

Day 26 – Port Vila, Vanuatu – 22 Oct. 09: The day started with dark overcast sky and the Vanuatu island of Efate in the distance. However, the waves were not too high so sea sickness was not a problem. The Island of Efate is one of the 83 islands that make up the nation of Vanuatu. The city we were planning to visit today was Port Vila which is the capital of Vanuatu

The Amsterdam picked up the pilot for the harbor and cruised slowly towards the dock. Here are a couple pictures of the beautiful harbor that we got on the way to the dock.



Barely visible in the photo below is a row of wind turbines that were slowly turning. Most of the island is without electric power but Port Vila has electric power and these wind turbines are providing a little “green” energy.



We were soon tied up at the Cruise Dock in the city of Port Vila on the island of Efate.

The map below shows where the island of Efate is located among the 83 islands forming the nation of Vanuatu.

Vanuatu became an independent republic in 1980 after a long history of British and French colonial rule. The islands that make up Vanuatu used to be known as the New Hebrides.

Port Vila is located on the island of Efate as shown in the map on the right.



The map shown on the left gives more detail about the island of Efate and Port Vila. The route of a 12 mile tour we took around the Port Vila area later in the day is shown by the double ended arrows on the map of the island.

Soon after tying up at the Cruise Dock we were cleared to leave the ship and start our visit to Port Vila. There was considerable construction in progress on the pier all along where the Amsterdam was moored. The new cruise terminal building and associated infrastructure was in the process of being built. We had to pick our way through the dusty construction area to the main gate. The taxi drivers, tour operators and souvenir vendors were anxiously waiting for us at the gate.

We had decided to walk the 2 or 3 miles in to the main part of Port Vila to look around before taking a more extensive tour. We first had to walk through about a quarter mile of vendor stalls where we avoiding making any purchases at this early hour.

Once we cleared the vendor area the walk was pleasant with a



few roadside flowers, such as this bougainvillea, to brighten our path.



After about a mile we came upon the Vanuatu Navy, tied up at the Navy Base. They seem to favor double hulled boats for their patrol craft, as shown on the left.

By this time we were starting to notice the heat and the road in to town was looking pretty long. Luckily, at this time a passing van driver, heading into town, yelled at us and asked if we wanted a ride. We had already passed up a couple opportunities like this but this time we took the bait. There were two other Amsterdam couples in the van whom he had picked up at the entrance to the pier whom we met as we piled in. The deal was he would take us into town for \$5 USD. After driving a short distance he propositioned us with a tour. For \$15USD each he would take us on a 1.5 hour tour of the Port Vila area and drop us off in downtown Port Vila. This sounded like a reasonable offer to us and the other passengers so we were off on an impromptu tour of Port Vila.

The name of our driver/guide was Manasi. He spoke good English and knew pretty much the basic tourist information that we wanted to know. He mentioned the chaotic time when the island was run under a cooperative agreement between the UK and France. No one knew who was really in charge and they had to rely heavily on tribal chieftains for leadership. Barbara Haenni, the Amsterdam Port Guide, had mentioned this time in her presentation about Port Vila. She said that is got so bad that people who favored the UK would drive on the left side of the road while those who favored the French drove on the right hand side. Obviously, no one could be happy under these circumstances and that period was left behind when the independent Republic of Vanuatu was formed in 1980. Fortunately, for the US type tourists the French right-hand-traffic rule was selected for the new nation so today we are not so apt to step into oncoming traffic when walking the streets of Vanuatu.



Here, on the right, is the view from our back seat perch in Manasi's van.

Manasi took us on a leisurely drive through several residential and business districts of low to middle income. He emphasized that the people of Vanuatu lead a simple life. Here are pictures of a range of housing that we saw.



Pigs are considered a sign of wealth, they are allowed to freely roam the neighborhoods and we saw many of them.



The fact that property, such as pigs, was not closely guarded was one of several signs we noted that the people of Port Vila are reasonably comfortable and not desperate for money or other material things.

Thatched roofs and siding made from tangara tree leaves was a common sight in the lower income housing areas. A tangara tree is shown below.



These next couple pictures are of buildings in a slightly more affluent neighborhood.



There were a few electrical lines strung between poles. It didn't look like enough electrical lines to serve all the houses but Manasi said the people of Port Vila had electricity, but they didn't have very many electrical appliances. We saw a couple satellite dishes for TV and at one home a man was using an electrical power saw. Manasi said the rest of the island of Efate was without a central supply of electricity.

We stopped in at the Tanna Coffee Plantation for a look around. They had a nice entrance and sales area. Barbara noticed a little stuffed dog on the counter and wanted to buy it. The clerk tried to explain that it was part of the decorations for the place and they couldn't sell it.



