

Day 56-Apia-R.L. Stevenson-Market-Aggie Grey's-Culture Show-20 Nov. 09: The day started with flat sea, partly cloudy, humid with temperature in the low 80s. We were entering the harbor at Apia, the capital of the nation of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa).

The reef on the starboard side as we entered the harbor held the wreckage of a boat, as shown on the right.

Perhaps it was washed up there by the tsunami that hit Samoa in September this year.



The Amsterdam proceeded in to the harbor and by 7am was safely docked. We could see

the Visitor's Center in downtown Apia with the brown Polynesian Meeting House simulation on the roof, as shown on the left.

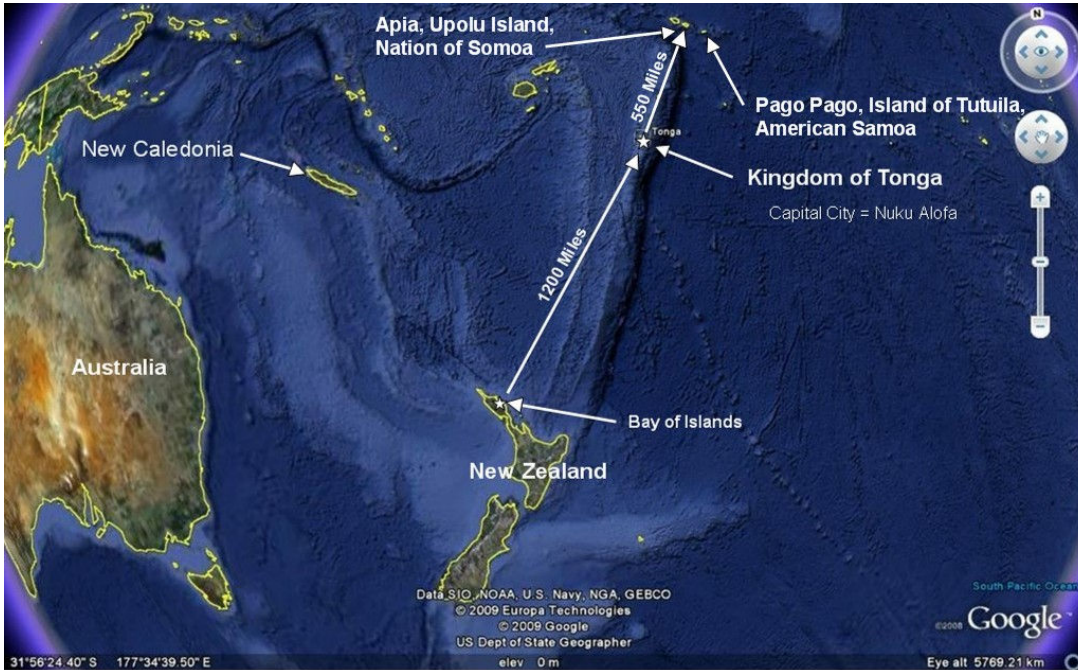


On the dock a troupe of Polynesian dancers had assembled along with musicians, as shown below.

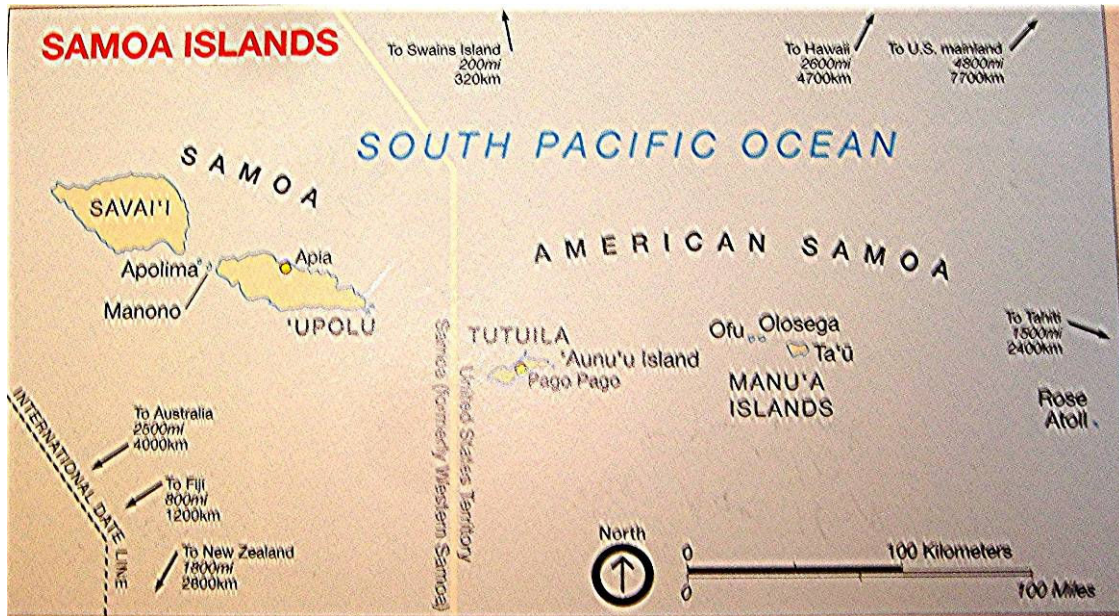
They were entertaining the enthusiastic Amsterdam passengers lining the rails. Shows like these really make the cruise ship passengers feel welcome in a host city.



