn to this natural harbor when exploring the coast of Hawaii. Although the natives were initially receptive, there was a series of unfortunate events. For example, Captain Cook wanted his stolen boat back and the Hawaiian discovered he was not a God. He was

killed during a battle on the shore of Kealahou Bay where the Cook Monument is now located. The Hawaiians recognized that although not a God, he was an important Chief so they gave his remains the traditional treatment for a Chief. In accordance with their religion which held that the spirit of a person remained in the bones, they removed the flesh from Captain Cook's bones and returned the container of bones, and his spirit, to the English. The English seeing the knife scrape marks on the bones assumed that the Hawaiians had eaten Cook's flesh and that was the source of the false impression that Hawaiians were cannibals. According to Tor, there was never cannibalism on the Hawaiian Islands.

We left the view of Cook's Monument and by good luck happened upon a Tesoro Gas Station with the current prices posted. Here on the big island of Hawaii today a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline at this station on the right cost \$3.669 per gallon. That's the lowest price we have seen on the cruise of the South Pacific, Australia and New Zealand. That's another reason for being glad to get back home.



The next stop on our exploration of the West Kona Coast was a place that used to be called "City of Refuge". Now it is known as "Pu'uhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park". We drove to a beach just north of the Refuge where we could see the Refuge walls and also the thatched roof of the temple within the compound, as shown on the left.

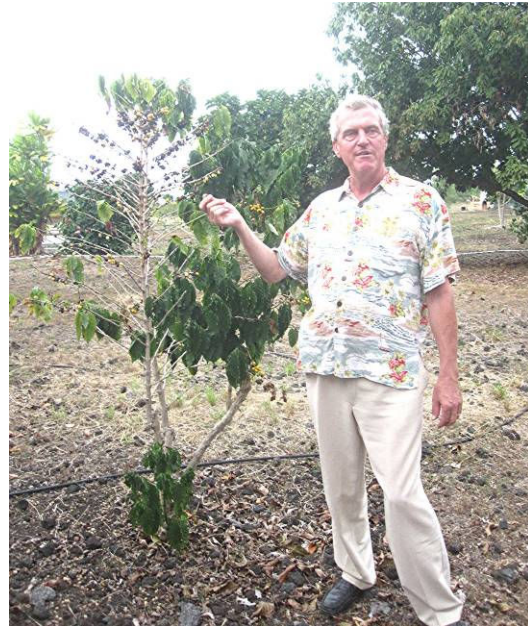


Tor explained that in the ancient Hawaiian culture there was the death penalty for what we would consider minor infractions, like letting your shadow fall on a royal person. There was an escape clause in the social contract and it involved the Refuge. If a person guilty of a capital offense could avoid capture and get

inside the walls of the Refuge then he was forgiven and could go safely back into society. A major problem was that because the walls of the Refuge were guarded the hunted person would have to swim out to sea and approach the Refuge on the side facing the ocean. An important part of the process was that the person had to demonstrate that he had placed himself in great danger from ocean currents, sharks and pounding surf on lava rocks. If the Gods had seen fit to let him survive that ordeal then he was eligible for pardon after making it inside the walls of the Refuge.

At this point Tor gave us some options. We could opt to take 30 minutes to buy tickets from the Hawaii Park Service and walk around the Refuge or we could be satisfied with the outside view in front of us and move on to other sites he planned to show us. Four of us wanted to move on but one couple wanted to stay and see the Refuge. Tor came up with another option. We would leave the one couple here while the rest of us did a 30 minute tour of a Kona coffee plantation. Then we would come back and pick up the couple at the Refuge. They would miss the detailed coffee tour but get a drive-by look. This was agreeable with everyone so we dropped one couple off at the Refuge entrance and were on our way.

It turned out that Tor had worked about 10 years at the nearby Bay View Farm which is a Kona coffee plantation and processing plant. Because of the current worldwide economic downturn, Tor had been furloughed but he was on good terms with the owners so he could bring tour customers to the plantation. His connection with Bay View Farm management was even more important today since the place was closed because of it being Thanksgiving Day.



We pulled in to the entrance of Bay View Farm and stopped next to a small coffee bean tree, shown on the right. We all got out for our first lesson in coffee culture. Tor told us about how the coffee “cherries” that can be seen lining the branches of the tree don’t all ripen at the same time. They all start with a green color and depending on the variety they turn either red or yellow and that is when they should be picked. Coffee cherries don’t all ripen at the same time so you can’t just strip all the beans off of a branch but must select only the red or yellow ones and leave the others to ripen. A coffee cherry contains two of the beans that we find in a bag of roasted coffee beans. The two beans are encased in a soft shell that makes up the “cherry” and gives it the color. The cherry picking goes on for about 6 months of the year with many visits to the same branch in a very labor intensive fashion. Tor has about 2.5 acres of his own coffee trees that he nurtures as a source of enjoyment, exercise and income.