Barbara finally gave up after a little begging and settled for a picture of the dog with the handsome clerk. While we

were clearly in a third world country, this was one of several instances where we got the message they weren't desperate for our money.

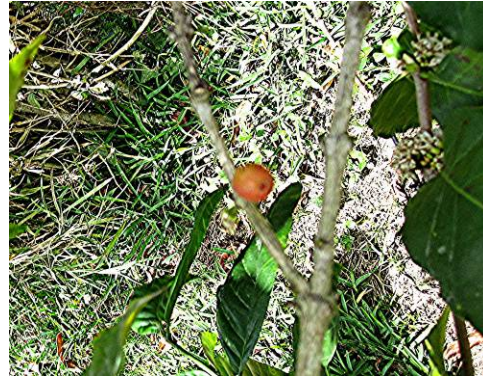
We bought a couple packages of the organically grown coffee beans. At the cost of \$8 per pound we can't wait to sample it when we get home.

Outside, there was a coffee bean tree that Manasi pointed out to us. Some green coffee beans were on the upper branches, as shown in the picture on the right.



Manasi said the orange colored bean on this branch shown on the right was ripe and ready for picking.

After our visit to the coffee plantation we all climbed back in to the van and proceeded on the tour.



The next point of interest on the tour was a brief stop at a place called Mele Cascades Waterfalls. There was a charge for admission so for this tour we just turned around in the parking lot and left after taking a picture to show we were there.

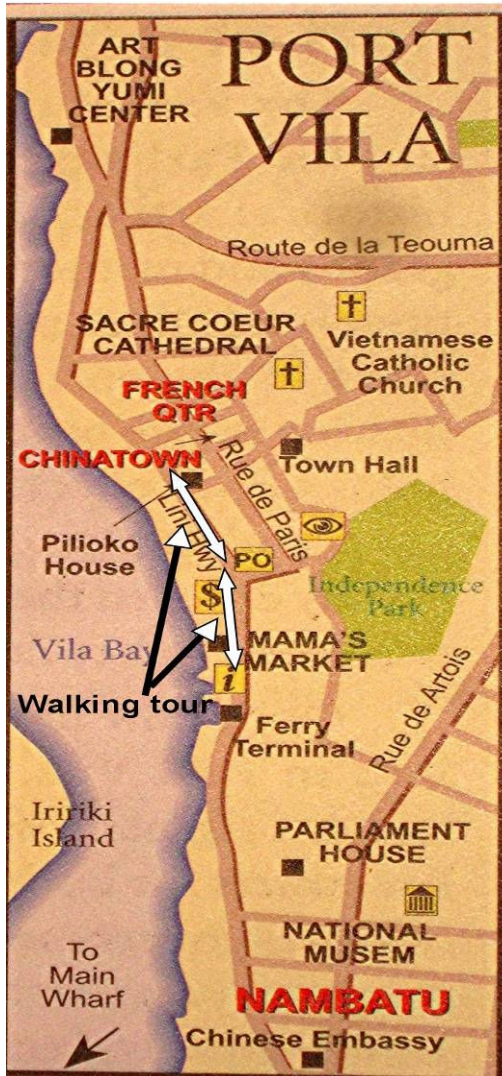
This is one of the advertised highlights of Port Vila. The main fresh water supply for the city is provided by the creek that forms the cascade and waterfall. However, there was no significant mountain or hill in the vicinity so we probably didn't miss a world class waterfall.



After the Mele Cascade Waterfalls, Manasi drove us along the coastline toward Port Vila. Along the way we happened to see these two horseback riders enjoying an outing on the beach. They probably came from stables at one of the resorts.



There are many resorts in the area. Port Vila appears to be a prime destination for many Australians and New Zealanders looking for an exotic get-away spot. The area probably has an appeal for Australians and New Zealanders similar to the attraction of Caribbean ports for Americans.



Our tour in Manasi's van ended near the area in Port Vila called French Quarter and Chinatown on the map shown on the left. We noted a Chinese restaurant that may have marked the Chinatown but otherwise, we couldn't see anything to distinguish the French Quarter or Chinatown from the rest of the city. The route of our walking tour of Port Vila is shown by the double ended arrows in the map on the left.