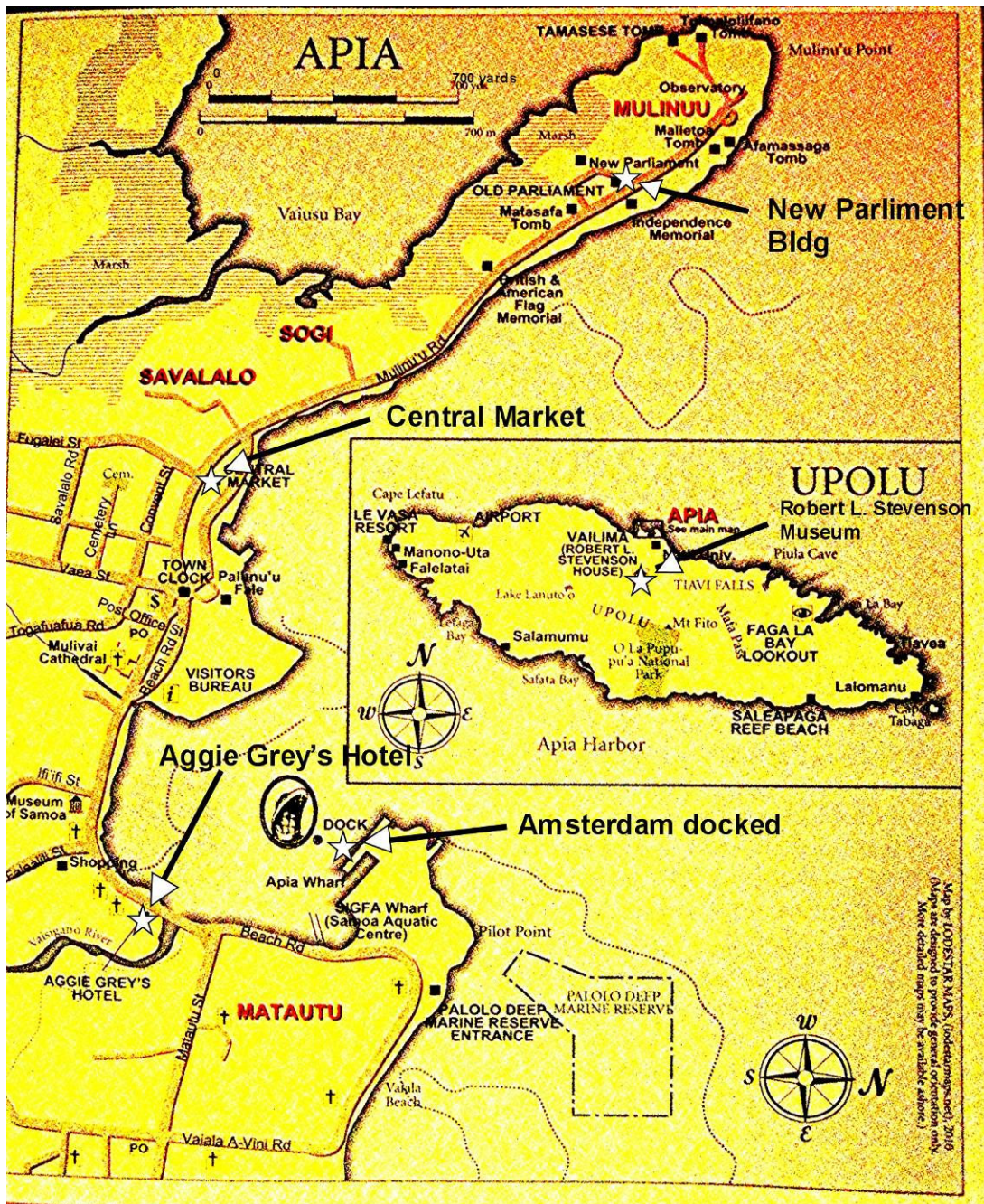
The Amsterdam had traveled about 550 miles from Tonga to the Nation of Samoa as shown on the modified Google Earth map below. Also shown on the map is the nearby island of Tutuila in American Samoa where we had visited the city of Pago Pago back on 17 October, 2009.