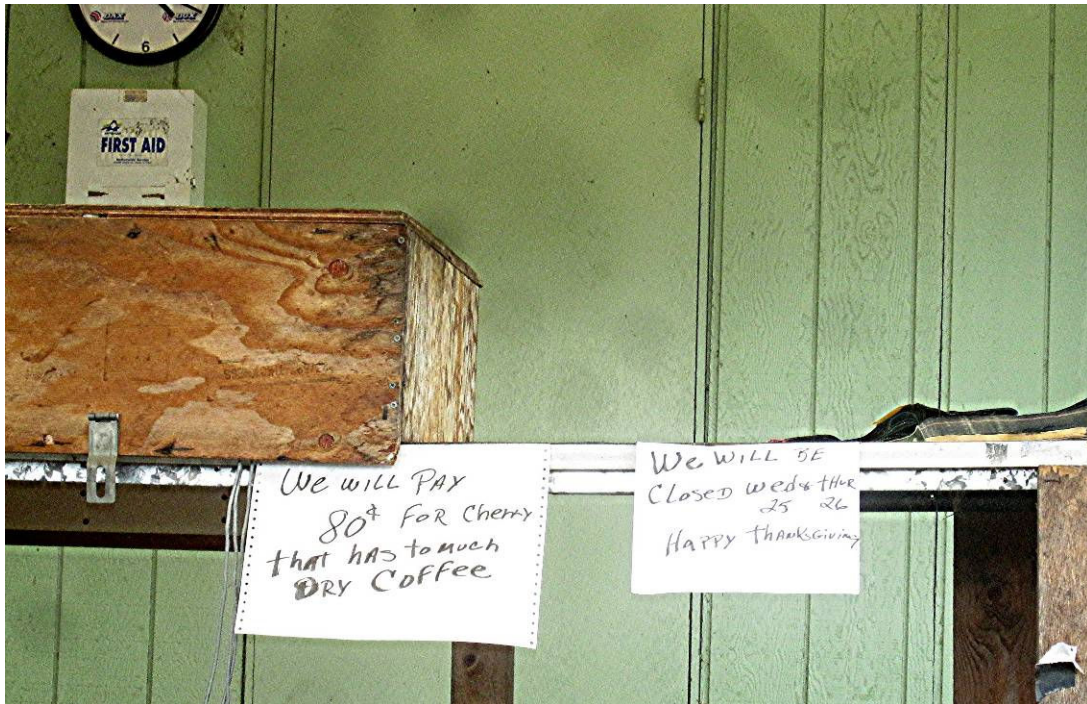
One reason that Kona Coffee is so prized is that because of prevailing winds and the three high volcanic mountains on the island, clouds often move in about noon and shade the trees from intense sunshine. Too much sunshine can degrade the coffee flavor so this shade is a good thing. The temperature can't be too high either so the coffee trees are located above the 800 foot level to avoid high temperature and below the 2000 foot level to avoid cool temperatures. These requirements restrict the area where Kona coffee can be grown. Because of the excellent flavor and limited availability Kona coffee is much higher priced than other coffees and is normally only used as a fraction of the content in a lower cost coffee blend.

Earlier Tor had noticed a blue haze over the area to the south and commented that this phenomenon is called "Vog" which stands for fog caused by the volcano. Not too long ago the erupting volcano, Mauna Loa developed a vent with an increased release of gas, including noxious sulfur dioxide. This gas normally drifts out to sea but occasionally, like today, it wraps around the island and cloaks the western slopes with Vog. By the time it reaches the Kona coast it has been diluted enough that the sulfur dioxide doesn't cause significant damage to plant life or humans.

Having covered the art of picking coffee beans we moved on to a shed where coffee beans are processed to prepare them for roasting, as shown below.



The hand written notes on the table at the head of the stairs bore Thanksgiving greetings but also the grim news that the price they would pay farmers for coffee beans is only 80 cents per pound. Tor said this was another effect of the hard economic times. In the not-too-distant past the price that the farmers got was more than double that figure.



Inside the shed Tor displayed the intimate detail he knew about the workings of the processing plant. Small rocks may be accidentally contained in the bags of beans delivered to the plant and they can damage the processing equipment. In this picture on the right he is telling us how baffles are arranged in the stainless steel container so that rocks are removed by flushing water through the bed of incoming beans dumped into the device.



In passing through the plant the coffee cherries are subjected to a liquid soaking and then fed into machines that gently remove the outer covering of the two inner beans. The beans are then cleaned, dried and prepared for shipment to the United States where they are roasted under carefully controlled conditions to enhance the flavor.