The boar's tusk has a special place of respect for the people of Vanuatu. The tusk symbolizes the food and prosperity brought by ownership of pigs, which were introduced by the first people to inhabit the islands of this region. It also represents the strength and responsibility that is laid on the male members of the tribe to protect and provide for their family members. The boar's tusk has been incorporated into the nation's flag and it shows up in the artwork for many commercial articles. A locally brewed beer goes by the name, "Tusker" and it is popular here. We had heard about Tusker Beer of Vanuatu in the Port Talk by Barbara Haenni on the Amsterdam but she really didn't recommend it. When we saw this large advertisement for Tusker Beer, shown on the right, it immediately got our attention. Orlin was wringing his hands in anticipation of a nice cold drink. Unfortunately, we can't report on the taste because we put off an immediate refreshment stop and didn't think of it again until we had collapsed back on the Amsterdam.



One reason for this giant mistake was that we were immediately attracted away from Tusker Beer by a park-like space between Lini Highway and the waterfront. The view from there across the bay was wonderful. An island, containing resort bungalows was a short distance off shore and the Amsterdam, at the Cruise Dock across the bay was visible, as shown on the below.



In addition there was an open air market with colorful goods for sale.



We browsed through this well organized display of local crafts and materials until we finally emerged back on Lini Highway near the center of Port Vila. The view at this point was much like that of any busy city street as shown in the photographs below.



We had noticed on the map that the Post Office was not far down the street. We were looking for some official sign where we could get a good picture to verify that Barbara's library card had made it to Vanuatu. The post office of any town is usually a good place to find the name of the community prominently displayed. We were in luck today as we found that the local post office had a very colorful display along with an official pronouncement that we were in Vanuatu, as shown on the right.



We walked farther down the street and came to Mama's Market, which we had seen on the map and wanted to visit. It turned out that Mama's Market was a giant farmer's market with a nearly endless supply of product. The following are a few photographs of what we saw at Mama's Market.



As shown above, the frequent use of baskets woven from plant leaves to contain was a colorful and practical use of inexpensive natural material for a useful purpose.



After sampling the agricultural splendor of Port Vila we went to the other extreme and checked out the local real estate market at an agency a short distance down the street. We took these pictures of advertisement of some property for sale locally.

This property appears to be a duplex that occupies a 5500 square foot lot with a wonderful view. It can be purchased for 400,000 Australian dollars or at today's exchange rate about \$372,000 USD.

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SOLD

Just Listed **AUD 400,000** **Ref:R-0497**

TOWNHOUSE DUPLEX IN GATED & MANAGED COMPLEX.

Established rental returns from over 80% occupancy for these two bedroom duplexes in popular Poppies.
Open plan with lagoon views and breezes.
Land title of 503 m2.
Two storey building in a secure environment with swimming pool and easy access to Port Vila town centre.
Would also suit someone living in Port Vila who wanted to live in on unit and rent out the other as an investment.

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Here was another piece of property with a lagoon view. This one was undeveloped and waiting for the right person to build a house on it. It was about 0.9 acres of land selling for 14 million Vatu (Vanuatu dollars) or at today's exchange rate of 107 Vatu per USD that is a price of about \$130,840. It might be worth considering.

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Just listed **Vatu 14,000,000** Ref: L-0449

VACANT HILLTOP LAND WITH DRAMATIC TOWN & LAGOON VIEWS.

This 3,496 m² plot is less than 10 minutes drive from downtown.
Beautiful panoramic views of both lagoons and the open sea in the distance.
There are many large trees on this gently sloping site.

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Setting our sights on less lofty prospects we headed down the street to find a gas station and a reading on what a gallon of gas would cost in Port Vila. We found this convenient gas station on the main street.



The price of gasoline posted on the fuel pump was 140.0 Vatus/liter as shown in this photo below. At the exchange rate of 107 Vatus per 1 USD that works out to about \$1.31 USD per liter. Assuming about 4 liters per gallon that is about \$5.24 USD per gallon of gas. That's a lower price than on some South Sea Islands but it still seems high by US standards.

We heard one unverified story that a company in Vanuatu was making or planned to make bio-gasoline from coconut oil harvested from local plantations. Maybe at \$5.24 USD per gallon that would make sense.



We carried our commodity pricing study a bit further and down the street was a friendly dealer in boar's tusks. He brought out his wares in a briefcase much like you would expect a jewel dealer to use in displaying some diamonds. He spread his boar's tusks on the table for us to see, as shown below.



The big one on the lower right could be purchased for \$500 USD while the smaller one near Orlin's hand could be had for about \$300 USD. He said these tusks could be from a pig as much as 30 years old so they were, no doubt, a rarity. These prices exceeded what we had budgeted for boar's tusks on this trip so we had to turn down this purchase opportunity. Similar to other experience we had on this visit to Port Vila, the sales person did not respond to our feeble attempts to get to a lower price. He obviously didn't depend on boar's tusk sales to get his next meal.