As further assistance in understanding the location of these islands in relation to the boundary between Samoa, US Territory and the International Dateline, another annotated map is provided below.



A map of the Apia area is shown below with stars highlighting the places we visited later in the day.



The souvenir shops were already setting up on the dock as shown on the right. About 7:30am clearance was granted by the local authorities so we could leave the ship. We didn't have any organized tour scheduled but we planned to meet with Louise and Phyllis at 9:30am for a trip to the Robert Lewis Stevenson Museum in Apia. There was plenty of time so we left the ship about 8am to browse through the shops that had been set up on the dock.



There was a great selection of items at this early hour. The prices of souvenir things like tapa



cloth, earrings and carvings seemed to be much lower than in French Polynesian Islands we visited earlier in the cruise. For example, cute earrings made of polished coconut shell and paua shell were selling for \$2.50 - \$4 USD. For a person we know with unusual taste we got an unusual tapa cloth with a rigid backing for \$10 USD. The artist posed for a picture with her artwork, as shown on the left.

Some views of souvenir shops are shown below.



At 9:30 we met with Louise and Phyllis and walked out to the gates of the Apia



Port where the taxi drivers were waiting. Along the way we noticed that the Apia welcoming committee for the Amsterdam had gone the extra mile and decorated the chain link fence along the road to the entrance of the port. It was a simple but really nice touch and we appreciated the effort that it took to put these flowers in the fence as shown on the left. We felt welcomed in Apia.

There were a lot of taxi drivers waiting for the Amsterdam passengers at the gate to the port, as shown on the right. We didn't see any police officers but the scene was relatively calm and we didn't feel uncomfortable. These guys were well fed and dressed well but there was a note of desperation as some of them bargained for our business. During the process of finding what reasonable taxi fare would be a fellow



Amsterdam passenger, named Lily, whom we had never met asked if she could join us.

We finally arrived at a price of \$55 USD total for 2 hours of taxi ride for the 5 of us to and from the Robert L. Stevenson House with a little tour of Apia thrown in. Our driver's name was Tuki. He had probably been at the gate early to get a fare so he was pretty well blocked in by other cabs, as shown on the left. However, Tuki managed to maneuver his van out of the cramped collection of taxis at the gate and we were on our way. The first thing we noticed was that this is a



left hand traffic country.

The Robert L. Stevenson Museum is on the mountainside facing Apia and 3 or 4 miles out of the main part of town. As we drove along we took pictures of some of the typical buildings that we saw. Some examples are shown on the right and on the page below.



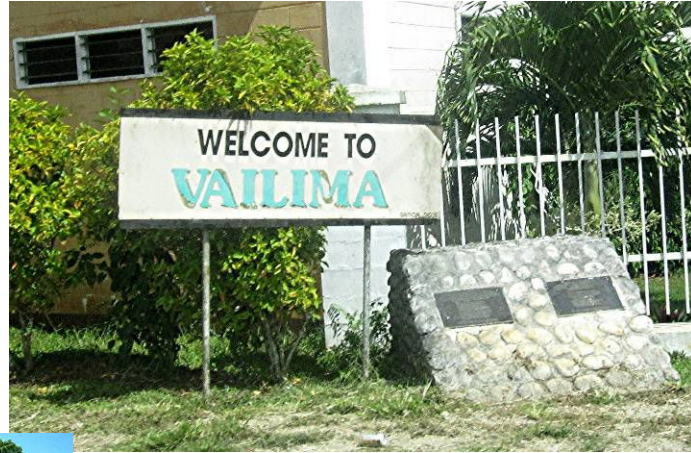


We saw the entrance to the Papauta Girls College as shown on the right.