After our tour of the coffee plantation we had a much better appreciation for how much work is involved in getting coffee to market. Also the high price of 100% Kona coffee

beans on the grocery shelf (about \$2 per ounce) will keep it in the luxury category but it will be easier to justify.

Barbara had asked Tor about stopping to get a photo of the many Poinsettias growing wild along the roadside. He said he had a special one he would show her. While still in the Bay View Farm he stopped at the special Poinsettia and we got the photos shown on the right and below.



As an incidental note Tor pointed out the small Ti plant growing beside the Poinsettia as shown on the right. He said the Ti plant was held in very high regard by ancient Hawaiians for having special power. Only Ti leaves could be used to cover the roof of a temple.

As a trivia note it also seems that we heard Ti leaves were used to make hula skirts.

On the subject of plants, at an earlier point in the tour we stopped by a Nuni tree and some fruit from the tree had fallen on the



ground. Tor picked it up, using a dead leaf as a napkin to protect his fingers, as shown on the left. There was a hole in the fruit that he held so a person could sniff at it with their nose. The odor was of Limburger Cheese or worse. Tor said that the Nuni tree fruit may have this awful odor but it was used by the ancient Hawaiians as a healing poultice on wounds.

Apparently modern medical science may have also found some value in it for treatment of cancer.

The next goal of our Kona tour was St Benedict's Painted Church. The Painted Church is a small operational Catholic church, high on the hillside, not far from the coffee

plantation we had just visited. However, before going there we swung by the Place of Refuge and picked up the couple who had opted to tour the Refuge rather than go to the coffee plantation. They were waiting for us and said the tour of the Refuge was a great experience.

We drove back up the mountain and arrived at St. Benedict's Painted Church. This is a well known local attraction for Kona so it was not surprising to find several other tour vans and cars in the parking lot. The front of the church is shown on the right. The fact that the Painted Church is painted white is not the reason for the fame. The fame comes from the presence of beautiful religious murals painted on the wooden interior of the church. A talented artist had done the work long ago and it was awe inspiring. The photos below attempt to show what we saw.



This view on the left is the altar area showing the ceiling which portrays the sky.

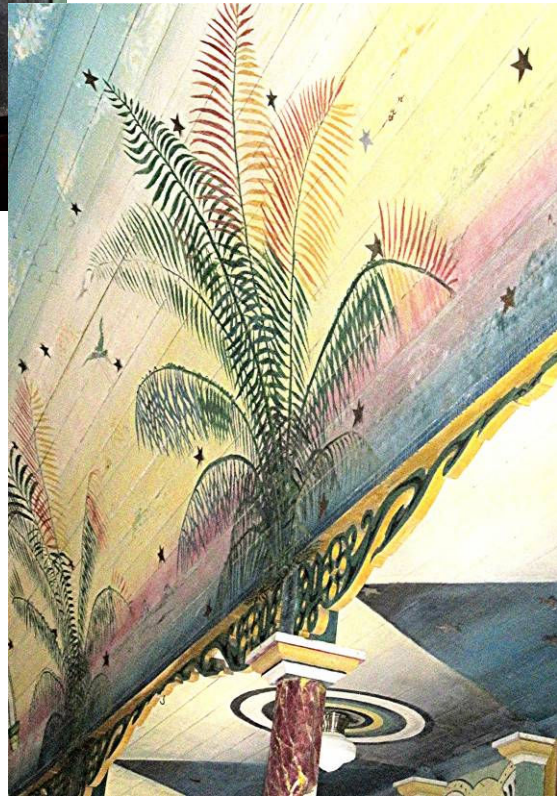
Notice that the support posts for the roof also serve as the trunks of the palm trees whose tops are shown on the ceiling.



The picture on the left is from the wall of the church and shows St. Benedict praying at an unusual cave-like location looking out over a lake. When our guide, Tor, first saw the painting he thought it resembled a view he had seen looking over a lake in Switzerland. He showed us a postcard he had found that had that identical view with the same rock outcroppings but absent St. Benedict and the vision. Apparently, the artist had worked from that same photographic image.

Tor had told us about the way the artist had shown the palm branches on the ceiling. The artist had

Painted the branches growing towards the altar and God as being green and lush. On the other hand, the branches growing away from the altar, and presumably away from Christianity, were dying and yellow. That pattern was clearly visible in the view we saw today as shown on the right and in the earlier view of the altar area above.



We left the Church and noted in the front yard a bust of Father Damien who was an early Catholic Priest in Hawaii. Father Damien came from Belgium and was revered by the Hawaiians for his humble nature and particularly his ministry to those Hawaiians in the

leper colony on Molokai Island. He eventually contracted leprosy and died from that disease. Tor then related an anecdote about when he was new in Hawaii. At first the natives treated him just like any other new-comer to the islands. However, they suddenly began to treat him with great deference and he discovered that it was because they had become aware of his roots in Father Damien's country of Belgium.