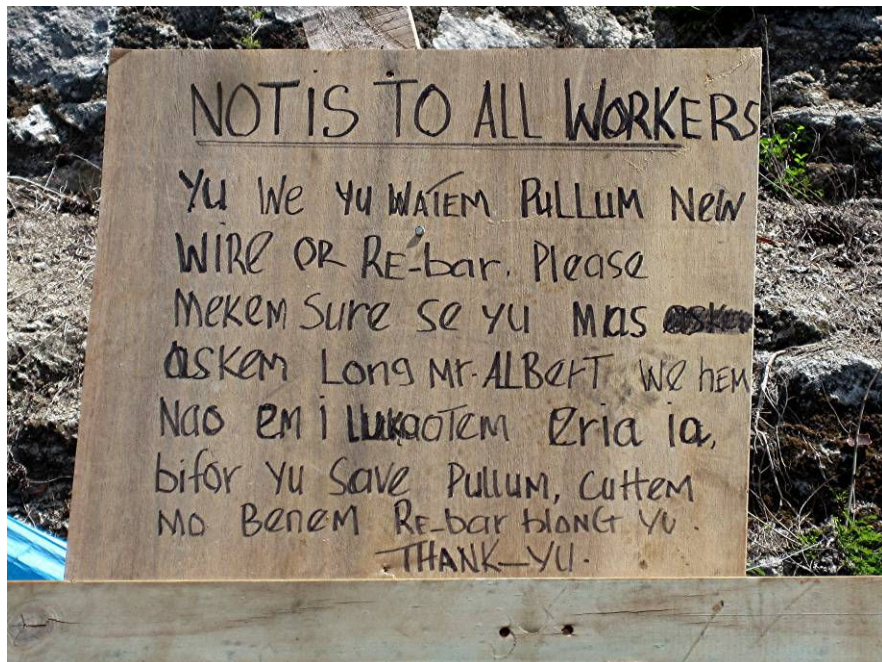
At this point we decided to bring our visit to Port Vila to an end and head back to the Amsterdam. We walked a short distance down to the Post Office which seemed to be the agreed upon pickup spot for a taxis. We soon found a taxi van with 4 other customers that would take us back to the ship for \$3 USD each. We thought that was a bargain and jumped in.

Back at the pier we made one more pass at the souvenir booths that lined the road up to the main gate. After seeing all the pigs running around the neighborhoods, and hearing the story of their importance in Vanuatu culture from the boar's tusk man we wanted to get a little carved wooden pig as a souvenir. After searching around a bit we located one that we purchased for \$5 USD. Then, just outside the gate we saw another one that

showed a little more polished craftwork with the wood. We asked the attendant for a price on the pig. He asked one of the other people in the booth and couldn't get a price. After rummaging around in box of other wooden carvings he shook his head and said he couldn't find a price. We had never had this experience with a souvenir booth before and were too dumbstruck to make an offer. We simply walked away and added this to the list of experiences we had today where the locals didn't seem to desperately need our money.

We walked into the dock area where construction was still in progress. We had learned a little bit about the local dialect for English which is called Pigeon English. The taxi drivers used it to converse with each other. Some of the words could be understood but it was not possible for us to really understand that dialect. We noticed a sign written in Pigeon English in the construction

area where reinforcement steel, "rebar", was cut and shaped. Here is a photograph of the sign on the right.



While there may be something lost in translation, we think the main message is that you better check with Mr. Albert before you cut any rebar.

From the rebar processing station we continued walking past the construction on the new Cruise Terminal. The building shown below will be the new terminal when completed. The Amsterdam, in the background, looms over the building while Barbara uses her remaining strength to trudge toward the gangway.



Once back on board the Amsterdam we enjoyed the luxury of our cabin. We shucked off the dirty clothes and stuffed them into the laundry bag. Barbara enjoyed hanging the bag on the cabin door for later pickup.



Later we got dressed and went down for dinner. During the meal, Tom, the Dining Room Manager, and Bernie, the Executive Chef made the round of tables in the dining room. They stopped by our table to chat and we got this impromptu photo.



The Amsterdsdam got underway about 5pm. We are headed for Cairns, Australia. The entertainment tonight was the banjo player, Peter Mezoian. We have seen and heard his show on previous cruises and he is very good.

It was a good day of exploring Port Vila. Vanuatu and Port Vila represent a new place for us and we are glad we came. Our impression is that this is a third world port but the people we saw are not desperately impoverished. The government appears committed to development of the resources for the tourist industry. Other industries like agriculture are also being developed. Our hunch is that a visit here in 5 or 10 years will reveal a much more prosperous community.