This primary school on the left was apparently having recess and the balcony and yard was filled with kids.

We arrived at the Robert Lewis Stevenson Home and Museum. Stevenson had named his home Vailima which is Samoan word meaning “water from the hand”. It is a reference to an ancient Samoan legend having to do with using the cupped hand to bring pure water to the lips of a thirsty person.



We drove into the spacious



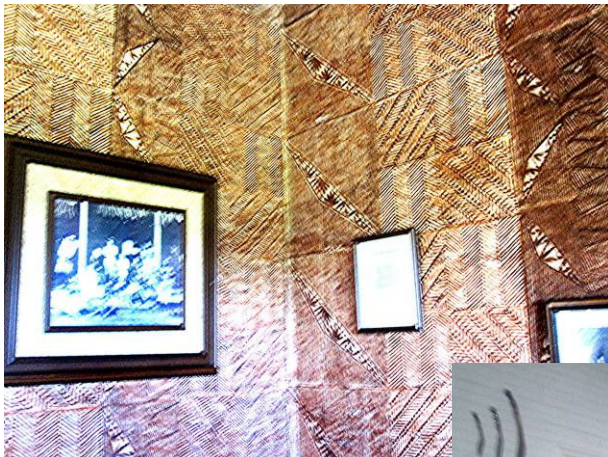
yard and Tuki dropped us off. We got this picture of Tuki and his taxi on the left, before he went around to the parking lot to wait for us.

We also took a picture of our friends as we started the tour. From left to right, Lilly, Phyllis, Barbara and Louise.

The admission price was \$7 USD per person and the tour consisted of going to each room of the house where a person who specialized in that room would tell us about how Robert Lewis Stevenson lived and worked in that room. It was necessary to take off our shoes before going into the house in order to preserve the floors. This rule produced the nice collection of shoes on the front porch, as shown on the right. Barbara, the Amsterdam port lecturer, had warned about this requirement and cautioned people that they might want to be sure that their socks didn't have any holes in them. There was also a ban on flash photography so some of our pictures were rather marginal in quality.



We were ushered into the first room of the house and the guide told us about the building of the house out of redwood brought in from California. Stevenson wanted a fireplace but it was too warm in Samoa to use one. The compromise was to build a brick fireplace in the room but no chimney was put in and there were no plans to ever build a fire in the fireplace. The walls of the room were covered with tapa cloth and it was called the tapa room. A picture of two walls of the room is shown on the right and below.



We next went upstairs to the library

room. The library was spacious and bookcases with the works of Stevenson filled the walls, as shown on the right. The guide described how Stevenson wrote everything in long hand and was very prolific in the rate of writing books even though he was in bad health with a lung disease much of the time. His books have been translated into 23 different languages.

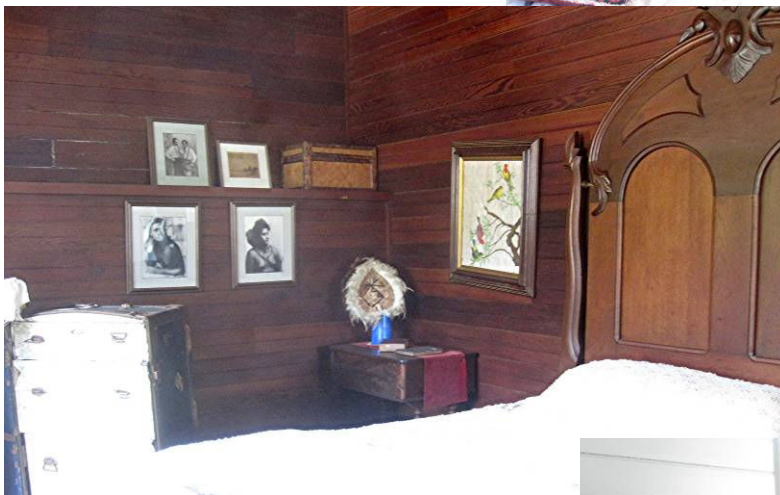


He lived in the house 4.5 years before his death in 1894 at 44 years of age. The official cause of death was given as a brain aneurism. It is often said that Stevenson had tuberculosis but Explorations speaker, Beth Foggin, recently said he had a genetically related non-communicable lung disease. He inherited considerable money from his father and with the amount he made from his writing, he and his family had a comfortable lifestyle.