At another point along the tour we stopped where there was a view over the coastline that included a large rectangular platform at the surf line made from lava boulders, as shown on the right.

Tor told us that this platform was the stage where human sacrifice was practiced by the ancient Hawaiians as part of the religion until it was banned in 1819. However, the ground still has a sacred aura for the Hawaiians.



Then he told of a luxury hotel built next to the site a decade or so ago. The natives thought the builders of the hotel were stupid to build on sacred land. The hotel never did well as a business and eventually went bust and the building was torn down to restore the land to the way we see it today. Of course, this bad end for the hotel was no surprise to the natives who saw the presence as a violation of sacred land.

On return to Kona we asked Tor to drop us off at the Farmer's Market that was a few blocks from where the Amsterdam tender boats pick up passengers. The other passengers continued on to the tender landing. We felt that Tor and Tor Tours delivered an excellent

product today with much detailed information about the Kona area and highlights. Tor told us that his wife had written a book published in German with the title “Hawaii Nei”. He had edited the book and was very knowledgeable. From the way he conducted our tour it was obvious that he drew on a depth of knowledge of Kona and Hawaii that went well beyond what he said in our brief time together today. Anyone considering a tour on the island of Hawaii may want to consider contacting Tor. His website is: www.tortours.com and his email is Tor@tortours.com .

The Farmer’s Market is near St. Michael’s Church on the main street in Kona called Alii Drive, as shown in the picture on the right.

It has a wide variety of fruits and vegetables as well as craft items, as shown below.



We browsed around a bit and then walked along Alii Drive toward the Kailua Pier as shown on the street map above.

We spied a friendly dog and decided this was a good time to add to our collection of “Dogs of Hawaii”, as shown in the pictures below.



Near the tender boat landing we ran across our friend Nicole whom we hadn't seen on the Amsterdam for several days. After chatting awhile about recent events we parted and she continued her exploration of Kona.



We continued on down the street and took this picture of the Banyan tree shown below. This huge Banyan tree shades much of the area around the boat landing.



In the boat landing area we spotted the Visitor's Center that had a great sign that we could use in a picture to show that Barbara's library card had visited in Kona. We quickly took the picture shown on the right.



After than we boarded a tender boat and returned to the Amsterdam.

The Amsterdam got underway for Hilo, Hawaii about 6pm. The sea was a bit choppy but not a real problem for negotiating the hallways.

The dress for dinner tonight was resort casual but it was a special occasion for two reasons. Number one, it was Thanksgiving Day. The kitchen and dining room staff had worked all day decorating the dining room and preparing the meal. Secondly, it was the birthday of our table mate, Karen, and we wanted to celebrate that important event with her.

The entrance to the dining room was laid out with colorful Thanksgiving decorations of pumpkins, squash, corn husks and straw. We took a picture with us to commemorate the occasion, as shown on the right. We wished we were with the folks back home but this was sure nice here on the Amsterdam.



The dining room festooned with sprays of paper fall leaves, as shown in the picture below.



The dinner served at our table was scrumptious with lots of turkey and all the fixin's. The downside of eating out on Thanksgiving is that you don't get the benefit of leftovers but we sure don't have to worry about getting enough to eat here on the Amsterdam.

Near the end of the meal we had a little ceremony for Karen's Birthday. We had glasses of celebratory Champagne all around except for Karen who prefers the non-alcoholic sparkling grape juice, as shown on the right.



Then her birthday cake arrived with a single candle as shown below



As is the custom on Holland America ships, our stewards gathered behind her and serenaded with the birthday song in Indonesian, as shown on the left.

Then came the moment of truth as she blew out her candle. She handled the job very well.



After some of the commotion calmed down, Henk Mensink, the Amsterdam Hotel Manager came by the table to wish Karen the best on her birthday, as shown on the right.

Karen has been the organizer of the Cruise Critic Meet-and-Greet sessions and has organized a few port tours so she and Henk developed a great working relationship. The arrangement to have Cruise Director, Bruce, collect the Cruise Critic tour groups in the Explorer's Lounge and escort to the first tender boats going ashore was a major convenience for us that she facilitated.



We reluctantly had to bring the birthday celebration to a close so that the stewards could start preparation for the second dining room seating tonight.

We continue sailing for Hilo by way of the northern route around the big island of Hawaii. Karen had asked Henk why we couldn't sail around the southern end of the island and view the red hot lava pouring into the sea at night. Henk had sketched on a napkin the argument that the distance we would have to travel would be just too much longer than our current route. The seas are a little bumpy tonight so we are happy with the shorter route to Hilo. We expect to arrive in Hilo about 7am tomorrow morning.