The next room was the bedroom of Stevenson's mother. This was probably the largest room in the upstairs part of the house. A picture of it is shown on the right.



His wife's name was Fanny. Her bedroom was paneled in redwood which had a beautiful rich dark grain as shown below.



Another upstairs room was called the hospital and that is where they kept the medicines. A picture of the exhibit is shown below.



Stevenson had no children of his own but two step children by Fanny. His stepdaughter lived in Hawaii most of her adult life and his stepson, Austin, lived with Stevenson. There was a whimsical drawing on one of the walls. It was drawn by Stevenson himself (RLS) and depicted him teaching Austin history. A photo of the drawing is shown below.



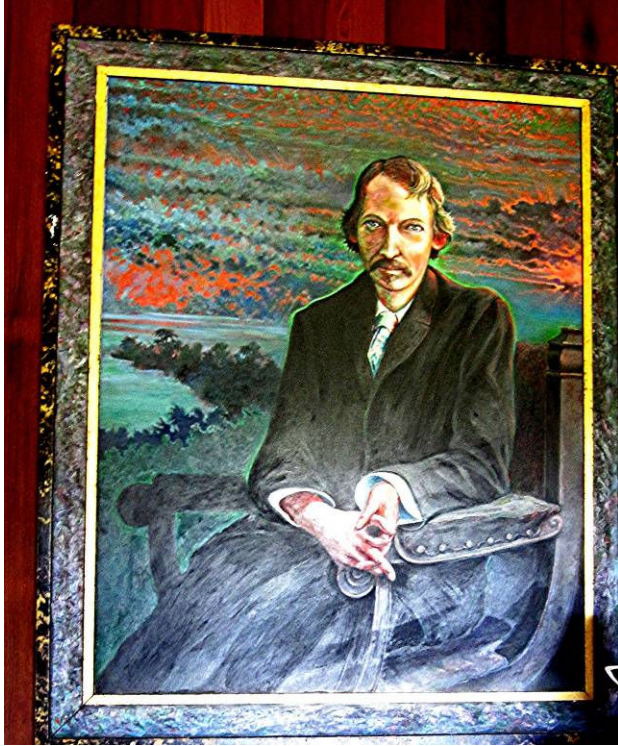
There was a wide staircase leading to the downstairs part of the house. Hanging on the wall of the stairwell was a huge tapa cloth drape, as shown on the right.

In view of the room with all the walls covered with tapa cloth it appears that Stevenson was a big fan of this material.



Downstairs in the house there was a huge safe shown on the left. The guide said that Stevenson told the neighborhood children ghost stories about the safe and also the house to scare them away from ever thinking about sneaking into the house to steal something.

Some of the downstairs walls had large paintings of Stevenson such as these below.



We finished the tour with a quick look around the outside. At one end of the long porch area there was a stone sculpture of two large men who looked Samoan, as shown on the left. The sculpture was created in commemoration of the end of cannibalism in Samoa. We couldn't see any connection between the scene depicted and cannibalism and no explanation was offered.

There was also the kitchen house that was completely separate and about 25 feet away from the main house. It looked like a children's playhouse as shown below.



It was separated from the main house to reduce the danger of fire and also to avoid heating the house during the cooking of meals.

We gathered on the porch and took a picture of the ladies in our little tour group today, as shown on the right. From left to right: our new friend Lily, then Phyllis, Barbara and Louise.



Buses were busy coming and going. There were several of the colorful vehicles like the one shown below that came through while we were there.



We were ready to leave and didn't need a bus. We found Tuki and his taxi and drove out of the museum grounds.

The presentation of the museum was very well done by the guides. The house and grounds had a neat and well kept appearance. The house and furnishings were not ostentatious and were probably much like the way it was when Stevenson was alive. After the tour of his library we had a new

appreciation for how prolific he was. Also, his high regard for Samoa and their love of him was new information for us. We felt we knew him much better after the tour.

Barbara had the idea of getting her library card photographed at the Robert Lewis Stevenson House. That seemed like a good thing to do so we stopped at the entrance and took the photo shown on the right.



As we drove around Apia we noticed several advertisements for the local beer called Vailima, the same as the name Stevenson gave to his home. The highway signs are shown on the right and below.



Since Vailima has some meaning related to quenching the thirst it seems appropriate for the beer label.

We had wondered if the Robert Lewis Stevenson House could be seen from the Amsterdam sitting at the dock in Apia. That question was answered by the observation that the Amsterdam was clearly visible from the city street at the entrance to the Stevenson House. It would probably require high powered binoculars and a good idea of where to look but you could probably see the Stevenson House, Vailima, from the harbor.

We had Tuki take us down to the main street of Apia and then out to the west on Mulinu'u Road. We had seen on the street map shown above that there was a New Parliament Building on that road and we wanted to see what it looked like.



It wasn't very far and we finally found the building, as shown on the right. It appeared to be under construction so they are probably still using the Old Parliament Building for legislation in the nation of Samoa.

About this time Tuki informed us that we only had 15 minutes left of our 2 hour contract. We asked him to take us back in to the main part of town and drop us off at the Central Market. He agreed and we headed back. On the way we spotted a gas station shown on the right. Like many stations we have seen since leaving New Zealand, this one didn't have the gas price posted on a large sign. We asked Tuki what gasoline costs in Apia and he said 3.60 Samoan Tala per liter. The current conversion rate is 2.7 Samoan Tala per \$1 USD so a liter of gas would cost \$1.33 USD per liter. It takes about 4 liters to make a gallon of gasoline so the cost of gas would be \$5.33 per gallon. This seems cheap compared with the price of \$7.40 per gallon we calculated in Tonga a couple days ago.



We arrived at the Central Market and got out along with Phyllis and Louise. We all paid Tuki our share of the \$55 charge and sent him and Lily on their way back to the port where the Amsterdam was docked. It was



only a 5 minute drive from the Market so they should have arrived well before our 2 hour contract with Tuki had expired. We had done a little shopping for souvenirs at the shops on the dock this morning but we all wanted to look around a bit more. We took a picture of our happy little shopping crew before parting company for 30 minutes of independent browsing.

The Central Market is a good place to look for Somoan crafts. We had shopped there in 2008 and it looked much the same as it did then. A typical display of tapa cloth and Samoan war clubs is shown on the right. Barbara found a few earrings in the less than \$4 USD level. However, she noted that one lady who had



stuff she really liked was missing this year.

We got back together with Louise and Phyllis and decided to walk back to the Amsterdam along Beach Road. It was warm and humid but a nice sea breeze made it pleasant to just saunter along the harbor and take in the sights. We hadn't gone far when we spotted the Apia Library. It had a face lift since last year and looked great. The wall facing the street had been reworked to make it look like tapa cloth as shown on the right.

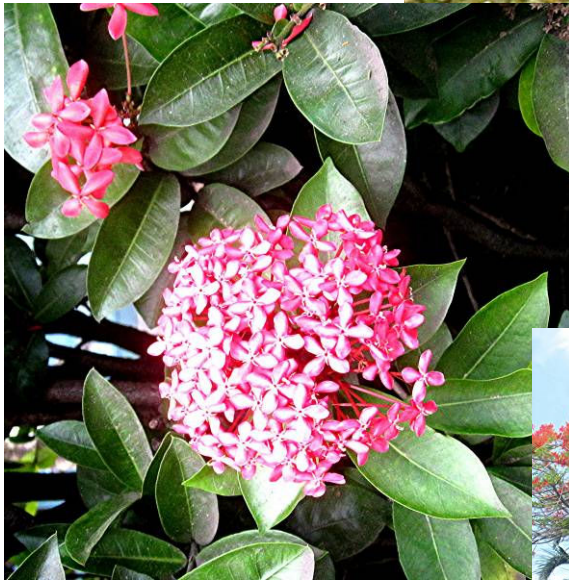


We continued on down the street under the huge trees that provide marvelous shade and have a beautiful shape as shown on the left.

There were sidewalk vendors of fruit and crafts between the sidewalk and the harbor. Then one of those moments took place that makes a person appreciate a true professional. With laser like precision, Barbara saw the lady and her sales booth that had been missing from the Central Market. It

was like a high school reunion as the two of them exchanged greetings. After some small talk Barbara got down to business and picked out some things she liked. We concluded the transaction and after much fanfare departed.

Our walk down Beach Road continued and we were treated to a range of beautiful flowers growing wild along the harbor and in people's yards. The following is a selection of the flowers we saw on this short journey.



The Aggie Grey's Hotel was on the road back to the Amsterdam and we wanted to drop in and have a look around. We have heard a lot about Aggie Grey's Hotel. Aggie Grey ran a humble guesthouse in Apia for years and was such a dynamic personality that many people think James Michener based his character, Bloody Mary, after her in his book Tales of the South Pacific. Because of that reputation she became a living legend until she died at 98 in the year 1988. Her guest house has become a luxury hotel along the Beach Road in Apia and Aggie Grey's son now runs the business.

We arrived in the lobby of Aggie Grey's Hotel hot and sweaty today. We quickly passed through the lobby and went to the bar in an atrium area in the back of the hotel. We settled into some chairs and enjoyed taking the weight off our feet. Four ice cold bottles of the local beer Vailima were brought to our table and we proceeded to enjoy a few minutes of the good life, as shown on the right. After cooling down and resting a while we figured we could make it the few hundred yards we had to walk to get to the Amsterdam. On the way out



we snapped some pictures of the decorations in the lobby. They were ready for Christmas here, as shown by the pictures on the left and below. We didn't see any other Christmas decorations around town

so Aggie Grey's Hotel may be a little ahead of the curve here. However, Thanksgiving doesn't get much attention in Samoa so Christmas is really the next holiday around here.



We made it back to the Amsterdam and were thankful for the air conditioned comfort of the ship. At 2:30 pm there was a Polynesian Cultural Dance Show put on in the Queen's Lounge by the Apia group called Pacific Soul Samoa. The group consisted of over 50 kids ages 5 to 14 years and they had prepared for this Amsterdam presentation for some time. The same group had entertained when we were here with the Amsterdam in 2008 and they were so good that Cruise Director, Bruce, had invited them back.

The show started with the brightly costumed kids coming on the stage and performing action packed choreography that was a blend of traditional Polynesian moves and more modern dance steps. The following is a series of photos we took to illustrate the range of dances that we saw.

This is the whole dance troupe lined up on stage.



This young boy led the group in a series of clapping sounds where they varied the pitch of the sound and he conducted it like an orchestra. We thought this was their best act.

This was a fan dance Samoan style.



This was a dance in celebration of the contribution made by the wonderful coconut in the lives of South Pacific people.

At the end of the hour long show the Amsterdam audience gave them a standing ovation. Bruce then came on stage and asked Pricilla, the leader of Pacific Soul Samoa, to come out on stage. He gave her a donation of \$3000 from Holland America to continue the wonderful work she is doing with young people in Samoa. She thanked Bruce and the people of the Amsterdam profusely, while the kids looked on.



This brought the show to a close and we all started to exit the Queen's



Lounge. As we worked our way towards the exit we saw some Samoan visitors still seated, as shown in the photo on the left. We thanked them for whatever part they had in working with the children and putting on the show for us today. It turned out that the lady on the left was the sister of Pricilla and they all worked with Pacific Soul Samoa. We were touched today by the good natured friendliness the people of Apria showed us wherever we

went. We aren't experts on Samoa or the South Pacific but our guess is that these folks we were talking to in the Queen's Lounge epitomized the good hearted people who make Samoa such a pleasant place.

Leaving the Queen's Lounge we decided to pamper ourselves a little so we took the elevator up to our deck. On the floor of the elevator was the friendly reminder of what day it was, as shown on the right. Well....we might have forgotten what calendar day it was but we were sure aware that it was a most enjoyable day of touring a great country with friends.

The ship got underway about 4 pm and we headed northeast towards the Hawaiian Islands. We were in a good mood but this



sign on a neighbor's cabin door was sobering. It reminded us that the end of the cruise is approaching and we may have to think of an innovative way to downsize in order to pack all the stuff in our room into a few suitcases.